

## Family Fun

### **Sometimes it seems hard to entertain youngsters, but there's lots to do in Dundalk & the surrounding area – & loads of it is free, healthy & interesting!**

The following playgrounds, parks, places to visit are mostly available free of charge. All are between 5 minutes & approx one hour drive from my home just outside Knockbridge.

*Please, please, PLEASE, leave no trace & bring home only good memories.*

- 1. Airbound** – indoor trampoline play area. Brave over 5s only. Has small, basic cafe & toddler area. Must buy special socks E2 which you can re-use on later visits & is about E10 per child for an hour. Sessions begin & end on the hour. One for a rainy day. Go early before it gets too busy. *(Bundle with any of the following: visits to Louth County Museum, the town library, cathedral and then do 'a church crawl'. Also Dundalk Gaol, now called the Oriel Centre, is worth a visit but needs to be organised in advance. The more interesting part of the jail now houses the town archives. It is not generally open to the public but if you phone up and ask nicely they will often oblige. If kids are jumping out of their skins, there is also Pirates Den, Aura Swimming Pool & two cinemas).* **NOT FREE WET DAY**
- 2. Aisling Park** – An interesting town playground, it is surrounded by a lovely park. Well worth a look. Not really suitable for little kids on bikes as is hilly. It is on the town's bus route. *(Bundle with any or all of the following: St Helena's Park & Playground, Ice House Hill Park, Muirhevenamor Playground & Park, all within the town boundaries)* **FREE**
- 3. Annagassan** – the village itself is little, but down by the pier is a beach great for picking shells & walking along the sea front. Bring buckets and stock up on stones & shells for make and do on a wet day! Picnic tables available in a sheltered area at the pier. Annagassan also has a little shop & pub (toilets). Drive along the coast a bit further, park up & let the kids enjoy clambering over the rocks & looking in rock pools. Lots of decent picnic spots. As usual, take care near water & remember that wet rocks & sea weed can be slippery. Avoid in stormy weather for safety reasons. *(Bundle with any or all of the following: Castlebellingham Playground & walk along Clogherhead cliffs from pier to village via beach)* **FREE**
- 4. Applegreen M1 Motorway Service Stations** (between Dundalk & Drogheda) – no, I'm not joking. A variety of food, friendly staff, clean toilets, easy parking, and an indoor & outdoor play area. What is not to like? Admittedly, the play areas aren't huge, but sometimes mums and kids just need a change of scene. Well worth the price of a cup of coffee...
- 5. Ardee Playground** – go upstairs on a double-decker bus from Dundalk to Ardee, visit the playground or small astro-turf football area, have a picnic & head back to Dundalk afterwards. Very popular with my kids. There are picnic tables in the small park surrounding the playground. However, litter can be an issue & the grass frequently seems overdue for a mow. Come on Ardee – you can do better! *(IF YOU HAVE A CAR*

*bundle with any of the following: Slane, Slane playground, Slane Castle, Littlewood Forest Park, New Melifont Abbey, The Irish Military & War Museum)* Playground is **FREE**

6. **Ardee Riverside Walk** – park at the church. Face Wogan’s old store, cross the road. Turn left and walk away from the town. The entrance lies on the left. The tarred walk leads through a small park with picnic tables. It runs along a small river & ends beside a wee carpark. It leads past the ford (crossing place) where Cuchulainn fought Ferdia & where legend has it that Maeve placed a memorial (basically a big rock!). At the car park there is a fabulous sculpture of the two heroes. (When you hit the street again walk towards town as Ardee Castle, the older Hatch’s Castle & St. Mary’s Church are worth seeing - from the outside only!) Alas, despite its huge potential, it all reeks of neglect. The tables lacked any tops, weeds sprouted through the cobbled areas, the grass area was overdue for a mow, seats/ benches needed painting, & litter was an issue. The base of Maeve’s memorial needs some serious work & the statue needed a good scrub. Come on Ardee – pull your socks up!!
7. **Ardgillan Castle** – yes it is near Balbriggan, but there’s a motorway (M1)! There are great walks & a fabulous playground here. Worth checking out. *On a dry day you won’t leave.* Bring a bbq, a picnic & a jumper! Those sea breezes can chill even on a sunny day! (If the weather doesn’t co-operate, there is a soft-play centre called PJs in Balbriggan – but it is **NOT** free) **FREE**
8. **Aura Dundalk** – swimming pool & gym. **E20** approx for a family swim at the weekend, but E9.99 for the same during the week. Great wet day activity, but check opening times online as they vary daily. Be prepared to wrestle with your kids as they pass the pick ‘n’ mix sweets as they enter & leave. Boo! (*Bundle with any or all of the following: visits to Louth County Museum, the town library, cathedral and then do ‘a church crawl’. Also Dundalk Gaol, now called the Oriel Centre, is worth a visit but needs to be organised in advance. The more interesting part of the jail now houses the town archives. It is not generally open to the public but if you phone up and ask nicely they will often oblige. If kids are jumping out of their skins, there is also Pirates Den, Airbound & two cinemas.*) **NOT FREE. WET DAY**
9. **Bailieborough Forest Park** (known locally as Castle Park) **(04.06.17)**. *Warning: there is NO castle – just a piece of grass where a castle / big house used to be!* I mention this only because my lads were rightly miffed by this piece of ‘false advertising’! That said, it is worth a visit, as many Coillte Forests are. It is easy to find & is about 50 minutes from Knockbridge via Carrickmacross & Shercock. Approaching Bailieborough from Shercock, turn right at Lakeland Dairies. The lake is signposted, but not the forest itself. The entrance to the forest is on the left a couple of kilometres down this road. There are two loop walks, both graded easy. One is 6.5km, but we did the shorter 3.5km one today. It loops around the lake. The trail is buggy friendly, fairly flat, pleasant & safe. It goes over two small bridges & there are half a dozen wee jetty for fishing (or running up and down if you are one of my lunatics). Both of these features were given the thumbs up by my lads. There are also many spots where the lake can be safely accessed by kids – that said, I got the distinct impression that it was a fishing, rather than a swimming lake. The walk is fairly flat, but pleasant and safe. Not Dun a Ri (the best one!) but a very pleasant way to spend an afternoon

10. **Balrath Woods** – This lies on the Kentstown road between Duleek & Navan. It has no toilets, but a decent car park, picnic tables & interesting looped forest walks. For my kids the best thing about this wood were the four pieces of playground equipment scattered throughout it. Could easily spend half a day here. (*Bundle with any of the following: Slane playground, Slane Castle, Littlewood Forest Park, New Melifont Abbey, The Irish Military & War Museum, or Ardee Playground*) **FREE**
11. **Blackrock Playground** – Popular playground in pretty Blackrock Village. Is often busy. There is car parking available, but not within eye-shot of the playground, so not ideal if a grumpy toddler has just dosed off.... While there, make sure to walk the promenade & maybe... if the sun is shining ... & you're feeling flush invest in a 99! (*Bundle with visit to Annagassan & Clogherhead, or to Stephenstown Pond, or any of the parks & playgrounds in Dundalk*) **FREE**
12. **Carlingford Greenway** – what's not to like? 10+ km of traffic free cycle paths along the coast between Carlingford & Omeath? Parking can cost E2 at the Carlingford Marina – but not always. Bring change with you just in case! (*Bundle one or more of the following: with Carlingford Playground, King John's Castle, Slieve Foy Forest Park, Omeath Playground, a quick snoop in Greenore, Lordship playground, Proleek Dolmen*) **FREE**
13. **Carlingford Playground** – older & well used, but a handy addition to any expedition to Carlingford with small children (*Bundle one or more of the following: with Carlingford Greenway, King John's Castle, Slieve Foy Forest Park, Omeath Playground, a quick snoop in Greenore, Lordship playground, Proleek Dolmen*) **FREE**
14. **Carrickmacross Playground** (04.06.17) has been newly extended & is a really decent playground which has something for most ages. There is also a skateboard park, basketball court and football pitch beside it. Well done Monaghan County Council – now if you could just take the padlock of the public toilets. That said, this building looks new, so maybe it is not yet open for business (*Bundle with a visit to Kilanny Playground & Inniskeen*) **FREE**
15. **Carrickmacross Festival** (04.06.17) I don't usually stick in festivals but I'll make an exception in this case as it has been running on the June Bank Holiday Weekend for the last 17 years and will probably run for quite a few more. It opens officially on Thursday evening and runs till Monday and is quite extensive. There is the usual expensive funfair (at least expensive when you have four kids) – E3 for dodgem cars sounds grand until you multiply it by 6! That said, there's also free stuff for kids. From colouring competitions, to a Find Wally challenge, a Teddy Bear's picnic, to storytelling by library staff in a cafe (also Lego, colouring equipment etc supplied), to face painting, balloon animals, outdoor connect four, mega jenga & mega lego... The one that took my lads fancy was a tyre changing game. Basically it was a big flat piece of wood painted like a bus with proper 'mini' wheels attached. A real wheel brace was supplied and the kids had to 'change the tyre'. I know it sounds daft, but my older lads loved it. Oh, and these were in a big tent – so rain didn't dampen spirits. The boys also got to try sparring with members of the local boxing club. Well done! Went down a charm!
16. **Castlebellingham Playground** – quite small, not visible from main road, sign is tiny, suitable for younger children mostly, car parking, away from traffic. (*Bundle with any or*

*all of the following: Annagassan & walk along Clogherhead cliffs from pier to village via beach) FREE*

17. **Castleblayney** – super playground with car park & toilets suitable for all ages on edge of Lough Muckno. Well done Monaghan County Council! There was even hot water in the taps the last day we visited! (On a wet day GR8 is nearby with soft-play area & bowling – alas it is **NOT** free) **FREE**
18. **Castle Roche** – the massive ruin of an ancient castle, fabulous views, great to explore & have picnic. Not a Disney castle – but a real fortification! Little (and big) boy heaven! This is set in private farm land. Please behave responsibly & wear wellies or hiking boots. *(Bundle with all or any of the following: Castletown Motte, Cuchulainn's Stone, Stephenstown Pond & Louth Village Playground) FREE*
19. **Castletown Motte** or **Cuchulainn's Castle** is a folly on a hill at the edge of Dundalk. Kids love it & it is a great place to pick blackberries in safety. *20<sup>th</sup> July 2016 Boo hiss! Horrible vandals had a bit of a hooley up there & now lots of broken glass, discarded beer tins & signs of campfires. Have notified relevant authorities. Hope will soon be rectified. (Bundle with all or any of the following: Castle Roche & Cuchlainn's Stone, Stephenstown Pond & Louth Village Playground) FREE*
20. **'Church Crawl'** – don't laugh, can be a life-saver on a wet day when kids are climbing the walls. You'd be surprised what can tickle a kid's fancy. This is particularly good coming up to Christmas when there are cribs to be explored (Kilanny & Knockbridge get my votes in the best crib category) There are some super examples of religious architecture in the town. The cathedral is the obvious one, but there are loads of them. I love the Redemptorist Church opposite the swimming pool, the Marist Church on St. Mary's Road with its 'baby chapel' to Our Lady, the Friary beside the Garda Station, and the Green Church at the bottom of Clanbrasil Street. There's also St. Joseph's in Fatima, St. Nicholas's at the bottom of Clanbrassil Street, the Holy Family Church in Muirhevnamor, the Redeemer in Cox's. The church in Louth Village & in Dunleer in particular are also worth a visit. And Inniskeen, Knockbridge, Kilkerry & Kilcurry are all within minutes of the town centre. Don't knock it till you've tried it! And if you're interested in the arts, Harry Clarke (Ireland's most famous stained glass maker) created windows in the churches in Knockbridge and Carrickmacross and probably a few more... And the Redemptorist bells are super on Sundays! And then there's St Peter's in Drogheda with the dead guy's head in it, the church in Dublin with the mummies in the basement... Churches rock on wet days! And I haven't even mentioned lighting candles & the pleasures of balconies. It mightn't do it for you, but your kids might love it if you play your cards right!
21. **Clogherhead** – yes, there is a beach there, but the walk from the pier cross country along the coast is a real adventure for little heroes.... Not buggy friendly & no loos. Often see seals at pier. *(Bundle with: Annagassan & Castlebellingham Playground) FREE*
22. **Clare Glen** lies on the left about 1 mile out the Markethill Road from the village of Tandragee, Co Armagh (north of Newry) and took about 45 minutes to reach. My boys absolutely loved it & we managed to spend 5 hours there, including a picnic. There are toilets & car parks at both ends. My boys were particularly impressed by the clean &

super technological toilets in the little car park! (The toilets in the car park at the other end are to be found in the little caravan park.) The glen comprises of 3 different walks, each just under 2 km in length on a fairly flat gravel based surface. Some sections are a little muddy & winter visitors would be advised to bring wellies or stout walking shoes. The green walk runs along by the River Cusher & is the easiest. It is flat & suitable for buggies. The blue & black walks are a bit more challenging, but even my brave 3 year old managed them. There is no chance of getting lost & yet there is plenty of scope for children to explore the forest surrounding the walks. Obviously there are a few spots where caution is advised with younger children due to the proximity of water & the possibility of falls. There are toilets at both ends of the walks & lots of picnic tables. It is a popular place for locals to walk dogs. A small minority don't pick up after their dogs. That said all those we met were very friendly & willing to chat to my boys who are dog mad. We have been advised to return again in winter when the whole glen is gushing with water & in very early spring when the bluebells are in bloom. As most of the walk is under tree cover this is an outing suitable for a day when showers are expected. **FREE SUITABLE FOR A SHOWERY DAY**

23. **Cuchulainn's Stone** – you've all seen the famous statue in the GPO of the dead hero with the raven sitting on his shoulder. But have you visited the stone itself? It lies just outside the village of Knockbridge. Dress up like a hero, tie yourself to it like the Celtic warrior himself & take a selfie! It is visible from the road and an easy walk through a field. It won't take long, but is good fun, especially if the kids know the story & see a picture of the sculpture in advance: *'Ten years after the Táin, Cúchulainn was defeated by magic at the age of 27. When he received his fatal wound, he tied himself to a pillar so he would die standing and facing his enemies.. The Mórrígan, a battle-goddess, perched on his shoulder in the shape of a raven when he was dead.'* (Bundle with all or any of the following: Castle Roche, Castletown Motte, Stephenstown Pond & Louth Village Playground.) **FREE**



24. **Darver GAA grounds**, Louth's centre of excellence, is a great place to bring small kids for a cycle (as long as there aren't a load of matches on – can be very busy on a match night) It has lots of paths away from traffic. However, it is not always open. Last time I was there some very energetic hare were bounding around the place. (Bundle with Stephenstown Pond & Louth Village Playground) **FREE**
25. **Drogheda Playground** – on the banks of the Boyne, this is a great playground. (A visit here can be followed by a walk along the river, a – don't shoot me! – trip to McDonalds which is more or less across the road, & if mum & dad are feeling really flush, a train-ride back to Dundalk. The food & transport mentioned here are clearly **NOT** free!) **FREE**

26. **Drumconrath Playground** – has been recommended to me. A few km from Carrickmacross. Will report back when have seen it with my own eyes.
27. **Dublin Zoo** – go early & bring a picnic. Is not cheap but the kids love it. Can get cheaper tickets via Tesco clubcard vouchers & other promotions. **NOT FREE**
28. **Dun a Ri Forest Park** – a little further afield, this Coillte forest lies between Carrickmacross & Kingscourt. It is a super place to bring kids, but not all routes are buggy friendly, as there are steps etc in places. Although there isn't a playground, there are basic toilets, a car park & lots of interest. The **E5** charge must be paid **IN COINS (!)** at the gate / barrier, but it is worth every cent. Ranked best forest park in the world by my kids. *(Bundle with Carrickmacross Playground, Kilanny Playground, Inniskeen)* **ALMOST FREE**
29. **Dunleer Playground** – this pretty little village might not be a major tourist destination, but it has a lovely new playground beside a church, the inside of which I personally find delightful. No toilets, but there is car parking & a well-stocked supermarket within a minute walk – great for an impromptu picnic. (It is also worth noting that this village hosts one of the best toy shops in the country. Don't be put off by the warehouse-like appearance of Duffys. It is a super place. Bring your wallet!) *(Bundle with Monasterboice, Old Melifont & playground in Tullyallen)* **FREE**
30. **Funtasia Waterpark** – in Drogheda, this is a water park. It is definitely NOT free. Go early in holiday time as sometimes long wait to get in. You can stay as long as you like, but no food inside so make sure they are well fed before you enter! **NOT FREE. WET DAY**
31. **Fun House** – indoor soft play centre just north of Newry on the Warrenpoint road. Friendly staff, but **NOT FREE. WET DAY**
32. **Hill of Slane** (see **Slane Hill**)
33. **Ice-House Hill** – lovely town park to walk / picnic in. No playground, but it has a little pond. It lies 'behind' the bus station, a stone's throw from the Long Walk Shopping Centre, one of the older shopping centres in Dundalk. Can usually park nearby. Litter can sometimes be an issue. *(Bundle with any or all of the following: St Helena's Park & Playground, Aisling Park & Playground, Muirhevenamor Playground & Park, all within the town boundaries)* **FREE**
34. **Inniskeen** is another great place to visit with children. This pretty little village has a lot to offer for a short outing with children. A lovely round tower, a riverside walk – great place for a picnic – and a small playground. Also if you walk through the graveyard to the top of the hill, there is a little gate that leads onto a farm lane... Fancy exploring? And of course is you are interested in poetry & Patrick Kavanagh...*(Bundle with Louth Village Playground & Stephenstown Pond, or Kilanney Playground, or Carrickmacross Playground)* **FREE**
35. **Irish War and Military Museum** – Near Collon, this excellent private museum comes with playground & picnic area and small walk. Better on a dry day, but suitable for one of those showery days as you can nip in and out *(Bundle with any of the following: Ardee*

*Playground, Slane, Slane playground, Slane Castle, Littlewood Forest Park, New Melifont Abbey)* **NOT FREE WET-ISH DAY**

36. **Jumping Church** – just outside Ardee, the ruin this sixteenth century church is surrounded by a small graveyard. Its claim to fame is ‘the jumping wall’. The gable wall of the church now stands about three feet from where it started (foundations are clearly visible). Was it a storm, or did the wall of the church jump supernaturally to exclude the grave of an excommunicated individual? It might only amuse kids for ten minutes or so, but sometimes that is all you need.... *(Bundle with any activities around Carrickmacross, Ardee, Collon, Slane)* **FREE**
  
37. **Kilanny Playground** – in between Dundalk & Carrickmacross ‘in the middle of nowhere’ is a super playground suitable for all ages. Large car park shared with church. There are toilets beside the church but alas these are often locked. Why build them if no one can access them?? **FREE**
  
38. **King John’s Castle**, Carlingford – right on the pier, this is a real boys’ castle. It is a ruin, but in good repair. Climb up the steps to it, explore and then exit via a wild overgrown area at the back. This will bring you down to a small STONY beach, great SHADED spot for a picnic. Not great for sandcastles, but ideal for a little paddling in shade on a hot day. Would advise kids to wear old sandals or ‘water shoes’ while paddling. *19<sup>th</sup> July 2016 Steps down to beach badly damaged by winter weather. Access possible but difficult for young, older or infirm. Advise postponing visit until repairs undertaken.* **FREE**
  
39. **Laytown** – a great beach & a dang good playground which benefits from a clear view of a railway bridge & a bus stop. Mightn’t be a view to set the adults on fire, but my kids like the playground & love seeing the trains whizz by. *(Bundle with Sonairte)* **FREE**
  
40. **Little Rascals** – indoor soft-play area just as you approach Newry **NOT FREE. WET DAY**
  
41. **Littlewood** – a Coillte forest just outside Slane (on the Collon side). No toilets, but a loop walk and decent car park. Couple of mucky spots. Don’t wear your designer shoes! *(Suggest that this could be bundled with visits to Slane Playground, Slane Castle & possibly the Irish Military Museum. There is a cafe in Slane Castle & George’s Bakery deserves a visit)* **FREE**
  
42. **Lordship** – the village of Lordship has a super playground in the GAA grounds which is open to the public. Even has a restaurant / cafe with a view of the playground. Large car park also. Wear sunscreen on a hot day as very little shade. In summer months frequent family-friendly car-boot sales in aid of charity. Please note that the playing fields here have recently been named in honour of Garda Adrian Donoghue who was murdered in the line of duty during a robbery at the local credit union. **FREE**
  
43. **Louth County Museum** *(Bundle with visits to the town library, cathedral and then do ‘a church crawl’. Also Dundalk Gaol, now called the Oriel Centre, is worth a visit but needs to be organised in advance. The more interesting part of the jail now houses the town archives. It is not generally open to the public but if you phone up and ask nicely they*

*will often oblige. If kids are jumping out of their skins, there is also Airbound, Pirates Den, Aura Swimming Pool & two cinemas).* **FREE. WET DAY**

44. **Louth Village** – recently opened playground in the middle of the village, pleasant, varied & close to shops. No designated parking or toilets (there is a toilet at the very pretty church nearby). 99s available nearby in summer months! St Mary's Abbey has huge potential & urgently needs a tidy up but thus far I can't find out who owns it. Anyone know? Not the parish, not the council.... **FREE**
45. **Melifont Abbey** – not to be confused with the ruins, this is a working Abbey in Collon Village. There is a nice, quiet walk up to it from the main road, although there are some cars. If the kids make it to the top and back, the filling station across the road serves cones in the summer... (*Bundle with a visit to Ardee Playground of any of the attractions around Slane*) **FREE** (not the cones!)
46. **Millmount Tower & Museum** Small charge. Great view from tower & my kids loved the bottom floor. Lots of old toys & and phone cards. Anyone remember them?? **NOT FREE. WET DAY**
47. **Monasterboice & Old Melifont** – The tower at Monasterboice always gets my kids' imaginations going & when they are tired (quietly) chasing round here – or when a bus of tourists arrive – we pop down the road to Old Melifont. It is in the care of the OPW, there is a small fee, but you can stay all day if the mood takes you. Some nice spots for picnics & no one glares at you if the kids make a bit of noise haring around. Just be aware that there are some areas where small children could fall from height, so care in necessary. The site has a small river running alongside it, so usual sensible precautions required if bringing smaller children. There are toilets & a car park but no food or drink of any kind, so come well stocked. (*Bundle with a visit to some of the following: Tullyallen Playground, Dunleer Playground & Duffy's toyshop*) **GOOD VALUE. ALMOST FREE**
48. **Muirhevnamor Playground** - surrounded by a decent park with adult exercise equipment in it. It is set in one of the more 'challenging' residential areas of Dundalk but don't let that put you off a visit. **FREE**
49. **Newgrange / Knowth / Dowth ('Bru na Boinne')**, Donore, Drogheda – Get there early during summer season or be prepared for a long wait. Decent cafe, but would suggest bringing a picnic for younger visitors as food 'adult' in nature. Go in good weather & ALWAYS bring coats & rain gear. Even if the sun is splitting the stones, it can be FREEZING on those hills...Knowth is best. Dowth is open access & **FREE. 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2016 To visit Knowth & Newgrange for 4+ hours, including four mini bus trips, for myself & four kids (9,7,5,3) cost E11. Can't complain about that, can I?** **GOOD VALUE. ALMOST FREE**
50. **Newgrange Farm** – this is not free, but again family tickets are available & you can stay the whole day & bring a picnic. No other purchases are required unless you go for a tractor ride (E2.50 per person) or buy something in the cafe or souvenir shop. It now accepts debit & credit cards. It deals a lot with schools & is good with kids. It is better on a drier day, but has enough to keep little people amused indoors on a showery day - under 5s play area with Wendy houses & wheeled toys, an in-barn hay 'hide and seek'

area & another area with lots of pedal tractors. **NOT FREE BUT REASONABLE & GOOD VALUE WET-ISH DAY**

51. **Newtown House & Gardens** – yes, this one does indeed lie in the direction of Dublin & there is a small charge, but it has animals, park & playground & you can stay the whole day, so arrive early on a sunny day. **NOT FREE, BUT REASONABLE & GOOD VALUE**
52. **Omeath Playground** – not huge, but a welcome addition when exploring the area with younger children. (*Bundle with Slieve Foy Forest Park, Carlingford & Playground, King John's Castle & a quick snoop around Greenore*) **FREE**
53. **Pirates Den** – indoor soft-play centre in Dundalk. **NOT FREE. WET DAY**
54. **Proleek Dolmen** – a safe place to take the kids for a walk & have a picnic. The dolmen is in the grounds of the Ballymacscanlon Hotel, so parking is no problem & the path is marked & car free. (The hotel does a nice hot chocolate if you can stretch to it...and if you think the hotel could survive a visit from your children...) **FREE**
55. **Ramparts Walk, Slane** – This is a walk which runs between the Boyne River & the old canal along what would have been the old tow path. Head away from the village across the bridge. There are small car parks either side of the road just as you exit the bridge. The walk runs on both sides of the road. On the left hand side the walk is 2.5 km and ends at a small bridge & weir. Then you have to walk back (not a loop), so 5km in total. On the plus side it is relatively flat and level, so ideal for a three wheeler buggy. Generally it is dry & safe with some great bird life. However, my lads judged it to be 'ok, but a bit boring'. It is one of those resources that has a lot of potential, but is really under developed. There isn't a single bench, for example, or any information about wildlife the whole length of the walk. That said, there are picnic tables near the car park. While I can see the logic of this, the fact that the picnic area is so close to a busy main road was a major downside. The walk on the right hand side is mowed grass & runs along the river Boyne. Though not as long as the walk on the other side, my boys judged it to be 'way more interesting' as they could get much closer to running water! **FREE (for bundle: see Slane Castle)**
56. **Rathescar Wildlife Reserve & Habitat** just outside Drogheda is a lovely place to walk with kids. It has a lake & plenty of picnic tables where the kids can watch swans. Limited parking. No toilets. Sections of paths can be a bit mucky at times. Wear old shoes. **FREE**
57. **Ravensdale Forest** – Another Coillte forest just north of Dundalk & off the M1. Don't leave valuables visible in the car! **FREE**
58. **Ravensdale Riverside Walk** – I don't know the official name, but this is a super 'adventure' trek for more sure footed, fit & adventurous children & adults. I did it with my 7 & 9 year old & they managed perfectly well, but younger children would most likely only be able to do the first part (to the first bench). Smaller children would need to be in a backpack & it is NOT suitable for a buggy. Wear wellies or waterproof hiking boots as there are a few boggy spots. The walk runs along a stream & criss-crosses the river via small, basic wooden bridges. There is a well-worn trail to follow. We walked to the end of the stream & back (2 hours-ish), however it is possible – and more advisable -

to do a loop coming down via the forest. Alas, as I wasn't sure of my directions, it was early evening, clouds were rolling in & I had kids with me, I took no chances. Both my boys & I loved it, even with wet socks! Directions: Find The Lumpers Pub in Ravensdale. Just to the left of the pub, there is a narrow road. Walk / drive up this road for 1 km or so. The entrance to the walk is on the right. It is not sign-posted but is the first place a few cars could park. It is a Coillte (state forestry) access road. Walk up here a little, & you'll spot a 'gap' on the left. Go through it & you're on see the wee river your way. The broader road in front of you & heading uphill is the end of the loop & you would return via it to your car. Ideally, park at The Lumpers. The pub take-away serves light refreshments & and meals from 5pm – reasonably priced & kid friendly (pizza, chips etc). There are picnic tables. **FREE**

59. **Rossmore Park** – A Coillte Forest just the other side of Monaghan town (a very attractive town to visit) This substantial park has basic toilets, picnic tables, & car park provided. A place a family could spend the whole day having adventures, but on our last visit it seemed a little jaded. A little TLC here could make a huge difference. **FREE**
60. **Skypark** – just outside Carlingford, this is well worth the E12 per child that I paid today, though it is not a place I'd visit every day! Suitable for children from 5 to adult on any day except icy or threat of lightning – but I'd aim for good weather to get max enjoyment out of it. **NOT FREE.**
61. **Slane Castle** – a guided tour of the house comes with a charge, but it is free to walk around the grounds when they are open. There is a little cafe & toilets & car parking. *(Suggest that this could be bundled with visits to Ramparts Walk, Slane Hill, Littlewood Forest Park, Slane Playground, the Ramparts Walk along by the river & possibly the Irish War & Military Museum. There is a cafe in Slane Castle & George's Bakery deserves a visit)* **FREE**
62. **Slane Hill** – discovered by accident following a brief encounter with some German walkers looking for directions (how embarrassing to be lead to such treasures by visiting continentals!) From the main road turn in towards the playground but drive past it and up the hill in front of you. It is a cul de sac with parking at the top. Remember your primary school history / religion when we learned about St Patrick lighting a Pascal (Easter) fire on the top of Slane Hill? Well, this is the place. The views are great, and there is space for the kids to have a good run around but the best bit is that there is a ruined monastery from 1500ish up there with **the absolute best stone spiral staircases** we have encountered yet. Mega place to explore for my lads (5,7,9) although you need to keep an eye on smaller ones as the potential to have a bad fall definitely exists. And for heaven's sake, please leave no trace!!! Bring home all litter – rubbish bugs the hell out of me!!!! *(for bundle: see Slane Castle)* **FREE**
63. **Slane Playground** – small but beautifully formed! Visible from the road on the right hand side as you approach Slane from Collon direction, it has a particularly good climbing frame which even entertained my 9 year old. It also has two big trees which provide great shade & a handy spot for a picnic, & better still one can be climbed! There is a small car park, but no toilet. There is a supermarket almost across the road which do fresh baked goods, very handy for an impromptu picnic. *(for bundle: see Slane Castle)* **FREE**

64. **Slieve Foy Forest Park** – just north of Carlingford on the left, this is another Coillte Forest. Drive to the top and let the kids follow the forest paths all the way down (not for buggies) & do some exploring. Is also part of some much longer Tain walks. **FREE**
65. **Slieve Gullion Park** – Just outside Newry, this is a great playground which caters for all ages. There is also a lovely forest walk, a large car park, picnic area & toilets available. There is also a small cafe, but not beside the playground. Scenic drive home. **FREE**
66. **Stephenstown Pond** – A community run nature reserve outside the village of Knockbridge this has a small playground, a lake with very tame swans where children can safely feed the ducks, basic toilets, a car park & a cafe with a full view of the playground. This mum likes it! There is no charge to use the facility. However, **E3 is charged for car-parking** to help fund this local resource. For safety reasons, please do not park outside the grounds as this requires you to cross the road at a dangerous bend. If you live locally, a yearly entry card for approx E20 is available. **ALMOST FREE**
67. **St Helena's Park** – my favourite town park as has loads of trees & shade, a playground suitable for all ages, & a walk along the estuary. Lidl is across the road and is the best place to park. Flat, so ideal for children learning to cycle. Be warned that there are FIVE possible exits from this park, four onto busy roads, so keep an eye on little ones. There are public toilets but they are not always open & I think require a small fee. In a crisis Lidl staff are very helpful if a little one is 'bursting'. **FREE**
68. **St Peter's Church, Drogheda** – this lies in the middle of 'main street' & has glorious architecture etc. However, I'll bet that the little monsters will be more interested in the mummified head of a certain saint...*(Bundle with Millmount Museum & possibly Funtasia Waterpark)* **FREE**
69. **Sonairte** – outside Laytown, this is an eco-centre. It has a lovely, though somewhat unkempt, river walk, a nice courtyard with some battered but popular toys & a decent cafe & eco shop. Beware – they only take cash as far as I am aware! It has a slightly neglected hippy feel to it, but I find it oddly appealing *(Bundle with Laytown Playground & beach)* **FREE**
70. **Tayto Park** – pretty good adventure park. Only 45 minutes away but expensive. Bring a picnic & be there midweek on a dull day when the gates open at 10am – and stay till the gates are banging shut! Great enclosed playground with only one exit, but if your kids are 10+ & over a certain height, it might be worth your while to consider buying the wristbands.... **VERY DEFINITELY NOT FREE**
71. **Townley Hall** – Outside Drogheda. Forest & Walks. **FREE**
72. **Tullyallen Playground** – exit 10, Collon road R168, then left for Tullyallen. Then take right immediately after school. Is on the right beside GAA grounds. *(Bundle with Monasterboice, Old Melifont, Dunleer Playground & Duffy's Toyshop)* **FREE**

73. **W5, Belfast** – technically ‘going abroad’ but is only 55 minutes on the train followed by a very short walk. Not free by any means, but indoors. Bring a picnic – and a change of clothes for the kiddies – and stay all day. **NOT FREE**

This list is not exhaustive. It has been compiled by a local mum from personal experience for the benefit of others who are trying to entertain their kids healthily & on a budget. More info on many online. Enjoy!

This mum's top 10 parent / child friendly 'eateries' (in alphabetical order)

1. **Airbound** – purely because it is handy to meet another mum for a coffee as it has a toddler play area & an activity for an older child. Only most basic drinks & snacks available.
2. **Applegreen Service Station M1** (between Dundalk & Drogheda) – no, I'm not joking. A variety of food, friendly staff, clean toilets, easy parking, and an indoor and outdoor play area. What is not to like? Admittedly, the play areas aren't huge, but sometimes mums and kids just need a change of scene. Well worth the price of a cup of coffee...
3. **Callans** (Castleblayney Road) – staff very patient & tolerant & prepared to adjust menu a little for fussy eaters. Food yummy.
4. **McDonalds** – don't knock it. I'm not a regular by any means, but it is policy for staff to be particularly accommodating of pregnant women & mums on their own with small children. The fact that they now have clear calorie counts on their food & serve fruit with Happy Meals also has bumped them up my approval table. In addition, they provide colouring materials & the local one in Dundalk now have some tablet things with educational type games on them. Not only that, but I got a free coffee when I agreed to fill in a customer report form one day, and no staff member ever huffed at me for breastfeeding there.
5. **Relish** – lovely ambience, friendly & co-operative staff, has a decent kids menu that won't break the bank & toys downstairs (when it is open). Have only snacked there but had a small coffee & four kids' hot chocolates - & had change from E10. Warning for those with buggies - some steps up to door & toilets upstairs.
6. **Sonairte**, Laytown – don't be put off by the slightly unkempt courtyard with toys like old tractors scattered around. They are surprisingly good at keeping kiddies amused, decent food & a reasonable children's menu make this an ideal place to chill.
7. **Stephenstown Pond** – just for a snack or coffee, doesn't do meals, but you're only feet away from the playground & can eat inside with Granny or new baby, or outside at picnic table....

8. **The Malt House, Dundalk** – no fancy table linen here, but atmosphere relaxed, lots of families, decent food, colouring stuff for kids etc
9. **The Rum House** – on Park Street, very fancy & impressive looking, newly renovated, but is on my list because I'm giving full marks to staff for effort above & beyond the call of duty when dealing with small kids. Thank you!
10. **'The Station Cafe'** at Lordship Playground - Full meals served within view of a great playground. Kiddie menu includes goujons, sausages & pasta (approx E5).

And the ones I haven't done .... YET

- American-Ulster Folk Park
- Ballymoyer Woodland
- Boyne Ramparts Walk – 8km from Stockallen to Navan Ramparts
- Cavan Burren & Marble Arch Caves
- Dalgan Park – 3 miles south of Navan, 7km, 1.5-2 hours walk, forest, river, 500 acres
- Dartry Forest Recreation Area – Coillte Forest 2km west of Rockcorry, Co Monaghan on R188 to Cootehill)
- Deerpark Forest – Coillte Forest 1km from Virginia
- Girley Bog – near Kells
- Guided Hillwalking (in summer) at Loughcrew – 3-4km, near Oldcastle Kells
- Loughcrew Gardens – small charge
- Mullaghmeen Forest near Oldcastle – 1000+ acres
- Senator Billy Fox memorial Park (Latton, between Cavan & Monaghan, just off R162 between Shercock & Cootehill) – 40 min
- Ballybay wetlands centre
- Cavan museum in Ballyjamesduff
- Silent Valley, near Kilkeel
- Commons Loop Carlingford
- Tullymore
- Gosford
- Peatlands

### **Ballymoyer Woodland**

The route leaves from the car park at the Junction of Ballymoyer Road and Drumcrow Road. It initially follows the Creggan River and then winds its way through the mixed woodland of a fairy glen with deep mossy and ferned banks before returning back to the starting point

COUNTY      Armagh

DISTANCE    2 miles

NEAREST TOWN Whitecross

ROUTE SHAPE Circular

ROUTE TYPE Woodland

TERRAIN Off road woodland trail

GRID REFERENCE (START) H978312

GRID REFERENCE (END) H978312

Point of Interest Diverse woodland and specimen trees

Route Description

Start at the carpark at the junction of Ballymoyer Road and Drumcrow Road. Follow the path through the gate alongside the Creggan River until it joins the Ballymoyer Road. Follow the trail and waymarkers on the opposite side to the viewpoint and through the looped top section that traverses the steep glen. From the viewpoint cross the road again and return via the Creggan River path to the starting point.

Getting to the Start Access from Ballymoyer Road between Whitecross and Newtownhamilton

Accessibility Grade Grade 5

Facilities Car parking at the start of the walk. Refreshments, shops and toilets in Whitecross.

Publication Ballymoyer - leaflet produced by National Trust

Publication Availability Contact Newry Tourist Information Centre on 028 3031 3170 or contact the National Trust on 028 9751 0721 or email - [info@smtp.ntrust.org.u](mailto:info@smtp.ntrust.org.u)