

Plant species to spot

The nature trail changes with the seasons. Flowers such as dog violet, primrose and wood sorrel (pictured) can be seen throughout the spring. In the summer the rich pink of flowering foxgloves are a familiar sight, along with purple carpets of different heather on the heathland. By the autumn the leaves of the trees have started to turn from green to gold, yellow and red, and the edges of the trail are bejewelled with mushrooms of all sorts of shapes and colours. Even in winter, the bright flash of the robin, or the deep red of holly berries brings colour to the valley.



Bluebells

Bluebells are a woodland wildflower, forming dense sapphire carpets under trees in April and May. They are seen best at the end of the nature trail along the old railway line where thick vegetation has been cut back, allowing light to fall on the ground. Before the trees have grown their leaves, bluebell bulbs under the soil benefit from the warm spring sun and put up their leaves and flowers. Bluebells are protected by law.



Wildlife you might see

Butterflies



Butterflies can be seen flying throughout the warm spring and summer months with some species such as the peacock butterfly (pictured) flying on warm days all year round!

The plants in Silent Valley produce sweet nectar in their flowers for butterflies to feed on which in turn helps the plants to pollinate one another and create seeds.

Ravens

Listen out for the low croaking 'Grok Grok' of ravens flying overhead. These handsome black birds nest up and around the Mourne and are regular visitors to Silent Valley.



Dragonflies & Damselflies



Add a splash of colour to riversides. There are lots of varieties - see how many you can count.

THE MOUNTAIN PARK OPENING HOURS:

10.00am - 4.00pm (October – April)

10.00am - 6.30pm (Summer)

A charge is payable at the entrance

Coffee Shop: daily 11.00am - 6.30pm in June, July & August, and on Bank Holidays in April, May & September.

Information Centre: interactive exhibition open all year round from 10.00am - 6.30pm. Free of charge.



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Ulster Wildlife Trust

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Northern Ireland
Tourist Board



Northern Ireland
Environment
Agency



An Agency within the Department of the
Environment
www.doent.gov.uk



The Silent Valley Reservoir is owned and managed by Northern Ireland Water

Silent Valley Nature Trail

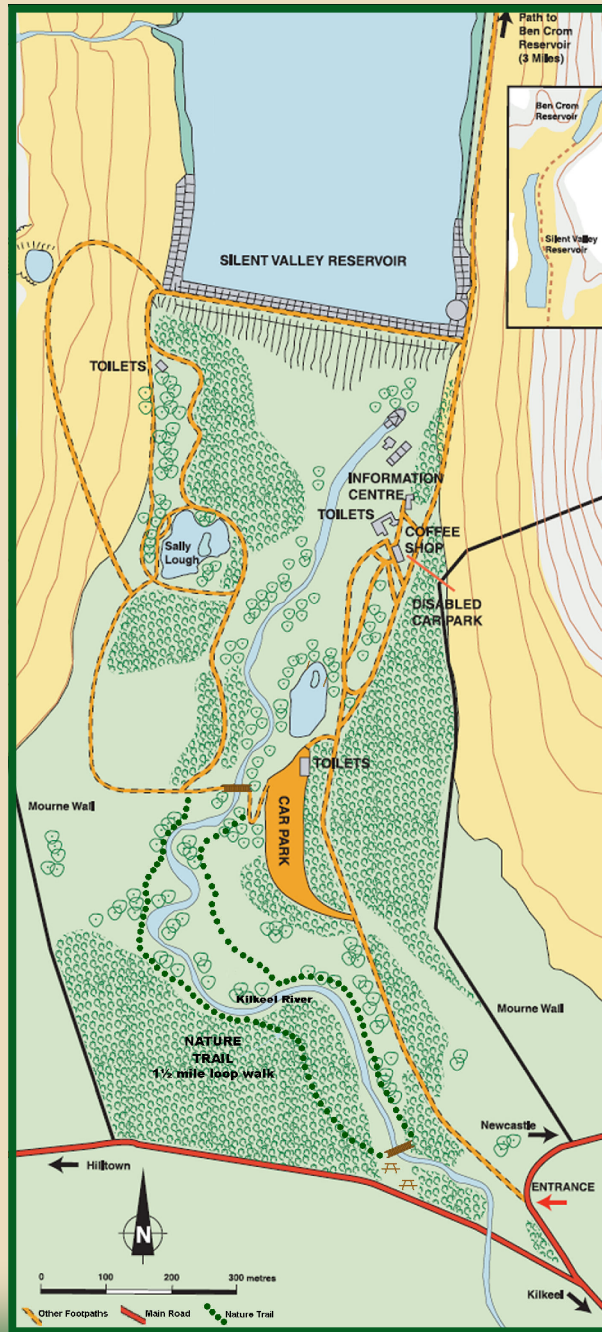
The Silent Valley Nature Trail is a 1.5 mile circular walk through the Kilkeel River valley. The trail is level with an all weather surface, and there are no steps or steep inclines, allowing the visitor, young and old of all abilities, to 'get close to nature.'

The Nature Trail experience is like the Mourne AONB in miniature – a sort of 'mini-Mourne'. Along the way you can enjoy the natural heritage of the heathland habitat; observe up close a traditional Mourne dry stone wall; encounter remnants of cut granite echoing the days of quarrying when the Mournes supplied stone to great industrial cities such as Belfast and London; recall, through following the railway, the feats of engineering that were the construction of the Valley dams; experience the cover of both forest plantation and native woodland; and hear the distinctive and rhythmic rush of the water in one of the many rivers that flows from the mountains to the sea.

As you walk

From the car park you can head down the east bank of the river valley. Here you follow the boardwalk across an area of lowland heath, with great views of the mountains. The path continues alongside the heath where restoration work is underway to remove the non-native trees and revitalise the heathland.

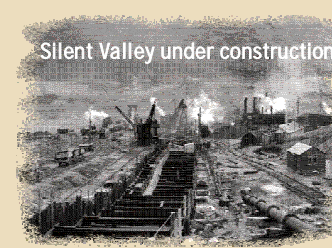
Beyond the heathland a flat area opens up to your right. This is the floodplain of the Kilkeel River. The area has become overgrown with bracken, which is being controlled by rolling and cutting in the summer. It is now planted out with Mourne oak, grown from acorns collected from Rostrevor ancient oakwood. Existing rowan and impressive mature holly trees are also present.



The trail drops down to the river through a narrow wooded corridor where you can see holly, willow and alder. There's also large stands of cotoneaster and rhododendron - non-native species we're gradually removing. You may see dragonflies and damselflies darting along this section looking for food if it is a warm day.

A traditional Mourne dry stone wall runs alongside the trail, and there are some large stones scattered around showing marks from the 'plug and feather' cutting technique used by stonemasons to split these boulders in the past.

You are now at the river which is crossed by a new wooden bridge. Here you'll see plenty of insects and birds, and possibly salmon or trout. There are picnic benches in the clearing by the river, but please remember to take your litter home.



Silent Valley under construction

Now on the west side of the river, the trail winds gently up through the coniferous wood and then follows the line of the old railway. This was built to carry supplies and materials from Annalong to the workers' settlement, Watertown, within Silent Valley.

Watertown had a population of 600-700, its own cinema, hospital, and its own policeman called Constable Lawless. The town and the railway line have long since disappeared but the route is now home to a host of plants and animals including ash, scots pine, rowan, bluebells and ravens.

As wonderful views of Slieve Binnian again open up, the trail joins the path leading back to the car park or onto the Sally Lough or Viewpoint Walk, if you wish to wander some more.