

About the College

Baltimore International College is a regionally accredited, non-profit, private college offering baccalaureate and associate degrees and certificate programs through the School of Culinary Arts and the School of Hospitality Business and Management. The college has been educating students since 1972 and offers its students the opportunity to broaden their educational and cultural experience by studying abroad at the Virginia Park campus acquired in 1987. This 100 – acre campus is located in Virginia, County Cavan, approximately 50 miles west of Dublin, Ireland. The Virginia Park estate once served at the sporting lodge and summer residence of the Marquises of Headfort during the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. The site is bordered by hundreds of acres of maintained woodland trails and lakeland including flower gardens, picnic areas and a golf course. In 1939, the lodge was converted into a country resort property – The Park Hotel – which now operates as part of the College's Virginia Park campus.



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Virginia Park Grounds and Surrounds

The Five Landscapes of County Cavan

The Cavan landscape has been the inspiration of many writers and painters over time and to this day the enormous beauty of the land gives pleasure to all who visit here.

The five main landscapes visible in Cavan today are lakes and rivers, mountains and hills, forest and woods, lowlands and bogs, and farmland and domestic gardens. Within these ecosystems a wide range of flora and fauna live in harmony in the wild and in the residential reaches of the country.

Rivers and Lakes

Plant life in and around the rivers and lakes yields vibrant colors in early spring – the bright yellow of the Flag Iris and the vivid purple and pinks of the Foxglove. Closer to the water, the Water Mint and Wild Garlic leave the air lingering with fragrances. In the shallows of the shoreline Bull Rush, Spear Reeds and Water Cress emerge from the water. Summer gives way to Sweet Rocket, Water Hyacinth and Meadow Sweet along with the small and eager flowers of Celandine and Forget-Me-Not. Meanwhile, the Nettle Showy in white bloom attracts an array of butterflies and insects and the Briar adds its baby pink flowers to the tips of its thorns. Towards late summer the Bull Rush appears in velvet and shows up elegantly against the sunset on long summer evenings.

Cavan's rivers and lakes contain both course and game fish. They also host birds such as the Heron, Moorhen, Coot and Great Crested Grebe. Minks and Otters can also be found scuttling along the shores and banks.

Forest and Woods

The forest parks of Cavan are mainly planted with Coniferous species of trees such as Norway and Sitka Spruce and the broad leafed species such as Ash, Beech, Oak, birch, Sycamore and Elder. These canopies provide almost total shade on the forest floor where a variety of delicate plant life grows. In summer



the sweet smell from the Woodbine Honeysuckle wafts from the flowers as the plants curl through the trees to reach the light. The wild raspberries and strawberries strive for survival along the edge of paths where the sun strikes.

The woods in Cavan vary considerably in size and give way to plenty of flora such as Ferns, Foxglove, Snowdrops and Primroses. Rhododendron, Laurel, Holley and Snowberries invade the woodlands natural clearances and path edges. The forests and woods are also home to a large range of birds like the Tits, Magpie, Chaffinch, Jays and Blackbirds and animals such as Grey Squirrels, Rabbits, Hedgehogs, Badgers and Foxes.

Lowlands and Bogs

The main type of bog in Cavan is the raised bog. They were formed after the lakes of the fens dried up, leaving rain as the only source of water. At this stage, moss grew on the top, drawing water up through the peat, increasing acidity and acting as a sponge on the surface. The bogs of Cavan house a l

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large collection of ericacious plant types such as Cranberry, Bog Rosemary and Myrtle.

On the lowlands, plants such as the Black Bog Rush and Marsh Spotted Orchid can be seen. Both areas are home to many animals and birds including the Frog, Fox, Grey Heron, Curlew and Red Grouse. Birds of prey use the vast open space of the bog as a hunting ground and can often be seen gliding in the air. The bogs are also used for cutting turf to provide fuel for the winter. This process is carefully managed to ensure the bog does not get cut away.

Mountains and Hills

The mountains in Cavan are situated in the western part of the county and consist mainly of Limestone. On the face of the Limestone only Lichens grow, but once there is a marginal layer of soil, the plant activity speeds up and produces mosses. As the soil deepens, the Whin Bush, Heather and Harebell grows. Some areas of the mountains consist of Blanket Bog which hosts Honeysuckle, Brambles, Bracken and many Ferns. The Fuchsia populates large portions of the foot of the mountains, skirting the mountains in red and purple in summer.

The hills of Cavan are more commonly known as “drumlins” and, like the mountains, consist mainly of Limestone. Hills are

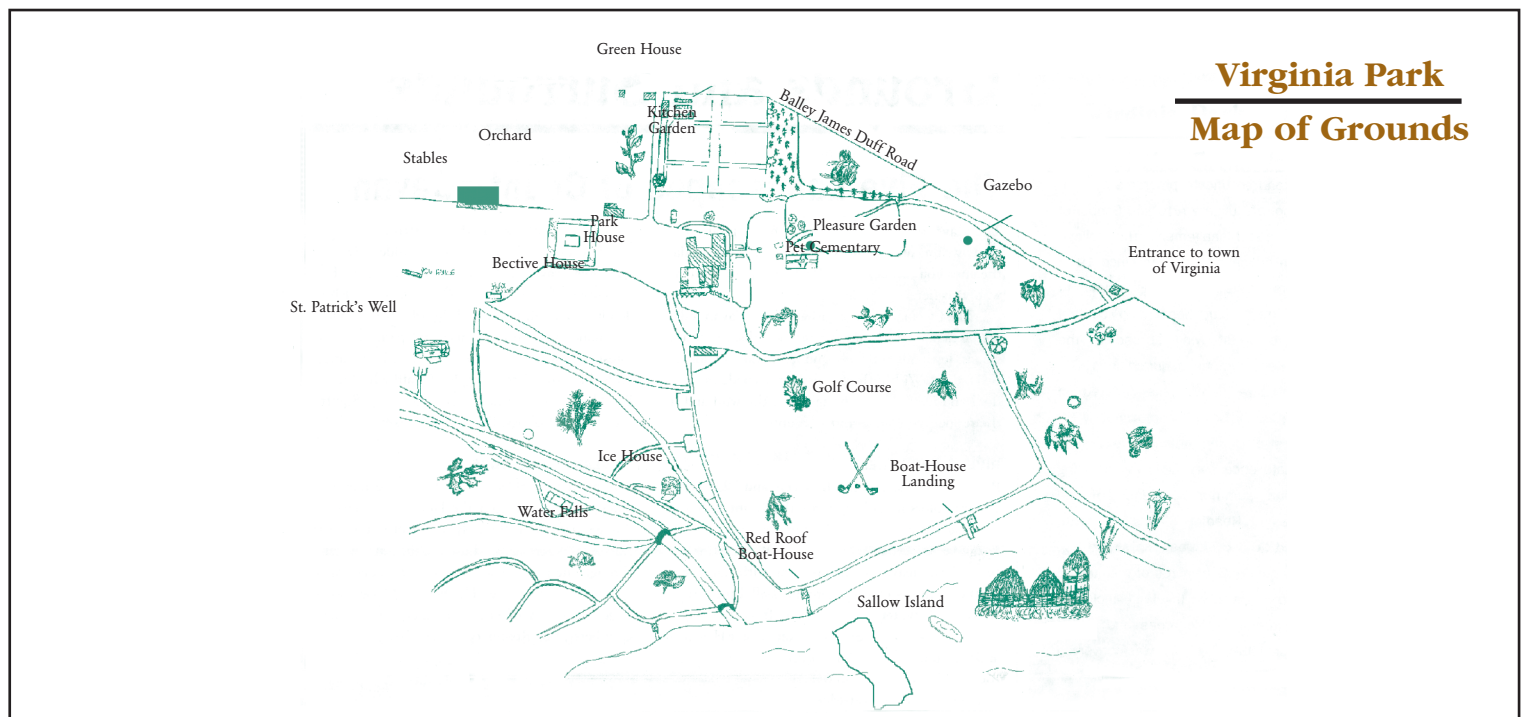
found in all parts of the county and are host to animals such as Foxes and Rabbits. The grasslands on the hills give way to a range of meadow flowers like Poppy, Cowslip, Ragwort, Cornflower and Yarrow.

Farmland and Domestic Gardens

Farming in County Cavan is widespread and many types exist. Dairy farms produce milk and vary in size from two to hundreds of cows. Arable farms exist on the flatter parts of the county and produce barley, wheat and oats. Intensive farms use poor farming land to house animals such as pigs and hens. Ostrich farming is becoming more prevalent while goats that were once farmed are now found wild on the hills. Vegetable and fruit farms also exist but on a small scale.

Domestic house and gardens from Victorian times have left County Cavan with a large collection of unusual plants and trees from the four corners of the world: Rhododendrons from Japan, Monkey Puzzles from Chile, Redwoods from California, and Cedars from Lebanon. Today, there is a revival in gardening and few homes in Cavan are without a neatly kept garden complete with color, fragrance and beauty. Frequently, the house garden overlooks the five landscapes of Cavan, all of which blend into each other with panoramic beauty.

Blazing a Trail: A self-guided tour of grounds



There are four main walks that cover various aspects of the gardens and grounds: The Woodland and Avenue Walk, Devil's Corner Walk, Boat House Walk and Well Walk. A self-guided tour for each one is described below.

Woodland and Avenue Walk **Approximate time- 20 minutes**

Some of the oldest trees on the estate can be found on the Woodland and Avenue Walk. The trees were planted in close proximity to each other which prevents the tree heads from

spreading to full potential. Although advised to plant the trees father apart, Lord Headfort wished to plant as many as possible in each area.

The walk begins in the Pleasure Garden by the front steps of the hotel. The Pleasure Garden is a sunken garden used in Victorian times by women for making flower crafts and doing needle work and by men as an opium den, hence the name “pleasure.” In restoring the garden, the formal design has been maintained with a central path and a gazebo as a centerpiece.

When in the garden, take the central path through the garden to the edge of the woodlands. This path exits onto the

Main Avenue by the gate lodge. Turning and looking down the avenue, a tunnel is created by a row of lime trees on either side, which at dawn and dusk leaves the avenue a place of mystery and magic with shimmering shadows and noises of the half-light.

Also found on the avenue are prime examples of mushrooms and toad stools. Many types of mushrooms are edible while others are of a more sinister nature. One noteworthy mushroom is called The Champion of the Fairy Ring, a small mushroom that grows in circles. According to folklore, they grow “where circles have been given by the footprints in the dance of the fairy rhythm.” Once the mushrooms have grown, it is believed they are used as seating for the political debate of the elves!

Continue along the avenue until you reach the car park. Walk through the car park to get back to the hotel.

Devil's Corner Walk

Approximate time – 45 minutes

Walk from the hotel through the car park and down to the Main Avenue. On your right is the golf course. Approximately half way down the avenue you will take a right onto a new trail. At the head of that trail, a Douglas Fir grows toward the ground then forks before branching upward. The tree is known as “Devil's Corner” because a tree that grows with gravity toward the earth is thought to be called by the devil.

From devil's corner to the edge of the lake are numerous varieties of Rhododendrons which are covered in large colorful blooms in April and May. These are only a small sampling of the Rhododendrons on the grounds which were collected mainly from Japan and China by Lord Headfort at the turn of the century.

When you reach the lake take the path that veers to the left. This path follows along the Lake Shore and through the woodland. The lake frequently floods the area to the right of the path. Because of the flooding, this area is considered a Wetland and grows a different range of plants than the rest of the gardens including Flag Iris, Spear Reeds and Bull Rush. The Winter Mint and Wild Garlic also grow here and give the air a unique fragrance. All of the wetland plants grow in the intermittent shade of the Alders and Poplars, both of which enjoy a constant supply of water from the lake.

The path leads to a gate which exits to the Town of Virginia. Continue up the street through the town and enter back onto the main avenue via the gatehouse. The main avenue will take you back to the car park and the hotel.

Boat House Walk

Approximate time 1 hour

Take the same route as Devil's Corner, walk until you reach the split in the path at the lake. At this point, turn right instead of left. The golf course will be on your right and the Wild Flower Meadow is on your left. This meadow has a wide range of native wild flowers. The Marsh Spotted Orchid has been introduced and displays its exotic flowers in late summer.

Looking out onto the lake, you can see a perfectly round island. This island was known as a Crannog. These were man made islands which were early Christian settlements dating back

to the 16th century. They were made with a wooden base built up with earth and stones. They hosted small communities/ extended families which grazed their animals on the mainland during the day and brought them on to the Crannog at night for protection.

Moving along the shoreline you come upon the first of three Boat Houses built in Lord Headfort's time. This is the largest of the three and is still in reasonably good condition. It possesses a pulley for pulling in larger boats off the lake into the bottom of the house. The small peer to the right side is still used for fishing boat access to the lake. The second house, located father down the trail on the shore at the edge of the woodland, is older and in poor repair, but possesses beautifully shaped gothic windows. In the past this was used for storing boats. To get to the third boat house – Fairy Boat House – follow the path past the wood gate and take the first path on your left. Follow this past the river to the water's edge. This house is the oldest and is shaped as a miniature castle and used for pleasure boating. To return to the hotel, follow the path back to the entrance of the woods at the wood gate and turn left. This will take you back to the car park.

Well Walk

Approximate time 2 hours

Taking the path by the clubhouse from the car, park at the bottom and turn right into the woods from the golf course. Taking the path straight ahead, keep going until you see the second exit on the left. On the right a clearance leads uphill to the Ice Pit, which was used into the 1920's for storing ice cut from the mouth of the river. Taking the path to the left will lead to a Stone Bridge over the river. This bridge dates from around the 1800's and was used for transporting the ice to the pit. The trail seen to the right side of the bridge will take you up the Water Falls and to the Meeting of the Waters. Here, there is a clearance on the bank for you to stand and look. This is the most narrow part of the river and gives way to a series of five falls. This is where the flow of water exudes great energy and is challenged by a secondary flow which thunders up from the earth from an underground spring. This forces it's way up against the down coming current, leaving this river to flow in opposite directions. Walking back to the path by the ice pit, you will see the river fall away to your left and will pass a fork in the road to your right. On the left you will see a large rock and just a few more steps on the right you will find a grass trail leading to St. Patrick's Well. This is a holy well that is dedicated to St. Patrick. Spring wells were seen as miracles in olden times and are thought to possess great healing and fertility in the pure water. This well is blessed in honor of St. Patrick and it was common on St. Patrick's Day to visit the well to pray, however, this tradition is not carried out in strength today. Following your steps back until you exit the woods by the golf course up toward the car park and the hotel.

Virginia Park Guide to Wildlife

The Park Hotel overlooks the Lough Ramor and is surrounded by lush, mature woodland. The woods were planted between 1810 and 1850, with a selection of two-year-old trees such as Oak, Ash, Elm, Scot's Pine, Spruce, Larch and Poplar varieties. Overall, 90,000 trees were planted during this time. Specimens of each can still be seen but only three elms out of 8,000 exist today. Most of the elm population was wiped out in the 1940's by the Dutch Elm Beetle. Since the beetle only attacks mature trees, the few Elms that remain today were spared because they were only seedlings at the time

More tree varieties were added over time like the Horse Chestnut, Sweet Chestnut, Cedar, Monkey Puzzle and Douglas fir. Lime trees line both sides of the avenue. The English Oak, Irish Oak, Canadian Oak and Evergreen Oak were the first planted and have grown into large, noble trees with strong bows and sturdy heads. Some of the best examples of these trees can be found on the golf course.

The California Redwood and Wellintonia trees are doing well in the very deep topsoil and moist climate. The Redwoods are only 40 years old but the Wellintonia are 80 years old and approximately 54 metres high with an 8-metre girth. Amazingly, both species have about 3,000 years left to live.

The self-seeding Adler and Poplar trees can be found in the wetland along the lake shore while Purple, Green and Hazel Beech trees outline the wooded areas. Yew trees mark the entrance to the pleasure garden and line the hedge leading up to the kitchen garden. The largest Scot's Pine tree, which produces an abundance of large cones in autumn, marks the entrance to the kitchen garden.

For more detailed descriptions of the trees and plants that can be found on the Virginia Park Campus, see the garden guide below.

