

Your gill

The lower section of the gill and the land for Coronation Wood were purchased by Hastings Borough Council between 1930 and 1935, and the upper section in 1995. The whole area was declared a Local Nature Reserve, with the full support of English Nature, in November 2002.

Management plans have been drawn up to ensure that the special wildlife and the aesthetic qualities of the gill are properly conserved and, where practical, enhanced. Footpaths, bridges, steps and other features are being restored and maintained for the benefit of visitors. A number of biodiversity surveys have already been undertaken and further work will be commissioned to get a better understanding of the wildlife riches of the gill, to monitor key species and help decide how best to manage the area in the light of new information and changing conditions.

How you can help

Work parties are organised by the Rangers and BTCV to help manage and conserve the gill. For details about work parties, events and to find out more about the wildlife found in Old Roar Gill and the other Local Nature Reserves in Hastings check out the wildHastings website www.wildhastings.org.uk or www.hastings.gov.uk



We are also interested in any records of plants and animals from the gill so please send any wildlife records you have to wildnews@hastings.gov.uk

Contacts

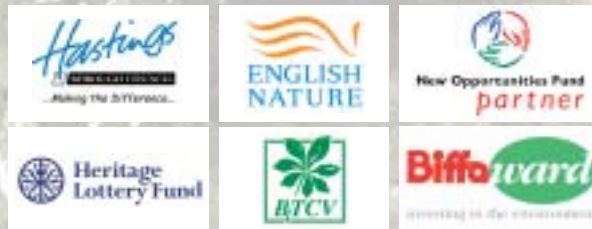
01424 781338

www.hastings.gov.uk

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Access

Old Roar Gill is a permanently open area and visitors are welcome at any time of year. The lower end of the gill is about 15-30 minutes walk from Hastings town centre and railway station and much of this walk is through Alexandra Park. The path through Coronation Wood is the most accessible for wheelchairs and pushchairs.



In recognition of the importance of the gill, the Heritage Lottery Project is funding the improvements to access, including safer paths, steps, handrails and bridges.

Cover photograph by Steve Prosser. Designed by Hastings Borough Council September 2003

Old Roar Gill

Local Nature Reserve





Gills and wildlife

Gills in South East England are very precious habitats for many reasons. They are too steep-sided ever to have been cultivated and have often had continuous tree-cover preserving a damp, shady microclimate for hundreds or thousands of years. They also have some of the best exposures of inland sandrock anywhere in the world. These water-retentive sandstone outcrops are essential for a remarkable range of rare ferns, mosses and liverworts and the insects and other creatures that live among them.

In addition to the sandrock species, Old Roar Gill has a rich diversity of woodland flowering plants, especially in spring: bluebells, red campions, yellow archangel, lady's smock, primroses, violets and scarcer species such as toothwort. There are also intricate tapestries of fern and sedge, often climbing over trees that have fallen down the steep banks or into the water.



One of the special insects of the gill that breeds in the wet, dead wood that is abundant in the gill is the crane fly *Lipsothrix nervosa*. This is not only rare and declining in Britain, it is one of the country's rather few endemic species that are found nowhere else in the world.

This gill woodland makes a wonderful habitat for a wide range of birds and those that nest here include spotted flycatcher, kingfisher, grey wagtail and lesser spotted woodpecker.



Coronation Wood

On the higher slopes of the gill there is almost continuous cover of mature woodland, some left from ancient forest, some that has regenerated of its own accord after clear-felling, and some that has been planted.

Coronation Wood with its many different tree species is a good example of the latter. It was planted in 1937 as part of a scheme to celebrate the coronation of King George VI and further trees, or replacements, have been added from time to time. It is managed as amenity woodland with trees that will be allowed to develop to full maturity as the most important features. Many of these are oaks grown from acorns gathered in Windsor Great Park.

'Old Roar'

Old Roar Gill & Coronation Wood, a Local Nature Reserve open to the public, is one of the most unexpected treasures of Hastings. It is a deeply cut, narrow valley running along the upper reaches of the stream that rises on the sandstone ridge to the north of the town and eventually through Alexandra Park, then on to the sea.

The relatively soft rock formations of this part of the High Weald have created the conditions in which a small stream can cut down for a considerable distance as the centuries go by.

The name 'Old Roar' is from one of the two waterfalls at the head of the gill where the stream plunges over a ledge of harder rock. After heavy rain, the falling water makes a roaring sound and, in the past, the fall was a popular visitor attraction in the area.

The word 'gill' is well-known in the north of England as well as being in general use in Sussex for these small, steep-side valleys. It was originally an Old Norse word and may have been introduced directly into Sussex by the Vikings, or brought in much later by people moving to the area from the north of England. Gill is also spelt locally as 'ghyll'.



It is only relatively recently that ecologists have become fully aware of the importance of dead wood for the wide range of species, both plant and animal, that it supports. Once fallen timber would have occurred naturally in vast quantities throughout Britain's forests, and today it is important to keep as much as possible in places like Old Roar Gill where it has probably always been present along with the species that are dependent on it.

