

Date Notified: 6 October 1989

County: North Yorkshire **Site Name:** Hack Fall Wood

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, as amended.

Local Planning Authority: Harrogate Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SE 235772

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 99 **1:10,000:** SE 27 NW

Area: 42.4 (ha) 104.7 (ac)

First Notified: 1989

Description:

Hack Fall Wood occupies the steep north and east facing slopes of the Hack Fall Gorge, along the River Ure north-west of Ripon. It is important as a largely undisturbed example of ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodland and it contains a wide range of plant communities. Such ancient woodlands are a diminishing resource in Great Britain due to agricultural reclamation and replanting with softwoods.

Local variations in geology within the gorge are reflected in the variety of plant associations within the wood. Where the underlying Brimham Grits are exposed as cliffs, acidic woodland is dominated by sessile oak *Quercus petraea* and silver birch *Betula pendula* with rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and holly *Ilex aquifolium*. The ground flora is typical of this community with great wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica*, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, heather *Calluna vulgaris*, hard fern *Blechnum spicant* and small cow-wheat *Melampyrum sylvaticum*.

The more gentle middle slopes of Ure Shell Beds support a mosaic of woodland communities which favour less acidic conditions. Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, wych elm *Ulmus glabra* and sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* dominate the canopy here with a well developed shrub layer which includes hazel *Corylus avellana* and guelder-rose *Viburnum opulus*. The ground flora is characteristic of old, established woodland with dog's-mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, ramsons *Allium ursinum*, woodruff *Galium odoratum*, enchanter's-nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, primrose *Primula vulgaris* and the uncommon toothwort *Lathraea squamaria* and herb-paris *Paris quadrifolia*.

A series of calcareous springs give rise to a large number of small streams, pools, and to extensive flushing. Steep rocky stream sides support an abundance of ferns including hart's-tongue *Phyllitis scolopendrium*, polypody *Polypodium vulgare* and male-fern *Dryopteris filix-mas* and a rich moss flora. Where conditions are wettest alder *Alnus glutinosa*, bird cherry *Prunus padus* and spindle *Euonymus europaeus* are common and the ground flora is particularly rich being dominated by meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, great horsetail *Equisetum telmateia*, pendulous sedge *Carex pendula* and tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*.

At the southern end of the site small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* is common in the open canopy and the wood fescue *Festuca altissima*, a species which has a very local distribution in Great Britain, is abundant on the cliff faces and precipitous slopes down to the river bank.

In the northern half of the site dutch elm disease has killed stands of wych elm leaving open clearings which have been colonised by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and rosebay willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium*.

Two locally rare animals, *Limax tenellus*, a mollusc and a beetle *Platycis minutus* have been recorded in the site.