

COUNTY: EAST SUSSEX SITE NAME: MARLINE VALLEY WOODS

BOROUGH/DISTRICT: HASTINGS, ROTHER

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

Local Planning Authority: HASTINGS BOROUGH COUNCIL, Rother District Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 780122 Area: 55.0 (ha.) 135.82 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 199 1:10,000: TQ 71 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1965

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 Date of Last Revision: 1989

Other Information:

Part of this site is a reserve of the Sussex Wildlife Trust.
This site was formerly known as Marline Wood.

Reasons for Notification:

These ancient woodlands on Wadhurst Clay and Lower Tunbridge Wells sandstone are dominated by a nationally uncommon woodland type. A valuable feature of the site is the steep sided stream valley (ghyll) which contains plants that have an 'Atlantic' distribution. The site also includes an area of species-rich unimproved grassland, a nationally declining habitat.

The nationally uncommon pedunculate oak-bornbeam (birch-hazel variant) woodland type dominates the woods. There is some variation in composition due to local differences in drainage, soil type, slope and management. There is a history of management under the coppicewith-standards system. The ghyll has been created by vigorous downcutting of the stream through the soft sandstones which underlie the Wadhurst clay. It has a moist and warm microclimate which favours 'Atlantic' plants, now restricted in Britain to the Weald and the west of the country.

Standards of pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* are widespread throughout above coppice of hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* and, less commonly, hazel *Corylus avellana* or sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa*. There are scattered stands of birch *Betula pendula*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, field maple *Acer campestre* and beech *Fagus sylvatica*. Alder *Alnus glutinosa* occurs discontinuously along the stream valley and in small flushes which drain into the stream. Occasional stands of alder coppice are present. Active coppicing has generally reduced the shrub layer but holly *Ilex aquifolium* is locally common and two shrubs associated with ancient woodland are present: butcher's-broom *Ruscus aculeatus* and midland hawthorn *Crataegus laevigata*. The ground flora varies with the current state of management, but honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*, enchanter's-nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and wood avens *Geum urbanum* are often

abundant. The stream valley and lateral flushes support a flora of pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*, yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* and opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*. Two wide rides have been cut through Marline Wood and are dominated by tufted hair grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* with bramble *Rubus fruticosus*.

The stream valley supports 61 species of bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) including 3 uncommon 'Atlantic' species: *Fissidens rivularis*, *Tetradontium brownianum* and *Metzgeria furcata*. Other plants of the ghyll area include soft shield fern *Polystichum setiferum* and broad buckler fern *Dryopteris dilatata*.

The agriculturally unimproved pasture supports a species-rich neutral grassland flora, dominated by lesser knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and common bent *Agrostis capillaris*. Other species adding to the interest of the pasture include adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria*, quaking grass *Briza media* and common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*.