

= Ebbor Gorge =

Ebbor Gorge is a limestone gorge in Somerset , England , designated and notified in 1952 as a 63 @. @ 5 @-@ hectare (157 @-@ acre) biological Site of Special Scientific Interest in the Mendip Hills . It was donated to the National Trust in 1967 and is now managed by Natural England as a National Nature Reserve .

The gorge was cut into the Clifton Down Limestone , an example of Carboniferous Limestone , by water . The floor of the gorge is impermeable Millstone Grit and Lower Coal Measures . The rare mineral mendipite has also been found . The site was occupied by humans in the Neolithic Era and their tools and flint arrow heads have been discovered , along with pottery from the Bronze Age . There are also fossils of small mammals from the Late Devensian . The nature reserve provides a habitat for a variety of flora and fauna , including flowers , butterflies and bats .

= = Geology = =

Ebbor Gorge lies on the southwest @-@ facing slope of the Mendip Hills and consists of a steep @-@ sided ravine cut into 350 @-@ million @-@ year @-@ old Carboniferous Limestone of the Dinantian . The gorge was cut into Clifton Down Limestone by meltwater in the Pleistocene Epoch . The rocks of the area lie above a thrust fault formed during the Variscan orogeny . Millstone Grit and Lower Coal Measures form an impermeable floor to this valley . An example of the rare mineral mendipite was found at the head of the gorge .

A stream issuing to the west of the site runs down the tributary valley of Hope Wood before joining the main gorge . The original watercourse which may have cut the gorge into the limestone became diverted underground and now emerges at Wookey Hole Caves to form the River Axe .

= = History = =

Various caves within the gorge were inhabited by neolithic people from which flint tools are held in the Wells and Mendip Museum . One particularly fine flint flake can be seen in the museum at King John 's Hunting Lodge in Axbridge . Human and animal bones from the Neolithic were recovered from Outlook Cave in 1907 . Bones from the Palaeolithic have been found at Savory 's Hole .

Several caves occur within the Gorge , of which Bridged Pot and Gully Cave provide some of the best Late Devensian small @-@ mammal assemblages known from Britain . Most of the deposits remain in situ and include steppe pika , Arctic lemming , Norway lemming , various voles , red deer and reindeer . Bronze Age finds include pottery from the Beaker culture , a stone axe and flint knife .

= = Current use = =

A 40 @-@ hectare (99 @-@ acre) area of the gorge is owned by the National Trust , and managed by Natural England as a National Nature Reserve . The land was donated to the National Trust by Mrs G.W. Hodgkinson , in 1967 , in memory of Winston Churchill . The site was purchased in 1931 by Wookey Hole Caves Ltd .

The site is close to Wookey Hole village and caves and offers views across the Somerset Levels to Glastonbury Tor and beyond . There are three marked trails of varying lengths around the steeply wooded gorge , the longest being 3 kilometres (1 @. @ 9 mi) long , the shortest of which is suitable for wheelchair users .

= = Biology and ecology = =

Because of the ecology of the area 63 @. @ 5 hectares (157 acres) was designated as a biological Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1952 . The ground flora is indicative of the calcareous nature of the site , with dog 's mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*) being locally dominant . Many of the associated

species are characteristic of ancient woodland . Wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) and common bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) are both locally abundant . The valley of the main gorge is humid and provides ideal conditions for fungi and ferns . It contains a substantial assemblage of bryophytes with over 120 species recorded including the nationally rare *Bryum canariense* and the very rare *Amblystegiella confervoides* .

The varied age and canopy structure of woodland encourages a high diversity of butterflies , nationally scarce species including the white letter hairstreak (*Strymonidia walbum*) and high brown fritillary (*Argynnis edippe*) , while species such as the chalkhill blue (*Lysandra coridon*) and brown argus (*Aricia agestis*) occur on the limestone grassland . Greater horseshoe bats (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*) and lesser horseshoes (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*) regularly use sites in the Gorge as hibernacular roosts . The site also supports birds of prey and a few red deer .