

Furness (Horseshoe) Quarry: Combining Nature Conservation & Recreation

Furness Quarry also known as Horseshoe Quarry (SK209 761) is an extensive disused limestone quarry in Stoney Middleton Dale in the Peak District National Park. The greater part of the site was acquired by the BMC as a climbing venue and local visitor spot in 2005 from Tarmac. Prior to the purchase of the land by the BMC, access had been prohibited.

The site measures approximately 8.5 ha and lies within Stoney Middleton Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the Peak District National Park which is notified because of the geological interest of its extensive cave system, and includes regionally important geological sites (RIGS) in addition to national and local priority Biodiversity Action Plan habitats. A range of habitats from bare rock (rich in coral beds) to colonising vegetation and tall herbs through to ash woodland can all be found within a relatively small area. Alongside this, the quarry features an excellent range of bolt-protected rock climbs. It is sheltered, easily accessible and quick drying – a good sport climbing venue serving the growing demand for this type of climbing.

The BMC has dedicated the whole of its landholding as open access land under section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) and has extended the existing public footpath network through Stoney Middleton Dale with the creation of stiles, gates, new routes and a viewpoint area (photograph 1). The BMC has also improved the car parking area at the entrance to the quarry which is available for public use, free of charge. An information board showing the extent of land owned by the BMC is sited at the entrance to the quarry.



Photograph 1: Viewpoint overlooking Stoney Middleton Dale

Over the past few years, footpath work, the creation of a wildlife pond, ecological surveys, woodland management, and the control of invasive species mean that Furness is a model site that illustrates well how a former redundant quarry has become a highly reputed recreational and environmental asset.

Increasing public understanding and enjoyment

The opportunity now exists for climbers, walkers and cavers to fully explore the area in perpetuity. A local management group has been created to oversee the care of the site and to manage the local botanical and ecological interests, and a management plan has been drawn up, agreed by Natural England. On the south side of the entrance track, there is a permanent wet area with shallow open water and aquatic vegetation (photograph 2). In 2007, the Vision Project also funded the creation of a wildlife pond, now inhabited by a breeding population of smooth newts, to the south of the quarry floor (photograph 3).



Photograph 2: The wet area to the south of the entrance track – with 4 species of rushes, common spikerush and crispy dock.



Photograph 3: Construction of a new pond to the south of the quarry in 2007.

Through a number of volunteer initiatives, brambles and invasive species have been cleared to reveal a full range of habitats from woodland on the south and south east of the site to calcareous grassland at varying stages of development across the site (including southern marsh orchids and bee orchids) as well as scrub and rock habitats. Similarly, remnants of an ancient coral bed can be seen across the quarry floor and the site is of speleological importance.

In keeping with local character

Land at nearby Stoney West has been designated as a nature reserve and the area is developing as a significant public amenity in a region where the local economy relies on tourism and recreation. The quarry is situated within Stoney Middleton Dale's SSSI and the environmental and access improvements have meant that it has added value and enhanced the SSSI status (now in 'favourable' condition). A number of ecological surveys have been commissioned in order to guide environmental work, in keeping with the local area.

Recent path works at Furness, thanks to the Derbyshire Aggregates Levy Grant scheme, have linked the site to the public rights of way network and the quarry is frequently visited by both local people (ramblers, picnickers and dog walkers) as well as visitors from afar who enjoy the extensive sport climbing and caving. Over the past few years, path and scrub control works have also been carried out to help conserve and enhance the landscape and wildlife, including improvements to priority national and local Biodiversity Action Plan habitats. As part of the management plan for the area, stabilisation of the rock face and banks around the site has also occurred.

Several volunteer initiatives are organised throughout the year and are designed to encourage local people who get enjoyment from this valuable landscape to put something back into conserving it.

Seeking inclusivity and consensus

Having agreed terms for acquiring the site, the BMC sought consensus from its local partners, community and parish councils, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, Peak District National Park Authority and Vision Project. The shared vision for the site is maintained by building on the public and environmental benefits being delivered by the quarry. Progressively more people have been visiting the site, helping to add to the local economy, as well as benefiting from increased activity and exercise - helping support the health agenda identified by the Government, Sport England and Natural England.

Combining nature conservation and recreation

In 2005, when the BMC purchased the quarry, some areas were overgrown and unstable, the public were unable to access the site and a large quantity of litter and debris had been left by a group of travellers. Today, Furness is a model site that illustrates well how a former redundant quarry has become a recreational asset and shows that recreation and conservation can work alongside one another.

For more information about Horseshoe, please contact access@thebmc.co.uk



Photographs 4 and 5: Footpath improvement work to the south of the quarry (before and after).