

The Wildlife of the Hill

Robinswood Hill is a special place for wildlife, with a diverse range of habitats; traditional flower rich meadows, scrub, old orchards and woodland. The Hill was grazed with farm animals for



Pyramidal Orchid.

much of its human history and, with the exception of Matson Wood, was almost devoid of trees until relatively recently. Evidence of previous use as farmland can be seen in the ridge and furrow pattern in some of the meadows, and the abundance of ancient hedgerows, used for managing livestock. The colourful grasslands contain flowers such as cowslip, dyer's greenweed, devil's-bit scabious, and a variety of orchids, which provide food for a range of butterflies including orange tip, peacock, and marbled white. Historically the grasslands were managed by grazing animals and making hay. This has helped to encourage the rich diversity of flowers and butterflies. Some areas are still cut for hay and grazed by the City Council's herd of rare-breed cattle to help stop the meadows becoming overtaken by nettle, bramble and scrub.



Marbled White on Teasel (Image Richard Lawrence).



Long Eared Owl (Image Richard Lawrence).

Bluebells, primroses, and wild garlic are among the flowers found in the woodlands, with speckled wood butterflies occupying almost every woodland glade throughout the summer. The areas of scrub and woodland are particularly rich in bird life, with summer visitors including warblers such as whitethroat, and sometimes cuckoo, buzzard and song thrush can be seen all year. Green woodpeckers may be found feeding on ant nests in the fields and you may have glimpses of rare winter visitors such as the secretive long-eared owl.

Many mammals are found on Robinswood Hill. Rabbits and grey squirrels are the most obvious, Red foxes are sometimes seen during the day. Voles and shrews are common in the grasslands, where they are hunted by buzzards, kestrels and weasels. After dark it is possible

to see badgers. You may see small scrapes in the grass where they have been digging for worms or grubs. Those other nocturnal mammals, the bats, are to be seen hunting along hedgerows at dusk in the summer. As you walk around, you can spot a number of big veteran oak and ash trees. The ancient, hollow trunks provide important habitat, and homes for bats, moths and other insects.

The old orchard (near Stroud Road) provides further wildlife diversity, and has apple and pear varieties dating from the 19th century. As well as cooking and dessert varieties, there are some that were used for making cider and perry. Other old and local varieties of fruit trees are now being planted in partnership with the Friends of Robinswood Hill volunteer work party.

A Country Park since 1972, Robinswood Hill became a Local Nature Reserve in 2003, in recognition of the wonderful array of wildlife, and the management aimed at conserving the rich heritage where people can enjoy the quiet and countryside.



The Friends of Robinswood Hill are an independent society founded in 1975 to stimulate public interest in Robinswood Hill, and endeavour to ensure that it remains an area for quiet, informal public recreation while conserving its natural beauty and amenities.

www.friendsofrobinswoodhill.btck.co.uk

Please contact: **Jackie Cave** on (01452) 527397.

Or email: friends.of.robinswood.hill@gmail.com



If you are walking your dog please remember to bag it and bin it!

Gloucester City Council

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Robinswood Hill Country Park and Local Nature Reserve



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**Gloucester
City Council**
Transforming Your City



Visit the Cotswold Countryside without leaving the City!

Robinswood Hill Country Park is a wonderful resource within the

boundary of Gloucester City. Rising to 198m (651feet) above sea level, and packed with historical and natural history interest, explore the footpaths and nature trails that give extensive views of the City and surrounding countryside.

The History of the Hill

During Saxon times the Hill was thought to have been called Whaddon (possibly after the Saxon God, Woden). Later in the Domesday book it is referred to as Mattesdon, a name that was corrupted in following years into Mattesdune and Matisknoll, and has survived to present times in the form of Matson, the suburb of Gloucester to the East of the Hill. Robinswood Hill gets its present name from the Robins family who grazed sheep here in Elizabethan times.



English Longhorn Cow (Image Richard Lawrence).

Flint flakes and a hand axe, dating from the Neolithic period, indicate that there has been human occupation on Robinswood Hill for at least 4000 years.

The Roman History of Gloucester is well documented; it is thought clay was used from the Hill to make bricks, tiles and pottery. Iron may have been processed from the Hill and smelted in Gloucester, certainly this practice was being carried out as late as the 18th century. Charcoal and burnt bone have been found on the Hill and dated to around 500 AD. This may have been part of a Saxon temple to Woden.

Gloucester from the Hill.

Robinswood Hill supplied Gloucester's drinking water from the 12th century until modern times. During this period, whoever owned the water supply could be said to govern the City. Most of the water on the Hill comes to the surface



along two permeable sandy rock formations and is forced to the surface when it reaches an impermeable clay layer below, forming springs in the hillside. Until the 12th century the City obtained its water from a well sunk into the gravel beds of the River Severn.

Increased demand led City monks to look for an alternative supply. They were the first to channel water from the springs at Robinswood Hill. The water was piped through a lead water main the two miles to the Cross, in the centre of the City, and to Scriven's Conduit in Southgate Street. During the Civil War, the besieging Royalist troops cut off the water supply from the Hill in an unsuccessful attempt to force the City to surrender.

The quarry, on the south west side of the Hill (overlooking Tuffley) was once home to the Whitfield Brick and Tile Works. Originally laid out in the early 1890's, clay from the quarry was used to produce bricks that can still be seen in many buildings across the City. The unpredictable nature of the clay meant that many bricks became mis-shapen when fired. Production eventually ceased in the 1940's when competition from larger brick works made it uneconomical to continue.

In the 18th century, reservoirs were constructed to store water on the Hill and the water rights (a yield of 70,000 gallons a day) passed into public hands with the formation of the Gloucester Water Works Company in 1835. The reservoirs remained in use until 1946, when they became derelict and were filled during the 1970's, forming the car park, picnic area, and the Conservation Centre. Most of the Hill is now a Country Park with the exception of the golf course and ski slope on the eastern and southern slopes.



Grazing on the Hill (Image Richard Lawrence).

Scriven's Conduit.



The Geology of the Hill

Robinswood Hill is a Jurassic outlier (essentially a block of the Cotswold scarp left in the Severn Vale). The Jurassic period (205-154 million years before present) is famous for its ammonites, an extinct form of shellfish that lived in the seas at that time. The fossilised remains of many different types may be found in the old quarry and other exposures on the Hill. The rocks that make up Robinswood Hill (and the Cotswolds) were deposited in warm tropical seas in an area that for many millions of years was actively subsid-ing. The type of rock deposited would depend on the depth of sea. The Hill is capped off with harder marine limestones formed in warm shallow seas allowing a rich



Seasons on the Hill (Image Richard Lawrence).



Left - a fossilised Gryphea, Devil's Toenail; right - a Cockle Shell.

life to flourish, leaving abundant fossil remains. After a long period of uplifting when the rocks were pushed up into hills, erosion formed the landscape. The landform we see today was strongly influenced by periods of glaciation (from half a million to 10,000 years ago). The effect of fluctuating climate was dramatic, with seasonal melt waters causing signifi-

cant erosion. It was during this time that Robinswood Hill became separated from the Cotswolds through erosion of the valley that now carries the M5.

The best place to see the sequence of rock types is at the quarry, which has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to the fantastic exposure, the best of its type in the country. Whilst searching the scree slope for fossils you may also see some of the feral goats, kept on the quarry to help reduce the scrub that has built up over the years. For further information contact:

Gloucestershire Geology Trust
on (01452) 864438 or email info@glosgeotrust.org.uk

The Quarry on the Hill.



Robinswood Hill Country Park and Local Nature Reserve

Robinswood Hill Country Park is managed and maintained by Gloucester City Council's Countryside Unit as part of over 200 hectares of countryside in the City. The Unit provides a full-time Countryside Ranger Service that helps to protect and care for the Country Park and to enhance your visit.

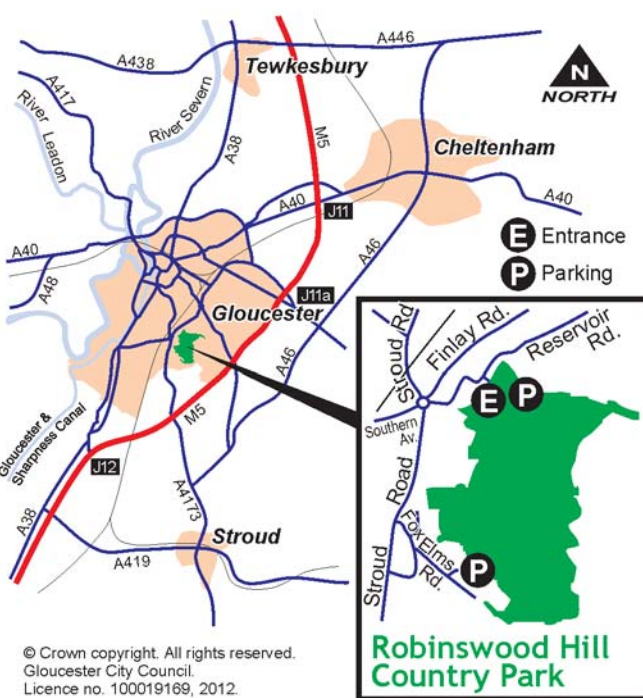
If you would like more information about Robinswood Hill, please contact: The Countryside Unit, Robinswood Hill Country Park, Reservoir Road, Gloucester, GL4 6SX. Tel no: (01452) 303206.

E-mail: countryside@gloucester.gov.uk

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How to Find the Hill



Enjoying the Hill

Robinswood Hill Country Park is perfect for enjoying the beauty of the countryside on your doorstep. For spectacular views take a walk to the top of the Hill - on a clear day you can see the new and old Severn Bridges, the Malverns, May Hill, the Cotswold Escarpment, the Black Mountains and the City of Gloucester.

Explore the footpaths and nature trails by following one of the four marked trails around Robinswood Hill and discover a diverse range of wildlife and habitats. (Suitable clothing and footwear should be worn as paths can be muddy and slippery in places).

Key to trails

- **Fox Trail** - The Fox Trail will guide you through woodland, scrub and grassland habitats in some of the quieter parts of the Hill and along the summit ridge. The route takes approx. 2 hours.
- **Woodland Trail** - Walk around the Hill through attractive and varied woodland plantations and get to know some of our veteran trees. Walking time approx. 2 hours.
- **Geology Trail** - Follow the geology trail and visit the quarry (site of the former Whitfield Brick and Tile Works). The quarry is an area of geological interest and a scheduled Site of

Special Scientific Interest. The trail will take you from the quarry to the south side of the summit ridge and on to the top of the Hill, before returning to the car park. The trail takes approx. 1 1/2 hours.

— **Horse Trail** - Access is gained from Juniper Avenue on the Matson side of the Hill, or from Fox Elms Road on the Tuffley side. Various routes divide and rejoin taking riders all over the Hill. Riders should keep to the marked trails. Please be aware that the Horse Trail in the Country Park is not a definitive bridleway and may be closed in exceptionally wet weather. Cycling is not permitted on the hill.

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust

The Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust headquarters are located at the Conservation Centre within the Country Park. The Trust aims to protect Gloucestershire's wildlife and wild places whilst inspiring more people to learn about nature, through running over 100 wildlife events each year and educating over 3,000 school children.

For further information please contact: **Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust** on (01452) 383333. Monday to Friday 9am-5pm (answerphone at all other times).

www.gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk