

# The Belfast Hills



Pond at Hightown Quarry

**Hightown Quarry**  
Laverene Bell

## Below your feet...

The Belfast Hills dominate the skyline of the city of Belfast. They are not only a great place to get away from it all, but provide incredibly valuable wildlife habitat, magnificent views, and are covered in mysterious monuments, relics of our ancestors who have lived upon the hills for generations. The number of ancient quarries and prehistoric stone monuments across the hills show that the area has a rich heritage of quarrying, probably from the time people first began to inhabit this area well over 6000 years ago.

The townland name **Slievenacloy** derives from the Irish *Sliabh na cloiche* meaning 'mountain of the stone'

This panel that you are reading is on rock sourced locally from Hightown Quarry owned by Tarmac Ltd., on the far side of the Belfast Hills. The

The quarry you can see from where you are standing is Aughrim quarry.

rock is basalt which, along with limestone, are the main rocks quarried from the Belfast Hills.

If you were to look at the walls of a deep quarry in the hills, you would see three distinct layers: The dark grey rock just beneath the soil is basalt, formed by volcanic activity 65 million years ago; underneath this is a layer of limestone which dates back 145 million years to a time when the area was underwater and formed the bed of a vast ocean; below this limestone layer is a mudstone formation from 200 million years ago when the area was a huge, arid desert.

Dotted around the Belfast Hills are a series of active and disused quarries. Opening up the hillsides and revealing the geology within often leads to greater biodiversity. A variety of semi-natural woodland and grassland habitats develop over time in quarries which are then colonised by plants such as the common spotted orchid. Ponds and wetland areas form which provide a perfect environment for plants and allow insects such as dragonflies to flourish. Exposed rock faces also create ideal habitat for cliff nesting birds such as the peregrine falcon.



## Quarry Products Association NI

The aggregates industry plays a significant role in delivering biodiversity conservation in Northern Ireland, as land managers they have a major influence on ecosystems and habitats.

**Quarry Products Association NI** is taking a lead role in promoting biodiversity and is developing a Biodiversity and Geodiversity Action Plan for the Aggregates industry, seeking to ensure that nationally and locally important species and habitats are conserved, enhanced and promoted.



**Peregrine Falcon** - Marc Ruddock