

HPK/2015/0213

Prepared interpretation board at scale 1:7.5

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# The Torrs

New Mills sits astride a gorge, 100ft (30m) deep at its lowest point. Two rivers, the Sett and the Goyt, meet here.

Take a walk down Rock Mill Lane (51 steps) to discover many natural and man-made features. Towering rock faces, trees, and wildlife mingle with mill ruins, weirs, bridges, railway, the Millennium Walkway and a community hydro scheme.

## History

For centuries the steep and rocky descent to the river was a barrier to development and communication.

Then, towards the end of the eighteenth century, riverside sites became sought-after locations to power water mills for the expanding cotton industry.

By the early 1800s no fewer than 5 mills had been built, huddled against the cliff faces, wherever there was space within the river bends. Sandstone was quarried from the gorge to build mills and also workers' cottages on the steep terraces. Brake horses were used to steady the descent of wagons carrying supplies.

The Torrs bustled with industry.

The mills still lacked easy access for goods and vehicles. New Mills Bridge (Salem Bridge) crossed the Sett, upstream of the gorge, whilst the two low-level bridges in the Torrs could only be reached after a steep descent.

The building of Church Road Bridge (1835) and the magnificent viaduct of Union Road Bridge (1884) united New Mills and New Mills Newtown. Hayfield closed in 1970 and one to Derby (now used as a line to Sheffield). Nevertheless, bankruptcy, fire, and continuing poor access contributed to industrial decline from the late 19th century. To admire the achievements of the nineteenth-century engineers follow the path (51 steps) into the Torrs.

## The Torrs Trail

Guide available from the Heritage Centre



## The Park under The Town

Abandoned for over 50 years, its mills in ruins, used as a rubbish dump, the Torrs became an area dangerous to the public. Only in the 1970s was the outstanding recreational value of the gorge recognised. On the initiative of a town council committee led by Dr Leslie Millward, the area was cleaned up and officially 're-opened' in 1974.



Subsequent councils continued making improvements, and the Torrs gorge is now known as 'The Park under the Town', open to all. Cliffs offer a range of routes for rock climbers. A wide variety of wildlife has returned, including dippers, herons, and kingfishers, and the gorge is rich in trees. Ash and sycamore dominate, mixed with oak, alder and willow. Wild life corridors lead from the gorge into established nature reserves.



## How the Gorge was formed

### 111,000 years ago

About 111,000 years ago a new ice age began. The ice sheet advanced from the north, covering the area around the Torrs. The ice level dropped and the River Goyt, flowing down to a lower level, cut out a deep gorge-like valley.



### 50,000 years ago

From the lowlands of Cheshire, ice pushed up the hillsides to about 800 ft (250m). Boulder-strewn as moraines, were dragged from the Lake District and can still be found in the soils around New Mills.



### 20,000 years ago

About 15,000-20,000 years ago the climate began to warm. The ice sheet melted, leaving behind vast quantities of meltwater cut down into the underlying gorge, 100 ft (30m) deep, which we now call the Torrs.



### 10,000 years ago

When the rivers Goyt and Sett started to flow again they found a route through the new gorge. In the late twentieth century the Torrs gorge had not been formed. There would be no town of New Mills.



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