SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: RAHUGH RIDGE (KILTOBER ESKER)

SITE CODE: 000918

Known to some as Rahugh Ridge and to others as Kiltober Ridge, this proposed Natural Heritage Area starts about 9km north-east of Tullamore and runs for about 2.5km in a north-easterly direction. It is a particularly fine esker ridge covered for almost its entire length in woodland. There has been some quarrying of gravel in the past.

The dominant species are Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), with the community almost certainly falling into the Corylo-Fraxinetum association. The wood is exceptionally rich in species with several uncommon or rare species present. These include Dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*), Columbine (*Aquilegia vulgaris*), Buckthorn (*Rhamnus catharticus*), Stone Bramble (*Rubus saxatilis*), Whitebeam (*Sorbus hibernica*) and Wood Melic (Melica uniflora). It is particularly unusual to find these species growing together.

Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*) occurs in small amounts throughout the wood but evidence from old stumps indicates that it was probably at one time more common. A certain amount of felling has clearly occurred throughout the wood and some areas have been clear-felled to create small fields, although some of these have subsequently been abandoned. In these old fields and around the quarries rabbit grazing maintains patches of scrubby grassland.

At the south-western end there are a number of small fields between the foot of the slope and the Silver River. These are subject to flooding and make an interesting contract with the dry esker slopes.

Gravel extraction is by no means advocated as a suitable management for the site, but of the small existing pits that have been allowed to become recolonised, the southernmost now has a colony of the nationally rare and protected Red Hemp-nettle (Galeopsis angustifolia).

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