SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: NENAGH RIVER GORGE

SITE CODE: 001133

The River Nenagh cuts a gorge from the south-west to the north-east through the dipping Upper Silurian beds south of Cooneen Hill, which itself lies to the east of the Silvermine Mountains. In a little over 1km the valley descends some 100m.

The valley and adjacent area were designated an Area of Scientific Interest (ASI) in 1972, and a much reduced site, restricted to the steeply sloping valley sides, is now redesignated a Natural Heritage Area (NHA). The boundary between the townlands of Longjohnshill and Cooneen follows the river for the length of the site.

The upper part of the valley is dominated by Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*) and rushes (*Juncus* spp.). Further down the valley there is a mosaic of different habitats, including scrub of Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), heath with Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), birch (*Betula* spp.) and willow (*Salix* spp.) woodlands and further grassland patches. Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) is also widespread. Typical associates indicating base poor conditions include Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) and Bitter-vetch (*Lathyrus linifolius*).

Typically for the area, there has been extensive planting of conifers by Coillte over lands above the valley, and in places the steep valley slopes themselves have been afforested, these areas have been excluded from the NHA. Within the designated NHA, it is still difficult to escape from small pockets of conifers, perhaps planted for 'landscape' rather than commercial reasons.

Despite this there remains a rich mosaic of unimproved semi-natural habitats through the site and it is important that the integrity of these habitats in the valley is not further compromised by more planting.

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