

National treasure

IT is one of the most intensively quarried landscapes in the UK. Yet the Cotswold Water Park is also a national treasure. You can walk, fish, sail or water ski here; you can marvel at a vast array of wildlife; you can take your holidays here and you can even sunbathe on and swim from a beach.

The tradition of quarrying is set to continue well into the future and will add new attractions to the park's 40 square miles. Extracting sand and gravel is the medium that has made the site on the Wiltshire/Gloucestershire border both a tourist magnet and a haven for nature.

No one company has dug more of it than the locally based Hills Group, which started work here in 1919 long before anyone decided it could become a water park. Over the years since, it has worked 15 sites and extracted nearly 20 million tonnes of aggregate to help feed the region's need for building materials.

The group's dedication to the cause was recognised with a special award at MPA's Quarries & Nature event in October. There were awards too for the Cullimore Group, Aggregate Industries, Hanson, and Tarmac, each of whom have played their own roles.

Within the park and across Wiltshire as a

whole, the Hills Group has also delivered millions of pounds worth of landfill tax and other funding to wildlife and community causes. It additionally gives both practical support and enthusiasm.

"We are a local family company and we care passionately about the area from which we make our living," says company director Peter Andrew. "Our sustained financial support for the Cotswold Water Park Trust and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust will ensure that we create wildlife habitats not just for the present generation but for future generations."

As Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's chief executive officer, Gary Mantle, puts it: "It has been a great encouragement to us to work with a company that is so passionate about putting

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stuff back into the environment."

The Cotswold Water Park Trust was also rewarded by MPA for its pioneering work. Says managing director Matthew Millett: "The park has come a tremendous distance and is now a wildlife site of international significance. All of this has been brought about by gravel extraction."