



Eric Ravilious

Cuckmere Haven, 1939

Watercolour on long term loan to Towner

Dimensions 41.4 x 57.5 cm

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About the artist

Eric Ravilious was born in Acton, London, and moved to Eastbourne at an early age. After growing up in Eastbourne and studying at Eastbourne School of Art, he gained a scholarship to the Royal College of Art under Paul Nash, and studied alongside a class of remarkable artists. After a period of returning to Eastbourne to teach, Ravilious settled in Essex but made regular trips to the Sussex landscape he grew up in, as well as undertaking painting expeditions around the country.

Ravilious's paintings always develop a very particular sense of place, with his dry brush technique creating the impression that Ravilious depicted his subject with clear precision. This technique contributes to the cool, detached feel many of his works exhibit but he simultaneously reveals a keen sensitivity to his chosen subject, whether it be an iconic landscape or a domestic interior.

The power of the works often lies in their ambiguous contradictions: the coolness of style against sensitivity to the landscape or subject; a surreal sense of permanence or stasis against a sense of particular place and time.

As an Official War Artist, his detached style enabled his work to operate in both documentary and artistic terms. He died in 1942, when the air-sea rescue mission in Iceland he accompanied, in his war artist capacity, failed to return.

Understand & Evaluate

Eric Ravilious used a very distinctive style of mark making. What is this style called?

He also used a very limited pallet. What colours and shades can you see?

Can you see anything other than landscape?

Would it look different if Ravilious had put animals, people, farm machinery or buildings into his landscape?

Why do you think he left it bare?

Where do you think the artist was placed when he was painting this landscape?

Do you get a sense of distance? If so, how? If not, why not?

Do you get a sense of the time of day or season?

What words would you use to describe the feeling of this painting?

If you were to paint this scene, how would you make it different??

Explore and create

This river has a very distinctive ox-bow shape. Look at images of rivers; how do rivers usually look? Create a set of photographs that represent different rivers.

As a class, join hands and creat a meandering snake river. Take a photograph of the shape you have made. In class, create a river on a large sheet of paper on the floor. Use different marks to fill in the space created. Think of different ways to make the marks, e.g. using your hands or your feet; putting pencils on sticks.

Draw in wax, cross hatching, stripes, shading, sketching in view, thinking about different marks to represent different hills, rivers, etc. Use watercolour washes over the different wax marks. Use a limited palette.

Collect materials that are natural, i.e. twine, sticks, string, cork, sand (sandpaper). Use all these materials to collage, focusing on different marks (think about how the marks would feel if they were 3D).



Further links to the National Park – Eric Ravilious (1903-1942) Cuckmere Haven (1939)

Use the South Downs National Park Learning Zone to explore <http://learning.southdowns.gov.uk/>. All resources mentioned below can be found through the Learning Zone.

[Learning outside the Classroom](#) Including links for health and safety and practical support in planning your work away from the classroom.

[About the National Park](#) The Cuckmere River is one of five rivers that flows through the The South Downs National Park. The South Downs National Park is the newest of the National Parks designated in 2009. It makes links to the geography curriculum in comparing and contrasting here and abroad. Why not look at Droxford Primary Schools or Rydon Community Colleges scheme of work to see how they do this and work with artists. If you are interested in this aspect of study please explore the John Muir award in the South Downs National Park.

[Geology and landscape](#) The river valleys in the National Park offer opportunities to compare and contrast the different geology within it, along with a place to look at soil types. The iconic landscape of the Cuckmere is easy to walk along and enables views of meanders and other river features from an elevated position. It enables discussion around coastal and flood management linking well to debates on climate change. The chalk cliffs of the Seven Sisters Country Park offer opportunities to look at the National Parks chalk downland and coastal landscapes. This is a popular site for geography coastal study in Year 8 and 10. Use the Learning Zone films to help introduce rivers.

[Farming and Land management](#) Rivers were important trade routes and the Cuckmere has a canal adjacent to it to illustrate the importance placed on transporting produce including wool to the sea. The river valley and downland is used for grazing and there is a [Seven Sisters Sheep Centre](#) (Use postcode BN20 0AA to search) which might support you further with work on farming. The National Trust and Wildlife Trust support the management of the downland and education of groups visiting the area. Their details can be found on the [clickable map](#) on the learning zone.

[Habitats and wildlife](#) Rivers are a rich habitat for a range of wildlife from plants that have adapted to live in the water; invertebrates that have part of their lifecycle in the water to mammals who visit and travel along the river and migratory birds that use the river for rest on a long journey. It is a great habitat to study and the [Sussex Wildlife Trust](#) works with thousands of children at the Seven Sisters Country Park. The surrounding habitats also include woodland, beach, downland and lowland grassland, making this an ideal site for habitat studies.

[Culture and heritage](#) The Cuckmere was of strategic importance during the second world war and the village of Alfriston offers a host of history links including: evidence of a Saxon burial ground and visit from King Alfred, who had a palace at West Dean; the Church is known as the Cathedral of the Downs with the 14th century rectory now being managed by the National Trust; there are a number of smugglers tales to be enjoyed particularly those about Stanton Collins and Alfriston gang; and finally the Napoleonic troops were housed here. Why not look at some fun hands on activities on the [Churches page](#) of the Learning Zone.

[Access and recreation](#) The Seven Sisters Country Park and the coastal strip of the National Park are heavily used by walkers. There area includes well known visitor sites such as Beachy Head, Birling Gap and [Seven Sisters Country Park](#). Much of the land is open access and managed under the Higher Level Stewardship

scheme. The River itself is used by canoeists, whilst the sea is used widely by fishing and pleasure boats. The Learning Zone holds a wealth of informaton on [tourism](#) in the National Park.

[Economy and industry](#) The site is heavily used by tourists and therefore supports a range of service providers including activity guides, catering, retail and accomodation providers. Use the Learning Zone to explore the current state of the National Park.

