



The hydrological role of ‘sunken lanes’

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Sunken lanes are found in many parts of southern England and have also been described in Belgium, France, Germany, Poland, Spain and the USA. They are associated with soft rock and long histories of vehicular and animal movements. They form important features of the cultural and physical landscape. Although most are probably Medieval in origin, some may date back to the Iron Age. Little attention has been paid to their function as conduits for runoff, sediment and pollutants from areas of forestry and agriculture to the watercourses in valley bottoms. In the Midhurst area of West Sussex, southern England, they are important routes for eroded sediments particularly during extreme rainfall events as occurred in the autumns of 2000 and 2006. This led to the flooding of property, disruption of minor roads and the pollution of the Western Rother river, an important fish habitat.