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BALGLASS CORRIES
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 122

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Purpose



This is a public statement prepared by SNH for owners and occupiers of the SSSI. It outlines the reasons it is designated as an SSSI and provides guidance on how its special natural features should be conserved or enhanced. This Statement does not affect or form part of the statutory notification and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

We welcome your views on this Statement.

Natural features of Balglass Corries SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)
Carboniferous – Permian Igneous	Favourable, maintained (June 2006)
Blanket bog	Unfavourable Declining (June 2006)
Upland assemblage	Favourable, maintained (November 2007)

Description of the site

Balglass Corries Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is situated on the northern edge of the Campsie Fells, a large plateau north of Glasgow in Central Scotland. The SSSI encompasses two north facing corries, Balglass and Little Corrie, which represent the most well developed corrie system in the Central valley hill massif. The SSSI is of further national importance for supporting the most extensive examples of undisturbed upland plant communities in the Stirling district.



Balglass Corries are two of the most perfectly developed corries in the Central Lowlands. They were probably last occupied by small local glaciers towards the end of the last ice-age. These glaciers formed a series of hummocky deposits of debris, known as moraines, which are still clearly evident today. The corrie cliffs contain excellent exposures of rocks known as the Clyde Plateau Lavas, formed during volcanic activity around 350 million years ago, which underlie the Fintry, Campsie and Kilpatrick Hills. The Balglass Corries site has lava flows, which show features such as columnar jointing (similar to that seen at the Giant's Causeway), and volcanic vents from which the lavas were erupted. This is one of the best areas in which to study the processes of volcanic activity in the Midland Valley during the Carboniferous period of geological time.

The SSSI also contains an extensive area, approximately 80-90 hectares, of nationally important blanket bog which occurs on the plateau above the corries. Peatland plant communities of this type are becoming rare in Central Scotland and Balglass Corries

represents the only upland SSSI notified for Blanket bog in the Stirling district. Typical plant species occurring on the bog include common heather, bog cotton, cloudberry and bog-moss.

The SSSI is also notified for Upland assemblage. This composite feature encompasses blanket bog, tall herb ledge, siliceous rocky slope, siliceous scree, and alkaline fen. The rocky cliff slopes and scree provide habitat for plants that specialise in the drier conditions offered by looser rocky habitat and support a large number of plant species with parsley fern *Cryptogramma crispera* occurring on the lower scree slopes. The blanket bog, as mentioned previously, occurs on the plateau above the corries. The alkaline fen component is found in areas flushed with base-rich water, and supports a number of species which are locally uncommon, such as the lesser clubmoss *Selaginella selaginoides*. The well developed tall herb communities occur on undisturbed cliff ledges where there is sufficient accumulation of soil to support this plant community. Northern upland species such as northern bedstraw *Galium boreale* and rose-root *Sedum rosea* are common along with great woodrush *Luzula sylvatica* and blaeberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*.

Site condition monitoring carried out in 2006 and 2007 found the Carboniferous – Permian Igneous and Upland assemblage features of Balglass Corries SSSI to be in favourable maintained condition. However the Blanket bog feature, also monitored in 2006, was found to be in unfavourable declining condition. The blanket bog feature failed the targets for vegetation composition due to drainage and excessive burning.

Picture 1. Blanket bog on the plateau above the corries.	Picture 1. Parsley Fern on the lower scree slopes.
	

Past and present management

Sheep grazing has historically been the main land use on the SSSI. On the plateau there is also a system of old drainage ditches and signs of past muirburn. This management was probably undertaken to enhance the moor for grouse shooting and grazing. Peat extraction is also thought to have taken place on site with an old track leading to plateau where there is some evidence of peat cutting.

At present the site is still used for stock grazing with around 1 sheep per hectare being grazed all year round. A small number of cattle (about 30) are also grazed in the eastern half of the site between May and July. The heather moor remains managed by muirburn for grouse and the drainage ditches, although historically cut, continue to have a drying effect on the moss and may be contributing to a reduction in characteristic blanket bog species on the site.

Objectives for Management (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

We wish to work with the owners and occupiers to protect the site and to maintain and where necessary enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims to carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate, to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site and its natural features and to monitor the effectiveness of its management.

1. To maintain the physical integrity and visibility of rock exposures.

To maintain the favourable condition of the geological features at Balglass Corries SSSI the most important management objective is to keep the exposures of Carboniferous – Permian Igneous rocks clearly visible. Loose blocks of rock should be left in situ where it is safe to do so and access to the geological features should be maintained for visiting geologists.

Any future forestry planting adjacent to the SSSI could potentially obscure and reduce access to the geological features and so should be planted at least 10 m from rock outcrops.

2. Maintain the favourable condition of the Upland assemblage.

The most recent site condition monitoring found the Upland assemblage feature of Balglass Corries SSSI to be in favourable maintained condition with the extent of all component habitats being maintained. However the methodology for monitoring Upland assemblage features has recently changed to take into account the more detailed condition of the component habitats rather than just the extent of these habitats, and that this may mean the monitoring result for the feature differs in future assessments. However, at present the component habitats of the upland assemblage are, with the exception of the blanket bog habitat, in good condition and current management should be maintained.

3. Maintain and where possible enhance the blanket bog habitat.

Sheep grazing maintains the character of the blanket bog and prevents the invasion of scrub. However, sheep are highly selective grazers preferring the most nutritious plants while leaving the poorest and overgrazing can lead to a loss of heather. Therefore grazing should be maintained at a level which does not damage the blanket bog. The current grazing regime seems appropriate and SNH staff will continue to monitor the condition of the blanket bog as part of the site condition monitoring programme.

In certain circumstances, muirburn can be carried out without damaging blanket bog. However, inappropriate muirburn or poor muirburn technique can damage some typical bog species and benefit less desirable species like purple moor grass and mat grass. Therefore muirburn which is carried out on the SSSI should always, as a minimum, conform to the recommendations of the Scottish Government's Muirburn Code.

The historically cut, but still active drainage ditches are continuing to damage the blanket bog feature. Remedial ditch blocking work would be required to reverse the ongoing drying effect and bring the blanket bog into favourable condition. Such positive management would be supported through the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) and owners/occupiers of the SSSI should consider application to this scheme in the future.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

There are occasional hill walkers at this site but they have little or not impact on the features of the site.

Date last reviewed: 10 September 2010