



Scottish Natural Heritage

**PEASE BAY COAST  
Site of Special Scientific Interest**

**SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

Site code: 1276

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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.

**Description of the site**

The Pease Bay Coast Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located on the Berwickshire Coast, starting at the local authority boundary with East Lothian at Gutcher's Hole, near Dunglass Old Bridge, and continuing approximately 3 km south along the coast to Red Rock at Pease Bay. This site is of geological and botanical interest.

The Dinantian interest of the site is shown by rocks exposed in the cliff and foreshore in the areas immediately north and south of Cove Harbour. These show excellent exposures of a continuous succession of Upper Devonian and Lower Carboniferous (Dinantian) rock layers that are of national and international importance which represents a link between the Midland valley and Northumberland basins. Upheavals in the Earth's crust have tilted the rock layers a few degrees to the north-west from the horizontal plane in which they were laid down, with the rocks getting progressively younger going north-west along the coast.

The Upper Devonian rocks at the south-east of the site represent river deposits laid down in an arid desert environment. The Dinantian rocks are a variety of sedimentary rock types produced under tropical climatic conditions in coastal and marine environments. Layers in the sequence include sandstone such as the Cove Harbour Sandstone, siltstone and mudstone, and coals and seatearths such as the Scremerston Coal Group. Rock layers known as the Cove (Upper and Lower) Marine Bands are also found within the sequence. These are muddy limestones that represent times when the river delta and coastal environments were inundated by a shallow tropical sea, and show fossil remains of plants and animals. Other layers within the sequence contain fossil fish and fossil bivalve molluscs, with fossil plant remains associated with the coals and seatearths.

This feature of the site was found to be in favourable condition when last monitored in March 2008.

The Palaeontological interest of the site is at Hawk's Head, where the Upper Devonian age deposits have yielded the remains of three types of fossil fish. The fish lived in the river systems that deposited the sediment, and fragmented remains of the fish are found within these coarse sands.

This feature of the site was found to be in favourable condition when last monitored in March 2008.

These two Geological Conservation Review (GCR) Sites are of national and international importance and are often used for teaching and research.

The third notified feature of Pease Bay Coast SSSI is the coastal grassland present on the steeper sections of cliff that are influenced by sea spray. There are also small areas of calcareous grassland on some of the smaller rocky outcrops, with neutral grassland along the top and upper slopes of the cliffs.

This feature of the SSSI was found to be in unfavourable condition when last monitored in October 2000, due to the presence of undesirable species. However, due to its topography and exposed nature, this feature of the site is a challenge to monitor, with monitoring carried out from the cliff tops using binoculars.

Other habitats of interest within the SSSI include the only area of saltmarsh in the Scottish Borders, at Reed Point, a narrow strand-line at Ramsheugh Beach, and several small areas of scrub woodland which provide shelter for passage migrant birds in spring and autumn, one of which is owned by the Woodland Trust (Fairbairn Copse). Fulmars nest along the cliffs, along with house martins.

The SSSI supports several insect and plant species which are rare in south-east Scotland. Most of the maritime plant species found in the SSSI are locally rare, and include sea spleenwort, teasel, several sedge species (including sand, distant and pendulous sedges), sea milkwort, saltmarsh rush and sea rush, crested hair-grass, sea campion, sea arrow-grass and yellow-horned poppy.

The SSSI is listed on the Invertebrate Site Register. Several notable and locally rare beetles, fly species and a number of locally rare butterflies such as the grayling are found on the site.

Much of the Berwickshire coast is used for recreation, particularly walking. The Southern Upland Way passes along the cliff top by Cove.

<b>Natural features of Pease Bay Coast SSSI</b>	<b>Condition of feature (date monitored)</b>
Lower Carboniferous (Dinantian – Namurian (part))	Favourable, maintained (March 2008)
Silurian – Devonian Chordata	Favourable, maintained (March 2008)
Maritime Cliff	Unfavourable, No change (October 2000)

## **Past and present management**

The SSSI forms part of the intertidal area of the Berwickshire Coast, with the coastal cliffs forming the sea braes of several farming units along the coast, some of which are grazed. Cove Harbour and its immediate environs are managed by Cove Harbour Conservation Limited.

## **Objectives for Management**

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 keep the geological exposures clearly visible and accessible.**

No active management is currently required for this objective.

Any upgrading of the track between Cove and Cove Harbour has the potential to damage the scientific interest of the site by obscuring rock outcrops. Should this work be required, the amount of rock exposure affected must be minimised.

The construction or extension of houses and other similar structures within the site could potentially damage the geological interest if development occurs on or near rock outcrops.

Any repair and maintenance work required on the tunnel must not obscure any rock outcrop at its entrances. Repair and maintenance of structures within the harbour area must not obscure any rock outcrop.

### **2. To maintain the condition and extent of the coastal grassland habitat.**

Grazing is usually the preferred management of grassland for nature conservation, the alternative being cutting. However, the physical nature of the coastal cliff makes it impractical to graze this grassland in places, and also to use machinery to cut it.

Where it is possible to manage the coastal grassland by grazing, the ideal is for the stocking level and grazing periods to be managed to produce a sward structure of varying heights that provides ideal conditions for plants and invertebrates, including butterflies, moths and beetles. The sward should be at its longest in the summer, while plants are flowering and setting seed. Most grassland species germinate in the autumn or spring, so the sward should be shorter at these times to give light and space at ground level for new growth. The ideal management for coastal grassland is grazing to a sward height of less than 10 cm.

## **Other factors affecting the natural features of the site**

The steep nature of the coastal cliffs along this SSSI makes it impractical to graze the grassland in places, and virtually impossible to use machinery to cut it. Fencing parts of the site to introduce stock is also impractical due to the nature of the cliffs and the intertidal area. As a consequence, the un-grazed areas of grassland are becoming rank. SNH accepts that the grassland cannot be actively managed in these areas of the SSSI.

The Berwickshire Coast is subject to the active natural process of coastal erosion, and there have been several localised rock falls and landslips along its length in recent years. The rock falls have not affected the geological features of the site to date. The landslips have resulted in small losses of the grassland feature, but these are temporary in nature as the areas affected re-vegetate naturally over time.

Date last reviewed: 24 September 2010