



Scottish Natural Heritage

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**RICKLE CRAIG – SCURDIE NESS
Site of Special Scientific Interest**

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1351

**West Lodge
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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

Rickle Craig – Scurdie Ness SSSI is located on the Angus coastline, stretching about 5.5 km from just north of Lunan Bay to the mouth of the River South Esk at Montrose.

This rocky stretch of coastline was selected as an SSSI for its maritime cliff grassland, saltmarsh, molluscs and geological interest.

Species-rich maritime grassland vegetation, reflecting the base-rich nature of the underlying rock and maritime influence, occurs mainly on the Rickle Craig and at scattered localities further along the coast, notably on and around the old lime kiln on Boddin Point. Such grassland is very rare in Angus and Dundee districts. Characteristic plants include the nationally scarce Nottingham catchfly, as well as kidney vetch, clustered bellflower, fairy flax, carline thistle and burnet saxifrage.

Small areas of saltmarsh are scattered along the whole length of the SSSI, occurring mainly as 'perched' saltmarshes on rocky ground, on or just below the high water line. Such 'perched' saltmarsh is very rare along the Angus and Dundee coastline and is very different from estuarine saltmarsh formed on silty ground on the fringes of the Montrose Basin. Four main saltmarsh community types have been identified. These are characterised by red fescue, common saltmarsh grass, saltmarsh flat-sedge and common couch respectively. The saltmarshes' fragmented nature, and susceptibility to erosion, makes these communities vulnerable.

There are over 30 species of snail present on this site, due to the rich vegetation of the grassland areas.

The best exposures of the Ferryden Lavas, a sequence of volcanic rocks that are the earliest indication of volcanic activity associated with a volcano or volcanoes to the east, are known as the Montrose Volcanic Centre. The oldest lavas are at Scurdie Ness. This locality is of

key significance in reconstructing the environment in which a sequence of rocks, termed the Montrose Volcanic Formation, formed. The volcanic activity, at a little over 400 million years old, is marginally younger than the lavas forming the Ochil and Sidlaw Hills. It occurred at a time when the Highland Boundary Fault, which now separates the relatively flat-lying Midland Valley from the Highlands to the north, was still moving, as Scotland's geological pieces were in the final stages of coming together.

The Scurdie Ness area is a rich source of the mineral occurrence called agate. These are nodular masses of the compound silica which, when cut and polished, show striking, coloured internal layering. The Scurdie Ness agates are found within shoreline outcrops of the basalt rock that formed from the lava flows. They also occur in shingle beaches in the area, as hard pebbles which have been eroded out of the less resistant basalt. The agates fill hollows in the rock, called vesicles, which were originally gas bubbles within the lava. Chemical studies indicate that the agates formed from warm, silica-rich groundwaters seeping through the rock long after the lava had hardened. These fluids permeated the vesicles, where the internal structure of the agates crystallised. The abundance of agates makes the site nationally significant for the study of minerals. The site is also of historical interest because agates have been collected and worked from here for centuries, and probably for millennia.



Current condition of the natural features

The site is currently classed as being in favourable condition for all of the notified features.

A summary of the latest site monitoring information is given below:

Natural features of Rickle Craig - Scurdie Ness SSSI	Feature condition (date monitored)
Saltmarsh	Favourable, maintained (October 2000)
Mollusc assemblage	Favourable, maintained (August 2010)
Maritime cliff	Favourable, maintained (October 2000)
Old Red Sandstone igneous	Favourable, maintained (January 2001)
Mineralogy of Scotland	Not yet monitored

Past and present management

Grazing takes place in some of the fields adjacent to the shoreline and cattle are free to go onto the shore, and hence the SSSI. Some cliff stabilisation has been done in the past and there is also a harbour and sea defences within the site.

Gem collecting is common at Scurdie Ness and was especially so in the 1970s and 1980s. There has also been some dumping and vegetation burning in the past.

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

1. To safeguard the maritime grasslands, saltmarsh, mollusc assemblage and exposures of Old Red Sandstone lavas from further land claim and new sea defences where appropriate,
2. To encourage a sustainable and responsible approach to agate collection in accordance with current codes of practice.

We wish to work with the owners 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, its natural features and the effectiveness of management.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

There is no evidence as yet of sea level rise associated with global warming.

Date last reviewed: 06 October 2010