

CITATION**SOUTH COAST OF ARRAN
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
North Ayrshire**

Site code: 1451

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NR 951208 to NS 041213

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 69
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 361

AREA: 220.64 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES**Geological: Igneous petrology: Tertiary igneous****Biological: Coastlands: Shingle****Biological: Coastlands: Maritime cliff****DESCRIPTION**

The South Coast of Arran Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is of national importance for its geological interest, consisting of numerous exposed dykes known collectively as the Main Arran Dyke Swarm, as well as for its vegetated shingle beaches and maritime cliff habitat.

The southern coast of Arran exposes the Main Arran Dyke Swarm exceptionally well, especially at low tide. The swarm, which formed approximately 60 million years ago during the Tertiary geological period, is one of the densest known in the British Tertiary Igneous Province and can justifiably be regarded on scientific and historic grounds as the type example. About 200 dykes, varying greatly in thickness up to 30 metres, provide classic examples, not only of a swarm, but also of virtually all other phenomena associated with dyke intrusion. At Bennan Head, the cliffs expose a composite sill of great petrogenetic interest, consisting of rocks of granitic and basaltic composition. In places these rocks contain material derived from one another and elsewhere show evidence of mixing when in a liquid state.

The site is also of biological interest for its vegetated shingle and maritime cliff habitats. Shingle beaches occur in a number of locations, most notably by the mouth of the Torrylinn Water, but also in smaller areas at Port a' Ghille Ghlais, south of Levenorroch and near Auchenhew. It is in the former location that the principal area of vegetated shingle occurs. Here, the shingle is vegetated to varying degrees, with a more stable grassland and scrub community developed on the landward side, and a transient, pioneer community towards the shore. The pioneer community supports a colony of oyster plant *Mertensia maritima* which is one of the largest in south-west Scotland.

To the west of Auchenhew the SSSI includes maritime cliffs and slopes that support a diverse flora, including locally uncommon plants such as adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, carline thistle *Carlina vulgaris*, wood vetch *Vicia sylvatica*, and narrow-leaved everlasting-pea *Lathyrus sylvestris* at the northern limit of its natural range in Britain.

The site also includes a range of transitional habitats between the intertidal zone and the maritime cliff, including saltmarsh and sand dune, although these are not notified natural features of the SSSI.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1978 as two separate biological SSSIs: Torrylinwater Foot SSSI and Kildonan – Bennan Head SSSI.

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 30 April 1986 with a 130 ha increase in area and amalgamation of the two previous SSSI. Overall area significantly increased to accommodate geological interest.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 31 March 2011

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected from 218.3 ha.