

CITATION

**ST ABB'S HEAD TO FAST CASTLE
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST**
Scottish Borders

Site code: 1466

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NT 880698

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 67
 1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 346

AREA: 250.88 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

**Geological: Igneous Petrology: Old Red Sandstone Igneous
Geomorphology: Coastal Geomorphology of Scotland**

**Biological: Coastlands: Maritime cliff
Birds: Seabird colony, breeding
Birds: Guillemot (*Uria aalge*), breeding
Birds: Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), breeding**

DESCRIPTION

St Abb's Head to Fast Castle Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) extends for over 10 km along the Berwickshire coast from Lansey Bank, 2.5 km west of Fast Castle Head, to Starney Bay, just north of the village of St Abbs. This site is notified for its geological, botanical and breeding seabird interests.

The Old Red Sandstone Igneous interest of the site lies in its excellent exposures of 400 million-year-old lavas and associated volcanoclastic rocks, together with breccias plugging a volcanic vent from which lavas were erupted. These lavas are separated by a major fault, the St Abb's Head Fault, from older sedimentary rocks to the west. The lavas represent the most south-easterly volcanic centres of Silurian–Devonian age in southern Scotland. Evidence suggests that the magma which gave rise to the volcanic activity was generated in the region of the suture between southern Scotland and England, which formed with the closure of the Iapetus Ocean.

The Coastal Geomorphological interest of the site is found in the spectacular assemblage of rock coast landforms including clefts, gullies, geos, caves, stacks, reefs and skerries. These provide representative and text-book examples of the type of features which develop in volcanic rocks in an open North Sea wave energy environment. The principal geomorphological importance of the site is the clear relationship displayed between bedrock lithology, structure, topography and coastal form. This is enhanced by the juxtaposition of the igneous rocks of the headland and the sedimentary rocks to the west, which produces a dramatic and unique contrast in coastal form.

The series of sea cliffs and wave-cut platforms present an outstanding diversity of habitats including scrub woodland, tall herb grassland, coastal grassland, coastal

heath, running and standing water, flushes, rock face seepage, and splash zone communities on a variety of rock and soil types derived from Lower Old Red Sandstone andesites, marl and ash beds, and strongly folded Silurian greywacke, shale and grits. Of particular interest is the coastal grassland and heath. Over 360 plant species have been recorded from the site including several which are rare in south east Scotland or are at the edge of their British distribution. These include Scots lovage *Ligusticum scoticum*, roseroot *Sedum rosea*, knotted hedge-parsley *Torilis nodosa*, early marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza incarnata*, burnet rose *Rosa pimpinellifolia*, soft clover *Trifolium striatum*, fern grass *Catapodium rigidum*, sea wormwood *Seriphidium maritimum*, spring sandwort *Minuartia verna*, and great horsetail *Equisetum telmateia*.

The coastal cliffs rise to 150 metres in places and support the largest mainland breeding seabird site between Angus and Yorkshire. There have been up to 9,000 pairs of guillemots, nearly 12,000 pairs of kittiwakes and regionally significant numbers of herring gull, razorbill and shag. Fulmars and puffins also breed on the site in smaller numbers. Over the whole site more than 240 species of bird have been recorded. The site is a good landfall for autumn and spring passage migrants, which take advantage of the cover and food afforded by the habitats around and near the cliffs.

Although not notified features of the SSSI, over 260 butterfly and moth species have been recorded at the site including several notable and locally rare species, such as grayling *Hipparchia semele*, northern brown angus *Aricia artaxerxes* and the swordgrass moth *Xylena exsoleta*.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1961

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 25 June 1986 with a 29.2 ha decrease in area.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 9 March 2011

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 257.3 ha).

The intertidal part of this SSSI is also designated as the Berwickshire Coast (intertidal) SSSI.

St Abb's Head to Fast Castle SSSI is included as part of the St Abb's Head to Fast Castle special protection area (SPA) for the birds listed below.

Birds : Seabird assemblage, breeding
: Guillemot (*Uria aalge*), breeding
: Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), breeding
: Herring gull (*Larus argentatus*), breeding
: Razorbill (*Alca torda*), breeding
: Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*), breeding

St Abb's Head to Fast Castle SSSI is also designated as St Abb's Head to Fast Castle special area of conservation (SAC) for the European habitat below:

Habitat: Vegetated sea cliffs

Part of St Abb's Head to Fast Castle SSSI is designated as part of the Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast SAC for the European habitats and species listed below:

Habitats: Shallow inlets and bays
Intertidal mudflats and sandflats
Reefs
Sea caves

Species: Grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*)