CITATION

STRATHFLEET
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
Highland (Sutherland)

Site code: 1491

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NC 755010

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 16, 17 & 21
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 441

AREA: 133.87 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Geological:	**Structural and metamorphic geology:**	**Moine**
Biological:	**Woodlands:**	**Upland oak woodland**
	Vascular plants:	**Vascular plant assemblage**

DESCRIPTION

Strathfleet Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located on steep slopes between the Mound causeway and Rogart in east Sutherland. The site has been designated for its nationally important rock outcrops, oak woodland and range of rare plant species.

Moine (Geology)

The rocks of Strathfleet SSSI are around 1000 million years old and form part of the 'Moine Supergroup' rocks. Around 425 million years ago, these rocks were partially melted by extreme heat to a molten 'tonalite' rock which now forms part of the 'Rogart pluton'. A pluton is a mass of rock that was originally magma which solidified as it moved towards the Earth's surface.

The Moine rocks formed through the metamorphism of sedimentary rocks, such as sandstones and mudstones. These rocks were first metamorphosed at high pressure during a large-scale mountain building event, and then subjected to the high temperatures which partially melted them and changed them into a rock type known as 'migmatite'.

The migmatite zone around the Rogart pluton varies in width. Strathfleet SSSI exhibits an excellent section through the thickest part of the migmatite zone. It is one of the most readily accessible and detailed sections through a migmatite zone to be found in Great Britain.

Upland oak woodland

The semi-natural upland oak woodland at Morvich is the most northerly oak wood of significance in eastern Scotland. Although this oak wood is relatively small, compared to other southern oak woodlands, it supports some impressive veteran oaks and a good range of typical woodland species for this habitat type.

In addition to oak *Quercus petraea/ robur*, commonly occurring tree species are birch *Betula pubescens*, hazel *Corylus avellana*, rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and alder *Alnus glutinosa*. The understorey is open with woody shrubs being uncommon, although gorse (whin) *Ulex europaeus* is locally common. The ground flora is largely dominated by grasses; wavy-hair grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and sweet-vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, and woodland herbs, such as; common cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense,* wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* and wood sage *Teucrium scorodonia*. The oak woodland also supports a good range of lichens growing on tree branches and high stems.

Vascular plant assemblage

Due to the varied underlying rock types and associated soils, the site supports a nationally important assemblage of plant species. Of particular note is a population of the nationally rare rock cinquefoil *Potentilla rupestris*, known to exist at only two sites in Scotland. Other scarce plant species that also contribute to this assemblage include rock whitebeam *Sorbus rupicola* and pyramidal bugle *Ajuga pyramidalis*.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act for its geological interest: 1963
Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 13 August 1986 with a 1035.3 ha decrease in area.
Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 28 January 2010

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected from 139.1 ha.