

CITATION

BEINN DEARG
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
Highland (Wester Ross, Easter Ross, Sutherland)

Site code: 165

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NH 270810

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 20
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 436, 437, 439, 440

AREA: 13,848.94 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Geological: Quaternary geology and geomorphology: Quaternary of Scotland

Biological: Upland habitats: Upland assemblage
Woodlands: Native pinewood
Vascular plants: Vascular plant assemblage
Birds: Breeding bird assemblage

DESCRIPTION

Beinn Dearg Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located in north-west Scotland, approximately 14km southeast of Ullapool. The site covers the highest and most diverse mountain range in the northern Highlands. Its Quaternary geology, upland plant communities, rare and scarce flowering plants, native pinewood and upland breeding birds are nationally important.

Quaternary of Scotland (geology)

The impressive moraines at Cnoc a' Mhoraire provide some of the clearest evidence in the north of Scotland of the last major glacial advance that occurred during the 'Ice Age' (11 – 10,000 years ago). This site has one of the largest and most accessible moraines that was formed during the Loch Lomond readvance. These extensive landforms comprise a large end moraine ridge, deposited at the end of the glacier, and lateral moraines which formed along the sides of the glacier. Clearly defined drift limits indicate the upper level that the ice reached along the sides of the glen. These moraines are also significant because they are close to Loch Droma where a dated sequence of sediments has been sampled from the mud in the bottom of the loch. These sediments allow the pattern and timing of glacial events, including the loss of glaciers at the end of the Ice Age, to be established for this area of the Highlands.

Upland assemblage

The physical diversity of this massif has resulted in the presence of an impressive range of upland habitats that together form the 'upland assemblage' feature.

The **subalpine dry heath** component of the upland assemblage is dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris* with other dwarf-shrubs such as bell heather *Erica cinerea* and blaeberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*. **Subalpine wet heath** is extensive on Beinn Dearg and is dominated by deer grass *Trichophorum cespitosum* and cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*. This site has the second largest extent of heather-cottongrass *Calluna vulgaris-Eriophorum vaginatum* **blanket bog** on an upland SSSI in the UK. It includes two montane sub-types. One is rich in heather, dwarf birch *Betula nana*, bearberry *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* and the

nationally scarce alpine bearberry *Arctostaphylos alpinus*. The other is a high-altitude type in which heather is replaced by the other dwarf-shrubs. There is a wide range of prostrate **alpine heaths** on exposed ridges and lower summits. These include heather - reindeer lichen *Calluna vulgaris-Cladonia arbuscula* heath and the oceanic north-western heather - woolly fringe moss *Calluna vulgaris-Racomitrium lanuginosum* heath.

At higher altitudes, there is extensive stiff sedge – woolly fringe moss *Carex bigelowii-Racomitrium lanuginosum* **alpine moss-heath**. The characteristic north-western form of alpine moss-heath, with an abundance of the cushion herbs cyphel *Minuartia sedoides* and thrift *Armeria maritima* with moss campion *Silene acaulis*, is well-represented on the site. There is also a complete range of the **snowbed** communities found in the northwest Highlands. Beinn Dearg is the best site in the northern Highlands for late-lie snow-bed communities for range, extent and presence of rare plants.

Subalpine calcareous grassland occurs below the cliffs and on the more broken cliffs. Characteristic species include sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris* and thyme *Thymus praecox*. Well developed **alpine calcareous grassland** is also found on this site. This habitat supports a variety of plants that normally grow at higher altitude or further north, including alpine mouse-ear *Cerastium alpinum*, arctic mouse-ear *Cerastium arcticum*, alpine cinquefoil *Potentilla crantzii* and net-leaved willow *Salix reticulata*.

The hills of Beinn Dearg and Seana Bhraigh have the best **rocky slope** habitats associated with strongly calcareous rock in the northern Highlands, as well as rocky slopes associated with acidic rock. This is also one of the best sites nationally for **tall herb ledge** communities due to their large extent. Plant communities rich in great wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica* and water avens *Geum rivale* occupy the larger ledges.

A variety of springs on Beinn Dearg are associated with snow-melt, including the nationally rare mountain thread-moss *Pohlia wahlenbergii* var. *glacialis* spring which forms the **springhead rill and flush** component of the upland assemblage. Areas of base-rich **alpine flushes**, including common yellow sedge – yellow saxifrage *Carex demissa-Saxifraga aizoides* mire and the nationally rare russet sedge *Carex saxatilis* mire, also occur on the high ground.

Native pinewood

There is a small area of native Scots pinewood *Pinus sylvestris* on the shore of Loch Vaich. In addition to the Scots pine, the woodland contains both birch *Betula pubescens* and rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*. The ground flora is typical of a pinewood and includes blaeberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and heather *Calluna vulgaris*.

Vascular plant assemblage

Three nationally rare montane species: Norwegian mugwort *Artemisia norvegica*, tufted saxifrage *Saxifraga cespitosa* and Highland saxifrage *S. rivularis*, and 31 nationally scarce species of flowering plant are found on this site.

Breeding bird assemblage

Beinn Dearg SSSI supports a nationally important breeding bird community, including golden eagle, dotterel, snow bunting, ptarmigan, ring ouzel, raven, golden plover and peregrine falcon. The site supports around 4% of the UK population of breeding dotterel.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act: March 1974

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 10 July 1984 with a 223.17 ha increase in area.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 23 February 2010

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 13,715 ha).

Beinn Dearg SSSI is also designated as Beinn Dearg Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for the European habitats listed below.

- Habitats : Acidic scree
- : Alpine and subalpine calcareous grasslands
- : Alpine and subalpine heaths
- : Blanket bog
- : Caledonian forest
- : Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels
- : Dry heaths
- : High-altitude plant communities associated with areas of water seepage
- : Montane acid grasslands
- : Mountain willow scrub
- : Plants in crevices on acid rocks
- : Plants in crevices on base-rich rocks
- : Species-rich grassland with mat-grass in upland areas
- : Tall herb communities
- : Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath

Part of Beinn Dearg SSSI is designated as part of the River Oykel SAC for the European species listed below.

- Species : Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*)
- : Freshwater pearl mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*)

The parts of Beinn Dearg SSSI above 650m are also designated as Beinn Dearg Special Protection Area (SPA) for the birds listed below.

- Birds : Dotterel (*Charadrius morinellus*)