

CITATION

**BEN HOPE
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
Highland (Sutherland)**

Site code:182

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NC 480490

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 9
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 447

AREA: 3033.94 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Geological

Structural and metamorphic geology: Moine

Biological

Upland habitats: Upland assemblage

Woodlands: Upland birch woodland

Vascular plants: Vascular plant assemblage

DESCRIPTION

Ben Hope Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located in northwest Sutherland between Hope and Altnaharra. The site includes the mountain of Ben Hope (927m), an isolated mountain that rises abruptly from the surrounding low moorlands. The site is designated for its geology, upland habitats, birch woodland and rare plants.

Moine (geology)

The streambed of the Allt na Caillich, and the adjacent crags, provide an excellent section through the Ben Hope Sill. This is the most southerly outcrop of an intrusion of molten rock that forced its way between existing rocks from deep within the earth, around 800 million years ago. The Ben Hope Sill can be traced from here to Tongue. The sill formed before the major continental collisions and mountain building events, known as the Caledonian Orogeny, which affected the rocks in this area of Scotland around 435 million years ago. The sill was deformed during these later events and therefore contains important information about the geology of the area before the Caledonian Orogeny.

Upland habitats

The lower and middle slopes of Ben Hope have a mosaic of upland habitats including wet heath and blanket bog vegetation. Prostrate montane heaths with alpine bearberry *Arctostaphylos alpina*, heather *Calluna vulgaris*, blaeberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and crowberry *Empetrum nigrum* are found on higher ground and in several wind-swept locations. Higher on the site, characteristic alpine species are found including moss campion *Silene acaulis* and cyphel *Minuartia sedoides*.

Upland birch woodland

The woodlands on Ben Hope are amongst the best examples of native woodland remaining in Sutherland. Woodland is found on the lower slopes and cliffs of Ben Hope at altitudes up to around 200m. The woodlands consist of birch *Betula pubescens* and rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* woodland, with occasional hazel *Corylus avellana*, bird cherry *Prunus padus* and holly *Ilex aquifolium* in the upper parts of the woodland, and a few trees of the nationally scarce rock whitebeam *Sorbus rupicola*. There is a diverse woodland field layer including bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scriptus*, blaeberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*.

Vascular plant assemblage

Calcareous hornblende-schist rocks are exposed in a band across the western cliffs of Ben Hope. These areas support many notable montane plants including mountain sandwort *Minuartia rubella*, mountain avens *Dryas octopetala*, rock whitlowgrass *Draba rupestris*, alpine saxifrage *Saxifraga nivalis* and downy willow *Salix lapponum*.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1963

Re-notified under the 1949 Act: 1971 with an increase in area.

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 31 July 1987 with a 321.9 ha increase in area.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 7 August 2008

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 3001.9 ha).