



Scottish Natural Heritage

**CAIRNBABER
Site of Special Scientific Interest**

**Holmpark Industrial Estate
New Galloway Road
NEWTON STEWART
DG8 6BF**

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

**Tel 01671 401075
Fax 01671 401078**

Site code: 286

Purpose



This is a public statement prepared by SNH for owners and occupiers of the SSSI. It outlines the reasons it is designated as an SSSI and provides guidance on how its special natural features should be conserved or enhanced. This Statement does not affect or form part of the statutory notification and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

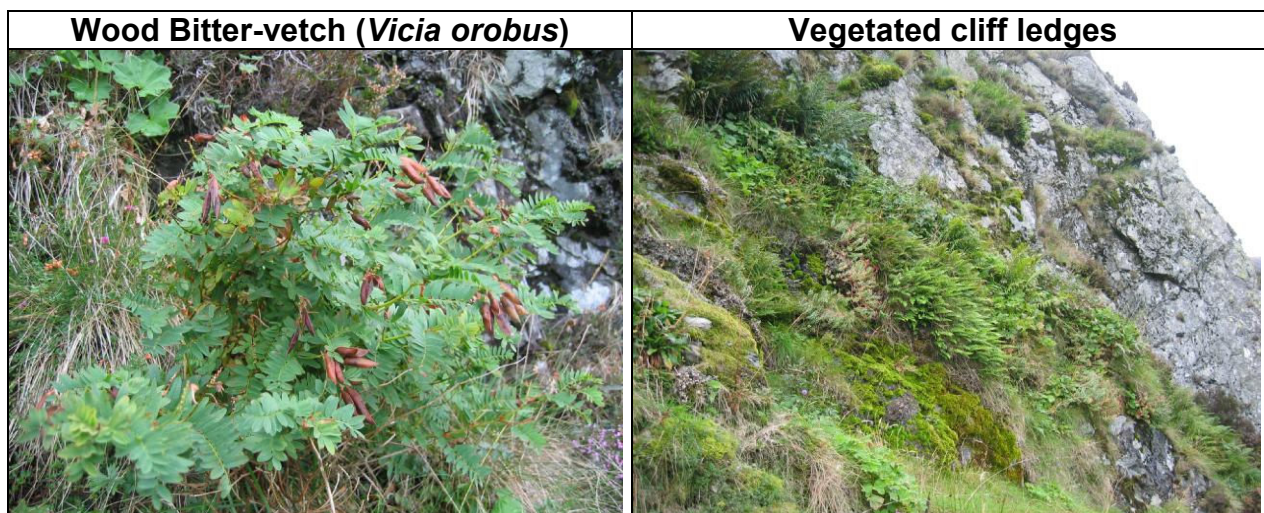
We welcome your views on this statement.

Natural features of Cairnbaber SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)
Upland assemblage	Favourable, maintained (September 2004)

Description of the site

Cairnbaber Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is situated approximately 12km northeast of Newton Stewart. The cliffs of Cairnbaber rise to an altitude of 550 metres above sea level and stand 160m high with a generally northeast/southeast aspect. The surrounding area is a mosaic of relatively recent conifer plantations and open heather moorland.

The site is however dominated by a series of smaller crags up to around 50m high. The rocks are mildly calcareous and the steep cliffs have block faces, ledges, crevices and larger gullies. Below these, a mix of flushes and scree slopes add further microhabitats. Narrow ledges and crevices host the nationally scarce wood bitter-vetch and oak fern, whilst parsley fern and brittle bladder fern are found on the scree slopes. Wetter areas are also important for unusual plants, including common butterwort, round leaved sundew, grass of Parnassus and alpine cinquefoil. Many of the larger ledges are inaccessible to grazing sheep. This allows a taller range of plants, including heather, to persist. The lower slopes are a mix of acid and calcareous grassland, with wetter areas dominated by purple moor grass and deer grass. A range of breeding birds, typical of upland Galloway, is also found on the site but is not a notified feature.



Past and present management

The SSSI is wholly owned by the Forestry Commission Scotland. The area has historically been used for extensive sheep grazing. Muirburning was carried out until around 1984 but is now difficult due to the proximity of conifer plantations. Where the adjacent conifer plantation has been fertilised, there may have been the risk of some fertiliser drift on to the site. Sheep grazing is the only land management activity carried out. The crags may be used on occasion for recreational rock climbing and scrambling.

The feature is in favourable condition as described by the Site Condition Monitoring report. The site is important, being one of the few calcareous areas of hill ground within the Galloway Hills with additional interest being associated with the steeply sloping rocky ground. This situation allows fern and taller herb communities to persist whilst surrounding areas are grazed by sheep, deer and goats.

There have been no recorded decreases in the extent of the notified habitats, although there is a reported, but negligible reduction in standing open water. Agricultural grazing of the more accessible areas by sheep would be consistent with maintenance of the dwarf shrub heath, wet heath and alkaline/basic flush/fen interests. Whilst not compromising the long-term condition of the wet heath at this time, the extent of purple moor grass was noted to be causing a slight reduction in abundance of other species. The impact of this was not significant but should be noted for monitoring in future years. All of these habitats had satisfactory physical and vegetation structure and composition. Tall herb communities were being maintained in an un-grazed situation (due to the steepness and broken nature of the slope). Whilst it is not currently a significant problem, adjacent plantations form a potential local source of tree seeds.

Objectives for Management (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

We wish to work with the owner and occupier to protect the site and to maintain and where necessary enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims to carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site and its natural features.

1. To maintain the extent of cliff ledge, crevice, scree and moorland habitats by light grazing

To maintain areas as open hill, favouring maintenance of the current plant communities. Light grazing by feral goats and deer occurs on parts of the site. Trees could shade out the characteristic plants on the site, such as butterwort and grass of Parnassus.

2. To maintain/increase populations of nationally scarce flora by reducing/avoiding significant disturbance and grazing pressure

Grazing should continue in order to maintain the grassland and heather communities. The intensity of grazing should match the capacity of the habitats. Increases could adversely affect the extent of dwarf shrub communities and especially heather. Grazing maintains the open nature of the site which maintains the mix of habitats. It also minimises any tree growth on the open hill and should therefore be continued. In cleuchs and on cliffs, the scrub/woodland communities should be protected from grazing and natural regeneration encouraged.

3. To maintain the interests of the site by minimising recreational disturbance to sensitive habitats and species

Increasing recreational use of the area if not carefully managed through encouraging compliance with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC), could cause localised erosion around footpaths and summit features. This is not currently a problem. An increased risk of disturbance to breeding birds and accidental summer fires is also possible. If recreational use becomes significant, action should be taken to raise awareness of and interpret the site interests. This should aim to highlight the sensitivity to disturbance of some of the habitats and breeding birds, the fire risk in the early spring and summer, and to manage and encourage responsible access under SOAC.

4. To maintain the low nutrient water quality by ensuring fertiliser drift and herbicide is prevented from reaching the site

This should maintain the diversity of habitats and sensitive species on the site dependent on the flushes and wetter ground.

5. To maintain open moorland habitats within the site by either swiping or if possible muirburning

If carried out on a long rotation in the drier areas, this should be considered as it would provide diversity in vegetation structure and prevent tree and scrub invasion of heather dominated vegetation. Extreme care would need to be taken due to the proximity of conifer plantations. Burning should not take place on deep peat or rocky ground.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Climate change: A risk of increased rainfall or reductions in winter snow cover could have long term impacts on the cliff ledge species, but this is outwith land management control.

Date last reviewed: 30 July 2010