

CITATION

CONIC HILL
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
Stirling

Site code: 397

PLANNING AUTHORITY: Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NS 421916, NS 415912, NS 411918, NS413920

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 56
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 347

AREA: 60.66 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Geological: Igneous Petrology	: Ordovician Igneous
Biological: Woodlands	: Upland oak woodland
	: Wet woodland
Upland habitats	: Subalpine calcareous grassland
	: Alkaline fen
Invertebrates	: Beetle assemblage
	: Moth assemblage

DESCRIPTION

Conic Hill Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is comprised of several detached areas and lies on the east side of Loch Lomond, immediately north of the village of Balmaha. The largest portion of the SSSI constitutes the upland part, whilst the lower areas, adjacent to the loch shore, support woodland. Conic Hill is a composite site supporting varying rocks and soils, and wildlife habitats.

The Highland Border Complex is of national importance and consists of a number of narrow, fault-bounded exposures of Ordovician sediments and igneous rocks, which crop out intermittently along the Highland Boundary Fault Zone between Arran and Stonehaven. The ultramafic and mafic rocks of the complex are interpreted as incomplete fragments of a greatly dismembered obducted ophiolite.

A narrow zone of rocks belonging to the Complex is exposed north of Balmaha, on the eastern side of Loch Lomond. Exposures extending from the lakeside to Druim nam Beurach consist of detrital rocks which have yielded a chitinozoan fauna of probable Arenig age. The rocks contain a wide variety of ophiolitic clasts including serpentinite, gabbro, dolerite and spilite, which by implication were derived from an ophiolite of early Arenig, or more likely pre-Arenig age. Abundant ophiolite-derived clasts are also found in the coarse sandstones at Arrochymore Point which are thought to be Cardocian in age. Red cherts belonging to the Complex are also exposed in this area.

The deciduous woodlands occurring across the site are largely of ancient origin with oak dominating on the drier acidic soils and alder with ash on the wetter flushed soils. Both woodland types support a characteristic ground flora. Upland oak woodland and wet woodlands such as these have a restricted distribution nationally, with those found at Conic Hill amongst the best examples of their types within the Stirling Council area.

Subalpine calcareous grasslands are also restricted in their distribution in this area, and the site supports good examples of this habitat type. It is characterised by species such as sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris* and wild thyme *Thymus praecox*.

Base-rich serpentine rocks provide relatively extensive areas of nutrient-rich groundwater flushing and basic rock outcrops, resulting in alkaline fen vegetation. These support plant communities and species which are very restricted in their distribution, with those found at Conic Hill being amongst the most extensive examples found in the Stirling Council area. Typically they consist of species such as dioecious sedge *Carex dioica*, common butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris*, yellow saxifrage *Saxifraga aizoides*, deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum* and cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*. Other species found also include the black bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans* at its only locality in the Stirling area, and the locally uncommon broad-leaved cottongrass *Eriophorum latifolium*.

The rich invertebrate fauna includes a diversity of moths, many with restricted distribution, including *Pancalia schwarzeella* whose larvae feed on violets. The site also supports many species of water beetles, including *Hydroporus longicornis*, classified as Near Threatened using IUCN criteria, and *Chaetarthria seminulum* and *Paracymus scutellaris*, which are Nationally Scarce (Nb).

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1951 (as part of Loch Lomond (south end) SSSI and 1973 (as Conic Hill)

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 30 March 1989 with a 145.7 ha reduction in area.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 3 February 2011

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 61.5 ha)

Part of Conic Hill SSSI is part of the Loch Lomond Woods Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is designated for the European habitats and species listed below.

Habitats : Western acidic oak woodland
Species : Otter (*Lutra lutra*)