

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 482

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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.

Description of the site

Cuttie's Hillock Quarry is a key locality for its unique fossil reptile fauna of the very late Permian period, approximately 250 million years ago, and this age sets it apart from the well-known late Permian reptile beds of South Africa and Russia. The quarry consists of bedded layers of various types of sandstones, reflecting the different depositional and erosional processes of the desert conditions in which the sediments were laid down.

Over the years, since the mid 1800's when the quarry was first explored for fossils, a rich and unique collection of reptile evidence, representing 12 or so genera, has been collected, including *Elginia*, a pareiasaur, which is the youngest of its kind. There are also the dicynodonts *Gordonia* and *Geikia*. These are members of a specialised group of herbivorous mammal-like reptiles with beak-like snouts, most of which had no teeth except for a pair of 'tusks' midway along the upper jaws. *Gordonia* was possibly related to similar animals found in South Africa. There are rarely any bone remains in the rocks, since these have usually been dissolved by percolating waters, leaving behind "natural moulds" of the generally complete reptile skeleton. The reptiles so far discovered seem to have been mainly herbivorous animals, which ranged around the lakes and rivers of the desert-like environment.

Cutties Hillock is a site of international importance as it has yielded the youngest Permian reptile fauna in existence. It is also important in the history of geology because of its association with some of the 19th century's most eminent scientists.

A comprehensive description of the site can be found in the SNH's Earth Science Documentation Series for The Cuttie's Hillock (MacFadyen 1994).

Natural Features of Cutties Hillock SSSI	Feature Condition (date monitored)
Permian-Triassic Reptilia	Favourable Maintained (September 2007)

Site condition monitoring was last carried in 2007. The site was in favourable condition: all quarry faces were visible and there had been no noticeable decrease in the visibility of exposures.

Past and present management

Cuttie's Hillock SSSI was quarried in the 19th century for building stone, much of which was used in Elgin. The surrounding ground lies beneath pine and larch plantation, with self-sown birch & rowan, and is managed by the Forest Commission, whose current management plan for the SSSI runs until 2011. In 2010 the Forestry Commission removed regeneration from the SSSI and is planning to undertake further work.

The site lies within the area managed by the Quarrelwood Woodland Park Association which was established in 1995. The Association is a Community Partnership which includes the Forest, Moray Council and Scottish Natural Heritage. The Association works on improving the amenity and natural heritage value of the woodland. In 1999 an interpretive panel was installed adjacent to Cuttie's Hillock SSSI, as part of a geological trail through Quarrelwood.

Objective for management (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

We wish to work with the owners and occupiers 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.

To maintain rock exposures at or above the current level and access to and within the site

Because the quarry is disused, vegetation and especially trees and scrub seed in from local sources. This can obscure and limit access to the crucial area of sediment beds, which includes the entire quarry and the areas of spoil. Hence, the Forestry Commission periodically clear trees to maintain visibility and access.

Date last reviewed: 09 May 2011.