

CITATION

GLEN EY GORGE
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
Aberdeenshire

Site code: 705

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NO087873

OS 1: 50 000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 43
1: 25 000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 387

AREA: 41.2 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Geological : Structural and metamorphic geology : Dalradian
Biological : Uplands : Subalpine dry heath
: Tall herb ledge

DESCRIPTION

The Glen Ey Gorge is located in upper Deeside, 7 km south-west of Braemar.

Geological Interest

Glen Ey provides one of the best-exposed and most complete sections through the Boundary Slide, a zone of highly strained rocks, which separates the Grampian Group from other, more lithologically variable, parts of the Dalradian throughout much of the Grampian Highlands.

At one time the slide was regarded as a fundamental tectonostratigraphical boundary separating the Moine and Dalradian successions, but the re-assignment of most of the Moine south-east of the Great Glen Fault to the Dalradian has lessened its potential importance.

The Glen Ey gorge section is particularly valuable since, unlike some sections to the south-west, there is a continuous section from the top of the Grampian Group, through increasingly strained rocks, into highly deformed schistose rocks assigned to the Lochaber Subgroup at the base of the Appin Group.

Large-scale, isoclinal F2 folds have been identified in the area, and the main deformation fabric is D2, but it is not possible to establish whether any stratigraphical units or any fold limbs have been excised by movement on the shear-zone. The so-called 'slide' could merely be a zone of high strain with no significant displacement, the Glen Ey Gorge therefore encompassing one of the most complete sections illustrating continuity of Dalradian lithostratigraphy.

Biological Interest

The gorge holds a wide range of upland habitats associated with the diverse underlying geology. Of particular interest are the steep rock faces of the gorge and the species-rich dwarf-shrub heath on the adjacent slopes.

The gorge is very humid and shady and the vegetation on the slopes and ledges is ungrazed. Heather *Calluna vulgaris* and blaeberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* are dominant, with abundant greater woodrush *Luzula sylvatica*, cowberry *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*, and opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and frequent marsh hawks-beard *Crepis paludosa*. Hard fern *Blechnum spicant* and oak fern *Gymnocarpium dryopteris* are abundant and widespread, and beech fern *Phegopteris connectilis*, brittle bladder-fern *Cystopteris fragilis* and green spleenwort *Asplenium viride* are frequent on ledges. Narrow buckler-fern *Dryopteris carthusiana* is frequent under overhanging rock. Less common plants such as mountain melick *Melica nutans*, holly fern *Polystichum lonchites* and Wilson's filmy-fern *Hymenophyllum wilsonii* have also been recorded in the gorge.

On the more gently sloping sides of the valley species-rich dwarf-shrub heath alternates with bent-fescue grassland. Petty whin *Genista anglica* and bitter vetch *Lathyrus linifolius* are locally frequent amongst the ling heather and intermediate wintergreen *Pyrola media* and bearberry *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* also occur. The associated bent/fescue grassland is also species rich with species such as alpine lady's mantle *Alchemilla alpina*, northern bedstraw *Galium boreale*, common rock rose *Helianthemum nummularium* and quaking grass *Briza media*.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

Date notified under the 1949 Act: 1956.

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 23 March 1989, with a decrease of about 1 ha.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 26 May 2011.

REMARKS

Parts of Glen Ey Gorge SSSI are designated as parts of the River Dee Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Cairngorms Massif Special Protection Area (SPA) for the European species and birds listed below. The species highlighted by an asterisk are most relevant to the area of this SSSI.

Species : Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar**
 : Otter *Lutra lutra**
 : Freshwater pearl mussel *Margaritifera margaritifera*
Birds : Golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* *