



Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

All of nature for all of Scotland
Nàdair air fad airson Alba air fad

ARDMEANACH

Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 74

Address: Cameron House, Albany Street, Oban, Argyll. PA34 4AE

Tel: 0300 244 9360 email: argyll_stirling@snh.org.uk

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.

This statement is available in Gaelic on request.

Natural features of Ardmeanach SSSI	Feature condition (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Hettangian, Sinemurian, Pliensbachian	Favourable maintained (May 2004)	–
Quaternary of Scotland	Not yet monitored	–
Cenomanian-Maastrichtian	Not yet monitored	–
Tertiary Igneous	Favourable, maintained (May 2004)	–
Maritime cliff	Favourable, maintained (August 2001)	SAC
Montane assemblage	Unfavourable, declining (June 2006)	–
Subalpine calcareous grassland	Unfavourable, declining (June 2006)	SAC
Vascular plant assemblage	Unfavourable, declining (July 2004)	SAC
Slender Scotch burnet moth	Favourable, maintained (June 2004)	–

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Feature condition (date monitored)	SPA or SAC
Golden eagle <i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Favourable, maintained (November 2007)	SPA
Tall herb communities	Unfavourable, declining (June 2006)	SAC

Description of the site

Ardmeanach Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) encompasses the Ardmeanach Peninsula on the south west coast of the island of Mull. The site is of national importance due to an array of biological and geological features.

The site is comprised of coastal and upland habitats. The uplands were formed by a sequence of successive lava flows forming a whale-back with indistinct summits separated by blanket bog and heath. The northern and western sides of the peninsula feature coastal cliffs and screes which are formed from the basalt terraces. These rise to 519 metres and support a rich and varied assemblage of coastal and upland communities. South east of Gribun, at the site's northern extreme, there is a large accumulation of debris which lies along the base of steep north facing coastal cliffs. This debris composes a moraine complex formed by a glacier during the Loch Lomond Stadial at the end of the last glaciation. The sediments preserved in a deep infilled basin behind the moraine provide an exceptionally detailed record of environmental changes during the postglacial period.

Within the western part of the peninsula there are several spectacular geological features, including the fossilised remains of trees engulfed by lava around 60 million years ago at the start of the Neogene period. The most famous fossilised tree 'MacCulloch's Tree' is the destination of a 10 kilometre coastal walk, which takes in many of the geological features present at the site. Further in to the 'Wilderness' there is a sequence of rocks comprising limestones and shales that were deposited in a shallow tropical sea at the beginning of the Jurassic period. These fossiliferous rocks allow an understanding of the ancient geography and environment of this part of Scotland around 200 million years ago

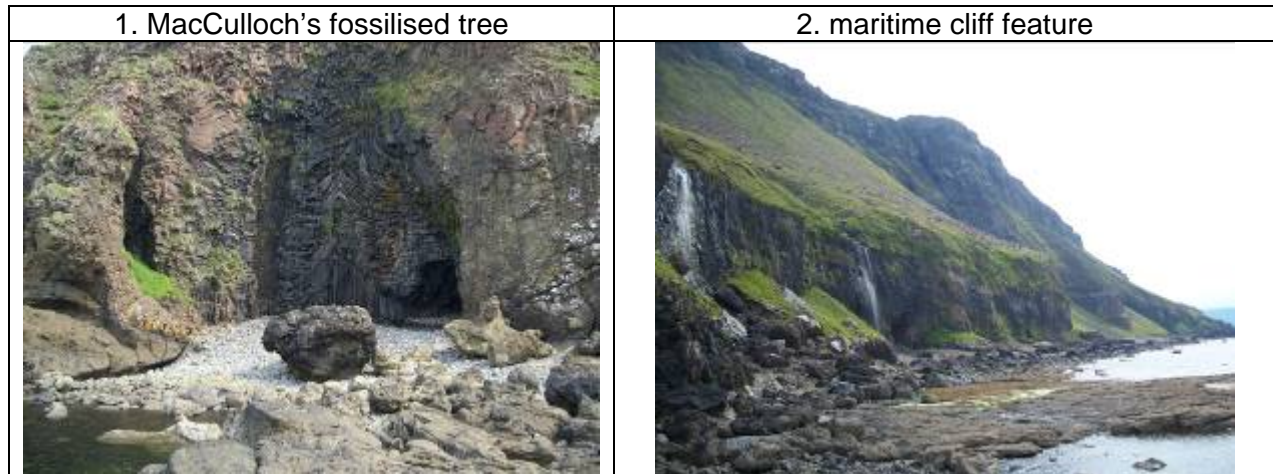
Targets for visibility and quality were met for geological features when monitored in 2004, they are therefore considered to be in favourable condition.

Low cliffs towards the shore support maritime grassland, rock crevice and cliff-ledge communities. Inland and less influenced by salt spray, species rich calcareous grasslands occur beneath and over outcropping basalt cliffs. The higher ground has a species rich montane flora, associated with cliff ledge and open moor habitats. The nationally rare Iceland-purslane is the most notable flowering plant at a site which supports over 400 vascular plant species. The Ardmeanach population of this small annual plant marks the southerly limit of its western European distribution.

The maritime cliff feature was found to be in favourable condition when monitored in 2001. However the species rich calcareous grassland and montane assemblage feature were found to be in unfavourable declining condition when monitored in 2006. Bracken encroachment, trampling and grazing pressure are known to threaten the quality of these features. The vascular plant assemblage for Ardmeanach was also found to be in unfavourable declining condition when monitored in 2004. The instability of many of the cliff ledge communities was highlighted and grazing pressure attributable to red deer, sheep and feral goats was noted as possible causes for the local loss of some plant species.

The UK population of the slender Scotch burnet moth *Zygaena loti* is confined to the

islands of Mull and Ulva, with the largest colonies occurring at Burg on the Ardmearach peninsula. Colonies of the moth are found on south and south-westerly facing short calcareous grassland. The slender Scotch burnet moth feature was found to be in favourable condition when monitored in 2004 and the larval food plant, common bird's-foot trefoil was confirmed within the short grassland. More recent site visits in 2009 also found healthy populations of the slender Scotch burnet moth.



Past and present management

The SSSI encompasses estates and land holdings within the Ardmearach peninsula.

Land owned by The National Trust for Scotland is primarily managed for its nature conservation and cultural value. The main sporting interests on the peninsula are undertaken by Ardmearach Estate, with deer stalking occurring outwith the lower inbye ground.

Grazing is an important factor in maintaining the various habitats across the site including the species-rich grasslands that are so important for the slender Scotch burnet moth. Domestic stock, red deer and feral goats graze within the site. However, owing to factors related to topography, scale and the open marches between neighbouring estates animals are able to forage throughout the site, with the result that some areas of land are preferentially grazed. Bracken can be locally dominant and is controlled at the Burg as part of a positive management regime for the slender Scotch burnet moth.

The National Trust for Scotland currently graze cattle in the summer and autumn, these cattle herding mainly in the area of Burg Farm. Cattle graze the grasslands on the lower slopes towards the coast. The upland areas are managed primarily as deer forest, with only limited agricultural grazing occurring on the eastern upland ground. Red deer numbers are estimated to be high over the peninsula. There is also a population of feral goats.

The grazing history of the site extends back many centuries. Burg was once a crofting township of perhaps ten families. Evidence of past cultivation is still apparent in the form of field systems and lazy beds at Burg. There are further dwellings and shielings on headlands at the Wilderness.

The bothy at Burg is used as holiday accommodation. Although remote the site is popular with visitors walking the coastal route and viewing the geological features. In recent years use of the track for mountain biking has increased.

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

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

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SACs and SPAs, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species, as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, in so far as such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of these Directives. The objectives below have been assessed against these requirements. All authorities proposing to carry out or permit to be carried out operations likely to have a significant effect on the European interests of this SSSI must assess those operations against the relevant Natura conservation objectives (which are listed on our website through the SiteLink facility).

1. To maintain the physical condition of the geological features.

Continue to monitor the geological features of interest as part of the site condition monitoring programme. Keep exposures clearly visible and where safe to do so loose blocks of rock should be left in situ. Historically, MacCulloch's Tree has been the subject of over-collecting by fossil collectors and curio hunters. Further collecting, unless it forms part of a multidisciplinary scientific research project, should not be permitted.

2. To maintain the condition and extent of the maritime cliff and calcareous grassland habitats.

Maintain stock at a level which creates a species rich turf. Grazing and trampling pressure should be maintained at levels which does not encourage the expansion of bracken.

Investigate opportunities to control/eradicate bracken from species rich grassland habitats.

3. To maintain the condition and extent of the montane and vascular plant assemblages.

A controlled reduction in deer numbers would favour the expansion of tall herbs and heath communities associated with the uplands and would reduce the negative effects of trampling by deer.

4. Maintain and enhance the population of slender Scotch burnet moth.

Maintain stock at a level which creates a short species rich turf. Grazing and trampling pressure should be maintained at levels which does not encourage the expansion of bracken.

Investigate opportunities to continue with the control/eradication of bracken from species rich grassland and the habitats of the slender Scotch burnet moth.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

None at present.

Date last reviewed: 31 March 2010