

Date Notified: 27/11/1986

File ref: SD 19/3

County: Cumbria **Site Name:** Stanley Ghyll

District: Copeland

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Local Planning Authority: Lake District Special Planning Board

National Grid Reference: SD 174998 **Area:** 8.20 (ha) 20.2 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 96, 89 **1:10,000:** SD 19 NE, NY 10 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1965 **Date of Last Revision:** 1975

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 **Date of Last Revision:** 1986

Other Information:

1. The site lies within the Lake District National Park.
2. This SSSI was previously known as Dalegarth Force.
3. Milkingstead Wood, formerly part of this site is now scheduled separately.
4. This remaining part of the site has been further modified by partial deletion and minor extension.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Stanley Ghyll is a deep stream-gorge cut into the Eskdale Granite on the southern valley slopes of the River Esk. The gorge carries the Birker Beck northwards, via a series of waterfalls, to meet the River Esk by the village of Beckfoot, 9 km up river from its estuary at Ravenglass. The tributary of the Esk has been left 'hanging' above the main valley floor as a result of glacial action. The lower reaches of the stream lie some 90 metres below the start of the waterfalls. The site includes the deeply incised Stanley Ghyll and flanking woodlands. This wooded ghyll is one of the finest waterfall ravines in the Lake District and the humid, sheltered conditions within protect a very rich assemblage of mosses, lichens, liverworts and ferns including notable rarities. The ghyll and adjacent woodlands form the most important site for these plants in southwest Lakeland.

The damp, shaded rock faces are often covered by locally extensive patches of Wilson's filmy fern *Hymenophyllum wilsonii* and a variety of moss species. These include the rarities *Isoetes holtii*, *Trichostomium tenuirostre*, *Hygrohypnum eugyrium*, and *Fissidens curnowii*. In the same habitat several rare liverworts are also present; *Jubula hutchsinae* in dripping crevices and *Lophocolea fragrans* in the spray zones of the waterfalls, two notable species in an association of unusual liverworts more typical of warmer, southern-oceanic conditions.

The same sheltered conditions have favoured the survival of a number of "old forest" lichens growing on the trunks of oak trees in the ghyll, e.g. *Thelotrema lepadinum*, *Menegazzia terebrata*, *Cetrelia cetrarioides*, *Mycoblastus sanguinarius*, *Parmelia laevigata* and *P. taylorensis*. These form a characteristic "upland, leached-bark" association of epiphytic

lichens. The site is also the only locality in northern England for *Menegazzia terebrata* and another *Parmelia* species, *P. arnoldii*.

The flanking woodlands on either side of the stream conform to a number of recognisable associations though these have been modified by past planting of ornamental species. Birch-sessile oak woods cover much of the higher ground with oak-hazel-ash woods within the ghyll. The lower reaches of the stream are dominated by oak-hazel stands. Plants of the woodland floor include some species more typical of southern woodlands, e.g. three-nerved sandwort, enchanter's nightshade and wood millet *Milium effusum*. Other species such as wood rush, oak fern *Gymocarpium dryopteris*, beech fern *Phegopteris connectilis* and lemon-scented fern *Oreopteris limbosperma* are more characteristic of north-western woodlands.