

Site notified to the Secretary of State on 14 October 1996

Citation Sheet

District: North Somerset

Site Name: Banwell Caves

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

Local Planning Authority: North Somerset Unitary Authority

National Grid Reference: ST 383588 Area: 1.7 (ha) 4.2 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet: 1:50,000: 182 1:10,000: ST 35 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1963 Date of Last Revision: 1974

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 Date of Last Revision: 1996

Further Information

This is a Geological Conservation Review site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Banwell Caves is located approximately 5 kilometres east of Weston Super Mare, at the western end of Banwell Hill. The site comprises two caves: 'Banwell Bone Cave' and 'Stalactite Caverns' within the grounds of a large house.

In these caves, barite deposits occur in greater abundance and variety than at any other location on the Mendip Hills. The deposits form encrustations and vein fillings in association with small amounts of galena, smithsonite, limonite and yellow ochre. Contacts with the limestone host rock and with cavity-fill sediments are also visible and the way in which the barite deposits guided cave development many million years after their formation.

The site also contains Banwell Bone Cave which is of particular importance both because of its uniquely rich Pleistocene bone assemblage (consisting of mainly bison and reindeer) and because the cave, which has a large hole in the roof, almost certainly acted as a pitfall trap. Extensive deposits containing Pleistocene bones remain *in situ* and further excavations will help refine the age and composition of the vertebrate fauna

Banwell Caves is of national importance for understanding mineralisation processes in the Mendip Hills and for its rich Pleistocene bone assemblage which has considerable potential for future research.

The caves are also used as a hibernation site (hibernacula) by greater horseshoe bats (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*). A rare and endangered species, the greater horseshoe bat is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and is listed in Annex II of the EC's Habitats Directive 1992.