

COUNTY: DEVON      SITE NAME: WISTMAN'S WOOD

DISTRICT: WEST DEVON

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

Local Planning Authority: DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL, Dartmoor National Park Authority

National Grid Reference: SX 613770      Area: 263.9 (ha.) 652.0 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 191      1:10,000: SX 67 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1964      Date of Last Revision: 1976

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The site is described in 'A Nature Conservation Review', 1977, Cambridge University Press. It lies within both the Dartmoor National Park and the Devon Structure Plan's Dartmoor Nature Conservation Zone. Part of the site is managed by agreement between the Duchy of Cornwall and the Nature Conservancy Council as a Forest Nature Reserve. It includes a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The site has been extended. The revised boundary incorporates the Wistman's Wood FNR and the former Wistman's New Intake SSSI.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Wistman's Wood is a rare relict example of the ancient high-level woodlands of Dartmoor. It is situated on the lower west-facing slopes of the West Dart Valley at an altitude of 380--435 metres and is an outstanding example of native upland oak woodland developed on soils derived from the hard rocks of western Britain. The site contains extensive areas of clitter (granite blocks) and in addition to the woodland it includes acid grassland, heath and mire communities characteristic of upland Dartmoor.

The wood is dominated by Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* and the trees have a gnarled and twisted growth-form, many with their lower branches resting on the clitter which forms the woodland floor. Rowan *Sobus aucuparia*, Holly *Ilex aquifolium* and Eared Willow *Salix aurita* also occur. The ground flora is characterised by areas of Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, Creeping Soft Grass *Holcus mollis*, Great Woodrush *Luzula sylvatica* and Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. The fern flora within the wood is diverse; the Filmy Ferns *Hymenophyllum tunbrigense*, and *H. wilsonii* occurring here. The epiphytic flora is luxuriant, and lichens are well represented, including the rare *Alectoria smithii*. Of the numerous species of bryophyte with a western distribution, *Antitricha curtispindula* is of particular note. Bryophyte mats also occur amongst the clitter.

The remainder of the site and surrounding valley slopes comprise characteristic unimproved acidic grassland incorporating areas of dry heather *Calluna vulgaris* and

Bilberry. There are also areas of Western Gorse *Ulex gallii* and acidic marshy grassland characterised by Purple Moor Grass *Molinia caerulea*.

Of additional interest are several wet flushes giving rise to mire communities dominated by Soft Rush *Juncus effusus* and with Bog Mosses *Sphagnum* spp., Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, Round-leaved Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* and Marsh St John's Wort *Hypericum elodes*.

With the exception of a small fenced area of the wood the whole valley is open to grazing by sheep, cattle and ponies. The turbulent West Dart River courses southwards through the site and there is a representative breeding bird population, including Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*, Whinchat *S. rubetra* and Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*.