

**County:** Cumbria

**Site Name:** Blea Water

**District:** Eden

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Eden District Council

**National Grid Reference:** NY 446107      **Area:** 102.0 (ha) 251.0 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 90      **1:10,000:** NY 41 SE, SW

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

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1984      **Date of Last Revision:** 1984

**Other Information:**

1. The site is listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review', edited by D. A. Ratcliffe, and published in 1977 by Cambridge University Press.
2. The site lies within the Lake District National Park.
3. The site is adjacent to Martindale Forest SSSI.
4. The boundary of the site has been modified by partial extension and deletion at this revision.

**Reasons for Notification:**

Blea Water is one of the best examples of a Lake District corrie lake. It lies at the head of Mardale, 20 km south-south-west of Penrith. As well as the lake, at an altitude of 490 m O.D., the site also includes the entire lake catchment of some 90 hectares and consisting of the steep back and side walls of the corrie, up to the summit of High Street at 828 m O.D. The steep walls of the corrie support a diverse montane flora in addition to being of interest as a fine example of a glacial landform.

Blea Water itself is remarkable in being exceptionally deep for its area of 17 hectares, reaching a maximum depth of 68 m. The water is oligotrophic (nutrient-poor), although small outcrops of base-rich rock in the otherwise acid Borrowdale Volcanics on which the lake and its catchment lie, prevent it from being exceptionally so. In character Blea Water is intermediate between the arctic-alpine lakes of the Cairngorms and lower altitude, richer, corrie lakes such as Llyn Idwal in Snowdonia. The shoreline, composed largely of boulders and stones, shelves steeply to a sandy bottom with rocks. Because of the nutrient poor conditions the lake is almost devoid of any flora or fauna. However, a narrow band of intermediate water-starwort *Callitriche hamulata* is present and shoreweed *Littorella uniflora* and the stonewort *Nitella flexilis* also occur. Little is known about the fauna except that it is extremely sparse and includes species characteristic of very pure water, for example the cladoceran *Holopedium gibberum*. Blea Water is used as a header reservoir for Haweswater and a small dam has been constructed at the outflow. This has modified the lake to a certain extent although it still remains in a relatively natural state and there is no problem with drawdown.

On moderately steep slopes around the lake are areas of acid grassland dominated by mat-grass *Nardus stricta* and sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, with bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* on steeper slopes. Above this are precipitous crags on which a number of less common plant species occur including three-flowered rush *Juncus triglumis*, grass-of-Parnassus *Parnassia palustris*,

alpine saw-wort *Saussurea alpina*, purple saxifrage *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, alpine meadow-rue *Thalictrum alpinum* and globeflower *Trollius europaeus*. Lichens are also moderately important with over seventy species recorded from these crags. The summit areas are peaty with mat-grass, sheep's fescue and heath rush *Juncus squarrosus* as dominants.