

File ref: NY 11/8

County: Cumbria **Site Name:** **Pillar and Ennerdale Fells**

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: NY 135123 **Area:** (ha) (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 89 **1:10,000:** NY 01 SE, NE,
NY 11 NW, SW, SE

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1991 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

1. This is a new site.
2. This site lies within the Lake District National Park.
3. Side Wood, formerly part of the adjacent Ennerdale SSSI, is now included within this site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Ennerdale lies on the western edge of the Lake District National Park. Situated on the north facing slopes of the valley this site overlies Borrowdale Volcanics with granite at the western edge. The site is important in exhibiting one of the best known examples of altitudinal succession in England. From native upland birch-oak woodland at 120 m on the shores of Ennerdale the vegetation changes through sub-montane heaths and grasslands to montane heaths along the summit ridge at an altitude of 890 m. The range of heathland types found on Ennerdale Fell are some of the most important in West Cumbria as are the herb-rich upland ledge communities associated with the crags of Pillar. Additional interest is provided by the native broad-leaved woodland of Side Wood and the upland breeding bird community.

The slopes above Side Wood and east to these below Steeple are gentle and the vegetation has developed largely on shallow acid peats. As a result extensive areas of heathland occur broken only by small areas of acid grassland. At lower altitudes the heathland is dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris* with lesser amounts of bell heather *Erica cinerea* and bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, whilst grassland species include sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, mat-grass *Nardus stricta*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, and heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*. Above The Side where grazing pressures are light and burning rarely carried out, a number of rare oceanic bryophytes have been recorded

within this heathland including; *Anastrepta orcadensis*, *Herbertus aduncus*, *Bazzania tricrenata*, *Lepidozia pearsonii* and *Ptilidium ciliare*.

With an increase in altitude the species composition of the heathland becomes montane in character and alters to one dominated by bilberry and grasses. Species associated with this heathland type include bilberry, cowberry *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*, crowberry *Empetrum nigrum*, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, and viviparous fescue *Festuca vivipara*.

Along the summit ridge where soils are thin and rocky a mosaic of bilberry heaths and moss-dominated heaths occur, whilst in hollows where late snow beds lie patches of mat-grass dominate. The most-dominated heaths occur on the summits of Pillar and Little Scoat Fell and typically comprise woolly hair moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum* with stiff sedge *Carex bigelowii*, and viviparous fescue. Several rare species found include willow *Salix herbacea*, and two lichens *Cetraria islandica*, and *Cladonia arbuscula*.

To the east of the gentle slopes of Ennerdale Fell lie the steep and rugged crags of Pillar which as a result of weathering of the Borrowdale Volcanics give rise to more base rich soils and therefore support a different range of species. Below the crags are lines of loose scree with parsley fern *Cryptogramma crista* and lemon-scented fern *Oreopteris limbosperma*. Between the screes the ground is covered with bilberry dominated heath, with lesser amounts of wavy hair-grass, heath bedstraw and a range of mosses. In addition there is an uncommon calcareous grassland type, of restricted distribution in Cumbria, dominated by alpine lady's-mantle *Alchemilla alpina* which forms a short sward with common bent, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, and wild thyme *Thymus praecox* spp. *arcticum*.

The crags themselves are made up of large blocks of Borrowdale Volcanics which have weathered to create a complex of steep faces, ledges, and gullies. Where thin base-rich soils have accumulated on ledges, away from grazing sheep, a lush herb-rich sward has become established. Typically species present include great woodrush *Luzula sylvatica*, water avens *Geum rivale*, roseroot *Sedum rosea*, smooth lady's mantle *Alchemilla glabra*, golden-rod *Solidago virgaurea*, and hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*. Less common species associated with this ledge vegetation include alpine saw-wort *Saussurea alpina*, mountain sorrel *Oxyria digyna*, stone bramble *Rubus saxatilis*, alpine meadow-rue *Thalictrum alpinum*, and the nationally rare shrubby cinquefoil *Potentilla fruticosa* at one of only 3 Cumbrian localities. On the steepest slopes, and over small rock outcrops which continually run with water, narrow lines of yellow saxifrage *Saxifraga aizoides*, with mossy and starry saxifrages *S. hypnoides* and *S. stellaris* are conspicuous.

On the fellside immediately above the lake lies Side Wood, one of the best examples of an upland birch *Betula pubescens* – sessile oak *Quercus petraea* woodland in West Cumbria. Under a canopy of luxuriant ground carpet of bryophytes has developed with large hummocks of *Polytricum strictum* and bog-mosses *Sphagnum palustre*, *S. capillifolium* and *S. quinquefarium* with the liverwort *Mylia taylorii*.

The lichen communities of Side Wood are of regional importance, with the rare *Ochrolechia inversa* occurring abundantly on birch.

As a result of the range of habitats found within the Pillar and Ennerdale Fells SSSI, the site supports one of the best upland breeding bird assemblages in West Cumbria. Breeding species include buzzard, peregrine, merlin, raven, red grouse, wheatear, whinchat and ring-ouzel.