

COUNTY: HEREFORD & WORCESTER, GWENT, POWYS

SITE NAME: BLACK  
MOUNTAINS

DISTRICT: SOUTH HEREFORDSHIRE, MONMOUTH, BRECKNOCK

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

Local Planning Authority: HEREFORD & WORCESTER COUNTY COUNCIL, South Herefordshire District Council  
GWENT COUNTY COUNCIL, Monmouth District Council  
POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

Total Area:	7,927 (ha.) 19,588 (ac.)
Area in Hereford & Worcester:	1,183 (ha.) 2,923 (ac.)
Area in Gwent:	1,393 (ha.) 3,442 (ac.)
Area in Powys:	5,351 (ha.) 13,223 (ac.)

National Grid Reference: SO 245300

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 161	1:10,000: SO 12 NE, SE, SO 13 SE, SO 22 NE, NW, SE, SW, SO 23 NE, NW, SE, SW, SO 32 NW, SW
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Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954	Date of Last Revision: 1978
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Site extended: 1969, 1972 and 1975

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

The Welsh portion of the site lies within the Brecon Beacons National Park. Parts of the site are registered as common land.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

An extensive area of upland moorland and associated habitats lying on rocks off the Old Red Sandstone series and rising to over 610 metres (2,000 feet). As such it represents the most south-easterly area of upland habitat in southern Britain and in this context is of particular importance for nature conservation.

The moorland itself contains a mosaic of characteristic upland heath communities dominated by dwarf-shrubs, principally heather *Calluna vulgaris* and bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* but with frequent occurrence of cowberry *V. vitis-idaea* and crowberry *Empetrum nigrum*. In the wetter parts purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, hare's-tail cotton-grass *Eriophorum vaginatum* and cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* become more abundant. On the lower slopes the moorland gives way to drier unimproved acidic grassland, which in places is colonised by large areas of bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*.

In a number of places wet calcareous flushes occur along spring lines. These have characteristic plants such as butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris* and a number of lime-loving mosses. Calcareous cliffs and rock outcrops also occur in various parts of the site, and these again provide a suitable habitat for a number of distinctive and locally rare species such as mossy saxifrage *Saxifraga hypnoides* and brittle bladder-fern *Cystopteris fragilis*. Of particular interest in the Welsh portion of the site are the cliffs of Tarren yr Esgob, which support the whitebeam *Sorbus porrigentiformis* and other uncommon plants such as wood crane's-bill *Geranium sylvaticum* and limestone fern *Gymnocarpium robertianum*. In places open mixed scrub ascends to 610 metres -- about the highest it is recorded in Wales.

The head of the Olchon valley, in the South Herefordshire part, embraces an area of unimproved permanent pasture and haymeadow whose juxtaposition with the high moorland contributes greatly to the overall value of the site to nature conservation. These meadows contain uncommon plants such as globe-flower *Trollius europaeus* and meadow saffron *Colchicum autumnale*.

The animal life of the site is also of great interest, particularly its birds. Characteristic upland species such as raven *Corvus corax*, peregrine falcon *Falco peregrinus*, merlin *F. columbarius* and red grouse *Lagopus lagopus* are present near the southerly limits of their range in Britain, whilst the unimproved pastures and scattered scrub communities of the Upper Olchon Valley provide some of the best habitat for species such as redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* and grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* in this part of the country.