

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 31 JANUARY 1990

COUNTY: PEAK DISTRICT, DERBYSHIRE &  
CHESHIRE

SITE NAME: GOYT VALLEY

DISTRICT: HIGH PEAK, MACCLESFIELD

SITE REF: 15 WKN

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

Local Planning Authority: PEAK PARK JOINT PLANNING BOARD, Derbyshire County Council, High Peak Borough Council, Macclesfield District Council

National Grid Reference: SK 010720

Area: 1324.8 (ha.) 3273.6 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 118, 119

1:10,000: SJ 97 SE, NE, SK 07 SW, NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1951

Date of Last Revision: 1972

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1990

Date of last Revision: –

Other Information:

Site boundary alteration (extension & reduction).

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The Peak District Moorlands overlie the Millstone Grits and Coal Measures of the Carboniferous Period. The main moorland area is north of the central limestone dome of the White Peak with narrower bands on the east and west sides. The moors and cloughs of the Goyt Valley form the western sector of the Peak District Moorlands and are contiguous with the Axe Edge Moors at the northern end of the Leek Moors SSSI. The site has a varied and scenically dramatic landform resulting from the folding and faulting of the gritstone and shale and subsequent dissection by watercourses. The level plateaux have extensive blanket bogs. Wet to dry heather moorland and acidic grassland with associated flushes and mires occur on steep to gently sloping ground.

The Goyt Valley is an extensive tract of semi-natural upland and upland fringe vegetation typical of the Southern Pennines. In conjunction with the Leek Moors, the Goyt Valley supports a nationally important upland breeding bird population.

There are important geological exposures along the banks of the River Goyt.

Biology

Unenclosed grazed acidic grassland, dwarf shrub heath and blanket mires are the major habitat types within the site. Heather *Calluna vulgaris* is the dominant plant of the better drained and less rugged moors. On poorly drained soils or steeper terrain the heathland is more botanically diverse with grasses, sedges and a wider variety of ericaceous shrubs such as bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, crowberry *Empetrum nigrum*, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* and cowberry *V. vitis-idaea*. Acid grasslands and grass heath mosaics are found on the open hills. On freely draining soils fescues *Festuca* spp., bents *Agrostis* spp. and wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* predominate. Mat-grass *Nardus stricta* is often abundant where soils retain moisture, and purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* or rushes *Juncus* spp. are generally dominant in the most ill-drained situations.

Part of the plateau, around Shining Tor to the south and to Pym Chair in the north, is covered by blanket mire dominated by hare's-tail cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum* with bilberry, crowberry and a small amount of bog moss *Sphagnum*

spp. This community, derived from blanket mire by a combination of sustained heavy grazing, burning and atmospheric pollution, is now the prevailing blanket bog vegetation of the Southern Pennines. The rest of this area exhibits a transition from blanket mire to wet moorland where the vegetation is dominated by heather and hare's-tail cottongrass. This plant community is typical of northern British uplands and is seen here at the southern extreme of its English distribution. Associated higher plants here include deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum*, common cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, heath rush *Juncus squarrosus*, purple moor-grass and several dwarf shrubs. The local dominance of crowberry is a feature characteristic of the Southern Pennines. These habitats are of particular importance for several uncommon breeding birds including significant numbers of golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*.

Various other vegetation types occur which contribute to the mosaic of semi-natural upland vegetation. Seasonally or permanently high water tables give rise to rank swards of rushes and coarse grasses, providing food and cover for birds such as curlew *Numenius arquata*, lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* and snipe *Gallinago gallinago*. Drier acidic grasslands have a naturally species-poor flora typically including tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*.

Significant areas of flush and soligenous mire are dominated by rushes and sedges such as glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* and green-ribbed sedge *C. binervis*. As is now the case throughout the Southern Pennines, there are only limited areas over which bog mosses are dominant. These contain a great diversity of plants such as marsh arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris* and marsh cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*. Wet habitats of this nature are also important for invertebrates.

Goyt's Clough retains remnants of semi-natural oak *Quercus* spp. woodland, with birch *Betula* spp. and occasional rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and alder *Alnus glutinosa*. Such woodlands are remnants of a formerly commoner woodland type and are of particular importance for their invertebrates, birds and lichens.

In conjunction with the Leek Moors, the Goyt Valley is of great importance for its community of upland breeding birds. Several species, such as merlin *Falco columbarius* and golden plover, require large areas with little disturbance and are vulnerable to both changes in land use and increased human activity. There are also good populations of twite *Carduelis flavirostris*, ring ouzel *Turdus torquatus*, red grouse *Lagopus lagopus* and occasional dunlin *Calidris alpina*. Lapwing, curlew and snipe are common on the hilly, rushy pastures with dipper *Cinclus cinclus* and common sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* breeding along the banks of the River Goyt.

### Geology

The exposures here show a section from the top of the Woodhead Hill Rock (locally known as the Cat and Fiddle Grit) to above the Honley Marine Band (lower Westphalian A of the Carboniferous Period). They contain a variety of marine and non-marine fossil bearing beds, and include an assemblage of the non-marine bivalve *Carbonicola* cf. *bipennis*, not normally found in sequences of this age. In the Pennines coalfields it is the thickest and best exposure of these strata which are of importance since they represent the base of the economically important coal bearing rocks of this area. It is thus a site of considerable scientific importance.