

COUNTY: GLOUCESTERSHIRE SITE NAME: BIGSWEIR WOODS

DISTRICT: FOREST OF DEAN

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

Local Planning Authority: GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Forest of Dean District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 546060 Area: 48.16 (ha.) 119 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 162 1:10,000: SO 50 NE and SO 50 NW

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

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

Other Information:

New site. Within the We Valley AONB. Part owned by the Woodland Trust. Part (Quarry Wood) managed as a nature reserve by the Gloucestershire Trust for Nature Conservation.

Reasons for Notification:

The woodlands of the lower Wye Valley form one of the most important areas of woodland conservation in Britain, comparable with the Caledonian pinewoods, the oceanic oakwoods of Western Britain, the New Forest and the mixed coppices of East Anglia. Semi-natural woodland is abundant and virtually continuous along the gorge. The woods are a mixture of many types, some of which are very localised, eg the lime-sessile oak stands on limestone, beech stands on both acid and alkaline soils in which lime *Tilia* spp., elm *Ulmus* spp., oak *Quercus* spp. and other species share dominance. Most woods are a rich mixture of stand types which are believed to be similar in composition to the original natural woods of the valley. Many rare and local species are present, including some of the rarest native tree species, eg large-leaved lime *Tilia platyphyllos*, whitebeams *Sorbus* spp. and trees close to the edge of their European range eg hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* and beech *Fagus sylvatica*. Furthermore these woods sit in a matrix of unimproved grassland and other semi-natural habitats which together with the woods, make the Wye Valley one of the most diverse, rich and attractive areas in southern Britain.

Bigsweir Woods overlie the Devonian Old Red Sandstone and quartz conglomerate which gives rise to fairly acid soils. A range of acid woodland types is represented with the canopy largely dominated by sessile oak *Quercus petraea* with some beech *Fagus sylvatica*, small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* and birch *Betula* spp. particularly on the lower slopes. A coppiced understorey includes abundant hazel *Corylus avellana*, small-leaved lime and beech with occasional rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and holly *Ilex aquifolium*. The field layer is made up of associations of bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, male fern *Dryopteris filix-mas* and ivy *Hedera helix* with occasional bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scriptus*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense* and greater woodrush *Luzula sylvatica*. Local

plant species present at the site include Forester's woodrush *Luzula forsteri*, bitter vetch *Lathyrus montanus*, alder buckthorn *Frangula alnus* and wood fescue *Festuca altissima*. The site also has a good range of ferns including hard fern *Blechnum spicant* and lady fern *Athyrium filix-femina*.