County: North Yorkshire and Cumbria **Site Name: Whernside**

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

Local Planning Authority: Yorkshire Dales National Park, (Craven District Council and South Lakeland District Council)

National Grid Reference: SD 735802

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 98 **1:25,000:** SD 67, 77, 78, 87

Area: 2600.1 ha 6424.8 acres (Craven)
1239.3 ha 3062.3 acres (South Lakeland)
3839.4 ha 9487.1 acres (Total)

First Notified: 1958*, Extended: 1996*, 1969* **Date of Revision:** 1986

Description:
Whernside is of major significance both for its upland vegetation communities, and for its physiographic features, including limestone pavements and cave systems. While the site shows some similarity to Ingleborough, and supports important examples of blanker mire, dwarf shrub heath, sub-montane acid grassland, inland cliff and limestone pavement vegetation, it differs in consisting of a ridge rather than a plateau. Whernside also qualifies for notification on the grounds of its outstanding assemblage of plant species, some of the rare.

The site is particularly noted for some of the most extensive unbroken, horizontal limestone pavement in Britain (Scales Moor). Furthermore, the markedly stepped form of Twisleton Scars illustrates the varied resistance of individual limestone layers to glacial erosion. The Kingsdale caves are more completely mapped than any other cave system in Britain and include the most extensively flooded system known in Europe. Preliminary study and dating of the deposits in the high-level abandoned caves indicate an exceptional age for the cave-system and offer potential for further study.

The varied topography and geology support a range of equally varied plant communities. Above 1200 m blanket bog dominated by hare's-tail cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum* is widespread. The associates, heath rush *Juncus squarrosus*, heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and crowberry *Empetrum nigrum* become locally dominant. Other species include deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum*, stiff sedge *Carex bigelowii* and sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina* with a bog moss *Sphagnum* lawn in the wettest situations. Elsewhere on the high land mat-grass *Nardus stricta* replaces blanket bog.

The limestone cliffs along Twisleton Scars and the pavement on Scales Moor are of considerable botanical interest, containing several uncommon or rare species. Their rich flora includes baneberry *Actea spicata*, wall lettuce *Mycelis muralis*, spring sandwort *Minuartia verna*, lesser meadow-rue *Thalictrum minus*, angular Solomon's-seal *Polygonum odoratum*, and two species of lady's-mantles *Alchemilla glaucescens* and *A. minima*. Many fern species occur including green spleenwort *Asplenium viride*, brittle bladder-fern *Cystopteris fragilis*, hard shield-fern *Polystichum aculeatum* and most notably rigid buckler-fern *Dryopteris villarii* and limestone polypody *Gymnocarpium robertianum*.

By contrast, sandstone cliffs on the summit ridge support sea campion *Silene maritima* and parsley fern *Cryptogramma crispa*.

Other Information:

1. Although not described in "A Nature Conservation Review", D A Ratcliffe, Cambridge University Press, 1977, part of this site (Scales Moor) is now recognised as an extension to the internationally important Ingleborough site.
2. Parts of this site are listed within the Geological Conservation Review under the name "Scales Moor" and "Kingsdale".
3. During the 1986 revision, the boundary of this site has been amended to include land not previously notified* and to exclude land previously notified.
4. This site is adjacent to Thornton and Twisleton Glens SSSI and Ingleborough SSSI.

* Under Section 23 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949.