

**County:** Lancashire **Site Name:** Calf Hill and Cragg Woods

**District:** Lancaster

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Lancaster City Council

**National Grid Reference:** SD 543615 **Area:** 34.38 ha 84.95 ac

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1: 50 000: 97** **1: 25 000** SD 56 SW

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 14 April 2000

**Other Information:**

1. This is a new site
2. The site lies within the Forest of Bowland AONB

**Reasons for Notification:**

Calf Hill and Cragg Woods support one of the most extensive stands of upland oak-birch, *Quercus petraea*–*Betula pubescens*–*Oxalis acetosella* and *Quercus petraea*–*Betula pubescens*–*Dicranium majus* woodland in Lancashire. It also includes large stands of valley alder, *Alnus glutinosa*–*Fraxinus exelsior*–*Lysimachia nemoraosa* woodland with wet birch *Betula pubescens*–*Molina caerulea* woodland. All four woodland types are nationally scarce and are typical of upland areas with high rainfall on shallow mildly acid soils with spring lines in sheltered valley situations in the north west of England.

**Description**

Calf Hill and Cragg Woods lie at an altitude of 150m OD, approximately 7km east of Lancaster on the north-western side of the Bowland Fells. They occupy the north and south facing slopes of a steep sided valley above the River Conder, a tributary of the River Lune, which has cut into underlying rocks of the Millstone Grit Series. The north facing slopes of Cragg Wood consist of a complex mosaic of two acid oak-birch woodland types with a sparse understorey layer of occasional holly, hazel and rowan. Throughout grasses and mosses are frequent, including sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, wavy hair grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and the mosses *Plagiothecium undulatum* and *Polytrichum commune*. Herbs present include wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, with broad buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata*. In places the mosses *Rhytidiadelphus loreus*, *Dicranum majus* and *Sphagnum* spp are frequent with variable amounts of different grasses and bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, especially on the more sheltered east

facing slopes of Cragg Wood, above a small fellside stream, which supports a fine stand of upland acid oak-birch woodland with carpets of moss and bilberry. Here the mosses *Bazzania trilobata*, *Sphagnum capillifolium* and *Diplophyllum albicans* are also present. In contrast the south facing slopes of Calf Hill Wood support similar plant communities, but are open to grazing from adjacent hillside pastures. As a result this part of the woodland complex has an impoverished ground flora dominated mainly by *Polytrichum*, wood sorrel and grasses.

Alder woodland, with abundant willow and pockets of birch, lines the length of the River Conder on both sides of the woodland complex within the valley bottom. An understorey of hazel, and hawthorn is present over a ground flora which includes, tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, meadow sweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, marsh hawk's-beard *Crepis paludosa*, narrow buckler-fern *Dryopteris carthusiana* and lady-fern *Athyrium filix-femina*. In places creeping soft grass *Holcus mollis* dominates with wood sorrel, whilst carpets of moss including *Sphagnum erectum*, *S. palustre* and *S. fimbriatum* occur together with soft rush *Juncus effusus*, in flatter areas beneath birch beside the river, where skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata* is present and unusually clumps of branched bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*. Small flushes associated with spring lines above the alder woodland support abundant opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, remote sedge *Carex remota* and smooth stalked sedge *Carex laevigata*.

The south facing slopes of Calf Hill and Cragg Woods support oak-birch, with rowan dominated woodland with a ground flora consisting mainly of sweet vernal grass and common bent with abundant bluebell, heath bedstraw and broad buckler-fern, with frequent bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. Of particular note is the presence of climbing corydalis *Corydalis claviculata* which is locally abundant within Cragg Hill Wood. This species is scarce in Lancashire.