

COUNTY: AVON

SITE NAME: PURN HILL

DISTRICT: WOODSPRING

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

Local Planning Authority: AVON COUNTY COUNCIL, Woodspring District Council

National Grid Reference: ST 332573                      Area: 6.1 (ha.) 15.1 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 182                      1:10,000: ST 35 NW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1990                      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Purn Hill is of interest for its exceptionally diverse unimproved calcareous grassland flora which includes three nationally rare species.

The site is a small promontory of Carboniferous Limestone projecting southward from the main Mendip ridge. The soils belong to the Crwbin Series and are composed of shallow well drained loams. Small limestone exposures occur in the southern part of the site.

The richest grassland communities are situated on the thin and stony soils of the steeper west-facing flanks of the hill. They share affinities with both the Mendip grasslands of Crook Peak to the east and the more maritime floras of Brean Down and Uphill Cliff to the west. Over 200 species occur in the sward, including Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*. Dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*, Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria* and Dwarf Thistle *Cirsium acaule*.

The rare plants are mainly associated with the small exposures of Dolomitic limestone in the southern part of the site. Purn Hill is one of only five British sites for the nationally rare Honewort *Trinia glauca*, which is restricted to coastal limestones in Devon, Somerset and Avon. Another nationally rare species, White Rock Rose *Helianthemum apenninum* grows in close proximity to the Common Rock Rose *H. nummularium*. The rare sulphur-coloured hybrid between these two species *H. x sulphureum* has been regularly recorded at the site since its discovery in 1888. Forty species of grass occur at the site, including Somerset Hair-grass *Koeleria vallesiana* which in Britain is confined to the Somerset/Avon border.

The site also supports large stands of mixed scrub with Privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, Spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, Hawthorn *Crataegus*

*monogyna* and Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, and patches of Gorse *Ulex europaeus* on more leached soils. The scrub grades into immature secondary woodland dominated by Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*. Hazel *Corylus avellana*, Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and Field Maple *A. campestre*.

Areas of taller under-grazed limestone grassland occur on the site and are particularly favourable for invertebrates. Butterflies which have been reported include Small, Large and Grizzled Skippers *Thymelicus sylvestris*, *Ochlodes venata* and *Pyrgus malvae*, Grayling *Hipparchia Semele*, Brown Argus *Aricia agestis*, Chalkhill and Small Blues *Lysandra coridon* and *Cupido minimus*.