

Date Notified: 23 March 1988

File ref: NY 20/3

**County:** Cumbria

**Site Name:** Scafell Pikes

**District:** Copeland

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Lake District Special Planning Board

**National Grid Reference:** NY 215073      **Area:** 1,102.2 (ha) 2,723.5 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 89      **1:10,000:** NY 10 NE, NY 20 SW, NW, NY 21 SW

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1965      **Date of Last Revision:** 1975

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1988      **Date of Last Revision:** 1988

**Other Information:**

1. This site lies within the Lake District National Park.
2. This site was formerly known as Scafell.
3. The boundary has been modified by extensions and deletions at this revision.

**Description and Reasons for Notification:**

This site comprises the upland massif stretching from Seathwaite Fell at the head of Borrowdale south over Great End, Broad and III Crags, Scafell Pike and Scafell to Slight Side overlooking the valley of the River Esk. Scafell Pike at 977 m (3,206 ft) is the highest mountain in England and lies 22 km south-east of Whitehaven and 17 km south of Keswick, on rocks of the Borrowdale Volcanic Series which although predominantly igneous tuffs of intermediate basivity have bands of more acid rhyolite lava.

The main interest of the site are the summit boulder field with associated lichen heaths, and a series of gills which provide some of the best examples of their types in Cumbria. Additional interest is provided by two upland oligotrophic tarns on Great Slack, and crags on the faces below the summit ridge which support a range of ledge communities and arctic/alpine species. The site is also of entomological interest.

The summit plateau stretching from Great End to Scafell is covered with shattered rock debris and provides the highest example of a summit boulder field in England. The rocks are covered in lichens including *Rhizocarpon geographicum*, *Umbilicaria cylindrica*, *Sphaerophorus fragilis*, *Lecidea* spp., *Cladonia* spp., and *Stereocaulon* spp. The moss *Rhacomitrium lanuginosum* grows abundantly amongst the rocks with various higher plants including viviparous fescue *Festuca vivipara*, stiff sedge *Carex bigelowii*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, heath bedstraw, alpine lady's-mantle and the club mosses *Huperzia selago* and *Diphasiastrum alpinum*. Also associated with the summit plateau are several uncommon species which include, three-flowered rush *Juncus triglumis*, dwarf willow *Salix herbacea* and thrift *Armeria maritima*. In places amid the boulder fields where soils have accumulated broken patches of montane sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina* grassland occur whilst to the west of Scafell Pike is an

area of lichen heath with sheep's fescue, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and *Rhacomitrium lanuginosum*. This is of particular interest as it forms the largest example of this habitat in the Lake District where it is very rare and only found from two other localities: the summits of Skiddaw and Kirk Fell.

To the north of Scafell Pike are a series of species rich high altitude gills which lead down to Lingmell Beck, of which Piers Gill provides the "classic" example of this type in Cumbria. The gill supports a range of tall herb ledge communities with roseroot *Sedum rosea*, mountain sorrel *Oxyria digyna*, northern bedstraw, alpine lady's mantle, wild angelica and alpine meadow-rue. Also present are starry, purple and mossy saxifrages *Saxifraga stellaris*, *S. oppositifolia* and *S. hypnoides* and in places banks of mountain saxifrage *S. aizoides* grow in profusion. Other ledges are dominated by great wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica* and bilberry with a wide range of ferns including lemon-scented fern *Oreopteris limbosperma*, beech fern *Phegopteris connectilis*, oak fern *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*, scaly male-fern and broad buckler fern.

The species composition of the neighbouring gills of Skew and Greta is similar but in Skew Gill there is a greater abundance of purple saxifrage. In contrast, Ruddy Gill to the north-east of Great End has a more lowland character and as a result supports a different range of herbs and is more wooded. Species include devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, stone bramble *Rubus saxatilis*, marsh hawk's-beard *Crepis paludosa* and common valerian *Valeriana officinalis*.

Herb rich ledges also occur on several of the crags within the site and support a similarly diverse range of species to those associated with the gills. Cam Spout, Great End, Lingmell and Horn Crags are particularly rich and support roseroot, bladder campion *Silene maritima*, golden-rod *Solidago virgurea*, great woodrush and in places abundant heather *Calluna vulgaris*. In addition uncommon species such as dwarf juniper *Juniperus communis* spp. *nana*, alpine cinquefoil *Potentilla crantzii*, glaucous meadow-grass *Poa glauca*, alpine saw-wort *Saussurea alpina* and bearberry *Arctosaphylos uva-ursi* occur.

Below the summit plateau and crags the slopes are a mosaic of scree, grassland and bilberry heath. The grasslands are generally dominated by mat-grass *Nardus stricta* with sheep's fescue, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, heath bed-straw, and green-ribbed sedge *Carex binervis*. The scree slopes however, support few higher plants, but in places as on the south-west face of Scafell abundant *Rhacomitrium lanuginosum* with patches of grass heath are present.

Lying to the north of Great End are Sprinkling and Styhead Tarns, which are good examples of upland nutrient poor tarns. In both cases marginal aquatics include bulbous rush *Juncus bulbosus*, intermediate water-starwort *Callitriche hamulata*, quillwort *Isoetes lacustris*, shoreweed *Littorella uniflora* and floating bur-reed *Sparganium angustifolium*. Awlwort *Subularia aquatica* a locally rare species occurs in both tarns, but water lobellia *Lobellia dortmanna* is only found in Styhead Tarn.

Between the two tarns on Seathwaite Fell lies an extensive area of mat-grass with flushes and small pools. This area supports one of the largest known populations of the nationally scarce Mountain Ringlet *Erebia epiphron* in Cumbria, whilst the summit boulder field of Scafell is the only known English locality for the boreo-British ground beetle *Nebria nivalis*.

The site also supports breeding peregrine, raven, ring ouzel and wheatear.