

CITATION

**AFFRIC – CANNICH HILLS
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
HIGHLAND (Inverness, Skye and Lochalsh)**

Site code: 18

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NH 160300

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 25
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 430, 415, 414

AREA: 17,317.88 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Geological: Structural and metamorphic geology: Moine

Biological: Woodlands: Native pinewood

Biological: Upland habitats: Upland assemblage

DESCRIPTION

Affric - Cannich Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is a large upland site straddling the three glens of Affric, Cannich and Strathfarrar and located 35 kilometres west of Loch Ness. It has the highest hills north of the Great Glen and is notified for its geological interest, remnant ancient pinewoods and diversity of upland plant communities, reflecting both western and eastern climatic influences.

Within the well-exposed and stream-washed section of the Abhainn Gleann nam Fiadh, there is a most remarkable series of well-preserved sedimentary structures that date from the Neoproterozoic. The structures are preserved in psammites within the Cannich Psammite Formation of the Glenfinnan Group of the Moine Supergroup. The sedimentary structures consist of cross-bedding and slump structures typical of shallow-marine deposition, possibly tidally influenced. These sedimentary structures are amongst the finest developed in the Moine, and are essential to the elucidation of how the Cannich Psammite was formed, the stratigraphy of the Moine Supergroup and the geological structure of Northern Scotland.

There are two areas of native pinewood on the north shore of Loch Affric and south shore of Loch Mullardoch. These are remnants of the once more extensive ancient pinewood and form an important link between the larger pinewoods in Glen Affric and Glen Strathfarrar.

The upland habitat assemblage consists of an exceptional range of acidic to mildly base-rich high montane plant communities. This includes well-developed snowbed communities and the largest extent of species-poor *Carex bigelowii* – *Racomitrium lanuginosum* moss heath in Scotland. It also includes extensive areas of the species-rich moss campion, *Silene acaulis*, sub-community of moss heath. A wide range of prostrate *Calluna* heaths are

evident on exposed ridges and lower summits with fern beds on some of the scree slopes. Dry and wet heaths are extensive on the lower slopes with a lichen-rich northern form of the latter. Blanket bog is well represented including areas influenced by ground water as well as those at higher levels where heather is replaced by crowberry *Empetrum nigrum* and bog blaeberry *Vaccinium uliginosum*. Species-rich flushes, including spring-fed communities, are also evident. The site also contains small pockets of a montane willow community where woolly willow *Salix lanata* and whortle-leaved willow *S. myrsinites* are found amongst tall herb vegetation on cliff ledges.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1974

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 27 January 1984 with a boundary amendment

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 23 March 2011

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected from 17,073.2 ha

Affric - Cannich Hills SSSI is part of Strathglass Complex Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated for the European habitats and species listed below:

Habitats: Acidic scree
 Alpine and subalpine heaths
 Blanket bog
 Bog woodland
 Caledonian forest
 Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels
 Dry heaths
 Montane acid grasslands
 Mountain willow scrub
 Plants in crevices on acid rocks
 Plants in crevices on base-rich rocks
 Tall herb communities
 Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath

Species: Otter *Lutra lutra*

Part of Affric - Cannich SSSI is part of Glen Affric to Strathconon Special Protection Area (SPA) designated for the bird listed below:

Birds: Golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, *breeding*.

Part of Affric - Cannich SSSI is part of West Inverness-shire Lochs SSSI and SPA which are both designated for the birds listed below:

Black-throated diver (*Gavia arctica*), *breeding*
Common scoter (*Melanitta nigra*), *breeding*