

**CYNGOR CEFN GWLAD CYMRU
COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES**

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

POWYS

GWERNAFFEL DINGLE

Date of Notification: 1989

National Grid Reference: SO 274708

O.S. Maps: 1: 50,000 Sheet number: 137
1: 25,000 Sheet number: SO 27

Site Area: 15.2 ha

Description:

The site is one of the largest of Radnor's ancient mixed broadleaved woodlands. It provides excellent examples of four distinctive nationally recognised woodland types, which together comprise a woodland whose species composition is intermediate in character between the sessile oakwoods of upland western Radnor and the base-rich dingle woodlands of southern Radnor. Locally uncommon plant species are present. The woodlands are situated in a generally steep-sided dingle developed in Silurian Shales, with a variety of aspects. The southern tributary stream passes through a small gorge approximately 5 metres deep. Much of the woodland is fenced out from stock, but the northern part of the dingle is subject to some grazing.

The woodland structure is varied, with the areas of ash *Fraxinus excelsior* wood frequently having a well developed shrub layer of hazel *Corylus avellana*, and often field maple *Acer campestre*. An area of relatively young ash is of plantation origin, but elsewhere trees are of uneven age and include some large, mature specimens. The shrub layer is also well developed in the southern oakwood, but is sparse or absent under a type of sessile oak high forest in the west-facing northern part of the site. Locally, there is dead standing wych elm *Ulmus glabra*, with young suckers. Alder *Alnus glutinosa* is a frequent component of areas of impeded drainage, and downy birch *Betula pubescens* is also well represented through the site. Other trees and shrubs present include rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, cherry – particularly *Prunus padus*, guelder-rose *Viburnum opulus*, red currant *Ribes rubrum* and crab apple *Malus sylvestris*.

When not dominated by alder, much of the dingle streamside and lower slopes support the ash/field maple vegetation type, with abundant tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and a species-rich herb layer which includes dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, enchanter's-nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, yellow archangel *Lamium galeobdolon*, herb-Paris *Paris quadrifolia* and early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula*. In the southern arm, the gorge contributes additional species diversity with a range of

mosses and ferns, including the locally uncommon oak fern *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*. Opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* is locally abundant and wood melick *Melica uniflora* also occurs.

On the steeper slopes of the southern half of the site the vegetation is a herb-rich example of the oak/bracken/bramble *Quercus robur*/*Pteridium aquilinum*/*Rubus fruticosus* vegetation type. As noted above the shrub layer is well developed, and locally abundant bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* and variable quantities of creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis* and meadow-grasses *Poa spp.* are characteristic of the field layer.

By contrast the west-facing northern part of the site is a high forest of standard oaks, with very few shrubs, and a ground layer either grass-dominated, with abundant sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, or moss-dominated, with abundant *Dicranum scoparium*. The former vegetation type relates to a type of oak/birch/common sorrel (*Quercus/Betula pubescens/Rumex acetosa*) woodland, and the latter to a type of oak/birch/wavy hair-grass (*Quercus/Betula pubescens/Deschampsia flexuosa*) woodland in which bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and broad buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata* are represented. There are affinities to the western sessile oakwoods, but typical western oceanic bryophyte species are not well represented.

A number of non-native species have been planted within the site, as evidenced by small areas of larch, spruce, Douglas fir, beech and southern beech.

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