

COUNTY: SOMERSET      SITE NAME: BREAN DOWN

DISTRICT: SEDGEMOOR

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

Local Planning Authority: SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL, Sedgemoor District Council

National Grid Reference: ST 290590      Area: 65.1 (ha.) 169.7 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 182      1:10,000: ST 25 NE, ST 35 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1952      Date of Last Revision: 1971

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Formerly scheduled with Uphill Cliff (now in Avon).

Statement of Interest

a. Biological

Brean Down is a peninsula of Carboniferous Limestone projecting westwards into the Bristol Channel and has a vegetation strongly influenced by oceanic conditions. It has outstanding examples of calcareous grassland, supports plant communities which are very local in Britain and is a locality for several rare plants and insects. The site is suitable for the study of a wide range of ecological factors and exhibits variations in aspect, slope, grazing pressure, recreational activity, maritime influence, soil depth and composition.

Limestone grassland occurs along the top of the Down and on the steeper southern slopes where it is particularly species-rich. The short sward is dominated by Fescue Grasses *Festuca spp.* and includes calcium-loving plants such as Salad Burnet *Poterium sanguisorba*, Yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*, and Wild Carrot *Daucus carota*. The maritime element is represented by Sea Pink *Armeria maritima*, Sea Campion *Silene vulgaris spp. maritima*, Stagshorn Plantain *Plantago coronopus*, Scurvy Grass *Cochlearia danica* and the Brome *Bromus ferronii*. Areas of invasive scrub include abundant Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Wild Privet *Ligustrum vulgare*.

The steep, craggy south-facing slopes support a unique community dominated by three nationally rare species of plant, two of which are listed in the British Red Data Book. Somerset Grass *Koeleria vallesiana*, a species which in Britain is confined to the Somerset/Avon borders, and White Rock-Rose *Helianthemum apenninum*, which is found only on coastal limestone in Devon and Somerset, occur in great abundance together with the very local Dwarf Sedge, *Carex humilis*. The sole British representative of a sub-family of Groundbug (Lygaeidae) is associated with the White

Rock-Rose. Several Weevils (Curculionoidea) of local distribution have also been recorded.

Communities on wind-blown sand deposits contrast with those on the limestone, and support a mosaic of scrub, bracken and tall herb habitats.

b. Geological

Beds of Devensian age contain abundant remains of horse, reindeer, lemmings and other mammals in an excellent state of preservation. An outstanding feature of the site is that the fossiliferous deposits very probably extend for a considerable distance inland along the Sand Cliff and there is great potential for excavation. The discovery of bone containing collagen sufficient for radiocarbon dating would considerably enhance the value of this site. Reindeer Rift in addition provides fissure deposits with a 'cold' fauna, including reindeer of probable Devensian age.