

COUNTY: Isles of Scilly

SITE NAME: CASTLE DOWN (TRESKO)

DISTRICT:

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

Local Planning Authority: Council of the Isles of Scilly

National Grid Reference: SV 885160

Area: 58.1 (ha) 143.6 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 203

1:10,000: SV 81 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1971

Date of Last Revision: 1976

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The site lies within the Isles of Scilly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Heritage Coast. Renotification covers land above Mean High Water Mark.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Castle Down is an exposed headland on the north side of the island of Tresco on the northern margins of the Isles of Scilly archipelago. Hercynian granite underlies the site forming a low windswept plateau only 35 metres above sea level. This extreme maritime exposure and the thin podzolic soils have resulted in the development of an extensive area of 'waved' maritime heathland with a particularly important lichen flora.

Glacial outwash gravels with abundant erratic pebbles outcrop over much of the northern part of the plateau and are particularly well exposed along the western shore between Cromwell's Castle and Gimble Point. Of additional interest is Piper's Hole, a small cave in raised-beach deposits in the cliffs on the north-east coast of the island.

'Waved' maritime heathland covers much of the central part of the site. Here the vegetation is dominated by distinctive low, prostrate ridges of Heather *Calluna vulgaris* together with some Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* and Western Gorse *Ulex gallii*. There are few other plant species within this wind pruned habitat but Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and English Stonecrop *Sedum anglicum* also occur. Thrift *Armeria maritima* and Buck's horn Plantain *Plantago coronopus* are more common along the coastal edge. The more sheltered depressions with deeper soils on the margins of the plateau have Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and Honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* merging into the heathland.

Castle Down is also of particular importance for its lichen flora, exhibiting a range of rare oceanic heathland species including the only known European record of *Heterodermia propagulifera* together with *H. leucomelos* and *H. obscurata*. These *Heterodermia* communities are now very rare and comparable sites, outside Scilly, only occur in Brittany and Channel Islands. The 45 species of lichen recorded also include *Lobaria pulmonaria* growing on *Calluna vulgaris* and a number of *Cladonia* species dominating the shallow soils and open pans on the central heathland.

In addition the short lichen rich heathland on the Downs supports an important breeding colony of Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*.

Site Notified to the Secretary of State on 10 December 1986.