

County: North Yorkshire **Site Name:** Conistone Old Pasture

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

Local Planning Authority: Yorkshire Dales National Park, (Craven District Council)

National Grid Reference: SD 990670

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 98 **1:10,000:** SD 96 NE

Area: 297.2 (ha) 734.4 (ac)

First Notified: 1955*

Date of Revision: 1986 (February)

Description:

Conistone Old Pasture is of importance not only for its limestone grassland communities and the flora of its limestone pavements, but also for a range of impressive physiographic features.

The site occupies a bench of Carboniferous Limestone on the eastern flank of Wharfedale, and includes the scars on the scarp-slope of the valley-side. Over much of the area the limestone soils are thin, and calcareous grassland is extensive. The sward is characterised by blue moor-grass *Sesleria albicans* and sheep's fescue *Festuca rubra* and is rich in herb species including rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium*, dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris* and limestone bedstraw *Galium sternerii*. In flushed areas grass-of-Parnassus *Parnassia palustris* and bird's-eye primrose *Primula farinosa* occur.

Patches of deeper soils support an acidic grassland characterised by mat-grass *Nardus stricta* and tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* with heath bedstraw *G. saxatile*.

The site contains five nationally important limestone pavements (Ward & Evans, 1976). The pavement flora is here mainly confined to the grikes by sheep grazing, and is very rich in species including alpine cinquefoil *Potentilla crantzii*, lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*, mountain melick *Melica nutans* and herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia*.

While the majority of the site is pasture land, a small meadow at Little Lathe has been separately identified as of significance for grassland typical of agriculturally unimproved northern hay meadows. The sward contains a mixture of grasses including crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and smooth meadow-grass *Poa pratensis* together with herb species such as great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis* and pignut *Conopodium majus*.

It is the Karst features of the Carboniferous Limestone which make the site of national physiographic importance. The pavements and scars are very well developed with large, little-fractured, inclined slabs dominating the south end of the site, and more fractured horizontal pavements at the northern end. Conistone Dib, along the northern edge of the site is a fine, dry meltwater channel with the narrow, deeply incised, potholed gorge of Gurling Trough at its lower end. Dib Scar is a dry waterfall in an adjacent channel at the southern end of the site.

Reference:

Ward, S.D. & Evans, D. F. (1976) Conservation Assessment of British Limestone Pavements based on Floristic Criteria. *Biol. Conserv.* 9, 217-233.

Other Information:

1. The site forms part of 'Conistone Old Pasture and Bastow Wood', listed in "A Nature Conservation Review", edited by D A Ratcliffe, (1977). Cambridge University Press. It was formerly included in the SSSI of that name, but during the 1985 revision it is extended and notified separately.
2. The site is identified as of national importance in the Geological Conservation Review.
3. Adjacent to Grass Wood SSSI and Bastow Wood SSSI which are now notified separately.

*Under Section 23 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949.