

COUNTY: SHROPSHIRE SITE NAME: WENLOCK EDGE

DISTRICT: BRIDGNORTH/SHREWSBURY & ATCHAM SITE REF: 15WJJ

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

Local Planning Authority: SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, BridgNorth District Council/Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SJ 610003–SJ 620013 Area: 136.8 (ha.) 338.0 (ac.)
SO 611999–SO 579974
SO 606995–SO 584976
SO 574968

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 127, 137, 138 1:10,000: SJ 60 SW, SO 69 NW,
SO 59 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954 Date of Last Revision: 1963

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Site boundary alteration (extension & reduction). Part of the site is owned by the National Trust. Site includes the previously notified site, Edge Wood.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Wenlock Edge is a scarp of Silurian limestone which runs for over thirty kilometres (18.6 miles) from Craven Arms to Much Wenlock. It is a prominent and well-known feature, and is of interest for its extensive exposures of rocks of the Wenlock series (Silurian) and for the woodland, scrub and grassland that occur along the ridge. The site consists of several separate localities in the northern part of the Edge west of Much Wenlock.

Biology

The scarp slope of Wenlock Edge is continuously wooded, but replanting with conifers has reduced and fragmented the original broadleaved woodland. The site includes the two largest areas of semi-natural woodland remaining in the northern part of the Edge, at Blakeway Coppice and Edge Wood. Parts of these woods conform to a 'stand type' characterised by ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, wych elm *Ulmus glabra* and sessile oak *Quercus petraea* which is confined to Silurian limestones and shale in the Welsh Marches. The only other significant examples of this woodland in Shropshire are at Tick Wood and Wolverton Wood.

The Wenlock Edge woodlands are rich in tree and shrub species. As well as sessile oak, ash and wych elm these include field maple *Acer campestre*, small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata*, wild cherry *Prunus avium*, crab apple *Malus sylvestris*, hazel *Corylus avellana*, holly *Ilex aquifolium*, yew *Taxus baccata* and wild service-tree *Sorbus torminalis*. Mature trees of wych elm are now scarce owing to Dutch elm disease. There is a diverse ground flora in which the most abundant species are dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, woodruff *Galium odoratum*, sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, great wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica*, tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*. The flora of Edge Wood includes two uncommon species, wood barley *Hordelymus europaeus* and violet helleborine *Epipactis purpurata*.

Scrub communities are found mainly on old quarry sites. Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, dog rose *Rosa canina*, birch *Betula* sp., spindle *Euonymus europaeus* and dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* form mixed scrub which is locally dense. In some places extensive

bryophyte carpets, consisting mainly of *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus* and *Hylocomium splendens*, occur beneath the scrub.

Grasslands are now scarce on Wenlock Edge, and are confined to two or three small areas above rock outcrops and to somewhat larger examples in areas previously disturbed by quarrying. Some of these grasslands are dominated by upright brome *Bromus erectus*, a species virtually absent from the limestone grasslands of north-west Shropshire where the only other area of significant limestone outcrops in the county occurs. Other abundant grasses include quaking grass *Briza media*, cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* and red fescue *Festuca rubra*. Among characteristic calcicolous (lime-loving) species which occur here are pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, hoary plantain *Plantago media*, greater knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa* and fairy flax *Linum catharticum*.

Geology

The world famous Wenlock Limestone outcrops of Wenlock Edge rank amongst Britain's most important geological sites. Studied by generations of geologists, the Edge remains a key research and educational locality. These are the finest sections available in the Wenlock Limestone, and they provide the best examples of reef development during the Silurian Period in Britain. The limestones contain a rich fossil fauna, and many fossil species, particularly of corals, brachiopods, trilobites and ostracods were first described from specimens collected here: Wenlock Edge is thus the standard or type locality for these species. The middle part of the Silurian Period is named the Wenlock Series after this area and localities within this site constitute the best sections available in the upper part of the Wenlock Series. This is a site of international significance for its stratigraphy and its unrivalled reef exposures.