



# COMMISSIONED REPORT

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Commissioned Report No. 130

**National Vegetation Classification survey  
for Craigdilly  
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**

(ROAME No. F03LJ08)

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*This report should be quoted as:*

*Central Environmental Surveys (2006). National Vegetation Classification survey for Craigdilly Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 130 (ROAME No. F03LJ08).*

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National Vegetation Classification survey for  
Craigdilly Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Commissioned Report No. 130 (ROAME No. F03LJ08)

Contractor: Central Environmental Surveys

Year of publication: 2006

### Main findings

- This SSSI shows good altitudinal and topographical variation. It lies on a very steep, generally dry hillside by the Megget Water. At the top of the SSSI the sub-montane *Alchemilla alpine*–*Carex pilulifera* sub-community of the *Vaccinium myrtillus*–*Deschampsia flexuosa* heath (H18b) begins the zonation, just coming in at this height. At this altitude there is also a small area of *Calluna vulgaris*–*Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire (M19) that occupies the flatter area, while the steeper areas are a mix of species-poor stands of *Luzula sylvatica* and the *Hylocomium splendens*–*Rhytidiadelphus loreus* sub-community of *Vaccinium myrtillus*–*Deschampsia flexuosa* heath (H18a). This latter community extends down-slope to the bottom fence-line in the North of the site. In the south, the *Luzula sylvatica* patches fade out and the *Vaccinium* heath continues down until it begins to change into the *Calluna vulgaris*–*Vaccinium myrtillus* heath. The transition between the two communities is fairly well defined in the field. The *Vaccinium* heath is occasionally given space around the linear bands of scree that regularly run down the mid–lower slopes. It is at about the junction between the two heath types that the frequency of woody cover begins to increase. Even in the upper slopes there is the occasional *Betula* and *Sorbus*, but they are rare. From the mid-slope down there are small pulses of saplings and scrub species. This woody cover thickens up and eventually there is a heathy, scrubby, bracken front that hugs the top of the woodland proper. The woodland itself lies on steep craggy ground and areas of shallower slope and deeper soil. Small trickles of water occasionally run over the rocks and flush through the woodland. Most of the woodland cover is the *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus* sub-community of the *Quercus petraea*–*Betula pubescens*–*Dicranum majus* woodland. It was generally heathy in nature with a broken canopy and stands of *Pteridium aquilinum* on the deeper soil. Localised flushing gave some variation and there were small areas where the canopy was more closed and the heath species gave way to ferns and small herbs.
- Below the woodland there are areas of bouldery scrub dominated by *Salix aurita* with *Molinia* dominating beneath. Otherwise, *Molinia* grassland is the predominant habitat. Super-imposed on this general altitudinal zonation are the areas of scree and one or two peculiar flushed areas. The scree was species-poor as expected, however it supported a good covering of lichens and bryophytes. A little *Dryopteris oreades* was found.
- The flushes were generally grassy in appearance and held the uncommon *Cirsium heterophyllum*.

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## **1 COMMUNITY DESCRIPTIONS**

### **1.1 Woodlands and scrub**

#### **1.1.1 W17 *Quercus petraea*–*Betula pubescens*–*Dicranum majus* woodland**

##### **1.1.1.1 W17b Typical sub-community**

Much of the woodland was over bouldery, steep slopes. The canopy was a mixture of *Betula pubescens* with some *Sorbus aucuparia*. The trees were a mix of all ages. The field layer was heathy with *Calluna* and *Vaccinium myrtillus* providing all of the heath cover. Patches of *Luzula sylvatica* occurred and *Pteridium* was common but not really dominant. *Lonicera periclymenum* trailed on the floor and in places was twining up the lower trunks. *Teucrium scorodonia* was frequent in the heathy background and there was the odd *Blechnum spicant*. *Dicranum majus* tended to grow under the cover of the *Vaccinium*. Otherwise the moss cover was varied with *Pleurozium schreberi*, *Hylocomium splendens*, *Dicranum scoparium* and *Rhytidiadelphus loreus*.

#### **1.1.2 W11 *Quercus petraea*–*Betula pubescens*–*Oxalis acetosella* woodland**

##### **1.1.2.1 W11b *Blechnum spicant* sub-community**

This community occurred on the more even slopes that were less craggy than the former community. The even-topped *Betula* and *Sorbus* canopy was closed, so there was less influence from the heath species and *Pteridium*. The field layer was distinctly fern-rich as opposed to the heathy look of the *Quercus petraea*–*Betula pubescens*–*Dicranum majus* woodland that it formed a mosaic with. *Athyrium filix-femina* and *Dryopteris affinis* together formed the bulk of the field layer, but there was also a little *Pteridium*, *Blechnum spicant* and *Phegopteris connectilis*. Between the ferns, small herbs were more abundant with scattered *Oxalis acetosella*, *Teucrium scorodonia*, *Veronica chamaedrys* and *Primula vulgaris*. There were small areas of *Vaccinium myrtillus*, but it grew as inconspicuous sprigs. The bryophyte cover was constant, comprising *Thuidium tamariscinum*, *Rhytidiadelphus loreus*, *Isoetes macrospora* and *Scleropodium purum*.

Within this community there were small flushed areas where *Lysimachia nemorum*, *Filipendula ulmaria*, *Angelica sylvestris*, *Carex pallescens* and *Salix cinerea* add local diversity.

### **1.2 Grasslands and montane communities**

#### **1.2.1 U16 *Luzula sylvatica*–*Vaccinium myrtillus* tall-herb community**

##### **1.2.1.1 U16c Species-poor sub-community**

Distinct patches of *Luzula sylvatica* dominated vegetation were seen at the break of slope towards the summit of the site. The dominance of *Luzula* left very little room for other species. The occasional area of *Oxalis acetosella* was found and a little *Deschampsia flexuosa*. Bryophytes were rare to absent under the thick wood-rush mat.

### 1.3 Mires and heaths

#### 1.3.1 M19 *Calluna vulgaris*–*Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire

##### 1.3.1.1 M19b *Empetrum nigrum* ssp. *nigrum* sub-community

*Calluna vulgaris* and *Eriophorum vaginatum* dominated this bog community. A little *Empetrum nigrum* and *Vaccinium vitis-idaea* were scattered through the community but not enough to warrant the consideration of the more montane *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*–*Hylocomium splendens* sub-community. *Sphagnum papillosum* and *S. capillifolium* give most bryophyte cover but there was also frequent *Hylocomium splendens*. *Rubus chamaemorus* was scattered throughout. This community was found at the top of the site on the flatter, more poorly drained areas and was limited in its distribution.

#### 1.3.2 M25 *Molinia caerulea*–*Potentilla erecta* mire

The *Molinia* grassland was restricted in occurrence to the bottom of the slope on the gently sloping to flat ground where the water-table was high. *Molinia* shared dominance with *Erica tetralix* and *Calluna vulgaris*. A little *Vaccinium myrtillus* came in on the drier hummocks. The ground was generally wet and in the wettest of areas there were small wefts of *Narthecium ossifragum*. Poor-fen associates were common, such as *Angelica sylvestris*, *Succisa pratensis*, *Potentilla erecta* and *Viola palustris*. *Carex panicea* was frequent but not abundant and there was frequently some *Juncus acutiflorus* which thickened up in some areas. The fit to any sub-community was not great as the area was small and not well developed as a distinct sub-community.

#### 1.3.3 M27 *Filipendula ulmaria*–*Angelica sylvestris* mire

Two flushes with some base-enrichment were found in the North of the site. These were difficult to assess in NVC terms and are described under this heading but the fit is extremely poor. The topography in this area was generally steep and dry. The community was present on small flushed terraces, traversing the hill. Grasses dominated with some areas dominated by *Molinia* and others by *Holcus mollis*. *Deschampsia cespitosa* was common throughout and there was a little *Agrostis canina*. A mix of herbs was recorded including *Rumex acetosa*, *Cirsium heterophyllum*, *Alchemilla* sp. *Centaurea nigra*, *Filipendula ulmaria*, *Achillea millefolium*, *Succisa pratensis* and *Potentilla erecta*. The drier grassland around this area was also base-rich.

#### 1.3.4 H12 *Calluna vulgaris*–*Vaccinium myrtillus* heath

##### 1.3.4.1 H12a *Calluna vulgaris* sub-community

This community was found on the lower dry, steep slopes around the edge of the woodland area and extending upwards. It was dominated by a strong growth of *Calluna vulgaris* with *Vaccinium myrtillus* sprigs beneath. *Blechnum spicant* occurred frequently beneath the heathy canopy, particularly around the edges of rocks and scree. *Deschampsia flexuosa* was sparse throughout, constant in frequency but never giving much cover. Herbs were rare, *Potentilla erecta* being the only species occurring with any regularity. The odd frond of *Pteridium aquilinum* encroached into these heathy areas and there was the occasional seedling or sapling of *Sorbus aucuparia*. There was a continuous bryophyte mat of *Hypnum jutlandicum*, *Hylocomium splendens* and *Pleurozium schreberi*.



### **1.3.5 H18 *Vaccinium myrtillus*–*Deschampsia flexuosa* heath**

#### **1.3.5.1 H18a *Hylocomium splendens*–*Rhytidiadelphus loreus* sub-community**

This heath-type generally occupied the mid to upper slopes, but also grew sparingly around any areas of scree in the lower slopes. In the north of the site, it extended all the way down the slope to the fence at the base. This heath was dominated by a low (to 20cm) canopy of *Vaccinium myrtillus*. Occasionally *Calluna* would also be found but over much of the community it was absent. *Empetrum nigrum* occasionally accompanied the heath layer along with a little *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*, these species tended to be further up the slope. *Deschampsia flexuosa* was present throughout the community along with *Potentilla erecta*, tufts of *Nardus stricta* and patches of *Galium saxatile*. A thick mat of bryophytes grew beneath the heath, principally *Pleurozium schreberi*, *Hylocomium splendens*, *Polytrichum commune* and *Hypnum cupressiforme*.

#### **1.3.6 H18b *Alchemilla alpine*–*Carex pilulifera* sub-community**

This sub-community was restricted in occurrence to the highest part of the site. *Vaccinium myrtillus* and *Deschampsia flexuosa* were most prevalent. *Festuca vivipara* and *Carex bigelowi* gave a more montane feel to the heath. Tufts of *Nardus stricta* joined the grass cover along with a little *Molinia* and *Anthoxanthum odoratum*. *Galium saxatile* was abundant throughout. *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus* and *Hylocomium splendens* gave most of the bryophyte cover.

## **1.4 Other communities**

### **1.4.1 Scree slopes**

The areas of scree were open with little cover from higher plants except from the occasional clump of *Teucrium scorodonia*. *Vaccinium myrtillus*, and occasionally *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*, thickened up around the edges and occasionally on more stable areas within the scree. Ferns were scattered with *Polypodium* ssp., *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*, *Dryopteris filix-mas* and *Dryopteris oreades* recorded. *Lycopodium clavatum* was also found on one or two areas. Mosses were common over the scree with mats of *Racomitrium lanuginosum* dominating.

## **2 MANAGEMENT COMMENTS**

The absence of stock in this site has led to a dramatic increase in the regeneration of trees outwith the woodland. The woodland edge is now a mass of saplings growing in the bracken and bouldery heath and tree saplings and seedlings are also prolific to approximately half way up the slope. Scattered individuals continue almost to the top of the reserve. No management is required here except to maintain the fences.

### **3 FAUNA**

Two black grouse were seen in the heath towards the top of the slope. Robin.

## Appendix 1 Craigdilly quadrat data

### H12a

Species	QP08	QP09	Summary
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	6	8	V(6-8)
<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>	6	4	V(4-6)
<i>Pleurozium schreberi</i>	0	8	III(8)
<i>Hylocomium splendens</i>	4	0	III(4)
<i>Blechnum spicant</i>	1	0	III(1)
<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	0	1	III(1)
<i>Salix aurita</i>	0	3	III(3)
<i>Teucrium scorodonia</i>	0	2	III(2)

### H18a

Species	QP12	QP14	QP15	QP17	QP19	QP20	Summary
<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>	8	8	8	6	5	8	V(5-8)
<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>	4	5	3	3	3	2	V(2-5)
<i>Galium saxatile</i>	0	0	3	0	6	3	III(3-6)
<i>Dicranum scoparium</i>	0	0	0	3	3	0	II(3)
<i>Pleurozium schreberi</i>	5	5	3	0	0	0	III(3-5)
<i>Hylocomium splendens</i>	6	4	8	8	8	9	V(4-9)
<i>Rhytidiadelphus loreus</i>	0	0	0	2	0	0	I(2)
<i>Blechnum spicant</i>	0	0	0	2	0	1	II(1-2)
<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	2	0	0	0	0	1	III(1-2)
<i>Carex binervis</i>	0	1	0	0	0	0	I(1)
<i>Hypnum cupressiforme</i>	3	0	0	0	0	0	II(3)
<i>Nardus stricta</i>	0	0	0	0	3	0	II(3)
<i>Vaccinium vitis-idaea</i>	0	0	0	5	0	0	II(5)
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	4	0	3	3	0	3	IV(3-4)
<i>Polytrichum sp.</i>	0	0	2	0	3	0	III(2-3)
<i>Agrostis canina</i>	0	0	0	0	3	0	II(3)
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	2	0	0	0	0	0	I(2)
<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i> seedlings	0	0	0	0	0	1	I(1)

## M19b

Species	QP13	QP18	Summary
<i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i>	4	3	V(3-4)
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	7	0	III(7)
<i>Pleurozium schreberi</i>	0	6	III(6)
<i>Sphagnum capillifolium</i>	4	3	V(3-4)
<i>Rubus chamaemorus</i>	3	0	III(3)
<i>Hylocomium splendens</i>	4	4	V(4)
<i>Vaccinium vitis-idaea</i>	0	5	III(5)
<i>Sphagnum papillosum</i>	4	0	III(4)
<i>Sphagnum subnitens</i>	0	3	III(3)
<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>	3	3	V(3)
<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>	0	3	III(3)
<i>Sphagnum palustre</i>	0	4	III(4)
<i>Empetrum nigrum</i>	3	7	V(3-7)

## M25a

Species	QP01	QP10	QP11	Summary
<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	9	8	8	V(8-9)
<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	3	1	2	V(1-3)
<i>Erica tetralix</i>	0	0	4	II(4)
<i>Narthecium ossifragum</i>	2	0	3	IV(2-3)
<i>Sphagnum palustre</i>	0	0	4	II(4)
<i>Sphagnum capillifolium</i>	0	0	3	II(3)
<i>Viola palustris</i>	2	2	2	V(2)
<i>Scleropodium purum</i>	0	5	0	II(5)
<i>Angelica sylvestris</i>	4	0	0	II(4)
<i>Cirsium palustre</i>	0	1	0	II(1)
<i>Juncus acutiflorus</i>	0	0	2	II(2)
<i>Succisa pratensis</i>	3	2	2	V(2-3)
<i>Carex panicea</i>	1	3	2	V(1-3)
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	3	0	0	II(3)
<i>Nardus stricta</i>	0	3	0	II(3)
<i>Achillea ptarmica</i>	0	2	0	II(2)
<i>Hypnum cupressiforme</i>	3	0	0	II(3)

**U4d**

<b>Species</b>	<b>QP06</b>
<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	3
<i>Festuca ovina</i>	4
<i>Galium saxatile</i>	7
<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>	3
<i>Agrostis canina</i>	8
<i>Nardus stricta</i>	4
<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>	4
<i>Rumex acetosa</i>	4
<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	2
<i>Rhytiadelphus squarrosus</i>	7

**U16c**

<b>Species</b>	<b>QP07</b>	<b>QP16</b>	<b>QP21</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<i>Luzula sylvatica</i>	10	10	10	V(10)
<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>	0	2	0	III(2)
<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>	0	2	0	III(2)
<i>Oxalis acetosella</i>	2	2	2	V(2)
<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	0	1	0	III(1)
<i>Carex nigra</i>	2	0	0	III(2)

## W11b

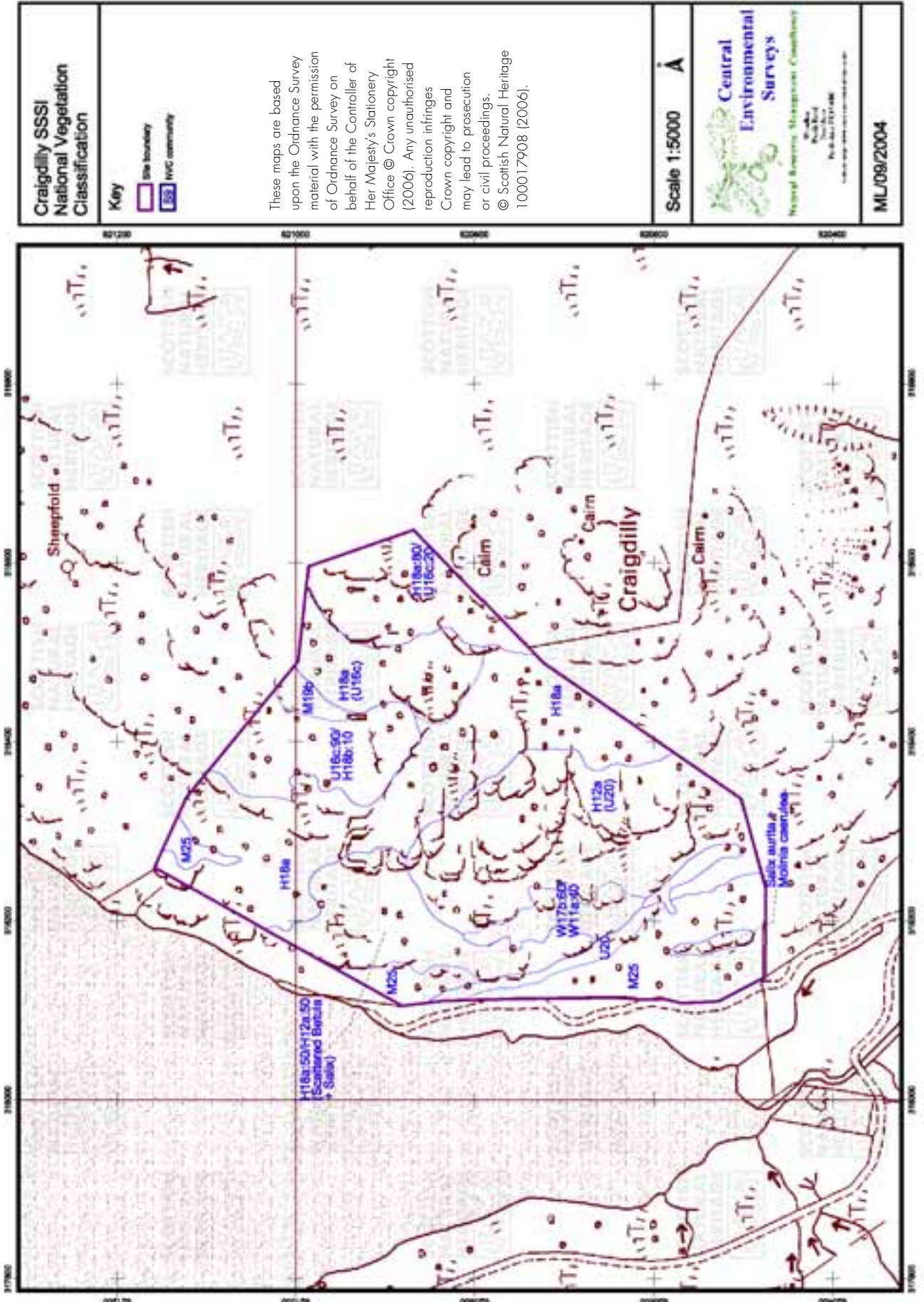
Species	QP04	QP23	Summary
<i>Betula pubescens</i>	7	8	V(7-8)
<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	7	2	V(2-7)
<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>	6	3	V(3-6)
<i>Blechnum spicant</i>	4	2	V(2-4)
<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>	4	2	V(2-4)
<i>Oxalis acetosella</i>	2	3	V(2-3)
<i>Thuidium tamariscinum</i>	0	7	III(7)
<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i>	0	5	III(5)
<i>Dryopteris affinis</i>	0	4	III(4)
<i>Hylocomium splendens</i>	4	0	III(4)
<i>Luzula sylvatica</i>	0	4	III(4)
<i>Phegopteris connectilis</i>	4	0	III(4)
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	3	0	III(3)
<i>Dicranum majus</i>	3	0	III(3)
<i>Dicranum scoparium</i>	3	0	III(3)
<i>Isoetes macrospora</i>	0	3	III(3)
<i>Scleropodium purum</i>	3	0	III(3)
<i>Galium saxatile</i>	0	2	III(2)
<i>Luzula pilosa</i>	0	2	III(2)
<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	2	0	III(2)
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	0	2	III(2)
<i>Primula vulgaris</i>	0	1	III(1)
<i>Teucrium scorodonia</i>	0	1	III(1)

**W17b**

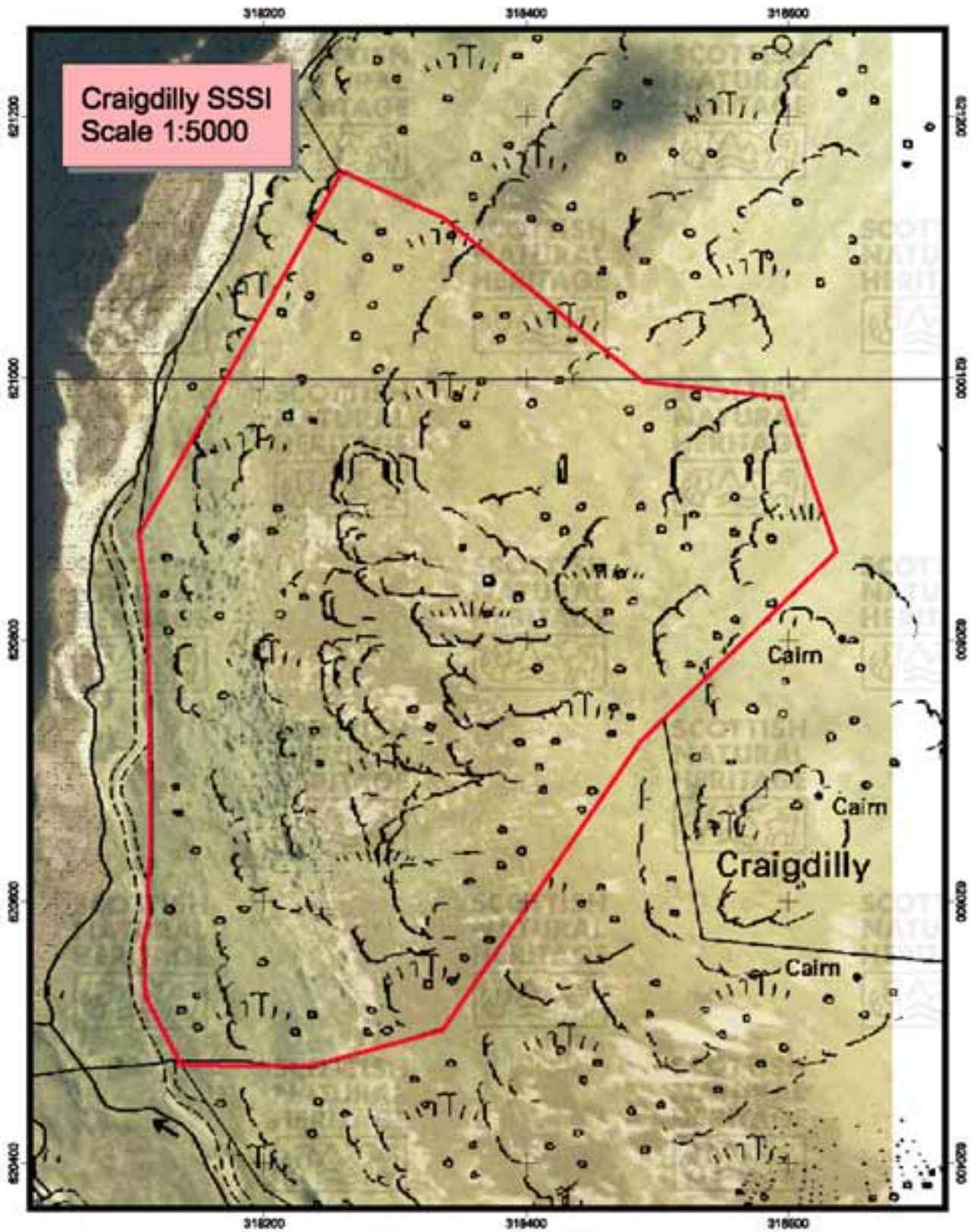
<b>Species</b>	<b>QP02</b>	<b>QP05</b>	<b>QP22</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<i>Betula pubescens</i>	6	6	5	V(5-6)
<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	4	6	5	V(4-6)
<i>Salix cinerea</i>	0	0	4	II(4)
<i>Salix aurita</i>	2	0	0	II(2)
<i>Rosa</i> sp.	1	0	0	II(1)
<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>	6	8	7	V(6-8)
<i>Thuidium tamariscinum</i>	3	7	4	V(3-7)
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	6	4	4	V(4-6)
<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>	2	3	2	V(2-3)
<i>Teucrium scorodonia</i>	2	3	2	V(2-3)
<i>Pleurozium schreberi</i>	7	0	3	IV(3-7)
<i>Dicranum majus</i>	3	0	5	IV(3-5)
<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	3	0	2	IV(2-3)
<i>Scleropodium purum</i>	2	2	0	IV(2)
<i>Rhytiadelphus loreus</i>	0	0	4	II(4)
<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i>	0	0	3	II(3)
<i>Hylocomium splendens</i>	3	0	0	II(3)
<i>Polytrichum formosum</i>	0	3	0	II(3)
<i>Dryopteris affinis</i>	2	0	0	II(2)
<i>Galium saxatile</i>	0	2	0	II(2)
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	0	2	0	II(2)
<i>Rumex acetosa</i>	0	0	2	II(2)
<i>Blechnum spicant</i>	0	0	1	II(1)
<i>Viola riviniana</i>	0	0	1	II(1)



Appendix 2 Map 1 – Craigdilly



Map 2 – Craigdilly



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