
NWHG Ref. 009 — Sandwood Bay

Location, grid reference and photograph

The Sandwood Bay site is located on the west coast, 8.5 km north of Kinlochbervie, at the seaward end of Strath Shinary, Grid Ref. [NC 220 650].

(Figure 14) Sandwood Bay from the south, BGS Photo P637344 — M Krabbendam.

GCR site reference, block, volume and notified feature of SSSI?

GCR Ref. 229, Coastal Geomorphology Block, Vol. 28. Notified feature of Southern Parphe SSSI.

Description and geological significance

Sandwood Bay is perhaps the best example on mainland Britain of a naturally unstable and dynamic beach-dune system. The beach complex consists of a highly dynamic, shingle-cored sand dune and machair bar impounding a freshwater loch at the mouth of Strath Shinary. The main geomorphological interest lies in the very high current activity of the beach, dune and machair landforms, in a situation where human interference has been minimal. It offers a rare opportunity to study natural rates of coastal change.

Accessibility

Access is limited. The nearest (small) John Muir Trust car park is on the unclassified Kinlochbervie to Sheigra road at Blairmore. There is an old peat track and waymarked path along the 6 km walk to the site. No all abilities access.

Conservation

Despite the scale and remote location of the site, there is a conservation requirement to ensure that the intrinsic characteristics of the beach-dune system are not affected by human activity.

Visibility and “clarity”

Once the site has been accessed, visibility of the various geomorphological features is excellent. Sandwood Bay is renowned for its natural, unspoilt beauty and the area has a very high visual impact on visitors. On the south side is the famous Am Buachaille sea stack — not part of the GCR site, but nevertheless a spectacular coastal feature.

Interpretation and interpretation potential

The site is mainly used by casual walkers interested in landscape, wildlife and photography. There is an interpretation panel available at the car park. Further information could be provided here or at the beach itself illustrating the key elements of the beach-dune system and also explaining the significance of Sandwood Bay within a national geomorphological context. Certainly the site should be incorporated within any local guided walks and also included in a future Geopark guide. The distance to the site might constrain the potential as an academic teaching aid for students.

Key references

Geological Conservation Review Series, Volume 28: Coastal Geomorphology of Great Britain, site description page 370.



(Figure 14) Sandwood Bay from the south, BGS Photo P637344 — M Krabbendam.