

SNETTISHAM COMMON PIT

Prospects for geoconservation

The Site

Snettisham Common is a County Wildlife Site (CWS 476), and includes a former sandstone quarry at NGR TF 6710 3362. This quarry exposes strata of the Sandringham Formation of Lower Cretaceous age (Leziate Beds) showing cross-bedding features, overlain by strata of the Dersingham Formation (Dersingham Beds) which include sands, clay and clay ironstone. A notable feature of the site is faulting, which trends in two directions, and may be associated with glacial loading or periglacial cambering. The Leziate Beds are thought to have been extracted here for building stone in the 19th century. Aerial photographs from 1946 suggest that the quarry may also have been active in the 1940s. Judging by its contents, an old gravel pit to the north is thought to have been backfilled with rubbish in the early 20th century.

For geological information, see:

- W Whitaker and A Jukes-Browne: 'The Geology of the borders of The Wash' (Memoirs of the Geological Survey of Great Britain; 1899), p.9;
- RW Gallois: 'Geology of the Country around King's Lynn and The Wash' (Sheet Memoirs 145 and 129 (part), British Geological Survey; 1994), pp77-78.



Snettisham Common Pit (1st edition OS map, courtesy Norfolk eMap Explorer)

Condition

The quarry is about 30 m x 20 m in extent, with an access slope on the south-eastern side and vertical exposures reaching up to 5 metres in height on the other three sides. It has notably accessible geological exposures, although its scientific and educational interest is compromised in three main ways:

- Spreads of talus have accumulated at the foot of the exposures, most notably on the north-eastern side; it is not known how deeply they have buried the original foot of the quarry wall.

- Sycamore trees mask exposures on the northern side, and gorse bushes and brambles mask them on the north-eastern side.
- Graffiti has been carved onto many exposed surfaces, masking geological details, but not impairing the stratigraphic, sedimentary and structural interest of the site.



North-eastern exposure, showing gorse and bramble encroachment



North-western exposure, showing talus spread and sycamore and gorse encroachment



Example of graffiti damage to the north-eastern exposure

Views about management

To conserve the geological interest of the site the following initial recommendations are made:

- It would be desirable to remove as much vegetation from the floor of the quarry as possible, particularly the sycamore trees, brambles and gorse obscuring the northern and north-eastern walls; this will help make the geological features more visible.
- An oak tree shading the north-western quarry walls from above may be retained, as it is helping to shelter the exposures from weathering.
- Graffiti should be discouraged, if at all practicable.
- The build-up of talus at the foot of quarry walls should be removed, to re-expose the foot of the walls and to remove a ready growing medium for gorse, brambles and other vegetation.

Opening up the quarry walls is likely to benefit wildlife, by improving nesting, basking and hunting ground for thermophilous fauna, such as hymenoptera.

Possible CGS status

Snettisham Common Pit would make a good candidate County Geodiversity Site on the following grounds:

- It is a notable exposure of the boundary between the Leziate Beds and Dersingham Beds;
- It has a history of published geological research;
- It displays good geological structures, notably faulting (rarely visible in Norfolk), and cross-bedding;
- It is a publicly accessible site, with clear educational potential.
- It is the subject of active interest by the Parish Council and local nature conservationists.

For more information about geoconservation priorities in Norfolk see section 3.3 of 'Norfolk's Earth Heritage' (Norfolk Geodiversity Partnership; 2010).