SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOWTOWN FEN

SITE CODE: 001764

Lowtown Fen is an overgrown kettle hole, situated approximately 5km north-west of Baltinglass. The fen is flanked by sloping grazed pasture and is dissected by wet channels derived from attempts at draining the area.

A concentric zonation of fen vegetation occurs. In the centre, where the ground becomes flatter and very wet, is a dense Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) swamp with occasional plants of Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*). Around the reed swamp Whorl-grass (*Catabrosa aquatica*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Fool's Water-cress (*Apium nodiflorum*) and Creeping Forget-me-not (*Myosotis secunda*) were recorded.

On the drier marginal areas of the swamp, there is a greater diversity of vegetation, including Marsh Cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), various grasses (*Festuca* spp.) and at least nine sedge species (*Carex* spp.). Several species of orchid also occur – Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*), Frog Orchid (*Coeloglossum viride*), two species of marsh-orchid (*Dactylorhiza* spp.) and the scarce Marsh Helleborine (*Epipactis palustris*).

Attempts have been made in the past to drain the fen. These, however, seem to have been ineffective and have had little effect on the flora. The old ditches are now bordered by Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*).

In spite of drainage attempts the area is still botanically diverse and is a very good example of fen/reed swamp development. The presence of some scarce orchids adds to the site's scientific importance.

25.11.2009