SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: KNOCKNAREA MOUNTAIN AND GLEN

SITE CODE: 001670

Knocknarea is a conspicuous flat topped hill of great scenic value about 6.5km west of Sligo. There is a large passage tomb on its summit reported to be the burial place of Queen Maebh of Connacht. The area is visited by many people and guided walks are led from the car park to the summit. This site is of great ecological interest for the plants and plant communities that have developed on its exposed limestone cliffs and the adjacent grasslands.

The cliff vegetation contains several interesting species including Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*), Hoary Whitlowgrass (*Draba incana*), Mossy Saxifrage (*Saxifraga hypnoides*) and Green Spleenwort (*Asplenium viride*). Some of these species form part of a reduced alpine flora which is most unusual in Ireland. The grasslands below the cliffs contain many species typical of limestone areas, including Quaking-grass (*Briza media*) and Blue Moor-grass (*Sesleria caerulea*).

Knocknarea Glen contains rich semi-natural woodland. Ash (*Fraximus excelsior*) is a conspicuous tree here, with Wych Elm (*Ulmus glabra*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*). The moss and ground flora of the wood are particularly rich and contain several rare plants including Ivy Broomrape (*Orobanche hederae*) and Wood Fescue (*Festuca altissima*).

This is a very compact and diverse site with a number of different habitats occurring in association with the limestone. The number of rare plants within the site and the mixture of both alpine and maritime species on the cliffs make them of great ecological interest. The richness of the moss flora and presence of Spindle trees in the glen make it a well known botanical locality.

The wood has suffered natural wind damage in the past which is unusual for Irish woodlands. The amount of rotting timber is therefore an important feature in the ecosystem. The invertebrate fauna of the glen has also been partly examined. All these factors combine to make this a most important and unusual site.

24.11.2009