



Site Name: St. Gobnet's Wood SAC

Site Code: 000106

St. Gobnet's Wood SAC includes St. Gobnet's Wood itself and an area of woodland to the north, called Cascade Wood. St. Gobnet's Wood is situated on the north-east side of a hill immediately south of Ballyvourney village in Co. Cork. Cascade Wood is situated immediately to the north of Ballyvourney. Together they form a relatively large but fragmented stand of woodland. The site supports old oak woodland, as well as a small area of alluvial woodland alongside the Sullane River. The underlying rock is Old Red Sandstone and the soil is a mosaic of acidic, shallow brown earths and brown podzolics, locally skeletal, mostly well-drained but with gleys associated with impeded drainage around flushes and watercourses. There is a distinct increase in fertility downslope.

The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the following habitats and/or species listed on Annex I / II of the E.U. Habitats Directive (* = priority; numbers in brackets are Natura 2000 codes):

[91A0] Old Oak Woodlands

In St. Gobnet's Wood the canopy is dominated by a mixture of birch (*Betula* sp.) and oak (*Quercus petraea*, *Q. robur* and *Q. x rosacea*), with abundant old Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*). Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) occur widely, especially on more fertile soils, and Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) is occasional, particularly on wetter areas. The trees vary in height from 14 m to 17 m or more in height, although a few old Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and fir (*Abies* sp.) occur as emergents. Coppicing has clearly occurred in the past and there are some very large oak and birch stools.

The shrub layer consists mainly of Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Rusty Willow (*Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), along with regeneration of the canopy tree species, especially Ash, and locally oak and Rowan. There are also a few Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) and Cherry Laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) bushes. There is a patchy dwarf shrub layer of Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*).

The herb layer is species-rich, although Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*) and Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.) in mosaic tend to dominate. Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) is locally frequent. Other species include St. Patrick's-cabbage (*Saxifraga spathularis*) on rock outcrops, Herb-Robert (*Geranium robertianum*), Cleavers (*Galium aparine*), Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*), Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Enchanter's-nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*),

Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*) and Irish Spurge (*Euphorbia hyberna*). Ivy is common, both in the field layer and as a liane. Ferns include Lady-fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), Hard fern (*Blechnum spicant*), Scaly Male-fern (*Dryopteris affinis*), Hay-scented Buckler-fern (*D. aemula*), Broad Buckler-fern (*D. dilatata*) and Tonbridge Filmy-fern (*Hymenophyllum tunbridgense*) on rocks, Polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*) both on the ground and as an epiphyte, and Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*). Wet areas are characterised by the local abundance of Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), with Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Creeping Buttercup (*R. repens*) and Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*). The ground layer is rich in bryophytes, with species such as *Dicranum majus*, *D. scoparium*, *Hylocomium brevirostre*, *Isoetecium myosuroides*, *Polytrichum formosum*, *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus*, *Thuidium tamariscinum*, *Diplophyllum albicans*, *Pellia epiphylla* and *Scapania gracilis*. The bog moss *Sphagnum* cf. *quinquefarium* occurs in wet sites.

At the bottom of the hill on the northern edge of the wood is an area of alluvial woodland containing old river channels and hollows. A stand of planted young oak and Ash dominate here with Alder and willow in the depressions. Large spreading Oaks occur on the margins. The field layer is characterised by species of wet ground such as Remote Sedge (*Carex remota*), Meadowsweet, Creeping Buttercup, Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*). An area of wet meadow occurs near the car park, with Common Bent (*A. capillaris*), Bracken and Bramble. At the top of the hill, two fields are being invaded by birch and Gorse (*Ulex europaea*) scrub.

Throughout the wood there is a large amount of dead, wind-thrown and fallen timber. The wood is largely ungrazed, or only very lightly grazed, although signs of deer are present in the upper parts of the wood.

The main body of the woodland conforms to the phytosociological unit *Blechno-Quercetum* sub-association *coryletosum*, while the alluvial woodland is probably close to the *Corylo-Fraxinetum deschampsietosum*, with small pockets of *Carici remotae-Fraxinetum*, although this needs confirmation.

Cascade Wood is divided into two sections by a minor road. The eastern section, which is the largest, is an undulating, rocky site with several paths and tracks running through it. The Bohill River skirts the northern edge before flowing through an impressive, narrow defile that divides the wood into two unequal-sized sections. Several houses and gardens have been developed within the wood on both the western and eastern edges. The western section lies on a rocky slope containing numerous springs and seepage areas. As the two sections are very different in character they are described separately.

At Cascade Wood East the canopy consists of an intimate mixture of old Beech, oak (*Quercus robur* and *Q. x rosacea*) and Sycamore. Occasional clumps and individuals of old conifers - Scots Pine, Norway Spruce (*Picea abies*) and firs - emerge above this layer. Birch is common, locally forming almost pure stands, especially towards the

western side of the wood. The shrub layer is dominated by dense thickets of Rhododendron and Cherry Laurel, up to 6 m or more in height. Native species, such as Hazel, Holly and Hawthorn are only occasional and chiefly confined to the vicinity of the river where the Rhododendron is more or less absent.

As a consequence of the dense shade cast by the Rhododendron and Cherry Laurel the herb layer is very poorly developed or absent over extensive areas. Like the shrubs, most of the species are confined to a narrow strip alongside the river before it enters the gorge, in the occasional light gaps and along the tracks where there is a certain amount of disturbance. Amongst these are elements typical of woods of the south-west that are also found in St. Gobnet's Wood, including Irish Spurge, St. Patrick's-cabbage and Tonbridge Filmy-fern. The stand of Birch towards the western side partly occurs on old cultivation ridges and is accompanied by Gorse, Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Bracken and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). This area is shown as rough grazing on the O.S.I. six-inch map and is clearly reverting to woodland.

The moss layer is also poorly developed, except on relatively well-lit rock outcrops. Epiphytes are locally abundant, especially near the river, where there are pendulous curtains of mosses in places, a feature of extremely moist and sheltered areas. A recent survey of lichens found over 90 species to be present. There is a considerable amount of dead and fallen timber.

The remnants of the native vegetation here suggest that the wood was originally an example of acid Oak woodland within the phytosociological category *Blechno-Quercetum*.

Cascade Wood West is very different in structure and species composition, consisting of a mosaic of wet and dry stands. An area in the centre has been felled recently. The wet areas, influenced by seepages and small springs, are open and relatively light. Alder dominates with scattered Oak, Ash and Birch. The herb layer is grassy, being dominated by bent grasses (*A. capillaris* and *A. stolonifera*) and Creeping Buttercup with prominent clumps of Lady-fern. The drier areas are dominated by Oak, with occasional Alder, Ash and Rowan. Under the heavier shade the herb layer is poorly developed, the most common species being Common Bent, Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*), ferns (mostly Broad Buckler-fern and Lady-fern) and Wood-sorrel. Throughout the wood the shrub layer is very poorly developed, with Holly the principal species. The moss layer is well developed, especially on rock outcrops, although in general epiphytes are less abundant than in the eastern section.

In the north-east corner of the wood there is a relatively young stand of Alder and Willow on very wet soil. Associated species include rushes (*Juncus* spp.), Marsh Violet (*Viola palustris*), Lesser Spearwort and abundant *Sphagnum* mosses.

Many of the Alders and some Oak are multi-stemmed, indicating past felling or coppicing. A number of trees, especially Holly, show signs of damage from bark stripping and there are numerous dead and moribund stems. This is undoubtedly a

result of past heavy grazing pressure and the sparsely developed herb and shrub layers indicate continued heavy grazing; there were signs of recent cattle grazing in the northern part of the wood. Unlike the eastern section, however, Rhododendron is almost absent and Beech and Sycamore are far less prominent.

The vegetation on the drier sites falls into the acid Oak woodland category *Blechno-Quercetum* subassociation *coryletosum*; that on the wetter sites is harder to classify but it would appear to be closest to the association *Carici-remotae-Fraxinetum*.

The woodland stands support Kerry Slug (*Geomalacus maculosus*), a species listed in Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive, and parts of Cascade Wood are known to be frequented by at least seven species of bat: Soprano and Common Pipistrelle, Brown Long-eared, Leisler's, Daubenton's, Natterer's and Whiskered/Brandt's bat.

St. Gobnet's Wood is a good example of a native woodland typical of the south-west. It contains old oak woodlands, a habitat listed on the E.U. Habitats Directive, and also supports rich herb, bryophyte and lichen communities.