

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: DOUGH/THUR MOUNTAINS NHA

SITE CODE: 002384

Dough/Thur Mountains NHA is an area of upland blanket bog, heath and grassland located 4 km south of Kiltyclogher, in north-west Co. Leitrim. The site includes two mountains, about 2 km apart, separated by the Cornavannoge River valley. The boundaries of the site are largely defined by transitions from blanket bog to rough pasture, areas of peat cutting or conifer plantation. The site ranges in elevation from 170 m to 465 m and is underlain by shale, fine-grained sandstone and small amounts of limestone.

The habitats found within this site include extensive areas of upland blanket bog, in association with dry and wet heath, exposed rock, streams, cutover bog and upland grassland. Upland blanket bog habitat occurs mainly at middle to higher elevations, and is the dominant habitat type on the flat to gently sloping areas on the northern and central areas of both mountains. The southern sides of both mountains are steeper and more exposed and support more heath vegetation with exposed rock. A large oligotrophic lake also occurs on the southern side of Thur Mountain.

The intact blanket bog supports a good heather and moss cover, with peat depths of up to 2 m. The vegetation comprises a tall canopy of Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Deergass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and cottongrasses (*Eriophorum* spp.) with a deep spongy understorey of bog mosses (*Sphagnum subnitens*, *S. capillifolium*, *S. papillosum*) and hummocks of the moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum* up to 1 m wide. Associated species include Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), lichens (*Cladonia portentosa*, *C. ciliata*), mosses (*Hypnum jutlandicum*, *Rhytidiadelphus loreus*), the liverwort *Diplophyllum albicans* and occasional Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). Flushes and small pools within blanket bog are colonized by Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Sundews (*Drosera rotundifolia*, *D. intermedia*) and bog mosses (*S. recurvum*, *S. auriculatum* and *S. cuspidatum*).

Shallower peat soils support heath vegetation. These areas also have a good cover of Ling Heather, but in association with species such as Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), Deergass, Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*), Wavy Hair-grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*), mosses (*Hylocomium splendens*, *Polytrichum commune*), Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) and lawns of bog moss (*S. capillifolium*). Swards of upland grassland occur on the lower slopes and also as patches within the heath and blanket bog mosaic. These areas feature many narrow streams and flushed channels, characterised by rushes (*Juncus effusus*, *J. acutiflorus*), grasses (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*, *Deschampsia flexuosa*, *Nardus stricta*, *Holcus lanatus*) and frequent Heath spotted Orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*). On the margins of the site, there are also areas of old cutover which are

very wet and regenerating well, with a good cover of Ling Heather, Purple Moor-grass, cottongrasses and carpets of bog mosses.

Red Data Book species that are found within the site include Irish Hare, Common Frog and Red Grouse.

Current landuse on the site consists of sheep grazing, with some active machine cutting of peat on Thur Mountain. Land uses adjacent to the site include extensive conifer afforestation, peat cutting and grazing. These activities have resulted in habitat loss and damage to the hydrological condition of the site. A wind anemometer has recently been erected adjacent to Dough Mountain and the site may be under consideration for wind energy development. The emplacement of access road networks and turbine foundations associated with such developments causes habitat loss and disturbance and can de-stabilise peat and lead to erosion.

Dough/Thur Mountains NHA is a site of considerable conservation significance. It contains an extensive area of upland blanket bog, with associated upland heath and grassland. Blanket bog habitat is a globally scarce resource. It is largely confined to coastal regions at temperate latitudes with cool, wet, oceanic climates. North-west Europe contains some of the best-developed areas of blanket bog in the world. The most extensive areas are found in Ireland and Britain. Upland blanket bogs, due to their exposure to severe climatic conditions at high elevations, are particularly vulnerable to erosion by human activities and extensive areas are currently undergoing active erosion due mainly to overgrazing. The current area of intact upland blanket bog in Ireland represents only a fraction of the original resource, due to the combined impacts of afforestation and overgrazing, and intact examples are therefore extremely valuable for nature conservation. Their long-term survival requires sensitive management.