

COUNTY: AVON

SITE NAME: AUST CLIFF

DISTRICT: NORTHAVON

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended

Local Planning Authority: AVON COUNTY COUNCIL, Northavon District Council

National Grid Reference: ST 565894, ST 570899      Area: 5.3 (ha) 13.1 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 172      1:10,000: ST 58 NE, ST 59 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954      Date of Last Revision: 1974

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986      Date of Last Revision:

Other Information:

Description and Reasons for Notification:

1. Rhaetian

A classic site showing 'Keuper', 'Rhaetic' and lower Lias unconformably overlying Carboniferous Limestone. The Rhaetian section of Westbury and Cotham Beds (the White Lias is absent) particularly the basal Westbury Bone Bed, has received much attention from geologists. This conglomeratic unit contains rich fish faunas, marine reptiles and the dinosaur *Avalonia*. The Cotham Beds contain a 'landscape marble' development and an insect bearing *Eustheria* bed, above a comparatively thin development of the Westbury Beds.

2. Permo-Trias

This thick section provides one of the most important Triassic exposures in the country; showing the transition from the red 'Keuper Marl' through the 'Tea Green Marls' (Blue Anchor Formation) to the overlying Rhaetic Beds (Penarth Group). The red mudstones of the 'Keuper Marl' include massive nodular gypsum, and show a sharp transition to the overlying green mudstones and sandstones of the Blue Anchor Formation.

3. Palaeoentomology

This is the most productive locality in Britain for Triassic insects. Several species new to science have been described from here and others are currently being studied. The specimens occur mainly in blocks of Rhaetian limestone from the top of the section. Fossils tend to occur in rare concentrates and the fauna includes a high proportion of complete bodies. Members of the Mecoptera are particularly common, some species having the colour pattern preserved. A nationally important palaeoentomology locality.

4. Vertebrate Palaeontology

Aust Cliff is famous for its 'Rhaetic bone bed'. This has been the source of much vertebrate material, which makes this locality the best site for Triassic marine reptiles in Britain. Hundreds of bones have been collected over the past one hundred and fifty years, including specimens of ichthyosaurs, plesiosaurs (as many as four species), 'dinosaurs' and possibly pterosaurs as well as other as yet unidentified forms. Aust is internationally significant for the reptiles from its bone bed.