

Nitrate concentrations in Nithsdale groundwater, 2004

Groundwater Systems and Water Quality Programme Commissioned Report CR/04/284N



BRITISH GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

GROUNDWATER SYSTEMS AND WATER QUALITY PROGRAMME COMMISSIONED REPORT CR/04/284N

Nitrate concentrations in Nithsdale groundwater, 2004

A M MacDonald, C Abesser

The National Grid and other Ordnance Survey data are used with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Ordnance Survey licence number Licence No:100017897/2004.

Keywords

nitrate, groundwater, NVZ, Scotland.,

Front cover

Dairy cows in Nithsdale (photo © NERC)

Bibliographical reference

MACDONALD A M, ABESSER C. 2004. Nitrate concentrations in Nithsdale groundwater, 2004. *British Geological Survey Commissioned Report*, CR/04/284N. 24pp.

Copyright in materials derived from the British Geological Survey's work is owned by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and/or the authority that commissioned the work. You may not copy or adapt this publication without first obtaining permission. Contact the BGS Intellectual Property Rights Section, British Geological Survey, Keyworth, e-mail ipr@bgs.ac.uk You may quote extracts of a reasonable length without prior permission, provided a full acknowledgement is given of the source of the extract.

© NERC 2004. All rights reserved

BRITISH GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

The full range of Survey publications is available from the BGS Sales Desks at Nottingham, Edinburgh and London; see contact details below or shop online at www.geologyshop.com

The London Information Office also maintains a reference collection of BGS publications including maps for consultation.

The Survey publishes an annual catalogue of its maps and other publications; this catalogue is available from any of the BGS Sales Desks.

The British Geological Survey carries out the geological survey of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the latter as an agency service for the government of Northern Ireland), and of the surrounding continental shelf, as well as its basic research projects. It also undertakes programmes of British technical aid in geology in developing countries as arranged by the Department for International Development and other agencies.

The British Geological Survey is a component body of the Natural Environment Research Council.

British Geological Survey offices

Keyworth, Nottingham NG12 5GG

O115-936 3241
 Fax 0115-936 3488
 e-mail: sales@bgs.ac.uk
 www.bgs.ac.uk
 Shop online at: www.geologyshop.com

Murchison House, West Mains Road, Edinburgh EH9 3LA

 Image: 1000
 Fax
 0131-668
 2683

 e-mail:
 scotsales@bgs.ac.uk
 scotsales@bgs.ac.uk

London Information Office at the Natural History Museum (Earth Galleries), Exhibition Road, South Kensington, London SW7 2DE

20-7589 4090	Fax 020-7584 8270
020-7942 5344/45	email: bgslondon@bgs.ac.uk

Forde House, Park Five Business Centre, Harrier Way, Sowton, Exeter, Devon EX2 7HU

The additional set of the additional set of

Geological Survey of Northern Ireland, Colby House, Stranmillis Court, Belfast BT9 5BF

2 028-9038 8462 Fax 028-9066 2835 e-mail: gsni@detini.gov.uk

Maclean Building, Crowmarsh Gifford, Wallingford, Oxfordshire OX10 8BB

☎ 01491-838800 Fax 01491-692345 e-mail: hydro@bgs.ac.uk

Sophia House, 28 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9LJ ☎ 029–2066 0147 Fax 029–2066 0159

Parent Body

Natural Environment Research Council, Polaris House,
North Star Avenue, Swindon, Wiltshire SN2 1EU201793-411500Fax 01793-411501

www.nerc.ac.uk

Fax 01793-41150

Contents

Co	ntent	ts	i
Su	mma	ry	iii
1	Intr	roduction	1
2	Geo	ological and hydrogeological setting	2
3	San	npling and data	4
4	Nitr	rate data	9
	4.1	Nitrate from the 2004 sampling	9
	4.2	Comparing 2004 and 2002 sampling	10
	4.3	Nitrate data from the SEPA network	10
5	Sun	nmary and recommendations	13
Ap	pend	ix 1 Data for the 21 sites	15
Re	feren	ces	16

FIGURES

Figure 1	The location of the Lower Nithsdale NVZ, as designated in December 2002 1
Figure 2	Bedrock aquifer productivity for the Lower Nithsdale NVZ 2
Figure 3	Superficial deposits permeability for the Lower Nithsdale NVZ 3
Figure 4	Location of sample points for the September 2004 survey
Figure 5 Nithsda	Cumulative frequency diagram for the cations measured in samples from the le NVZ
•	Cumulative frequency diagram for the anions measured in samples from the le NVZ
Figure 7	Piper diagram of groundwaters sampled in the Nithsdale NVZ
U	Histogram of the nitrate concentrations measured in the 21 sites sampled in le, September 2004
0	Measured nitrate concentrations in groundwater sampled during September 2004. lrock aquifer productivity is used as a backdrop
U	Comparison of nitrate concentrations for sites that were sampled in both ber 2004 and August 2002
0	Average nitrate concentrations from the SEPA monitoring network. Table 3 details of the individual sites

TABLES

Table 1	Summary of physical information from sites sampled in September 2004
Table 2	Summary statistics for groundwater sampled in the Nithsdale NVZ 6
Table 3	SEPA monitoring sites in the Lower Nithsdale NVZ 11

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fieldwork was undertaken with the cooperation of the landowners and farmers from Dumfries and Thornhill. Sarah Hannay of the BGS laboratories in Wallingford is thanked for here timely analysis of the sampled. The authors would also like to thank:

Bruce Eriksson, SEPA

Francis Brewis, Scottish Executive

John Chilton, BGS

Summary

This report describes the results of a survey of groundwater nitrate concentrations in the Lower Nithsdale nitrate vulnerable zone (NVZ), southwest Scotland. The survey was carried out during September 2004. Rigorous field sampling techniques were used, and the samples analysed in the BGS laboratories at Wallingford. Shallow groundwater was targeted, where the effects of recent land use (within the past 10 years) would be reflected in the samples.

Twenty-one sites were sampled comprising 5 springs and 16 boreholes; all the sites were rural – thirteen were located on dairy farms. None of the boreholes showed any signs of contamination from surface water. Most were located in huts with concrete plinths, others were under manhole covers in fenced areas. The springs were more vulnerable to surface water contamination.

The median concentration of nitrate from the 21 samples was 33 mg NO₃ L⁻¹. Six samples had concentrations greater than 50 mg NO₃ L⁻¹, a further 3 sites had concentrations between 40 and 50 mg NO₃ L⁻¹. All sites with concentrations greater than 40 mg NO₃ L⁻¹ are located on dairy farms. There is broad agreement between nitrate concentrations measured in this survey and a previous survey in August 2002.

This current survey indicates much higher nitrate concentrations than monitored by SEPA from their 12 monitoring sites in Nithsdale. This is due to the nature of the sampled sources. The SEPA monitoring network in the area comprises deep boreholes in the Permian bedrock; age dating has shown that much of the water sampled is pre-1950s. In contrast, much of the groundwater sampled during the current survey is young – recharged within the past decade. By making corrections for the dilution factor from the older water at the SEPA sites, it is possible to estimate nitrate concentrations in the recently recharged groundwater. These corrected concentrations are considerably higher, and consistent with those measured from the shallow groundwater sources in this current survey.

In the light of this present survey, it is recommended that SEPA review the monitoring network in the Lower Nithsdale. Several shallow sources, which contain a high proportion of modern water, and are regularly pumped, should be adopted, and data from the existing deep sources should be interpreted in the context of the age of the groundwater sampled.

1 Introduction

The British Geological Survey was commissioned by the Scottish Executive to undertake a rapid sampling of groundwater sources within the Nithsdale nitrate vulnerable zone (NVZ). The purpose of the survey was to assess concentrations of nitrate in groundwater, and to compare with earlier surveys of groundwater nitrate concentrations. The sampling was carried out during the second week of September 2004. This report presents the results of the survey.

The Lower Nithsdale NVZ was designated in December 2002. The area covers the land around the Dumfries and Thornhill (see Figure 1). Much of the land in the area is used for pasture, particularly for dairy farming; the NVZ also includes the urban area of Dumfries. Earlier research (MacDonald *et al.* 2000, 2003) had indicated that nitrate concentrations in modern recharging groundwater from the agricultural land around Dumfries had concentrations of nitrate approaching 50 mg NO₃ L⁻¹ (the E.U. standard). Sampling in 2002 had confirmed that nitrate concentrations throughout Lower Nithsdale were elevated, and similar to concentrations in other, previously designated NVZs (Ball and MacDonald 2001, Ball 2002).

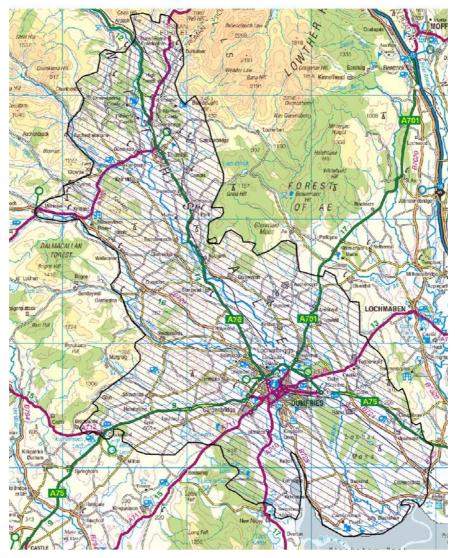


Figure 1 The location of the Lower Nithsdale NVZ, as designated in December 2002.

2 Geological and hydrogeological setting

Much of the area within the Lower Nithsdale catchment is underlain by Permian age sedimentary bedrock. This thick sequence of sandstones and breccias forms one of the most prolific aquifers in Scotland (see Figure 2). Groundwater flow in the sandstones is primarily intergranular (i.e. through the pore spaces between grains) and in the breccias, is through fracture zones. Groundwater within the sandstone and breccia can be greater than 50 years old, and in some places may be several thousands of years old (MacDonald et al. 2003). The Permian sediments are surrounded by much poorer aquifers – Silurian age greywackes and to the southeast, granite. These rocks have little or no intergranular flow and rely on the presence of fractures in their shallow weathered zone for their ability to transmit groundwater. Consequently they have low aquifer productivity. Some Carboniferous aged sandstones are also present in the Nith catchment, most obviously around the Thornhill Permian sandstone in the north. These sandstones form moderately productive aquifers.

The bedrock is overlain by superficial deposits over much of the Lower Nith (see Figure 3). These comprise permeable sands and gravels over much of the lower-lying ground around Dumfries and the River Nith, which were deposited by meltwater from glaciers, or reworked by rivers to form alluvium. These deposits are over 30 m thick in some areas and can form an

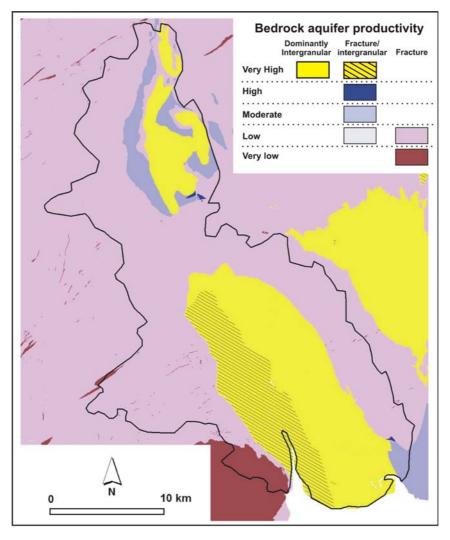


Figure 2 Bedrock aquifer productivity for the Lower Nithsdale NVZ. Aquifer productivity is a measure of how easily groundwater can be abstracted from a certain rock (MacDonald et al. 2004).

important aquifer where the water-table is close to the surface in the valley bottoms. On higher ground, the superficial deposits are much thinner and generally comprise moderate permeability glacial till. Low permeability peat is present in some areas, particularly the low-lying area of Locharmoss to the southeast of Dumfries.

Groundwater is extensively used in the Lower Nithsdale catchment. The high productivity Permian aquifer around Dumfries is extensively used for public water supply, and also for fish farming and industrial supply. Several farms also abstract water for cattle watering. The Permian aquifer around Thornhill is also used for public water supply, but to a lesser extent than around Dumfries. Many farms make use of groundwater throughout the catchment, but particularly in the low lying ground near to the Nith. These sources, which are used for dairy washing and animal watering, often abstract water from the high permeability superficial deposits.

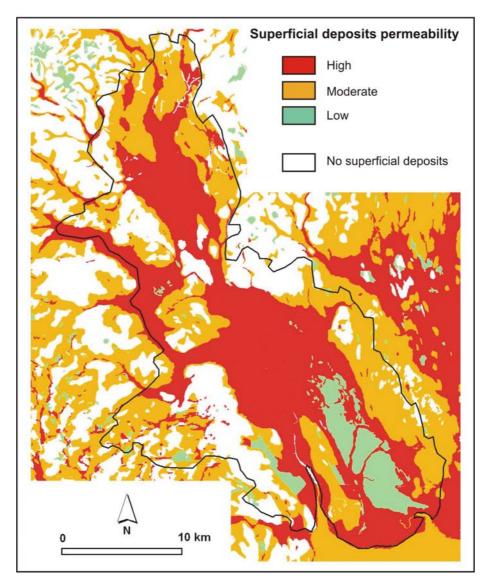


Figure 3 Superficial deposits permeability for the Lower Nithsdale NVZ. Where saturated, high permeability superficial deposits form an important aquifer.

3 Sampling and data

Twenty-one sites were sampled during 6-10 September 2004 using rigorous sampling methods. All boreholes were pumped and the pH and Eh monitored to ensure the chemistry was stable prior to taking a sample. Dissolved oxygen, specific electrical conductance and alkalinity were also determined onsite, and samples taken for a full chemical analysis, and where possible for dissolved CFC concentrations to help with age dating the samples. Chemical analysis underwent routine quality-control checks and calibration against known standards. Charge imbalances for these determinations were in all cases less than 5%.

Table 1 gives a summary of the physical information for each site; the location of each site is shown in Figure 4.

- 1. Five springs, 4 boreholes greater than 40 m deep, and 12 boreholes less than 40 m deep, were sampled.
- 2. None of the borehole sites showed ingress of surface water; most of the boreholes are located in huts with concrete bases. Several are under manhole covers away from pasture.
- 3. Any potential sources of nitrate within 10 m of the source were recorded (see Table 1).
- 4. The springs appeared generally more vulnerable to local effects, but most are fenced around the spring collection tank.
- 5. All sites are located in rural areas thirteen on dairy farms.
- 6. Six of the boreholes sampled groundwater from the Permian sediments; all springs are located in the Silurian greywackes; the remaining 10 sites sampled groundwater mainly derived from the superficial deposits.

Table 2 summarises the major ion chemistry for the samples. The data are also plotted on cumulative frequency plots (Figure 5 and 6) and summarised on a tri linear Piper diagram in Figure 7). The pH of the samples varies from 5.4 to 7.6. Most of the samples were aerobic (i.e. contained significant dissolved oxygen) and were oxidising. Therefore, denitrification of groundwater should not be widely significant. (Site 5 may be an exception where dissolved oxygen is low, and elevated nitrite has been measured).

Groundwater from the three different rocks types: Permian sediments, Silurian greywackes and superficial gravels could be identified by their different chemical composition:

- Permian groundwater is generally Ca-Mg HCO₃ type, the pH is usually greater than 7.0.
- Groundwater from the Silurian springs, although also Ca-Mg-HCO₃ type, is generally less mineralised than the Permian groundwaters. The pH in most samples was less than 7.0.
- The composition of the groundwater from the gravels is more varied (see Figure 7). The pH was significantly less than 7.0, usually less than 6.5.

2004.	
tember	
pled in Set	
d in	
pled	
sam	
of sites s	
of	
mation of	
nfor	
÷Ξ	
'sical	
f phys	2
0	
ummary (
S	
1.	
Table	

₽	Site name	Landuse	Source	Depth	Aquifer	Protection*	Within 10m**	Pumping	Easting	Northing	Sampled 2002
-	Cleuch Head	Upland pasture	Spring	surface	Silurian	ц	۵.	flowing all year	282000	601000	7
2	Bellstane Sawmill Cottage	mixed arable	Spring	surface	Silurian	ш	Wet	flowing all year	283821	599472	≻
с	Byreholm Farm	Dairy farm	Borehole	< 40 m	gravel	н	P, T	pumping all year	285451	594239	≻
4	Waterside Mains	Dairy farm	Borehole	< 40 m	gravel	H, F	A	pumping all year	286444	592673	≻
2	Rosehill Farm	Dairy farm	Borehole	< 40 m	gravel	H, F	P, DSh	pumping all year	288393	592580	≻
9	Kirkland Farm, Thornhill	Dairy farm	Borehole	< 40 m	gravel	н	U	pumping all year	287969	593030	≻
2	Kirkbog farm	Dairy Farm	Borehole	< 40 m	gravel	н	Ъ	pumping all year	287440	593952	≻
œ	Romesboech Farm	Dairy farm	Spring	surface	Silurian	unknown	U	flowing all year	286154	574935	≻
o	Crochmore House	Pasture	Spring	surface	Silurian	Σ	P, T	flowing all year	289316	577738	≻
10	Kerricks farm	Dairy farm	Borehole	< 40 m	gravel	н	Ъ	pumping all year	295873	583552	≻
1	Guillyhill farm	Dairy farm	Borehole	< 40 m	gravel	н	G, Sh	pumping all year	296577	578627	≻
12	Abbey Farm	Dairy farm	Borehole	< 40 m	gravel	н	Ľ	pumping all year	295657	580099	≻
13	Holmhead Farm	Dairy farm	Borehole	< 40 m	Permian	Σ	G, Sh, R	pumping all year	305910	571339	≻
14	Kirkland farm, Terregeles	Dairy farm	Borehole	> 40 m	Permian	н	P, Sh	pumping all year	292985	576993	≻
15	Longbridgemuir farm	Dairy farm	Borehole	> 40 m	Permian	Σ	Si, DSh	pumping all year	306553	569494	≻
16	Bardennoch Farm	Upland pasture	Spring	surface	Silurian	ш	Ъ	flowing all year	277842	591542	≻
17	Manse Rd Observation Bh	Pasture	Borehole	< 40 m	Permian	Σ	P, R	not pumping	293925	576575	≻
18	Locharmoss 1.6	Pasture/Landfill	Borehole	< 40 m	gravel	Σ	Ъ	not pumping	301230	576717	≻
19	Thornhill Golf Course	Golf Course	Borehole	> 40 m	gravel/Permian	Σ	U	summer	289048	596002	z
20	Kettleton treatment works	Pasture	Borehole	> 40 m	Permian	M, F	Si (bagged)	pumping all year	290116	598483	z
21	Tibbers Dairy	Dairy farm	Borehole	< 40 m	Permian	unknown	Wet	pumping all year	286200	596800	z

* F = fence; H = hut; M = manhole cover
 ** P = pasture; T = trough; A = arable; Sh = shed; Dsh = dairy shed; G = garden; Si = silage; R = road

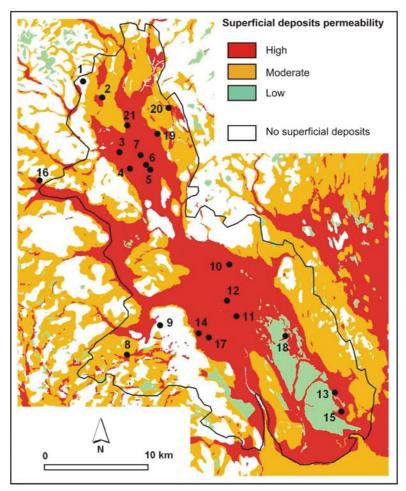


Figure 4 Location of sample points for the September 2004 survey. A summary of the conditions at each site is given in Table 1; the permeability of the superficial deposits is used as a backdrop.

Table 2Summary statistics for groundwater sampled in the Nithsdale	NVZ.
--	------

	Min	5 %ile	25%ile	median	75 %ile	95%ile	max
Ca (mg L ⁻¹)	7.66	9.76	16.1	25.1	50.7	85.3	102
Mg (mg L⁻¹)	3.29	3.68	6.78	9.42	20	22	27.3
Na (mg L ⁻¹)	5.17	5.59	6.83	9.64	12	18.4	25.6
K (mg L ⁻¹)	0.52	0.55	1.42	1.91	2.86	5.51	5.66
HCO₃ (mg L ⁻¹)	12	16	54	67	165	207	283
SO ₄ (mg L ⁻¹)	5.05	5.43	10.2	12.8	16.4	66.9	153
CI (mg L ⁻¹)	5.17	6.94	9.63	14.5	20	31.1	33.3
NO ₃ (mg L ⁻¹)	5.8	6.2	16.4	32.7	51.8	86.3	112.4
рН	5.4	5.6	6.2	6.4	6.8	7.6	7.6
SEC (µS cm ⁻¹ @ 25 °C)	125	134	195	285	458	681	707
Temperature (°C)	9.3	10.4	10.8	11.4	12.9	13.3	13.5
Eh (mV)	341	385	404	442	469	484	505
DO (mg L ⁻¹)	0.81	1.31	2.73	6.13	7.86	10.8	11.19

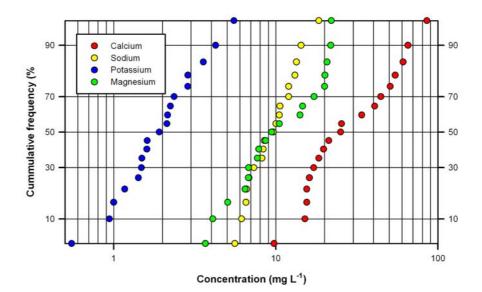


Figure 5 Cumulative frequency diagram for the cations measured in samples from the Nithsdale NVZ. The bimodal distribution of calcium and magnesium illustrates the different chemistry from the samples taken from the Permian aquifer (higher magnesium and calcium) and the gravel aquifers (lower magnesium and calcium).

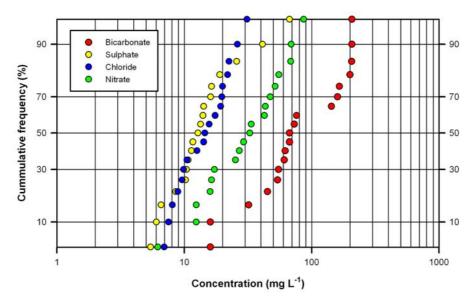


Figure 6 Cumulative frequency diagram for the anions measured in samples from the Nithsdale NVZ. The bimodal distribution of bicarbonate follows that of calcium and magnesium and illustrates the different chemistry from samples taken from the Permian, Silurian and gravels.

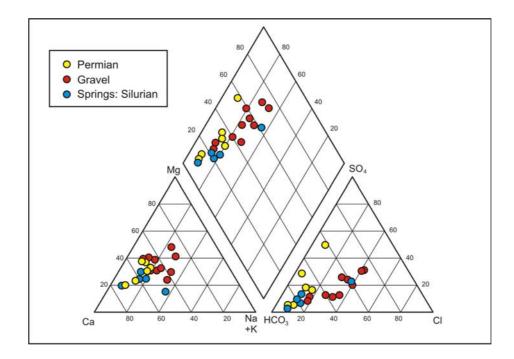


Figure 7 Piper diagram of groundwaters sampled in the Nithsdale NVZ. The sampled Permian and Silurian groundwaters are general Ca-HCO₃ type waters; groundwater in the gravels is more varied.

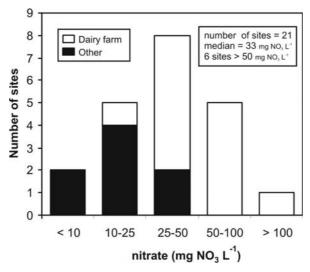


Figure 8 Histogram of the nitrate concentrations measured in the 21 sites sampled in Nithsdale, September 2004.

4 Nitrate data

4.1 NITRATE FROM THE 2004 SAMPLING

The nitrate data for the 21 samples are summarised in Figure 8 and plotted on Figure 9. Elevated concentrations of nitrate have been measured in many of the samples.

- 1. The median concentration of nitrate from the 21 samples is 33 mg $NO_3 L^{-1}$.
- 2. Six samples have concentrations greater than 50 mg NO₃ L^{-1} , a further 3 sites have concentrations between 40 and 50 mg NO₃ L^{-1} .
- 3. All sites with concentrations greater than 40 mg NO₃ L⁻¹ are located on dairy farms (the median concentration of nitrate for the 13 samples taken on dairy farms is 47 mg NO₃ L⁻¹; the median nitrate concentrations of the remaining 8 sites is 16 mg NO₃ L⁻¹).
- 4. At most sites, the samples are believed to be representative of groundwater quality in the vicinity of the sample point. Only the samples from the springs, and in particular site 8, are believed to be at risk from direct surface water contamination.

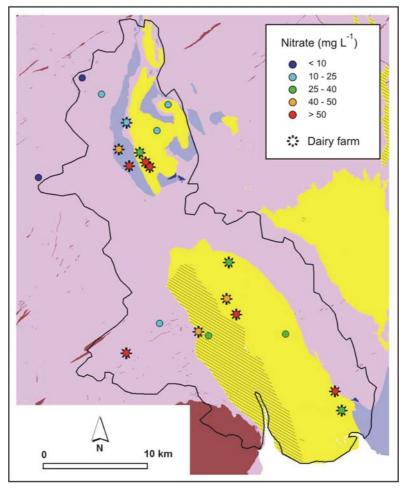


Figure 9 Measured nitrate concentrations in groundwater sampled during September 2004. The bedrock aquifer productivity is used as a backdrop (see Figure 2 for key).

4.2 COMPARING 2004 AND 2002 SAMPLING

Sixteen of the sites sampled in September 2004 had previously been sampled in August 2002 for nitrate concentrations (see Ball 2002 for details). The 2002 sampling methods were less rigorous and analysis of the data had been carried out from unfiltered samples at the SEPA laboratories in East Kilbride. A comparison of the data from the sixteen sites sampled in both 2002 and 2004 is given in Figure 10.

- 1. There is a broad relation between nitrate concentrations measured in August 2002 and September 2004 ($r^2 = 0.8$), excluding site 5.
- 2. In 2004, 6 sites exceeded 50 mg NO₃ L^{-1} , compared to 2002, where 4 sites exceeded 50 mg NO₃ L^{-1}
- 3. Site 5 shows a significant increase in nitrate concentrations from 2002 to 2004. The most likely explanation is a sampling or analysis error in 2002. Ball and MacDonald (2002) demonstrated that nitrate reduction can occur in unfiltered samples if they are not analysed within 24 hours.

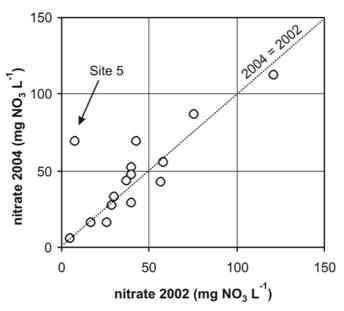


Figure 10 Comparison of nitrate concentrations for sites that were sampled in both September 2004 and August 2002.

4.3 NITRATE DATA FROM THE SEPA NETWORK

Twelve sites are currently monitored by SEPA in the lower Nithsdale NVZ. The details of the sites are given in Table 3, and their locations in Figure 11. These sites are sampled 4 times a year to monitor nitrate concentrations. All of the sites sample groundwater from the Permian bedrock aquifer; eleven of them are from the Dumfries basin.

The measured nitrate concentrations from the network are significantly lower than those from the current survey. No sites exceed the 50 mg NO₃ L^{-1} standard, and none are greater than 40 mg NO₃ L^{-1} .

The discrepancy can be explained by taking into account the age of the groundwater sampled at each site. By measuring the concentration of dissolved CFC gas in the groundwater (see

MacDonald et al. (2003) for an explanation of the technique) it is possible to estimate the proportion of groundwater in the sample that has been recently recharged (i.e. in the past 10 years). Much of the groundwater abstracted from the gravels is from recent recharge, and, therefore, reflects the nitrate leaching from land use over the past decade. However, groundwater abstracted from the Permian bedrock aquifer is considerably older, and has a high proportion of pre-1950s groundwater. This older water contains negligible nitrate and, therefore, dilutes the concentrations of nitrate measured from pumping boreholes.

By measuring the relative proportions of recent and pre-1950s groundwater in samples from the Permian bedrock it is possible to estimate what the nitrate concentrations are in the recently recharged groundwater. Table 3 shows the proportions of recent groundwater in bedrock samples from the SEPA network in the Lower Nithsdale NVZ. Using this information and the measured nitrate concentrations from the sample, an estimate has been given of the likely nitrate concentrations in the recently recharged groundwater (Table 3). These concentrations are much more in line with those measured in the gravel boreholes as part of this current survey.

Thus, there is general agreement between the data from the current survey of shallow groundwater in the Lower Nithsdale NVZ, and data from the SEPA monitoring network, when adjusted to take account of the dilution from the older, pre-1950s water.

ID	Site Name	Grid Reference	Pumping	Average monitored nitrate (mg NO ₃ L ⁻¹)	Proportion of modern water (1990s) with respect to pre-1950 water	Predicted nitrate in modern water (mg NO ₃ L ⁻¹)
а	Cargen Production	NX9616772303	pumping all year	25	45%	56
b	Crichton Bh	NX9783373275	pumping all year	28	no age	data
c	Greenmerse	NX9781370445	pumping all year	8.5	<10%	unsuitable
d	Hardthorn Road	NX9357578096	pumping all year	25	60%	42
e	Ironhirst Moss	NY0496670790	not pumping	<0.5	<10%	unsuitable
f	Kettleton Production	NX9010698674	pumping all year	17	60%	28
g	Larchfield Production	NX9803075093	pumping all year	22	30%	73
h	Longbridgemuir Farm	NY0703368891	not pumping	28.5	30%	95
1	Pleasance Farm	NX9702572314	pumping all year	29	no age	data
j	Pow Bridge	NX9608171320	not pumping	18	no age	data
k	Racks Moss Deep	NY0293672768	not pumping	<0.5	<10%	unsuitable
I	Terregles Fish Farm	NX9292977323	pumping all year	27	70%	39

Table 3 SEPA monitoring sites in the Lower Nithsdale NVZ.
--

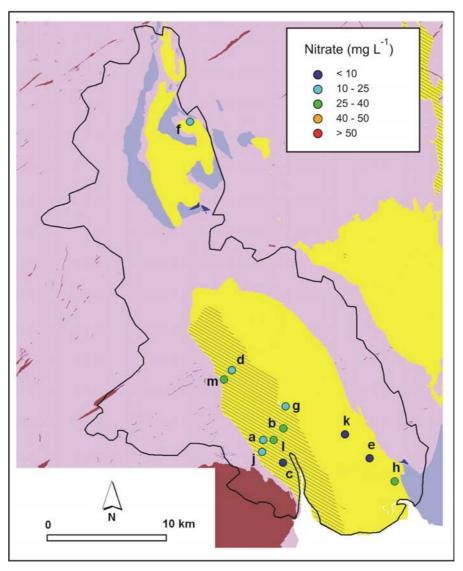


Figure 11Average nitrate concentrations from the SEPA monitoring network. Table 3 has the
details of the individual sites.

5 Summary and recommendations

Nitrate concentrations across the Lower Nithsdale NVZ were sampled during 6-10 September 2004 from 21 sites. The aim of the survey was to get a widespread view of current nitrate concentrations from *shallow* sources, which are generally more representative of current land use practice than deeper sources. Five springs were sampled (all from Silurian bedrock), 4 boreholes greater than 40 m deep and 12 boreholes less than 40 m deep.

- All the sites are rural; thirteen are located on dairy farms.
- 5 sites (all springs) sample groundwater from the Silurian greywackes; six boreholes sample water from the Permian sediments in the Dumfries and Thornhill basins; the remaining 10 boreholes sample groundwater from the superficial gravels.
- Rigorous hydrogeochemical sampling techniques were used to take samples; all the boreholes were pumped and the chemistry monitored to ensure it was stable before taking samples.
- None of the boreholes showed any signs of contamination from surface water. Most are located in huts with concrete plinths, others are under manhole covers in fenced areas. The springs appeared more vulnerable to surface water contamination.
- Samples were sent for major and minor ion analysis; age-dating using CFC concentrations was used at selected sites.

The nitrate concentrations from the 21 sites have been interpreted in the context of the aquifer hydrochemistry and land use.

- 1. Groundwater chemistries in the Permian, Silurian and gravel aquifers are distinctive.
- 2. CFC age dating indicates that groundwater from the gravels is generally modern, much of it recharging in the past 10 years. Groundwater from the Permian bedrock generally has a high proportion (generally more than 50%) of older pre-1950s water (see MacDonald et al. 2003).
- 3. The median concentration of nitrate from the 21 samples is 33 mg NO₃ L⁻¹. Six samples have concentrations greater than 50 mg NO₃ L⁻¹, a further 3 sites have concentrations between 40 and 50 mg NO₃ L⁻¹. All sites with concentrations greater than 40 mg NO₃ L⁻¹ are located on dairy farms.
- 4. There is broad agreement between nitrate concentrations measured in this survey and a previous survey in August 2002, and no indication of a decrease in nitrate concentrations. In 2004, 6 sites exceeded 50 mg NO₃ L⁻¹; in 2002, 4 sites exceeded 50 mg NO₃ L⁻¹.
- 5. The 12 sites monitored by SEPA in the Lower Nithsdale NVZ indicate much lower concentrations of nitrate, with none exceeding 40 mg NO₃ L⁻¹. This is not inconsistent with the current sampling, but can be explained by the age of the groundwater sampled. The 12 SEPA sites are from deep boreholes in the Permian bedrock and contain a high proportion of pre-1950s water. By making corrections for the dilution factor of this older water, nitrate concentrations of recently recharged groundwater can be estimated from the SEPA data. These corrected concentrations are considerably higher, and consistent with those measured from the shallow sources in this current survey.

In the light of this survey, it is recommended that SEPA review the monitoring network in the Lower Nithsdale. Several shallow sources, which contain a high proportion of modern water, and are regularly pumped should be adopted (such as sites 4, 6, 7, 10, or 12). Although not pumping, site 17 could also offer a useful monitoring point. Site 13 could also merit routine monitoring because of its sustained elevated concentrations. Data from the existing network must in future be interpreted in the context of the age of the groundwater sampled.

₽	Site name	temp	Hd	dissolved oxygen	SEC	Ca	Mg	Na	×	HCO ₃	SO_4	ū	NO3	Modern Fraction
	units	°c		mg L ⁻¹	uScm@ 25 C	mg L ⁻¹	-1 mg L	mg L ⁻¹	-1 mg L	% 1990s water relative to pre- 1950s water				
-	Cleuch Head	13.2	6.7	8.0	178	19.7	5.1	7.3	0.5	76.1	10.4	7.52	5.8	
2	Bellstane Sawmill Cottage	12.3	6.4	1.3	195	21.2	6.8	5.6	0.9	73	5.4	6.94	15.9	
З	Byreholm Farm	10.4	6.4	5.7	277	25.4	9.4	10.0	2.2	67	11.7	17.5	42.5	modern
4	Waterside Mains	10.4	6.2	2.3	285	16.1	14.6	12.0	1.9	54	11.4	21.9	55.3	%99
5	Rosehill Farm	11.5	5.9	0.8	331	25.1	14.1	9.6	4.3	45	16.4	26.1	69.0	
9	Kirkland Farm, Thornhill	10.5	5.6	9.5	228	15.5	7.7	10.6	1.4	16	19.0	15.7	51.8	67%
7	Kirkbog farm	12.9	6.0	2.1	195	15.5	6.5	8.4	2.1	32	14.2	14.5	29.2	75%
80	Romesboech Farm	13.3	6.4	7.4	403	33.8	6.8	25.6	5.7	55	25.8	33.3	68.6	
6	Crochmore House	10.9	6.8	7.9	400	60.9	8.6	6.5	1.0	207	6.0	8.9	16.4	
10	Kerricks farm	12.3	6.3	5.0	247	15.1	10.5	13.4	1.5	61	10.2	19.7	32.7	modern
ŧ	Guillyhill farm	11.6	7.1	5.4	458	44.4	20.1	10.5	1.6	143	16.1	20	86.3	70%
12	Abbey Farm	10.9	6.4	1.4	444	40.7	21.8	13.1	1.6	165	13.4	22.4	47.3	56%
13	Holmhead Farm	11.1	6.8	2.7	707	85.3	20.0	18.4	3.6	200	41.1	31.1	112.4	46%
14	Kirkland farm, Terregeles	13.0	7.6	10.8	465	50.7	22.0	8.2	1.5	207	8.6	14.2	43.4	
15	Longbridgemuir farm	11.4	7.4	6.1	681	102.0	17.2	12.0	2.9	160	153.0	19.3	27.0	24%
16	Bardennoch Farm	13.5	6.5	11.2	145	17.1	4.1	5.2	0.6	62	5.1	5.17	6.2	
17	Manse Rd Observation Bh	9.3	7.3	9.3	550	65.3	27.3	8.5	2.4	283	10.7	10.5	33.6	
18	Locharmoss 1.6	10.7	5.4	6.5	125	9.8	3.3	6.2	2.9	12	6.6	8.05	25.2	
19	Thornhill Golf Course		6.1	7.6	134	7.7	3.7	6.8	2.2	16	12.8	12.6	12.4	
20	Kettleton treatment works	13.2	6.5	7.6	201	18.4	7.9	6.6	1.2	67	14.0	9.63	17.3	64%
21	Tibbers Dairy	10.8	7.6	6.0	510	54.5	20.7	14.3	5.5	206	6.99	9.89	12.4	

Appendix 1 Data for the 21 sites

References

Most of the references listed below are held in the Library of the British Geological Survey at Keyworth, Nottingham. Copies of the references may be purchased from the Library subject to the current copyright legislation.

BALL, D F and MACDONALD, A M. 2001. Groundwater nitrate vulnerable zones for Scotland. British Geological Survey Technical Report CR/01/250, 70 pp

BALL, D F and MACDONALD, A M. 2002. Additional groundwater nitrate monitoring sites for Scotland. British Geological Survey Technical Report CR/02/139 31 pp

BALL, D F. 2002. Additional Measurement of Nitrate Concentrations in Groundwater in the Nith catchment. British Geological Survey Internal Report, CR/02/262N. 17pp.

MACDONALD, A M, BALL, D F and DARLING, W G. 2000. The Permian aquifer of Dumfries: groundwater chemistry and age. British Geological Survey Technical Report WD/00/24.

MACDONALD, A M, DARLING, W G, BALL, D F and OSTER, H. 2003. Identifying trends in groundwater quality using residence time indicators: an example from the Dumfries basin Scotland Hydrogeology Journal 11: 504-517

MACDONALD, A M, BALL, D F and Ó DOCHARTAIGH, B É. 2004. A GIS of aquifer productivity in Scotland: explanatory notes. British Geological Survey Technical Report CR/04/047N 21pp