

Location

The dales sub type is found around Alston in the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and at Mallerstang and Low Dovengill near the Yorkshire Dales National Park. This type meets the criteria for National Park designation at Mallerstang and Low Dovengill and is being considered for designation in 2010/11.

Key Characteristics

- Distinctive, wide V-form upland valley
- Angular limestone scarps and steep slopes
- Dominated by rough pasture bounded by stone walls
- Steeper slopes are covered in bracken and scrub
- Woodlands are found along river banks
- Dispersed farms, small traditional villages and rural roads are the main built features

Physical character

The geology of these areas is varied. At Alston Moor a stepped profile has formed along the valley sides from alternating bands of mudstone, sandstone and limestone of the Yoredale series with drumlin features along the valley bottoms. Elsewhere Carboniferous Limestone is overlain by glacial till. These river dales are located in fells and scarps landscapes ranging from 225m up to 400m high.

The upland valleys generally have a distinctive wide V-form, defined by steep slopes from adjacent fells. These culminate in open skylines. In some places there are angular limestone scarps, narrow gorge features and small terraces forming a stepped profile along the slope sides. In other places the valleys widen and open out. The main rivers or becks are fed by numerous side ghylls which are often deeply incised.

International and regionally important geological sites are found around Nenthead.

Land cover and land use

Land cover is dominated by rough pasture, with many of the steeper slopes being covered with bracken and scrub. Tree cover is mainly confined to small woodlands along riverbanks, stream sides and ghylls. However there are some small copses and small plantations elsewhere. Large-scale afforestation is limited to the higher valley sides near Alston.

The grazing land covering the valley bottom is usually divided into small square fields by stone walls. In places the fields are more elongated and divided by a long series of walls separating the lower fields from the higher rougher grazing commons. Hay meadows are common in the lower areas. The fields often increase in size up the valley sides with some isolated 'intakes' found even higher still. Stone field barns are dotted about the valley. Old trees stand alone, follow walls or are clustered near buildings.

Settlements are generally only found in the dales at Alston Moor, where they are sited close to bridging points along the rivers. These are mostly associated with early mines or mining and small tips and mine buildings are distinctive features that have modified the dales valleys. Dispersed farmsteads in limestone vernacular are found along the valley bottoms, with isolated barns (often derelict) dotted about the fields.

Roads are rural in character and tend to hug the valley bottom or lower sides. In Mallerstang the Settle to Carlisle railway forms an unexpected but discrete feature.

Ecology

These high river valleys support narrow bands of upland oak woodland and occasional areas of wet woodland, together with rush pastures, hay meadows and calamarian grassland linked to the lead mines. The

roadside verges provide an important wildlife habitat in these dales, supporting broad swathes of species-rich grassland and tall herb vegetation, characterised by meadowsweet, wood crane's-bill and around Alston, melancholy thistle. The rivers support otter, dipper and in the Alston area are noted for the flora and invertebrate fauna of their shingle banks which include rare helleborines and water voles. This mosaic of habitats in the Tyne and Nent valleys provides the main black grouse stronghold in Cumbria. Statutory designations include Alston Shingle Banks SSSI.

Historic and cultural character

The dales are generally characterised by a dispersed settlement pattern with irregular fields featuring surviving ring garths and evidence of intacks as well as isolated field barns. The fields are generally enclosed with dry stone walls and the buildings are limestone built. Alston has medieval origins and there are many traditional buildings of seventeenth and 18th century date. Outside of Alston bastles are a characteristic feature of the rural buildings. Archaeological features include medieval defensible structures such as Pendragon Castle, evidence of quarrying, lime burning and coal and lead mining including surviving binsteads. The increased industrialisation linked with the exploitation of minerals and the traditional farming heritage has led to farmer/miner landscapes. Culturally the landscape was developed as small holdings with mining being carried out as a part-time activity.

Nenthead is rich in mining heritage, regarded as the most important single site associated with the lead mining in the north Pennines. The mining dates back from Roman times where lead was smelted to extract silver content. The Quaker London Lead Company built the village of Nenthead in the 1830's.

Perceptual character

In higher parts there is a large landscape feel with wide expansive views over the adjacent moorland. In the lower parts a smaller scale valley landscape prevails. This landscape can provide a feeling of enclosure, openness or remoteness depending on height and location. At higher levels changes in the seasons and weather can

accentuate the remote feeling. The lower parts of the valley are tranquil due to a lack of modern development and a sense of naturalness from the hay meadows, birdlife and river. Relics of former mining activity provide a link to history and expose the geology of the area. Stone walls provide a strong unifying element. Seasonal changes bring colourful additions to the low lying pasture and hay meadows and the higher bracken covered slopes.

Sensitive characteristics or features

Open and expansive uninterrupted views along the valley bottoms and rims are sensitive to unsympathetically sited and scaled development. Undeveloped skylines are sensitive to large scale infrastructure development. The deciduous ghyll woodlands, the tight matrix of stone walls that contain lower level pasture and the contrasting open moor are sensitive to changes in land management. The small scale vernacular towns, villages, farms and field barns are sensitive to expansion and redevelopment to non agricultural uses. The open moorlands and more enclosed valley bottoms are sensitive to additional large scale plantations. Discrete rural roads curve along valley sides and over moorland tops and are sensitive to urban style highway improvements and safety measures. The rich mining heritage and archaeological features are sensitive to changes in land management.

Vision

Conservation and restoration will be the priority in these dales which are designated and/or highly valued landscapes.

The well managed and traditional landscape pattern will be fostered and features such as stone walls, barns, trees, woods and hay meadows will be retained and kept in good condition. Farming support schemes will be targeted towards these aims and some forms of farm diversification will be accepted to aid in maintaining this traditional landscape pattern; in addition, small-scale farm based tourism developments supplementing farm incomes will be encouraged. However, new farm buildings will be strictly controlled, carefully and sited and sympathetically designed to avoid intrusion into the landscape. Small-scale broadleaved or mixed plantation will be introduced to make a positive

contribution to the landscape and in the northern Pennines a strategy will be developed for the conservation of landscapes modified by early mining remains.

Changes in the Landscape

Over the next 10 – 20 years this landscape could be subject to the following changes or issues:

Climate Change

- Changes in approaches to flood risk management could provide an opportunity for some floodplain areas to become wetter in future.

Management Practices

- Agricultural intensification including grassland improvement, loss of traditional hay meadows and new farm sheds.
- Symptoms of neglect including derelict walls and field barns, replacement of walls and hedges by fences, old woodlands and trees.
- The need to provide more renewable energy sources could result in an interest for large scale wind energy development and small scale hydro electric schemes.
- Diversification to tourism and forestry.
- Environmentally sensitive farming initiatives (Pennine Dales ESA) are beginning to have an effect in these areas.
- Small scale potential for further mineral working in the Pennine dales.

Access and Recreation

- Public rights of way provide a network of routes that enable quiet appreciation and enjoyment of the countryside. Ongoing maintenance is needed to support this network in the future.
- Current farm stewardship grants provide the opportunity to develop more public access in the countryside. Future grant or other programmes may continue to support this.

Guidelines

Climate Change

- Opportunities should be taken to create new areas of wetland in response to changes in flood risk management.

Natural Features

- Manage, conserve or recreate species rich hay meadows. This may involve sensitively timed light grazing and late cutting to allow seeding, prevention of ploughing, cultivation, herbicide and fertiliser applications and re-seeding with an appropriate diverse mixture.
- Conserve the pattern of small woods and scattered trees by appropriate management, natural regeneration, restocking and exclusion of stock.
- Plant new field boundary trees to replace maturing stock using indigenous species.
- Protect gill sides from livestock to encourage development of diverse ground flora and beck-side trees by natural regeneration or restocking.
- Avoid new tree planting in areas of hay meadow.
- Conserve and enhance semi-natural habitats in relation to Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP).
- Protect and enhance marshes, wet meadows and pasture, off-stream ponds, reedbeds, willow and alder, carr and bank side trees. This may involve for example, sensitively timed light grazing, maintenance of water levels, protection from livestock or control of invasive vegetation.

Cultural Features

- Conserve and maintain the historic field pattern which is a key element in the dales.
- Encourage the restoration of gappy hedgerows using traditional methods.
- Restore stone walls and replace wire fences where possible.
- Conserve and maintain historic structures such as field barns, farmhouses, mining structures and lime kilns. This may include protection from stock, removal of trees or scrub and carrying out structural repairs with archaeological advice.
- Conserve important spoil heaps and other earthworks.

Development

- Ameliorate existing daleside coniferous plantations including softening geometric outlines, introduction of open spaces and greater diversity of species.
- Ensure that new farm buildings and all other developments are carefully integrated into the landscape.
- Resist the proliferation of minor intrusions such as fences, enlarged vehicular access points and

tracks. Where these are absolutely necessary encourage locally distinctive constructions and use of materials that harmonise with the local landscape characteristics.

- Large scale wind energy schemes will be strongly resisted in national landscape designations as they would cause significant harm to the landscape character and the purposes of designation.
- Hydro electric schemes should be sited and designed to be discrete elements in the landscape and not harm nature conservation interests.
- Minimise surface scarring, clutter and dereliction of existing mineral workings.

Access and Recreation

- Public rights of way should be well maintained and quiet recreational areas and facilities should be improved and developed to be compatible with the rural character of this sub type.
- Seek opportunities to enhance access to farmland through farm stewardship or other schemes.

