

Sub type 13b

Moorland, High Plateau

Location

This landscape sub type is found along the western side of the North Pennines and to the east of Kendal. A small area of this type to the east of Kendal meets the criteria for National Park designation and is being considered for designation in 2010/11.

Key Characteristics

- Fells, summits and moorland plateau
- Incised by deep valleys and ghylls
- Extensive areas of blanket bog
- Acid grassland and dwarf heath shrub provide contrast to bog
- Valley slopes have varied land cover

Physical character

This area is predominantly Carboniferous limestone which forms an extensive area of upland moorlands. Much of the moorland is plateau-like with numerous deep valleys and ghylls. There are several high fells and summits that are generally over 500m, rising to around 900m at places like Cross Fell. The summits in the west central section are the highest in the Pennine chain and dominate the adjacent scarp.

Land cover and land use

The majority of the area is covered in blanket bog and is interspersed with a mosaic of other vegetation. To the north dry dwarf shrub heath dominates, in the centre fen, marsh and swamp features abound. On the lower valley slopes limestone and acid grassland can be found. Where heather survives, managed grouse moors are a rare feature; otherwise the majority of the area is used for extensive sheep grazing with some ponies and hill cattle. The area is largely devoid of tree cover.

A major civil aircraft radar installation at Great Dunn Fell is the only intrusive man made feature which is visible from a wide area.

Ecology

These high Pennine moorlands are of international importance for their extensive blanket bogs and the breeding populations of moorland birds they support, including species such as golden plover, dunlin and hen harrier. These moors also support areas of upland heathland and acid grassland, together with limestone grasslands, species-rich springs and flushes with rare species such as marsh saxifrage, spring gentian and alpine forget-me-not. Several of the summits support montane heath communities and a range of rock and scree vegetation is present. On former lead mines, the spoil often supports a unique lead tolerant flora including alpine penny-wort and spring sandwort. Along the moorland edge there are large areas of rough pasture, including expanses of rush pasture. These moorland edges provide important habitat for black grouse. Further north, Geltsdale and Glendue SSSI is noted for its upland bird communities and moorland vegetation.

Historic and cultural character

This remains an unenclosed area, with no settlements or field systems and little of archaeological interest. Nineteenth century grouse pits occasionally feature in some areas. The southern part of the landscape contains extensive areas of common land including Ousby, Dutton and Murton fells, Stainmore, Winton and Kaber fells. Large parts of these commons are included within Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Perceptual character

This landscape has a strong feeling of remoteness due to the lack of settlement and development. Its sweeping topography provides wide expansive views and uninterrupted skylines providing a sense of wildness. Changes in weather can reinforce the feeling of wildness, especially on stormy and unsettled days. In contrast on still, dry days there can be a feeling of tranquility.

Sensitive features or characteristics

Extensive areas of blanket bog interspersed by heather, fen, marsh and swamp are ecologically sensitive to some changes in land management. Grouse moors are a rare feature also sensitive to changes in land management. Wide, expansive views within the Pennines and almost total lack of man made structures and uninterrupted skylines are sensitive to vertical structures and other large scale development.

Vision

The remote and diverse qualities of these upland landscapes will be conserved and enhanced. The heath and species rich acidic grassland, natural features and habitats are all key features within this landscape and will be conserved and enhanced to improve landscape interest and ecological diversity. Sympathetic management of moorland areas will be re-established, grips will be blocked and natural processes will be left to develop where possible to retain the remote wild qualities. The remaining areas of semi-natural woodland will be conserved and enhanced while further coniferous planting on open moorland and slopes will be discouraged. With regard to recreation and tourism, improved facilities for low key activities in selected locations will be provided offering good accessibility, protection of sensitive habitats and minimal intrusion on the landscape. The open, unspoilt, uncluttered and wild qualities and characteristics of these landscapes will be conserved through resisting intrusive development which may impinge on these unique features; this could include vertical energy developments such as large scale wind turbines or pylons.

Changes in the Landscape

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

Climate Change

- Blanket bog has a high carbon sequestration potential. Good condition bog can help mitigate against adverse effects of climate change. Management practices might need to change to improve the condition of blanket bog and enhance its carbon sequestration potential.
- This area is heavily influenced by natural erosion processes. These could intensify with increased rainfall and extreme weather events. Land cover and management practices could be changed to make the landscape more robust to effects of climate change.

Management Practices

- A fragile farming system subject to changing markets.
- Over intensive grazing and agricultural improvement leading to loss of moorland and heathland vegetation and limestone grassland to the detriment of wildlife.
- There could be further interest in afforestation if farming becomes more marginal and incentives are provided for short rotation forestry in the future.
- An increase in moorland tracks for shooting activities has been seen in the North Pennines. These can sometimes create visually intrusive features and affect peatland conservation.
- Sound grouse management can contribute to the landscape character. Well managed peat burning can form part of the management regime. However some burning practices could damage the hydrological integrity of the peat and its vegetative cover.

Development

- Energy infrastructure developments and associated vertical structures such as, communication masts, pylons, large scale wind turbines or overhead transmission or telephone lines, and associated transport infrastructure could harm the open, undeveloped and wild character of the landscape.
- The further intensification of training at the Warcop Training Area could introduce incongruous features and threaten the remote, unspoiled character
- Small scale mining or quarrying has continued in a few places. Any further development could have major implications on landscape character particularly if scarp slopes are affected

Access and Recreation

- Public rights of way and areas of open access land 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.

Guidelines

Natural Features

- Regenerate suppressed heather through detailed management programmes including reduction of stocking levels, control of bracken, phased cutting and burning in accordance with Natural England's Heather and Grass Burning Code.
- Encourage joint measures for the sustainable management of common land.
- Maintain and enhance areas of semi-natural acidic grassland and heath to enhance biological diversity including reduction in stocking levels.
- Maintain limestone grassland through appropriate grazing regimes.
- Restore allotment grasslands by ditch blocking, reducing grazing levels etc.
- Strongly discourage further agricultural improvement including ploughing, reseeding, application of fertiliser, liming or herbicide treatment.
- Maintain and enhance blanket bog through appropriate management including lowering stocking levels, ditch blocking and reviewing any burning practices.
- Maintain other fell wetland including flushes, small tarns and bog pools by discouraging inappropriate drainage schemes, preventing over/under grazing or poaching by stock and by controlling scrub encroachment.

Cultural Features

- Manage and create 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 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.

- Encourage the removal of eyesores and derelict sites of no historic interest. Conserve important spoil heaps and other earthworks.
- Encourage the conservation and repair of boundary walls to fields or large allotments where significant in historic or landscape terms (This applies mainly in 13A).
- The erection of fencing on open moorland is normally to be avoided.

Development

- Avoid development in remote, open, prominent and exposed areas that would degrade the landscape character. Particular developments that could cause harm include telecommunications masts, pylons, large scale wind turbines, and overhead transmission lines and telephone lines. Domestic scale wind turbines may be accommodated if visually and functionally related to and in proportion with existing used buildings.
- Resist major developments such as minerals or those involving permanent built structures including roads, embankments or dams.

Access and Recreation

- Improvements to the Pennine Way and other footpath or bridleway networks should be encouraged, including the laying of flags where necessary, better waymarking, improved gates and gaps and improved interpretation. All such work should use natural materials that harmonise with the landscape.
- Provision of sensitively designed small scale parking facilities for cars and buses in appropriate locations.
- Interpret the landscape, history and wildlife of the area and thus promote its care and conservation. Provide safety advice to those wishing to walk in remote areas, explore caves or old mines.