

CORNWALL AND ISLES OF SCILLY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER STUDY



Landscape Character Area Description

LCA - Camel and Allen Valleys

LCA No

CA33

JCA

Constituent LDUs

Total 15: 51, 192, 204U, 205U, 206, 207U, 208, 237, 238, 251, 252, 307, 357, 358, 360



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Location Area running north and west of Bodmin following the river systems.

Designations LDU 208 and 358 are partly within the AONB; no WHS; 6 LDUs have SSSIs- 237, 238, 251, 307, 357, 358 ; 11LDUs have SMs and 1 has aCGS.

Description

The area is defined by the Camel and Allen valleys which cut through the undulating plateau. The River Camel and its tributaries are a designated SAC. The valleys are intimate and wooded, especially the Camel with coniferous and mixed woodland including Upland Oakwoods with sessile oak and Upland Mixed Ashwoods. The Allen valley has broadleaved woodland. The plateau tops are open and are dominated by estate farms with a mix of improved pasture and arable land within a medium scale field pattern of prominent Cornish hedges with few trees. The sloping lands to the south of the Camel where there is a considerably greater proportion of Recently Enclosed Land have a stronger field pattern with many hedgerow trees. Settlement is clustered in small villages on higher ground with distinctive churches. Bodmin is the main settlement with major roads radiating from it. The Beacon is an important landscape feature which the town wraps around. There is evidence of industrial archaeology in the Camel valley including mills and weirs. The area is generally hemmed in by higher land to the east (Bodmin Moor) to the north (Delabole ridge) and to the south. The plateau reaches 140mAOD to the north and south and is gently undulating. The landform is a strong determinant of landscape character in this overall area.

Key Landscape Characteristics

Undulating plateau with valleys, steeply incised in places such as the Camel valley.

Valleys well wooded, especially the Camel, with estate plantations, coniferous in places and mixed woodlands.

On the plateau, exposed higher land with medium scale fields and straight Cornish hedge boundaries with few trees.

In the valleys, smaller scale fields with sinuous boundaries and wetlands in places. On sloping land to the south, medium scale fields with prominent Cornish hedges and hedgerow trees.

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Settlement is in dispersed clusters with estate farms on the plateau and small farms elsewhere. Some nucleated settlements focused on medieval churchtowns.

Village churches are landmarks on the higher ground.

Scatter of substantial later prehistoric hillforts and enclosures.

Mills, weirs and other industrial archaeology in Camel valley.

The main urban settlement of Bodmin.

Geology and soils

The geology consists of bands from south to north of Lower Devonian sandstones, siltstones and slates; Middle and Undifferentiated Devonian slates, greywackes and siltstones; Upper and Middle Devonian slates with some pillow lava which define the courses of the Camel and Allen rivers; and Upper Devonian slates. The soils are shallow hard rock soils.

Topography and drainage

The topography is defined by the River Camel and its tributaries, most notably the River Allen to the north. These create incised valleys, steep in parts, cut into the plateau to the north and sloping land to the south. The course of the Camel River is unusual in that it changes its direction of flow from south-west round to north-west, close to Bodmin town, to continue towards Wadebridge and out through the Camel Estuary to the Atlantic. This change of course is likely to have been the result of river capture, the Camel River previously flowing south to the Fowey. The Allen is the smaller of the two rivers, being a tributary of the Camel, forming a confluence south-east of Wadebridge. Its source is located in the Delabole Ridge, whereas the River Camel begins further north in Hendraburnick Downs. Many of the Camel's tributary valleys flow from the fringe of Bodmin Moor joining the Camel on its eastern side. Although both valleys are incised, the steep sides of the Camel valley are more pronounced along its entire length, whereas the incised nature of the Allen Valley becomes less defined as the land drops away towards the basin of the River Amble.

Biodiversity

The farmed area is primarily improved grassland with some arable and small areas of neutral grassland. The Landscape Character Area has a large proportion of broadleaved woodland in the valleys, following the river courses, much of it replanted or semi-natural Ancient Woodland, with, in places, planted conifers. Some of this is Upland Oakwood, with Upland Mixed Ashwoods, and Wet Woodland with alder and willow along the valley bottoms. These woodlands link to areas of scrub, bracken and wetland, and in the upper reaches of the rivers and their tributaries, small areas of Fens, Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pastures and Lowland Heathland as at Retire Common SSSI and Rosenannon Downs SSSI. Some of these habitats fall within the River Camel and tributaries SAC. In the more sheltered areas, Cornish hedges have many mature trees and scrubby growth forming an important linking network of ecological corridors to the woodlands in the valleys.

Land Cover

The majority of the area is improved grassland/pasture with some arable, mainly on higher ground to the east and west of the Allen valley. Most of the land is medieval enclosure with some post medieval enclosure. The Camel valley is covered with large areas of coniferous and mixed woodland while the valley bottoms elsewhere tend to be broadleaved woodland. Small areas of neutral grassland, bracken and scrub are found on the steep slopes of the valleys. Bodmin forms a large settlement.

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Land Use

The main land use is improved pasture grazing/grassland with arable on the better drained areas. There are significant areas of coniferous plantations and also some woodland. Tourism is a minor use with a few caravan/camping sites. The main urban development is at Bodmin.

Field and woodland pattern

The steep sides of the valleys have a high incidence of woodland, including extensive areas of ancient woodland, which include oak, ash, hazel and some alder, particularly in the lower reaches of the Camel; for example, South Dunmere, Outland and East Woods. Elsewhere, ancient woodlands occur in smaller blocks such as near Lamellen in the Allen Valley. A significant amount of native broadleaved woodland has been removed from the Camel valley and replaced with coniferous plantations giving similar landscape characteristics to those of the River Fowey east of Bodmin town and of rivers in the Caradon area. The presence of sycamore in woodland suggests a decline of management in more recent years. Between the areas of woodland and along the floors of the valleys and floodplain are small irregular fields containing pasture. These fields comprise a pattern of medieval enclosed land, and form a patchwork with meadows and river wetland. Trees in hedgerows are very common and contribute to the overall enclosed, intimate and sheltered nature of this landscape. Dominant species include beech, oak, ash, and sycamore, with alder along the rivers. North of the Camel is a well preserved medieval landscape of Anciently Enclosed Land, and contains improved and ley pasture with significant patches of arable. Cornish hedges have visible stone facing and tree cover is sparse. To the south the field pattern is medium and tends to be regular with straight boundaries indicative of Recently Enclosed Land and the Cornish hedge and hedgerow boundaries are strong and well established here with hedgerow trees. The fringes of Bodmin Moor to the east at Cardinham Downs are Recently Enclosed Land, with open medium sized fields with few trees and without hedges on vegetated banks. This becomes less defined as the land drops away on its western side towards the basin of the River Amble in the adjacent Landscape Character Area (LCA 34 Camel Estuary.)

Settlement pattern

The settlement pattern is clustered with estate farms to the north and small farms to the south. The largest settlement is Bodmin. Formerly the county town, it is located prominently to the south east. It wraps around the lower slopes of a north-facing hillside leaving the highest point as grassland on which the Beacon Monument stands out as a prominent landmark. Bodmin was an early medieval Christian settlement which had become a town by the 11th century but was re-established as a planned settlement in the 12th-13th century. It is located on or close to a number of important historic communication routes. Other settlements tend to occur on higher ground above valleys but avoiding the highest points. These include churchtowns such as St Teath, Helland, St Mabyn and St Tudy. Churches stand out as landmarks along the horizon in higher areas. New development on the edge of these more exposed settlements can be prominent. Lanivet is the only village to the south. A dispersed pattern of farmsteads occurs in this landscape and quite often at river crossing points in the valleys there are small clusters of buildings, including old mill buildings as at Hingham Mill. Estates and associated parklands are apparent although the houses are fairly discreetly located. Materials include granite and slate to the south of the Camel. To the north, stone and slate is common.

Transport pattern

Major roads crisscross this area radiating from Bodmin but tend to avoid the Camel valley. The busy dualled A30 runs east of Bodmin cutting through the landscape in sweeping curves. The A39 runs both through the Allen Valley, where it is enveloped in broadleaved woodland and on the more exposed plateau tops, allowing wide views, as with the B3266. The A389 running west from Bodmin traverses a varied wooded landscape. The smaller lanes are often enclosed by the high and robust slate walls and hedges. Particularly where the lanes take steep descents into the valleys, the routes are cut into the slate

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bedrock. Oak and hazel commonly overhang these lanes. The Camel Trail, a cyclepath, runs down the river valley from Bodmin towards the estuary and is popular with visitors.

Historic features

This LCA is notable for a number of substantial and important late prehistoric hillforts, including Castle Canyke, Pencarrow Rounds, Dunmere Wood, Helsbury and Killibury; the remains of one of only two Roman military forts known in Cornwall are at Nanstallon. Bodmin retains significant elements of its medieval topography and presents visible remains of its important post-medieval role as county town - the Shire Hall, gaol, barracks and asylum. The nineteenth-century obelisk on the Beacon is a landmark over a wide area. The preserved Bodmin and Wenford Railway incorporates parts of a former Great Western Railway branch line and the Bodmin and Wadebridge line; remains of the former North Cornwall railway survive in the Allen Valley. Pencarrow House is eighteenth century with nineteenth-century grounds included on the register of historic parks and gardens.

Condition

Generally the agricultural land is in good condition; broadleaved woodlands are in poor condition in parts; settlement is sprawling east of Rock. Electricity pylons run through the Allen valley and are prominent. Some of the upper reaches of the Rivers Camel and Allen catchment are within adjacent LCAs, which could impact on the ecological sensitivity of the SAC.

Pressures

- Lack of broadleaved woodland management.
 - Expansion of settlements.
 - Road improvements.
 - Tourism developments related to the Camel Trail and other trails.
 - Equine related development.
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Aesthetic and sensory

This is a landscape of contrasts. The valley bottoms, particularly of the Camel, are well wooded and enclosed with intimate vistas and tranquil Landscape Character. The plateau tops to the north are open with long views, pasture and arable land and exposed settlements. To the south the sloping landscape is finer grain with more trees and pleasant vistas.

Distinctive features

The most distinctive features are the steep valleys and rivers of the Camel and Allen and their associated woodland, wetland and enclosed pastures. These are enjoyed by cyclists on the Camel Trail. The granite of the buildings and the character of Bodmin is also distinctive as is Bodmin Beacon where the nineteenth-century obelisk on the Beacon is a landmark over a wide area.

Visions and objectives

Conserve and enhance the broadleaved woodlands in the valleys, the valley floor wetlands and the strong Cornish hedges and hedgerows whilst controlling development strictly in rural/semi-rural areas.

Planning and Land Management Guidelines

- Manage the broadleaved woodland to maintain landscape character.
 - Replace coniferous planting with broadleaved over time.
 - Conserve and enhance the Cornish hedges and hedgerows encouraging trees.
 - Manage the valley floor wetlands for biodiversity.
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Encourage appropriate planting around settlements which are expanding and are in exposed locations.

Protect and enhance the Beacon area in Bodmin.

Support the continued management of the Camel Trail.