

Area of LDU within AONB: 379.9 hectares

% of LDU within AONB: 100%



Date surveyed: 3 March 2010

Survey points: SS218183, SS217185, SS250194, SS249191

Summary of landscape character

A branching combe system located in the south of the AONB, stretching north-east from the coast at Welcombe Mouth as a series of valley fingers of varying length. Under a mixed pattern of land use, oak woodland is predominant and lends many parts of the combe an enclosed wooded character, though large areas of pasture and rough scrubby ground also occur on both the floodplain and slopes. With a road running alongside the stream in the west, access elsewhere is limited and levels of tranquillity are generally high.

LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION

LANDFORM / TOPOGRAPHY

Landform description	A branching combe system with generally steep slopes. In the west near the coast slopes are steeper and the floodplain wider, a trend that reverses slightly as valleys of varying length branch east, with very narrow valley bottoms and more gentle slopes along the main branch further east.
-----------------------------	---

LAND USE AND PATTERNS

Agriculture	<i>Main agricultural land use</i>		<i>Other agricultural land use(s)</i>	
		Pasture	One or two arable fields on the upper slopes of the central eastern combe.	
Field patterns and boundaries	<i>Field patterns and origins</i>		<i>Size (note variations)</i>	<i>Boundary type / description</i>
	A very varied field pattern across the upper combe slopes, with some regular post-medieval patterns (especially in the far east), some noticeable curving		Fields are generally medium or large, though occasionally small and	Often Devon hedgebanks with patchy hedges or outgrown hedgerow trees, or enclosed

	boundaries of medieval strip-field enclosures north-west of Henaford, and modern enclosures along the central combe branch. Rough open ground dominates the west, while valley bottom pasture fields represent both medieval and post-medieval enclosure.	irregular where they encroach onto upper slopes in the west.	amongst woodland.
Other land uses (e.g. recreation)	N/A		

WOODLAND AND SEMI-NATURAL HABITATS

Trees / woodland cover	<i>Size and distribution within landscape</i>	<i>Type and species(broadleaved / conifer)</i>
	Woodland predominantly occurs as a sinuous interlinked block along the course of the combe streams, often expanding up either the northern or the southern slope with large un-wooded areas opposite. In the west, the north-western slope in particular is devoid of woodland.	Predominantly oak-dominated broadleaved woodland, with two areas of ancient semi-natural woodland in the large central combe (Putshole Wood in the centre, and Lutsford Wood in the east). Shrub woodland dominates the northern combe branch and also occurs in the south-west.
Semi-natural habitats	<i>Description and location within landscape</i>	
	A mosaic of unimproved neutral grassland, broadleaved woodland and scrub occurs throughout the area, with BAP priority habitats including lowland mixed deciduous woodland, wet woodland, lowland meadows, and purple moor-grass and rush pasture (i.e. Culm grassland). Large areas are covered by Country Wildlife Site designation, including Strawberry Water in the west, two mixed areas in the centre of the combe branches, and Meddon Cross in the far east (designated for its Culm grassland). The Marsland to Clovelley Coast SAC & SSSI extends into the western edge of the combe.	

SETTLEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Settlement pattern	<i>Settlement size, type, density and relationship to landscape</i>
	Settlement is largely absent and confined to the road running up the western valley, with a dispersed collection of houses along the more open floodplain in the west (around Strawberry Water). Cranham Mill lies in the centre of the LDU, with a few dwellings in the north-west leading up to South Hole Farm. Also unique hillside chalets occur in the valley west of Darracott.
Transport pattern (including Public Rights of Way)	<i>Road pattern, character and relationship to settlement / landscape</i>
	A winding rural road runs along the valley bottoms of the western and the south-western combes, with steep lanes running up/down slopes to

	Welcombe and Mead in the south. The road is cut into the slope-bottom, and is especially distinctive in the south-west with deeply-sunken fern-covered banks. Access is generally restricted within the combe, limited to vehicular access and a footpath in the west, and a bridleway crossing the central combe limb in the east.		
Local vernacular styles and materials	<i>Predominant traditional building materials</i>	<i>Any local variations</i>	<i>Other built features reflecting vernacular</i>
	Whitewash walls with grey slate roofs and red-brick or white-render chimney stacks.	Red tile roof e.g. roadside cottage north of Strawberry Water, and some exposed brickwork, plus red-brick or painted wood window frames.	Old stone bridge e.g. south of Welcombe
Modern development styles / materials	Creamy-yellow render walls occur on modern houses/renovations in the area.		
HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT			
Key historic features visible in the landscape	<i>Description</i>		
	N/A		
VIEWS / PERCEPTUAL QUALITIES			
Views	<i>Key views / landmark features</i>	<i>Intervisibility with LDUs</i>	
		<i>From this LDU</i>	<i>To this LDU</i>
	Views from the road are largely confined given the predominance of woodland, though glimpses of the gorse/scrub-covered slopes are afforded through trees in the west and to pasture fields along the floodplain, as well as views out to the coast.	694 (coast - west) 684 (to the north) 405 (to the south) 686 (to the east)	694 684 405 686
Perceptual qualities (description)	Perceptions of tranquillity are high throughout the majority of the area (especially in the east away from vehicular access). Contrasts between enclosure and openness are provided by the varying nature of land cover.		

LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS

Designation	Number	% of LDU land area that is within the AONB
NATURE CONSERVATION		
SAC	2	3.43%
SSSI	2	3.43%
County Wildlife Sites	6	25.47%

UK BAP PRIORITY HABITATS

UK BAP Priority Habitat	Area (ha)	% of LDU land area that is within the AONB
Lowland heathland	12	3.16%
Maritime cliff and slope	11.76	3.09%
Purple moor grass and rush pasture	6.18	1.63%
Upland oakwoods	9.9	2.61%

KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING LANDSCAPE CONDITION

Perceptual qualities	Levels of tranquillity are generally high and unaffected by development, though opportunities to experience this are restricted by the limited access provision.
Views	Views are predominantly from the road (due to limited access), and are often restricted by woodland. The landform allows views along the open pasture floodplain (with views to settlement) and to the coast/open slopes in the west.
Land use	Large areas of pastoral farmland have been retained amongst the woodland, with some evidence of recent change along plateau boundaries (see below).
Field patterns	Field patterns are varied, with ancient patterns retained in places (e.g. north-west of Henaford), whilst some fields of modern enclosure are found along the upper slopes of the central and northern combe branches.
Field boundaries	Field boundaries vary, and are gappy in places with hedgebanks lacking hedges e.g. in the east.
Trees and woodland	Large areas of woodland are covered by County Wildlife Site designations, along with a small block of ancient woodland, suggesting a generally high ecological value and favourable management.
Semi-natural habitats	Woodland is predominantly interlinked and occurs in mosaic with other habitats e.g. large areas of scrub/grassland in the west and smaller patches of Culm grassland in the east (which may benefit from expansion/re-linking). Rhododendron is encroaching on the hillside opposite Watergap, whilst elsewhere hillside pasture is scrubbing over.
Settlement and development	Settlement pattern is predominantly historic with few incursions (excluding local electricity wires along the floodplain).
Local vernacular	Modern styles are found on several of the hillside chalets (e.g. green corrugated bungalows).