

Type 10

Sandstone Ridge



This landscape consists of a sandstone ridge running north from Penrith breaking off into a series of hills north of Lazonby.

This open, large-scale landscape has a varied character including improved farmland, conifer plantation and unimproved heathland. Open expansive views are present both toward and away from the Lake District National Park.

Location

This landscape consists of a sandstone ridge running from Cotehill to Whinfell, south of Penrith.

Key Characteristics

- Prominent north south ridge
- Improved pasture with a mosaic field pattern
- Conifer plantation blocks and mixed woodland punctuate farm and heathland
- Significant areas of improved heathland
- Open, expansive long distance views

Physical character

The ridge of Permo Triassic sandstone is overlain by fluvial glacial deposits and has some scientifically important sandstone exposures. The ridge forms a distinctive landform with a number of hill and fell summits. These vary in height from 100-300m AOD. The southern part of the ridge including Beacon Hill and Lazonby Fell is most pronounced and Whinfell forms an outlier to the south of Penrith. North of Lazonby Fell it breaks into a series of isolated hills. Here the ridge is partly intersected by the Eden Gorge which forms a dramatic feature on the east side.

Land cover and land use

Land cover is dominated by improved farmland along the lower parts of the ridge with large blocks of conifer plantations and mixed deciduous woodlands on the middle and upper parts of the ridge. These are interspersed along the length of the ridge hill and fell summits by significant areas of unimproved heathland.

The pasture fields are generally regular in shape and medium to large in scale. They are often bounded by hedges, particularly in the northern part of the ridge, or stone walls which are more common in the southern part of the ridge. The strong field boundaries form a geometric mosaic around the large scale plantations or areas of open heathland. The type generally lacks clear 'historic' field patterns and in recent years farming out

by 'open range' methods has resulted in a neglect of some field boundaries.

The deciduous woodlands provide contrast and sometimes soften the edges of the more angular, large scale coniferous plantations. Woodland shelterbelts can form linear features across the ridges which reinforce the geometric patterning of the fields.

Roads run along and across the ridge between the summits. These are straight and wide and are often enclosed by tree belts of hawthorn, rowan and birch and species rich hedges. These connect isolated farmsteads and dwellings which usually nestle in dips and hollows away from the ridge tops. Some farmsteads have new uncharacteristic farm entrances and large-scale modern farm buildings. Otherwise settlement is limited.

Other development includes a small number of telecommunications masts located in prominent ridge top locations, with pylons running more discretely across the ridge along dips between the summits.

Ecology

This ridge supports the main areas of lowland heathland in Cumbria on Wanfell and Lazonby Fell. Whilst most of the conifer plantations are of limited ecological interest, those found to the south of Penrith support a range of uncommon plants associated with native Scot's pine woodland, including northern bilberry, creeping lady's tresses and common wintergreen. These also provide a resource for red squirrels. A basin mire supporting a range of uncommon and rare mire species, including lesser tussock sedge is also present on the southern end of the ridge. Rush pasture is occasionally present. At the northern end of the ridge a series of ponds and wetlands formed by mineral extraction support a range of swamp and fen communities.

Historic and cultural character

Settlement is sparse but mainly nucleated. Buildings are of sandstone. The field pattern is regular and of 19th century origin. The area was historically sparsely populated and was formerly used as medieval hunting preserves, either as forest or deer park. However

most of these characteristics have been lost to modern plantations and field enclosures.

Perceptual character

This is a large scale, open landscape with a mixture of open and rough areas with colourful patches of heather and smoother managed pastoral fields. Tree lined roads provide a feeling of enclosure in places. Seasonal changes can accentuate the colour and contrasts between the heathland, woodland and managed fields. There are large and expansive uninterrupted long distance views over the Petteril valley to the Lake District and the Eden Valley towards the North Pennines. The ridge is particularly prominent from the M6 corridor to the west from where it provides a mainly afforested skyline.

Sensitive characteristics or features

The summit and ridge top areas of heathland and geometric mosaic of fields and boundaries and woodland shelterbelts are sensitive to changes in land management and large scale infrastructure development. The strong road enclosure from woodlands and hedges is sensitive to improvements to highway safety and access to new development. Discretely sited small scale vernacular settlements are sensitive to unsympathetic expansion.

Vision

The important features of this landscape will be enhanced and restored. Forests will be managed in this visually prominent landscape to create a more natural character, softening the edges of coniferous plantation with deciduous species. The remaining areas of open ridge will be conserved and cluttering with vertical structures will be resisted. Stone walls and hedgerows within farmland, remnant sandstone heath and semi-natural acidic grassland will be conserved, expanded and restored. Wetlands will be conserved and re-created along with other natural features enriching the visual and wildlife diversity.

Changes in the Landscape

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

Climate Change

- There could be increased interest in the planting of energy crops to support renewable energy generation. Energy crops could include miscanthus, short rotation coppice (usually willow) or short rotation forestry of fast growing tree species to provide biomass for electricity production and heat. Large scale planting or planting in sensitive locations could change the character of this landscape. Opportunities could also arise to bring woodland into better management to support the biomass and wood fuel markets.
- Farming practices could change if temperatures rise and it is more effective to grow arable crops.

Management Practices

- Agricultural improvements have led to an increase in the number of native cattle, but the loss or neglect of hedgerows and walls and wetland habitats.
- There could be future pressures for arable intensification to help with food security and an increase in popularity for community farming and allotment schemes.
- There has been a loss of considerable areas of dry heathland to afforestation in the past.

Development

- Telecommunications masts have been erected on some prominent ridge tops without harming the overall character of the landscape. However, as the higher parts of the landscape is open and is likely to have good wind speeds, interest in wind energy is likely to increase in response to changes in technology and the Government's commitment to renewable energy provision.
- The nearby M6 corridor could have the potential to attract new large scale commercial development. Improvements to surfacing, lighting and information systems along the motorway could affect its appearance and people's awareness of it in adjacent landscapes such as this.
- Pressure for sand extraction could lead to loss of boundaries and affect the character of the landscape.

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.
- The Oasis holiday complex at Whinfell, though generally inconspicuous, could possibly create localised recreational pressures, particularly if expanded.

Guidelines

Climate Change

- Encourage biomass planting of a scale that respects the local characteristics. Edges to forestry or coppicing should respect existing field boundaries and be designed to reflect the general grain of the land.

Natural Features

- Recreate and enhance wetland including flushes, small tarns and marshy hollows. This may include preventing drainage improvements and blocking existing drains to maintain high water levels, preventing overgrazing and poaching by stock, controlling scrub encroachment.
- Encourage regeneration of suppressed heather through management programmes including reduction of stocking levels, control of bracken, phased cutting and burning.
- Encourage management of semi-natural acidic grassland to enhance biological diversity including controlled light grazing, control of bracken and rushes.
- Strongly discourage further agricultural improvement including ploughing, reseeding, application of fertiliser, liming or herbicide treatment.
- Encourage the re-creation of heath or rough grassland on land which has been 'improved' to pasture to strengthen the continuity of semi-natural land cover. This may involve cultivation to expose peat soils, spreading heather cuttings with ripe seed from nearby moorland and initially excluding stock.
- Encourage opportunities to return areas of commercial forestry land back to heathland and moorland.
- Integrate single species coniferous plantations into the landscape by softening geometric outlines, introducing open spaces, diversifying species and identifying suitable broadleaved species for long term retention.

Cultural Features

- Discourage introduction of fences to replace or 'gap up' hedges.
- Restore fenced boundaries to traditional hedgerows.
- Encourage retention and traditional management of hedgerows.
- Encourage retention and restoration of traditional stone walls.
- Encourage the appropriate use of local sandstone to help maintain local distinctiveness.

Development

- Avoid developments in exposed skyline locations and ensure developments respect the ridgeline. This is particularly important regarding the introduction of tall and vertical structures such as pylons, large scale wind turbines or additional telecommunication masts.
- Retain the rural character of the M6 corridor by resisting large scale commercial development and ensuring new motorway infrastructure such as information signs and necessary lighting is sited to minimise adverse effects on open parts of the landscape. Noise pollution should be mitigated against through careful selection of surface materials.
- Ensure that farming related or other development is discretely located and designed to complement the landscape character.

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 pastoral character of this sub type.
- Seek opportunities to enhance access to farmland through farm stewardship or other schemes.
- Promote and enhance existing recreation routes by improving waymarking, providing appropriate surfacing, gates and gaps and interpretation.
- Support measures to improve the availability of public access to woodlands and forests and that incorporate discrete facilities such as car parking.
- Support better management of routes and rights of way in close proximity to the Oasis complex at Whinfell to limit any adverse changes to landscape character.