

CORNWALL AND ISLES OF SCILLY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER STUDY



Landscape Character Area Description

LCA - Penwith Central Hills

LCA No

CA03

JCA

Constituent LDUs

Total 8: 136, 139, 141, 274, 275, 276, 281, 282



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Location This area is the central core to the far west of the Cornish peninsula.

Designations AONB covers majority of the area [LDUs 139, 274, 275, 278, 282]; Heritage Coast; LDUs 276 and 282 have WHS; LDU 276 has SSSI; 4 LDUs have SMs and 1 LDU has a CGS.

Description

This area is the central core of the windswept granite peninsula to the far west of Cornwall. An arc of bare rounded hills with prominent rocky outcrops wrap around the area with steep slopes to the adjacent coastal strip to the north. (LCA02 West Penwith- North and West Coastal Strip) On the south side, valleys run south-eastwards with parallel ridges, gradually softening, and these define the settlement and road pattern of the area. The impoverished soils of the hills support Lowland Heathland and rough grasses but also accommodate a wealth of prehistoric features including standing stones, barrows, megalithic tombs (quoits), field systems, settlements and hillforts. In the valleys and lower ridges the field pattern is one of small scale sinuous prehistoric enclosure with some areas of post medieval enclosure with Cornish hedges on higher ground. Improved pasture is the main land use with some arable and horticulture on the better soils to the south and east. Woodland occurs in the valley bottoms and is often willow carr to the more open north with sycamore, ash and beech to the south and east. Settlement avoids the exposed moorland and is clustered with small farms in characteristic granite farmsteads with slate roofs. Structures from the tin mining era are prominent on the hills, especially close to St Just and the north coast. There is other evidence of mineral extraction including china clay and stone quarrying.

Key Landscape Characteristics

Core of an exposed, windswept granite peninsula rising to a chain of gently rounded hills with prominent rocky outcrops.

Rugged boulder-strewn moorland of Lowland Heathland, bracken and scrub on the upland areas.

Open landscape with few trees except linear broadleaved woodland in small river valleys, shallow depressions and around farmsteads.

Prominent rocky outcrops.

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Internationally important concentration of archaeological remains from Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages through to the medieval and post-medieval periods, with extensive remains of post-medieval mining.

Historically important, small scale, field pattern with sinuous boundaries, much of it of prehistoric origin. Hedges often drystone, without earth.

Dispersed small granite farmsteads and small nucleated hamlets/villages.

Pasture and rough ground dominate with some arable/horticulture to the south and east.

Highly visible evidence of tin mining, china clay and quarrying.

Extensive views to north and south coast from highest hills.

Geology and soils

The granite intrusion forms the core of the peninsula. Impoverished humic soils on the granite cover the bulk of the area coinciding with the higher moorland and valley areas. Shallow hard rock soils lie on the lower south east facing slopes around Lelant Downs and Ludgvan.

Topography and drainage

An arc of gently rounded hills with rocky outcrops enclose the area from Trencrom Hill [165m AOD] to the east, north to a high point at Watch Croft at 252m AOD and then south west to the viewpoint overlooking Sennen at Chapel Carn Brea [196m AOD]. These hills form an undulating horizon broken by occasional weathered granite outcrops as at Rosewall Hill, Zennor Carn, Carn Galver and Carn Kenidjack. They slope more steeply to the northern coastal strip (CA02) and more gently to the south. The gentler, longer slopes of the south side are drained by valleys running more or less from north west to south east towards Mount's Bay (LCA04). The area emerges as a narrow neck of land on the coast at Carbis Bay.

Biodiversity

The farmed areas are a mixture of improved grassland and arable with Cornish hedges forming a network of ecological corridors in the valleys. Much of the high land along the spine of the LCA is a mixture of Lowland Heathland, forming extensive areas with bracken and scrub, and small areas of wetland with some Fens, Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pastures and Wet Woodland in the valley bottoms. This area links to the narrow strips of broadleaved woodland with some Wet Woodland in the middle reaches of the valleys. In the deeper sections of the valleys, particularly to the south east, there are small areas of Ancient Woodland. Otherwise, there are few trees except hedgerow hawthorns and the characteristic farmstead groups of wind-sculpted pines and sycamore.

Land Cover

Landcover is primarily improved grassland/pasture with some arable land, the amount of which increases towards the southern part of the LCA, reaching about 50% on the south eastern fringe facing Mounts Bay and the Hayle Valley. There are substantial areas of Lowland Heathland, bracken and neutral grassland on the hills. In the lower parts of the valleys, woodland creates a more lush and more intimately scaled landscape.

Land Use

Land use is primarily pastoral agriculture with some arable/horticulture to the south and east. Areas of heath have been broken in for grazing of dairy or beef cattle. The Upland Rough Ground of the moors forms an important part of the traditional farmholdings in West Penwith. Many of the landholdings/tenancies are ribbon-shaped and include coastal heath, rough grazing on the cliffs, pasture

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on the coastal shelf, and rough grazing on the moorland. This interdependence on different but adjoining landscape types goes back to the Bronze Age, and has been carried on to the present day. Examples are: Treen, Treen Cliff, and Treen Common; Tremedda, Tremedda Cliff, and Tremedda Common. An active quarry extracting granite for roadstone at Castle-an-Dinas, near Nancledra, has a considerable visual impact on this area, having broken through the skyline. The associated spoil heaps have affected an expanse of moorland also on the skyline. There is a reservoir at Drift with an associated picnic spot.

Field and woodland pattern

The landscape pattern is irregular and contrasting in scale. On the Anciently-Enclosed Land, sinuous Cornish hedges form an intimate network of small to medium-sized fields that slope up the valley heads to form an edge with the large scale moorland areas of unenclosed Upland Rough Ground. On exposed areas the Cornish hedges are stone-faced and drystone covered in wild flowers in the early summer but have with more lush vegetation to the south. On the higher slopes, larger, rectilinear fields of recently enclosed land derived from former upland rough ground, are distinctive. This new grassland has affected large areas in Zennor and Towednack Parishes in the north-east, Madron and Morvah parishes in the centre, and Sancreed and St Just parishes in the west. Small areas of broadleaved woodland are found along the small valleys and some Ancient Woodland is found in places near Penzance.

Settlement pattern

The higher moorland is virtually without settlement, with the exception of a few scattered post-medieval farmsteads, (often associated with Recently Enclosed Land), and dwellings linked to former mining activity. Other buildings on the upland are predominantly mining related. Generally, it is a dispersed pattern of granite farmsteads and small hamlets on the southern side of the central ridge. Hamlets are situated in sheltered valleys associated with the lanes following the valley bottoms. Madron, Sancreed and Towednack are medieval churchtowns with surrounding areas of historically dispersed settlement. Nancledra and Newbridge are both roadside 'service' settlements (inn, school, smithy, chapel, etc), the former serving the Penzance - St Ives road and nearby mining area, the latter the Penzance - St Just road and surrounding agricultural area. Sancreed, Madron, Nancledra and Newbridge have been the focus for twentieth-century development which has created more nucleated settlements. Halsetown developed as a planned industrial settlement associated with nearby mining activity. Carbis Bay lies within the area but is on the far north east margins and is focused on St Ives Bay. It is a tourism and retirement based settlement climbing the slopes from the bay with a suburban landscape character and caravan sites.

Transport pattern

The road network is defined by the valleys. Most roads run along the ridges or along the valley sides with only relatively minor tracks/lanes crossing the ridges. This pattern becomes less definite towards the south and more major roads cross east west here such as the A3071 to St Just and the A30 to Land's End.

Historic features

This area is exceptionally rich in archaeological features including a Neolithic tor enclosure at Carn Galver, prehistoric and medieval field systems, megalithic chambered tombs such as Lanyon, Chun and Zennor Quoits, stone circles, barrows and cairns and hillforts including Chun Castle, Castle-an-Dinas and Caer Bran. There are well-preserved Iron Age and Roman-period settlements presented to the public at Chysauster and Carn Euny and widespread remains of other prehistoric settlements. Various historic hilltop structures form highly-visible landmarks: Knill's Monument adjoining Steeple Woods near St Ives, Roger's Tower at Castle-an-Dinas, and Greenburrow engine house near Ding Dong. There are extensive remains of post-medieval mining, including derelict engine houses and areas of mining waste, and of streamworking, some of which is probably medieval. There are also several areas of former china clay working. Traces of moorstone working and granite quarrying are also widespread across the moors.

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Condition

The 'breaking in' of some moorland areas led to the amalgamation of small anciently-enclosed field systems, the ripping of podzol soils to improve drainage, the wholesale removal of natural granite boulders and destruction of significant numbers of archaeologically important sites. Heathland and semi-natural grassland communities have been destroyed in the process, and ironically areas are often abandoned again to revert to bracken, gorse and bramble. Where heathlands have been left untouched, encroachment from bracken, gorse or bramble has supplanted the more diverse and finely balanced heath vegetation communities. These activities pre-dated the Environmentally Sensitive Area designation (much of the damage occurring during the 1960s - the early 1980s). The historic value of these areas has been largely removed (although some buried archaeology may survive), grass fields or rough bracken have replaced diverse habitats and the landscape character has been significantly altered and thus the condition is poor. Where the area is covered by the ESA there has been much improvement.

Pressures

- Agricultural intensification poses a continued threat of loss of moorland habitats particularly outside ESA.
- Ending of the ESA scheme will potentially lead to reduced positive management of landscape elements.
- Windfarms and communication masts on sensitive exposed areas.
- CROW Act allowing open access may result in more intense use of moorland and features.
- Rural diversification including tourist facilities.
- Piecemeal development of dwellings.
- Plantations of conifers.
- Invasion of exotics on hills such as rhododendron and turkey oak.

Aesthetic and sensory

This is a wild and unique landscape with the contrast of exposed moorland, granite outcrops and small fields of the upper valleys slopes. From the high points, there are long and wide views to the north and south coasts. The multitude of ancient sites and artefacts combine with the relatively unspoilt rural landscape to create a powerful sense of place which has inspired many local artists.

Distinctive features

The distinctive features of this landscape are the spectacular rocky carns (Carn Galver, Carn Kenidjack, Chapel Carn Brea, Watch Croft, etc) and the rounded outlines of the upland moors. There are also numerous prehistoric structures including quoits, standing stones and forts such as Lanyon Quoit, Men-an-tol, and Chun Castle as well as settlements like Chysauster. Various hilltop structures form particular landmarks; Knill's Monument adjoining Steeple Woods near St Ives, Roger's Tower at Castle-an-Dinas, and Greenburrow engine house near Ding Dong and Madron Carn.

Visions and objectives

A wild and rugged landscape, full of ancient landscape character. That character has been altered especially on the hills by ploughing up the heathland but there has been little alteration in the southern valleys except for the invasion of rhododendron in the woodlands. The objective should be to restore the Lowland Heathland on the hills where feasible and conserve the rest of the area.

Planning and Land Management Guidelines

Encourage infill in existing settlements preparing design guidelines and limit development in the open countryside.

Conserve, enhance and restore the heath and rough grassland on the hills.

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Conserve and enhance the small scale field pattern and the Cornish hedges with their Landscape Characteristic stone faces and cores.

Remove scrub and bracken, and exotic species where appropriate, to maintain diversity of species.

Protect and conserve prehistoric and historic features including below ground archaeology providing interpretation where appropriate.

Promote appropriate levels of grazing and scrub control to increase the visibility of above-ground features and reduce damage to buried archaeology.

Conserve and enhance the mining structures and features with interpretation where appropriate.

Encourage regeneration of woodlands in the sheltered valleys with native species.