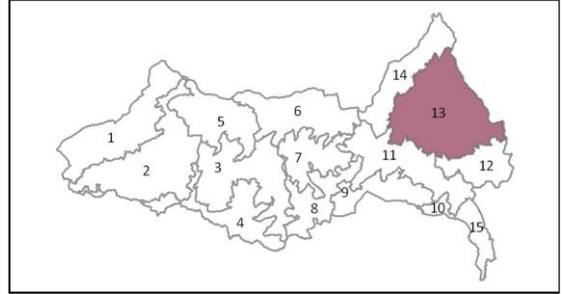


LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA 13: *THE BLACK MOUNTAINS***Broad Landscape Type: *MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS******Description*****Location and Context**

This large LCA includes the highest land associated with the Black Mountains. It is located on the eastern edge of the National Park, and its character extends beyond the National Park boundary into England. To the north is the Wye Valley Foothills LCA, to the west the Eastern Usk Valley LCA and to the south Skirrid and Sugar Loaf LCA.

**Summary Description**

This LCA is largely defined by its topography: a series of broad ridges running north-south and separated by narrow, steep-sided valleys. It contains some of the highest land in the National Park- the summit of Waun Fach is over 800m above sea level. The higher moorlands are empty and remote, contrasting with the more pastoral and settled valleys between them. This is a rich archaeological landscape, with a concentration of surviving prehistoric features on the higher land, as well as the Medieval Llanthony Priory in the Vale of Ewyas. The valleys contain a network of ancient farms, fields, woodland and winding lanes.



View south-west from Twmpa, showing the ridges of the Black Mountains

Historical Development of the Landscape

This landscape has been shaped over several millennia, with features surviving from many phases of human occupation. The earliest monuments are prehistoric cairns and barrows representing an extensive ritual landscape, and there are also early defensive sites including the prominent surviving Iron Age hillforts at Table Mountain. Surviving Medieval landscape features include Llanthony Priory, Cwmyoy church and many of the lanes and farms. The lack of modern development, and the continuation of traditional farming practices of valley pasture and upland common land has enabled the survival of many earlier features.

Distinctive Characteristics

- High ground formed by Senni formation sandstones creating the steep scarp which forms the northern edge of the LCA. Highest land formed by Devonian Brownstones which dip down slightly towards the south. Older mudstones occur in the depths of the Vale of Ewyas and Rhiangoll valley. Plateau Beds form the sloping tableland south from Pen Allt-mawr and a small area of Carboniferous rocks form the upper slopes of Pen Cerrig-calch.
- Distinctive ridged landform with flat tops, and dramatic scarps along the northern face. In long views from the west, the horizontal ridges have a profile similar to breakers on a beach. Landslips such as Cwmyoy create distinctive landforms.
- A series of rocky rivers (fed by tributary streams sourced in upland bogs and streams) draining southwards into the Usk or Monnow along V-shaped valleys. Reservoir at Grwyne Fawr constructed in the early C.20th to supply water to Abertillery.
- Higher land used for open grazing of sheep ponies and some cattle on unenclosed common land. Pastoral farming and forestry in valleys.
- Deciduous woodland limited to valley floors, particularly in south of LCA. Extensive forestry in central part (Mynydd Du Forest) with pockets in other valleys. Field boundaries generally hawthorn hedges enclosing semi-regular fields. Some hedges trimmed (especially in valleys) whilst others grown out, with hedgerow trees.
- Semi-natural Habitats of Principal Importance to Wales including dry modified bog, wet modified bog, blanket bog, bare peat, flushes, acid dry dwarf shrub heath, acid and neutral grassland and broadleaved woodland.
- Numerous prehistoric sites (ritual and defensive) surviving in their landscape context, particularly on higher land. Medieval ecclesiastical sites include Llanthony Priory and Cwmyoy church.
- Very limited settlement within the LCA (scattered farms and hamlets) but visual connections with towns beyond (e.g. Hay-on-Wye & Crickhowell). Roads generally restricted to valley bottoms.
- Upland areas large in scale, appearing empty and spacious, with distinctive flat horizons. Valleys more enclosed and intimate, with more complex patterns and varied textures. Ridges and valleys create a repeating rhythm in the landscape.

Landmap Components (See Appendix 3 for components of all LANDMAP Aspect Areas)

Key Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas	Black Mountains (O); Vale of Grwyney (H); Rhiangoll Valley (H); Mynydd Llangorse (O); Mynydd Du (M); Olchon Valley Ridge (O); Vale of Ewyas (O); Monnow Valley (H); Sugar Loaf scarp slopes (H)
Key to Landmap evaluation criteria: (O) Outstanding: of international importance. (H) High: of regional or county importance. (M) Moderate: of local importance. (L) Low: of little/no importance	

Settlements

This LCA is very lightly settled, with scattered farms and hamlets in valleys, usually constructed of local stone. However, it forms the backdrop and setting for larger settlements; the northern scarp creates a distinctive setting for Hay-on-Wye and other settlements along the Wye valley, and the ridge of Pen Cerrig-calch (and the hillfort at Table Mountain) contribute to the setting of Crickhowell and settlements in the Usk Valley.

Key Views

Panoramic views are obtained from high land over surrounding LCAs and out of the National Park to the north and east. The distinctive northern scarp and long ridges of this LCA contribute to views from a considerable distance away, including from Herefordshire to the east, and from the northern side of the Wye Valley, beyond the National Park. This LCA also contributes to the setting of the Usk Valley, and is visible from many summits and areas of high land within the National Park.

Evaluation**Special Qualities**

The natural beauty and recreational factors that make this landscape special are summarised in the table below, along with examples of their sensitivities to landscape change:

Criteria	Special Qualities for this Landscape Character Area	Sensitivities
Scenic quality and Sense of place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High scenic quality and a strong sense of place, resulting from its elevation, panoramic views, dramatic and distinctive topography, historic sites, and traditional land uses. 	Development within this LCA and surrounding areas affecting views, particularly from higher land.
Landscape quality and integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High landscape quality, enhanced by the contrasts between pastoral agriculture in valleys and the open commons above. 	Decline in traditional hillfarming and grazing affecting the appearance of the landscape.
Perceptual qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A large-scale landscape, with a strong sense of openness and expansiveness on higher ground, particularly when valley bottoms are not visible. Horizons are notably flat and unbroken. In poor weather the landscape is bleak, exposed and disorientating. Extensive commons have a strong sense of tranquillity, remoteness and relative wildness, with very few incongruous features and little noise or disturbance caused by traffic or other detracting influences. Much of the common land is relatively inaccessible by road. Valleys (particularly forested areas) have a much greater sense of enclosure. Although they feel less remote and wild, many have a tranquil feel and few detracting features. 	Introduction of incongruous features, particularly on ridge lines.
Artistic and cultural associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Llanthony Priory visited by 12th century chronicler Gerald of Wales, 19th Century poet Walter Savage Landor, and artist JMW Turner, who made studies and paintings of the Priory. 20th Century designer Eric Gill lived at Capel y Ffin. 	
Rarity or representativeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Important upland habitats (e.g. peat bogs) and opportunities to experience tranquillity, remoteness and relative wildness. 	Changes in land management, e.g. changes in grazing levels affecting the composition of moorland vegetation.
Natural heritage features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numerous nature/ geological conservation designations, including an extensive moorland SSSI. The River Usk tributaries are also designated SAC. Ancient woodland concentrated in the south of the LCA. 	Changes in environmental conditions (e.g. air and water quality) and water retention affecting surface vegetation.

<p>Cultural heritage features</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rich archaeological landscape containing an exceptionally high concentration of Scheduled Monuments (over 40) including numerous prehistoric barrows, cairns, enclosures and hillforts, and also Medieval domestic and ecclesiastical sites (including Llanthony Priory). Several cultural sites (e.g Iron Age hillfort at Table Mountain) are prominent landmarks. Historic park at Tre-wyn partially within this LCA. • Railway and village of up to 450 people constructed in the heart of the LCA 1910-1928 during construction of Grwyne Fawr Reservoir. 	<p>Loss/ damage to archaeological features as a result of natural processes or erosion/ damage by visitors.</p>
<p>Opportunities for landscape enjoyment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good opportunities to access extensive areas of high-quality, remote, tranquil and relatively wild landscape, including open access land, Beacons Way and Offa's Dyke Path (which runs along the eastern boundary of the National Park). Gospel Pass is a popular high-level road with parking areas. The area is particularly popular with less experienced walkers such as Duke of Edinburgh's award groups. Hang gliding at Hay Bluff and Three Wells. 	<p>Too much footfall can result in damage to paths and habitats, and also reduce levels of tranquillity.</p>
<p>Recreation provision and access</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further recreation opportunities at accessible cultural sites including Llanthony Priory and Crug Hywel hillfort on Table Mountain, both with outstanding views. Forestry trails provide active recreation such as mountain cycling, and there are popular picnic sites (e.g. Standing Stone car park) 	

Contribution to Ecosystem Services and Green Infrastructure (refer to sections 4.6 & 4.7 for terminology)

Principal ecosystem services include provisioning through rough grazing and fresh water supply, and regulation and supporting services through deep peat, organic soils and water regulation. Plantations provide timber and wood fuel. In common with the rest of the National Park, this LCA also contributes to cultural services such as spiritual enrichment, cultural heritage, recreation and tourism, and aesthetic experiences. There is potential for electricity generation through high head micro-hydro schemes. Green Infrastructure features include the extensive woodland plantations of the Mynydd Du Forest, Grywyne Fawr Reservoir and rivers. The LCA is popular for a range of recreational and leisure activities.



Hay meadow in Vale of Ewyas



Crug Hywel hillfort ,Crickhowell



Llanthony Priory

Forces for Change in the Landscape

Local Forces for Change and Their Landscape Implications

(See also the general forces for change described in section 6.0)

Past and Present

- Past construction of reservoir at Grwyne Fawr.
- Past extensive forestry plantation at Mynydd Du forest in the centre of the LCA.
- Historic air pollution and acid rain, and ongoing nitrogen deposition caused ecological degradation of upland habitats, particularly peat bogs, affecting biodiversity and water-holding capacity.
- Reduced diversity of moorland vegetation as a result of changing common grazing practices. See section 6.0 for more detail.
- Bracken encroachment on side slopes.
- Loss of traditional hillfarms and economic pressures for farm amalgamation and expansion, resulting in loss of agricultural buildings and changes in agricultural management.
- Forest management/ clearance.
- Footpath erosion on popular and accessible routes (e.g paths near Gospel Pass).
- Damage to hedgebanks along narrow lanes by wide/ passing vehicles, and insensitive signage/ highways works affecting the traditional character of lanes.

Future

- Potential loss of the open landscape and smooth horizons as a result of development (e.g. masts/ turbines) or planting of trees.
- Reduction in woodland management, and in management of traditional valley habitats such as hay meadows.
- Loss of traditional hillfarms, and potential changes to agri-environment schemes affecting management of historic landscape features, grazing patterns and vegetation, e.g. effects and outcomes of the Glastir Common Land Element.
- Management of forestry plantations, particularly if trees are cleared.
- Tree loss due to disease, e.g. *Phytophthora*.
- Loss of archaeological features as a result of damage and natural processes.
- Climate change potentially affecting environmental conditions and upland vegetation.
- Increased visitor pressure affecting upland habitats, archaeological sites and paths.
- Development and road schemes (including outside the National Park) affecting views from high land.
- Positive moorland management schemes improving the condition and variety of upland vegetation.



Coniferous forestry plantation



Footpath erosion (Gospel Pass)



A natural force for change: landslide at Cwmyoy.

Strategy

Overall Strategy

To retain and strengthen the special qualities of both mountains and valleys, protecting their tranquillity, remoteness and the area's distinctive topography of smooth horizontal ridges and steep northern scarp.

The area's valuable upland and valley habitats are well managed, and traditional agricultural methods (such as common grazing) are supported. Archaeological and historic features are protected and managed as appropriately. Visitors are encouraged, but good visitor management minimises damage to paths, habitats and archaeology. The area's long views are protected from visually-intrusive development.

LCA-Specific Management Guidelines

Protect

- Protect the **open character** of the ridges, their **unbroken skylines and qualities of tranquillity, remoteness and relative wildness**.
- Protect the **open moorland landscape** and its valuable **upland habitats**.
- Protect **valley landscapes** and their **traditional features** such as vernacular farm buildings and hay meadows.
- Protect (through appropriate management) the area's **archaeological sites and their settings**, in particular the prehistoric upland sites and medieval valley sites.
- Protect the area's **sparsely-settled character**, ensuring that any new development is carefully sited and designed.
- Protect the area's **network of quiet lanes** enclosed by **species-rich hedgebanks**, ensuring that their character is not lost through unsympathetic highways works or signage.

Manage

- Manage land through encouragement of a **viable farming community**, farming the land in a traditional way which enables the upland and valley landscapes of the area to be retained and enhanced.
- Manage areas of **upland common** through encouragement of appropriate levels of livestock grazing to enhance biodiversity and maintain an open moorland landscape.
- Manage upland **wetland** sites such as blanket bog to increase carbon sequestration and water storage capacity.
- Manage **plantations** to encourage biodiversity and minimise damage to archaeology.
- Manage **ancient woodlands** using traditional techniques to increase age and species diversity.
- Manage **valley-floor meadows** using appropriate grazing and cutting to retain their biodiversity.
- Manage **recreational pressure** (particularly on popular walking routes and at 'honeypot' sites with easy parking) in order to minimise damage to habitats, paths and archaeological features.

Plan

- Plan to **create, extend and link semi-natural habitats** such as heather moorland, broadleaved woodland and valley grasslands.
- Plan to develop a **National Park-wide visitor management strategy** to minimise impacts of visitors on popular sites, and encourage visitors to explore lesser-known parts of the National Park.