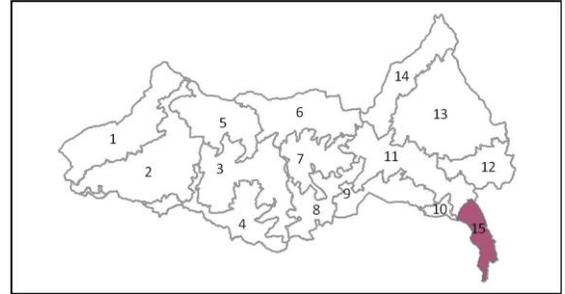


LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA 15: *BLORENGE HILLS AND SLOPES***Broad Landscape Type: *MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS******Description*****Location and Context**

This LCA forms a 'peninsula' of land which extends southwards at the south-east corner of the National Park. Its western boundary is the top of the Blorenges Ridge, and its eastern boundary is the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal. To the north are the Eastern Usk Valley and the Clydach Gorge.

**Summary Description**

The slopes of this LCA have an exceptionally timeless and peaceful quality and a sense of being rarely visited. Scattered farms are linked by deep lanes lined with exposed tree roots and flower-rich banks, whilst the Blorenges moorland ridge provides a contrasting backdrop and sense of orientation. From the ridge there are panoramic views. The landscape has a rich industrial history (particularly apparent at the popular recreation site of Goytre Canal Wharf) and lies partially within the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site.



Blorenges from the south-east

Historical Development of the Landscape

Although today this is a peaceful, agricultural landscape, it has been shaped by both agriculture and industry. The irregular fields and surviving woodland suggest that the fields were created by assarting (clearance of woodland for agriculture), probably in the Medieval period, and it is likely that many of the farms, fields and lanes date from this period. In the 17th-19th centuries, this was also an industrial landscape, connecting the mining and iron production sites in the valley of the Afon Lwyd to the west with the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal to the east. Numerous tracks and tramways survive, as well as the loading wharf at Goytre, and smaller-scale industrial features such as hammer ponds, charcoal hearths and limekilns. Blorenges was used as a grouse moor by the owners of Blaenavon Ironworks.

Distinctive Characteristics

- Old Red Sandstone and mudstones underlie most of the area, with Carboniferous Limestone, Marros Group and South Wales Lower Coal Measures Sandstones forming the plateau areas.
- Highest land of Blorengel in the north-west of the LCA, extending southwards in a craggy ridge along the western boundary of the LCA. Land slopes downwards towards the east, with concave slopes (more pronounced in the north) creating ‘punchbowl’ shapes to the landform.
- Fast-flowing streams (often spring fed) running down from the ridge towards the Usk (to the east of the LCA). Small glaciated cwm lake lying below Blorengel summit. Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal forming the eastern boundary of the LCA.
- Land cover of open moorland on Blorengel summit and ridge tops, with pastoral farmland & pockets of woodland/forestry on lower slopes
- Irregular fields on valley sides (possibly resulting from assarting) enclosed by hedgerows with some stone walls. Some replacement of traditional boundaries with post and wire fences. Moorland unenclosed.
- A well-treed landscape, including a blend of deciduous and coniferous trees in valley-side woodlands, plus hedgerow and riparian trees and tree-lined lanes.
- Semi-Natural Habitats of Principal Importance to Wales including wet and dry dwarf shrub heath, acid grassland, blanket bog, broadleaved woodlands, calcareous grassland and acid/neutral rock exposure.
- Many historic features relating to the area’s agricultural and industrial past, in particular its associations with the Blaenavon iron industry.
- A very lightly-settled landscape, with scattered farms increasing in density towards the east of the LCA. Distinctive domestic building styles more associated with canal architecture than the local vernacular.
- The high plateau of the Blorengel is easily accessible by car (B4246) and the public can enjoy panoramic views from the high car park.
- Contrasts in scale, texture, colour and enclosure between the open moorland and the pattern of woodland and pasture below. Together they create a harmonious composition with strong seasonal changes in colour. Folly prominent on western horizon in south of the LCA.

Landmap Components (See Appendix 3 for components of all LANDMAP aspect areas)

Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas	Blorengel scarp slopes (H); The Blorengel (O); Goytre Lowland (H); Garnclochdy Hills (O); Mynydd Garnclochdy (H); Twyn-Gwyn (M)
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

Settlements within the LCA are limited to scattered farms (reducing in density towards the north and west). Nevertheless there is a locally-distinctive building style influenced by canal architecture. The LCA contributes to the setting of a number of settlements surrounding it (including Abergavenny, Llanfoist, Govilon and Blaenavon) by providing an elevated backdrop which adds to their sense of place.

Key Views

Key views are mostly from higher land, including Blorengel summit and the ridge which forms the western boundary of the LCA. Because of its proximity to the National Park boundary, these panoramic views include land both within and outside the National Park. Within the LCA, the enclosure and deep lanes means that views are often sudden and spectacular. The LCA is prominent in views from outside the National Park, including from the A4092, and the Newport-Abergavenny railway line, from where it is seen as a wooded foreground with the western ridge behind.

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 resulting from the harmonious juxtaposition of moorland, woodland and pasture. Distinctive concave landforms, the Blorenges ridge and long views across the Usk valley create a strong sense of place, enhanced by the bluebell carpets, deep lanes and woodland. 	<p>Negative changes in land management (e.g. replacement of hedgerows with post-and-wire fencing). Introduction of visually-intrusive features into views.</p>
Landscape quality and integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A well-managed landscape of high visual quality, which has retained its integrity and intactness and has few detracting features within it. 	As above
Perceptual qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valley sides are exceptionally peaceful, with a sense of enclosure, timelessness and very few detracting influences. Moorland feels more open and exposed, with longer views over surrounding landscapes. 	As above
Rarity or representativeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant remains of industrial landscapes and features, partially included within the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site. Building styles are distinctive within the National Park. 	Loss of archaeological features such as former tramways through neglect or damage. Insensitive alterations to buildings resulting in a loss of local distinctiveness.
Natural heritage features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High conservation and geological interest, with complex geology resulting in a variety of habitats within a relatively small area. Blorenges is designated an extensive SSSI for its moorland habitats, including peat bogs and is home to the southernmost population of red grouse in Britain. Extensive ancient woodlands with bluebells occur throughout the area, including Coedy-person Beechwoods SSSI. Geological interest includes Llanover Quarry SSSI (site of a wide range of Devonian fossil plant material) and a possible extensive cave complex. 	<p>Loss of upland and woodland habitats due to changes in land management and/ or grazing.</p> <p>Damage to habitats by fly tipping/ illegal fires and other antisocial behaviour.</p>
Cultural heritage features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A rich historic landscape of particular importance for its industrial archaeology, specifically the tramroads, inclines, tunnels 	Archaeology vulnerable to neglect, damage and environmental processes.

	and wharves used to transport products from Afon Lwyd valley to the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal. It contains existing and remnant impounded water bodies (e.g. Keepers Pond), several Scheduled Monuments and numerous other archaeological sites including prehistoric cairns, a holy well, manor house, watermills, hammer ponds, limekins and charcoal hearths. Partially included in the Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest in Wales (Area 16).	Settings to sites may also be affected.
Opportunities for landscape enjoyment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blorenge is open access land, easily accessible from Blaenavon, Govilon and Abergavenny and provides an accessible recreation resource for local communities as well as visitors. Woodland Local Nature Reserve at the Punchbowl. 	Localised 'urban fringe' issues such as off-roading and fly tipping.
Recreation provision and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A relatively dense network of public rights of way (some following historic tramroads) enables access into this high quality landscape. Goytre Wharf is a focus for recreation accessible from the A4092. Air sports (e.g. hang gliding) is popular from the north-east face of the Blorenge. 	Lanes are narrow, steep and unsuitable for large numbers of vehicles. Potential conflicts with pedestrians and/or cyclists.

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

Ecosystem services provided by this landscape include provisioning, regulating and cultural services. Examples include food production from pasture and moorland grazing land, and timber production. 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.

Main Green Infrastructure assets include the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, numerous woodland stands and nature reserves. The Usk Valley Walk follows the canal towpath linking the area to wider Green Infrastructure resources such as the River Usk and Clytha Park.



Blorenge summit moorland and WHS interpretation.



Pastoral scene on valley side



Goytre Canal Wharf

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 planting of coniferous plantations on lower slopes.
- Localised impacts in the landscape reflecting agricultural changes, e.g. replacement of hedges/ walls with post-and-wire fences; introduction of larger agricultural buildings.
- Changes in common grazing practices and management of former grouse moors affecting upland habitats.
- Degredation of peat bogs as a result of pollution, drainage and changes in management.
- Repeated damage to habitats by wildfires and illegal burning.
- Decline in woodland management, and threat of tree loss through disease such as *Phytophthora ramorum*.
- Damage to hedgebanks by wide vehicles or volume of traffic.
- Positive management and increased visitor numbers due to inclusion in the World Heritage Site and the Forgotten Landscapes Project.
- Localised 'urban fringe' issues e.g. off-roading and fly-tipping, particularly in the west of the area.
- Footpath erosion on summit path.
- Loss of locally-distinctive building styles as a result of neglect or insensitive modernisation (e.g. loss of wooden casement windows).
- Past settlement expansion and construction of large buildings outside the National Park which affect views out.
- Past construction of telecommunications masts on Blorenges summit interrupting the smooth skyline.

Future

- Continued agricultural modernisation, and potential changes in agri-environmental schemes affecting grazing levels and the repair of historic features such as hedgebanks.
- Management of coniferous plantations, particularly when trees reach maturity.
- Continued expansion of surrounding settlements affecting views.
- Continued management of the area in association with Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site.
- Climate change affecting upland habitats and woodlands through changes in environmental conditions and species composition.



Hedgerow replaced with post and wire fencing.



Damage to hedgebanks on narrow lanes caused by wide or passing vehicles.



Locally distinctive farmhouse in a poor state of repair

Strategy

Overall Strategy

To retain the area's peaceful character, long views and special qualities whilst celebrating its rich heritage. Farming is supported, with traditional practices such as common grazing and hedgerow maintenance encouraged. Woodland, plantations and upland moorland are well managed, increasing their biodiversity. The heritage of the area is understood, valued and visited by local people and visitors, but without damage to its historic features or undeveloped character.

LCA-Specific Management Guidelines

Protect

- Protect the area's valuable **upland habitats**, particularly heather moorland mosaic and active peat bogs.
- Protect (through appropriate management) the area's rich **archaeological landscape**, including its industrial features.
- Protect the **long views** from the area, including those to land outside the National Park.

Manage

- Manage **archaeological sites and features** with regard to the recommendations of the World Heritage Site Management Plan.
- Manage **farmland**, maintaining traditional landscape features such as hedges, stone walls and flower-rich meadows.
- Manage **woodland and plantations** to increase age and species diversity.
- Manage valuable **wetland sites** such as blanket bog to increase carbon sequestration and water storage capacity.
- Manage **common grazing land** through encouragement of viable grazing regimes and heather management which support traditional hillfarming practices, encourage biodiversity and retain an open moorland landscape.
- Manage **recreational pressure** and urban fringe issues to avoid the damage to sensitive habitats and archaeological features, and minimise any appearance of neglect.

Plan

- Plan to ensure that the World Heritage Site's emphasis on industrial archaeology does not overshadow the importance of other **archaeology** in the area.
- Plan to increase **visitors' awareness** of this part of the National Park and encourage recreational use, whilst ensuring that the area's **peaceful quality and narrow lanes** are not damaged by an increase in traffic e.g. develop cycle/ footpath routes along old tramways.
- Plan for **community education and involvement** in the management of the area.
- Plan for the **creation, extension and linking of semi-natural habitats** such as heather moorland, woodland and species-rich grasslands.
- Plan to **reduce the visual impact of development** beyond the National Park boundary.