

# Yorkshire Southern Pennine Fringe

Character Area

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## Key characteristics

- Eastern slopes of the Pennines, dropping from upland in the west down to the east, dissected by numerous steep-sided valleys.
- Extensive urban influences from the matrix of large and small towns.
- Close conjunction of large-scale industry, urban areas and transport routes with open countryside.
- Predominance of local sandstone and 'gritstone' as a building material notably in large and dominant industrial buildings.
- Urban development mainly confined by valleys creating dramatic interplay of views between settlements and the surrounding hillsides.
- Predominantly pastoral farming with strong linear patterns of walled enclosures on plateaux.
- Predominantly broadleaved woodlands on steep valley sides forming important backdrops to industrialised areas.
- Impression of a well-wooded landscape even though tree cover is relatively sparse overall.
- Dense network of roads, canals and railways.

## Landscape Character

This part of the Pennine Fringe landscape marks the transition from the Pennine uplands to the west to the lower, undulating landscapes of the Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire Coalfield to the east. The most striking aspect of the landscape is the mingling of predominantly 'gritstone' industrial towns and villages with the strong valley forms and pastoral agriculture of the Pennine foothills. The 'gritstone' industrial buildings and settlements bring a sense of visual unity to the landscape.

The upland plateau drops down from west to east and is deeply dissected by a series of rivers, notably the Don, the Calder, the Hebble Brook and the Colne in the north and

the Sheaf, Rivelin and Loxley in the south near Sheffield. These rivers have created a deeply dissected landscape with high plateaux cut by steep-sided valleys. Patterns of settlement have been strongly influenced by this dominant land form, combined with the historical development of the textile industry and other local industries. Mills and factories, and their associated towns and transport routes, have been mainly confined to the valley bottoms and slopes where they have often spread in a linear form. Tall mill chimneys often act as a focal point in each valley while terraces of stone-built houses are packed into the valley bottoms and spread up the hillsides.



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Urban developments, such as Sowerby Bridge, are mainly confined by the landform of valleys and ridges, creating a dramatic interplay of views between settlements and the surrounding hillsides.

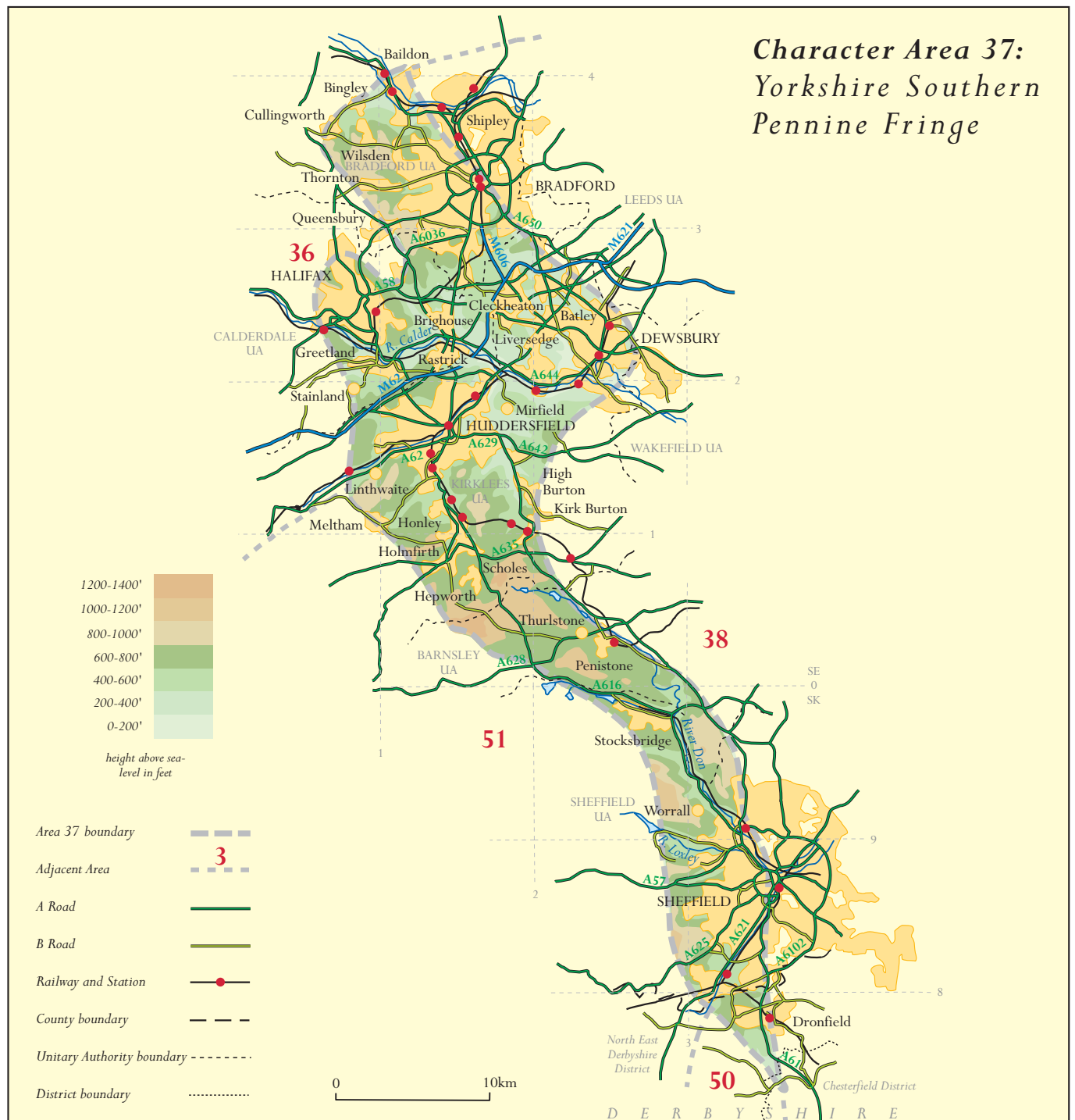
In contrast, the hill plateaux are characterised by tracts of treeless rough grazing on the higher ground, together with extensive areas of enclosed pasture and remnant moorland. Here the industrial towns give way to scattered farmsteads and small hamlets and the landscape has a more remote character even though the towns are never far away. The farmhouses, barns and stone walls are all built of local sandstone and 'gritstone' which again gives unity to these upland areas. On some plateaux, notably around Penistone, there are distinctive patterns of regular rectangular fields delineated by dry stone walls. Farming, consisting of sheep, beef and some dairying, is important in the area.



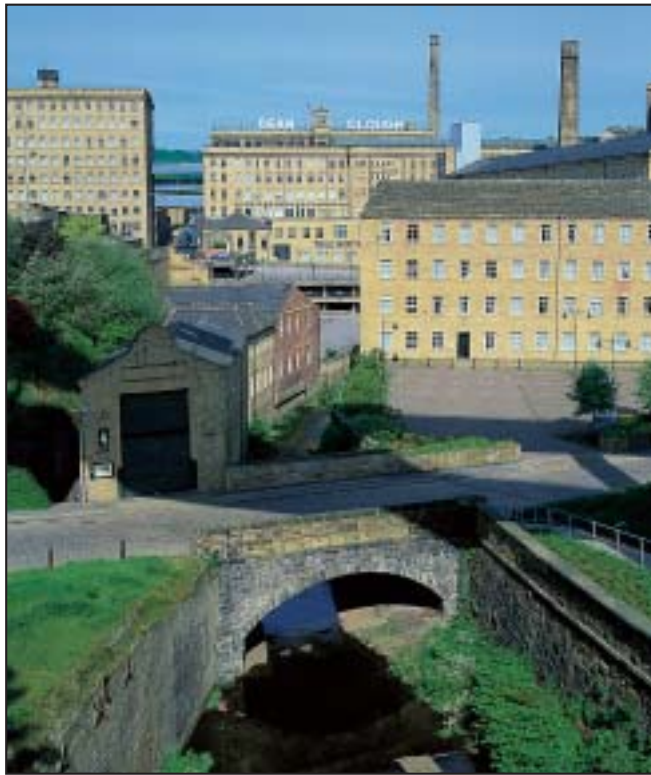
The steep sides of many of the narrow, winding valleys are clothed in mainly broadleaved woodland which forms a prominent visual backdrop to the industrial towns. The pronounced landform, of high plateaux divided by steep-sided valleys, often gives rise to dramatic views. There are long views from the plateaux across valleys to the tightly packed urban areas. From within the towns there are views out to the surrounding hills so that town and country appear inextricably linked. Around Batley, Dewsbury and Cleckheaton, where the Coal Measures occur as outcrops, the hills and valleys are gentler and more rounded, urban development has extended further and has covered the hillsides. Here remnants of open land, fields and woods are encapsulated within the areas of housing and industry.

The impact of development is nearly always evident in the landscape, where the network of roads, railways and canals is prominent and skylines are often topped with pylon lines and communications masts. The landscape contains a wealth of industrial archaeology which contributes significantly to its strong sense of historical character and visual identity.

Although united by common features such as the transitional character, the 'gritstone' influences, the strong dissected landform and the all-pervading effects of an industrial history, the landscape also varies according to the character of the major settlements. In the north this area embraces the traditional West Yorkshire woollen towns, of Halifax, Huddersfield and parts of Bradford, where



imposing local sandstone and ‘gritstone’ mill buildings are often prominent in the landscape. In the south the landscape includes the western fringes of Sheffield where the urban area is dominated by sandstone and ‘gritstone’ Victorian villas as well as large houses and gardens built by the City’s steel magnates. In between, smaller settlements like Penistone and Holmfirth have a distinctly Pennine character, combining the dark ‘gritstone’ buildings with open hills and moorland.



ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGES/MARTIN BOND

Mill buildings associated with the woollen trade dominate many valleys. The carpet mill at Dean Clough in Halifax, once the largest in Europe, has now been converted for a mixture of business, retail, warehousing, workshop and gallery uses. The sensitive reuse of buildings such as these can make an important contribution to conserving the character of this landscape.

### Physical Influences

This landscape is underlain by Carboniferous strata. Most notable are the hard coarse-grained sandstone beds (‘gritstones’) interbedded with softer siltstones and mudstones of the Millstone Grit which here dips to the East where it is overlain by the beds of sandstone, siltstone and mudstone of the Coal Measures. The smooth hills and plateaux formed by the Millstone Grit are dissected by fast-flowing rivers and streams to form deep, narrow valleys. Except for the vicinity of Bradford, the area occurs to the south of the southern limit of the ice-sheet during the last glaciation and lacks glacial deposits.

The Millstone Grit supports extensive but poorly drained pasture land which is prominent in the west of the area and has traditionally been a source of grindstones and building stone. Coal Measures sandstones, notably the Elland Flags,

provides the highest quality of building stone and this was extensively used during the rapid growth of the large conurbations of Bradford, Halifax and Huddersfield. These products, along with the plentiful streams and local resources of ironstone and coal, have fuelled the long history of industrial development, based on wool, textiles, cutlery and steel, which has been such a major influence.

### Historical and Cultural Influences

There is some remaining evidence of Bronze Age and Roman habitation on the undeveloped higher land to the west but, more significant, are the old packhorse trading routes across the Pennine hills which once linked settlements lying to the east and west. These have, by and large, evolved into today’s modern road routes.

The woollen industry has been the main influence on the landscape in much of the area since the 12th century. It arose because of the suitability of the land for sheep rearing, combined with the numerous water courses running off the Millstone Grit which provided abundant supplies of soft water. This was suitable for many of the processes involved in the preparation of the wool as well as supporting other processes in the textile industry and also provided a source of power. The woollen industry grew up initially as a home industry, in small settlements on the plateaux, with small intakes of land enclosed to support subsistence farming for the woollen trade workers. By contrast later planned enclosures, dating from the 19th century, resulted in larger, regular, rectangular fields on the plateaux enclosed by stone walls and forming strong patterns in the landscape.

In the area to the west of Sheffield, fast-flowing streams and reserves of iron led to the development of small-scale smelting works along the valleys. This was the start of the steel and cutlery industry which became so important to the City.

As demand for products increased, water power was increasingly utilised and large-scale industrial processes were developed. The preparation and weaving of wool moved into factories, located by larger rivers on the valley floors, and a similar process occurred in the cutlery industry. For both industries, however, it was the use of coal that led to the most significant changes. At first small ironstone reserves and shallow coal mines on the side slopes of the Pennines were exploited but, as they were exhausted, mines were extended into the deeper richer veins to the east and the small-scale works in the west closed down. The use of coal to drive machinery led to massive increases in the scale of industrial activity. There was mass migration of people into the industrialised valleys and an extensive programme of building - mills, factories and housing - took place as well as the creation of transport

routes to serve them. This transformed the area between 1750 and 1850 and established the pattern of urbanisation which is so characteristic of the landscape today.

Large quarries were opened up to supply building stone for both local use and for export and some are still a notable feature of the hillsides, particularly around Halifax. Transport of materials in bulk became necessary and, in the late 18th and 19th centuries, canals were constructed to supply raw materials, take away the goods produced by the burgeoning industries, and supply the needs of the rapidly increasing urban populations. Access to canals, and later to railways, both of which were similarly restricted to the shallow gradients of the valley bottoms, affected the location of new development and reinforced the pattern of linear valley settlements.

Today only Stocksbridge continues to be focused on one of the traditional industries, namely steelmaking. Elsewhere new service and light industries are moving in and replacing the traditional industries which shaped the landscape.



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Much land is down to permanent pasture used for sheep rearing and for cattle, including dairying. Fields around Thornton are generally bounded by dry stone walls. However hedges become more prominent in the lower, eastern parts of the character area.

### Buildings and Settlement

Vernacular architecture dating from the period before the main wave of industrial development still survives in some places such as the villages of Norland, Lindley and Slaithwaite. Some of the 17th and 18th century vernacular architecture of cottages and farmsteads still remains and many weavers' houses, from as far back as the 16th century, can still be identified with their large windows, to maximise the light, on the first floor. Later whole terraces, three stories high, were built in the towns and the top floors, with characteristic wide windows, were devoted to weaving.

Most settlements were, however, overtaken by the extensive building programme of mills, factories, municipal buildings and housing which occurred as industry flourished and coal took over as the main source of power. The local Millstone Grit and Coal Measures sandstones were widely

used for all the building, creating the visual unity in the buildings and settlements which is so typical of the landscape today. Large mills are evident in all the main valleys, and often tend to dominate the towns perhaps explaining why the term 'satanic mills' has sometimes been used to describe this part of Yorkshire. The mills and factories were often surrounded by terraced housing built nearby for their workers.

The construction of the canals resulted in a shift in the focus of the valley development and several towns found themselves paired with lower lying valley bottom settlements, for example Sowerby and Sowerby Bridge; Rastrick and Brighouse. The railways, which came later, were similarly restricted to the valleys and linked these new towns. Major conurbations like Sheffield, sited on lower ground surrounded by hills, extended rapidly. The wealthier industrialists built homes on the hill slopes to the west of Sheffield, which are now the focus of well-wooded suburbs, and any industry which remains is confined to the valley bottoms.

The spread of other large towns, notably Halifax and Huddersfield, was more constrained by the adjacent steep-sided hills.

Both the emerging municipalities and individual 19th century industrialists displayed their wealth and status by ambitious programmes of building public facilities, such as town halls, libraries, museums and schools, which are now a prominent feature of nearly every urban centre. Examples include the centre of Dewsbury which is dominated by sturdy stone buildings; Sheffield and Bradford which both have magnificent Victorian town halls and Saltaire which is an entire village, complete with mills, schools, library and church, built in 1853 on the river Aire by the industrialist Sir Titus Salt. Others built homes or museums which now feature as important public open spaces within the dense urban areas, such as Cartwright Hall in Bradford.

Many of the mill buildings still dominate the valleys visually though many now stand empty or are being converted for a wide range of other uses. The carpet mill at Dean Clough in Halifax, for example, once the largest in Europe, has now been converted for a mixture of business, retail, warehousing, workshop and gallery uses. Large churches, built in the 19th century on prominent sites, are also a notable feature of the valleys. Many of these prominent Millstone Grit buildings are blackened by smoke and pollution and have a dark and sombre appearance but in recent years a number have been cleaned and are now a rich, light ochre in colour.

### Land Cover

In much of the area there is a complex matrix of urban development and open countryside. In the wetter west there is permanent pasture used for sheep rearing and for



Local Millstone Grit and Coal Measure Sandstones were traditionally used for buildings, creating the visual unity in the buildings and settlements which is so typical of the landscape today. This unity is often interrupted by more recent constructions, such as these high rise buildings in Sowerby Bridge.

cattle, including dairying. The proximity of urban areas also has a significant influence with much land being used for horse grazing or other land uses typical of the urban fringe. As the land drops towards the drier east, there is more arable land combined with permanent pastures and leys. Field boundaries are predominantly dry stone walls in the west and hedges in the east. Some pasture land on the plateaux shows very distinctive regular enclosure patterns, for example in the area between Holmfirth and Penistone and Penistone and Stocksbridge. In general the fields are small to medium sized, with some unenclosed rough grazing and upland pastures on the high land to the west.

Tree cover is generally quite sparse, although some localised areas have retained a substantial framework of hedges, hedgerow trees and small woodlands. These help to create an impression that the landscape is quite well-wooded although this may not actually be the case overall. The steep slopes of the valleys are, in many places, particularly well-wooded mostly with broadleaved woodland and some conifer plantations. These woods form green backdrops to the linear settlements in the valleys. The valley bottoms often tend to be developed right up to the river banks but there are a few undeveloped pastoral valleys where 'gritstone' walls give way to hedges and fences, and there are a few scattered hedgerow trees of ash and oak. The narrow wooded valleys on the west side of Sheffield have become part of a network of linear parks that lead right into the centre of the City.

### The Changing Countryside

- The traditional industries of wool and textiles, steel making and heavy engineering have declined but the area is still under pressure for further urban development including housing, new types of industry and transport routes.
- The higher land provides opportunities for wind turbines and communications masts. These, along with pylon lines and other tall structures, can add to the visual clutter which tends to be characteristic of much of the area.
- The decline of the traditional industries has left a legacy of disused and often derelict buildings, many of a very substantial size. Alternative positive uses need to be found or perhaps, in some cases, the buildings dismantled, the materials recycled and the sites reclaimed.
- The pattern of industrial settlement means that there are extensive areas of urban fringe countryside. Some of these suffer from a range of typical urban fringe problems such as degradation of land, poor condition of field boundaries and, especially, the fragmentation of farms and the separation of farmsteads from farmland. This contributes to the dereliction of unused farm buildings and dry stone walls but also creates pressure to restore farms and convert farm buildings for residential use.
- Much of the woodland, being relatively small-scale and fragmented, suffers from neglect and lack of appropriate management. The presence of large urban areas creates

high demands for both organised sports facilities, such as golf courses, and informal countryside recreation. Both these demands might, in some circumstances, have adverse effects on semi-natural habitats, on the character of the landscape and on the tranquillity of the remaining areas of countryside.



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Many of the steeper valley sides are cloaked in woodlands. Even where the topography is less dramatic, such as here at Brighouse, the position of woodlands gives the area a wooded feel, despite relatively low actual tree cover.

## Shaping the Future

- Woodland management initiatives could assist in the protection and management of the valuable woodland resource.
- Development plans and planning control need to direct development to suitable locations and encourage a high standard of design, giving more attention to characteristic vernacular building materials and styles.
- There are opportunities - particularly for recreation - to reinforce the close links between town and country by linking urban green space to the countryside by green corridors.
- Conversion of farm and industrial buildings for residential use can be a positive influence but needs to respect the character of the landscape particularly in the external treatment of buildings and in the conversion of farmland to gardens.
- The structure of the landscape would be aided by the repair and maintenance of field walls.

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