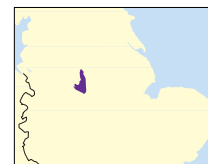


Derbyshire Peak Fringe and Lower Derwent

Character Area

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Key Characteristics

- Transitional zone between the natural beauty of the Peak District National Park and the industrialised urban areas of the Coal Measures.
- Broadly similar elevational range of 100 metres - 300 metres including numerous outlying ridges separated by impressive, sometimes gorge-like, river valleys.
- Derwent Valley tends to dominate the area and be the focus for strategic communication routes.
- Stock rearing and rough grazing on improved grassland with arable concentrated on the valley sides towards the south of the area.
- Minor rivers and brooks in the north of the area flow eastwards towards large urban areas and are dammed to create small reservoirs.
- Woodland cover includes deciduous woodland along valley slopes, isolated copses on higher ground (historically providing charcoal for local industries) and some large blocks of conifer plantation.
- 18th and 19th century stone- and brick-built industrial buildings along valley bottoms, together with historic association with Sir Richard Arkwright which provides important heritage connections.
- Major quarrying activity, for both gritstone and limestone, forms large scars on the landscape.
- Extensive urban fringe areas, particularly around Chesterfield, with golf courses and horsiculture.
- Hedgerow field boundaries at lower altitudes remain largely intact and are replaced by stone walls above 200 metres.
- Small market towns and villages tend to be nestled in valley bottoms and are characterised by sturdy stone cottages and fine church buildings with dispersed farmsteads in outlying enclosed land.



JOHN MORRISON/COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY

Stone and brick built industrial buildings are a familiar feature along the Derwent valley which is rich in cultural heritage. This major river valley has a dominant influence as a strategic communication route and played an early role in the development of the industrial revolution.

Landscape Character

The Derbyshire Peak Fringe and Lower Derwent occupies the transitional zone between the natural unspoilt beauty of the limestone dales of the Peak District and the more heavily populated urban areas of the Coal Measures including Sheffield and Derby. From north to south, the area includes small towns such as Wirksworth, Belper and Duffield. The area is largely defined by the boundary to the National Park to the north west, principal highways to the east, and the ridge to the river Ecclesbourne to the south west.

The area has a broadly similar elevational range of 100 metres - 300 metres with outlying ridges separated by numerous river valleys with their source outside the area, in the Pennines. The largest of these, the river Derwent, flows through the heart of the area in a deep valley with some notably steep-sided stretches, eg around Cromford. Other significant rivers include the Amber and Ecclesbourne. The rivers follow meandering routes along broad valley bottoms where historically many mills have been located, as at Belper. Towards the north of the area, smaller fast-flowing brooks have been dammed to harness water power for local mills.



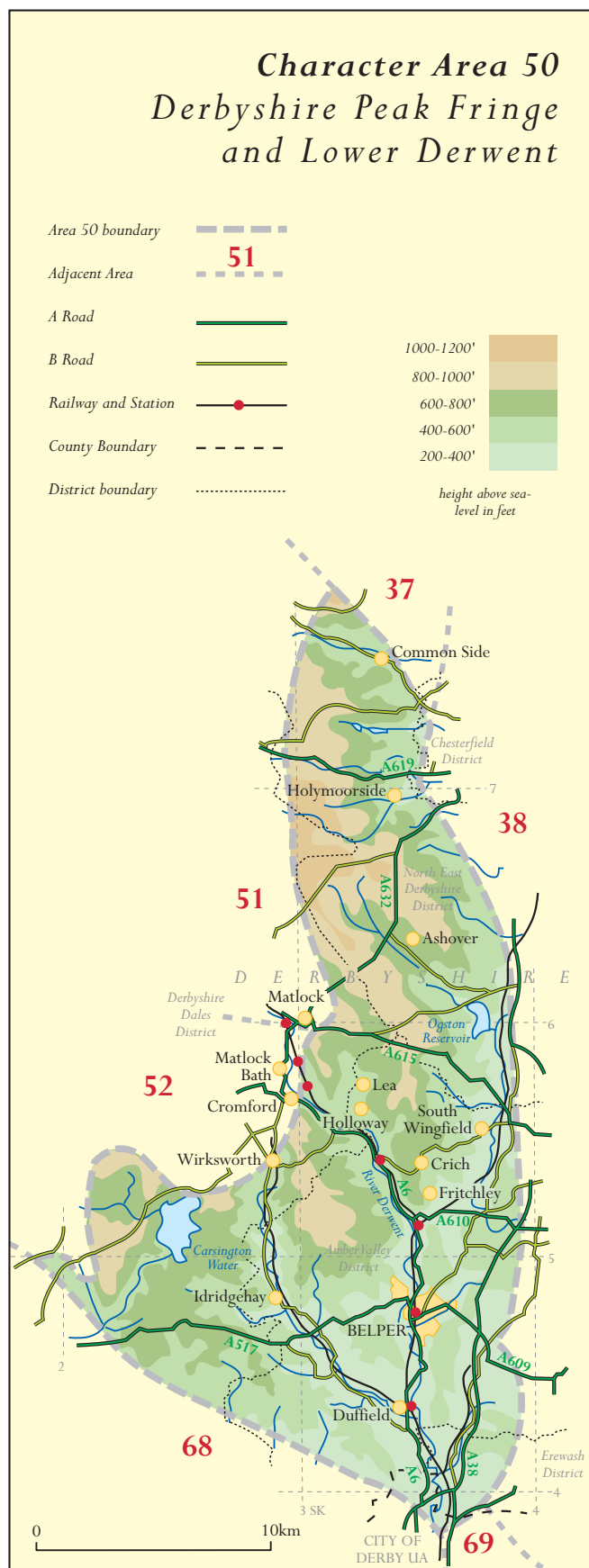
The predominant landuse of the area is agriculture with mixed stock rearing and rough grazing on improved grassland. Arable land tends to be restricted to shallow valley sides towards the south of the area. Deciduous woodland is generally confined to the steep valley sides (notably Derwent Valley and Via Gellia) and well-scattered isolated copses on higher ground throughout the area.



JOHN MORRISON/COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY

A transitional zone between the Peak District and the industrialised urban areas of the Coal Measures, the area is characterised by numerous outlying ridges. Deciduous copses are interspersed with large conifer plantations.

Rectilinear blocks of coniferous woodland cover large portions of the elevated ground north of Matlock. Field boundaries comprise reasonably intact hedgerows at lower elevations and stone walls on higher ground above 200 metres. There is evidence of farming decline around some of the larger urban areas, particularly around Chesterfield where quasi farming uses (horsiculture) are more common.



Physical Influences

The area displays a sequence of rock types exposed on the eastern flanks of the Derbyshire Dome. The oldest are the limestones of the White Peak which can be clearly seen around Wirksworth. To the east, upland areas with acidic soils coincide with the sandstone and mudstone outcrops of the Millstone Grit and dip eastwards to pass beneath the flanking Coal Measures. Small upfolds at Ashover and Crich have brought the limestone to the surface again in the middle of the Millstone Grit outcrop.

In the north, uplands underlain by Millstone Grit and low Coal Measures descend eastwards towards the urban areas of Sheffield, Dronfield and Chesterfield. In the south, near Belper, a Millstone Grit scarp called the Chevin (the Celtic *Cefn* means a back or ridge) is one of the several claimants to be the last outlier of the Pennine chain. Another scarp at Alport Hill (314 metres) provides an excellent vantage point with views of the Wrekin in Shropshire and Cannock Chase.

Historical and Cultural Influences

Traces of very early colonisation exist in the numerous caves found in the area. These show evidence of human occupation for thousands of years preceded by a far longer period of animal occupation. Bones from long-extinct animals such as the sabre-toothed tiger have been found.

The Roman road, Ryknild Street, skirts the eastern boundary and many features of interest, in terms of cultural

heritage, occur. These range from prehistoric burial mounds to medieval moated sites and settlements. The area has strong associations with the industrial revolution and Sir Richard Arkwright and Jedidiah Strutt built cotton mills here in the late 18th century. Rows of 'gritstone' cottages tended to accompany the mill buildings.

The area has a long tradition of lead mining and quarrying as well as farming. Lead mining and smelting, particularly around Ashover, declined in the 19th century with a consequent decline in the population of those upland villages.

Other interesting cultural associations of the area include Florence Nightingale's links with the settlements of Dethick, Lea and Holloway.

Buildings and Settlement

Urban influences are located in the lower lying regions on the fringes of the area at Chesterfield and on the sides to the broader valleys as at Belper, Wirksworth and Duffield. Elsewhere settlement is restricted to isolated small villages or hamlets nestled into depressions on higher ground.

Villages are typified by sturdy stone cottages arranged in a linear fashion along the main street. Villages to the east of Matlock (Brackenfield and Wessington) have red brick as the predominant building material. These are attractively set around greens which are unusually large for Derbyshire.

Many villages such as Ashover comprised self-supporting communities until quite recent times. Their development

resulted from quarrying together with lead mining, the domestic weaving industry and farming.

Land Cover

The lower, steeply undulating foothills to the fringes are of variable quality grassland with wooded valleys and scrub on steeper slopes. Woodland is sparse overall though there are concentrated copses and pockets confined to narrow, steep-sided stream valleys and elevated areas as well as some coniferous blocks to the north.

Stock rearing and rough grazing is practised in a regular pattern of fields which vary in size according to the topography. Stone walls tend to replace hedgerows at higher elevations above 200 metres. The traditional agricultural base is in decline due to urban fringe problems caused by trespassers, vandalism, severance of buildings and housing development pressures.

Much of the area has seen evidence of industrial activity resulting from naturally occurring minerals. Industries have included coal, lead and ironstone mining, glass making and limestone and 'gritstone' quarrying. Quarrying activity is particularly intrusive around Wirksworth and Crich.

The Changing Countryside

- Traditional agricultural base in decline. An increase in farm diversification and gentrification into alternative uses including riding schools, haulage and farm building conversions.



The hills are lower in the east where the hedgerow field boundaries are largely intact, with deciduous woodlands on steeper ground. A pattern of dispersed farmsteads is prevalent.

- Changes to farming practices have led to poorly maintained walls and hedges and their replacement by fences.
- Pressure to rework old quarries as well as open up new sites.
- Increase in recreational demands for walking, cycling and horse riding and other urban fringe pressures.
- Closure of redundant reservoirs.
- Increasing evidence of landowners wishing to infill and level their land by tipping operations.
- Change of use of railway lines (High Peak Trail) to recreational walking and cycle routes producing a wider spread of recreational activity into countryside areas.
- Drainage of rushy meadows and reduction in the number of herb-rich hay meadows.

Shaping the Future

- The development of redundant reservoirs as sites of biological importance or recreational facilities should be considered.
- There is scope for community woodland, particularly in urban fringe areas.
- The retention and management of species-rich hay meadows is important for landscape and ecology.
- The restoration and management of stone wall and hedgerow field boundaries should be addressed.
- Sympathetic conversion of redundant farm buildings would provide alternative uses on the edge of urban areas.
- The retention of industrial heritage, including old mill buildings and lodges, should be considered.
- Appropriate treatment is needed for redundant quarries.



DAVID WOODFALL/COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY

North Mill, Belper; an important early industrial building dominates this view of the Derwent Valley.



DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL/SVERN/TRENT WATER LINACRE VALLEY PROJECT

The area between Chesterfield, Dronfield and the Peak is dissected by east-west flowing rivers. It is characterised by frequent trees and woodlands and a transition from hedges in the east to dry stone walls in the west.

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