

13 LOW LIMESTONE PLATEAU

Character Areas

- 13A Paulton and Peasedown St John Ridge
- 13B Hinton Charterhouse Plateau



Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating open plateau;
- expansive long distance views across the open plateau to distant hills and immediate surrounding valleys;
- generally equal distribution of arable and pastoral land of medium and occasionally large sized, geometric fields enclosed principally by hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees;
- fields generally enclosed by hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees;
- sparse woodland cover of small farm woodlands and shelterbelts limiting the sense of exposure;

- limited areas of species rich grassland on the fringes of the landscape type;
- sparsely settled with little settlement beyond isolated farmsteads;
- communication routes principally limited to minor roads connecting small settlements and individual dwellings; and
- limited number of archaeological remains, although their presence verifies the long history of settlement and use of the area.

Landscape Character

The Low Limestone Plateau is characterised by small areas of plateau landscape with gentle undulations located in the most southern section of the Cotswolds AONB, south of Bath. These fragmented sections of the character type form part of a broader area of Low Limestone Plateau that extends to the south and west, beyond the AONB boundary. In common with the Oolitic Limestone that underlies the main part of the Cotswolds AONB the underlying geology has a unifying effect on character. Limited small settlements and scattered farmsteads harmonise with the landscape through the use of local materials, although modern farm buildings can look out of place due to their size, materials and design.

Arable and pastoral land combine in equal amounts to dominate land use within the area. Woodland planting is limited to small, scattered blocks that are regular in shape and fit with the pattern and texture of the landscape. Hedgerows provide the most common boundary feature with scattered hedgerow trees, which in areas can lead to the impression that the landscape is more wooded than it actually is.

The open nature of the plateau areas allows long views over valleys to surrounding hills, including views as far as the Wiltshire Downs. The sky provides an important feature of the views and tall elements such as pylons, masts and towers are consequently highly visible.

Physical Influences

The main plateau areas fall between approximately 110m and 150m AOD, with localised high points reaching 160m AOD and low areas falling to 70m AOD. The elevated plateaux surrounded by valleys allow expansive views over the landscape towards nearby hills and generally there is a limited sense of enclosure due to the lack of woodland although locally, hedgerows and hedgerow trees provide some seclusion.

The Low Limestone Plateau is principally underlain by the upper portions of the Great Oolite Group, which comprise a succession of Fuller's Earth, overlain by a series of limestone horizons including Forest Marble, and Cornbrash Formation. The soils are typically well-drained, although localised areas of poorly drained materials soils can be found. Drainage features on the plateau are not significant due to the flat nature of the landform and porous geology.

The calcareous brashy clay soils derived from the underlying geology support both arable and pastoral land uses in approximately equal amounts in this farmed area, although where Cornbrash Formation occurs, arable production is favourable. Fields are medium and occasionally large in size and are generally regular in shape and enclosed by hedgerow boundaries. Hedgerows are varied throughout the landscape and include tall, unclipped examples and low, well trimmed ones. Reinforcing post and wire fences can be found along a number of hedgerow boundaries, in particular where stock is farmed. Hedgerow trees are common features with species including oak and ash. Woodland cover within the area is very limited, although where they do occur they are generally small and regular reflecting surrounding field patterns with deciduous species predominating.

Human Influences

Due to the small areas of Low Limestone Plateau within the AONB, there are limited archaeological remains. However, it is likely that in common with other parts of the Cotswolds there has been continuous human habitation since the prehistoric period. Indeed, there is evidence of tumuli on the plateau areas, and the remains of a Roman road.

Throughout the majority of the plateau areas communication routes are limited to a small section of the A36(T) and B3110 with the remaining routes being minor roads. They generally run along the ridge of the plateau or across it and are enclosed by hedgerows. Settlement is sparse limited to small number of dispersed villages and hamlets and occasional scattered farmsteads located adjacent to the road network. Building materials include Oolitic Limestone, and red clay or brown concrete tiles, therefore harmonising buildings with the surrounding landscape. A number of footpaths cross the landscape and are frequently located along higher areas.

Character Areas

13A

Paulton and Peasdown St John Ridge

The Character Area to the south of Bath consists of a small area of low limestone plateau which separates the Cam and Wellow Brook Valleys to the north and south respectively. The Great Oolite series forms the capping layer giving way to bands of limestone and Fuller's Earth. The soils are generally shallow, well-drained, calcareous clays and where the Fuller's Earth Formation outcrops, the soil is more slowly draining and deeper, although still calcareous. The plateau ranges in height from 145m AOD to approximately 100m AOD.

Medium to large arable fields enclosed by hedgerows and post and wire fences predominate within the area. Hedgerows are usually low and clipped and frequently



contain oak and ash trees. There are also a limited number of calcareous grasslands. There is no woodland, thus creating an exposed plateau with views over the valleys.

Settlement within the area is limited to a few scattered farmsteads located adjacent to the minor road network which passes over the high points of the landscape.

13B

Hinton Charterhouse Plateau



The low limestone plateau located to the south of Bath separates the Wellow Brook and Frome/Avon Valleys to the west and east respectively. The Forest Marble Formation covers the majority of the area, below which further horizons of the Great Oolite Group limestones are evident on the fringes of the plateau. Cornbrash can be found on the highest points. The drainage of soil can be impeded over the Forest Marble mudstone, though is usually free draining over the Oolitic Limestone. The soils have a considerable amount of brashy limestone debris.

Fields of arable and pastoral land are medium in size, and occasionally large, enclosed by hedgerows and post and wire / rail fences. Mature hedgerow trees are frequent, usually oak, with a smaller number of ash, sycamore and beech. Stone walls can also be found around settlements and intermittently along roadsides. Woodland within the area is very limited, although where it does occur, deciduous species predominate with only limited areas of coniferous plantation.

The two main settlements within the area are the village of Hinton Charterhouse and the hamlet of Pipehouse, both typical dispersed rural settlements related to agriculture, with dwellings mainly constructed from Oolitic limestone with red clay or brown concrete tiles. There are also a number of individual farmsteads scattered across the plateau. Cutting across the area to the east is the A36(T) with the B3110 to the west, both of which run in a north south direction. Connecting the two roads and dwellings is a more minor road network.

Features of interest on the plateau include the water tower at Pipehouse, Hinton House and surrounding 18th century parkland and Hinton Carthusian Priory. A number of Second World War relics are also visible around Pipehouse, including pillboxes and anti-tank and infantry trenches. A small limestone quarry is located north of Pipehouse. Archaeological remains verify the long history of settlement and use of the area and include tumuli and a section of Roman road south west of Pipehouse, designated as a SAM.