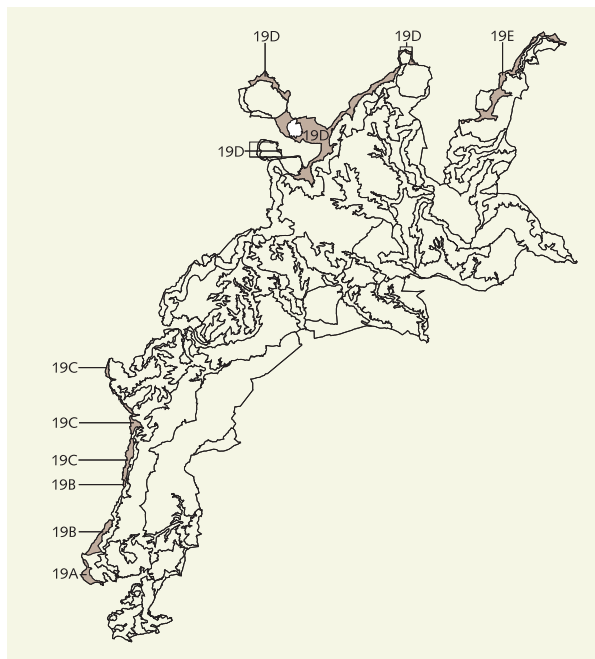


19 UNWOODED VALE

Character Areas

- 19A Avon Valley
- 19B Boyd Valley
- 19C Wickwar Vale
- 19D Vale of Evesham Fringe
- 19E Vale of Feldon Fringe



Key Characteristics

- Soft rolling landscape on the lower slopes of escarpment forming a transitional area between the adjacent escarpment and vale area, and with intermittent ridges and valleys in southern part of vale;
- stretches of the Cotswolds escarpment, as well as the escarpment outliers, provide a dramatic backdrop to many views across the vale;
- wide, open, sparsely settled agrarian landscape;
- small areas of wet meadow and narrow floodplain bordering numerous streams and rivers;
- well maintained hedgerows, some of great antiquity;

- numerous mature field and hedgerow oaks, riverside trees and small woodlands;
- quiet winding lanes link isolated farms and hamlets;
- remnants of ancient open fields and moated sites;
- varied mix of brick, timber and stone for buildings, and slate and thatch roofing, with Oolitic Limestone still prevalent within the vale villages in closer proximity to the Cotswolds Escarpment; and,
- adjacent steep escarpment landform and associated woodlands generally limit views.

Landscape Character

The Unwooded Vale landscape character type forms part of the extensive lowland vales that are located along the western and northern perimeter of the Cotswolds AONB, extending from Bath to below Stinchcombe Hill, then re-commencing in a broad sweep northwards and then eastwards adjacent to the Vales of Evesham and Feldon. Within the boundary of the AONB, the areas of land classified as Unwooded Vale are very limited, confined to narrow and fragmented sections of the landscape type at the base of the escarpment, merging into the broader lowland vales. In view of their peripheral location in relation to the vales beyond, the characteristics that these areas display are not always typical of those occurring within the heart of the extensive vale areas. There is also a transition from this landscape type to the adjacent Settled Unwooded Vale (Landscape Character Type 18) where the influences of large urban areas and major infrastructure are more dominant.

In the southern part of the AONB, the landscape character assessments undertaken by South Gloucestershire and Bath and North East Somerset Councils provide a more detailed examination of the landscape types that occur across the wider vale to the west of the Cotswolds escarpment, together with the mosaic of landscape character areas. Similarly, Worcestershire County Council's LCA provides a detailed examination of landscape types that occur across the Vale of Evesham Regional Character Area, including the land that extends into the AONB in the vicinity of Bredon Hill. To avoid any confusion or contradiction with the findings of these more detailed landscape character assessments, the landscape character areas that occurs within the AONB Unwooded Vale landscape type are named separately to differentiate them from those identified and described within the detailed LCAs.

The following descriptions are principally confined to the transitional lowland 'edge' landscape that occurs below the escarpment and escarpment outliers. Where appropriate, however, reference is made to the characteristics and features that occur within the wider adjacent vales in order to provide the context and linkage with the wider landscape type.

The overall character of the landscape is distinctly rural, small scale and domestic and contrasts strongly with the exposed landscapes of the neighbouring Escarpment and Escarpment Outliers landscape character types.

The soft, rolling landform, underlain with Lias Group mudstones and sandstones and extensive drift deposits is cloaked in a patchwork of arable and pasture fields, generally medium to large in size, although locally, such as around Wickwar, small field patterns can be found. These are predominantly enclosed by a network of hedgerows, both well maintained and overgrown which often contain ageing oaks, and are valued for their nature conservation



value in an otherwise highly managed agricultural landscape. Stonewall boundaries can also be found within the unwooded vale.

Woodland cover is not a characteristic feature of this landscape type, and generally restricted to small deciduous copses and shelterbelts. Where woodlands do occur, they are often closely associated with farmsteads that are dotted throughout the landscape, although occasional more substantial areas of woodland do occur, notably to the east of Wickwar in the southern part of the vale. Elsewhere woodland cover is restricted to the narrow semi-natural woodlands bordering streams that drain the neighbouring uplands and broadleaved woodland within landscaped parks. Where present woodlands gain visual prominence in this low landscape and when viewed from ground level, merge with hedges and hedgerow and field trees leading to the impression that the landscape is more wooded than it actually is.

Beyond the AONB boundary, tributaries of the Severn, Bristol Avon, and the Stratford Avon weave through the wider vale. These occupy shallow, sometimes narrow valleys and are often only visible by the presence of alder and willow trees that line their banks. In contrast to this network of numerous secondary valleys, to the west of Bath the wide floodplain of the River Avon forms the southern boundary of the designated area. Softer landform and wet, rushy meadows and increased use of post and wire fencing are also characteristic features.

The settlement pattern is generally dispersed. Countless farmsteads largely dating to the time that the landscape was enclosed in the 18th and 19th centuries, are located throughout the vale. Villages and hamlets are predominantly small linear clusters bordering the lower slopes of the neighbouring escarpment. Larger settlements have also established, such as Winchcombe and Broadway. These take advantage of sheltered locations within embayments in the escarpment.

Ancient churches, and remnants of ridge and furrow of the former open fields, indicate that many of the vale settlements have their origins in the medieval period or earlier. Building materials vary. In the historic core of both Winchcombe and Broadway, for example, the older buildings are mainly constructed from stone. Some of the more recent developments that occur on the outskirts of these settlements beyond the historic core are constructed from brick. Within the vale settlements generally, many of the older buildings also use timber in their construction, indicating that suitable building was less available than elsewhere in the Cotswolds where stone built buildings

are prevalent. Since the arrival of the railways and canals, brick has formed the dominant building material within the Vale settlements.

Physical Influences

Beyond the AONB boundary, the majority of the vale is underlain by Triassic rocks. Within the AONB, however, the soft, undulating landform has formed on the Lias Group mudstones and sandstone, and is typically between 10 and 40m AOD, although in some areas the vale rises to 100m AOD. The sense of elevation is much diminished by local landform and intervening vegetation obscuring long distance views.

There is a general sense of land rising gradually to the east where the vale merges into the lower slopes of the escarpment. It is within this transitional zone that slips and detached masses of Oolitic debris create a hummocky landscape and areas of raised landform, and from which more extensive views are sometimes possible.

Beyond the AONB, the Vale landscape varies considerably from the small sections of rolling landform found at the base of the Escarpment. Both the Vale of Evesham Fringe, and Vale of Feldon Fringe provide a typically soft, rolling vale landscape rising only to heights between 30m and 50m. Elsewhere, the vale landscape beyond the AONB has more local variations. Within the area surrounding Bath the wide valley of the River Avon dominates the area, with the gently sloping valley sides rising up to the Escarpment on one side and beyond the AONB towards undulating open valleys and plateaux on the other. Around Wick, Downton and northwards towards the southern limits of Old Sodbury, land shelves from the escarpment and dips into the valley of the River Boyd, beyond the AONB. The Pucklechurch Ridge, beyond the River to the west, provides a prominent backdrop when viewed from the vale landscape within the AONB. Between Old Sodbury and Stinchcombe, the land shelves gently from the escarpment. Beyond the AONB boundary the vale landscape falls gently to the west towards the Yate Vale and the Severn Ridges Character Areas defined in South Gloucestershire Council's Landscape Character Assessment.

The underlying geology gives rise to heavy, cold and frequently waterlogged soils that tend to limit their capacity for arable farming. Improved pasture for cattle is therefore prevalent although some arable fields are conspicuous. Here, ditches have been cut to aid drainage and limit waterlogging. These ditches often border roads and define, along with hedgerows, regular 'parliamentary' field boundaries that suggest that they were a feature of the 19th century enclosures.

Orchards are well suited to the vale soils and microclimate, and were once a prominent feature of the vale landscape. The vast majority has been grubbed out and the land turned over to more lucrative arable or pasture farming.

Hawthorn hedgerows define a patchwork of relatively large fields. These are often well maintained and give the sense of a managed productive agricultural landscape. However, in some areas the hedgerow pattern is breaking down and is increasingly being replaced by post and wire fencing. Many hedges are of great antiquity and possibly predate the enclosures of the 18th and 19th century which are prevalent across the vale. These later boundary features may be easily identified in the landscape as the hedges are less species rich and define geometric 'parliamentary' fields. Hedgerow trees, predominantly oaks, are conspicuous and offer valued habitats for a range of birds and insects, particularly where dead timber is left in close proximity to provide additional habitats. In other areas, stone walls provide boundary features.

There is little woodland cover in this long settled landscape and not, therefore, a characteristic feature of the Unwooded Vale. Throughout the landscape it is restricted to small copses and shelterbelts although hedgerow trees and isolated field trees lead to the impression that it is more wooded than it actually is. Woodlands are most conspicuous when located on the lower slopes of the escarpment and on undulations within the vale.

Few large woodlands exist, although some significant areas may be observed bordering streams draining the escarpment and within landscaped parks that may often be found stretching up onto the lower slopes of neighbouring scarp and outliers.

Between undulations in the vale, a multitude of rivers and streams weave winding courses as they flow towards the Severn and Avon. These are often bordered by flatter, gentler landform and wet meadows above thick deposits of alluvium and diamicton. These areas are periodically flooded and pastures here are often wet and rushy. The watercourses flowing in these meadows are often only visible at crossing points where brick or stone bridges offer excellent vantage points. However, their route can also be traced by the alder and willow trees that often line their banks.

Human Influences

There is little evidence to confirm whether the vale was heavily exploited and settled during the prehistoric period. To the east of the Severn, settlement of the gravel terraces bordering the river has been established from at least the Neolithic period. However, it is likely that poor waterlogged soils and thick woodland cover prohibited settlement and farming on a large scale.

With the improved ploughs of the Middle Ages, and a rapidly expanding population, pressure grew for settlement of the poorer land to the east of the Severn. At the foot of the escarpment, and in the wider vale, numerous settlements were established, or earlier settlements expanded. Many would have been surrounded by open fields. The ridges and furrows deriving from this are still extant in the vale landscape today where they have survived beneath permanent pasture established at the time of enclosure. This is particularly evident where the vale meets the escarpment, with many of the open fields here having been under permanent pasture since the time of enclosure. Elsewhere, modern ploughing and development has resulted in the loss of vast areas of ridge and furrow.

Moated sites are conspicuous in the vale landscape although relatively infrequent in the AONB. These sites, often barely visible in the landscape, are likely to date from 13th century and rather than representing manorial centres, they are likely to have been the homes of wealthy yeoman farmers, as moated sites were a symbol of wealth and status during the medieval period. Many of the sites of moated farmsteads are in close proximity to more modern farms, indicating a continuity of settlement within the vale.

Perhaps the most potent evidence for human activity in the vale is the dominant pattern of regular hedged fields established during the enclosures of the 18th and 19th centuries. The neat, geometric patchwork created by hawthorn hedges is relentless and a monument to the surveyors and agriculturists that created them. These fields are interspersed with farms, often built at the time of enclosure and made conspicuous by large barns and outbuildings that often enclose a central yard.

Whilst the regular geometric pattern of hedged fields dominates the vale, it may often be observed to sit within a more organic framework of hedged boundaries, watercourses and winding roads. These are the remnants of the ancient open fields that surrounded vale villages into which the enclosures were imposed.

Villages within the vale are small and compact, lining roads approaching the neighbouring escarpment or the winding

lanes that encircle the outliers. However, more dispersed villages with a radial form are also evident. Their names often indicate their geographic location, Aston Subedge and Ashton-under-Hill being notable examples. The older centres of these settlements have an abundance of stone, red brick and timber-framed buildings. The older village properties are typically clustered around the church, which are often ancient and imposing stone structures, with a prominent spire visible from some distance from the village.

Beyond these villages the settlement pattern becomes dispersed with numerous farmsteads and hamlets, commonly with a linear form, scattered across the landscape, with farmhouses and individual buildings gaining visual prominence when they are sited on the top of undulations. Generally, development is located in valley bottoms, at the foot of hills and hill terraces. Roads descending off the escarpment tend to spread out at the foot of the scarp into a multitude of narrow winding lanes. These are often bordered by neat, square-cut hedgerows, wide grass verges and drainage ditches.

Some large settlements exist, Broadway and Winchcombe being notable examples. These are sited in the shelter offered by north facing combs and represent market towns that were established during the medieval period. Indeed Winchcombe was the earliest market town in the Cotswolds and remained the largest up until the 16th century.

Character Areas

19A Avon Valley

The Avon Valley Character Area extends from the western limits of Bath north-westwards to the south of Upton Cheyney. It is bordered to the east by the Escarpment and may be observed to extend westwards beyond the AONB boundary along the course of the River Avon.



The area is underlain by Lias Group limestone from Saltford to Kelston Park and Lias Group mudstones from Keynsham to Kelston, north of the limestone outcrop. However, drift deposits are an important component of surface geology with alluvium found throughout the floodplain as well as smaller outcrops of river gravel and head material.

The landscape consists primarily of the eastern flank of the meandering River Avon and its wide valley, with a flat or gently sloping valley floor that rises from approximately 15m AOD bordering the river channel to the foot of the escarpment. Local variations do exist, however, with steep river cliffs bordering the river between Saltford and Kelston Park. Here, deciduous woodlands cling to the steep landform. These are identified as being as ancient semi-natural woodland.

Soils are generally clayey in nature and at risk of flooding, although are better drained in limestone areas. Land use is varied, the landscape comprising a patchwork of arable and grassland. Arable fields are found particularly to the north of Saltford and around Corston, outside the AONB boundary. Fields are generally regular in shape representing enclosure of open fields in the later Middle Ages. Field boundaries vary with hedges, both clipped and un-clipped, some with and some without trees. Walls are localised and generally associated with farm buildings. In areas of horse grazing white tape is often used to divide paddocks. More open landscapes occur on areas of floodplain bordering the Avon. Here, rich wet grasslands were enclosed in the medieval period as areas of meadowland provided an early crop of grass. There is also a significant area of parkland at Kelston Park. This is a terraced garden and landscape park of some 75ha created between 1767 and 1768 by Capability Brown for Caesar Hawkins.

The Avon Valley is an important transport corridor. At one time the river was an important route for trade and communication. However, it is now largely used for recreational purposes. The eastern boundary of the character area is in part formed by the busy A431 between Bath and Kingswood. Beyond the AONB boundary, the Avon Valley is crossed by the A4 Bristol to Bath road and the Bristol to London mainline railway. This has been raised above the floodplain in places by steeply sloping embankments, with other sections at grade or in cuttings. The Avon Walkway runs alongside the river for a short distance. The Path was constructed on the trackbed of the former Midland Railway between 1979 and 1986. The Railway was important to the industry in the area but finally closed in 1976.

Settlement within the character area is sparse with only the village of Kelston located within its boundary. However, other villages and towns such as Swineford,



Saltford and Corston border or lie in close proximity to the AONB boundary. The City of Bath borders the character area to the east but is not prominent in views due to local landform.

The escarpment forms a striking backdrop to the vale landscape. Prominent features such as the distinctive tree group on Kelston Round Hill are local landmarks although the scarp slopes in general are important to provide a sense of orientation.

19B Boyd Valley



The Boyd Valley character area occupies the foot of the escarpment between Wick in the south and Old Sodbury in the north. It is part of a more extensive landscape that stretches westwards to Westerleigh and Siston. Landform shelves gently from the base of the escarpment (at approximately 100m AOD) to 80m AOD at the AONB boundary. Beyond this to the west, the landscape dips further to the channel of the River Boyd. Further to the west the landscape rises gently to the abrupt scarp edge of the Pucklechurch ridge.

The vale landscape is dissected by numerous tributaries of the River Boyd that drains southwards through the Golden Valley and into the Avon. Land cover comprises a roughly equal proportion of arable and pasture land in medium to large regular fields. Field boundaries are defined by a combination of clipped and overgrown hedges and some post and wire fencing. There is limited tree cover and infrequent woodland copses. Settlement in the character area is limited to a small number of scattered farmsteads and the villages of Beach and Doynton and houses on the southern outskirts of Wick. Buildings associated with Wick Quarry, located on the outskirts of the town are outside the AONB boundary but form a locally prominent landscape feature. A mixture of building materials is used although limestone is conspicuous in some areas such as Doynton where Cotswolds stone has been widely used in many of the buildings within it. Stone walls also enclose roads through the village.

The character area is bordered to the east by the escarpment. Landform features along it such as Hanging Hill form prominent local landmarks from where extensive views over the valley are possible towards Oldland Ridge and the Pucklechurch Ridge which also form significant landform features within the vale, to the east of the urban area of Kingswood. The line of mature beech trees on Freezing Hill on the crest of the escarpment also forms a notable landmark from the vale below.

The southern extent of the character area forms the eastern slopes of the Golden Valley; a north-east / south-west orientated valley through which flows the River Boyd. However, the river, which follows a tightly meandering course, and its floodplain are beyond the AONB boundary. The valley is formed from alluvium within the valley floor with a mixture of Middle Jurassic limestone, and Carboniferous rocks forming the valley sides. The river channel is bordered by riparian vegetation and irregular shaped medium and small pastoral fields, which lead to larger regular shaped fields on the upper valley slopes within the AONB. Field boundaries are generally tall and overgrown with some clipped and laid hedgerows along lanes.

Tracey Park golf course, which is situated within the grounds of a large stately house, is a significant landscape feature. Here, mature tree specimens, within sweeping lawns contained by stone walls, introduces managed landscapes to otherwise rural countryside. Another notable landscape feature is the remains of a burial chamber to the north of Coldharbour Farm.



19C Wickwar Vale

The Wickwar Vale landscape character area occupies the foot of the scarp between Old Sodbury in the south and Stinchcombe in the north. It is part of a wider landscape that extends westwards to the character areas defined in South Gloucestershire Council's Landscape Character Assessment of Yate Vale and the Severn Ridges around Thornbury. The rural landscape is gently undulating. Within the boundary of the AONB, however, the landscape shelves gently westwards off the escarpment from approximately 120m AOD to 90m AOD. To the north of Worsley, the landscape falls from approximately 90m AOD at the edge of the Rolling Hills and Valleys landscape type to 70m AOD at the AONB boundary.

The landscape is dissected by numerous rivers and streams. These flow westwards off the escarpment and through the Rolling Hills and Valleys landscape type (Landscape Character Type 3). The landscape is rural and, as is typical of the vale landscape type, displays a mixture of arable and pasture farming. Fields are predominantly irregular and small to medium sized. In the wider landscape, beyond the AONB boundary, woodland is a predominant landscape feature with Wetmoor Wood to the east of Wickwar representing an extensive area of ancient woodland of significant nature conservation value. Large areas of common land also exist beyond the AONB boundary. These comprise areas of rough grassland and heathland.

Within the AONB boundary the landscape is rural with settlement limited to scattered farms and hamlets. The largest settlement is the village of Hillesley, although the larger settlement of Wotton-under-Edge, located immediately beyond the character area, exerts a strong influence over the landscape, as it occupies a prominent position on the skyline. In the far north of the character area, the AONB boundary is defined by the M5 and reduces the rural and peaceful character of the landscape.

The escarpment forms a backdrop to the vale landscape. The Tyndale monument and distinctive beech hanger on Nibley Knoll, and Stinchcombe Hill, both form striking local landmarks and are important orientation points in the landscape.

19D

Vale of Evesham Fringe

The Vale of Evesham is a broad landscape type that extends from the western slopes of Oxenton Hill in the south, along the northern stretch of the Cotswold escarpment towards Stratford-upon-Avon. Only small areas are located within the AONB, however, principally lining the foot of the scarp slopes but also fringing the outliers and perhaps most significantly, the tracts of land surrounding Alderton, Dumbleton and Bredon Hills.

The vale is underlain by Blue Lias and Charmouth Mudstones of the Lias Group, which have created the soft, rolling landscapes. Land rises towards the escarpment and surrounding the outliers and high points reach 100m AOD in places. Elsewhere the vale has a consistent elevation of between 30m and 50m AOD. The landscape is typical of the vale and the gently undulating landform is cloaked in a patchwork of fields, boundaries being formed by neat, well-maintained hedgerows. Soils derived from the underlying geology are often heavy and wet. However, drainage and improvement allows mixed arable and pasture farming to prosper. Dairy farming is particularly conspicuous and cattle sheds are often large and visually obtrusive features of this relatively flat landscape. Less productive wet pastures are often located on the alluvial beds that lie adjacent to the many streams and rivers that flow northwards to the Avon. The principal river is the Isbourne that flows off the Winchcombe embayment.

Tree cover is typically limited to small deciduous woodlands and supplemented by occasional hedgerow, riverside and field trees. However, larger woodlands may be found fringing parkland such as those around Sudeley Castle, Stanway House and Toddington Manor. Orchards, prevalent elsewhere in the Vale of Evesham, are not numerous in the AONB indicating that many were removed and converted to farmland.

Broadway and Winchcombe are the largest towns in the landscape. The latter dominates the local skyline, along with Sudeley Castle, and occupies the head of the dramatic embayment overlooked by the Belas Knap long barrow. The road pattern is rural, and narrow winding lanes, bounded by hedgerows, grass verges and drainage ditches link numerous small villages and hamlets marking the base of the escarpment and the outliers. Farmhouses

tend to be located at the end of short lanes off the main road network..

The dramatic slopes of the wooded escarpment and outliers form a distinctive backdrop to these landscapes and offer many excellent vantage points from which to observe its vast scale and unified landscape character.

19E

Vale of Feldon Fringe

The Vale of Feldon Fringe is in the far north east of the AONB and occupies the foot of the escarpment of Edge Hill and the low-lying landscapes below the Ironstone Hills and Valleys landscape type (6) and the Brailes Hill outlier. Beyond this character area, the more extensive Vale of Feldon extends to the east and north.

Charmouth Mudstone Formation of the Lias Group is widespread and has created the typical vale landscape of very soft and gently rolling landform. Indeed, land only rises by 30m across the width of this landscape type, up to the break of slope at the foot of the Marlstone Rock escarpment. The area between Brailes and Stourton is even softer, with local rises of between 10 and 20m. This is due to the deep deposits of silty clay and river terrace gravels bordering the course of the River Stour, cloaking the underlying geology and further softening underlying landform features.

The name of this character area refers to a much broader area of Warwickshire south and east of the Avon and relates to the Anglo Saxon 'feld' meaning open area or field. This indicates that this landscape was cleared and cultivated from the first few centuries AD and hundreds of years of ploughing since this time have left traces of ridge and furrow beneath areas of permanent pasture throughout the area. Such early and widespread clearance may also explain the lack of ancient woodland in the





locality. The landscape pattern of neat, regular hedged fields evident today dates to the enclosures of the 18th and 19th century. Improved pasture is the predominant land use on these heavy soils although arable farming is also evident in many of the larger drained fields.

Hedgerow trees and field trees are important landscape features. These are typically oak, although willow and other wetland species predominate along the course of rivers and streams. In the absence of large woodlands, these, along with overgrown hedges, combine with the backdrop of scarp slopes woodlands to give the impression of a relatively well-treed landscape when viewed from ground level.

The Vale of Feldon Fringe is deeply rural with a small number of isolated farms dotted throughout the landscape. Warmington, Radway, Stourton, Cherington and Lower Brailes represent ancient nucleated villages at the foot of the scarp. Many older houses in these villages retain thatched roofs, with red brick and timber construction elements, indicating their close relationship to the wider vale where these building materials are prevalent. However, buildings in Radway and Warmington are notable due to the predominant use of ironstone, a building material typical of the Ironstone Hills above the escarpment. The use of stone is also evident in Warmington and Cherington.

Interestingly the local name for the wider area of the Vale of Feldon between Kineton and Edge Hill to the Stour valley is the 'Vale of the Red Horse', and refers to the figure of a horse that was cut into the iron rich soils of the escarpment, possibly in the Saxon period. Although the horse has now disappeared, the name still persists.

The site of the Battle of Edge Hill of 1642 is located to the east of the Vale of Feldon Fringe within the broader Vale area. A monument to the battle, which forms part of a public house, is located above the vale on the Edge Hill escarpment. The registered battlefield borders the boundary of the AONB to the west of Radway.

