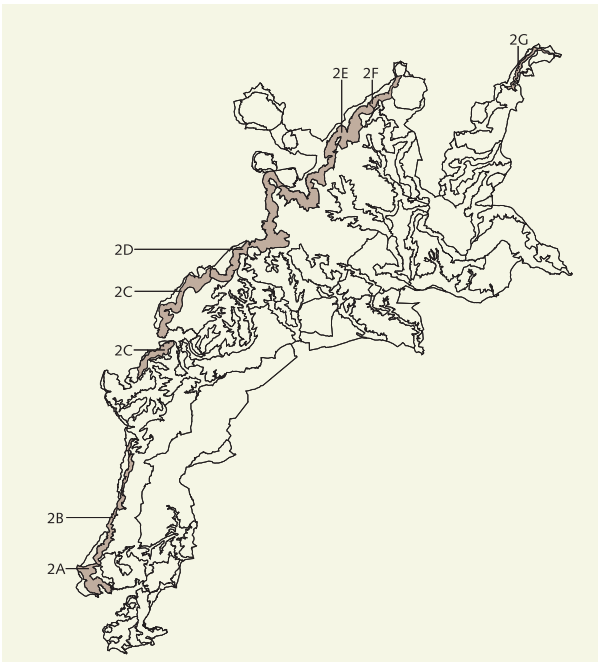
2 ESCARPMENT

Character Areas

2A Bath to Beach Farm
2B Beach Farm to Hillesley
2C Uley to Cooper's Hill
2D Cooper's Hill to Winchcombe
2E Winchcombe to Dover's Hill
2F Dover's Hill to Mickleton
2G Edge Hill



Key Characteristics

- Steep exposed and elevated west facing scarp slope, partly cloaked in semi natural broadleaved woodland;
- generally poor soils and steep sloping relief of the escarpment not suited to arable farming, and primarily used for pasture or woodland;
- limited areas of Registered Common Land on upper scarp slopes merging into the more extensive areas on the High Wold;
- distinct sense of elevation with dramatic panoramic views over the Severn Vale to the Forest of Dean and beyond into Wales, the Malverns and the Shropshire Hills;
- continuity of escarpment face interrupted by a series of major valleys and embayments;
- gentler landform on lower slopes below the spring line;
- calcareous grasslands located on steeper scarp slopes;
- summit of the scarp slope marked by dramatic linear beech hangers;
- rock outcrops often mark the site of former quarries, except within the southern section of the escarpment;
- woodlands, hedgerows, scrub and isolated trees give the impression of a well treed landscape;
- small scale settlement generally confined to lower, shallower slopes of the escarpment, in sheltered locations, and adjacent to spring lines;
- many large towns and cities located at varying distances from, or in the vicinity of the foot of the escarpment;
- roads and tracks surrounded by dense vegetation and occupying holloways;
- numerous prehistoric sites, and more recent monuments and follies, are located on promontories and elevated sections of the escarpment; and
- intermittent historic parks and designed landscapes provide distinctive features on escarpment.

Landscape Character

The Cotswold escarpment is a narrow landscape type, rarely exceeding more than 1 km (0.6 mile) in width. It forms a dramatic and prominent landscape feature running in a virtually unbroken line for 84 kilometres (52 miles) from Mickleton in the north, south westwards to Bath and often appears as a wooded backdrop to undulating landscapes of the vale in the foreground. Breaches do occur, however, where major rivers have carved substantial valleys through the escarpment, notably the Frome as it flows out from the Stroud Valleys, and the Bristol Avon and its tributaries to the south in the vicinity of Bath. Between Hillesley and Uley, the escarpment has been breached by numerous streams and rivers and is less defined than elsewhere, forming a complex succession of Rolling Hills and Valleys. As a result, this section of the escarpment has been classified as a separate Landscape Character Type (3). The escarpment affords excellent views westwards, and from some areas on the upper escarpment slopes, the course of the Severn can be traced in the Vale below. Fine views of Gloucester, Evesham, Bath, Bristol and Cheltenham are also possible from key viewpoints on the escarpment. The Cotswold Way follows the summit of the escarpment, between Chipping Campden and Bath.

The escarpment is a well-known landscape feature, forming a 'wall' to the Vale below, and is best viewed in its entirety from the uplands of the Forest of Dean. From here it can be seen to rise sharply from the undulating landscapes of the Vale where solid geology is overlain by thick Quaternary deposits. The escarpment serves to define the western limits of the outcrop of the Middle Jurassic Limestone that forms the bulk of the elevated landform of the Cotswolds.

For much of its length the escarpment forms an abrupt face of Middle Jurassic Oolitic Limestone and overlying older Lias Group clay strata, and rises in a concave profile to where it meets the High Wold and High Wold Dip-Slope. South of Hawkesbury the escarpment is less than 100 m high, but below at Cleeve Common it reaches almost 320 m AOD, the highest point in the Cotswolds. The summit of the escarpment is often marked by a narrow belt of trees or beech hangers, which when viewed from the vale, occupy the skyline and form a dramatic silhouette.

The Inferior Oolite is the main scarp-forming rock in the north, whilst in the south this becomes thinner with Great Oolite forming the highest relief. The upper slopes of the escarpment are outward looking, steep, exposed and elevated, although embayments and combes give these upper slopes a dissected appearance. The upper slopes are also often marked with former and active quarry sites, and areas of exposed rock also occur, creating dramatic landscape features. Beyond the more open areas characterised by rough grassland, scrub and calcareous grasslands, and small, hedged and sometimes walled, improved pastures are evident.

At the base of the escarpment slope older Lias Group shales, sandstones, mudstones and siltstones of the Lower Jurassic are exposed. These are soft and easily weathered and as a result have slumped or been eroded to form hummocky ground. These areas of slippage blur the transition from scarp slope to undulating vale. The lower slopes are also dissected by numerous gullies formed by fast, narrow streams flowing into the Vale. The course of many streams and gullies may be traced on the escarpment, as they are bordered by narrow belts of broadleaved woodland. These landscapes are better suited to agriculture and have been divided up into moderately sized fields. Improved pasture dominates although where conditions are suitable arable fields are also conspicuous. The lower slopes are generally softer and more intimate, with hedgerows, hummocky landform and woodlands providing shelter and limiting long distance views.

The presence of the Lias Group Marlstone Rock Formation has resulted in the formation of distinctive terraces and secondary escarpments, as at Stinchcombe. The Marlstone Rock terrace marks the spring line, and as a result numerous small settlements and farms have been established along it, together with dispersed development on the lower hillsides. Settlement is limited on the upper reaches of the escarpment due to landform constraints. Where present, villages and hamlets tend to be small, dispersed and linear and are often closely associated with preserved areas of ridge and furrow on the hillsides. These villages border east-west orientated roads, many of which may be ancient, and link ancient summer pastures on the high wold to winter pastures in the vale. Although linear settlements predominate on the escarpment, hamlets that have either a radial, organic or planned form also occur. Farmsteads and individual dwellings are also evident on the escarpment.

Physical Influences

Rocks forming the escarpment mainly comprise of the Lower Jurassic Lias Group and the Middle Jurassic Inferior Oolite series. The junction between the Lias Group and Oolitic Limestones is particularly well displayed at Leckhampton Hill. The Lias Group (sandstones, mudstones and clays, siltstones, shales and ferruginous limestones) represent the oldest rocks in the AONB and outcrop at the base of the Cotswolds escarpment and form extensive exposures along the escarpment north of Stroud. Soils derived from the Lias Group clays mudstones are heavy, cold and frequently water-logged and as a consequence agriculture at the base of the scarp slope is often limited to pasture.

Above the mudstones of the Blue Lias and Charmouth Mudstone Formations sits the Marlstone Rock Formation. This ferruginous sandy limestone is generally harder than the rocks above and below it and can be observed forming an often wooded terrace along the escarpment such as exists between Wotton-under-Edge and Dursley, and from Cheltenham to Chipping Campden. The Marlstone Rock marks the spring line that is evident along almost the entire length of the escarpment. Here, the Marlstone Rock and the Bridport Sand Formation above it, form a reservoir holding the water that seeps in from the surface. The water held in these strata is forced out as springs as it reaches the impermeable layers of Lias Group clay below. These often form fast flowing narrow 'anti dip streams' that flow into the vale and onward into the Severn. Interestingly many of the springs issuing from the Marlstone Rock are a rusty brown colour and have a high iron content. The Marlstone Rock is also responsible for creating the distinctive escarpment at Edge Hill.

The sequence of limestone formations within the Inferior Oolite Group generally forms the upper levels of the escarpment north of Stroud where its can be seen extending onto the High Wold and capping promontories such as Nottingham Hill and Haresfield Beacon. South of Stroud, these rocks form the bulk of the escarpment slopes along with the younger Great Oolite Group limestones.

The morphology of the escarpment is a consequence of the regional dip of the rocks, the steep west facing slopes forming the prominent strike face, and exposure of the succession of Lower and Middle Jurassic strata described above. Progressive erosion of the escarpment has resulted in its eastward retreat, with a series of outliers and fragmented and convoluted sections arising from the differential resistance of the rock units. The action of rivers and streams has also created the indented profile of the escarpment with rivers such as the Cam and numerous tributary streams forming impressive combes, embayments and promontories. Elsewhere, the line of the escarpment has been breached by major valleys such as the Frome, at Stroud.

Land cover on the steeper scarp slopes consist predominantly of grassland and broadleaved woodland. Much of the grasslands are unimproved and extensively un-managed, although improved grassland and occasional arable fields are present on flatter areas of Marlstone Rock or on landslips and at the base of the scarp at the junction with the vale. The scarp top is often unenclosed or is divided up into large enclosures. Typically, common land or rough grazing is prevalent and this may be seen rolling up over onto the high wold. In places the upper slopes / plateau transition has been cultivated, which interrupts the broad sweep of traditional grasslands. On the middle scarp slopes small to medium sized pasture fields predominate. These are defined by a strong pattern of hedges, punctuated by hedgerow trees, which follow landform. Fields become larger and more regular at the base of the slope where they blur into the geometric Enclosure fields typical of the vale. Here, significantly more arable and intensive grassland for dairying is evident.

Scattered scrub occurs on the steepest upper slopes where it may often be seen fringing long established woodlands in gullies. Whilst this gives the landscape an unmanaged appearance, it can enhance the biodiversity interest of grasslands offering nesting and feeding sites for a range of invertebrate and bird species. Woodland ranges from beech hangers at the top of the scarp on the steepest slopes and thinnest soils, to ash and oak woods on lower slopes. A high proportion of escarpment woodlands has been identified as being ancient woodland. The beech hangers are a distinctive landscape feature and often make a dramatic silhouette against the skyline when viewed from the vale below. These beech woods are also of nature conservation value. For example the area of ancient beech woodland and unimproved grassland along the top of the escarpment between Birdlip and Painswick has been designated as a SSSI on account of the woodlands being amongst the most diverse and species rich of their type. These can often be observed forming a close relationship with unimproved grasslands on the steeper slopes and contribute to the landscape's semi-natural character. Whilst extensive woodlands are evident along some stretches of the escarpment, elsewhere a distinctly unwooded character is evident adding to the visual diversity of this landscape.

The steep slopes and thin soils, particularly on the upper scarp slopes, have protected grasslands from improvement. Two principal types exist: unimproved Jurassic limestone grassland and unimproved neutral grassland. These grassland sites are of national importance, based on their diverse flora and invertebrate fauna although diminished grazing threatens them with invasions of scrub and Tor grass. Wet grasslands also occur, particularly adjacent to springs on impermeable pockets of Fuller's Earth.

Human Influences

The escarpment landscape has been exploited for its dramatic form and wide viewing opportunities since Prehistoric times. The numerous Neolithic long barrows and Bronze Age round barrows that line the upper fringes of the scarp attest to this and were probably sited here to mark the western limits of territories that extended deep into the Cotswolds. The symbolic power of such a dramatic landscape feature was further exploited in the Iron Age when numerous hillforts and ditched enclosures

were established along it. It is obvious that the steep slopes and wide panoramic views were strategically important for defence. Most hillforts are univallate and had considerable defensive structures consisting of a ditch and stone wall, possibly surmounted by a pallisade. Others were multivallate, notably Kimsbury on Painswick Beacon. Nevertheless, many sites only had minimal defences, and their siting on promontories and dramatic edge locations must also therefore have had some symbolic resonance, possibly to reflect the power and prestige of the community that built them.

Throughout prehistory the escarpment was obviously a symbolic frontier, but not a physical barrier, however. It is not unreasonable to assume that many of the hollow ways, preserved in the course of modern roads and tracks that climb the scarp, are remnants of ancient routes linking resources and communities in the vale to those on the uplands of the High Wold. One can be more certain that these routes were used in the medieval period to allow the free movement of sheep between summer pastures on the plateau of winter pastures in the vale. This practice is known as transhumance and was largely abandoned by the 14th century. Roads and tracks traversing the escarpment link more heavily trafficked roads that mark the upper and lower boundaries of the slope.

Beyond these dramatic and evocative landscape monuments, the escarpment displays little evidence of settlement, and exploitation beyond agricultural and forestry/silvicultural usage. By far the most obvious evidence of activity is in the form of field patterns such as the lynchets that run along the slope and form grassy terraces and Celtic field systems on Cleeve Common. Later field systems are marked by hedges and reflect enclosure of former common pastures. Field patterns also indicate that significant areas were assarted. Many fields are therefore irregular in shape although more regular Parliamentary enclosures are prevalent at the base of the scarp where they extend into the vale. Here, ridge and furrow fields are also evident and mark the former open fields that may date back as far as the Saxon period. On the upper scarp slopes remnants of once larger areas of common land survive. These may be the remains of landscapes that have been open and grazed since the Neolithic but were first recorded as common land in the Domesday survey and sometimes in Saxon charters.

Stone quarrying has also been an important agent in shaping the escarpment landscape and contributing to the appearance and prosperity of the wider Cotswolds. The varying colour and characteristics of the Cotswolds stone along the escarpment has had a major influence on this landscape type, through its use for dwellings, roofs, walls and field boundaries. Other materials have also been extracted. For example Lias Group mudstones and clays, found at the base of the scarp slope, at the junction with the neighbouring vale make excellent bricks and were quarried at numerous sites, particularly in the Stour basin within the Vale of Moreton. The clay was also extracted to line mill pools that occupied the industrial sites that were strung out along many of the valleys draining the High Wold.

On the upper slopes the creamy buff coloured Oolite, and in particular the Freestone, has been extensively quarried and indeed these areas are often pockmarked by former and active quarry workings. Elsewhere, Fuller's Earth was extracted, for example at Minchinhampton. The mudstone horizon within this Formation provides an important clay layer, which was used as an agent for cleansing wool and felting cloth in the fulling mills that were established.

The steep scarp slopes are generally devoid of large-scale settlement although isolated farmsteads and small linear hamlets may be found nestled in sheltered locations adjacent to roads climbing the plateau. These are often surrounded by small to medium scale fields and closely associated with small deciduous woodlands. On the lower slopes, and on the Marlstone Rock terrace, larger dispersed linear villages and hamlets are sited. These often take advantage of sheltered locations, and the close proximity of a spring. Combes offer sheltered locations for larger settlements such as Winchcombe, while smaller villages and hamlets tend to be located mid-combe. The more heavily wooded north facing slopes are thinly settled[20].

A small number of designed parklands are sited along the escarpment, their location and layout usually designed to exploit the dramatic landscape and extensive views out across the vale. Dyrham Park, Dodington House and Radway Grange are all notable examples. Many are associated with towers and obelisks that form prominent local landmarks.

A number of open and public access sites are located along the escarpment. Examples include Tog Hill, Coaley Park, Painswick Beacon, Barrow Wake, Crickley Hill, Leckhampton Hill and Cleeve Common. These offer opportunities to access some of the most dramatic viewpoints along the escarpment.

20. William Dreghorn (1967) Geology Explained in the Severn Vale and Cotswolds

Character Areas

2A
Bath to Beach Farm

The escarpment between Beach Farm and Bath is high and wide, and much indented with combes and gullies, adding significantly to landscape character. At Upton Cheyney the scarp slope rises gently from 40 m AOD to 235 m AOD providing a well-defined backdrop to landscapes in the Vale to the west. Steep slopes are also evident, particularly below Kelston Round Hill and Beckford's Tower where they rise dramatically from the outer limits of Bath.

The gentle slopes have allowed more intensive agriculture and much of the scarp has been cleared of woodland in favour of improved grassland. Small copses and woodlands do survive, however, particularly on steep slopes and lining gullies draining the slopes westwards into the vale. On westward facing slopes, fields are often moderately sized. Above Upper Weston, however, fields are extensive, with hedged boundaries following strong landform features. Less intensive practices here have allowed for the survival of extensive areas of calcareous grassland.

Significant local landscape features are Kelston Round Hill, a wooded knoll to the east of Kelston and Beckford's Tower, an impressive stone monument on the southern edge of Lansdown Hill which was built in 1827 for William Beckford to provide a retreat in which he could study and enjoy the commanding views of Bath from the Tower's Belvedere.

2B
Beach Farm to Hillesley

The escarpment between Beach Farm and Hillesley is narrow, gentle and low when compared to stretches of escarpment elsewhere in the AONB. It varies in height above the vale from just 50 m AOD in the north to 90 m AOD in the south, east of Wick. As a result, landcover is more typically improved pasture, with moderately sized fields enclosed with a network of neat hawthorn hedges.

Woodlands, although sparse, do contribute to local landscape character. Typically these ancient broadleaved woodlands are very narrow and occupy the upper scarp slopes, areas of steep landform and the course of brooks draining westwards into the Vale. Larger areas of woodland survive in parkland, however, as at Dodington and Dyrham, where parkland trees also make a significant contribution to landscape character.

As is typical, hillforts line the edge of the escarpment, the most notable being Little Sodbury, and at Hinton Hill where the course of the modern road through the site may mark the line of the ancient trackway linking the fort to the vale below.

Settlement is largely sited in the vale. However, the shallow nature of the slopes has allowed villages and hamlets to extend up the scarp some distance, generally comprising spring line villages and hamlets, and in the form of scattered roadside developments. The M4 is a significant feature. Despite occupying deep cuttings close to Springs Farm, it introduces noise and movement to this otherwise quiet rural landscape.

2C
Uley to Cooper's Hill

The escarpment between Uley and Stroud, and beyond the Frome Valley breach to Cooper's Hill is similar to the Cooper's Hill to Winchcombe character area to the north in that they share similar landform and landcover characteristics. Between the section from Stroud northwards to Cooper's Hill, the form of the escarpment is interesting, as it is narrow and not associated with High Wold or High Wold Dip-Slope. Instead, east of the escarpment top, the land falls into the Painswick Valley, the narrow watershed between the two being marked by the course of a winding country lane. At Cud Hill this watershed is almost breached.

As is typical of the escarpment, ancient broadleaved woodland marks the upper slopes and is often found in matrix with calcareous grassland as at Haresfield Beacon, Scottsquar Hill, and Huddinknoll Hill south of Stroud. The lower slopes have been divided up into a neat patchwork of regular fields. Hedgerows here are often overgrown and contain many mature hedgerow trees. Over much of

the area they combine with upper slope woodlands to contribute to the sense of a well-wooded landscape when viewed from the vale.

Many barrows and hillforts border the upper scarp slopes. Perhaps the most impressive monuments are the Iron Age hillforts at Uley Bury and Painswick Hill. The latter monument is close to Gloucester and is a popular local attraction. At these sites the escarpment effectively creates their defensive characteristics, strengthened by massive ramparts. A number of impressive viewpoints, much visited by ramblers and tourists are located along this stretch of the escarpment. At Cud Hill a small folly has been constructed from where dramatic views to Robinswood Hill and Gloucester Cathedral are possible, as well as views south eastwards into the Wash Brook Valley, a tributary of the Painswick Valley.

Despite the proximity of large urban centres, the landscape retains a strong rural character. However, Gloucester and Stroud do have a marked local influence. Indeed Stroud, Stonehouse and Leonard Stanley occupy the significant

breach created by the Frome as it emerges through the escarpment on its way to the Severn. These settlements are notable for their terraces of brick and stone houses and mills which are indicative of the area's industrial past

2D
Cooper's Hill to Winchcombe

This stretch of the escarpment forms a dramatic backdrop to the towns of Gloucester, Cheltenham and Bishop's Cleeve and limits their eastward expansion. The height of the escarpment gradually increases in a northerly direction. Thus at Cooper's Hill it rises from 100 AOD to just over 200 m AOD. At the northern section, the escarpment rises from 80 m AOD to over 300 m AOD and forms the highest stretch of the Cotswolds escarpment. In the north of the character area the line of the escarpment terminates at Nottingham Hill, south west of Langley Hill.

Woodland cover is less extensive than in the neighbouring Winchcombe to Broadway character area and is limited to narrow bands of broadleaved woodland at the scarp summit. There are fewer ancient woodlands also, indicating more extensive clearance possibly as a result of the pressure exerted on woodlands in this location by the large urban population of Cheltenham. An exception is Dowdeswell Wood, a large area of ancient woodland associated with parkland at Dowdeswell Court, and the large woodland complexes at Witcombe between Cooper's Hill and Birdlip. Land use is characterised by large unenclosed areas of rough grassland on upper slopes and improved pasture in moderately sized hedged enclosures bordering the vale. Significant areas of calcareous grassland also exist. These are often on the upper slopes and form a close relationship to areas of existing broadleaved and felled woodland such as at Cold Slad, Barrow Wake and Leckhampton Hill. Large areas also survive on the upper slopes of the escarpment on Nottingham Hill and Cleeve Hill, where they mark the edge of extensively grazed common land.

As elsewhere on the escarpment, numerous important archaeological sites border the upper slopes, the most notable being those on Crickley Hill, Cleeve Common and Nottingham Hill. Despite this perhaps the most well known local landmark is the Devil's Chimney. This is a rock pinnacle formed of Lower Freestone that was left by 17th and 18th century quarrymen in the quarry at Leckhampton Hill and is visible from Cheltenham. Quarrying has been a significant influence on the local landscape and much of the Freestone quarried in the area helped build Regency Cheltenham. Despite the close proximity of large urban centres, settlement on the escarpment slopes is sparse and limited to scattered linear settlements bordering the many roads that link Cheltenham to villages on the High Wold, and Oxford further to the east.

2E
Winchcombe to Dover's Hill

The escarpment between Winchcombe and Dover's Hill is broad and relatively high, rising from approximately 100 m AOD to over 200 m AOD in places. There are many spurs, combes and embayments leading to a dramatic and varied landscape. The most significant embayment is that above Winchombe which is thought to have been formed due to erosion along a line of weakness. The River Isbourne and the Beesmoor Brook and their tributaries drain the embayment northwards, through the town of Winchombe, into the Avon.

Woodlands cloak much of the landscape, ancient broadleaved woods being the most dominant. Many are sizeable and stretch along the escarpment top, down to the mid and lower lopes, often along the line of brooks and gullies. Between these woodlands on the upper slopes, large unenclosed expanses of rough grassland predominate. On lower slopes, improved pastures, bounded by overgrown hedges reinforced with post and wire fencing is the most dominant land use. Calcareous grassland is not extensive. However, a large area at Horn

Hill Bank Farm above Stanway is notable as this occupies a large woodland clearing. Orchards are also conspicuous on the lower slopes. Orchards were at one time more numerous here and in the vale below.

The upper escarpment slopes / High Wold transition are marked by numerous archaeological sites including Belas Knap, the Snowhsill Chambered Tomb and Beckbury Camp. All were sited in dramatic locations and to take advantage of wide views over the Vale of Evesham. Below Beckbury Camp are a series of well-preserved lynchets. Other historical sites include the Roman Villa at Spoonley Farm and the Grade I Medieval deer park at Stanway House, developed as a formal landscape in the late 17th and 18th centuries.

Broadway Tower is located on the summit of the escarpment above the town of Broadway, the second highest point in the Cotswolds. This is an important local landmark, built in 1797 by the 6th Earl of Coventry, George William, for his wife. The story associated with its construction is that she wanted an impressive tower on which she could place a beacon that could be seen from her house near Worcester, the hilltop having long been used as a beacon point. Broadway Tower is one of England's outstanding viewpoints and it is possible to survey an area that includes as many as thirteen counties.

The escarpment is sparsely settled, although the village of Broadway extends some way up the lower slopes.

2F
Dover's Hill to Mickleton

The short stretch of escarpment north of Dover's Hill comprises a spur of high ground separating the Vale of Moreton from the Vale of Evesham. The slopes here are shallow and gentler than elsewhere and are generally well wooded. Ancient woodlands are a noticeable feature of the crest of the slope where they form narrow skyline features. Improved pasture predominates although arable fields may be seen on the lower slopes extending into the vale. Neat hedgerows divide the landscape into a patchwork of regular fields that climb up the gentle slopes. Kiftsgate Court, a registered garden is a notable feature of the landscape and represents a 20th century plant and shrub garden surrounding a late 19th century house.

Dover's Hill is perhaps most well known as the site of the 'Cotswold's Olympicks', which were established by Robert Dover in the 17th century and located in a natural amphitheatre on the escarpment. The games were given Royal assent by James I and featured events such as shin-kicking and sword play. The games ended in 1851 when the common was enclosed although another explanation is that that the games were stopped due to public disorder caused by navvies who were constructing the nearby railway. The Dover's Hill Olympicks were revived for the Festival of Britain in 1951 and have been held annually since 1963.

2G
Edge Hill

A distinctive stretch of escarpment is located at Edge Hill, in the north-eastern section of the AONB, to the east of the Vale of Moreton. Here the scarp slopes are generally steep but not high, rising from 140 m AOD to approximately 200 m AOD. Unlike the main Cotswold escarpment, which is capped by the Jurassic Inferior and Great Oolite limestones, the Edge Hill scarp is formed from Lias Group rocks capped by the harder ferruginous limestone of the Marlstone Rock Formation. It has also been an important local source of building stone, the high iron content in the Marlstone Rock giving the buildings in the area a distinctive warm brown colour. Interestingly the colour of the 'Ironstone' has led to local people referring to the part of the Vale of Feldon beneath Edge Hill, as "The Vale of the Red Horse". The name relates to the figure of a horse that was cut into the hillside above Tysoe, possibly during the Anglo Saxon period. The earliest recorded reference to a figure dates to 1607, although sketches of the horse made at various times suggest that the figure became overgrown and subsequently re-cut with an evolving outline over many generations. Indeed up until 1800 the landowner imposed a feudal obligation on the local peasantry to scour the horse each Palm Sunday. The horse no longer survives although it is preserved in local folklore, and the name of the vale.

The lower slopes are broad, gently sloping and agriculturally improved, becoming less improved and more extensively grazed on the steeper upper slopes where gappy hedges enclose large irregular fields. Rough grassland occupies the scarp crest. Beech woods, typical of the crest of the escarpment elsewhere in the AONB, are not found in this character area. This is due to the nature of the underlying geology creating a less base rich soil than the Oolitic limestones found on the escarpment slopes to the south and eastwest. Despite this, isolated trees are evident along hedge lines and often mark the crest of the scarp. In contrast to these open sections of the escarpment, large mixed woodlands are located along the upper steep slopes between Edgehill Farm and Radway Grange.

The lower slopes are generally improved and form a patchwork of regular hedged fields. Many retain traces of ridge and furrow. There is very little settlement on the escarpment, farms and villages such as Radway and Warmington tending to be located at the foot of the scarp.

The escarpment overlooks the site of the Civil War Battle of Edge Hill (1642), the event commemorated by the octagonal Radway Tower, located at the summit of the escarpment, and now part of the Castle Inn. It was built as a sham castle in the 18th century on the spot where King Charles raised his standard and is a prominent landscape feature when viewed from the vale below. The Tower also forms part of the setting of Radway Grange, an early 18th century landscape garden adjacent to a Gothic house, located in the village of Radway at the foot of the escarpment.