

5 SETTLED VALLEY

Character Areas

- 5A Nailsworth
- 5B Frome Golden Valley and Stroud



Key Characteristics

- Steep sided, concave narrow valleys with upper sections forming an abrupt break of slope with the High Wold and High Wold Dip-Slope;
- strong sense of enclosure;
- predominantly pastoral land use with scattered areas of arable land enclosed by a network of hedgerow boundaries;
- relatively well wooded with deciduous species predominating, with a large proportion of ancient woodland;
- stonewalls are common features within the valley bottom, particularly surrounding settlements;
- sequence of settlements along the valley bottoms and sides resulting in a settled character;
- close proximity of large urban areas beyond the AONB boundary;
- strong evidence of industrial past from communications infrastructure and mill development confined primarily to valley floors;
- areas of development dominate the valley floor and sides with significant urban influence from surrounding settlements;
- extensive road network within the majority of valleys connecting settlements and areas within the valleys to the High Wold; and
- isolated and deeply rural character in remoter tributary valleys.

Landscape Character

The Settled Valleys comprise an area of relatively narrow, high sided valleys of the River Frome and its tributaries which dissect the High Wold and High Wold Dip-Slope. Along the valley floor the urban settlements, which originated at river crossing points, have now merged to form a dense ribbon of urban development with scattered industrial sections, although these primarily occur on the outer edges of the AONB with dispersed villages and hamlets being located within the designated area. The textile and woollen mills associated with the area's industrial past are located within the valleys, primarily due to the occurrence of running water in close proximity of sheep rearing areas, providing optimum conditions for wool and cloth production. These distinctive buildings with their chimneys often dominating the urban skyline, are a landmark in the landscape. Development extending up the valley sides in terraces, and communication routes concentrated on the valley floor, are characteristic of this landscape.

This is a contrasting landscape with areas that are highly developed and others that remain inaccessible and are dominated by farmed or parkland landscapes, increasing pressure for development to extend into such areas from surrounding urban centres. Pastoral land dominates the valley sides interspersed with scattered areas of scrub, rough pasture and arable land. Woodlands dominated by deciduous species cling to the valley sides creating a sense of enclosure in smaller tributary valleys and combine with the hedgerow network to create, in areas, a relatively well wooded character.

Physical Influences

The alternating geological layers of limestone, Fuller's Earth, mudstone and alluvial clay have been eroded by the rivers flowing along the valley to form distinctive concave narrow valleys. Where the resistant Oolitic Limestone forms the valley sides, distinctive steep upper slopes have formed. Capping the top of the valley sides is a combination of Fuller's Earth and Limestone that extends to underlie the surrounding High Wold landscape.

The incised valleys, which dissect the High Wold and High Wold Dip-Slope, are cut by the River Frome and its tributaries. The River flows in a westerly direction to converge with the Slad Brook, outside of the AONB and drain into the Severn Valley. A number of tributaries feed into the river from surrounding hills. The valley sides are typically 200m AOD in height with a narrow valley floor that drops to around 60m AOD along the course of the River.

Soils derived from the underlying geology have given rise to a combination of materials including a sticky wet soil from the Fuller's Earth, often marked by patches of woodland and delicate, thin, light calcareous loams from the Oolitic Limestone which are particularly suitable to permanent pasture. However, during the last century the light soils have been able to accommodate conversion to arable land through agricultural improvements and the increased use of fertilisers.

The location of Fuller's Earth within the Settled Valleys has led to the establishment of woodland blocks, which in areas are quite substantial in size and extend for the length of the valley. A pattern of woodland that responds to the landform prevails, with the majority of plantations dominated by broadleaved species, although a number of coniferous blocks are scattered throughout the valleys. A large proportion of the woodland is ancient woodland.

Land use within the valleys is dominated by pasture, with areas of both improved and rough pasture with some scrub encroachment. Areas of mesotrophic and calcareous grassland are mainly confined to steeper valley slopes with scattered areas also found on lower slopes. Field sizes vary, although they are generally smaller on the lower slopes and valley bottom and larger on the upper slopes and valley tops. Interspersed with woodland on the upper slopes, are extensive areas of horse pasture, which has resulted in the poaching of many fields. Enclosing the field pattern is a network of hedgerows with many hedgerow trees, creating a well wooded character when extending from woodland blocks. Whilst stonewalls are a common feature along the valley bottoms surrounding settlements, there are generally less frequent on the valley sides.

Human Influences

In common with other parts of the Cotswolds, it is likely that there has been continuous human habitation within the valleys since the prehistoric period. The suitability of the lower valley sides for cultivation, the sheltered location, and a plentiful supply of water would have been attractive to early man. However, the main evidence of human occupation are the remnants of industrialisation and the significant influences that occurred during the 18th to 20th centuries which are likely to have masked any remnants of pre industrial settlement and land use. They include the early communications infrastructure of the railways and canals and the distinctive vernacular architecture of the textile industry; the large mills and chimneys; and the rows of terraced housing. The valleys and plentiful supply of

running water lent itself naturally to the production of woollen cloth, water being used to power mills and in many cloth manufacturing processes. The close proximity of Fuller's Earth also assisted in the development of the woollen industry as it was used as an agent for cleansing wool and felting cloth, activities undertaken at fulling mills. The weaving industry within the area evolved throughout the period between the Middle Ages and the 19th century. Although originally people exploited the water power of the rivers, particularly in the steep side valleys, coal became an increasingly important source of energy, and resulted in factories being concentrated in the main valley floor where major transportation routes were developed and the existing labour force could be exploited.

The urban landscapes generated by the process of industrialisation are one of the special and significant features of these valleys. Urban areas, which were confined by topography, tended to grow along the bottoms of the valleys and have encroached into the edges of the character type. This has resulted in both dispersed villages and hamlets primarily linear in form, although they are also radial and organic along the valley floor in streamside locations. Whilst once confined to such locations, development can now also be found on the valley sides. Associated with a number of settlements are the mill buildings, although many of them have now become redundant or have been converted to new uses, including houses, workshops and offices.

Connecting settlements along the valley floor is a road network of both major and minor roads. Whilst the main roads are confined for the majority of their length to the bottom of the valley, the minor road network extends along the lower slopes and in areas as far as the upper valley slopes and onto the High Wold. A number of small tributary



valleys are inaccessible except on foot. The network of footpaths, however, is extensive within the Settled Valleys providing access to what would appear to be remote areas.

Character Areas

5A

Nailsworth

This is the largest of the Character Areas within the Settled Valleys Landscape Type, located to the south of Stroud and centred around the settlement of Nailsworth, located outside the AONB boundary. Four small tributary valleys adjoin the main valley around Nailsworth, which then flow into the River Frome at Stroud.

The valley slopes are dominated by pastoral land with only scattered areas under arable production. Fields are enclosed mainly by hedgerow boundaries, although stone walls become frequent features around settlements on the valley floor. Woodland within the valleys is extensive, particularly in smaller tributary valleys and consists mainly of ancient deciduous species, although large areas of coniferous plantation can be found within Woodchester Park, an area owned by the National Trust. Four lakes have been created within the valley bottom in Woodchester Park, their waters discharging into the main valley, north of Nailsworth. Whilst larger woodland blocks predominate on the valley bottom, they frequently extend up the valley slopes, although it is smaller woodland copses that dominate the upper slopes. Small areas of calcareous and mesotrophic grassland can be found within the valleys, and despite the majority of areas being located on the upper valley slopes adjacent to areas of the High Wold, limited areas can be found in the valley bottom south of Box and around Newmarket.

Development within the Nailsworth Character Area is located mainly along the valley bottom, although in areas it has extended up the valley sides to join areas of the High Wold, particularly around Houndscroft, St Chloe, Box and Avening. The settlement of Minchinhampton located within the High Wold also extends beyond the Character Type and onto the upper slopes of the Settled Valley, east of Box. The extension of the settlement mainly in a linear form along the valley bottoms and up the valley slopes, along with scattered dwellings and small villages has resulted in the main valley and a number of smaller tributary valleys being extensively developed. Although large proportions of development have traditional characteristics, the close proximity of large urban centres has had a significant influence and many dwellings are modern in character. A significant built element in the landscape, and a clear indication of the valley's industrial past, is Longfords Mill. Records indicate that a mill was

on this site from c1300 and that both fulling and corn grinding were being carried out here by the mid seventeenth century. The existing mill complex, which is dominated by a tall stone chimney and four storey mill buildings, is currently being converted to luxury flats.

A number of 'B' roads, confined mainly to the valley bottoms, connect development along the valleys. A large number of smaller roads also extend up the valley sides, and in places onto the valley tops and High Wold, beyond the area. There is a limited section of the A46 south of Nailsworth, the only 'A' road within the area which extends from the town centre up the valley slope to the High Wold. Whilst the majority of tributary valleys are highly accessible, the two valleys west of Nailsworth containing Woodchester Park and Bowlas Wood and High Wood cannot be accessed by any public roads. In contrast, the footpath network within the valleys is generally extensive. However, the area around Woodchester Park has no public rights of way.

5B

Frome Golden Valley and Stroud



The Frome and Golden Valley Character Area is the most northern of the Settled Valleys and is located to the south east of Stroud.

Land use within the valley is again dominated by pastoral land with limited areas under arable production. Areas of common land can also be found on upper slopes along with evidence of horse pasture that has led to poaching in a number of areas. Although limited, there are scattered areas of calcareous and mesotrophic grassland mainly along the valley tops with a number of areas on lower slopes. Fields are enclosed by both hedgerow and stonewall boundaries with common land frequently having no boundary elements. Moderately sized deciduous woodland blocks, a significant number of which are ancient, such as those at

Far Thrup and on the southern slopes of the Golden Valley at Chalford and Brownshill, are scattered along the valley, both on the upper slopes and along the course of the River.

Development within the valley is extensive, although is partially absorbed in areas by scattered trees and woodland. The valley sides below Rodborough Common are dominated by ad hoc squatter development and modern housing development connected by meandering minor roads. At Burleigh, Brimscombe and Chalford, development can also be seen to extend up the valley sides onto areas of the High Wold, and again is connected by a significant number of minor roads cutting across the valley sides. A combination of both modern and Victorian development dominates settlement on the valley sides.

The main communication routes are confined to the valley bottom and include the A419, railway and River Frome. Mill buildings located along the valley floor also illustrate the use of the valley as an important resource in past years. Canals are also a feature of note within the valley. Those running through the Golden Valley to the Severn date to the mid to late 18th century, the earliest canal constructed being the Kemmett Canal from Framilode to near Stonehouse (built between 1759 and 1763). This was superseded by the Stroudwater Canal, built between 1775 and 1779, and linking Framilode to the Wallbridge lock near Stroud.

The construction of the Thames and Severn Canal linked the Wallbridge lock eastwards to the Inglesham Lock near Cirencester, hence providing the link between the Thames and Severn Rivers. This canal extended through the Golden Valley to the Daneway where 28 locks over seven miles took vessels to the Sapperton Tunnel, which provide a navigable route through the 'high ground' between the Severn and the Thames systems. This eastern section of the canal within the Upper Frome Valley, including the Sapperton tunnel, is located in Landscape Character Area 8A (Toadsmoor, Holy Brook and Upper Frome Valleys), forming part of the sequence of High Wold Valleys.