

NCA 4 Cheviots

Overview

The Cheviots NCA forms the northern end of the Northumberland National Park. The area is characterised by rounded hills of volcanic origin and the landscape is dominated by open, wild and windswept moorland, and is included under the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type. It is very sparsely settled with few roads. Where there is settlement, the pattern is dominated by hamlets and individual farmsteads within the valleys. Although within the National Park, it is relatively little visited. Nearly three quarters of the area is open access, although the south-western part is within the Otterburn military training area where access is restricted. The moorland is characterised by mixed white grassland, heath and blanket bog. There are rocky outcrops and deep ravines as well as scree slopes. In contrast, the settlement in the valleys are surrounded by pasture lands and meadows. These valley bottom fields are enclosed by some hedgerows but also dry stone walls and modern fencing. The large, regular parliamentary enclosure period fields on the moorlands are enclosed by dry stone walls. The percentage of woodland cover is high, at 15%, but almost all of this is in the form of large coniferous plantation blocks. Only 1.5% of woodland is ancient woodland, of which most has been replanted. The hill tops are free of broadleaf woodland cover, which is restricted to the narrow valley sides, known as cleugh woodland. Here, there is semi-natural ancient woodland and gorse scrub. There are large-scale commercial forestry plantations on the higher hill slopes, for example Kidland Forest. In some areas, coniferous plantations are being reduced or removed, such as in the College Valley, and open moorland is being restored.

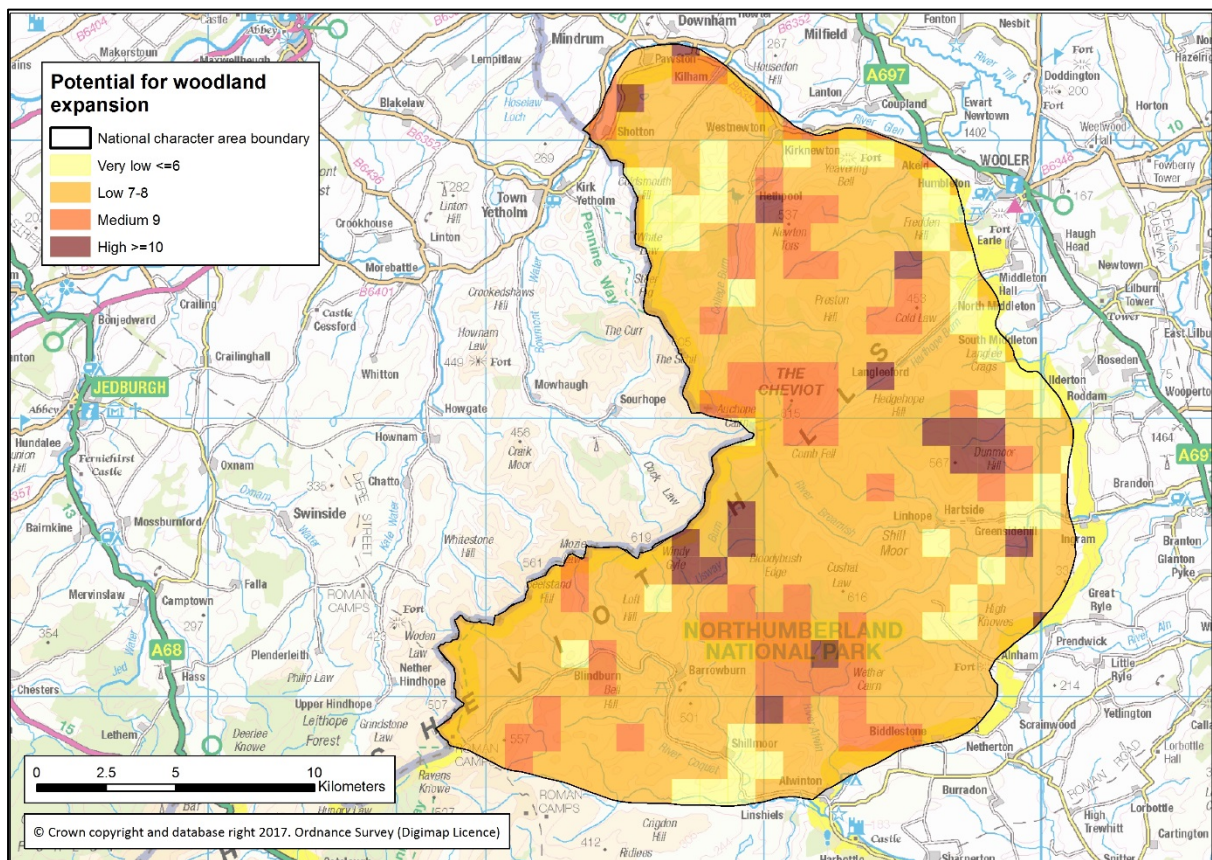
The Historic Environment Character

The permanent pasture and moorland of the NCA has allowed good preservation of archaeological remains from the Neolithic period onwards. There are extensive, well-preserved and highly visible prehistoric landscapes, including burial cairns, settlements, field systems, defended settlements and hill forts. From the Roman period, there is Dere Street with associated marching camps as well as farmsteads and larger enclosed settlements. The settlements are often associated with field systems with rig and furrow and lynchets. Deserted farmsteads and hamlets, with associated field systems, also survive from the later medieval period, particularly within the valleys and on the lower hillsides. Evidence of the unsettled nature of the Anglo-Scottish border at the end of the medieval period and into the early 17th century, is evident in the defended buildings, such as tower houses and bastles that survive as standing structures. Although the NCA description equates desertion of medieval settlement with border warfare, much of this may have been the result of the large-scale sheep farming by the large land-owning estates from the later 17th century onwards, and then reorganisation and enclosure of the landscape from the late 18th century. In the 19th century, large areas of moorland in the NCA were managed for grouse shooting.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes suggests only a low potential for woodland expansion, particularly because the environmental opportunities identified for the area priorities the restoration of the moorland mosaic, including upland mires, blanket bog, flushes, wet heaths and acid grassland. In some areas, such as College Valley, this

involves the removal of commercial forestry, thus reducing the overall woodland coverage. The NCA does recommend looking at opportunities for large-scale planting of oak and ash from valley bottoms and onto the hillside as one way of managing flood risk downstream, increasing water infiltration, reducing soil erosion and increasing carbon capture. The opportunities for woodland expansion on a large scale is limited, however, given the quantity and quality of the recorded archaeological resource. Existing areas of woodland could be extended, commercial forestry could be replanted with native species and edges softened and made less regular. Care should be taken, however, to avoid archaeological remains, such as prehistoric sites on the hill sides and hill tops, and settlement sites and cultivation earthworks on the valley sides and bottoms.



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