

NCA 11 Tyne Gap and Hadrian's Wall

Overview

The Tyne Gap and Hadrian's Wall NCAs comprises a narrow corridor centred on the River Tyne, and is included within the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type. The Tyne and its tributaries flow east, whilst the River Irthing flows westward into the River Eden. The central section lies within the Northumberland National Park, with a small area near Haydon Bridge lying within the North Pennines AONB. The NCA also includes part of the transnational Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site (Hadrian's Wall), which also includes the German Limes and the Antonine Wall. The character of the NCA is varied. To the north, the valley rises steeply to the Whin Sill escarpment, where there is rough pasture divided into large, regular enclosures with drystone walls and fences and settlement is characterised by scattered farmsteads. The southern side of the valley rises more gently and is characterised by improved pasture. At the western end, there are pastures on the valley floor of the River Irthing, arable crops on gentle slopes. Eastwards from the watershed at Haltwhistle, the valley gradually widens out, with arable fields on the valley floor, and semi-improved pasture. East of the confluence of the rivers North and South Tyne, the valley broadens out into a well-wooded landscape with several country estates set within parklands. As the valley opens up, large, arable fields dominate the flood plain. East of Hexham, the villages become larger with the character of commuter settlements for Newcastle. The NCA covers an important transport corridor, dominated by the A69 and the railway between Carlisle and Newcastle. Above the valley to the north, is the B6318, known as the Military Road, which also connects east and west and is a key route for visitors to Hadrian's Wall by car and bus, with a parallel National Trail for walkers. The NCA is relatively well-wooded when compared to the surrounding upland areas, with 10% of the total area covered by woodland, of which nearly one quarter is ancient woodland. Most of the woodland is on the valley slopes, with more plantation and shelter belts towards the eastern end, particularly on the southern side of the valley where trees are also a key component of the designed parkland landscapes.

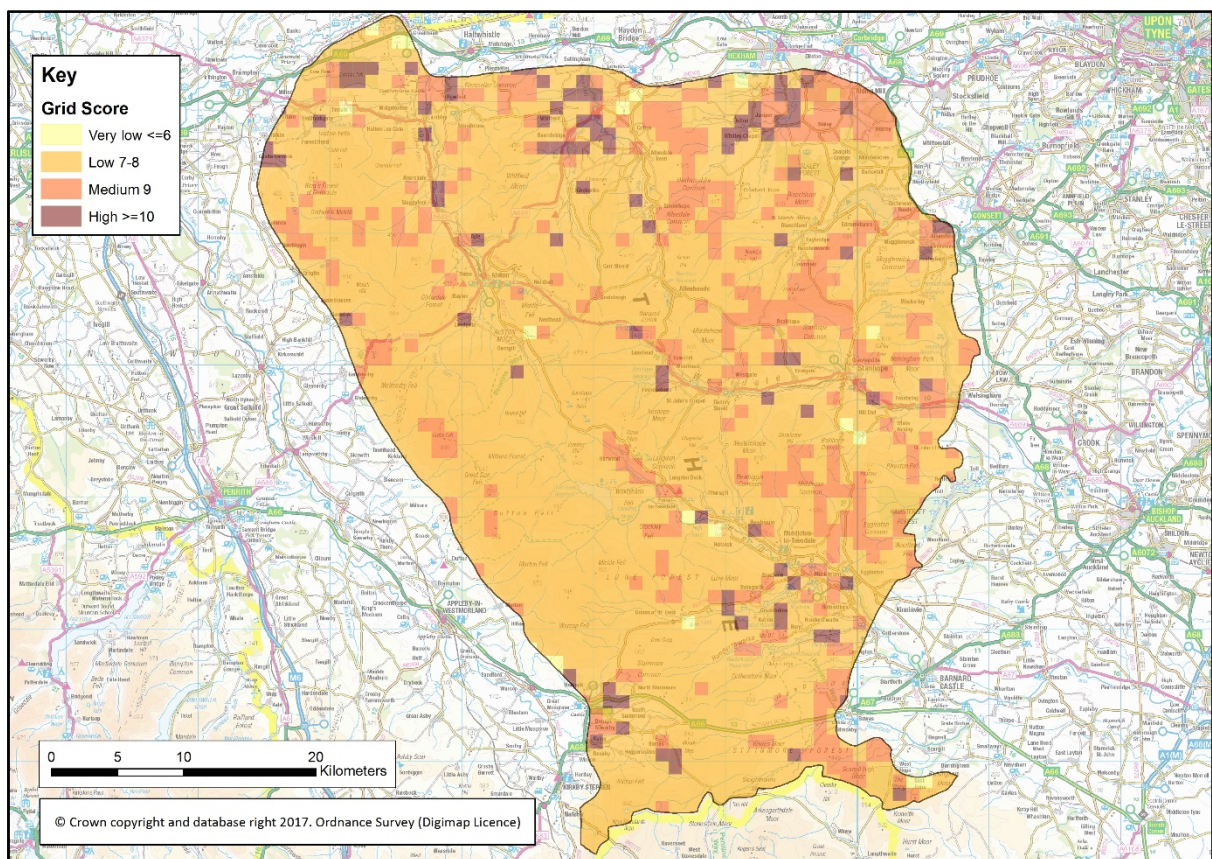
The Historic Environment Character

There is archaeological evidence for human activity and settlement from the Mesolithic and Neolithic, as well as Bronze Age stone circles and burial cairns and an Iron Age hill fort at Warden, overlooking the junction of the North and South Tyne valleys. The predominant and most visible remains, however, are those of Hadrian's Wall and its associated features and which is the main visitor attraction in the area. In the early medieval period, the area was part of the Kingdom of Northumbria and the Tyne Valley has several churches with surviving Anglo-Saxon fabric including Hexham Abbey, which has a 7th century crypt. In the later medieval period, the area of the NCA was part of the Anglo-Scottish border. The legacy of the border wars and later cross-border raiding has been left in form of surviving fortified structures, including castles controlling crossing points on the Tyne, as well as domestic fortified houses such as tower houses and bastles. The medieval landscape was one of small, nucleated settlements, surrounded by open fields of arable and pasture, beyond which was the extensive 'waste' of the wider countryside. The strategic importance of the area continued into the post medieval period, when the Military Road (now the B6318) was built between Newcastle and Carlisle, to facilitate troop movements following the Jacobite

rebellion. From the 18th century there was also extensive agricultural change, which included the enclosure and reorganisation of common fields and the enclosure and improvement of the common wastes. Large country houses were built and set in designed parklands.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates only a low potential for new woodland, mainly as a result of the dominating presence of Hadrian's Wall and the extensive areas of moorland to the north of the valley. The NCA profile acknowledges the importance of maintaining the moorlands of the upper valleys sides, where planting would be likely to affect Hadrian's Wall and its setting. It sees opportunities in extending the areas of existing woodland, creating buffers and links between them as habitat corridors. Woodland planting on valley slopes is recommended as a means of helping to reduce soil erosion. The mapping, suggests that the southern slopes of the valley would be most able to absorb new woodland, particularly at the eastern end where there is more existing woodland. There is also the possibility of planting on the steeper northern slopes, for example in the valley of the River North Tyne, where it would enhance existing woodland.



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