

# NCA 99 Black Mountains and Golden Valley

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## *Overview*

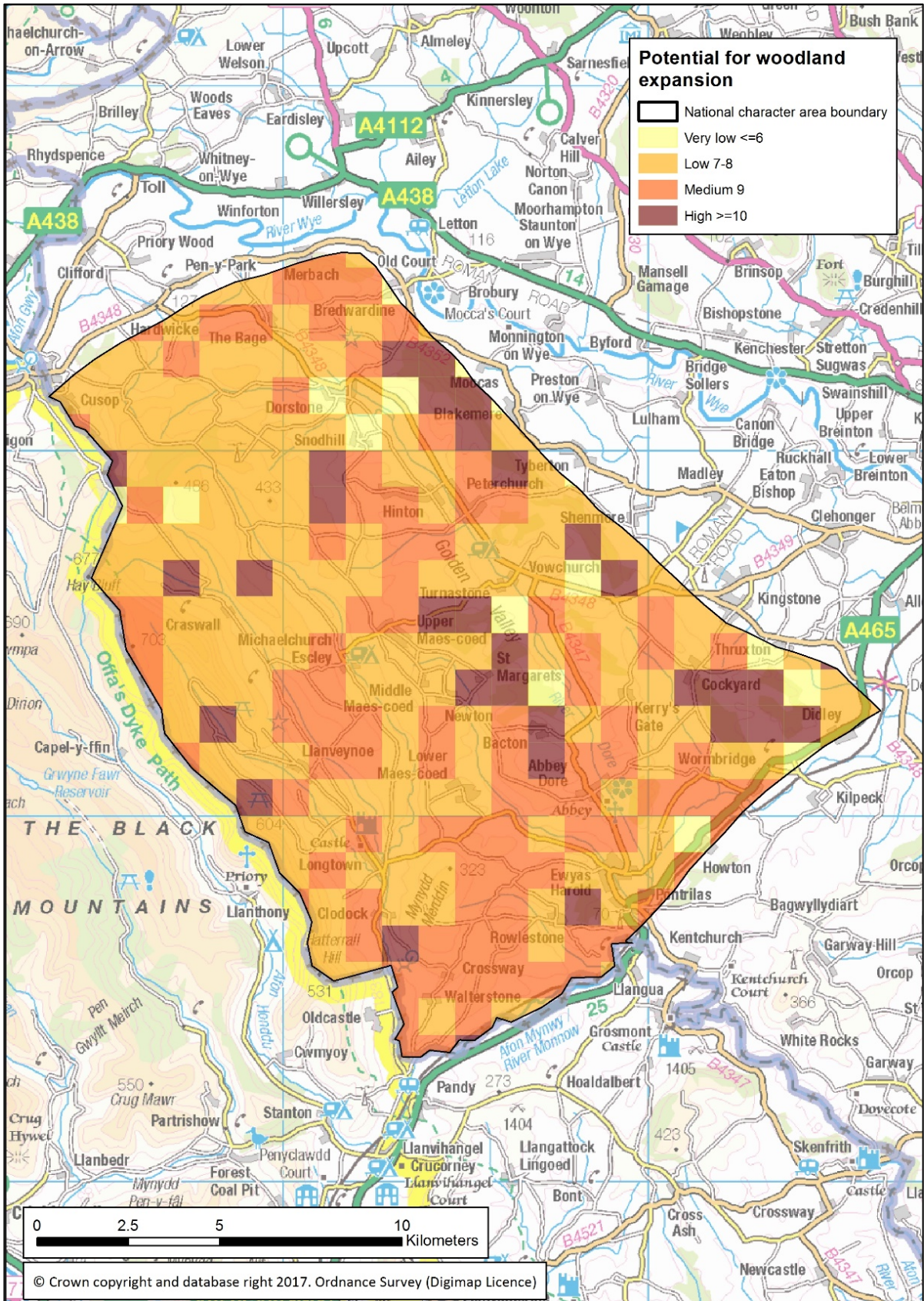
This small NCA lies in the south-west corner of Herefordshire, bounded by the Welsh border and the Brecon Beacons National Park to the west and south west. It lies within the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type, and the western side of the NCA forms part of the Black Mountains, with upland moorland cut by river valleys running south into the River Monnow. Within the valleys is a highly dispersed settlement pattern of farmsteads and hamlets, with small irregular pasture fields. On the east side of the NCA is the Golden Valley, through which flows the River Dore. The Golden Valley has a wide flood plain and a varied pattern of pasture and arable agriculture. Further west, the landscape begins its transition to the uplands, where there are irregular pasture fields, often with mature hedgerow oaks and overgrown hedgerows. Within the valley fields are larger and more regular or semi-regular, resulting from piecemeal enclosure and gradual field reorganisation. The broad river valleys were also used for water meadows. Settlement in the valley is more nucleated, in the form of villages. Overall, the entire NCA is rural, lacking towns and with a tranquil character. Apart from the A465, which runs along the southern boundary of the NCA connecting Hereford and Abergavenny, the communications network is one of local roads and lanes. It is a well-wooded area, with woodland accounting for 13% of the NCA. Of this, over half is ancient woodland. Most of the woodland is found on the sides of the Golden Valley, or along the valley sides of its tributaries.

## *The Historic Environment Character*

The permanent pasture and moorland landscape of much of the NCA means that there is extensive survival of prehistoric and later earthwork monuments, including barrows, hillforts and camps, and medieval earthwork castles. A Roman road runs through Golden Valley. Because of the area's location on the border with Wales, it has a long history as a frontier landscape, for example the Offa's Dyke Path runs along the western boundary, and there is a high concentration of motte and bailey castles and moated manorial sites within the area. A key historic feature is the site of the Cistercian abbey at Abbey Dore.

## *Opportunities for Woodland Expansion*

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates there is only low potential for woodland expansion in the NCA. Where there are areas of high potential, these are limited to land around existing woodlands. New planting opportunities, therefore, should mainly be through the expansion of existing woodlands, particularly on the sides of the Golden Valley, to extend and link habitats. Expanding existing woodland areas is a recognised opportunity in the NCA profile, which also states that new planting should be small scale.



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