

NCA 104 South Herefordshire and Over Severn

Overview

This area lies in south Herefordshire and north-west Gloucestershire, and is bounded by Garway Hill to the west, the Woolhope Dome to the north-east and May Hill to the south. The Wye Valley runs down the centre of the NCA, the scenic quality led to its designation as the Wye Valley AONB, 39% of which lies within the NCA. To the east of the Wye Valley is Limestone geology, characterised by low hills including the areas of Marcle Ridge and Over Severn rising to the Woolhope Dome. To the west, is the Old Red Sandstone of the Garway Hills. The undulating landscape is included within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, and is generally of good agricultural quality. Much of the farmland is used for cereals and grass leys, but with a wide variety of other uses including horticulture, potatoes, pigs and poultry rearing, and dairying. Fields tend to be large and rectangular, resulting from reorganisation and rationalisation of older piecemeal enclosure and successive re-organisation of medieval common fields, particularly in the lower Wye Valley, Over Severn and Garway Hills. On the steeper slopes, such as around the Woolhope Dome, there are small, irregular pasture fields. Orcharding is a particularly significant form of agriculture, producing apples, pears and damsons, with many of the apples and pears used for cider- and perry-making. As well as Bulmers, one of the country's biggest cider makers, there are several small, independent producers. Although there are a few villages and towns, such as Ross-on-Wye, Newent and Dymock in the east of the area, the overall settlement pattern is a dispersed one of hamlets, farmsteads, and church and manor house groupings. Many of the settlements are polyfocal, comprising hamlets scattered across a parish. The NCA is a transport corridor, with one of the key routes from England into South Wales along the M50/A40. There are also routes linking regional urban centres, such as Hereford, Gloucester and Monmouth, but the overall road pattern is one of minor roads and lanes. The area is well-wooded, with a coverage of 12% of the NCA, of which over 60% is ancient woodland, though significantly replanted. Woodland is concentrated in certain areas, such as the Garway Hills, the Woolhope Dome, the Kempley and Gorsley area, and around May Hill. The extensive orchards, particularly to the east of the Woolhope Dome, add to the wooded character of the NCA, as do some of the landscape parks, such as Brockhampton. The area is famous for its wild daffodils, found in woodlands, on woodland edges and along field margins around Dymock, in particular. Recent arable intensification has led to the loss of many daffodil fields, though they are still widespread within the woodlands.

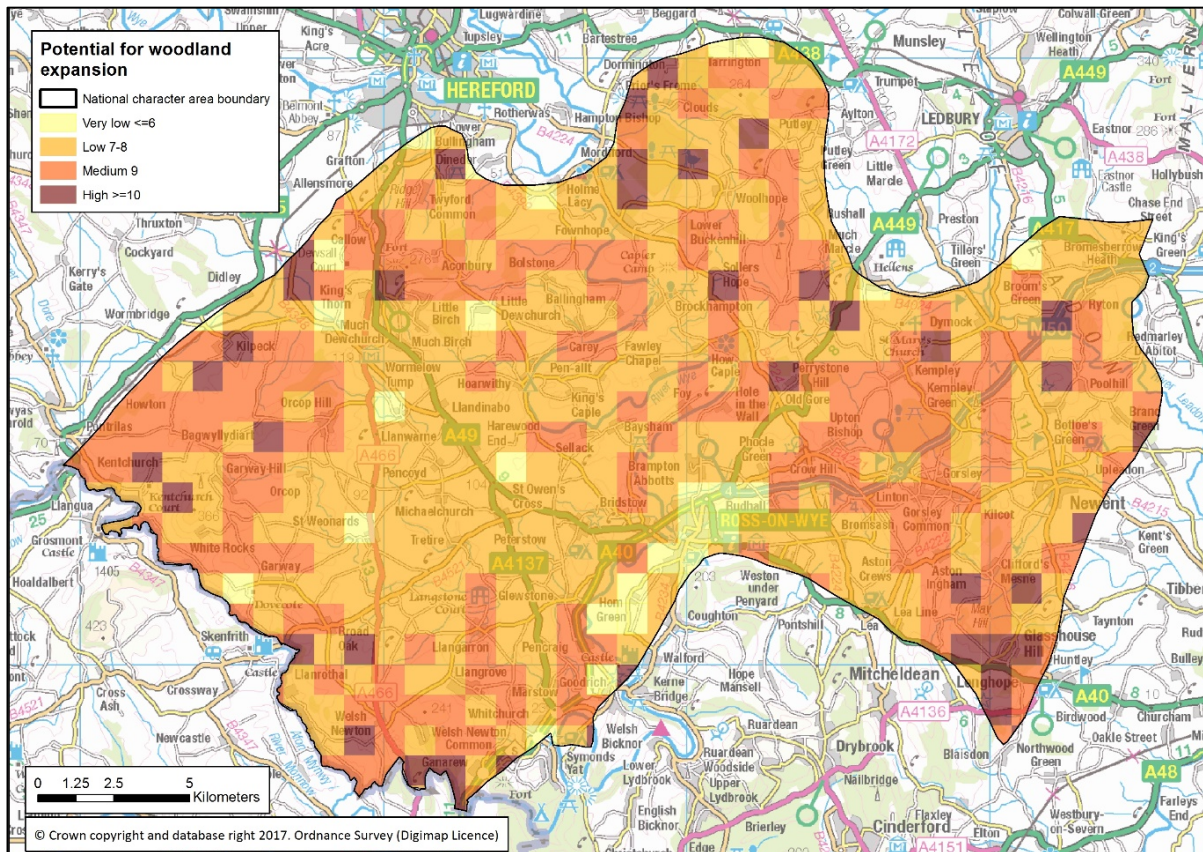
The Historic Environment Character

There are several Iron Age hill forts in the NCA, most of which have woodland on the surrounding hill slopes. Evidence for Roman settlement is largely restricted to the east of the area, with a possible Roman town at Weston under Penyard (Ariconium), a settlement at Dymock, a villa at Putley, and iron mining and processing at Peterstow. In the early medieval period, the western side of the NCA was in the Welsh kingdom of Ergyng until absorbed into Mercia in the 8th century, and the landscape character and place-names retain a Welsh flavour. A feature of the NCA's location on the border between England and Wales are a series of later medieval castles. Most are early motte and bailey or ringwork defences, but the area also includes the well-preserved stone-built Goodrich Castle, standing on a bluff overlooking the River Wye. Apple and pear orchards were an important

part of the agricultural regime from the medieval period, becoming extensive from the 17th century, particularly for making cider and perry.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

Opportunities for new woodland planting are low according to the mapping of historic and natural environment attributes. Where there are areas of higher potential, these are generally around existing woodland, particularly the Woolhope Dome and May Hill area, with a few limited areas to the west in the Garway Hills. The mapping does not reflect the potential for new orchard planting, although this is highlighted within the NCA profile and has already been a target of environmental stewardship schemes. Small-scale woodland planting and management is also highlighted as a way of minimising soil compaction and erosion, and diffusing pollution. Where there is woodland planting around existing sites, care should be taken to avoid direct impact upon archaeological monuments, such as hill forts, and their setting.



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