

NCA 151 South Devon

Overview

The NCA covers a coastal plateau landscape, deeply cut by distinctive rias and estuaries. Its southern boundary is formed by the south Devon coastline, extending as far as Torquay in the east, and the Tamar Estuary in the west. The western boundary of the NCA follows the River Tamar north to its confluence with its tributary, the River Lyd. The northern boundary is marked by Dartmoor. The NCA contains the whole of the South Devon AONB, which covers much of its coastline, as well as those parts of the Tamar Valleys AONB that lies within Devon, as well as the southern fringes of Dartmoor National Park, all of which comprise 35% of the total area. The Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage site also extends into the NCA in the Tamar Valley and Tavistock area. It is included within the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type, and is a fertile agricultural landscape of rounded hills and deeply cut valleys, with mixed farming and, on the Bere peninsula, market gardening and orchards. The field pattern varies, with larger, more regular fields on flatter and higher land, and smaller, more irregular fields on valleys sides. Field boundaries are dominated by hedgebanks. The settlement pattern is largely dispersed, with a high concentration of dispersed farmsteads and hamlets. Intermixed with the dispersed settlement pattern are villages and towns, particularly around the coast, alongside estuaries and at the head of the rias. Plymouth is the main urban centre and only city within the NCA. On the coast, there are large seaside resorts such as Torquay, Paignton and Brixham, in an area known as the English Riviera. The presence of significant urban centres has led to the development of major communications routes, including the main railway line and the A38 trunk road to Plymouth, but also several other major roads leading to the coastal resorts. The limited road access across Dartmoor to the north has also contributed to the concentration of routes through the NCA. The woodland coverage is 10%, of which almost 28% is ancient woodland. Ancient woodland sites are found on valley sides, particularly in the Dart and Erme valleys. Woodland encloses farmland in the wider valleys, and there are some orchards on settlement edges.

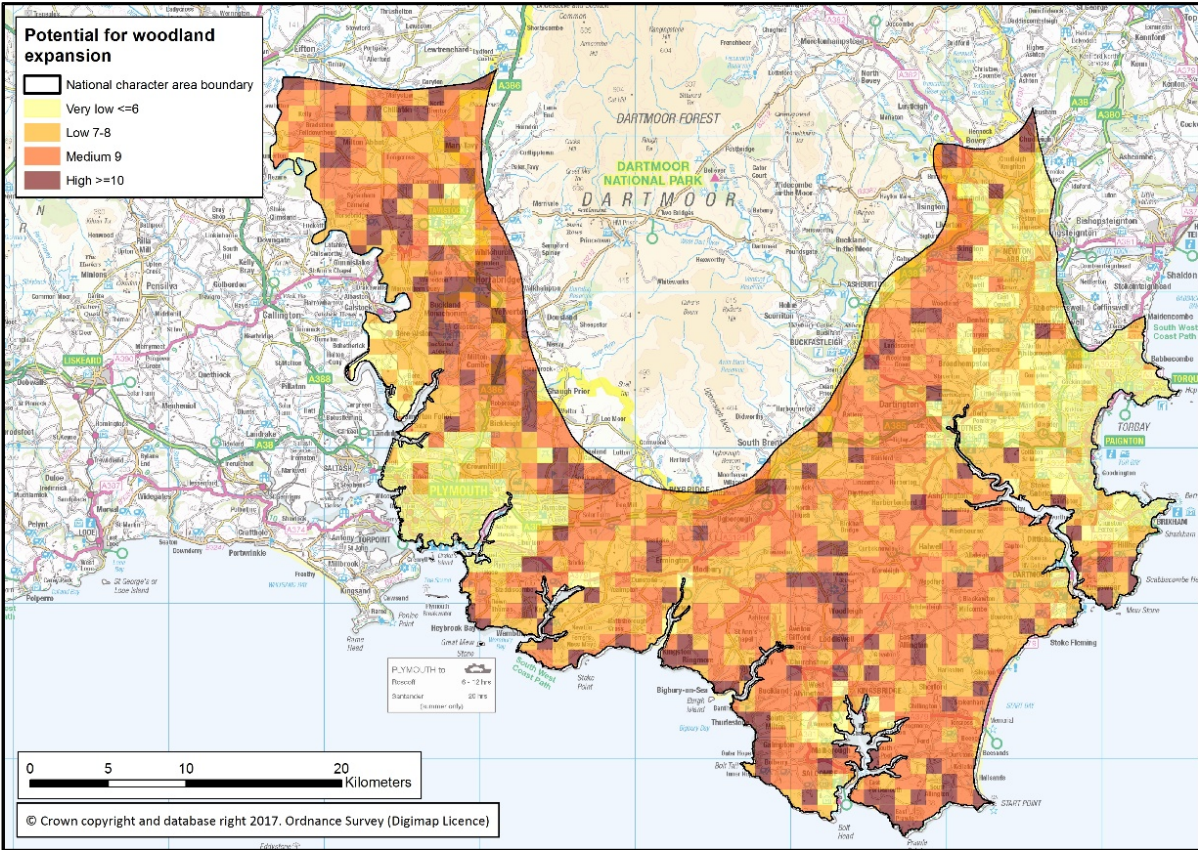
The Historic Environment Character

The fertile soils of the NCA encouraged settlement and exploitation from prehistory onwards. Although most visible monuments of Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age date are in the form of burial mounds, camps and hillforts, as well as some rural settlements, there are also areas of surviving co-axial field systems indicating early cultivation. The importance of the sheltered bays and beaches is evident at Bantham, where a Roman settlement was constructed for the trade in tin and tin-made products. It continued to trade in the post-Roman period, as did nearby Mothecombe, where 5th and 6th century pottery imports have been excavated. It is likely that the basic medieval settlement structure was established by the 9th century, and the eastern part of the area was amongst the most prosperous in Devon. There was a pattern of mixed farming from the medieval period, though the arable fields, including infield-outfield systems, appear to have been enclosed in a piecemeal fashion, and was almost complete by the 16th century. Barton fields, large regular fields associated with an individual farm (often with the place name element 'barton'), were a product of the process of enclosure and rationalisation, appearing from the 15th century onwards. Barton fields were sometimes created out of former strip fields, but might also be

laid out within areas of former deer park. Surplus produce, including grain, was exported via the coastal trade, facilitated by access through the estuaries and rias that cut far inland. Wool and cloth was an important industry from the medieval period, and sold through the local market towns and exported through ports such as Kingsbridge, Totnes, Salcombe and Dartmouth. Quarrying and mining were important industries, particularly tin and copper mining. Three of Devon's stannary towns: Tavistock, Plympton and Ashburton, are within the NCA, and Tavistock forms a detached part of the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage site. Dartmouth and Plymouth became important maritime centres, and both have associations with the Royal Navy, the latter opening a naval dockyard in the 1690s. As a result, there are many surviving military sites in and around the two towns, dating from the medieval period to the 20th century.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a low level of potential for woodland expansion within the NCA, though this score may be skewed by the extensive area of urban development in Plymouth and around Torbay. There are clusters of high potential for new woodland, particularly around the river valleys and along the coast of the south west. In some cases, this would represent extensions to existing woodland, but also planting around areas of development. Planting in these areas would help to achieve the environmental opportunities highlighted by the NCA profile, to connect and expand links between woodland habitats, particularly on former woodland sites. The profile emphasises the need to plant and replant areas of phytophthora-affected woodland to the north of Plymouth, and this coincides with one of the clusters of high potential identified by the mapping. In all cases, however, areas of new planting should be assessed for the potential impact on archaeological monuments and their setting, as well as ensuring that the historic field patterns are respected.



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