

10 HIGH WOLD DIP-SLOPE VALLEY

Character Areas

- 10A Middle Churn Valley
- 10B Middle Coln Valley
- 10C Upper / Middle Leach Valley



Key Characteristics

- Well-defined gentle concave valley form with intermittently very steep and indented valley sides dissected by minor watercourses, and distinctive convex profile at transition with the High Wold Dip-Slope;
- intermittent areas of predominantly broadleaved and mixed woodland extend across sections of the valley sides, particularly across the steeper sections;
- predominance of improved pastoral farmland extending between the wooded slopes, and along valley bottoms, together with pockets of arable land, particularly on the shallower slopes;
- occasional remnants of unimproved and calcareous grasslands;

- sheltered, visually contained and intimate valley systems;
- intermittent stone built villages occupy sheltered locations in valley bottoms, often in association with a bridging point;
- farmsteads and individual buildings within the more open valley sections link to farmed areas on the adjacent High Wold Dip-Slope;
- occasional private parklands within or adjacent to valleys influence character; and
- road network generally confined to a single valley bottom road, together with principal and local cross valley routes.

Landscape Character

The valleys flowing across the High Wold Dip-Slope form a transition from the steeper and more confined upper reaches, and the sections to the south-east that flow across the Dip-Slope Lowland to the Thames. As a consequence they share characteristics of both valley types, the differences often relating to the progressive change in elevation from the higher wolds down to the lowland areas that form the south-eastern boundary of the AONB.

The river valleys have a well-defined form with locally more incised sections, particularly within the principal tributary valleys that link into the main valley. At the crest of the valley slopes, there is a more gentle convex profile at the junction with the High Wold Dip-Slope. The main valleys sides are further dissected by a series of small secondary valleys that link into the main river, the majority of which are dry.

All of the valleys have a sheltered, and secluded character distinct and separate from the more open and extensive

High Wold Dip-Slope that define their limit. They display a mosaic of land uses, with a mix of intermittent areas of broadleaved, and occasionally ancient woodland clothing the steeper slopes and forming a backdrop to the areas of predominantly pasture land. Arable land is present, generally in small consolidated holdings and principally occurring on the shallower valley slopes, or connected to farms occupying the High Wold Dip-Slope edge.

Physical Influences

The Thames tributaries flow in well-defined valleys across the Great Oolite, with the Forest Marble Formation occurring in a band along many sections of the valley sides. Alluvial deposits are present within all of the valley bottoms forming a distinctive flat valley bottom across which the rivers meander. The soils of the floodplain are often poorly drained and therefore wet pasture grazed by cattle or even wet meadowland is predominant within the valley floor.

Along the fringes of the floodplain silty soils support fertile land for productive pasture and in some areas, less at risk from flooding, arable farming takes place. On the valley sides pasture predominates. On some slopes too steep for improvement and heavy grazing, calcareous grasslands survive and are an important nature conservation resource.

Riverside trees such as willow, ash and alder may often be seen in close proximity to the course of the High Wold Dip-Slope rivers. The intermittent mainly deciduous woodlands and copses, together with the enclosing topography, combine to limit views and reinforce the sense of enclosure and intimacy within the valleys. Hedgerows as well as stone walls on valley sides also contribute to the sense of a well-treed and enclosed landscape and provide some landscape structure. However, on the valley bottom, some post and wire fences occur together with areas of horse pasture.

Human Influences

The presence of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments throughout the course of the Thames tributary river valleys, from the High Wold down to the Dip-Slope Lowland, suggest that both these and other sections of the valleys were the focus of settlement in prehistoric times. It is also likely that the valleys were important trade and communication routes. The influence of the Roman occupation affects all of the High Wold Dip-Slope rivers, with Fosse Way crossing both the Coln and the Leach at important bridging points. To the west, Ermin Way, now followed by the A417(T), follows close to the western

perimeter of the Middle Churn character area in the vicinity of the principal tributary valley that extends to Shewel Wood.

Despite much earlier origins, many of the valley settlements were established in the Saxon or medieval periods. The geographical locations of settlements also indicate that river crossing points were the natural locations of many settlements. Today, dispersed villages of a radial form, and dispersed hamlets of a linear form predominate in the valley bottoms along with scattered individual dwellings. Dispersed hamlets and individual buildings also occur on valley terraces, although these are less frequent.

High Wold Dip-Slope Valley villages and hamlets are generally small and quiet. The apparent historic layout of the historic core of many villages, coupled with evidence of traditional building styles and materials, adds significantly to their visual appeal and character. Distinctive stone churches are often associated with these villages although they are not often at the centre, instead occupying a peripheral location close to the river channel. Northleach is a particularly notable settlement within the Leach Valley, at one time a key medieval wool trading centre.

Character Areas

10A

Middle Churn Valley

The Middle Churn Valley Character Area extends across the High Wold Dip-Slope from the south of Rendcomb to the northern perimeter of Cirencester, at the village of Baunton and the boundary of the AONB. Although the valley form is still distinct, it assumes a progressively broader form with shallower slope profiles to the south of the character area. The valley extends across the White Limestone Formation of the Great Oolite, but river erosion has cut through the rock strata to expose the Forest



Marble Formation along the middle and lower valley slopes. Extensive alluvial deposits occur within the valley bottom, which is noticeably wider than in the upper sections of the valley, extending up to 300m in width in some sections. There are also numerous braided sections within the river course, and a series of springs rise within the valley floor and lower slopes to feed into the river.

The land is predominantly under pasture, with occasional areas of arable, within a mosaic of regular and mainly medium-scale fields. Woodland cover within the Middle Churn Valley is generally sparse. There is, however, an intermittent cover of small rectilinear broadleaved woodlands on the lower valley slopes and bottom, together with riparian vegetation, and a mosaic of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. On the margins of the principal settlements of North Cerney and Baunton the introduction of 'decorative' species has resulted in a more domestic influence within the valley.

The A435 follows the valley bottom and is a busy and disruptive element within the valley. A further intrusion within the valley is the 19m high bridge between Baunton and Perrott's Brook that carries the A419(T) across the Churn Valley, and now forms a bypass to Cirencester and Stratton. The bridge structure, together with the approach roads which are in cutting, have a significant local effect on the southern section of the character area.

Settlement in the northern section of the character area is confined to the stone built village of North Cerney, and occasional farms and residential properties. Further south, however, in the vicinity of Baunton and the northern perimeter of Cirencester, urban influences are more apparent with a greater number of residential properties, and leisure uses including a caravan and camping site at Perrott's Brook, and a golf course west of Baunton. These impart a more settled character to the valley.

In contrast, the subsidiary valley to the west of the Churn that extends as far as Shewel Wood retains the same complex and deeply incised profile that is more typical of parts of the upper reaches of the Churn, particularly from Rendcomb to Colesbourne and within the Hilcot Brook Valley. Extensive areas of woodland extend along the valley slopes, including ancient woodland at Moor Wood. The valley is sparsely populated, and inaccessible to vehicles, except for a minor road that crosses the valley to the south of Shewel Wood.



10B Middle Coln Valley

The section of the Coln Valley that flows through the High Wold Dip-Slope is short in length extending from Stowell Park south to the small valley bottom villages of Calcot and Coln Rogers. A tributary of the Coln is also included in this character area, and from its confluence with the Coln at Fossebridge, extends westwards to the village of Chedworth.

In common with the Middle Churn, the Middle Coln flows across the Great Oolite but has exposed Forest Marble in the upper sections of the valley. Alluvium is also deposited along the valley bottom to form a well-defined flat valley floor across which river gently meanders within the broader meander form of the valley morphology. The valley is particularly broad below Stowell.

Much of the valley is managed as pasture, within medium to large regular fields of improved grassland as well as unimproved former water meadows. Small fields are common in the valley bottom, and on the perimeter of the villages. Remnants of calcareous grassland can also be found in the bottom of tributary valleys to the Coln. Occasional areas of arable also occur, notably in the vicinity of Moor Farm, west of Coln St Dennis. Woodland cover within the main valley is generally limited and confined to small rectangular copses within the tributary dry valley east of Coln St Dennis. Numerous bankside and isolated trees, as well as intermittent areas of river edge woodland and copses also occur along the valley bottom forming a distinctive backdrop or setting to the stone villages within the valley.

The sequence of small peaceful and unspoilt stone villages along the Coln valley has resulted in a rural settled character amidst the wider pastoral setting. There is some intrusion into the unspoilt rural character, however, notably where horse grazed pasture occurs, in association with features typical of 'horsiculture'.

The most notable archaeological feature within the character area is the Roman road Fosse Way, which crosses the river at Fosse Bridge. There is also evidence of ridge and furrow in places along the lower valley slopes and bottom. Stowell House is located on the upper slopes above a broad valley meander. The historic house and its parkland setting, with parkland trees, pasture and remnant features dominate the valley and contribute to the peaceful pastoral and parkland estate character.

The small tributary valley to the west of Fosse Bridge has a notably more incised valley form than the main valley. In contrast to many other smaller tributary valleys that extend across the High Wold Dip-Slope it has a settled character, with the village of Chedworth extending along the valley. The settlement form of the village is uncharacteristic of typical Cotswold valley villages with cottages spread along the valley sides, and climbing up the steep and narrow valley; indeed, in some sections, the settlement form is more reminiscent of the Stroud valleys. The wooded embankment that once supported the viaduct carrying the former Cheltenham to Cirencester railway line is also a notable feature within the valley.

10C

Upper / Middle Leach Valley



The River Leach rises from a series of springs in the village green of the small village of Hampnett, which is set in the bowl of an enclosed valley. Although extending for a short section into the High Wold landscape type, this Upper / Middle reach of the river has been considered as part of the sequence of High Wold Dip-Slope valleys. In common with the Churn and Coln, the river flows across the White Limestone Formation of the Great Oolite Group. Alluvial deposits also occur along the valley bottom.

Northleach is the principal settlement within the character area. This notable historic wool market town is located within a well-defined valley form, the Perpendicular tower of its 15th century 'wool' church forming a focus for views from the surrounding area. The river is culverted through the town and emerges at the southern end adjacent to an area of playing fields. To the south-east of Northleach, the valley has a well-managed appearance. The sequence of small stone hamlets of Upper, Middle and Lower End nestle low within the valley, and are sheltered by steep wooded valley sides and numerous trees, resulting in a secluded and intimate character.

Land use within the valley is a mix of arable and pasture, the latter predominant within the valley bottoms. Woodland cover throughout the character area is intermittent with a notable area of ancient woodland at Prison Copse between Northleach and Hampnett. Further areas of valley side woodlands occur below Northleach, and also in association with Lodge Park, including Larkethill, which is classified as ancient woodland.

The Registered Historic Garden of Lodge Park is a notable feature at the southern limit of the character area. The parkland landscape associated with this extensive deer park forms part of the Sherborne Estate to the north. It is a unique example of a 17th century deer course and grandstand. Created in 1634 by John Dutton, it has now been restored by the National Trust, relying on archaeological evidence. The surrounding parkland, designed by Charles Bridgeman in 1725, extends across the west facing slopes of the valley.