

Area of LDU within AONB: 1702.1 hectares

% of LDU within AONB: 92%



Date surveyed: 24 February 2010

Survey points: SS611,448, SS600453, SS576472, SS556450, SS533464

Summary of landscape character

This LDU is formed of a group of three steep-sided north-facing combe valleys in the north of the AONB to east of Ifracombe. Small streams drain the surrounding downland and thread through the combe bottoms, flowing north to the coast where the LDU adjoins coastal cliffs and caves. Settlements of varying scales are located along the combe bottoms, including Combe Martin and the historic village of Berrynarbor, as well as numerous scattered farmsteads nestled into the folded slopes. Combe slopes are characterised by pasture and rough grazing land, with upper reaches being densely wooded, forming ‘fingers’ of woodland which extend south into the open rolling downland. Away from the main settlements the combes are tranquil landscapes, with lower slopes often featuring the sounds of running streams.

LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION

LANDFORM / TOPOGRAPHY / VIEWS

Landform description	Steep sided gently meandering combes carving deeply into the rolling landform to open out into rocky coves at the coast. Limestone outcrops provide detail to the landscape.
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LAND USE AND PATTERNS

Agriculture	<i>Main agricultural land use</i>		<i>Other agricultural land use(s)</i>	
		Predominantly rough sheep-grazed pasture.	N/A	
Field patterns and boundaries	<i>Field patterns and origins</i>		<i>Size (note variations)</i>	<i>Boundary type / description</i>
	Varied patterns – generally irregular medieval fields following the rolling valley contours, with regular post-		Small to medium scale on lower slopes, becoming larger	Patchy hedgerows with some grown out sections, with scattered hedgerow

	<p>medieval and more recent fields often associated with combe bottoms and summits. Distinctive medieval strip fields (narrow and curving) define the slopes above Combe Martin.</p>	<p>on higher ground.</p> <p>Small strip fields are particularly associated with the slopes above Combe Martin.</p>	<p>trees – often beech (wind-sculpted on higher slopes).</p>
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Other land uses (e.g. recreation)	<p>Numerous recreational and tourism-related facilities (including Ilfracombe Golf Course on the slopes of Widmouth Hill, a number of camping and caravan sites along the coast, quad biking at Keypitts Farm (on the boundary with LDU 582) and a wildlife park attraction near Higher Leigh).</p>		
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WOODLAND AND SEMI-NATURAL HABITATS

Trees / woodland cover	<i>Size and distribution within landscape</i>	<i>Type and species(broadleaved / conifer)</i>
	<p>Dense woodlands characterise the heads of the combe valleys, with small shelter belts and copses further inland associated with folds in the landscape, scatted farmsteads and tributary streams.</p>	<p>Predominantly mixed and broadleaved (including oak and beech ancient and semi-natural woodlands) with some coniferous plantations at the heads of valleys (e.g. Woolacott Cleave Plantation in the Sterridge Valley). Coniferous shelterbelts are associated with farm buildings.</p>

Semi-natural habitats	<i>Description and location within landscape</i>	
	<p>Patches of fragmented heathland and gorse scrub are interspersed in-between areas of rough pasture.</p> <p>Many of the combe-side woodlands are designated as County Wildlife Sites (CWS) based on their rich woodland flora. The LDU includes Napp's Cave SSSI on the coast - containing large crystals unique in Britain and valued bat roosts.</p>	

SETTLEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Settlement pattern	<i>Settlement size, type, density and relationship to landscape</i>	
	<p>Long linear settlements follow narrow valley floors; dispersed farmsteads and hamlets are scattered throughout and are nestled into valley sides.</p> <p>Combe Martin in the east is the largest settlement, with some 20th century development extending up valley sides and in linear form along roads.</p> <p>Caravan and camping sites (mainly along the coast) result in prominent 'seasonal settlements' which add greatly to the settled character of the area in peak visitor season.</p>	

Transport pattern	<i>Road pattern, character and relationship to settlement / landscape</i>	
	<p>Winding rural lanes are enclosed by woodland, settlement and the steep</p>	

	landform. They traverse the combe slopes following their course to the coast, where roads then wind along the flatter combe floors.		
Local vernacular styles and materials	<i>Predominant traditional building materials</i>	<i>Any local variations</i>	<i>Other built features reflecting vernacular</i>
	Whitewash stone cottages with black detailing on door frames and window ledges with grey/brown slate roofs.	Victorian core at Combe Martin highlighting the growth of the village as a popular seaside resort. The whitewash and black detailing of the local vernacular is well displayed in the historic village of Berryarbor.	Stone-built churches, including at Combe Martin and Berryarbor.
Modern development styles / materials	Extensive modern expansion of Combe Martin, with bright coloured (particularly white) houses and bungalows standing out prominently against the coastal and muted combe-side backdrop. Evergreen garden plantings and ornamental walls introduce a suburban influence.		

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Key historic features visible in the landscape	<i>Description</i>
	The historic core of Berryarbor is a Conservation Area and includes numerous listed buildings. Many of the scattered isolated farmsteads are also listed. St Peter's Church at Combe Martin is a Grade I listed building – its stone tower forms a prominent local landmark, as does the tower of Berryarbor church and Newbury Castle. Limekilns, silver mines and other mineral workings are features of the landscape on the edge of Exmoor National Park.

VIEWS / PERCEPTUAL QUALITIES

Views	<i>Key views / landmark features</i>	<i>Intervisibility with LDUs</i>	
		<i>From this LDU</i>	<i>To this LDU</i>
	Views are largely contained by the wooded valley slopes, allowing occasional glimpses north along the combes to the sea. The square tower of the Church of St Peter in Combe Martin is a prominent feature in views, as is a telecommunications mast east of Berryarbor. Glimpses of ridge-side development at Ilfracombe (outside the AONB) are afforded from the western-most	576 (elevated downland to the south, white washed houses are dominant features) 583 (north coast) 852 (elevated downland in the west)	576 583 852 387

	combe.	387 (Ilfracombe)	
Perceptual qualities (description)	<p>At the heads of valleys there is a strong sense of containment as a result of the steep wooded valley sides. The sound of flowing water contributes to a sense of tranquillity in the bottom of the combes. The presence of extensive development at Combe Martin, along with the location of numerous caravan and camping sites and other visitor attractions, as well as the proximity of Ilfracombe in the west, erodes tranquillity in coastal locations – particularly in the peak tourist season.</p>		

LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS

Designation	Number	% of LDU land area that is within the AONB
NATURE CONSERVATION		
SSSI	1	0.69%
County Wildlife Sites	18	9.37%
Local Nature Reserves	1	0.98%
HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT		
Scheduled Monuments	2	0.64%
Listed Buildings	65 (1 grade I, 4 grade II* and 60 grade II)	

UK BAP PRIORITY HABITATS

UK BAP Priority Habitat	Area (ha)	% of LDU land area that is within the AONB
Lowland beech and yew woodland	4.68	0.04%
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	48.41	0.41%
Maritime cliff and slope	2.36	0.02%
Traditional orchards	6.56	0.06%
Upland oakwoods	45.87	0.38%

KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING LANDSCAPE CONDITION

Perceptual qualities	This is a varied landscape of enclosed woodlands and open combe-side pastures contrasting with settled valley floors. The impact of a seasonal influx of visitors and summer residents associated with the coastal resorts reduces the sense of tranquillity during the peak tourist season.
Views	<p>Modern development extends up the valley sides at Combe Martin and along ridges east of Ilfracombe; tourism related development (numerous coastal caravan and camping sites) strongly feature in northward views, particularly during the summer months.</p> <p>A telegraph mast on higher land to the east of Berrynabor is a dominant feature in views to the north.</p>
Land use	Generally this is a strongly pastoral landscape, with areas of rough grazing contributing to landscape interest. A spread of recreational land uses can detract from agricultural character particularly in coastal locations.
Field patterns	Evidence of field enlargement on higher ground, eroding the traditional medieval curving field patterns of the area e.g. in the south east at Nutcombe Hill.
Field boundaries	Hedgerows are fragmented and grown out in places, including at the head of the eastern-most combe. Conversely, some locations have intensively flailed hedgebanks with few hedgerow trees, including at Higher Leigh – indicating variable levels of management across the landscape.
Trees and woodland	Many combe-side woodlands are County Wildlife Sites which indicates that they will be under appropriate management regimes. No issues were noted in the field.
Semi-natural habitats	No issues were noted in the field – areas of heathy scrub and rough grassland contribute to landscape interest. Napp's Cave is currently assessed by Natural England as in unfavourable recovering condition as a result of inappropriate recreational access.
Settlement and development	Spread of modern development up valley

	sides and in linear form along roadside – this is particularly prevalent at Combe Martin, whilst ridge-side development at Ilfracombe, outside the AONB is prominent in views from the western-most combe.
Local vernacular	Suburban influence within Combe Martin as a result of domestic scale planting and building e.g. evergreen species, ornamental walls. Modern buildings generally use a unifying style of white/light coloured painted walls and grey/brown slate roofs.