

A. High Coastal Heaths



Strongly articulated landform – steep, rugged coastal cliffs give rise to inland areas of moorland plateaux and hills.



Rich semi-natural heathland (interspersed with gorse and bracken) defines the land cover.



Heavily used walking routes make linear tracks in the heather.



Some stretches of the cliffs defined by dramatic rocky outcrops and scree slopes.



The South West Coast Path makes this landscape popular with walkers and provides striking coastal views.

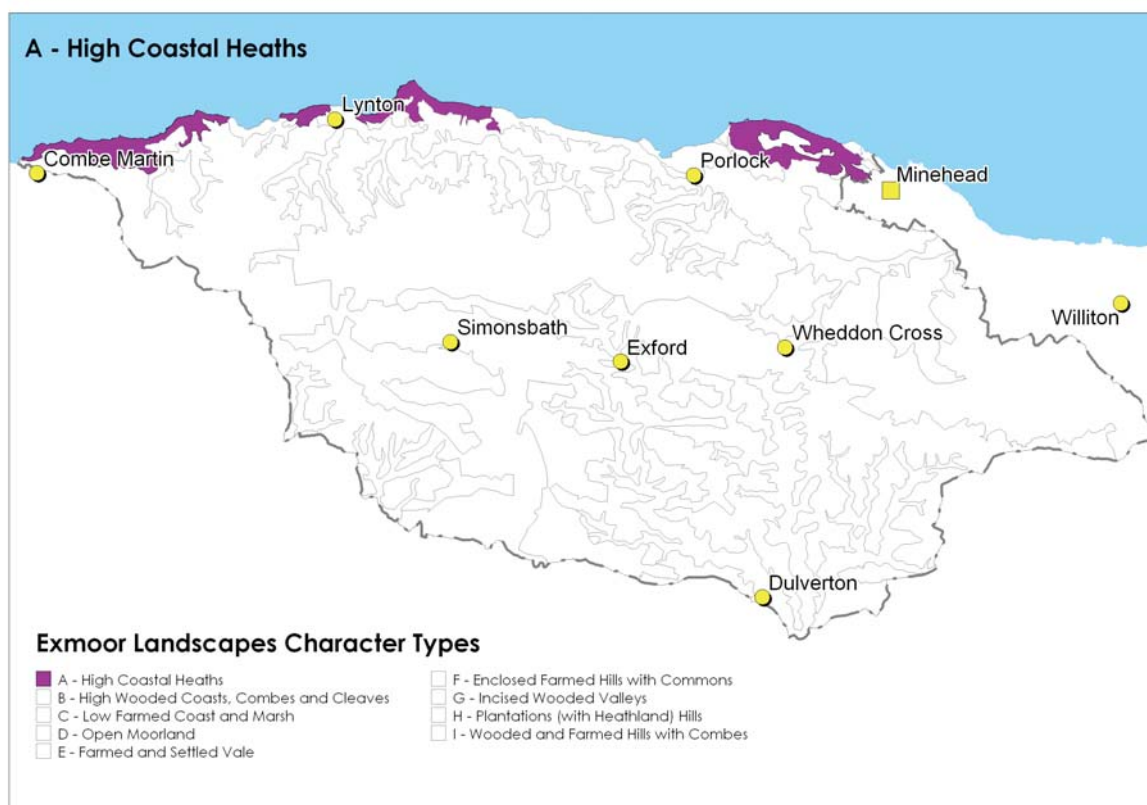


Gorse encroachment in places acts to enclose the landscape and restrict views.

3. A: High Coastal Heaths

Location and Boundaries

- 3.1 The dramatic, elevated, open and exposed landscape type defined as **High Coastal Heaths** occurs as a series of separate character areas aligning the Bristol Channel - marking the northern extent of the National Park.



Key Characteristics

- Open landscape of **rich semi-natural heathland** interspersed with gorse and bracken.
- **Strongly articulated landform, undulating plateaux, rounded moorland hills** and **steep, rugged coastal cliffs**.
- **Overriding sense of the sea with wide skies and distant views** across the adjacent Bristol Channel to Wales.
- Strong sense of **elevation and exposure** to the elements due to the steep cliffs fronting the sea.
- **Inaccessibility** of the cliffs creates a sense of **solitude**.

- **South West Coast Path** provides good pedestrian access to the slopes and cliffs and offers **far-reaching coastal views**.
- Located adjacent, or in close proximity, to areas of **significant population size**.
- **Elevated and open landscape** (due to lack of tree cover and other enclosing landscape features) providing **wide skies and distant views** across the Bristol Channel.

Landscape Character TYPE Description

- 3.2 Covering a relatively small land area compared with other Landscape Types within Exmoor National Park, the *High Coastal Heaths* are nonetheless distinctive and dramatic.
- 3.3 With elevation ranging from 0 to 342m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), this landscape type has a strongly articulated landform - steep and rugged hogs-back coastal cliffs (with coves and combes) that give rise to inland areas of gently undulating moorland plateau and hills. The coastal cliffs create an impressive coastline – the scalloped cliff face revealing the varied colours of the landscape’s underlying geology – purple, grey and green sandstone and reddish-brown mudstone of the Hangman Sandstone formation, supporting well-drained soils.
- 3.4 Rich semi-natural heather moorland defines the majority of the land cover, interspersed with gorse and bracken (bracken being dominant on the coastal slopes). The ecological value of this landscape type is reflected in the extensive areas of heathland designated as SSSI and SAC. The colour of the heather is one of the defining features of the landscape – the purple-covered hills often visible from considerable distance.
- 3.5 The challenging terrain of the coastal cliffs makes them largely inaccessible and as such they have remained, for the most part, free from modern agricultural practices and human intervention in general.

- 3.6 Elevation and a lack of tree cover or other enclosing features creates a strong sense of openness - wide skies and distant views across the Bristol Channel to the south coast of Wales; the physical and visual connection with the sea being fundamental to the character of the landscape. An impressive outlook is also offered inland – with striking views of the contrasting *High Wooded Coast*, *Combes and Cleaves* and the patchwork landscape of the *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*.

Landscape Character AREA Descriptions

A1. Holdstone Down and Trentishoe

- 3.7 This Character Area forms the northwestern coastal stretch of the National Park, extending from Great Burland Rocks in the east to Lester Cliff in the west where Exmoor's boundary ends at the coastal town of Combe Martin. This area of the High Coastal Heaths includes a significant stretch of Exmoor's coastline containing a series of deep cut cleaves, combes, waterfalls as well as the lower reaches and mouth of the River Heddon valley.
- 3.8 Inland the landscape is dominated by the smooth rounded heather moorland hills at Holdstone Down (349m AOD), Trentishoe Down (324m AOD) and Girt Down (318m AOD) – the large-scale landforms looming over their moorland foothills.



Rounded heather moorland hills of Holdstone Down, Trentishoe Down and Girt Down

- 3.9 A secondary road runs between Holdstone and Trentishoe Downs and is dotted with occasional car parks (small and informal in character) as well some residential properties of varied age and style – the Glass Box being a well-known local landmark. The buildings are strong points of human reference in an otherwise undeveloped landscape.



Residential properties are points of human reference in the landscape.

- 3.10 With the exception of the one road, there are no other vehicle access routes and as such, much of the landscape is inaccessible by car. With particular reference to the coastal slopes, the lack of vehicle access creates a sense of isolation and solitude.

- 3.11 This character area provides clear views to the farmed landscape surrounding the village of Trentishoe – sheep-grazed pastures delineated by stone walls and stone faced banks.



Views to enclosed farmland – improved pastures contained by stone walling.

A2. Valley of Rocks

- 3.12 The much-visited Valley of Rocks occurs immediately west of the coastal holiday town of Lynton (and Lynmouth). Although exhibiting the characteristics of the High Coastal Heath landscape type, the Valley of Rocks also has a number of significant features that are unique to this area. For example, its valley landform, its dramatic rock formations and British native goats that graze the seemingly inaccessible slopes.



Valley landform

- 3.13 Once believed to form an exit route to sea for the River Lyn, the Valley of Rocks is now dry. This is a landscape of spectacular views – the coast, the prominent rocks (Castle Rock for example forming a striking landmark as you look down the valley), the steep heathy valley slides and scree slopes. This also appears to be a landscape of two halves – the rugged, wilder steep sided slopes and coastal cliffs contrasting sharply with the flatter, lower valley floor that has seen much human influence and change.



Castle Rock and heather-covered slopes.

- 3.14 On entering the Valley along the road from Lynton the landscape is influenced by human activity and has a very different (tamed) character compared with the less accessible cleaves, rock outcrops and coastal slopes and cliffs. The valley floor houses a cricket pitch, a picnic area, a car park and a café – together evoking a sense of gentle, organised recreation which in many ways seems at odds with the challenging, rugged, windswept, exposed character of the valley sides, outcropping rocks, slopes and cliffs.



Tamed valley floor contrasts with the rugged outcropping rocks.

A3. The Foreland

- 3.15 The Foreland is centrally located along Exmoor's northern coastal edge. Extending immediately east from the *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscape of Lynton and Lynmouth, this Character Area offers some of the National Park's most dramatic coastal scenery. Here the rugged, concave coastline sweeps from east and west, culminating at

Foreland Point, the most northerly point on Exmoor to abut the Bristol Channel - indicated by its lighthouse.



Heather-covered hills stretch towards the coast at Foreland Point.

3.16 Inland views are no less inspiring – a panoramic scene of deeply incised wooded combes, the patchwork landscape of the *Enclosed Farm Hills with Commons* and the contrasting open and wild landscape of the *Open Moorland*.



Views across adjacent *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons* towards the *Open Moorland*.

3.17 With the coast road cutting through the area, running between coastal towns of Porlock and Lynton and Lynmouth, human influence in the landscape is apparent. Road noise, road signs, car parking areas, and views of the populated coastal towns combine to create a landscape that is clearly influenced by humans. There has been significant loss of heathland (to pasture) along the A39 corridor.



View along the coast to Lynmouth.

- 3.18 Away from the main road much of the landscape has retained a sense of tranquillity – becoming increasingly remote towards the coastal cliffs.

A4. North Hill

- 3.19 This is the most easterly Character Area of the *High Coastal Heaths* landscape type – occurring between the two *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscapes that surround the small village of Bossington in the west and the large holiday town of Minehead in the east.



View through Wood Combe and Bratton Wood to the western edge of Minehead.

- 3.20 There is one road (Hill Road) providing vehicle access to this landscape – a no through road extending up from the Higher Town area of Minehead and terminating at a car park just north of the Allerford Plantation. From here, there are dramatic panoramic views both coastal and inland. There are a number of

other key viewing points – Bossington Hill for example, providing views across the *Porlock's Low Farmed Coast and Marsh*, and Bratton Ball, offering views into the *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscape to the *Porlock – Dunster – Minehead Farmed and Settled Vale* below.

- 3.21 Previously used as a military training ground, this Character Area is now a much-visited and much-used recreation in part due to its close proximity to and easy access from Minehead. Car parking areas, a camp site, interpretation boards, finger signposts and benches combine in the landscape to create a strong sense of management and human influence; evoking a 'country park' character more evident than in the other *High Coastal Heaths* landscapes.



North Hill is popular with walkers – many using the South West Coast Path.

- 3.22 The majority of the land cover is characterised by heather moorland (although with significant tracts of bracken and gorse) with grazing Exmoor ponies often in view. Gorse encroachment is particularly evident along the roadside between North Hill and Bossington Hill. To the north of Selworthy Beacon, the heaths give way to an area of very different character (*Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*) landscape type. Here, large fields of improved pasture are divided by post and wire and post and rail fencing – grazed by cattle and sheep.



Exmoor ponies roam free over the heath.

- 3.23 Unlike the other character areas, the South West Coast Path is set further inland so access to the coast is limited.

Landscape TYPE Evaluation

Strength of Landscape Character

- 3.24 With a dramatic topography and aesthetic land cover of heather moor, the Coastal Heaths landscape is highly distinctive and of **strong** character overall. In addition to its intrinsic characteristics and qualities, much of landscape's character is borrowed or determined from its surroundings – the coastline and seascape to the north contrasting with the far reaching inland views to the south. Because of its coastal boundary, there is a strong sense of the Heaths defining the edge or limit of the National Park. With this is an awareness of the special juxtaposition of heather moor meeting sea – the purple-coloured, strongly articulated landform giving way to a rugged coastline and wide-open skies.

Landscape Condition

- 3.25 The condition of the Coastal Heaths is judged to be **moderate**. There are number of factors (recreational, agricultural, and infrastructure for example) that are affecting the state of repair, or degree of intactness, of this landscape type. Those judged to be endemic to the landscape as a whole are noted below; recognised as key issues or 'visible forces for change'. There are other issues affecting parts or particular areas of this landscape but which are not

common across the entire type. These are noted separately as part of the Character Area Evaluation.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the High Coastal Heaths is to **Conserve** and **Enhance** landscape character. It is essential to conserve the tranquil (remote in parts) nature of the landscape – the sense of exposure and vulnerability to the elements that makes the coastal heaths an exhilarating and inspiring place to be. There is a danger that further incremental inclusion of human elements in the landscape (such as benches, speed restrictions, and parking provision) will threaten to tame or dumb-down the essentially rugged and wild character of this coastal landscape.

The following table highlights the range of **Issues** recognised through field survey as having (or likely to have in the future) a negative impact on the landscape. The associated **Objectives** are those that would benefit landscape character (and visual amenity) and condition thereby improving overall landscape quality. It is recognised that some of these may be in conflict with other objectives e.g. ecological, agricultural or recreational. The objectives are intended to act as a guide for future consultation work and to inform, for example, the development of actions or implementation strategies. Those issues considered to be long-term landscape threats appear first in the table (under the heading '**Key Issues**' and highlighted in grey). Landscape issues considered, at present, to be less threatening (of secondary significance) appear after the Key Issues under the heading '**Secondary Issues**'. These secondary issues are nonetheless important considerations.

Landscape Issues	Objectives	Priority Areas
Key Issues:		
Loss of the simple, open purple hills (often visible from considerable distance) due to the encroachment of bracken and gorse and some broadleaved woodland species.	Continuous tracts of open heath land without significant areas of bracken or gorse.	A4. North Hill A1. Holdstone Down and Trentishoe

<p>Loss of sense of openness/ expanse as well as opportunities for viewing the landscape due to encroachment of gorse along the roadsides – changing the sense of scale by enclosing and channelling views.</p>	<p><i>Create more open views from roads through removal of roadside gorse (paying particular attention to areas offering finest views) in order to improve visibility across the heath land and improve visual connection with inland areas of Open Moorland.</i></p>	<p>A4. North Hill</p>
<p>Threats to tranquillity due to provision of facilities – car parking, interpretation boards, signs and benches and road infrastructure. These evoke a sense of management – taming the landscape and creating a ‘country park’ character.</p>	<p><i>Remove/rationalise facilities (where deemed excessive or unnecessary) in order to maintain the essentially rugged and wild character of much of this coastal landscape.</i></p>	<p>A2. Valley of Rocks A4. North Hill</p>
<p>Secondary Issues:</p>		
<p>Poor quality views into some areas of adjacent farmland due to management of boundary features, intensive management of grassland, inappropriate siting of large silage bag stacks and farm litter/waste.</p>	<p><i>Work with landowners to improve/ enhance views into the adjacent farmed areas.</i></p>	<p>A1. Trentishoe and Holdstone Down A3. The Foreland</p>
<p>Erosion of verges and informal enlargement of car parking areas threatening the heath land cover.</p>	<p><i>Prevent further expansion of car parking areas through careful design and restore areas that have already been damaged by vehicles.</i></p>	<p>A3. The Foreland A4. North Hill</p>

<p>Periodic and temporary decline in visual amenity/landscape quality due to burning of scrub (charred stumps of burnt trees and gorse).</p>	<p><i>Reduce the visual impact of burning scrub in most heavily visited areas/those areas with greatest visual amenity by cutting charred leggy material.</i></p>	<p>A4. North Hill</p>
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Landscape Character AREA Evaluations

A1. Trentishoe – Holdstone Down

- 3.26 Bracken encroachment, threatening heather moorland, is evident within this Character area – particularly on the slopes ascending towards the coast.



Bracken encroaching heather moor.

- 3.27 Residential properties occurring on the foothills between Holdstone Down and Trentishoe are an overt human influence in the landscape. In addition the buildings and post and rail fencing combined with tree and shrub planting at the property boundaries bring a sense of enclosure and domestication to this essentially simple, open and large scale landscape. These elements create an awkward visual relationship and detract from the setting of the hills. Further development within this landscape should therefore be avoided.



Domestic boundaries juxtapose the open areas of heather moor.

3.28 Another key concern is the juxtaposition of this heathland landscape with the adjacent fringe farmland. Unsympathetic management techniques within the farmland is reducing the visual amenity of this area of the *High Coastal Heaths* e.g. decline of stone faced banks - gaps being plugged with post and wire fencing, post and rail fencing, corrugated metal roofing panels, pallets etc and non-removal of old silage bags.



Declining condition of stone walls.

3.29 Footpath use has led to erosion of the heather – forming strong linear tracks in the landscape.



Strong linear tracks in the heather.

A2. The Foreland

- 3.30 The principal threat to The Foreland is the A39 and its influence on tranquillity. The busy nature of this main coastal route brings numerous associated issues. Prominent road-marked instructions for drivers have recently been introduced. These are eye-catching elements that urbanise the road; reinforcing its presence and influence in the landscape. It is preferable, in landscape and visual terms, for the road to have as little visual intrusion as possible.



Prominent road markings on the A39 – urbanising the road.

- 3.31 The car parking area adjacent to Barna Barrow is suffering from erosion – deeply pitted in places and evoking overuse. The potential cumulative effects of vertical elements on the skyline are also of concern – the weather station with its mast at Butter Hill is a prominent landmark feature on its own but the influence of additional vertical features within adjacent landscapes should be taken into account. A recent small-scale wind turbine at Yenworthy is an

example of how incremental change within surrounding areas could affect the setting to the heaths and how additional structures can change the character of the skyline.



Consideration will need to be given to the effects of vertical elements on the sensitive, open skyline.

A3. Valley of Rocks

3.32 As noted in the description of this landscape, the Valley of Rocks has seen considerable human intervention in the lowest part of the valley and this forms the 'gateway' into the landscape along the road from Lynton. Although at present this tamed recreational area does not dominate above the spectacle of the drama of the rocks and coast, there is a danger that without careful management, these foreground elements (car park, café, cricket ground, picnic area, toilets etc) could become visual detractors – removing attention from the real feature and spectacle of the natural landscape.

3.33 The road is currently of a secondary nature – with minimal signage and



The road does not dominate the landscape.

markings. It is imperative that this remains the case.

A4. North Hill

- 3.34 A key issue on North Hill is the encroachment of gorse and young trees onto areas of heather moorland. Gorse along Hill Road is, for example, reaching heights of 3 metres in places - significantly enclosing the landscape, restricting views and reducing the landscape scale.



Gorse and young trees are well established on North Hill.

- 3.35 Visitor pressure is more evident in this character area than the others of the same landscape type. In addition to people-presence (which reduces levels of tranquillity), associated facilities supporting visitor recreation have a marked influence on the landscape - signage (including interpretation boards), benches, car parking areas are, on their own, relatively minor additions to the landscape but in combination have a notable presence. Additional elements such as these could continue to erode the very essence of the landscape – its simplicity, peacefulness and its stark contrast with the urban environment of the neighbouring town of Minehead - that should be retained.



Cumulative presence of simple facilities in the landscape can heighten awareness of human intervention on the heaths.