

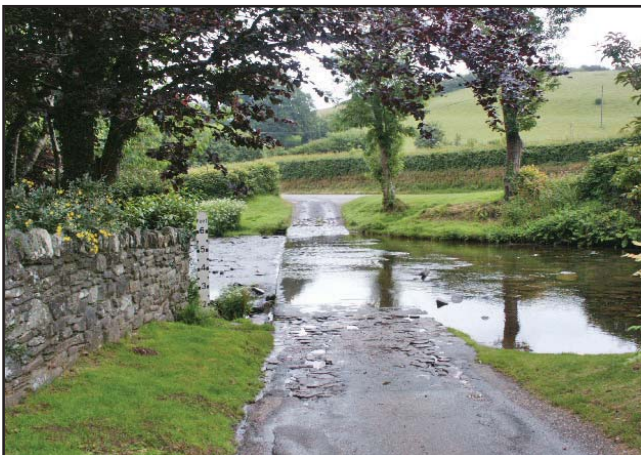
B. High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves



Clear views of the wooded coastal slopes and sheltered bays below.



Villages nestle at the base of the steep wooded valley sides.



Fords and stone bridges form crossings over the rivers.



Rivers, streams and brooks wind their way northwards to the coast.



The heavily wooded combe valleys offer a striking landscape scene.

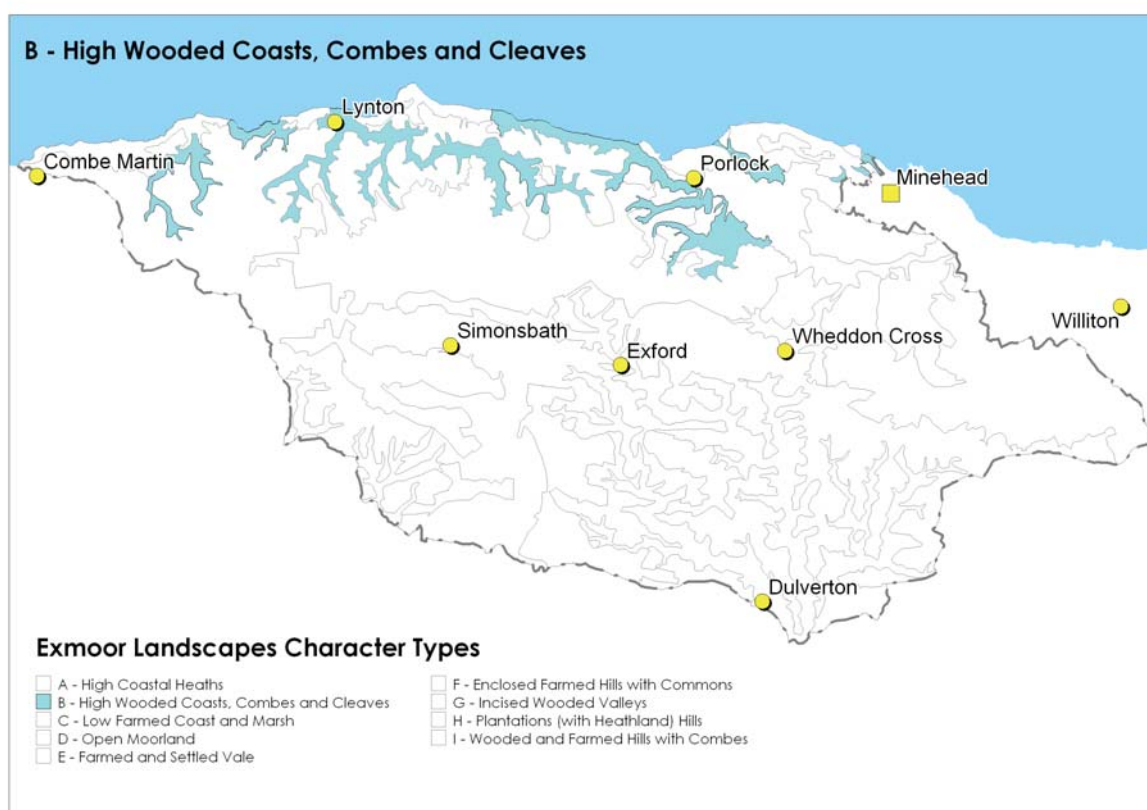


Wooded slopes are prominent backdrops to villages and hamlets.

4. B: High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves

Location and Boundaries

- 4.1 There are six character areas of the **High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves** landscape type. The character areas occur as a series of clearly defined combe valleys that extend down from the *Open Moorland* as springs turn to streams and rivers that meander and widen towards the Bristol Channel. Where the watercourses meet the sea, the wooded valley sides give way to steep wooded slopes that extend along the coast; forming densely wooded cliff tops, cleaves and woody bays.



Key Characteristics

- Generally occurring between 0 and 300m AOD, this is a landscape of **dramatic landform character** with steep **convoluted coastal slopes** and **deeply-incised narrow valleys and combes**.
- Dominated by tree cover with **continuous tracts of predominantly**

deciduous woodland (much of which is Ancient) clothing the steeply sloping valley sides and coast.

- Underlain by a **solid geology of Lynton Slates** (grey or dark grey silty slates or siltstones and grey sandstones) with drift valley head deposits and alluvium.
- **Series of meandering rivers and streams** (some boulder-strewn).
- **Small-scale field pattern, interspersing the woodland**, reflecting medieval enclosure of the landscape (although some boundaries have been modified from the 17th century onwards).
- **Farmland typically characterised by pasture**, with sheep, horses and cattle grazing.
- **Primary and secondary roads provide vehicle access** (and predominantly follow the course of the waters) but many areas are only accessible by foot.
- **Varied settlement size and character** from linear riverside hamlets to coastal towns.
- Away from the larger coastal villages and sections of busy road, the landscape has **an overriding tranquil character** (remote in parts).

Landscape Character TYPE Description

4.2 The **High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves** landscape type is a visually striking landscape. Although character areas vary in size, the overall landscape type is defined by strongly articulated landform of deeply incised narrow combe valleys and steep coastal slopes, knitted together by the consistency of the land cover - dense, predominantly deciduous, woodland. Rivers (with some tumbling waterfalls) wind their way through the deeply wooded valleys to the sea.

4.3 The rivers, streams and brooks that wind their way, northwards, to the coast are often strewn with boulders and are lined and enclosed by the wooded combes. These deep, wooded, sinuous corridors form dark, dramatic patterns

in the landscape, and offer breathtaking scenery, particularly from the surrounding areas of *Open Moorland* and *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*.

- 4.4 Where watercourses meet the sea, and the combes converge with the coastline, the woodland cover extends out from the valleys to cloak large areas of the steep coastal slopes, forming the backdrop to rocky coastal cliffs.
- 4.5 The landscape is underlain by a solid geology of Lynton Slates (grey or dark grey silty slates or siltstones and grey sandstones) with drift valley head deposits and alluvium. The soils are defined as typical brown earths – well drained coarse loamy soils.
- 4.6 Although woodland accounts for the vast majority of the land cover, there are some farmed areas defined by a small-scale field pattern, enclosing pasture with sheep, horses and cattle grazing. Small-scale free-range poultry farming is also evident.
- 4.7 The majority of the combe valleys are accessible by roads and are well served by public footpaths. Conversely, the wooded coast is much less accessible - although crossed by a number of footpaths there is extremely limited vehicular access. As such there is a greater sense of remoteness and detachment from human activity.
- 4.8 People presence within the landscape is varied but as so much of the wooded combes offer such inspiring landscape scene, this landscape is very popular with both tourists and day visitors. With the exception of the coastal towns of Lynton and Lynmouth, settlement is limited to hamlets (of predominantly stone and slate construction) that align the course of the water or occur at fords or crossing points.

Landscape Character AREA Descriptions

B1. Heddon's Mouth

- 4.9 The most westerly of the *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscape type, this character area comprises two watercourses (and thus two valley systems) – a tributary of the River Heddon and the River Heddon itself. There are a number of springs and minor streams that run into the main watercourses.
- 4.10 The tributary converges with the River Heddon at the foot of Heddon's Mouth Wood and here, the Hunters Inn, a car parking area and National Trust visitor centre/shop combine to form a focal point for visitor activity. Settlement is limited to the occasional farm and cottage.



Hunter's Inn and National Trust Visitor Centre.

- 4.11 The sloping valley sides of the River Heddon are densely covered with deciduous woodland. The tributary valley has a more mixed land use character comprising woodland and farmland (predominantly pasture within small, irregular fields). Much of the woodland is owned and managed by the National Trust and is nationally important – forming part of the West Exmoor Coast and Woods SSSI.
- 4.12 Unlike the other Character Areas, this landscape does not extend up to the coast. Instead, at Heddon's Mouth Cleave, woodland merges into the heathland of the *Holdstone and Trentishoe High Coastal Heaths* that in turn extends to the coast at Heddon's Mouth Beach.

4.13 Although served by a secondary road, many parts of this character area are only accessible on foot.

B2. Woody Bay

4.14 The heavily wooded character area of Woody Bay extends from West Woody Bay Wood to Cuddy Cleave and Six Acre Woods. Much of the focus of this landscape is the wooded slopes that extend to the cliff shore but this landscape starts further south, as three small stream valleys that run towards (and merge before meeting) the coast. These streams open out into two scalloped bays – Woody Bay and Lee Bay – breathtaking views of which are offered along the coastal road and footpaths.



Lee Bay and Woody Bay.

4.15 The South West Coast Path runs the full length of the area (east to west) and there are a number of other footpaths and bridleways in the combes. Martinhoe Manor and Woody Bay Hotel are large buildings in the landscape.

4.16 The deciduous woodland of Woody Bay forms part of the SSSI designated West Exmoor Coast and Woods.

B3. Lyn

4.17 One of the largest character areas of the *High Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscape type, The Lyn is centred around the East Lyn and West Lyn rivers, their

journey to the coast and their convergence at the densely wooded gorge where the towns of Lynton and Lynmouth lie.



Densely wooded East Lyn valley at Lynmouth.

- 4.18 There are a number of tributary combe valleys that run into the Lyn Rivers and form part of a relatively wide river catchment area. These valleys include continuously wooded combes such as that surrounding Hoar oak Water and valleys with a more varied land use and land cover such as The Doone Valley, which follows the course of Oare (and Badgworthy) waters and is both wooded and farmed. This valley, clothed in the history, legend and romance of R. D. Blackmore's 'Lorna Doone', is much visited and there is a strong tourist character in parts of the landscape due to the presence of camp sites, parking areas, a tea room and gift shop.
- 4.19 The Doone Valley has boulder-strewn waters, outcropping areas of heathland on steeper slopes, stone walls and stone bridges and as such has something of the feel of a moorland valley. Due to the amount of woodland and the enclosed fields (predominantly for sheep grazing) the moorland connection is not always obvious but nonetheless a 'moorland fringe' character is evident in parts.



Tourism in the Doone Valley.

- 4.20 The Doone Valley and the other tributary valleys and combes contain small-scale dispersed settlements – hamlets and collections of dwellings typically having a linear form as they line the courses of the water e.g. Brendon, Rockford and Barbrook. Grey sandstone, white painted stone and slate are the principal building materials of the traditional cottages, farms and farm buildings.
- 4.21 Where the waters of Hoarook meet the East Lyn River (at Watersmeet), there are dramatic waterfalls and this is a popular area with visitors, and is well served by a variety of footpaths.
- 4.22 The valleys of the East and West Lyn Rivers are very densely wooded and contain the A39 and the B3234 roads that follow the watercourses, ascending and descending over very steep gradients. These roads are often busy as people converge on the coastal towns of Lynton and Lynmouth - referred to as Little Switzerland by the Victorians. The town of Lynton (with its strong Victorian architectural influences) sits above, and is connected by a road and Cliff Railway, to the harbour side town of Lynmouth. Lynmouth sits at the base of Glen Lyn Gorge with traditional cottages (and hotels) that “tumble” down the gorge sides to the quay.

B4. Culbone - Horner

- 4.23 This is the largest of the six character areas and stretches from Glenthorne Plantation in the west, defining the coastal slopes that reach almost as far as Gore Point. Here, the wooded slopes extend inland to form the backdrop to

Porlock Weir, West Porlock and Porlock where the landscape splits into the two wooded valley systems of Hawkcombe and Horner Water.

- 4.24 Horner Wood sits immediately adjacent to the *Open Moorland* of Dunkery Hill and forms part of the Dunkery and Horner Wood National Nature Reserve. Horner Wood has more than 1000 ancient trees. A parking area at Webber's Post provides stunning views across the woodland, adjacent *Open Moorland* and *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*.



View from Webber's Post.

- 4.25 The hamlet of Horner with its packhorse bridge nestles at the foot of the woodland and forms part of the *Farmed and Settled Vale* landscape type.
- 4.26 Hawkcombe comprises a whole series of much smaller combes (e.g. Shillett Combe, Berry Castle Combe) with their own spring fed streams running off the *Open Moorland* and *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*. Hawkcombe has particularly good public footpath provision and offers excellent connectivity between the moorland, Porlock and the coast.
- 4.27 Some secondary roads serve the landscape but vehicular access is limited. A toll roads winds its way through the wooded combes west of Porlock and offers a peaceful journey through a fern clad valley with small streams tumbling over rocky streambeds. As with many parts of this landscape type, there is an overriding sense of enclosure due to the enveloping valley sides and the density and darkness of the tree cover.



Strong sense of enclosure due to landform and density of tree cover.

- 4.28 West of Porlock Weir, the landscape is focussed on the coast with Worthy Wood, Yearnor Wood and Culbone Wood, Embelle Wood and Yenworthy Wood forming a continuous woodland system, completely covering the combes and slopes that meet the cliff line and backshore of the adjacent beach.

B5. Bossington

- 4.29 One of the smallest character areas, Bossington comprises woodland (predominantly deciduous with some coniferous planting) covering the interconnected combes of Church Combe, Lynch Combe, Allerford Combe, Holnicote Combe and Selworthy Combe. Some of the combes are dry whilst others are fed from water running off the *North Hill High Coastal Heaths*.
- 4.30 At the base of the woodland in the east is the village of Selworthy with its



Selworthy Church stands prominent against the woodland.

prominent, limewashed church. Here, clear and extensive views across the vale below make this a popular stopping and viewing spot.

- 4.31 The wooded combes are served by a number of footpaths. Some connect with the parking area in the village of Bossington (in the *Farmed and Settled Vale*) and offer a steep ascent to Bossington Hill beyond. These are well-used routes, some leading to Bury Castle – a well-preserved Iron Age enclosure situated within the woodland.



Numerous footpaths cut through the woodland.

- 4.32 Although becoming much less dense, the woodland does extend off the steeper slopes to form a woodland strip, aligning the stream that runs through Bossington and on through the *Low Farmed Coast and Marsh* to the sea.

B6. Culver Cliff

- 4.33 This is the most easterly and the smallest of the character areas belonging to the *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscape type. It characterises the coastal slopes that extend northwest from the Higher Town area of Minehead. The area falling within the National Park boundary forms part of a larger wooded coastal landscape that offers a striking backdrop to Minehead Harbour, promenade and the recreational area of greenspace at its foot. This character area also includes the inland areas of Moor Wood and Bratton Wood that surround Wood Combe and Bratton Wood respectively.



Wooded slopes form a prominent setting to Minehead.

- 4.34 Although significantly smaller than the other character areas, this landscape provides a strong wooded context and setting to Minehead.

Landscape TYPE Evaluation

Strength of Landscape Character

- 4.35 The *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscape type is judged to have **strong** landscape character overall. The continuous woodland systems, the dramatic landform, views into the dark, deep valleys from higher ground, picturesque watercourses and the steep wooded coastal slopes create a very recognisable pattern of elements and a consistent and strong landscape character.

Landscape Condition

- 4.36 There is some degree of variation but, overall, the landscape is judged to be in **good** condition. There are some issues affecting the condition of the woodland – such as rhododendron encroachment. A declining hedgerow condition, in farmed areas, is evident in some parts.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves* is to **conserve** the many features of the landscape that combine to create a high quality landscape. The woodland is fundamental to the character of the landscape as well as to the wider landscape scene of Exmoor. So, conserving its extent, density and variety is imperative.

Internal views of the landscape are important, as are views into the landscape from adjacent areas of higher ground. It is important therefore that the quality and variety of viewing opportunities into (and within) the landscape are retained. There are a number of areas where a certain degree of remoteness can still be experienced and it is important to ensure these are protected in the light of visitor pressure.

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 natural/semi-natural character of woodland (as well as views into and through woodland areas) due to rhododendron encroachment.	Manage levels of encroachment to prevent mono-species coverage of the ground flora and under storey.	B2. Woody Bay
Secondary Issues:		
Threats to remoteness and tranquillity due to visitor numbers and associated facilities.	Ensure that any additional development/infrastructure does not intensify the degree of human influence/people-presence in the landscape.	B1. Heddon's Mouth B3. Lyn
Weakening landscape	Strengthen the landscape pattern	B3. Lyn (Doone

Landscape Issues	Objectives	Priority Areas
<p>pattern in farmed areas due to declining condition of field boundaries – hedges and stonewalls.</p>	<p><i>by encouraging boundary management techniques using traditional (local) methods and materials.</i></p>	<p>Valley)</p>

B1. Heddon's Mouth

- 4.37 There is a need to ensure provision of facilities – car parking, toilet block etc - at the National Trust visitor centre, remains low-key and of informal design so as not dominate in the landscape.

B2. Woody Bay

- 4.38 Rhododendron encroachment is an issue at Woody Bay and there is also a need to safeguard clear views across the bays and coastline (from the coastal road) through appropriate hedgerow management.

B3. Lyn

- 4.39 Key visible forces for change within the Lyn include the scrubbing up of the steeper (farmed) valley sides, hedgerow sections falling into decline and being plugged with post and wire fencing (diluting the field pattern). Stone walls (particularly in the Doone Valley) are also degraded in places.



Scrubbing up on the steeper valley sides.

- 4.40 There is a general need to ensure visitor pressure in this area is managed so that facilities and infrastructure do not detract from the simple, uncluttered character of the landscape.

B4. Culbone - Horner

- 4.41 Much of this wooded landscape is difficult to access and as such there are a number of remote areas that should remain free from obvious human influence.

B5. Bossington

- 4.42 This area is popular with visitors. Its easy access from parking areas at the top of the hill (within the *North Hill High Coastal Heaths* landscape type) and the car parking area at Bossington (within the *Farmed and Settled Vale* landscape type) makes it a popular choice with walkers. There is a need to ensure that the infrastructure and facilities provided for visitors to the area (signage and seating for example) remain unobtrusive. It is important to protect the archaeological feature and setting of Bury Castle and to ensure views to Selworthy church from the adjacent vale remain clear and uninhibited.

B6. Culver Cliff

- 4.43 This small character area abuts a large coastal town and offers good footpath access through the woodland and on to the *High Coastal Heaths* landscape of North Hill. As with character area B5, there is a need to ensure that the infrastructure and facilities provided for visitors to the area (signage and seating for example) remain unobtrusive so as to safeguard the simple, small-scale nature of the landscape.

