



Location and Context

The *Dissected Plateau Moorland* Landscape Character Type is an upland plateau landscape characterised by level-topped hills of heather and coarse grassland, dissected by distinct steep-sided valleys. This Landscape Character Type is present in the Moorfoot and Lammermuir Hills which form the northern arm of the outer crescent of uplands which surround the Tweed Basin, as well as in the Pentland Hills.

Key Characteristics

- Plateau landform consisting of a series of level-topped hills and ridges.
- Strong topographic identity and overall grandeur of scale.
- Individual hill masses separated by steep sided valley features of differing scales.
- Semi-natural peatland, heather moorland and grassland communities dominant, with a high degree of perceived naturalness of vegetation cover.
- Very low settlement density with isolated, dispersed pattern.
- Scattered prehistoric settlement and burial mounds above water courses.
- Sense of wildness created by wide horizons and long distance, unobstructed views.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Dissected Plateau Moorland* ranges mainly between 300 and 500 metres, rising to 650 metres at the high plateau summits of the Moorfoot Hills. The topography is characterised by a level or gently-undulating plateau surface, formed by the summits of a series of ridges and hills, separated by strong convex slopes on the intervening valley sides. The valley features range in scale from minor clefts and gullies to the larger burns and rivers, many of which have been enlarged by glacial erosion and locally modified by fluvioglacial deposits. The Moorfoot and Lammermuir plateaux are underlain by greywackes and shales of Lower Palaeozoic age, the Western Pentlands by Old Red Sandstone lavas and sediments. Varying thicknesses of glacial drifts cover all areas, and the soils derived from these range from brown forest soils on the valley

sides, to wetter gleys, podzols and blanket peats on the higher, less steeply-sloping ground.

The Pentlands form part of the drainage basin of the River North Esk, which flows to the Firth of Forth. The Moorfoots and Lammermuirs drain to the Tweed system, the Moorfoots mainly via the Leithen Water and Gala Water, the Lammermuirs via the Leader, Whiteadder and Blackadder.

Landcover

Land cover is characterised by heather moor and acid grassland vegetation communities. On the highest ground, blanket bog peatland is dominant, grading into wet and dry forms of Atlantic heather moor. The grassland is typically unimproved rough grazing of bents and fescues. On the drier slopes, permanent pastures are more common, with rush pasture in areas of poorer drainage. Tree cover is not a common feature of this landscape type, although locally there are very significant woodland and forest blocks such as Glentress and Leithenwater Forests in the southern Moorfoots, and Edgarhope woods in the Lammermuirs. Deciduous woodland, mainly of oak and birch, is mostly confined to small areas in the lower reaches of the more sheltered burn courses.

Settlement

Prehistoric burial cairns are found across this landscape on all but the highest hills. Fortified settlements dating from the late Bronze Age or Iron Age are a prominent feature on the plateau margins, generally sited on the hill promontories commanding wide views over the river valleys. There are also numerous forts, cairns and stone circles which testify to the importance of these hill landscapes for stock grazing and even arable agriculture in earlier times. Large areas of later medieval and pre-improvement agriculture survive throughout the landscapes. Today land use on the grasslands is dominated by sheep and cattle grazing, usually in large units separated by prominent drystone "march" dykes. Much of the heather moorland is managed for grouse giving a distinctive patchwork of muirburn, punctuated in places by hill tracks and shooting butts.

The pattern of present-day settlement is one of widely-dispersed farm building groups - there are no significant towns or villages within this landscape. The farms are almost entirely restricted to the sheltered valleys, and are often sited to take advantage of protection from topography or from associated shelterbelt plantations. The road network is correspondingly sparse. There are no roads traversing the plateaux tops, although a minor road links Gifford to Longformacus across the Lammermuirs, and the B709 crosses the Moorfoots via the headwaters of the Leithen and Gala Waters. There are wind energy developments with multiple turbines both within and surrounding these areas, with Fallago Rig wind farm forming a point feature on the central Lammermuir Plateau.

Perception

On the plateau tops, the landscape is one of wide horizons and distant unobstructed views, often ranging across the lower ground of the intervening valleys and adjoining landscape types and creating an impression of considerable wildness and remoteness. Views, however, from within the hills are punctuated by the presence of windfarms, with clusters of development at Crystal Rig in the east, Fallago Rig in the centre and Dun Law to the west, forming notable features in many opens views across the hills. By contrast within

the valleys, views are restricted by topography or by woodland features, and the scale is more intimate. The moorland vegetation exerts a strong influence on the characteristic colours of this landscape. The heather communities are particularly distinctive, ranging from dark chocolate brown in winter through muted greens to a brief spell of vivid purple in late summer. The grassland colours vary between the fresh green of early summer, to phases of russet and gold, accentuated by the low winter sunlight. The typically dense, dark green of forestry plantations provides strong contrasts and backdrops to the moorland vegetation, particularly in winter. In spring, the fresh greens of larches and broadleaves are prominent, and their autumn colours also provide diversity.

Variation

The primary topographical and forestry features which distinguish the three areas of *Dissected Plateau Moorland* from each other can be summarised as follows;

- The Moorfoot Plateau is very deeply dissected, with individual hill masses tending to be quite distinctly defined. There is also the presence of an additional step in the terrain with high plateau summits rising above surrounding plateau moorland to over 650m above sea level. There are extensive coniferous plantations in the south and west at Glentree and Leithen water forests.
- The Lammermuir Plateau, is generally lower and has a more uniform plateau surface, and the valleys are less incised. On the fringes at Harecleugh and Edgarhope there are extensive conifer forests.
- The Pentland Hills have a slightly more rolling terrain. There are distinctly shaped conifer plantations and shelterbelts on lower hill slopes and valley sides.

This is one of 390 Landscape Character Types identified at a scale of 1:50 000 as part of a national programme of Landscape Character Assessment republished in 2019.

The area covered by this Landscape Character Type was originally included in the Borders LCA (ASH Consulting Group), published 1999.