



Location and Context

The well-defined river valley landscapes of the lowlands in Lothian form a distinctive type. These are distinguished primarily by their landform, and include the incised headwaters of the River Tyne system, and the gorge-like valleys of the North and South Esk. Their steep slopes carry a relatively high proportion of broadleaf woodland cover.

This Landscape Character Type occurs along six rivers in the Lothians, from west to east:

- Running parallel to the eastern flanks of the Pentland Hills, the valley of the River North Esk follows a north-east trend, before converging with the South Esk to the north of Dalkeith;
- The River South Esk, which flows northwards from the Moorfoot Hills;
- Originating within the fringes of the Moorfoot Hills, the Upper Tyne Water follows a gently winding northwards course, concealed within a narrow, flat-bottomed valley;
- The valley of the Humbie Water, a major tributary of the River Tyne, originates on the western fringe of the Lammermuir plateau;
- The Gifford Water winds its way north-westwards from the edge of the Lammermuir Hills towards the valley of the River Tyne; and
- From its origin in the Lammermuir hill fringes, the Whittingehame Water flows north-eastwards to feed eventually into the broad shallow floodplain of the Biel Water.

Key Characteristics

- Meandering rivers and tributary streams flowing northward from the hills.
- Predominantly incised river valleys, enclosed and often narrow, though with landform ranging from sections of broader floodplain to very narrow gorges with distinctive rock exposures, although the lower North and South Esk are more open in character.
- Well wooded with extensive deciduous riparian woodland, and mature mixed policy woodlands associated with the numerous estates.
- Scrub and pasture within open areas of valley sides, giving way to arable land with shelterbelts on upper slopes and fringes;
- Large number of significant historic buildings, including vernacular cottages, 18th and 18th Century farmsteads, churches (often with highly visible spires), industrial architecture, castles and towerhouses. Large country houses, often with extensive designed landscapes.

- Remnants of the coal mining industry are evident around the North and South Esk, where rolling farmland, settlement, transport infrastructure, light industry and business uses, also illustrate the diversity of land uses.
- Views are generally contained by enclosed topography and dense woodland, opening out on the farmed and settled upper slopes which give longer distance views to the Pentland Hills to the west. Many valleys are rural and tranquil, whilst quiet and secluded locations occur within all the valleys.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

Within the *Lowland River Valleys - Lothians* Landscape Character Type the majority of these valleys share an incised, enclosed form, cutting through the transitional slopes and rolling farmland. Valley sides are strongly defined, occasionally opening out into narrow areas of level ground or small level stretches of floodplain with coiling meanders. The lower reaches of the North and South Esk valleys are, however, much less incised and enclosed. The rivers have many tributary streams, which cut their own channels into the surrounding topography, creating a pattern of interweaving slopes. Local distinctiveness is seen in the strongly moulded convex hill slopes which enclose the head of the Humber Water valley, and in the rugged hummocky terrain of the Upper Tyne.

The valleys are also distinguished by the geology which is exposed through erosion. For example, a conspicuous, rich rusty earth in areas of red sandstone, or the precipitous gorge of the North Esk bordered by sheer bluffs of hard volcanic rock. This river follows an extremely confined steep-sided valley cut by the powerful erosive force of glacial meltwater in Pleistocene times. Rising above the valley and opening out to either side, the enclosing slopes of broad smooth undulating ground are broken by numerous small streams originating within the higher land to east and west.

Landcover

The river valleys are generally well wooded, including much deciduous riparian woodland. The ancient woodlands of Roslin Glen are of particular note. Major estates along the river valleys, including Preston Hall, Oxenford, Saltoun and Vogrie, contribute extensive areas of dense mixed and broadleaf estate woodlands which often dominate the valleys. Scatterings of isolated parkland trees and lines of mature avenue trees are also present. The designed landscape of Vogrie Estate is now preserved as a country park, while elsewhere numerous recreational paths are routed through the valleys. Coniferous forest lies along the upper valley slopes in some areas, with the large Saltoun Forest alongside the Humber Water.

On the gentler valley slopes, shelterbelts of mature mixed woodland and broken lines of Scots pine define field and farm boundaries. Low hawthorn or beech hedgerows and post-and-wire fences subdivide the arable fields. In places there are concentrations of oak and ash field boundary trees including tree lines along roads. Areas of improved pasture occur on steeper or uneven ground, and along the Pentland fringes. Drystone walls are common throughout the pastureland of the upper North Esk, and stone walls are also a feature of estate landscapes. Areas of bramble, gorse and thorn scrub occur along the margins of the watercourses and along steep inaccessible slopes. Stretches of marshy water-meadows occupy poorly-drained sections of floodplain.

Settlement

The North and South Esk valleys contain the main routes of the A701, A702, A68 and A7, feeding into the busy A720 by-pass to the south of Edinburgh. Within all the valleys, a network of minor roads connects a scattering of minor settlements and farmsteads, both traditional and modern in style. The area is long-settled with evidence of Bronze Age activity

in the carvings in Roslin Glen, and signs of settlement dating from medieval times are common, and include numerous tower houses, castles and country houses. Among the most significant are the imposing ruin of Crichton Castle by the Tyne, and the 15th Century tower of Hawthornden Castle. A number of important 18th and 19th Century country houses can also be found with designed landscapes which often incorporate the natural features of this Landscape Character Type. The aesthetic influence of the country estates is extended through the workers' cottages, stables, lodges, farm steadings extravagant gateposts and high enclosing stone walls which are distinctive features of the valleys. Several stone bridges are notable at crossing points along the river, the most striking being the five-arched span of the Lothian Bridge.

The North and South Esk valleys are the most populous, with a number of towns and villages. The largest of these – Penicuik, Bonnyrigg and Loanhead – originated in the 18th and 19th Centuries, the core of each town now surrounded by extensive 20th Century housing development. A picturesque 14th Century church and single street of 18th Century cottages comprise the riverside village of Temple in the South Esk valley. Along the higher crest enclosing the eastern edge of the valley, housing development spread out from the intact 19th Century core of the mining village of Gorebridge. The well-preserved terraced brick cottages of Newtongrange attest to the industrial origins of the village, on the outskirts of which is sited a mining museum. The burgh town of Dalkeith owes much to the commercial boom of the 18th Century and the rebuilding programmes of the 20th Century. Urban expansion continues around and between all these settlements.

The villages of Garvald and Stenton in the Whittingehame Valley date mainly from planned improvements of the 18th and 19th Centuries and retain their traditional appearance and character. Built from the local warm pink-red sandstone and roofed with pantiles, the one- and two-storey houses are centred around well-defined village greens and the parish churches. 20th Century additions to the streetscapes are carefully integrated through the use of harled walls and orange pantiles. Encircled by sweeping woodlands, including to the south-east the designed landscape of Yester House, the early 18th Century planned village of Gifford is notable for its broad main street edged by one and two-storey sandstone buildings focused on the village church. Spreading out from the traditional centre are modern housing developments of varying styles and ages. Humbie and West Saltoun are small tree-edged hamlets consisting of sandstone or harled houses and cottages, with modern additions tying in satisfactorily. Roof materials are a mix of purple-grey slate and rich orange pantiles. Spreading along the eastern slopes of the valley, the traditional stone houses and cottages which once formed the linear centre of Pathhead have been extended by 20th Century housing developments. Nestling in a hollow at the base of the valley slopes is the picturesque hamlet of Ford.

Small areas of light industry have developed on the urban fringes within the North and South Esk valleys, creating modern replacements for the once-prosperous paper mills. The extensive policies of Bush House, sited at the base of the Pentlands, have been revitalised as the Edinburgh Technopole business park, and there is a similar development at Little France in association with the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. Large busy retail parks lie alongside the A720 at Straiton. Occasional bings and reclaimed coal mines attest to the rich coal seams that provided the wealth to build many of the estates in this landscape. A single pylon line cuts across the Humbie Water valley. The remnants of a dismantled railway line are utilised as a walkway and cycle path and bridleway from Penicuik to Musselburgh, while the Waverley railway line is being reopened. Several golf courses occur along the valley edges.

Perception

The strong topographical enclosure and plentiful woodland of the valleys create secluded,

sheltered and small-scale landscapes, with a high degree of tranquillity. The individual character of each valley is emphasised by the distinctive styles of farmsteads, estates and villages. Traprain Law, one of the Iron Age and early medieval capitals of Scotland, dominates views from across the region and is a local distinctive landmark alongside the Whittingehame Water.

Views are predominantly channelled along the valleys, and are obstructed by the enclosing wooded slopes. More extensive views of the wider landscape of nearby hills and coastal plains can be gained from the valley crests and upper slopes. Influencing both land cover and architectural styles within the valley, the estate policies have contributed to the establishment of a well settled, prosperous landscape of diverse colours and textures. The rougher textures of scrub and woodland on valley floors and slopes contrast with the smooth fields on the upper slopes and fringes.

The proximity of the city is evident towards the north of the North and South Esk landscape character areas, where the arable farmland is interspersed by busy roads and pylon lines. Large stretches of these areas are intensively settled, with the dense woodland along the valley slopes. The great variety of settlement, infrastructure, business use, leisure and industry, combined with the heavily wooded farmland, creates a diverse landscape of well-tended and long-inhabited character.

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 Lothians LCA (ASH Consulting Group), published 1998.