

AREA

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Approved
Feb 2004

A Moorland above Middlesmoor.

Gritstone Moor (Nidderdale & Washburn)



Description

This is a vast open upland landscape of the lower Pennines covering approximately 230km² of the western edge of the District. It is, by far, the largest Character Area in the District. The landform is flat to gently undulating and generally above 300m AOD consisting of the broad upland ridges of the Nidderdale valleys.

The dominant vegetation is heather and cotton grass. The colour changes with the seasons and gives rise to dark hilltops which contrast with the green of the valleys and upland fringe.

Tree cover is limited to narrow gills and sparse elsewhere resulting in open views and an exposed landscape. Occasionally, dark green rectilinear conifer plantations at the moorland edge are a discordant feature.

The wild heather moors are managed for grouse shooting. Large, rectilinear rough grass fields along the moorland fringe are used for sheep grazing.

This is a landscape with many features of historic and archaeological interest. Prehistoric cup and ring marked rocks are scattered throughout. Possible evidence of old field systems and lead mining through the centuries indicate that although comparatively remote now, the landscape has a long history of human activity.

The area is not settled and few public roads provide access into the upland evoking feelings of remoteness.

This is an invigorating landscape within the designated Nidderdale AONB and is an important resource for walkers who use the limited public footpaths to access the moors and appreciate the stunning scenery.

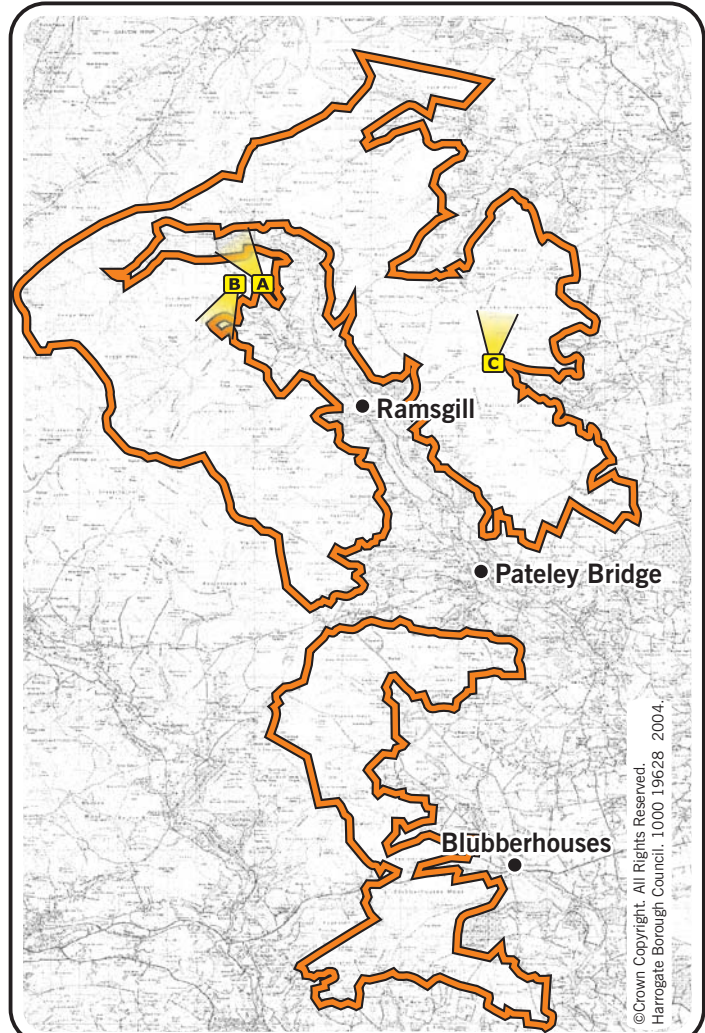
Key Characteristics

Geology, soils and drainage

- Millstone grit solid geology with slowly permeable, seasonally to permanently-waterlogged peaty soils.

Landform and drainage pattern

- Moorland plateau landform exceeding 300m AOD, with convex slopes and occasional gritstone outcrops.
- The moorland is within the catchment for the Rivers Nidd, Washburn and Burn. They are fed by numerous small tributaries arising in the moorland generally draining eastwards.



HARROGATE DISTRICT Landscape Character Assessment

Location in Harrogate District

- Area boundary*
- Camera location & direction



Not to Scale



* NB Due to the nature of landform, surface treatment and soil/geology composition Character area boundaries cannot be delineated precisely and should be considered "transitional".



B Moorland edge at Middlesmoor.

Key Characteristics (Cont'd)

Land use, fields, boundaries, trees and wildlife

- Heather, cotton grass, bilberry and bracken moorland and mire plus rough grassland. Grouse shooting and low density grazing with grade 5 agricultural land.
- Well-maintained drystone walls indicate the extent of the open moor and its boundaries with the improved enclosed grassland of the valleys, grassland plateau and upland fringe to the east.
- Tree cover is limited to narrow gills and occasional blocks of conifer woodland at the moorland edge.
- Much of the area is designated a candidate Special Area of Conservation, a Special Protection Area and a SSSI.

Settlement, built environment and communications

- Built structures include drystone walls, stone butts, shooting lodges & access tracks.
- Traditional building material is local gritstone.
- Cup & ring marks and evidence of settlement dating back possibly to the Neolithic and Bronze Ages..
- A few long and isolated public footpaths and tracks reach into the moorland plus access tracks for landowners.



 The shooting lodge on Dallowgill Moor.

Sensitivities & Pressures

- Pressure results from the declining fortunes of grouse shooting leading to changing moorland management regimes. In addition, the identification of much of the area as having open access under the Countryside Rights of Way Act (2000) is likely to result in increased pressure for recreation provision and ease of access to the moorland.
- The characteristic vegetation is sensitive to changes in management.

- Minor tracks and paths crossing the moorland are used (illegally) for off-road activities with motorbikes and 4-wheel drive vehicles causing erosion and creating noise.
- Archaeological and historic features are susceptible to neglect and changes to their setting as a result of changing management regimes.
- Geometric conifer plantations on the moorland contrast starkly with its open, wild character. There is a lack of transitional habitats between moorland and improved grassland.
- Neglect of boundary stone walls (which ensure low grazing densities required to maintain moorland vegetation) threatens the landscape pattern.

Guidelines

Aim: To maintain the open character and characteristic vegetation of the moorland

- Promote continued traditional management of heather moorland.
- Encourage diversification of appropriate plant communities at moorland edge to promote a transition of habitats from moorland to improved grassland, e.g. scrub along gills for black grouse.
- Maintain and repair stone walls along the moorland edge to ensure continued low stocking densities.
- Forestry plantations at the moorland edge impact on the openness of this character area. Promote introduction of deciduous edges to existing plantations to soften their appearance. New plantations should respect landform, and landscape pattern (see Harrogate Council's Landscape Design Guide: LDG8.1.1. for appropriate species mix).

Aim: To manage access to minimise disturbance of landscape and habitats.

- Signs, car parking and other facilities needed to improve access to open land (and to inform the visitor) should be designed and located to respect the landform and views. Detailed guidelines should be prepared for this in consultation with the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Office.
- Illegal use of tracks across the moor by off-road vehicles must be discouraged. Again liaison with the Nidderdale AONB Office, landowners and managers is needed.

Aim: To record and conserve the setting of archaeological and historic features.

- Promote research of archaeological and historic features and their contribution to landscape character.
- Register new archaeological features and disseminate information regarding historic features and characteristics of the landscape.