

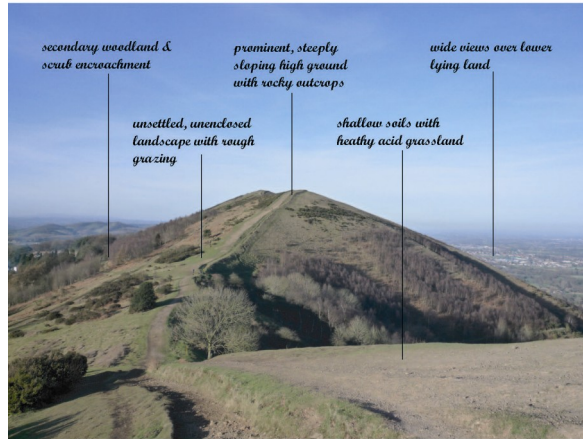
Landscapes of Worcestershire

Landscape Type Advice Sheet - *Land Management*

High Hills and Slopes

Landscape Type Description

An unenclosed 'highland' landscape characterised by its steeply sloping topography, shallow mineral soils and extensive tracts of rough grassland and heath. The large scale and open, exposed character is heightened by the dramatic form of the topography creating a wild, invigorating quality. This is a simple, yet visually distinctive landscape, strongly contrasting with the surrounding, more gentle, enclosed agricultural landscapes.



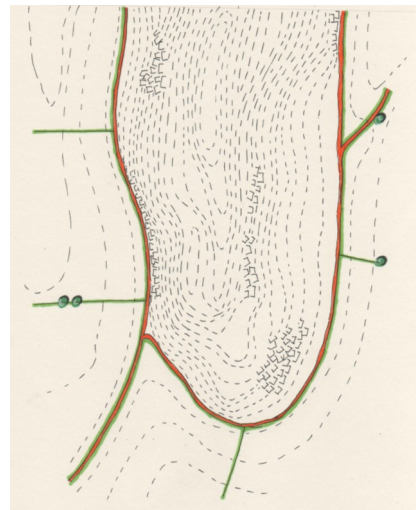
Key Characteristics

Primary

- Prominent, steeply-sloping highland topography
- Unsettled landscape, with few signs of human habitation
- Wide views over surrounding, lower lying farmland
- Hard rock geology with localised prominent rocky outcrops
- Shallow mineral soils supporting extensive areas of acid grassland and heath
- Unenclosed landscape

Secondary

- Rough grazing land use
- Absence of woodland, though occasional patches of secondary woodland and scrub



Current Concerns

This is a landscape that owes its character primarily to a combination of its past management and its physical structure. In Worcestershire, this Landscape Type is restricted to the summits and upper slopes of the Malvern Hills, an area that, in the past, has been largely an unenclosed expanse of commons and rough grazing. The stocking levels would have been sufficient to keep scrub encroachment at bay and so maintain its distinctive open character, producing a close, botanically valuable sward in the process. It is an area that has a much greater diversity of vegetation today, with significant areas of bracken together with scrub and secondary woodland, particularly on the lower slopes.

The severe reduction in stocking levels over the years has led to the advance of bracken and scrub, and the character of the landscape is likely to change enormously if this encroachment is allowed to continue. An increase in woodland cover would have the effect of wiping out the historical record of the landscape, destroying the essential scale and openness in the process. The notable ecological status of the area, particularly the habitat requirements of certain rare species must strongly influence the eventual management strategy of the area.

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High Hills and Slopes Guidelines for Land Management

How to use this sheet

The aim of this information sheet is to provide *general guidelines* about the priorities for land management activities - focusing on relevant landscape features - within this Landscape Type. However, Landscape Types are generic descriptions of landscape character and any advice **must** be interpreted within the context of the site in question. Please also visit the Landscapes of Worcestershire mapping pages <http://gis.worcestershire.gov.uk/home/wcc-lca-maps> to click on your area and read the more specific ecological and landscape descriptions.

In the case of any habitat work, specialist advice should be sought from the County Ecologists and/or the appropriate agency (Natural England, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency, Defra) to ensure that the work is appropriate, is carried out at the right time of year, in the correct manner and in the best possible location. Surveys may need to be carried out to assess the sites for presence of protected species or existing habitat. With this in mind, please read on for opportunities for land/habitat management activities appropriate to this Landscape Type...

Managing Upland Commons & Rough Grazing

As a visually prominent and unsettled landscape with a wild and invigorating quality, the High Hills and Slopes is a popular landscape with a high degree of recreation pressure as well as representing an important area for nature conservation. The general management objectives broadly reflect this:

- **enhance** the nature conservation interest of the whole area through appropriate sustainable management, with particular emphasis placed on restoring grazing at the necessary stocking densities
- **conserve** all remaining areas of semi-natural grassland
- **restore** areas of former grassland whilst acknowledging the need to retain other habitats of importance for endangered species

So, as historically grazed upland commons, much of the management of this Landscape Type rests on restoring a suitable grazing regime to maintain the botanically valuable sward and to manage the diversity of other habitats that could otherwise threaten to dominate.

There are basically three options for the future management of the areas of scrub and woodland. The first is to endeavour to return such areas to their former grassland dominant status, whilst at the other extreme woodland encroachment could be allowed to continue and even actively encouraged, on the lower slopes. The third option is a compromise approach, accepting a degree of woodland and scrub cover and endeavouring to maximise habitat diversity within the matrix of habitats present. In light of the growing recognition of the importance of habitat linkage on a landscape scale, opportunities should also be sought to bolster the network of habitats that surround these landscapes in order to ensure that they remain connected to the wider fabric of the countryside and do not become isolated islands of biodiversity value.

For more information visit our website www.worcestershire.gov.uk/lca or contact the Worcestershire County Council Environmental Policy Team on 01905 766038