

Landscape

The 'Landscape Strategy for Lancashire – Landscape Character Assessment' document published by Lancashire County Council in 2004¹ describes Rossendale as part of the Southern Pennines, the key features of which are:

- Extensive areas of blanket bog on moorland tops
- Impoverished areas of wet and dry upland heathland
- Large areas of upland acid grassland
- Frequent springs and flushes
- Fast flowing streams and rivers, and reservoirs
- Some upland hay meadows in valleys
- Grasslands, upland oak and mixed ash woodlands in valleys

It summarises the landscape of Rossendale in terms of:

- Moorland plateaux
- Moorland hills
- Enclosed uplands
- Moorland fringe
- Settled valleys (including industrial age settlements)
- Reservoir valleys

Springhill comes under 'settled valleys'.

Moorland plateaux

In Rossendale this is represented by the area of Scout Moor and Heald Moor. 200-300m above sea level.

'The high, moorland plateaux are the most remote and exposed landscape type in Lancashire. They are generally characterised by a level or gently rolling landform although they may include steep high level escarpments, and are found at elevations between 300 and 600 metres. Land cover is predominantly blanket bog, and trees are generally absent. Rock outcrops occur in some areas and some moorland summits are strewn with gritstone boulders. Soils are poor and a vegetation cover of dwarf shrub heath, purple moor grass and/or cotton grass is typical of these acid moorlands. Localised erosion of the soils has exposed the underlying rocks and gravels giving rise to crags and peat hags. The plateaux have a sense of elevation and openness, with uninterrupted views across vast areas of surrounding countryside. The open landscape also creates a sense of wilderness, remoteness and space, which is further strengthened by the enormity and dominance of sky in these large scale landscapes.'

Layers of sandstone and millstone grit with thin soil and peat. Gritstone crags

¹<http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/environment/landscape/landscapecharacass/cover.asp>

where the shale has been eroded. Little evidence of human settlement although Mesolithic flint implements have been found in some areas and may represent summer hunting camps. More recently used for grazing (with ruined farms and barns particularly in Rossendale), quarries and reservoirs.

Moorland Hills

In Rossendale these are represented by the eastern fringes of the West Pennine Moors along the Oswaldtwistle and Holcombe Moors.

‘The rolling Moorland Hills are generally at lower elevations than the higher Moorland Plateaux. Although grit crags and glacial erratics provide some texture to the smooth profiles, the steep escarpments create distinctive and dramatic landforms which are steeply incised and drained by fast flowing streams. Hillsides allow long views across wide valleys or the surrounding lowlands.

Land cover is typically blanket bog, heather moor, and acid grassland although the presence of several large woodland blocks, both broadleaved and coniferous, distinguishes these lower moorland hills from the high moorland core. Colours are generally muted, although the moorland vegetation creates striking seasonal effects. The open, exposed character of the hills creates a wild and windswept experience. Small, isolated hamlets and stone farmsteads, although rare, are focal points in the landscape and fields in their vicinity are enclosed by an undulating network of stone walls: however most of this landscape lies above the upper limit of enclosure. The mosaic of upland habitats are of significant nature conservation value and there is considerable evidence of settlement and land use since prehistoric times, particularly in the form of industrial monuments and landscapes.’

Comprised of Millstone Grit, in alternate bands of gritstone and weaker shales, the latter forming the lower areas. Shallow soil, peat on higher summits (>400m). Slopes softened by glacial activity, and with radial valleys draining higher ground. Habitat types include heather moorland, ‘grass moor’, wet flushes and springs, blanket bogs and semi-natural woodlands.

Sparse remains of Mesolithic hunting camps. Forest probably cleared by Neolithic and Bronze Age farmers. Later enclosure was largely piecemeal and irregular. More recently marginal farmsteads have been abandoned, leading to reversion of the land to rushy pasture.

Enclosed Uplands

This area is limited to Rossendale and is found between the Limey, Whitewell and upper Irwell valleys and on Cribden.

‘The upland plateau of the Rossendale Hills has a relatively level landform with only the peat capped ridges and summits providing discernible pattern and diversity in the landscape. The distinctive character of these exposed uplands is derived from a long history of settlement and exploitation of the mineral wealth of the moors. A network of gritstone walls encloses virtually the whole of the upland area and the landscape is dotted with a network of small, remote farms. Many of these are now abandoned and in ruins as farming has retreated downslope. The area’s industrial history is reflected by the landscape of miner-farmer small holdings, squatter settlements, abandoned coal mines and quarries. The overall impression is of a somewhat derelict landscape with rush infested pastures and tumbled stone walls. Views of the prominent high tension power lines which cross the plateau top, reinforce the sense of bleakness. The landscape type is only found in the Rossendale Hills.’

Geologically, mainly lower coal measures (sandstones, shale and mudstones) with Millstone Grit outcrops and hill caps. Vegetation mainly grass moor with rush patches. Part of the medieval hunting forest, enclosed in the 18th and 19th centuries up to 350m above sea level. Mined for coal since the Middle Ages, mainly bell pits. Multiple footpaths and rights of way form a dense network. Several late Victorian reservoirs.

Moorland Fringes

‘The fringes of moorland areas are transitional enclosed landscapes between the inhospitable moorland fells and the more intensively farmed land of the lowlands. They occur, generally above the 200m contour, throughout the study area and are characterised by a rolling landscape of marginal pastures divided by stone walls which reflect the underlying geology. Sheep grazing forms the predominant land use of these fringe areas which have

Often been improved either from semi-natural acidic, neutral or wet grassland. There is a great diversity of landform, colour and texture. Tree cover is sparse in these landscapes although trees are usually associated with farmsteads and gorse is common along the roadsides. Isolated stone farmsteads are often prominent on the steep slopes and are reached by dead-end lanes. There are also terraces of weavers’ and other workers cottages and sparse linear settlements, particularly along the winding roads towards the foot of the slopes. There is good preservation of archaeological sites in these marginal locations as a result of the non intensive agricultural practices adopted.’

‘This character area fringes the smaller, fragmented blocks of moorland within Rossendale. The moorland fringe is generally above 350m here, a higher altitude than is typical. The field patterns indicate a late stage of enclosure with large regular fields enclosed by stone walls, which are generally in a poor state of repair, and large farmhouses at the end of narrow lanes at a high altitude. The predominant land use is agriculture with a combination of sheep and cattle grazing. However, there are also strong links with the urban/industrial economy

and activities such as haulage, scrap metal recycling and small scale forestry; the farm complexes frequently include large sheds/barns and makeshift structures associated with these diversification activities. Quarrying has been an important land use with both active and disused quarries seen at the junction with the moor. Most grassland is improved, but the remaining unimproved/acid grassland provides important wildlife habitats.'

Almost entirely Millstone Grit with soil of various thickness. Typically between 215-250m above sea level. Some support a summer hay crop. Long history of settlement, usually small land holdings with relatively close farmhouses. More recently the land has been used for sheep grazing. Much land has improved drainage and is now used for big bale silage rather than traditional hay.

Settled valleys

Unique to Rossendale and distinguished from 'industrial foothills and valleys', these follow the tributaries of the Irwell.

'The narrow, high sided valleys of the River Irwell and its tributary streams, dissect the high moorland plateau of the Rossendale Hills and provide one of the most distinctive landscape types in Lancashire. Along the valley floor the urban settlements between Rawtenstall and Bacup, which originated at river crossing points, have now merged to form a dense ribbon of urban and industrial development. The textile mills, with their distinctive chimneys, dominate the urban skyline and are a hallmark of this South Pennines landscape. Gritstone terraces form characteristic features of the hillsides and valley floor and roads are concentrated in the narrow valley floor. North facing slopes usually remain free of development and there are frequently views towards woodlands, the patchwork of in-bye pastures and the moorland edge. Broadleaved woodlands cling to the steep slopes and fill the steep valley side cloughs, reinforcing the sense of enclosure within the valleys, although the Irwell Valley has relatively little woodland. Pockets of adjacent farmland are often under-used with attendant derelict structures.'

Steep valley sides expose sheer faces of underlying grit/coal/sandstone, more gentle slopes have thin soil cover. Valley sides typically 200m in height with a narrow valley floor. Settlement in the medieval period in 'booths' or farmsteads, developing into small hamlets with official or unofficial forest encroachment. Much evidence of industrial heritage, including communications. Later settlements are of tight-knit centres with textile mills surrounded by close terraces of cottages with associated civic buildings and churches.

Reservoir valleys

Grane valley.

'The Reservoir Valleys are characterised by large reservoirs constructed in the

mid-late nineteenth century to supply water for Lancashire's growing urban population. They are dominated by large expanses of water and their associated engineered landforms of bunds and embankments. The Victorian landscape is evident in the form of mixed woodlands, gothic architectural detailing and sturdy dressed stone walls. The valleys are predominantly rural in character with attractive areas of pasture and broadleaved woodland surrounding and linking the water bodies. The extensive woodlands and plantations allow the valleys to absorb relatively high numbers of recreational visitors from the surrounding urban areas, without becoming overcrowded and recreational use is now an important influence on landscape character.'

'The Grane valley is a somewhat remote wide valley to the west of the town of Haslingden. The valley floor is occupied by three large reservoirs; Calf Hey, Ogden and Holden Wood, while the valley sides contain a mix of coniferous and broadleaved plantations and open pastures. Quarried crags and edges overlook the valley and border the surrounding high moorland. This was once a well populated valley with farmers, quarry workers and a number of mills. The entire valley was depopulated in association with the reservoir construction in a effort to reduce the risk of waterborne diseases. Today, the scattered abandoned farmsteads, ruined cottages and pastures and packhorse tracks are remnants of the pre- reservoir landscape. The Grane valley is gradually being discovered by visitors and is increasingly used for informal recreation with car parks and footpath links established.'

In deeply glaciated valleys along faultlines in the bedrock. Much evidence of human influence destroyed by the reservoirs but the constructions themselves are significant.