LCA 2 Orton Fells

Yorkshire Dales National Park - Landscape Character Assessment

YORKSHIRE DALES
National Park Authority

Limestone outcrops and [illegible]s on Cowdale Slack, on uplands near Little Asby

LCA 2 Orton Fells



Key characteristics

- Wide, open and sweeping upland plateau landscape of heather moorland and limestone grasslands interspersed with extensive limestone pavements, rocky outcrops, scars and screes.
- Upland plateau is fringed by rolling moorlands and hills where there is a transition from upland rough pastures to improved grassland on lower slopes
- Pastures on the slopes of the upland plateau are bound by a prominent rectilinear network of drystone walls on slopes of local limestone.
- Largely treeless on the higher land; broadleaved woodlands in narrow gills, alongside the River Lune floodplain and associated with occasional halls and small conifer plantations and shelterbelts on parts of the moorland fringe.
- Villages within Lune Valley; elsewhere settlement is dispersed in the form of hamlets and isolated farmsteads
- A small number of long straight roads cross the upland; walled drove roads connect settlements to the moorland.
- Evidence of early settlement on the upland plateau, with stone circles, cairns, burial mounds, field systems and settlements.
- Long panoramic views out to the dramatic landforms of the surrounding upland landscapes.

Numbered photographs illustrate specific key natural, cultural and perceptual features in the Orton Fells LCA (see page 8)

1



Sweeping scale - views to distant skyline ridges contribute to a sense of tranquillity and relative wildness

From Gaythorne Plain, looking north towards Gaythorne Hall and the upper Scale Beck Valley

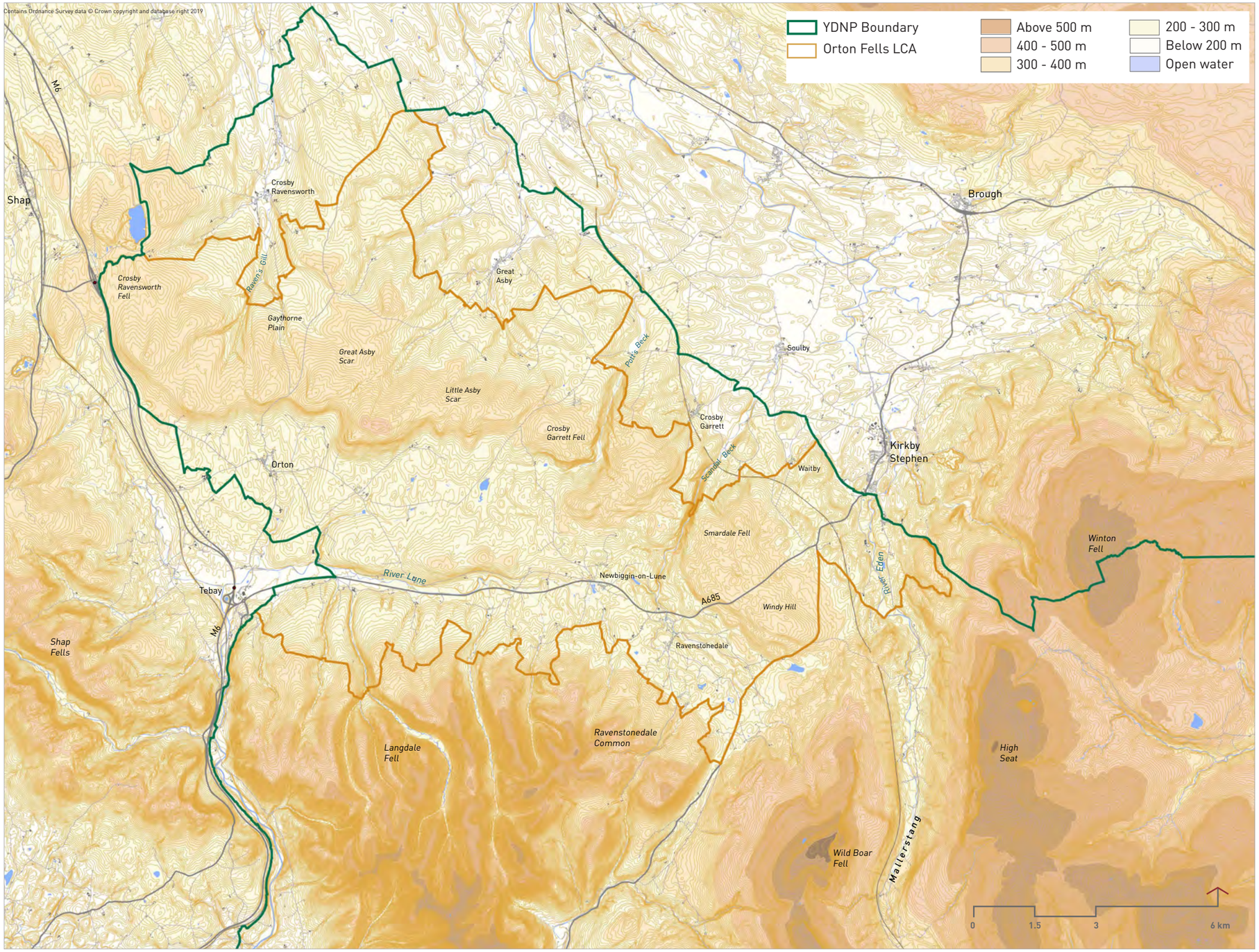
2



Long straight walled drove roads, here crossing unenclosed moorland

Sayle Lane on Gaythorne Plain

Landscape context: Orton Fells



Landscape context

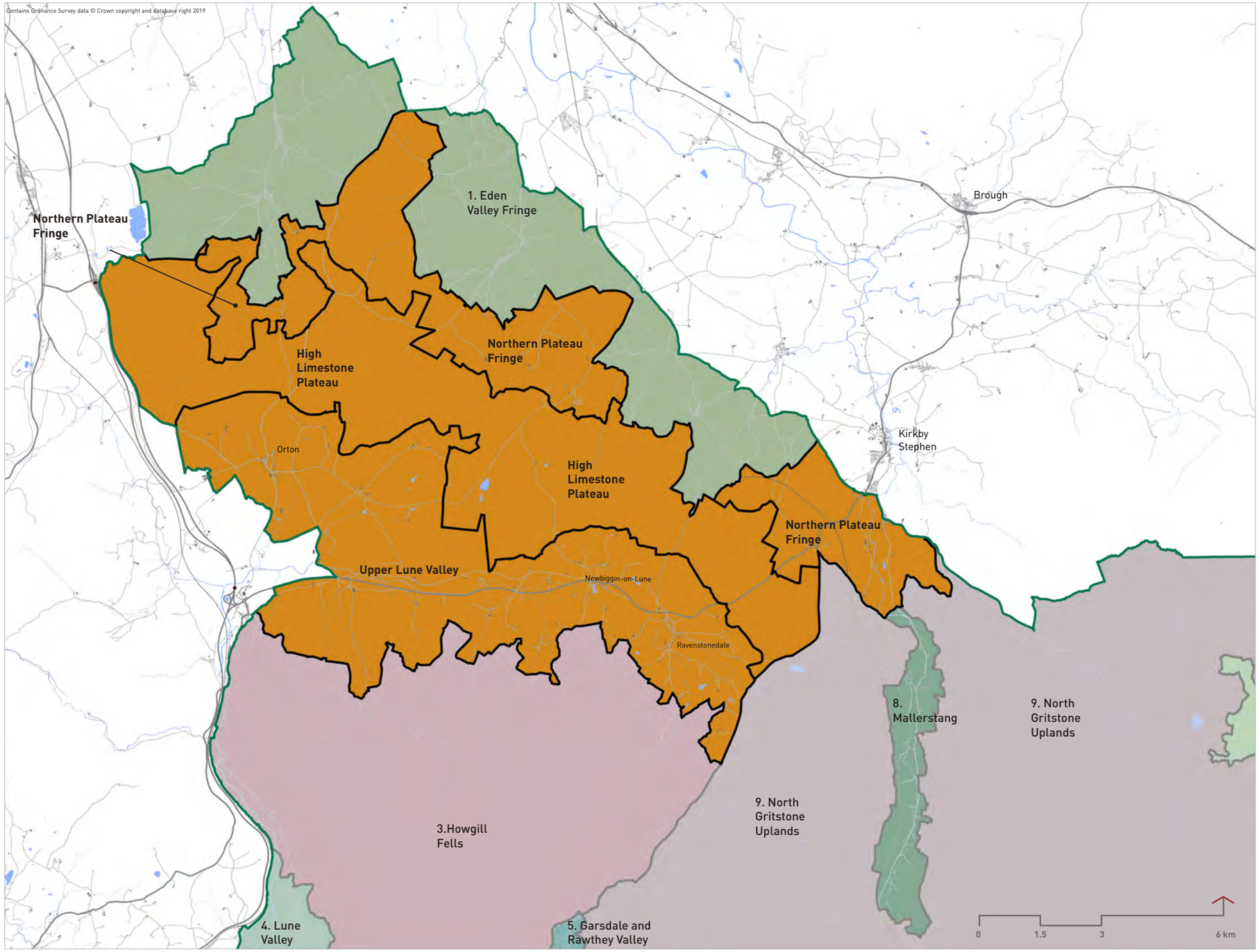
The Orton Fells LCA comprises a distinctive tilted upland limestone plateau and the rolling moorland fringe landscapes that surround the plateau, including the upper River Lune valley which separates the limestone plateau from the Howgill Fells and Northern Gritstone Uplands to the south.

The limestone plateau is mostly between 180 m and 300m in elevation, with its highest point at 412m. There are striking views out in all directions, to the Cumbrian fells to the west, the Howgills to the south, Mallerstang and the gritstone uplands of the Pennines to the east and north-east.

The upland plateau forms the watershed between the rivers Eden and the Lune. The River Eden flows north through Mallerstang to the town of Kirby Stephen and then on through the wide Eden Vale which is to the north of the National Park boundary. The valleys formed by the tributaries to the River Eden on the northern fringes of the limestone plateau are within the Eden Valley Fringe LCA.

The River Lune flows east-west between the upland limestone plateau to the north and the Howgill fells to the south. It is fed by tributary becks flowing from the north slopes of the Howgills. The valley of the Upper Lune is an important transport corridor, connecting the M6 at Tebay with the towns of Brough and Kirby Stephen to the north.

Landscape character: Orton Fells



Landscape character

The principal variations in landscape character at a local scale are:

- **High limestone plateau** - tilted upland plateau with extensive stretches of characteristic karst scenery
- **Northern plateau fringe** - rolling moorland fringe landscape with a prominent network of drystone walls enclosing fields of rough pasture on upper slopes and improved grassland on the edge of the Eden Valley Fringe LCA. Drumlin field within Upper Eden Valley, to the south of Kirkby Stephen.
- **Upper Lune Valley** - east-west aligned valley of the upper Lune, fed by tributaries that flow from the Howgill Fells to the south. There is a wide, bowl-shaped vale at the head of the Lune Valley with scattered drumlins, villages and a network of small fields, walled lanes and tracks

Distinctive landscape character

The upland plateau forms the central 'spine' of the LCA, flanked by rolling moorlands and hills to the north and a steeper, ragged limestone 'edge' to the south. To the north of the plateau, the rolling moors and hills are underlain by mixed sedimentary rocks, including outcrops of sandstone, overlain by drift deposits. They are dissected by a series of broad gill valleys, which flow northwards towards the Eden Vale.

To the south of the upland limestone plateau, the gently undulating south facing slopes drain towards the valley of the Upper Lune, which flows east-west from a broad bowl-shaped valley head near Newbiggin-on-Lune towards Tebay, where it turns south to flow through the Lune Gorge on the western edge of the National Park. The broad Upper Lune Valley is enclosed by the upland limestone plateau to the north and the high, open ridges of the Howgill Fells to the south.

High limestone plateau

The distinctive open limestone plateau moorland is has a gently rolling landform with a series of exposed limestone pavement, scars and screes extending from Crosby Ravensworth Fell in the west to Ash Fell in the east. The majority of the upland plateau is unenclosed open moorland, grazed by sheep and cattle, but there is a transition to enclosed pastures towards the edges of the plateau, which are bounded by a prominent rectilinear pattern of limestone.

There are extensive areas of intact limestone pavement and mosaics of calcareous grassland, acidic grassland and areas of heath, with springs and flushes which have high biodiversity value. Sunbiggin Tarn is a rare marl lake in a dry landscape of few watercourses.

The high limestone plateau has many visible archaeological features, including Bronze Age stone circles, early settlement sites and burial mounds.

This is an exposed, open, unsettled and treeless landscape, with panoramic views in all directions - to the Lake District to the west, the Howgill Fells to the south and the North Pennines to the east; these distant skyline ridges contribute to the sense of tranquillity and relative wildness.

Northern plateau fringe

To the north of the upland plateau, the land descends gradually across rolling hills and moors, dissected by gills, which broaden to a series of verdant tributary

Numbered photographs illustrate specific key natural, cultural and perceptual features in the Orton Fells LCA (see page 8)



3

View across the Upper Lune valley towards the Howgill Fells from Kelleth

The Upper Lune valley is flanked by the dramatic high, open ridges of the Howgills Fells



Limestone walls and hawthorn on the moorland fringe



Wooded bank along the Upper Lune floodplain



Upper Lune at Rayne Bridge



A strong sense of exposure and remoteness

4

From Bank Moor on Gaythorne Plain looking west towards Crosby Ravensworth Fell and the Cumbrian Fells

valleys. The flanks of moorland and farmland between the valleys are prominent in views from the low-lying Eden Vale to the north and offer long views to the distant ridges of the Cumbrian Fells and North Pennines.

This rolling plateau fringe landscape forms a transition between the upland limestone and the improved pastures of the Eden Valley, with improved grassland on lower slopes and rough pasture on more elevated land, as well as areas that have reverted back to a wilder 'moorland' character of rush pasture, marshy grassland and colonising willow and birch scrub fields of more intensively managed grasslands. The fields are enclosed by an intact pattern of limestone walls. The distinctive, regular pattern of limestone walls, which undulate with the landform, gives visual emphasis to the rolling topography.

There are small coniferous and mixed woodlands, established for timber, shelter and shooting interests and one area with more extensive plantations, on the slopes of Drybeck Moor, overlooking the valley of Scale Beck. These plateau fringes are remote, with the only small hamlets and farmsteads; settlement is concentrated in the adjacent Eden Fringe Valley LCA to the north.

To the east of the LCA, the plateau fringe landscape becomes more undulating, with well defined drumlins on the slopes and floor of the Upper Eden Valley. The River Eden flows north from Mallerstang through the village of Nateby to the market town of Kirkby Stephen which is just outside the National Park. The narrow river valley is bordered by rolling pastures and its landscape is influenced by the remnant historic parklands and earthworks of Lammerside Castle and Wharton Hall. Both sites are scheduled monuments with associated settlement earthworks and lynchets which add time depth to the landscape. On the fringes of Kirkby Stephen the narrow Eden Valley is enclosed by strips of woodland but it is relatively inconspicuous within the rolling pastures and the character of this area is predominantly that of an upland fringe landscape.

Upper Lune Valley

The Upper River Lune is fed by a series of fast flowing tributary becks on the northern slopes of the Howgills. The principal watercourse flows east to west within a narrow, flat floodplain, gathering pace as it is joined by Bowderdale Beck and Langdale Beck. The river has cut a steep slope on the northern edge of the floodplain which is often cloaked in broadleaf woodland. Linear fluvio-glacial features create a more intricate and hummocky landscape near Bowderdale.

The valley is flanked by the dramatic high, open ridges of the Howgills Fells, which rise steeply from the floodplain to the south and the limestone plateau uplands of the Orton Fells to the north. The northern valley slopes have a more gently, undulating landform, which rises to a low scarp of limestone and sandstone, which marks the change to the higher limestone plateau.

This northern side of the Lune Valley is drained by the Chapel and Rais Becks, which flow south-west to the Lune and in places cut deep incised valleys. This is a farmed landscape with pastures enclosed by a strong, prominent pattern of limestone walls on the moorland fringe, with a transition to hedged fields on the lower slopes and floodplain of the Upper Lune valley. Most fields are large and rectangular, but there are areas of enclosed common field, especially around the village of Orton and to the north of Raisbeck, and some areas of ancient enclosure with small, irregular fields. Shelterbelts and woodlands associated with parklands at Orton Hall and Holme House create a quite wooded character in some areas and numerous mature ash and sycamore trees, growing singly or in lines, especially along field boundaries, also add to the sense of a relatively well treed landscape.

The southern slopes of the Lune Valley are the ridges of open moorland on the fringes of the main Howgills dome. The enclosed moorland and moorland fringe landscapes extend high onto the slopes of the Howgill Fells in this area, where the bedrock geology is composed of softer slates compared to the hard sandstones and gritstones of the upland block and is covered by a layer of till.

The village of Orton and hamlet of Raisbeck are springline settlements and there are other small hamlets along the top of the steep bank that edges the Lune floodplain. There is a dispersed pattern of farms and a small number of individual sometimes large houses connected by straight drove roads with wide verges. The substantial farms and outbuildings on the lower slopes of the Howgill Fells are often prominent in the dramatic views to the south and west to the Howgills and the fringes of the Lake District.

The A685 follows the edge of the floodplain and the fast moving traffic along this road is visible in views from the adjacent slopes. From the east there are glimpsed views of the M6 motorway.

To the east of the village of Newbiggin-on-Lune, the Upper Lune valley broadens to meet the flanks of the surrounding uplands and the river course becomes imperceptible. The Howgill Fells, the Orton Fells and Wild Boar Fell form a distinct backdrop in views throughout the area. The limestone buildings, including many field barns and stone walls reflect the underlying limestone bedrock and seem integrated within their landscape setting. The pattern of small fields to the east of Newbiggin-on-Lune and particularly around the village of Ravenstonedale gradually broadens to larger fields, with a more remote upland fringe character on the edges of the fells. The villages are at the heart of an access network of roads, minor lanes and tracks into the wider landscape and the surrounding uplands.







Numbered photographs illustrate specific key natural, cultural and perceptual features in the Orton Fells LCA (see page 8)



8

Outstanding long views in all directions from the upland plateau

Panorama looking south from Orton Scar towards the Howgills, with the Tebay Gap and the Cumbrian Fells beyond



View south towards the Howgill Fells across the Upper Lune valley from just west of Kelleth

A transition from stone wall to hedgerows on the lower slopes and floodplain of the Upper Lune valley



Long straight walled drove roads with wide verges

9

Low Lane east of Ravenstonedale



10

Smardale Viaduct from the valley to the north



Small stands of conifers on the upland limestone plateau at Westgate Hill



11

Limestone outcrops and scars on Asby Winderwath Common

Underlying limestone bedrock is exposed as pavements, scars, outcrops and screes

Small quarries expose the underlying limestone bedrock



Former limestone quarry near Orton Scar



Pastures east of Ravenstonedale on the slopes of Blirt Hill



Linear hamlet of Kelleth

The Howgill Fells create a dramatic backdrop to views south across the Upper Lune valley



Rolling farmland on the southern slopes of the upland plateau near Kelleth

Key natural, cultural and perceptual features

NATURAL

Characteristic karst scenery, including one of the most extensive and intact areas of limestone pavement in the UK with woodland species and assemblages of ferns growing within the deep, sheltered grykes. Great Asby Scar is a National Nature Reserve (NNR), (5)

The underlying limestone bedrock is exposed as pavements, scars, outcrops and screes and also in the building materials used throughout the area, particularly the distinctive pattern of high drystone walls on the edges of the fells. (11)

The ragged limestone edge along the south of the limestone plateau is a prominent backdrop to the upper Lune Valley; the white 'edge' frequently catches the sunlight in views from the northern slopes of the Howgills. (15) (16)

Herb-rich calcareous grassland, acidic grassland and areas of heath occur in close proximity, with springs and flushes; Extensive areas of the fells, notably the Asby Complex, are designated as an SAC, for their range of karst features and their combinations of acid and base-rich soils that give rise to wet heath, with small areas of blanket bog, dry heath, and both acid and calcareous grassland.

Sunbiggin Tarn, a marl lake, of particular interest with its rich fen and reed swamp flora and its tufa formations.

Long straight walled drove roads with wide verges, often very rich in flowering species. (2) (9)

Becks with high-quality water rising in the upland and flowing either to the north or south support internationally significant plant and animal communities.

CULTURAL

A rich collection of visible archaeological features including Bronze Age stone circles and burial mounds, disused limekilns, pillow mounds, a Roman Road, dykes and tracks, which contribute to a landscape with a rich time-depth. There is a concentration of Romano British settlement sites in the small valley of Crosby Gill and a spectacular defended site from the same period at Castlefolds on the upland plateau - all are scheduled monuments. (6)

Smardale viaduct, part of the disused Darlington–Tebay railway line, is a listed building and notable landmark. (10)

Historic farmsteads, which are thought to have originated from monastic granges eg Gaythorne Grange, Asby Grange. Each has a definable holding and anciently enclosed fields.

Extant boundaries of former medieval deer parks, associated with Crosby Gill, Ravenstonedale and Wharton Hall.

Fields enclosed by a distinctive rectilinear pattern of drystone walls, built from local limestone. In places these fields follow medieval open field systems of long narrow strips or small fields around settlements, giving rise to very strong historic field patterns. (14)

Small quarries expose the underlying limestone bedrock. (12)

PERCEPTUAL

Outstanding long views in all directions to the dramatic skylines of the surrounding uplands; contribute to the sense of tranquillity and relative wildness. (1) (3) (8) (13)

Strong sense of exposure and remoteness particularly on the upland limestone plateau. (4) (7)

Use of local limestone for building throughout the area creates a strong visual unity. (15)

The area is associated with Turner, who sketched Orton Scar and painted the Lune Valley from Orton Scar and contemporary sculptor, Andy Goldsworthy has constructed a number of 'sheepfolds' that link history and geology to contemporary ideas.

Photos that illustrate specific key natural, cultural and perceptual features are numbered eg. (10)

Numbered photographs illustrate specific key natural, cultural and perceptual features in the Orton Fells LCA (see page 8)

14



Prominent rectilinear pattern of high limestone walls enclosing pastures on the moorland fringe

Network of walled fields on moorland slopes north west of village of Great Asby



Rolling farmland on moorland fringe NE of Kirkby Stephen



Occasional isolated blocks of conifer plantations

Dina Gill, on the edge of the limestone plateau near Gilts

15



Photo ©Richard Webb cc_by-sa/2.0

The edge of the limestone plateau near Sunbiggin

The ragged limestone edge to the south of the plateau and the field stone walls display strong visual unity

Rolling, open moorland fringe farmland, with hints of limestone bedrock outcropping on upper slopes



16

The southern edge of the upland limestone plateau near Asby Scar from the B6261 just west of Raisbeck

Yorkshire Dales National Park - Natural Beauty and Wildlife Special Qualities: Orton Fells

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Maulds Meaburn
Shap
M6
Crosby Ravensworth
Rutter Force
Great Asby
Brough
Soulby
Crosby Garrett
Waitby
Kirkby Stephen
Orton
Tebay
A685
River Lune
Newbiggin-on-Lune
Cote Gill
Ravenstonedale
Mallerstang

Crosby Ravensworth Fell
Gaythorne Plain
Internationally important limestone features and habitats on limestone plateau - Asby Complex SAC and multiple SSSI designations
Extensive limestone pavement
Great Asby Scar
Little Asby Scar
Limestone edge to south of plateau is prominent in views from Upper Lune Valley
Sunbiggin Tarn
Crosby Garrett Fell
Smardale Gill
Smardale Fell
Drumlin landscape on slopes and floor of Upper Eden Valley
Windy Hill
Ravenstonedale Common
Howgill Fells
Langdale Fell
Wild Boar Fell

0 1.5 3 6 km

The Special Qualities of the Yorkshire Dales National Park are described in the National Park's Management Plan 2019-24. This map shows selected special qualities (for which spatial data is available) that are found within the Orton Fells LCA.

This special qualities mapping is shown within the area that forms the backdrop to local views; it reflects the extent of visibility and the overall landscape setting for the Orton Fells LCA

Special Qualities of the YDNP

- YDNP Boundary
- Orton Fells LCA boundary
- Extent of area that forms the backdrop to views from the Orton Fells LCA

Natural beauty

- **Outstanding classic limestone scenery**
  [Underlain by Great Scar Limestone & displaying distinctive karst character]
- **Dales with distinctive stepped profiles**
  [Displaying outcrops of rocks from the Yoredale series]
- **The Howgills**
  [Areas in the YDNP underlain by Silurian rocks]
- **Significant glacial/post-glacial features**
  [Prominent drumlins and glacial drift landforms]
- **Spectacular waterfalls**
  ['Water features' noted as 'recognised attraction' in YDNPA Visitor Strategy]

Wildlife*

- **Flower-rich hay meadows and pastures**
  [Lowland meadows; Upland hay meadows]
- **A range of rare limestone habitats**
  [Limestone pavements; Lowland calcareous grassland; Upland calcareous grassland]
- **Extensive areas of moorland**
  [Upland heathland; Blanket bog; Lowland raised bog]
- **Small areas of broadleaf woodland**
  [Deciduous woodland; ancient woodland (darker tone)]

*Priority Habitats [S41 NERC Act 2010]

Yorkshire Dales National Park - Cultural Heritage Special Qualities: Orton Fells

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Maulds Meaburn
Shap
M6
Crosby Ravensworth
Brough
Stone Circle
Raven's Gill
Gaythorne Earthworks
Bronze Age cairns
Great Asby
Blasterfield Grange
Cow Green Deer Park
Extensive medieval field systems
Romano-British enclosed hut circle settlement
Soulby
Asby Grange Farmstead
Bronze Age cairn
Bronze Age cairn
Friar Biggins Monastic Grange
Scattered small limestone quarries near Orton
Crosby Garrett
Pott's Beck
Bousfield Park (Deer Park)
Castle Folds Romano-British defended stone hut circle
Extensive medieval field systems
Gamelands stone circle
Orton
Smardale Viaduct
Waitby
Kirkby Stephen
Bronze Age cairns and three Romano-British settlements + associated field systems
Extensive limestone quarries on fringes of Kirkby Stephen
Scandal Beck
Smardale demesne medieval village
Wharton Hall Deer Park
Dykes and mounds on either side of Scandal Beck valley - Iron Age - Roman-British field system and medieval pillow mounds
Tebay
River Lune
A685
Newbiggin-on-Lune
Medieval Deer Park
Ravenstonedale
River Eden
Mallerstang
0
1.5
3
6 km

Special Qualities of the YDNP

- YDNP Boundary
- Orton Fells LCA boundary
- Extent of area that forms the backdrop to views from the Orton Fells LCA

Cultural heritage*

- **A traditional pastoral landscape**
  [Traditional stone-built field barns]
- **An exceptional range of archaeology**
  [Strip lynchets & prehistoric field systems that are prominent]
- **Powerful reminders of periods of dominance by large estates and religious houses**
  [Ancient & historic parklands & other ornamental landscapes]
- **The remains of former rural industries**
  [Sites of former lead & coal mines & lime kilns]
- **Settle-Carlisle Railway Line**
  [Conservation Area]
- **Historic settlements with distinctive traditional architecture**
  [Conservation Areas]

* YDNPA Historic Environment Record

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