

Courtesy Tom Bourne, artist, Gills in the Upper Rawthey Valley

LCA 3 Howgill Fells

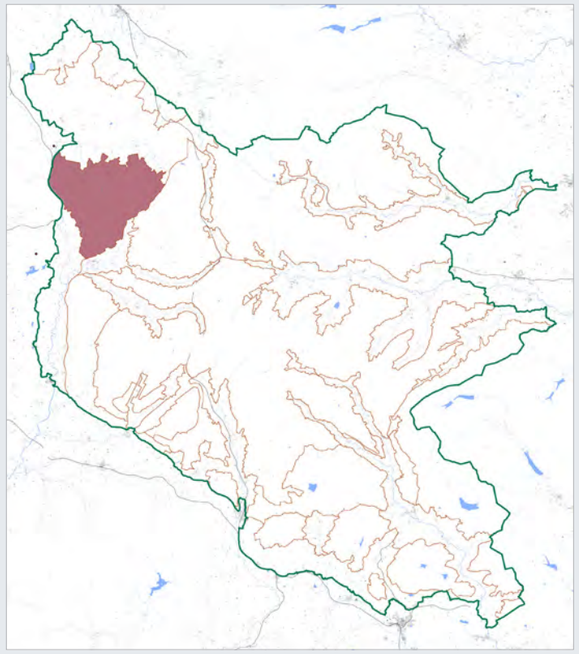
Yorkshire Dales National Park - Landscape Character Assessment

YORKSHIRE DALES
National Park Authority

LCA 3 Howgill Fells

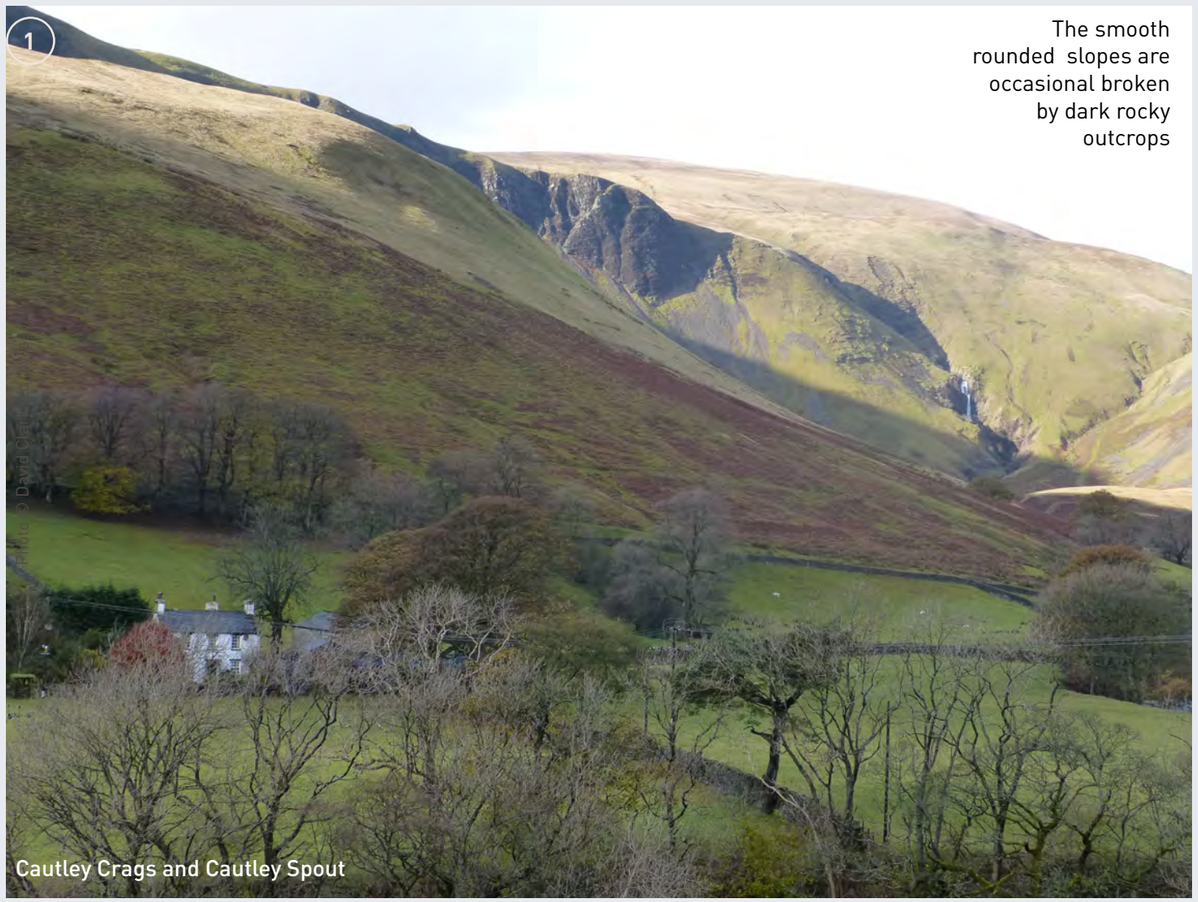
Key characteristics

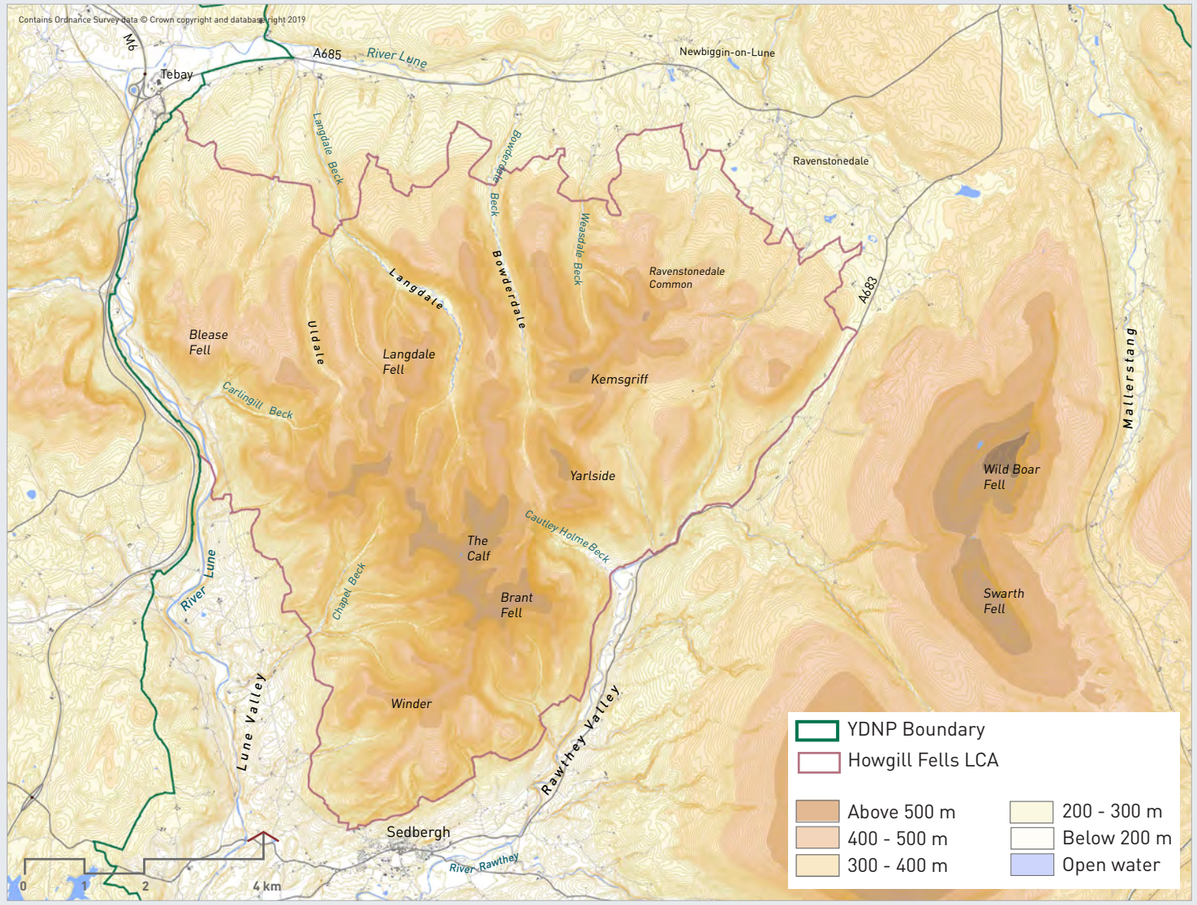
- Massive, wild, open, and inaccessible upland, composed of Silurian rock overlain by moorland and rock screes.
- Smooth, distinctive, well defined closely spaced ridges fan out from dome shaped fells to create long, steep sided dales and steep dark rocky gullies with occasional steep, tumbling waterfalls.
- Steeply incised gills cut through the overall smooth form of the fells, creating sharp contrasts in landform.
- Virtually treeless; where trees occur, they cling to occasional exposed rock edges in gills and rocky valley sides.
- Expansive and exposed, the moorland provides largely unenclosed grazing for sheep and wild ponies.
- Strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity - almost total absence of roads and settlement.
- The smooth, deeply folded form of the uplands play host to a pattern of light and shade.
- Panoramic and very extensive views from the fell tops



Landscape context: Howgill Fells

Numbered photographs illustrate specific key natural, cultural and perceptual features in the Howgill Fells LCA (see page 7)

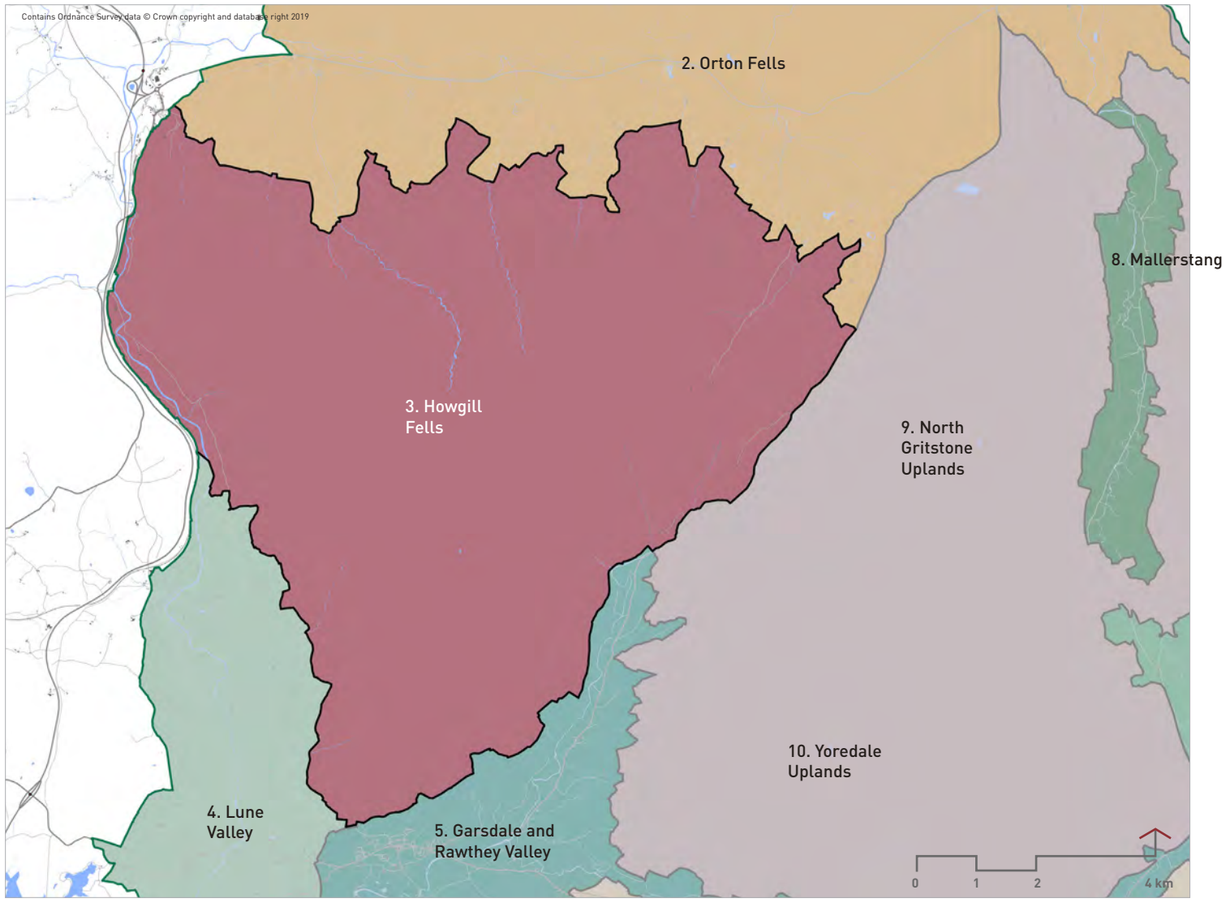






Blease Fell and Hare Shaw, from the A685 to the west of the M6 corridor

Landscape character: Howgill Fells



Landscape context

These unusually shaped hills are formed from an outcrop of sequences of sandstones, siltstones and mudstones which contrast markedly with the igneous formations of the Cumbria High Fells to the west and the limestones of the Yorkshire Dales to the east and south east. The primary rock type is a hard sandstone, but the rocks all possess a similar resistance to erosion which gives rise to the smooth, rounded shape that is so characteristic of these fells. Ice scouring during the last glaciation has emphasised the evenness of the slopes.

The bulk of the Howgills, as well as Middleton and Barbon Fell to the south, are of Silurian age (430-415 million years old), and some 60 million years older than the Carboniferous rocks that make up most of the Yorkshire Dales. The most important feature of the geology of the area is the Dent Fault, which is aligned along parts of the Rawthey Valley and Barbondale between Kirkby Stephen and Kirkby Lonsdale, forms the physical division between the two contrasting types of scenery – the smooth flanked Howgills and the horizontal limestone scars of the Yorkshire Dales. Although the mountain mass of the Howgills was large enough to have its own ice cap during the last Ice Age, ice from the Lake District and Pennines may have hemmed the Howgills in ice, reducing the amount of erosion that could take place. The rounded summits therefore show very little glacial erosion. Cautley Crags are the only glacial features, where the cliffs rise up from behind the beginnings of a corrie. Several small streams flow off the hilltops and down the gills in a radial pattern from the central core, to join the River Lune in the north and west, and the Rawthey in the east and south.



Fell ponies, Arant Haw

The fells are grazed in common by sheep and wild ponies

Distinctive landscape character

The fells comprise a discrete group of high steep sided, smooth rounded hills, dominated by the summits of Arant How, The Calf, Fell Head and Bram Rigg Top, and sharply incised by a number of gills. The remarkable landform of the Howgill Fells makes them visually distinct from the surrounding high land of the Cumbria High Fells to the west, the main part of the Yorkshire Dales to the east and the Orton Fells to the north.

The high and exposed open moorland provides uninterrupted views. The fells are unenclosed, but drystone walls separate the open common land of the fells from the rough pastures on the lower slopes. There is evidence of severe erosion on some of the steeper slopes, whilst others are covered with loose scree. Small streams cascade over black rocks down the narrow rocky gills, occasionally forming dramatic waterfalls.

The Howgill Fells are isolated and inaccessible. The difficult landform has prevented settlement, and there is a notable absence of archaeological features on the fells. There is no settlement and no through roads. Access has been limited to the river valleys that provided routes around the edge of the group of hills. They have thus been little affected by any particular phase of historical or cultural activity, although they have been cleared of woodland and used for grazing for many centuries. There are no roads crossing the fells and only occasional isolated farmsteads on the slower slopes, sheltered by groups of mature sycamore.

There is no woodland cover on the fells, although occasional isolated trees and small groups of trees occur within steep sided gills and cling to rocky outcrops. The hills are unenclosed and are grazed in common by sheep and wild ponies.

The majority of the area consists of acidic grassland with small stretches of heather. Blanket bog occurs on some of the higher, flatter hilltops, while bracken covers the freer draining side slopes. There is virtually no tree cover; only small ash, alder and hawthorn woodlands in some of the steep sided gills.

This is a dramatic, awe inspiring landscape with a strong sense of identity. The virtual absence of settlement and roads and the extensive tracts of empty exposed upland create a remote landscape with a strong sense of relative wildness. To the west the M6 motorway and railway are close by, but the landscape is able, for the most part, to retain a remote feel by virtue of its scale and elevation.



Cobles, from Bush Howe



The cluster of summits appears over-scaled - like a mountain range - in some views from the surrounding landscapes

6



A powerful identity - the Howgills have a dramatic, awe inspiring scale and strong visual simplicity and unity

Great Dummocks and Cautley Crags - From Bluecaster Side in the Upper Rawthey Valley

7



Photo © Karl and Ali cc_by-sa/2.0

Simple, distinct and very consiste pattern of landfo and landcov

Gais Gill and the summit of Knott

8



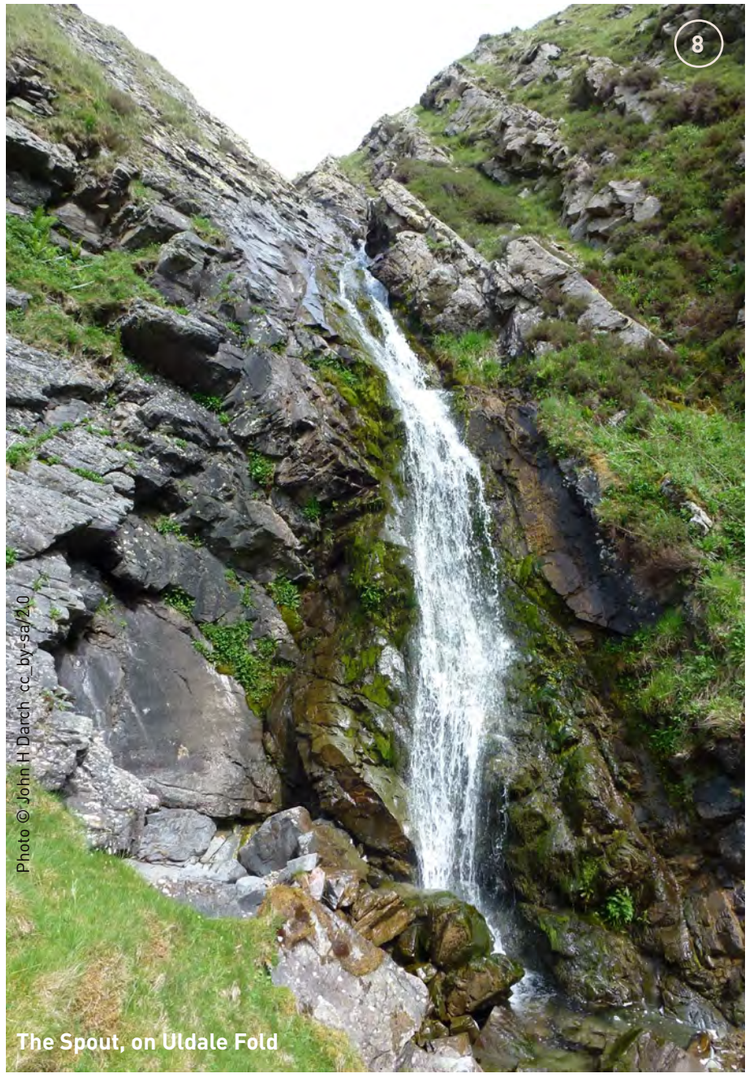
Photo © Matthew Hatton cc_by-sa/2.0

Eroded gully and debris fan within the Langdale, Bowderdale and Carlin Gill SSSI

Leath Gill in Bowderdale



Carlin Gill



The Spout, on Uldale Fold

Small streams cascade down dark rocky gills and over occasional dramatic tumbling waterfalls



Sheep and fell ponies grazing on Udale Head

Empty, exposed and remote - with an exceptionally strong sense of tranquillity and wilderness

Key natural, cultural and perceptual features

NATURAL

High rounded summits, dissected by deeply incised narrow gills - a prominent and visually striking landform with a soaring scale and smoothly folded profile. (6) (10)

Hard erosion-resistant rocks, alongside the Dent Fault, have created a remarkable landform which contrasts with the surrounding uplands and is unusual and rare in England. (2)

Distinctive domed massif with a radial drainage pattern of small streams, which cascade down narrow dark rocky gills and over occasional dramatic tumbling waterfalls, such as Cautley Spout and Black Force. Most gills are unwooded and appear as wrinkles and creases on the otherwise smooth slopes. (2)

Occasional exposed dark rocky outcrops, such as the partial corrie at Cautley Crag and areas of rock scree. (1)

Simple, distinctive and very consistent pattern of landform and land cover - dominated by acid grassland, with poorly drained areas of moorland and blanket bog on the high ground and stands of bracken on lower slopes. (7)

Occasional steep-sided wooded gills, with **small areas of ancient semi-natural woodland**, particularly on the lower slopes of the Lune Gorge.

Nationally important geodiversity - Langdale, Bowderdale and Carlin Gill SSSI is of exceptional importance for its undisturbed fluvial geomorphology. Other SSSIs include Backside Beck and Spen Gill which has valuable exposures of Ordovician and Silurian rocks. (8)

Pockets of habitat diversity - small areas of heather and blanket bog on the hill tops and springs and flushes on the lower slopes are the most diverse habitats.

CULTURAL

Complete absence of settlement due to the high landform and difficult terrain of the fells

Unenclosed, open moorland with an unusual and historic pattern of land ownership and management – the fells are grazed in common by sheep and wild ponies, with the rights held by farming families based in the adjoining valleys. This grazing system forms a significant part of the local farming culture and economy. (3)

Low Borrowbridge in the Lune Gorge - earthworks at the site of an important Roman Fort along a historic transport route. Fairmile Road, a short section of Roman Road, crosses the lower slopes of Ling Haw and Blease Fell en route to Low Borrowbridge Fort.

PERCEPTUAL

Powerful identity – a highly distinctive landscape unit with a dramatic, awe inspiring scale and strong visual simplicity and unity. (6)

The Howgills have an 'ancient', timeless quality - the cluster of summits appears over-scaled - like a mountain range - in some views from the surrounding landscapes. (5)

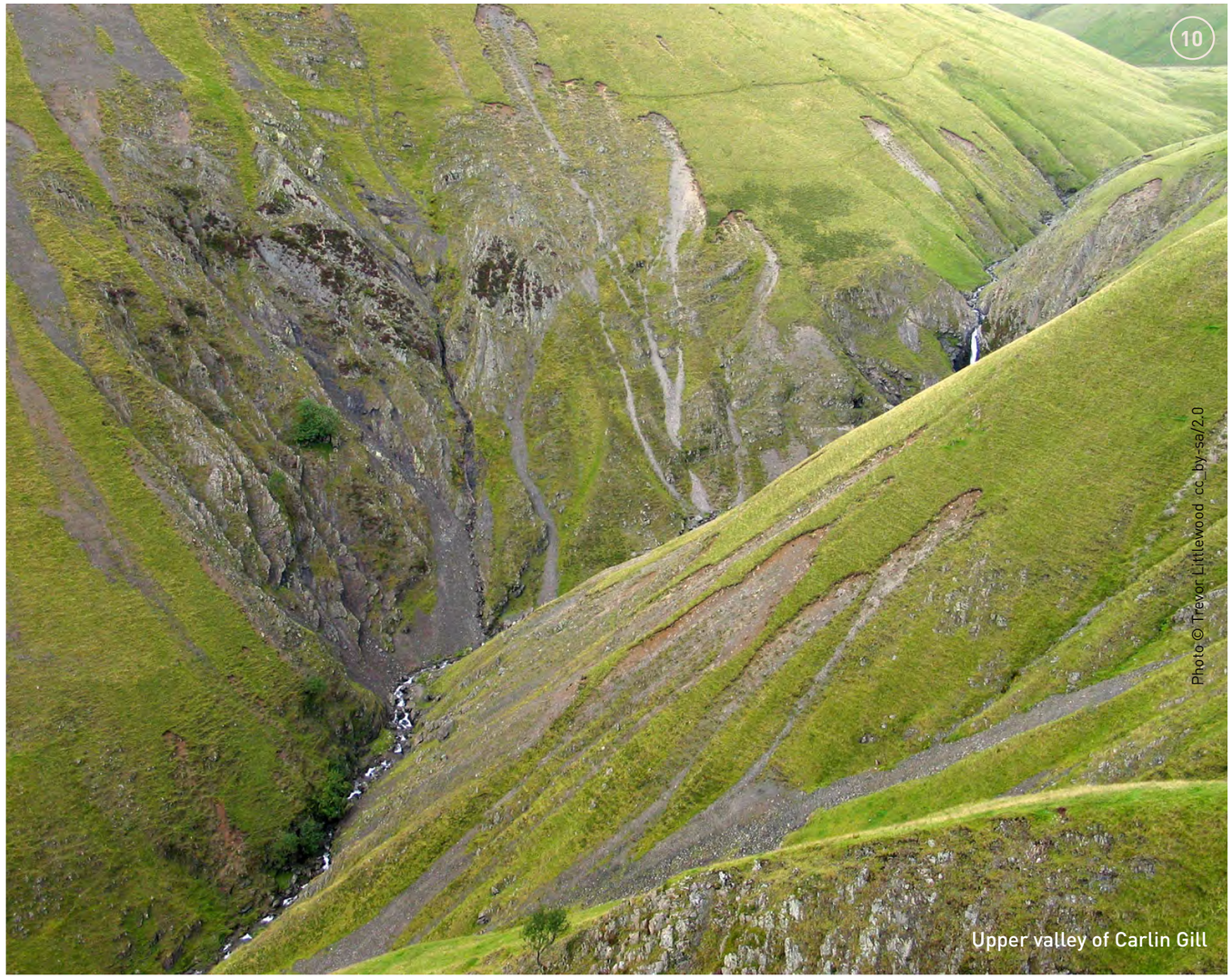
Strong associations with Wainwright who evocatively describes the Howgills landscape as *"sleek and smooth, looking from a distance like velvet curtains in sunlight, like silken drapes at sunset; they are steep sided but gently domed.... Their soaring sweeping lines are not interrupted by walls or fences... a remarkable concentration of summits often likened to a huddle of squatting elephants"*. **Aptly described by Wordsworth** as the 'naked heights.' (4)

Empty, exposed upland with an **exceptionally strong sense of tranquillity and wilderness.** (9)

Striking contrasts in the colour and texture on the unenclosed fell sides - the extent of matt grass, combined with heavy grazing, contributes to the smooth, sleek character and light colour of the fells which is juxtaposed with areas of bracken and tussocky wet flushes. (2)

Outstanding panoramic, long distance and uninterrupted views.

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



High, rounded summits dissected by deeply incised narrow gills

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

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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 Howgill 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 Howgill Fells LCA

Tebay
A685
Cote Gill
Ravenstonedale
Drumlin landscape on floor of Upper Lune Valley
Lune Gorge
Langdale Beck
Bowderdale Beck
Weasdale Beck
Langdale, Bowderdale and Carlin Gill SSSI - Nationally important fluvial geomorphological features and processes
Blease Fell
Langdale Fell
Kemsgriff
Carlingill Beck
The Spout
Black Force
Backside Beck and Spen Gill SSSI - valuable exposures of Ordovician and Silurian rocks
A683
Wild Boar Fell
Mallerstang
Cautley Spout
Cautley Crag
Cautley Holme Beck
The Calf
River Lune
Chapel Beck
Brant Fell
Swarth Fell
Winder
Lune Valley
Rawthey Valley
Sedbergh
River Rawthey
Drumlin landscape on floor of the Rawthey Valley
Baugh Fell
0 1 2 4 km

Special Qualities of the YDNP

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

Natural beauty

- **Dales with distinctive stepped profiles**
  [Displaying outcrops of rocks from the Yoredale series]
- **Fells that rise to over 700m**
  [eg the Millstone Grit capped 'Three Peaks']
- **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: Howgill Fells

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Tebay
A685
M6
Ravenstonedale
Low Borrowbridge Roman Fort
Fairmile Road (Roman Road)
Langdale Beck
Bowderdale Beck
Weasdale Beck
Leathgill Bridge Pits (post-medieval quarry)
Carlingill Beck
Medieval field systems on some lower fell slopes
A683
Murthwaite - site of medieval deer park
Mallerstang
Cautley Holme Beck
River Lune
Chapel Beck
Lune Valley
Rawthey Valley
Sedbergh
River Rawthey
0
1
2
4 km

Special Qualities of the YDNP

- YDNP Boundary
- Howgill Fells LCA boundary
- Extent of area that forms the backdrop to views from the Howgill 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]
- **Historic settlements with distinctive traditional architecture**
  [Conservation Areas]

* YDNPA Historic Environment Record

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