

5.6. Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons

1. Location

This extensive case study surrounds the open moorland across the eastern two thirds of the National Park. It occupies a zone between the *High Coastal Heaths and High Wooded Combes and Cleaves* to the north of the open moorland and surrounds the areas of open moorland in the south of the National Park. Towards the east the *Farmed Hills with Commons* are extensively incised by the river systems, which flow from the uplands southwards towards Dulverton.

2. Why was the Case Study selected?

The *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons* are, as the name suggests, largely agricultural, with numerous fields bounded by hedges and extensively grazed. There is very little development apart from small villages and hamlets, such as Parracombe, Simonsbath and, on the coast, Martinhoe and Trentishoe. Although the case study area, because of its rural and agricultural nature and relative lack of development, would be likely to be of less interest to artists in terms of suitable subject matter, for the sake of completeness this case study site has been included.

3. Summary of Geology, Geomorphology, Processes and Environment

On account of its extent, the case study encompasses a broad range of geological Periods extending through the Devonian and into the Triassic, therefore, including sandstone and mudstone formations. Ranging in height between 250 and 450 m above sea level, the landscape is largely enclosed and is predominantly occupied by grazing, with limited cultivation on some more low-lying land.

The case study area has a rich cultural heritage in terms of archaeological remains, dating back to the Bronze Age and Iron Age; this includes a number of Scheduled Monuments including earthwork fortifications.

4. How can the art imagery inform us of changes that have affected the case study over time?

The nature of the landscape comprising largely agricultural land with very little development has meant that this case study area was rarely visited by artists who concentrated more on the coastal zones, the dramatic river valleys and the picturesque towns and villages to the north. In fact, the cultural associations within this case study are few and far between (Fiona Fyfe Associates, 2018¹). A picturesque view of a scene near Simonsbath was included in the Reverend George Tugwell's *The North Devon Scenery* (Tugwell, 1856²). On the coast the Rev. Swete painted a picturesque view of the coastline near Martinhoe but this lacks identifiable geographical features. A watercolour by George Cumberland shows Cow Castle at Simonsbath, one of a number of ancient fortifications to be found on Exmoor.

5. What are the key issues that can be learnt from this case study?

Although extensive, this case study shows that it is not possible to find images for all landscapes across Exmoor National Park. In this case, the reason is the generally widespread agricultural use of the land and limited development, such as character towns and villages, that prove popular subject matter for visiting and resident artists. This contrasts with the generally rich resource of artistic images to be found within most of the other case studies described in this report.

6. References

1. Fiona Fyfe Associates. 2018. *Exeter National Park Landscape Character Assessment*. 256 pps.
2. Tugwell, Rev. G. *The North Devon Scenery Book*. Simpkin & Marshall. London.



Figure 5.6.1: *Cow Hill, Simonsbath* showing the ancient fortification on Exmoor by George Cumberland (1754-1848). An early member of the Bristol School of Artists he, like many antiquarians of the period, recorded archaeological sites such as this in fine detail. These can sometimes provide the only records of archaeology that may have been lost subsequently as a result of agriculture, natural processes or development.

Image courtesy: Bristol Museum & Art Gallery.

5.7. Incised Wooded River Valleys

1. Location

The case study is located primarily in the southern area of the National Park and comprises the valleys of the main watercourses, which are flowing in a generally southerly direction off the high ground to the north. A number of tributaries join the main watercourses, in particular the Barle, Exe, Haddeo, Avill, the Bray and the Mole. These flow through steep, heavily-wooded valleys, such as the course of the Barle as it finds its way south towards Dulverton close to the southern edge of the National Park.

2. Why was the Case Study selected?

The Case Study illustrates the upper reaches of southerly flowing river systems, which emerge as springs from the high ground in the centre of the National Park, mainly flowing in a southerly direction to reach a confluence near Dulverton. Two smaller catchments of the Bray and the Mole flow south-westwards from their sources within the *Enclosed Farm Hills with Commons*.

Art imagery can follow the course of the streams and rivers, passing through open fields and small settlements, before descending rapidly on their journey southwards. These watercourses provide interesting subject matter for artists in search of wild and romantic river scenery.

3. Summary of Geology, Geomorphology, Processes and Environment

The river systems flow largely through rocks of the Devonian Period, including mainly sandstones but also mudstones of the Pickwell Down Sandstone Formation and the Mort Mudstone Formation. The rivers flow through mixed landscapes of woodland and agricultural land, before descending through the wooded gorges, such as the course of the Barle.

4. How can the art imagery inform us of changes that have affected the case study over time?

The case study includes a number of historic small villages, including Simonsbath, Exford, Withypool, and Exton; the largest settlement within this case study site being the historic town of Dulverton in the south. The various sections of the rivers, together with bridges and waterside buildings, were painted from the late eighteenth century onwards, whilst other artists engraved views to appear in topographical publications.

Whilst not as extensively illustrated as the short and fast-flowing rivers that run north into the Bristol Channel, there are sufficient images of the rivers within this case study to make informed comment on changes that may have occurred.

5. What are the key issues that can be learnt from this case study?

The remote landscapes of the sources and upper reaches of the south flowing rivers have not been affected by significant changes that can be highlighted through the artworks. The fact that there has been little or no change over time is, of course, valuable in informing management of the National Park.

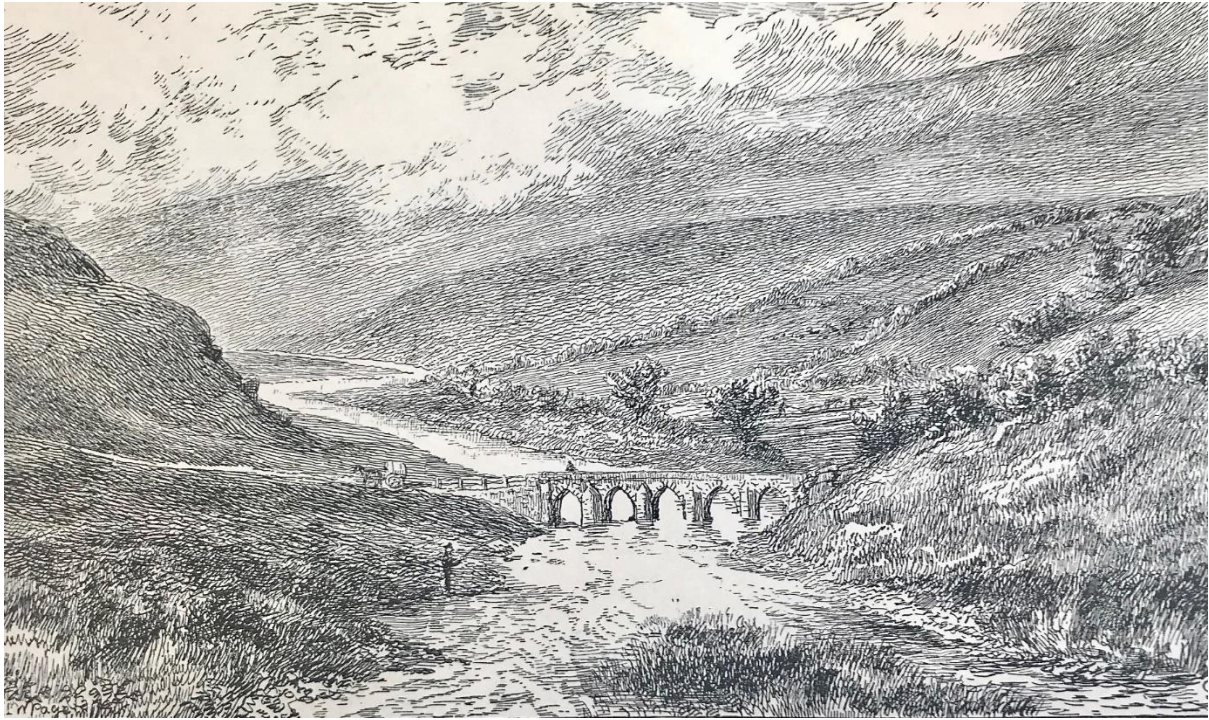


Figure 5.7.1: The sources and upper reaches of the southward flowing rivers, including the Barle and the Exe pass through the enclosed farmlands, commons and high moors, before descending steeply towards Dulverton in particular. Exmoor has many fine bridges such as here at Landacre near Withypool. A Scheduled Monument, it crosses the River Barle at this point. The engraving above by Alfred Dawson, produced in 1890 bears comparison with the present-day image (**Figure 5.7.2**) below, although tree growth has extended slightly over time.

Image courtesy: Lewis Clarke/Geograph.





Figure 5.7.3 (Top) shows the valley of the River Barle flowing south of Withypool, a favoured location for artists including Sir A. Munnings. Nearby Tarr Steps (**Figures 5.7.4 & 5.7.5 Centre**) is a fine example of a 'Clapper Bridge' built of large slabs of local stone in the Medieval Period or earlier. The watercolour view was painted in c.1910 and there appears to be little change here, although the steps have been subsequently repaired.

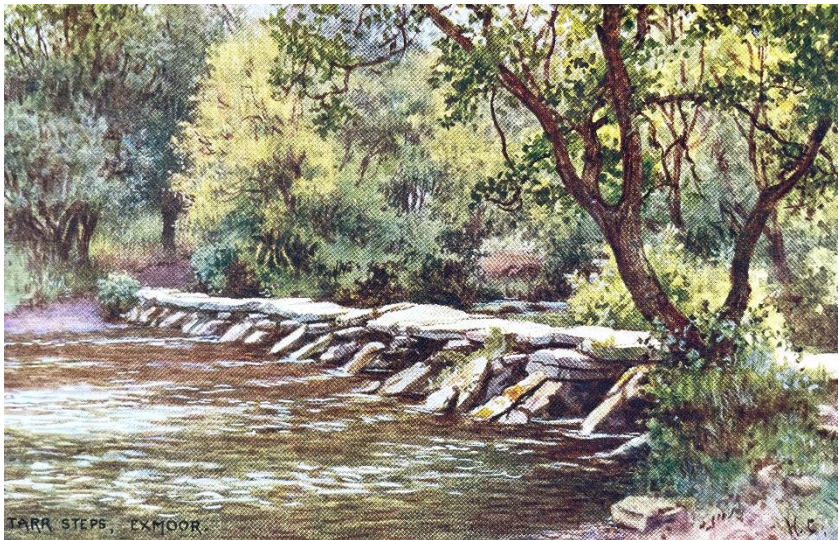


Figure 5.7.6 (Below) shows a scene of rural life in the village of Winsford on the River Exe to the east of Withypool, with huntsmen passing some cottages of local stone. The scene was painted in watercolour by John White in 1907. Courtesy: The Exmoor Society.





Figures 5.7.7 (Above) & 5.7.8 (Below) are detailed watercolour drawings on the River Barle by prolific local artist and author, Hope Bourne (1920-2010). Her detailed views of Exmoor's landscapes and river scenery provide a valuable record of the physical and natural environments through the seasons in this location. A large archive of her work is in the collection of The Exmoor Society.





Figures 5.7.9 & 5.7.10 above show the River Barle at Dulverton after its steep descent from the high moors to the north.



The Barle is bridged at Dulverton (**Figure 5.7.11 Above**) and was depicted by many artists, including Rev. John Swete, who painted this view in c.1795. The bridge has been altered and strengthened over the centuries and these changes are illustrated through the range of artworks.

Image Courtesy: Devon Archives & Local Studies (DHC 564M/F/10)

Figure 5.7.12 (Left) shows the bridge today.



Figure 5.7.13 (Above) shows a view overlooking Dulverton by the important early watercolourist, John White Abbott (1763-1851), from Exeter. His artistic style follows that of his teacher, Francis Towne, who also painted some Devon subjects.

Image Courtesy: Victoria & Albert Museum/Bridgeman Images.

Figure 5.7.14 (Below) shows a view from the churchyard at Dulverton also by John White Abbott and was painted in 1800. Most of the churches and other historic buildings across Exmoor National Park have been recorded in detail by artists over the last two hundred years.

Image Courtesy: Christie's/Bridgeman Images.





Figure 5.7.15 (Above) shows *A Corner of Dulverton* by the exceptionally fine watercolour artist, Stanley Roy Badwin (1906-1989). The watercolour shows the ability of some artists to produce works of exceptional topographical accuracy and detail using this medium.

Image Courtesy: Chris Beetles Gallery, London.

5.8. Plantations (with Heathland) Hills

1. Location

To the west of the town of Dunster and immediately to the north and south of the River Avill there are extensive plantations close to the village of Wootton Courtenay to the north, and to the east of the hamlet of Timberscome to the south. The timber plantations occupying the slopes rising up from the river on both sides form dark forests interspersed with open areas and with prospects across the low-lying countryside to the east towards Blue Anchor Bay.

2. Why was the Case Study selected?

The site was included in the Exmoor National Park Landscape Character Assessment on account of its marked contrast with adjacent Land-use Character Types (LCTs). For the sake of completeness, all of the LCTs from the Landscape Assessment have been included for consideration as part of this study, although it is recognized that heavily wooded areas such as this are unlikely to be chosen by artists as suitable subject matter.

3. Summary of Geology, Geomorphology, Processes and Environment

The case study is largely located over rocks of the Hangman Sandstone Formation of the Devonian Period. Weathering of the sandstones gave rise to the development of a heathland habitat, over which the planting later took place. The study site is almost entirely undeveloped, with the exception of Wootton Courtenay village and isolated agricultural buildings. The environmental interest of the area is reflected in the designation of the *Dunster Park and Heathland Site of Special Scientific Interest*.

4. How can the art imagery inform us of changes that have affected the case study over time?

As mentioned, no artistic images of significance have been found for this limited case study, which comprises largely coniferous forest. However, some views of the landscape surrounding Dunster and its striking castle have been illustrated in Case Study 5 *Farmed and Settled Vale* (described already).

5. What are the key issues that can be learnt from this case study?

The study demonstrates that not all landscape types provide artworks for interpretation and, on account of the nature of this particular landscape character type, no further images are provided.



Figure 5.8.1: Because of the nature of the *Plantation (with Heathland) Hills* Landscape Character Type there are very few historical images showing the plantations that cover the hillsides around Dunster. Any views of the area tend to focus on Dunster Castle itself and its picturesque parkland setting, as shown in this mid-nineteenth century lithograph. Further views in the vicinity can be seen in Case Study 5.

5.9. Wooded and Farmed Hills with Combes

1. Location

The case study is at the eastern end of the National Park and offer views over the adjacent Brendon Hills, the Bristol Channel to the north, and the Quantock Hills.

2. Why was the Case Study selected?

The study comprises a significant area within the National Park and is tranquil landscape, with numerous small villages and the presence of rivers and streams, providing a varied environment that contrasts strongly with the *Plantations* to the north-west and the *Enclosed Farmed Hills and Commons* to the south.

3. Summary of Geology, Geomorphology, Processes and Environment

The geology comprises mudstones, sandstones and slates, with occasional limestone outcrops of the Devonian Period. Fast-flowing watercourses have cut deep valleys through deciduous and coniferous woodlands, as well as arable and pasture land. Much of the land is drained by the Washford River, which runs north-eastwards to emerge on the coast at Watchet.

4. How can the art imagery inform us of changes that have affected the case study over time?

This landscape was less painted on account of its relatively remote and undeveloped character. Two important properties, Nettlecombe Court (a Grade I Listed Building and Grade II Listed Parkland) and Combe Sydenham (with historical connections to Sir Francis Drake), are important heritage sites.

5. What are the key issues that can be learnt from this case study?

As with LCT 8, the number of artworks available to review is extremely limited. As a result, this case study site does not provide a full opportunity to review landscape change, compared with most of the other Case Study sites within Exmoor National Park.



Figure 5.9.1: Because of the extensive woodland cover and agricultural use of land in this Case Study area artists tended to focus more on the dramatic coastal scenery or the majestic high moors. However, historical properties, such as those of the Nettlecombe and Combe Sydenham Estates, were depicted. Nettlecombe Court (Above), engraved by J. Collinson, is a Grade I Listed Building and lies within the National Park.

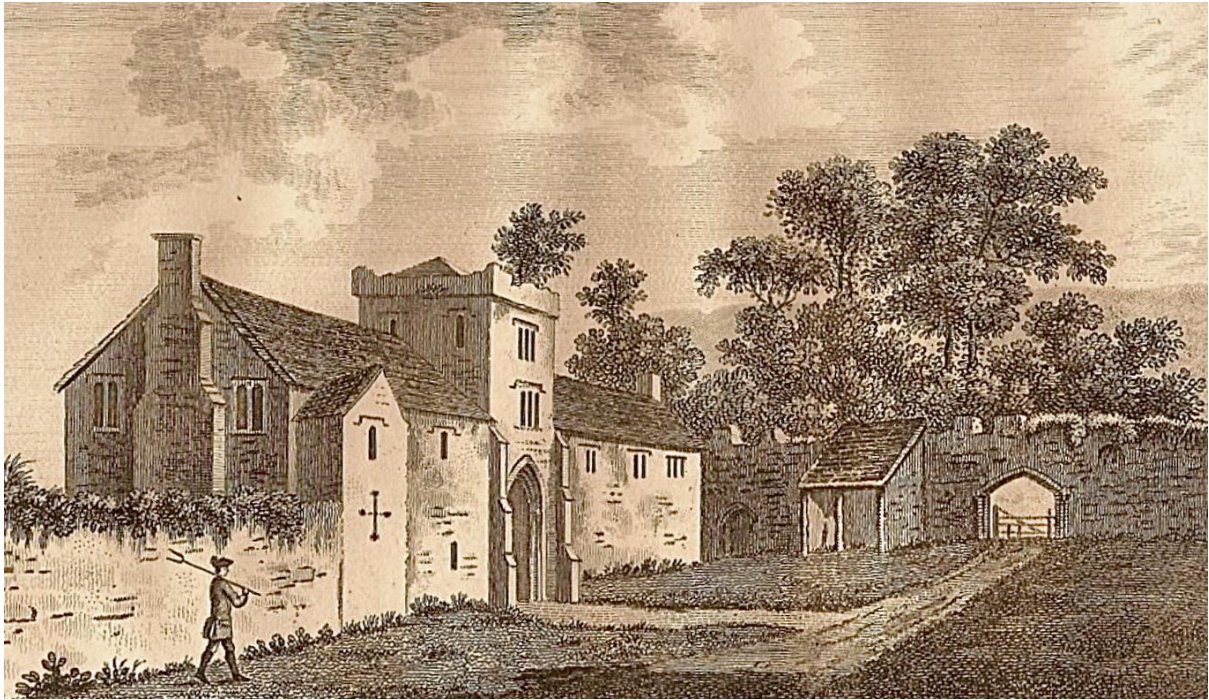


Figure 5.9.2: Combe Sydenham, a fifteenth century manor house at Stogumber was depicted by C. Sparrow in 1783.

Figure 5.9.3 (Below) shows *St Petrock Church* at Timberscombe, which was painted in watercolour in c.1837 by James Bulwer, who painted a fine album of views of Exmoor and Somerset in the 1830s.

Image Courtesy: Yale Center for British Art.

