

1 ESCARPMENT OUTLIER

Character Areas

- 1A Cam Long Down Peaked Down and Downham Hills
- 1B Langley Hill
- 1C Oxenton and Dixton Hills
- 1D Dumbleton and Alderton Hills
- 1E Bredon Hill
- 1F Meon and Ebrington Hills
- 1G Brailes Hill and Castle Hill



Key Characteristics

- Distinctive hills detached from the main Cotswolds escarpment and rising above the neighbouring vale;
- varied and sometimes steeply sloping topography;
- dramatic panoramic views from upper slopes possible over the Severn Vale to the Welsh borders and eastwards to the Cotswolds Escarpment;
- areas of rough grassland and scrub occur on some sections of the upper slopes and areas of steep landform;
- woodlands and belts of trees often occupy steeper slopes of the outliers and border the gullies of brooks draining radially into the vale;

- areas of woodland and hedgerows form interlocking patterns;
- lower, gentler slopes cloaked in improved pastures and arable farmland, divided up by a network of hedgerows and some dry stone walls;
- sparsely settled;
- hilltops often the site of prehistoric hillforts or other defensive enclosures; and
- hills criss crossed by footpaths often surrounded by dense vegetation link the hill tops to the vale villages.

Landscape Character

The outliers represent remnants of the ancient escarpment that have survived as distinct and discrete hills rising from the lowland vale to the west of the main scarp slope. The majority of the Cotswolds outliers are located within the AONB, Robinswood Hill and Churchdown Hill being notable exceptions, and are located at varying distances from the scarp between Mickleton in the north and Cam in the south. A further outlier at Brailes Hill is located to the north of Stourton in the north-east part of the AONB. They vary in size with the largest being Bredon Hill, which is extensive enough to have influenced the course of roads and rivers. Although the smallest, Peaked Down is a dramatic landscape feature and local landmark.

The intrinsic character of the outliers is derived from their pronounced relief, flowing woodland cover and field boundaries, which combine to give a strong sense of unity and visual integration. The character of each individual outlier varies dramatically, however, and depends upon the extent of woodland cover, the nature of landform and the type of agriculture employed on their slopes. Interestingly,

patterns may vary across different sides of the same hill and result in giving each face a distinct and separate character and sense of place.

Despite their differences all represent very visible landscapes that frame views, and form punctuation marks in the landscape. The larger outliers form a backdrop to the vale landscapes beneath them and all offer an important orientation point and local landmark. These landscapes also offer dramatic long distance views from their upper slopes. From the highest outliers, views to the Welsh mountains are possible. Even from lower elevations, dramatic views across the vale are possible.

The outliers share many geological, physiographic and land cover elements with the neighbouring escarpment, having once been a part of it themselves. As a result, patterns of land use and historic influences are broadly similar. Hedgerows follow landform and emphasise the sloping landform and help contribute to the sense that the hills are well wooded. In reality few large woodlands survive, and the majority of broadleaved woods are small and occupy slopes that are too steep to cultivate, and areas bordering streams. Stone walls, whilst not widespread, are present on the Ebrington and Bredon Hill outliers and where present contribute to landscape character and evoke images reminiscent of the high wold landscape to the east where stone walls are more prevalent.

Agriculture on the outliers contributes significantly to their character. Mature hawthorn hedges define productive pasture and arable land on lower gentler slopes. These give way to more open areas and larger fields of rough grassland on upper slopes. In many areas scrub encroachment is evident.

Physical Influences

The Cotswolds outliers represent areas of rock separated by erosion from the main mass of the Cotswolds. At one time, the escarpment lay very close to the line of the Severn, but over the course of millions of years the escarpment has been eroded eastwards through the exploitation of lines of weakness or faulting. Erosion has therefore been uneven leaving the outliers as upstanding remnants of the former scarp. Their position marks the former alignment of the escarpment, the most westerly line of which is marked by Robins Wood Hill and Churchdown Hill which lie to the west of the boundary of the AONB.

Much of the eroded debris from the escarpment has long since disappeared having been carried to the sea by rivers. As a result, a number of the outliers are of particular geological interest as they afford greater clarity for the

study of divisions in the Lower Jurassic system, unlike the same sequence occurring on the adjacent escarpment slopes where divisions are often obscured by slippage of the Lias Group clays and Oolitic debris.

The processes that formed the outliers still continue and new outliers are progressively becoming detached from the escarpment. The most notable example is Langley Hill. Further eastern retreat of the escarpment, together with headward erosion of Dip-Slope streams will eventually fully detach the Hill.

The outliers generally mirror the Jurassic geology of the stretch of escarpment they are located adjacent to. Local differences do occur, however, largely due to the dip of the strata and differing rates of erosion. As a result of their similar geology, land cover and land use patterns on the scarp slopes and outliers are broadly similar. For example, where areas of slip occur at the base of both landscape types, hummocky ground is widespread. In both landscape types such areas are evident as undulating areas of either permanent pasture or occasional arable fields. Areas of slip are also marked by gorse, which rapidly colonises disturbed ground as well as areas of sandy and poor soil.

Woodland cover is notably less extensive than on the scarp. Where it does occur, however, broadleaved woods predominate, often marking areas of steeper landform or defining the line of streams that drain radially from the summits of the outliers into the surrounding vale. These woodlands often form interlocking patterns with surrounding hedged fields, and combine with hedgerow and field trees to give the impression that the outliers are well wooded, especially when viewed from the surrounding vale. Few of the woodlands are ancient which possibly indicates that the outliers were extensively cleared for agriculture. This is substantiated by field patterns and historic documents that indicate that throughout the medieval period the majority of the outliers were indeed open areas of common land used for sheep grazing by the villagers living in settlements on the lower slopes.

Human Influences

The symbolic and strategic importance of the outliers cannot be underestimated. Wide views over the surrounding vale and the natural defences formed by steep slopes all around ensured that a number of these hills were exploited as the site of hillforts during the Iron Age period. Indeed fine views over the Severn Vale probably mean that they were used as vantage points as far back as the Mesolithic when hunters tracked the movement of big game herds. Interestingly, long barrows and round barrows, the burial monuments of the Neolithic

and Bronze Age so typical of the scarp slope, are absent. This possibly indicates that the outliers were beyond territories stretching westwards from the scarp across the High Wold and Dip-slope.

Owing to their steep slopes and shallow soils limiting agriculture, the upper portion of many of the outliers were open common land during the Medieval period, and used for sheep grazing by villagers living on the lower slopes and the bishops and abbeys which owned much of the north Cotswolds during the Medieval period. Interestingly it is the medieval abbeys that pioneered sheep farming on a large scale, Gloucester Abbey at one stage owning a flock of 10,000. The names of individual hills often mirror the name of the village that the common land was farmed by. Fine examples are Alderton Hill and Dumbleton Hill, with the villages linked to them located on the gentler lower slopes in the vale to the north and south of the outlier. Many of the tracks that traverse the outliers are ancient and may mark the line of routes used by villagers to drive their sheep to these commons. As was typical the lower gentler slopes formed part of the open fields that surrounded villages and which extended into the vale. These were large hedged fields divided up into furlongs, the ridges and furrows of which are evident in many locations today. Field patterns, on the lower slopes of numerous outliers such as those on the north-eastern slopes of Bredon Hill, also indicate that assarting was taking place.

Despite objections, many of the outliers were enclosed during the 19th century and the open hill pastures divided into a neat patchwork of fields by hawthorn hedges and walls, profoundly altering their appearance. There is no common land remaining on the outliers although remnants of calcareous grassland and ancient woodland on steeper slopes are remnants of the pre-enclosure landscape. The upper slopes of some hills retain their open character and represent areas of common pastures or waste that escaped enclosure.

The dramatic relief and views afforded from the outliers has been exploited by numerous late medieval landowners who established great houses and landscaped gardens on their lower slopes. Whilst occupying only a small section of individual hills, they exert a strong influence over the local landscape, particularly in the extensive woodlands and exotic tree species that are associated with them, as at Overbury Park. Other settlement on the Outliers consists mainly of dispersed linear hamlets and on the hillsides and hill terraces with a number of farmsteads and individual buildings mainly on the hillsides, terraces and crests, although they can also be found scattered in the vale

below. Compact linear villages and hamlets and dispersed villages, whilst limited on the Outliers, do occasionally occur at the foothills of this character type.

Roads fringe the lower slopes of many of the larger outliers. Where present they encircle the hill and link villages on their lower slopes. These narrow, winding lanes generally follow the contours of the hill and in many instances mark the outer limits of the outlier. Despite the roads encircling them, most hills are remote, cars being unable to access beyond the lower slopes. Tracks are present but these tend to link the encircling roads to mid-slope farms that date to the enclosures. Public rights of way criss cross the hills and are often the only means of accessing vantage points on or close to their summits.

Some summits, notably Ebrington Hill, are accessible by car, with roads providing easy access to the large communication masts that mark the hilltop. The height of the outliers, combined with their proximity to the M5 and large urban populations has made them the ideal location for such aerials and indeed many have one on their summit.

Character Areas

1A

Cam Long Down, Peaked Down and Downham Hills

These three hills are the southernmost of the Cotswolds outliers in the AONB and are only partially separated from the stretch of escarpment to the east of Cam by narrow winding brooks.



The profiles of these hills are important and ensure that they are instantly recognisable features of the local landscape, and indeed Cam Long Down is a local landmark. Cam Long Down and Downham Hill retain their capping of hard Inferior Oolite limestone, which has helped them retain their level surface. However, on the Peaked



Down, this layer has been eroded away exposing the Lias Group Sandstone to the elements. The sandstone is soft and easily weathered, resulting in the hill's distinctive conical shape. On the Cam Long Down and Downham Hill, the presence of these sands has resulted in steep even slopes below their surface capping.

The Oolitic limestone cap of Cam Long Down and Downham Hill supports a fine example of unimproved grassland. On Cam Long Down this sits above an area of scrub woodland that clings to its steep southern slopes. By contrast, the particular geology of Peaked Down has meant that amongst areas of bracken, patches of more acidic grassland thrive. Here, plants such as Sheep's Sorrel and Heath Bedstraw may be found. Bracken is also conspicuous on the mid slopes of Downham Hill and Cam Long Down, where the Lias Group sandstone outcrops below the Oolitic cap. Traditionally, these hills were grazed by sheep, and the bracken burnt. In more recent times, however, cattle grazing and bracken cutting maintain the open grassy hillsides and areas of heath.



The various habitats on these hills are important to a range of faunal species including Buzzards, Chiffchaffs, Fieldfare and Brambling. Migratory birds such as the rare Ring Ouzel are also known to stop off here. Such species, and the landscape itself, attract many visitors and a small car park has been constructed at the base of the Peaked Down to serve the nature reserve located on its slopes.

Beyond the hedges on the lower slopes of these hills, the lynchets amidst bracken and isolated scrub trees on the slopes of Cam Long Down are the most potent remnant of human interaction with the landscape. There can be little doubt, however, that these distinctive hills would have retained some importance to the Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age communities whose monuments line the escarpment from Uley Bury fort to Nymphsfield. Until Victorian times limestone was extracted from the Long Down. This area has also been used as a rabbit warren, and during the Second World War a firing range was established and used by the Volunteer Rifle Brigade; however, few traces of these uses remain.

1B

Langley Hill



Langley Hill is located to the west of Winchcombe and effectively defines the limits of the town. Its position is very close to the stretch of escarpment below Nottingham Hill and is an excellent place to observe how the outliers have been formed. Langley Hill is gradually becoming detached from the main scarp and Cotswolds 'massif', separated from Nottingham Hill only by the Prestcott Saddle. Underlain by a band of the more resistant Marlstone Rock, the Saddle forms the local watershed between the headwaters of the Tirl Brook flowing north-westwards eventually into the Severn, and the initially south-east flowing headwaters of the Langley Brook,



a tributary of the River Isbourne. Over the next few thousand years, as the escarpment retreats eastwards, Langley Hill will become a true outlier, left surrounded by vale landscapes on all sides.

The hill rises in gentle, even slopes to its summit at 274 m AOD and is capped by the Cleeve Cloud Member of the Birdlip Limestone Formation under which sits thin bands of the Leckhampton and Crickley Members of the same Formation. These strata form a steeper landform and are cloaked in broadleaved woodland and limited areas of calcareous grassland. The hill's lower slopes are formed from mudstone and siltstone and the gentle slopes are characterised by arable farming and improved pastures.

The landscape is divided up into moderately sized irregular fields by hawthorn hedges and it is likely that, prior to enclosure, the hill was largely open and communally grazed by the local villagers although remnants of ridge and furrow on lower slopes mark the limits of the open common fields. Hedges are generally overgrown and gappy and give the landscape a neglected appearance. This is emphasised by areas of rough grassland and scrub encroachment in a number of fields on the upper slopes.

Small compact farms occupy sheltered positions on the mid slopes of the hill and are reached by narrow tracks. The hill is encircled by roads. However, public access to the summit is only possible by traversing footpaths such as the Wychavon Way.

1C

Oxenton and Dixon Hills

Hard outcrops of Birdlip Limestone Formation form the summits of Oxenton Hill and Crane Hill, which rise to 223 m AOD and 120 m AOD respectively. These are underlain by a wide Lias Group Marlstone Rock terrace, below which extend gentler slopes formed from older

mudstones of the Lias Group. By contrast on Dixon Hill (164 m AOD), the Marlstone Rock forms the summit on which sits the kidney shaped Iron Age hillfort.

The north and south faces of Oxenton Hill are of very different character. The north face is cloaked in woodland, with lower slopes characterised by large areas of open semi-improved pasture and orchards. The woodlands, a large proportion of which are ancient, are valued for their beetle populations and mark the limits of the Dyrham Formation mudstone. These woodlands also obscures views to the summit of the hill on which sits The Knolls, an Iron Age enclosure, made more remarkable by an area of calcareous grassland and woodland that form an impressive silhouette against the skyline when viewed from the vale.

The sheltered and sunnier aspect of the southern slopes makes them more suitable for farming and more intensive agriculture is evident here, with hedged fields extending up the slopes to the summit where significant slumping create an interesting landscape feature.

Dixon Hill is a well-known local landmark, particularly with historians interested in how the landscape appeared in the 18th century. A painting titled 'Dixton Manor House' by an unknown artist and dated to 1715, shows the hill as it would have appeared at the time with the house and formal gardens in the foreground and a patchwork of small hedged field on the lower slopes of the hill leading to woodlands and open grassland on the summit. Many features of the scene are still identifiable. A second painting by the same artist, entitled 'Countryside Around Dixon Manor' illustrates the landscape surrounding the hill.



1D

Dumbleton and Alderton Hills

Dumbleton and Alderton Hills form a prominent outlier punctuating the vale between the main Cotswold escarpment and Bredon Hill. The hills, rising to 203 m AOD and 168 m AOD respectively, are capped by Whitby Mudstone Formation rocks and surrounded by a broad Marlstone Rock terrace, which is cloaked in extensive areas of broadleaved woodland.

Woodland essentially defines the character of these hills and ensures that they are instantly recognisable from the surrounding vale. It is likely that most are relatively recent in origin, especially the large-scale coniferous woodlands on the south side of Alderton Hill. An exception is the ancient woodland capping Alderton Hill. Despite being extensive, woodland is not continuous across the entire hill and forms a broken pattern, with small blocks following and emphasising landform. Between areas of woodland lies a patchwork of hedged fields. These are predominantly managed as improved pastures although some arable fields on the gentle slopes of the summit are visible.

Alderton Hill Quarry, located on Alderton Hill to the immediate south west of Dumbleton Wood, is a SSSI and noted for its well-preserved fossil insects and fish. The site is an important research site for the study of early insect faunas.

1E

Bredon Hill

Bredon Hill is the largest of the Cotswold Outliers, extending to some 5 km (3 miles) long and 2.5 km (1.5 miles) wide. It rises to 305 m AOD in the north-west where steep slopes, some of 20 degrees, occur. Bredon Hill dominates the skyline and rises from the surrounding vale as a massive whaleback hill that forms a backdrop to the vale landscapes between Pershore and Eckington. Indeed Bredon Hill is so large as to have deflected north south traffic and the course of the Avon. During the last Ice Age it is also said that the hill formed a barrier to ice flows coming down from Wales and Lincolnshire¹⁹.



The cap of the hill is formed from Birdlip Limestone Formation, beneath which sits mudstones and a Marlstone Rock terrace. Beneath these strata, the Lias clay gives the landscape a hummocky nature, particularly where it has been affected by rotational slips on its northern slopes. The hill itself is like the Cotswolds in miniature, with a north west facing escarpment leading to a gentle Dip-Slope trending southwards to Overbury and Ashton under Hill.

Beneath the limestone summit of Bredon, and occupying the steep northern slopes above the junction with the mudstone, is a narrow surviving band of ancient, unimproved calcareous grassland, which is interspersed with areas of calcareous scrub. This sits between areas of mixed woodland, which again clings to these steep slopes. Species rich grassland such as this would have at one time been much more extensive; however, agricultural improvement since enclosure has diminished this resource. Ancient broadleaved woodlands occupy lower slopes generally just above the Lias clay on areas of mudstone and Marlstone Rock.

¹⁹. William Dreghorn (1967) *Geology Explained in the Severn Vale and the Cotswolds*

Areas of calcareous grassland, ancient woodland and isolated veteran trees are together designated as part of the Bredon Hill NNR/SSSI/cSAC. This major lowland wood pasture site in Worcestershire supports an outstanding assemblage of saproxylic invertebrates. The interest extends far beyond the SSSI boundary where surviving parkland, veteran trees in regenerating woodland, remnants of undisturbed woodland and hedgerow and field trees offer important habitats. The 13th century deer park and associated medieval castle above Elmley Castle offer particularly important parkland habitats.

The southern face of Bredon Hill is generally less steep and therefore has been less of a constraint to agriculture. Here, hawthorn hedges and dry stone walls divide the landscape up into a patchwork of large to moderately sized fields. Extensive landscaped parkland also exists at Overbury Park.

The name Bredon refers to an area of Anglo Saxon Down, the suffix 'Dun' being added to an earlier British word for Hill that must already have been used to describe it. The implication of this is that the hill was largely open common grazing land from early times and only in the past few centuries has it been enclosed to create the modern patchwork pattern of fields. Indeed the early name for the hill may date back to the Iron Age, during which time three hillforts were located on Bredon Hill at Comberton, Elmley and the summit itself.

Local landmarks include Bredon Tower, or Parsons' Folly, which was built by Mr Parsons of Kemerton in the late 18th century. The landmark is made more visible by the introduction of modern communication masts. Other well-known landmarks are the King and Queen and the Banbury Stones. These are regarded as fine examples of gulls, a feature of Oolitic geology.

Bredon Hill is ringed by settlements marking the springline just below the band of the Marlstone Rock Formation. These are linked by narrow winding lanes that mark the outer limits of the hill. A number of narrow lanes also link these settlements to farms slightly higher up its slopes. The upper slopes of Bredon are only accessible on foot. A holloway runs up the hill from Woolas Hall, an early 17th century mansion, past St Catherine's Well to the Banbury Stone and probably represents one of many ancient trackways onto the summit from the vale.

1F

Meon and Ebrington Hills

Meon and Ebrington Hills are the northernmost of the Cotswolds outliers and mark the point where the main Cotswold escarpment terminates before entering the Vale of Evesham. These impressive hills, along with Brailes Hill and Castle Hill to the east, act as a gateway marking the entrance to the Vale of Moreton.

Meon Hill, capped with Marlstone Rock, and with lower slopes formed from Dyrham Formation mudstone and siltstone, is the smaller of the hills, rising to just 194 m AOD. Its summit is capped by an impressive Iron Age hillfort defended by double rampart and ditch except on its north-west side where steep slopes require only single defences. The hill was settled thousands of years prior to this and traces remain on the south of the hill of Neolithic earthworks. On visiting the hill it not difficult to appreciate its strategic importance, the summit affording splendid views across the Vale of Evesham as far as the Malvern Hills.



The northern scarp face of the hill and the ramparts of the fort are obscured by scrub and woodland. However, on the Marlstone Rock cap, including the inner area of the hillfort, and on the hill's gentler south facing slopes, arable farming predominates. Here, large sweeping fields are defined by well-maintained hawthorn hedges.

Ebrington Hill is to the south of Meon Hill and represents a massive outlier. It rises to 259 m AOD and 242 m AOD as two distinct hilltops, both of which are capped by large telecommunication masts. Indeed, Ebrington Hill is the highest point in the whole of Warwickshire and is visible from many points in the lowland vale.

The gentle, even slopes of the hill are formed from siltstone and mudstone although a wide Marlstone Rock Formation terrace is also evident. Inferior Oolite caps the



hill and is surrounded by a thin outcrop of Bridport Sand Formation. Settlements such as Ilmington and Ebrington sit at the base of the hill where the siltstones and mudstones of the Lias Group gives way to the clay of the Blue Lias Formation, which extends into the vale.

The gentle slopes are well suited to farming and large fields of brassicas are conspicuous on the hill's southern face. Elsewhere, permanent pasture predominates although some arable is also evident. On steeper slopes, rough grazing prevails; however, no significant species rich grasslands have been identified, possibly due to improvement in the past. These areas are generally open and dotted with scrub and isolated field trees with remnants of ridge and furrow.

Woodland is not extensive although ancient broadleaved woodland is conspicuous on the hill's steep northern slopes below the Marlstone Rock and above Kiftsgate Court and on Windmill Hill. Kiftsgate and Hidcote are well known features of the landscape, both representing 20th century plant and shrub gardens.

1G

Brailes Hill and Castle Hill



Brailes Hill, and the smaller 'knoll' of Castle Hill, forms a low, gentle but distinctive outlier in the far north east of the AONB. Here, a hard cap of Chipping Norton Limestone and Sandstone survives at the summit, which rises to 232 m AOD. The conspicuous rectangular copse located on the summit of the hill is a distinctive local landmark. The lower slopes are formed from mudstone, and shelve gently into the surrounding vale. These slopes are cloaked in a mosaic of arable fields and semi-improved pastures. Fields are generally large scale although the network is breaking down and gappy due to poor hedgerow management. Isolated areas of scrub encroachment also occur on sections of steeper slopes giving the landscape a locally neglected or unmanaged appearance. Broadleaved woodlands are generally located on the hill's northern and western slopes bordering the 150 m contour.



The village of Upper Brailes borders the lower slopes of Brailes Hill to the north and mark the breach between it and the smaller Castle Hill. This is a distinctive landscape feature and may be observed for some distance, despite only rising to 160 m AOD. Castle Hill is a fine example of a medieval Motte and Bailey castle and is cloaked in pasture. Scrub encroachment is extensive on the steep slopes and its summit is punctuated with scrub trees.