

## Landscape Character Type G: Incised Wooded River Valleys



The River Barle looking south from Tarr Steps

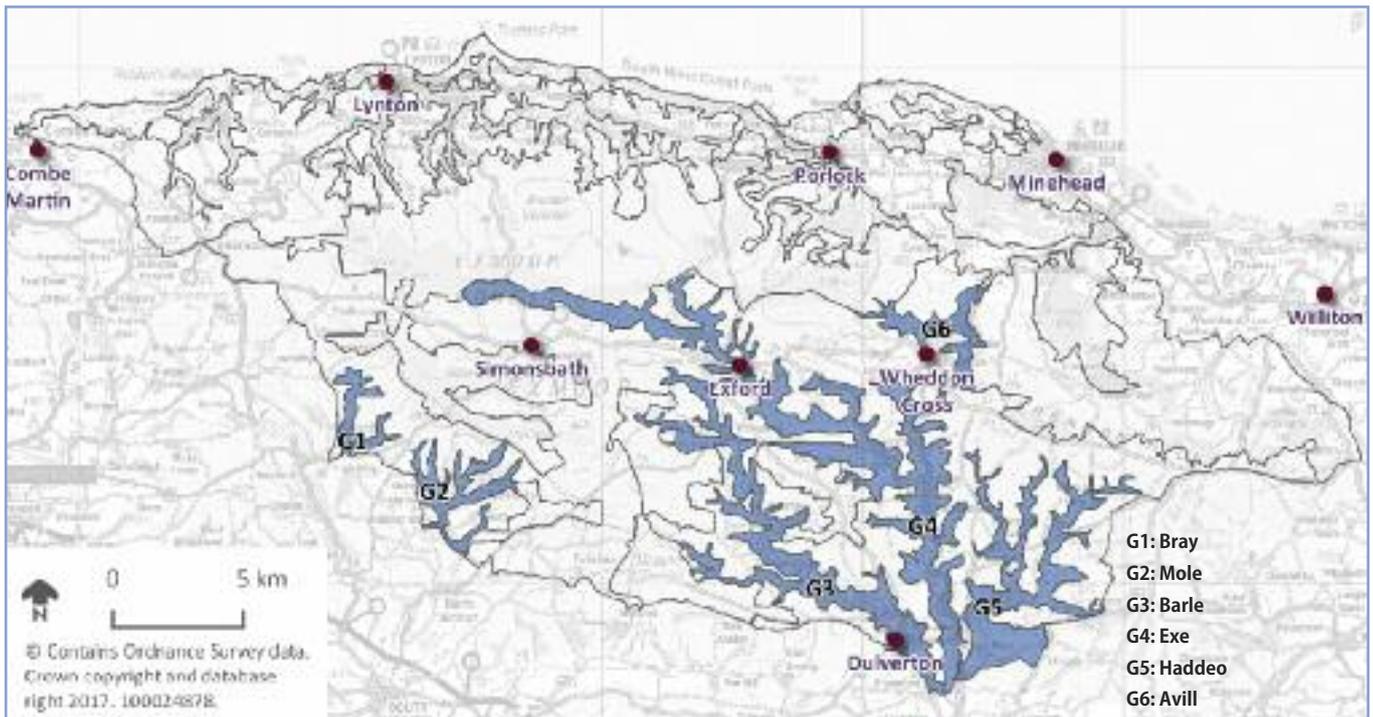
### Summary Description

This LCT is largely located within the southern part of the National Park. It encompasses the tributaries and main courses of a number of rivers- the Bray, Mole, Barle, Exe, Haddeo and Avill, cutting through the surrounding areas of Enclosed Farmland with Commons and Open Moorland. There are a number of villages within this LCT, including Exford, Withypool, and Brompton Regis, along with numerous hamlets and scattered farms, and the town of Dulverton.

The landscape comprises steep-sided, often densely-wooded valleys. They form distinctive dark green fingers that push through the surrounding areas of farmland and moorland. Fast flowing rocky streams tumble along valley floors, often with dramatic descents in levels. Roads often follow the courses of the rivers, and settlements are clustered around bridges and fords. Together with the

scattered farms, these give many of the valleys a settled character. However, there are also long stretches of valley floor which are only accessible on foot and therefore feel more remote and tranquil. The character of the rivers is very changeable, becoming particularly dramatic when they are in spate following heavy rain. The **Incised Wooded River Valleys** is a rich historic landscape, containing many fine bridges including Tarr Steps and Landacre Bridge, which are popular visitor destinations. There are notable Iron-Age defensive sites overlooking the valleys, and many medieval landscape features. The reservoir at Wimbleball is another popular site, and a much more recent addition to the landscape.

There are six distinctive Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) within the LCT, each representing a different river catchment.



## Key Characteristics of the Incised Wooded River Valleys

- The underlying geology is varied, including slate, sandstone and siltstone with drift deposits of alluvium along the courses of the rivers.
- Dramatic valley landform, with steep-sloping sides and relatively narrow but open valley floors.
- Fast-flowing and steeply-descending rivers with large deposited boulders. Wimbleball reservoir is a substantial area of open water.
- Primarily woodland and agricultural land cover, with a strong pastoral character in valley floors.
- Semi-natural habitats include woodland, grassland and lush riparian (river bank) habitats. Ferns are also common.
- Valley sides cloaked in woodland-mixed, deciduous and coniferous. There is considerable coverage of ancient woodland, including bluebell woods.
- Field patterns often ancient/ medieval in origin, forming an irregular mosaic. Fields are usually enclosed by hedges, hedgebanks and trees.
- Settlement is small-scale and picturesque. Settlements are typically nucleated and nestled in the shelter of the valley bottoms. Many are centred around fords or bridges.
- Numerous historic buildings and structures, including bridges, mills, churches, houses and farms.
- Traditional activities include field sports, with woodlands providing shelter to raise game.
- Woodland cover and enveloping sides of the valleys creates a dark and enclosing landscape character, which feels sheltered, and which varies with the changing seasons.
- Tranquillity is variable, depending on proximity to the valley roads.

## Natural Landscape Features

With a general elevation range of between 150m and 350m AOD, this is a highly distinctive landscape of steep-sided valleys with narrow, flat valley floors. Long Barrow in the upper Exe Valley is a periglacial feature. The twisting form of the valleys reflects the meandering streams and rivers which created them. The clear, boulder-strewn waters are important habitats for fish, birds and mammals, including salmon, eels, kingfishers, dippers and otters, and the River Barle (G3) (which is in an exceptionally natural state) is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest. These rivers have been described as the 'blood supply' of much of Exmoor's ecology. Wimbleball Lake reservoir (G5) is the largest expanse of water within the National Park, and is a valued resource for water storage and recreation. Woodland defines much of the landcover, predominantly deciduous woodland interspersed with mixed and coniferous areas.

There is a considerable amount of ancient woodland, and the Barle Valley (G3) is also within the Exmoor and Quantock Oakwoods Special Area of Conservation. Tarr Steps Woodland is a National Nature Reserve, with routes taking in the river, woodland and nearby moorland on Winsford Hill. Many of the deciduous woodlands have lush understoreys, and are rich in ferns, rare mosses, liverworts and lichens. In spring there are carpets of bluebells, and in autumn rich shades of golden leaves. Tree cover is predominantly sessile oak, but holly, ash, hazel and honeysuckle are also present, with many veteran trees. The glades of heath and small fields within the woodland support populations of butterflies (including rare fritillaries), and there are also colonies of bats roosting in the woodland. Woodland also provides cover for red and roe deer and other native mammals such as foxes and stoats.



Fern-lined bank in the Mole Valley



Bluebell wood in spring, Barle Valley



Autumn colours in the Haddeo Valley

## Designated Nature Conservation Sites

<b>Special Area of Conservation (SAC)</b>	Exmoor and Quantock Oakwoods (G3); Exmoor Heaths (G4)
<b>Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)</b>	Barle Valley (G3); River Barle (G3); North Exmoor (G4, G6); South Exmoor (G5)
<b>County / Local Wildlife Site (C/LWS)</b>	Extensive throughout, including woodland, grassland, copses, historic parkland (Pixton Park), moorland and commons

<b>Ancient Woodland</b>	Occurs throughout all areas, extensive in G2, G3, G4, G5, G6
<b>National Nature Reserve (NNR)</b>	Tarr Steps Woodland (G3)
<b>Local Geological Site (LGS)</b>	Pennycombe Crag and Knolls (G3); Tarr Steps Face and Quarry (G3); Marsh Bridge Quarry (G3); Upper Exe Warren Group (G4); The Punchbowl (G4); Brockhole Quarry and Weir Rock (G4); Oaktrow Quarries (G6)

## Historic Landscape Features and the Built Environment

Rivers (and specifically their crossing points) have long been a focus for human influences, and there are many examples within the **Incised Wooded River Valleys**. The popular clapper bridge at Tarr Steps was built in Medieval times, although the structure has been rebuilt following floods on a number of

occasions. It is the longest bridge of this type in Britain. The River Barle is also overlooked by a series of Iron-Age defended sites (known as ‘castles’) which are located on high ground above the river and near to iron ore deposits. These have long views along the river valley. Their location away from modern roads adds to their sense of isolation and detachment from the contemporary world.



Ford and footbridge at Bury, Haddeo Valley



Oldberry Iron-Age Hillfort, near Dulverton (G3)  
©Historic England Archive

There are a number of other notable bridges within the LCT, including Landacre Bridge and Withypool Bridge (both on the Barle). Landacre Bridge was the meeting place of the Forest Court, which dealt with crimes against the Royal Forest, such as entering with a gun, bow or dog. There are also numerous fords, often with an ancient stone pedestrian bridge alongside. Many settlements have developed around bridges and fords, and the

**Incised Wooded River Valleys** contain many historic buildings, including churches, houses, pubs and a priory. The local emphasis on the ‘ford’ element of the placename is perhaps not a coincidence. These are recognised through Scheduled Monuments, Principal Archaeological Landscapes, Listed Building and Conservation Area designations. The river-based origins of the settlements are apparent in their place-names, including Exford, Withypool,

Exton, Winsford and Bridgetown. Building styles are varied within the LCT, and within individual settlements. For example, Exford contains thatched cottages with coloured render, and stone buildings with slate roofs. Most village buildings are small in scale, but there are some larger hotels, many of which still cater for visitors coming to view or take

part in traditional country sports such as hunting, shooting and fishing. Several of the villages are popular destinations for visitors, who appreciate the historic bridges, fords, churches, and picturesque cottages clustered around village greens. The landscape setting of these villages adds to their character and charm.



Landacre Bridge



Withypool bridge

The town of Dulverton is a local service centre and sits at the southern end of the Barle Valley. Often referred to as the southern gateway to Exmoor, Dulverton sits adjacent to the Barle floodplain, and is characterised by small-scale shops, pubs and tearooms surrounding the town hall with its distinctive external steps, first-floor porch and arched windows. The square-towered church also forms a focal point in views. The oldest houses are generally found in the town centre – some have

medieval origins behind later facades. Most of the houses are stone (some rendered) with slate roofs. Housing gradually becomes more recent along the roads leading out of the town, with some Victorian buildings, examples of Arts and Crafts architecture, and post-war housing towards the outskirts. The Georgian country residence of Pixton Park is set in wooded parkland to the south of the town, and Hollam House lies to the north.



Dulverton town centre (Barle Valley)



Winsford village centre, with thatched cottages and bridge (Exe Valley)



Exford Village (Exe Valley)



Heasley Mill (Mole Valley)



Holewell Cross (Bray Valley)

The long use of the land for agriculture is apparent within today's landscape. The mosaic of field patterns represents stages of enclosure from early medieval times to the present day, and as a result is a complex and varied pattern. In general, the smallest, most irregular and oldest enclosure patterns are found around the settlements. Farms are scattered throughout the LCT, often located on the valley sides, and tucked into the sheltered combes of tributary streams. There are some excellent surviving examples of gutter systems and catch meadows, where fields were artificially irrigated to encourage early grass growth to support early spring lambs.

As well as a long history of agriculture, the **Incised Wooded River Valleys** have a rich industrial history, although it is less apparent in today's landscape. There are a number of sites associated with iron ore extraction and/ or processing, including (for example) Sherracombe Ford in the Bray Valley,

where slag heaps have been radio-carbon dated to the late Iron-Age/Romano-British period. Mining landscapes at Bampfylde and New Florence mines in the Mole Valley are a Principal Archaeological Landscape.

Charcoal production was also often associated with mineral extraction, as charcoal provides the necessary hot temperatures for furnaces. There are charcoal production sites throughout the **Incised Wooded River Valleys**, dating from the Iron Age through to the post-medieval period. For centuries, the valley woodlands would have been managed for charcoal production, using a rotation coppice system. These traditional management techniques for charcoal production and firewood have been an important influence on forming the character of the woodlands and landscape which we see today. There is also a long history of use of water power, and a series of mills, leats and ponds may be found alongside the rivers.

### Designated Cultural Heritage Sites

<b>Scheduled Monuments</b>	Landacre Bridge (G3); Barle Bridge (G3); Tarr Steps (G3); Brewer's Castle (G3); Mounsley Castle (G3); Oldbury Castle (G3); Barlynch Priory (G4); Road Castle (G4); Staddon Hill enclosure (G4); Winsford Bridge (G4); Brompton Regis lock -up (G5); Earthworks west of Bury (G5);
<b>Principal Archaeological Landscapes</b>	Bampfylde & New Florence Mines (G2); Barlynch Priory (G4); Warren Farm (G4); Withiel Florey medieval settlement (G5); Mansley Combe (G6); West Harford & North Hawkwell gutter system (G6)
<b>Conservation Areas</b>	Dulverton (G3);
<b>Listed Buildings</b>	Scattered farm and domestic buildings throughout. Clusters in settlements e.g. Withypool, Dulverton include churches, bridges, public buildings, also milestones, well head

## Landscape Perceptions and Cultural Associations

### Perceptual qualities of the landscape

The perceptual qualities of the **Incised Wooded River Valleys** vary greatly. Where there are concentrations of visitors (for example Tarr Steps, Landacre Bridge or Wimbleball Lake) there is bustling, holiday atmosphere, particularly in summer, but a short walk away along a footpath will take the visitor away from the traffic, people and ice-cream vans to a different world of tranquillity and seclusion.

The presence, sound and energy of water has a strong influence on the landscape and contributes to people's perceptions. It can be a soothing presence, babbling in the background, but when in spate becomes a destructive and intimidating force. The rivers also form a link with the outside world, flowing on beyond the National Park boundary. The combination of woodland and steeply incised topography creates a marked sense of enclosure, and a shaded, sheltered, and verdant landscape character within woodlands. In contrast, the farmed areas, and the upper parts of valleys, are more open and lighter. The high proportion of

woodland within the **Incised Wooded River Valleys** mean that seasonal influences are very strong, particularly the bluebell carpets and trees bursting into leaf in the spring, and the rich colours and crispy leaves of autumn.

The '*Exmoor Landscape Perceptions Study*' also picked up people's appreciation of seasonal changes, with a number of respondents within this LCT noting the autumn colours, and the busier, happy feel on a sunny summer's day at Tarr Steps. Descriptive words which were used to describe this landscape included *idyllic, noisy, inviting, historically interesting* and *sublime*. Visitors to the LCT also exhibited a wide range of positive emotions, including *relaxed, happy, inspired, comfortable, optimistic* and *touched*.

There is a small amount of light pollution from Dulverton, but elsewhere there are few sources of light pollution. The landform helps to block sky-glow (thereby improving star visibility), but also restricts the extent of sky which can be seen from within the valleys.



Tarr Steps Bridge on the River Barle

### Key views, viewpoints and landmarks

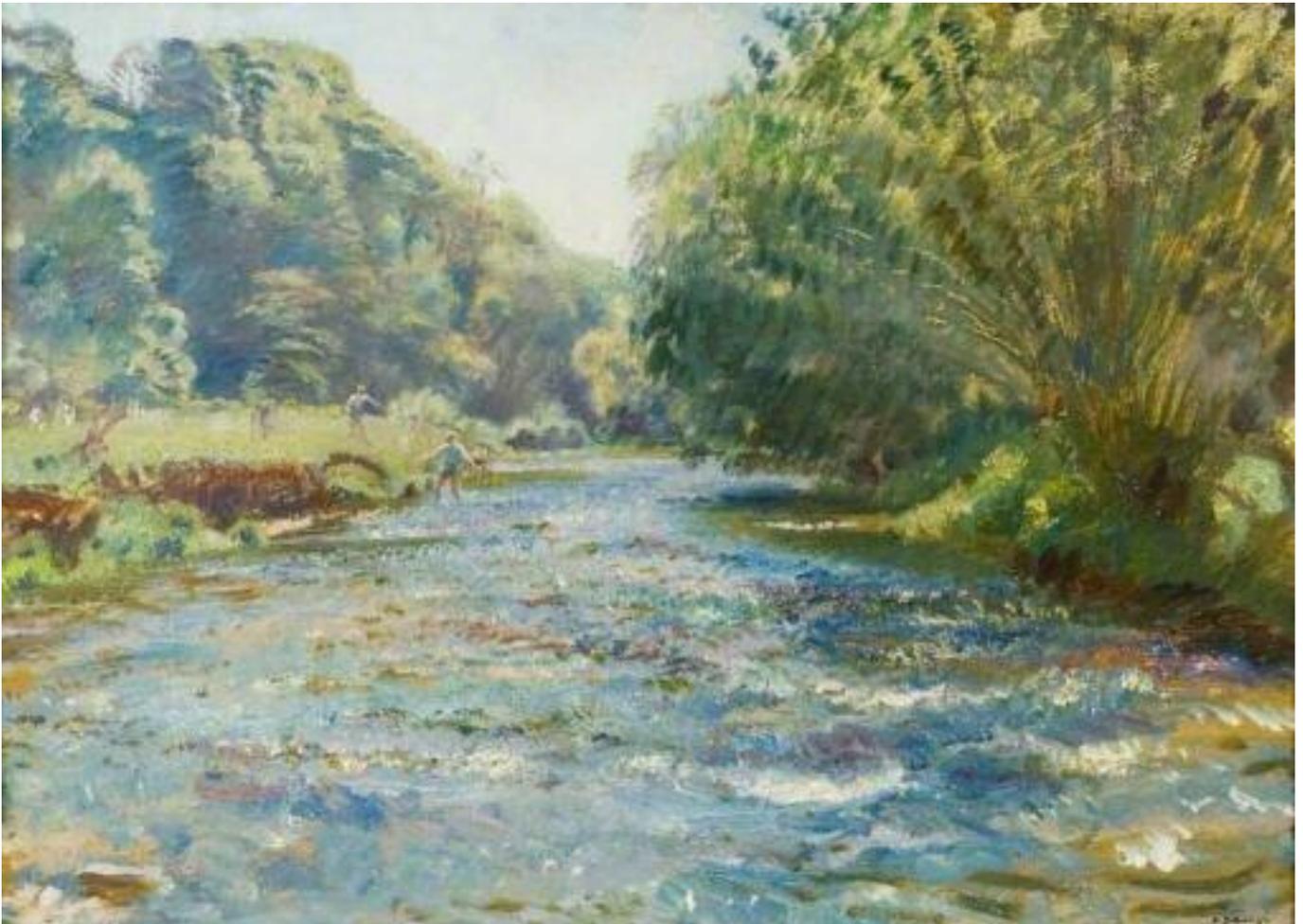
Views within the **Incised Wooded River Valleys** are often restricted by the landform, and channelled along the valleys. Bridges, 'castles' and settlements can act as focal points, but are often not seen in long views.

The roads within the valleys offer viewing opportunities, with compositions constantly changing. A typical view from a road could be through the valley-side woodland, across the floodplain and down into the fast-flowing river. The A396 follows the Exe and Avill valleys, and is likely to be an ancient route to the north coast. Today, it is a popular tourist route as it twists and turns along the

valley floor, with woodlands rising up on both sides. However, other valleys contain few roads (or even paths) and access is therefore limited.

Horizons are generally wooded, although from higher up on valley sides there are views into the surrounding farmland and moorland. These views emphasise the contrast in scale, colour and texture between the wooded valleys and the more open land which surrounds them.

The large expanse of water at Wimbleball Lake is unique within the National Park, and forms a focal point in views from surrounding higher land, particularly the popular viewpoint of Haddon Hill.



**The Barle near Brightworthy, 1942, by Alfred Munnings**  
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### Cultural Associations

This landscape has been popular with visitors for many years. Pixton Park, overlooking the Barle Valley south of Dulverton, was the seat of the Herbert Family. Laura Herbert married the novelist Evelyn Waugh, who started work on *Brideshead Revisited* and *Scoop* whilst staying at Pixton Park.

### Natural Assets and Ecosystem Services

The **Incised Wooded River Valleys** contain a rich diversity of Natural Capital Assets, which enable the functioning of many ecosystem services. Many of the ecosystem services provided in this LCT are likely to become even more important due to their role in reducing/ mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Woodlands are a key Natural Capital Asset, forming habitats for numerous species of trees, plants, insects, birds and mammals, and rare species of lichens, liverworts and mosses. Trees enhance air quality, and sequester carbon. Decaying leaf litter contributes to the formation of nutrient-rich soils, and woodlands also help to retain and filter water, which regulates water flows into the rivers (reducing flooding downstream), and improves water quality. Woodlands provide food, fuel (including charcoal) and building materials, and were managed for these roles for many centuries.

The many rivers within this LCT are important habitats and supplies of fresh water. The River Barle is particularly valuable for biodiversity and water quality as it is in such a natural state. Wimbleball Lake Reservoir contributes many ecosystem services in addition to its primary role of storing fresh water. The ecosystem services provided by the Wimbleball catchment are described in detail in the 'Wimbleball Catchment Ecosystem Services Project', under the themes of: food production; water supply and quality; biodiversity; services from woodland; climate regulation; landscape and historic environment, and tourism, recreation and access.

Farmland within the **Incised Wooded River Valleys** is primarily pastoral, but the woodland is also used

for commercial game shooting. Farmland and woodland therefore contributes to food and fibre production, and to biodiversity by providing a variation in habitat and food sources.

The **Incised Wooded River Valleys** contribute many cultural ecosystem services such as recreation, spiritual enrichment, aesthetic experiences, sense of history and education. They contain many famous and less well-known recreation sites. Tarr Steps, Landacre Bridge and various villages are popular, picturesque beauty spots which receive large numbers of visitors, particularly in summer. Wimbleball is popular for a wide variety of recreation, including sailing, canoeing, walking, cycling, camping and glamping. There are campsites within the Exe Valley at Westermill and Bridgetown, and numerous hotels and guest houses, particularly within the Exe and Barle Valleys. There is a network of footpaths, often connecting archaeological sites, which provide opportunities for quiet recreation and appreciation of the historical features, and some rivers are also popular with canoeists and kayakers. The Two Moors Way, Exe Valley Way and the Macmillan Way West run through the Exe Valley (G4), and the Coleridge Way passes through the Avill Valley (G6). Woodlands in this LCT contain numerous archaeological sites of great cultural value, contributing to people's sense of history and providing opportunities for learning. The rivers and woodlands provide natural noise masking and contribute to the sense of tranquillity.

### Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) within this LCT

Within the **Incised Wooded River Valleys** LCT, there are six distinctive LCAs, each with a unique 'sense of place'. Some also have distinctive landscape characteristics, which are included in the descriptions below. Any LCA-specific management or planning recommendations are identified within the recommendations at the end of this LCT profile.

## LCA G1: Bray



View south from Whitefield, showing valley floor meadows below woodland

### Description

The smallest of the Incised Wooded River Valleys, this valley forms part of the much bigger valley system of the River Bray that occurs just outside the National Park boundary. The landscape is heavily wooded, with significant tracts of deciduous woodland (e.g. East Down Wood) and coniferous woodland (e.g. Sherracombe Wood). There are areas of small-scale farmland, and grassland on the valley floors, but these are secondary to the wooded character of the landscape.

There are also important archaeological sites, such as the early iron extraction and processing site at Sherracombe Ford. With the exception of two rural roads (Muxworthy Lane and Whitefield Lane), there are no other vehicular routes through the landscape, which gives this LCA a particularly isolated, changeless and remote feel. The Macmillan Way West long-distance route crosses the valley between Whitefield and Holewater. Settlement is limited to riverside cottages at Holewater Cross, and farms at Whitefield and Muxworthy, both of which are located on the upper valley sides, and accessed via steep and winding lanes with narrow stone bridges over streams.



## LCA G2: Mole



View of the Mole Tributary Valleys from near Champion's Irish Bridge. North Molton Ridge forms the horizon

### Description

Centred on the River Mole, this is another small LCA belonging to the **Incised Wooded River Valleys** LCT. Unlike the tributary valley of the River Bray (G1) this area has a greater mix of woodland and farmland. Extensive areas of tree felling are currently taking place in this LCA, particularly at South Wood. The woodland is predominantly coniferous plantations, including Buttery Wood and Long Wood. The farmland is characterised by small, irregular field units used for pasture. Some of the upper reaches of the combs have a more scrubby character, creating a gradual transition between woodland and farmland.

The hamlet of Heasley Mill occurs just inside the National Park boundary, close to a bridge over the River Mole. It comprises a cluster of stone and white painted/ rendered properties with slate roofs. Surrounding the hamlet are a number of disused mines and shafts, including the Bampfylde and New Florence Mines Principal Archaeological Landscape. This area contains features associated with both extraction and processing of copper and iron ore, including remains of shafts, spoil dumps, wheel pits and leats, the mine office, and the well-preserved crusher/ winder house.



## LCA G3: Barle



The Barle Valley above Winsford

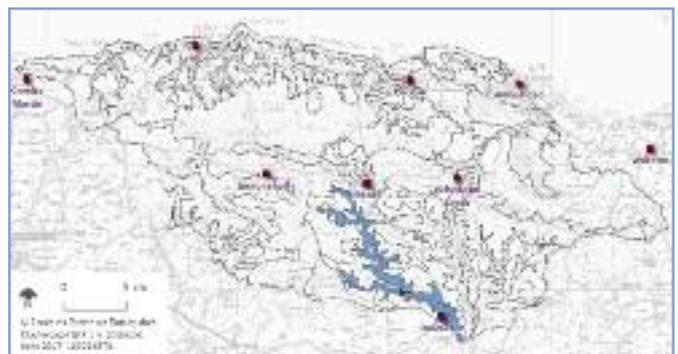
### Description

One of the largest LCAs within this LCT, the Barle Incised Wooded River Valley stretches from Landacre Bridge and the upper reaches of Pennycombe Water (both north-west of the village of Withypool) to Pixton Park (south of Dulverton). During its course it therefore changes in character, starting as a shallow, steep combe, and gradually turning into a deeper, wider, wooded, settled valley.

The river Barle has an exceptionally natural character, having seen little impact from water abstraction, pollution or engineering. It therefore has a high nature conservation value and supports a wide range of species, including important spawning grounds for migratory salmon and trout. The woodland is relatively continuous north of Dulverton, but becomes less dense further upstream, where it is broken by farmland. This is especially true of the small combes around the tributary streams. The farmland comprises small scale, irregular fields (often grazed by sheep and cattle). The bulk of the woodland comprises deciduous, native species (including much ancient woodland) but there are also some areas of coniferous woodland.

This valley has many visible historic and archaeological landscape features, including the Iron Age enclosures of Mounsey Castle and Brewer's Castle overlooking the river valley, and old bridges at Tarr Steps and Landacre. These are much-visited beauty spots, but the Barle Valley as a whole is popular with visitors, being well-served by facilities and public rights of way, including the Two Moors Way. However, there is limited vehicular access within the valley, and there is no continuous stretch of road following the river.

Dulverton is located at the southern end of the valley, and Withypool near the confluence of the River Barle and Pennycombe Water. Farm buildings are scattered throughout the LCA, often located on the upper valley sides, sheltered in the combes of tributary streams.



## LCA G4: Exe



The Exe Valley at Hele Bridge. The A396 runs within the trees in the centre of the photograph

### Description

The Exe is the largest of the Incised Wooded River Valleys and exhibits variation in character along its course. It starts as spring-fed streams and waters running off the adjacent Open Moorland in Exe Cleave, and continues in a south-easterly direction, winding its way through the picturesque villages of Exford and Winsford, converging with the River Quarme and continuing south, through Exton and Bridgetown before meeting the River Barle, south-east of Dulverton. The four small settlements within the Exe Valley all take their names from the river or its crossing places: Exford, Exton, Winsford and Bridgetown. The busy A396 follows the River Exe as far as Exton, and then the River Quarme. Steep side roads descend the valley sides to meet the main road.

Like the Barle Valley, the Exe is more wooded in the south, where there are larger and more continuous tracts of tree cover. These are mostly deciduous, with some areas of conifer plantation. However, the floodplain is generally open, and often used for pasture. Towards the north of the valley, closer to the higher ground of the Open Moorland, there is less woodland and a greater proportion of land given over to pastoral farming, contained within high-banked fields.

The upper stretch of the valley contains a diversity of past and present land uses, from the former rabbit warren at Warren Farm (Exe Cleave) to the popular valley-bottom campsite at Westermill.



## LCA G5: Haddeo



Wimbleball Lake from Haddon Hill



The river Haddeo near Hartford

### Description

The River Haddeo Incised Wooded River Valley is unique within the National Park in that it contains a large open water body, namely Wimbleball Lake, an artificial reservoir. The lake is a much-used recreational resource for sailing, fishing, camping, bird watching and walking. Around the lake, the presence of the water and the recreational land uses, with associated car parks, visitor facilities and campsites have a localised impact on the character of the National Park. As the largest expanse of open water within the National Park, it is a distinctive feature in views from within this LCT, and from surrounding LCTs.

The LCA comprises three tributary valleys extending down from the surrounding Enclosed Farmland with Commons to merge with the River Haddeo in the south. The tributary valleys include the River Pulham, which passes the village of Brompton Regis before joining the Haddeo at Hartford. Brompton Regis is the largest village within the LCA. Other settlements include the hamlets of Bury and Hartford (both clustered around fords) and several farmsteads which are generally located on the valley sides. Settlements and farms are connected by a network of dark and winding lanes, often lined with fern-clad banks. There are extensive areas of woodland in the central part of the LCA, but public access into the woodland is very limited.

Within the more secluded parts of this LCA there are relatively-intensive game-rearing areas in woodland, and also a fish farm. The woodland contains numerous tracks, some of which appear eroded due to overuse by vehicles.



## LCA G6: Avill



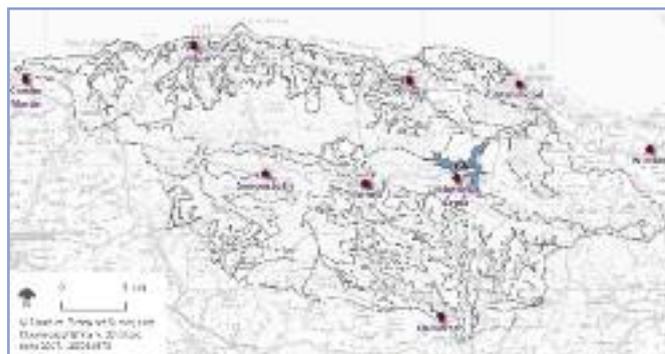
The Avill Valley at North Hawkwell

### Description

The River Avill is the only example of this landscape type to run towards the north of the National Park. It is separated from the Exe river system by the central watershed, and instead feeds into the Avill, which reaches the sea east of Minehead. The LCA is small, with two watercourses and valley systems merging before entering the Farmed and Settled Vale LCT.

The western Avill valley starts at Dunkery Gate, adjacent to the Open Moorland at Dunkery Hill. The southern side of the valley is covered with deciduous woodland and the A396 cuts along the valley side at Cutcombe Hill. On the northern side of the valley, much of the land is in pastoral use, and the well-preserved catch-meadow system at West Harford and North Hawkwell is a Principal Archaeological Landscape.

The southern valley is mainly covered by coniferous plantations. The watercourse extends northwards until it meets the River Avill at Steart. From Steart the floodplain widens; the western side is open and farmed, whilst the eastern side is characterised by deciduous woodland. Both the A396 and a minor road follow the course of the River Avill before the valley widens to merge with the more open and less wooded Farmed and Settled Vale.



## Strength of Landscape Character and Landscape Condition in LCT G

This is a landscape of **strong** landscape character. The river valleys contain dramatic landforms, picturesque floodplains, attractive settlements, historic bridges, dense woodland and fast-flowing scenic rivers which combine to create a definite sense of place, and a landscape character which contrasts with the surrounding farmland and moorland.

The condition of the landscape is generally **moderate-good**. Most woodland and farmland is well managed, and buildings are well-maintained. However, there are some localised issues (described in 'forces for change' below) which affect landscape condition. Condition of SSSIs within the **Incised Wooded River Valleys** is variable. The River Barle itself has been assessed as being in 'unfavourable declining' condition due to the presence of invasive species (montbretia and Japanese knotweed) and the presence of habitat modifications (walled banks and check weirs). Himalayan Balsam is increasingly growing alongside the River Barle, and spreading from the south towards Dulverton. Riverside SSSIs have been assessed as a mixture of 'favourable', 'unfavourable recovering', 'unfavourable no change' and 'unfavourable declining'. Most of the woodland SSSIs have been assessed as 'unfavourable recovering'.

Listed buildings are generally in good condition, and most are occupied. Milestones in the Avill Valley (G6) have been identified as buildings at risk, and milestones along the A396 (G5) and Withial Florey church (G5) have been assessed as being in

relatively poor condition. The Conservation Area Appraisal for Dulverton notes that most historic buildings (listed and unlisted) are well maintained, and there is evidence of the public sector and the local community restoring and maintaining buildings for visitor use. It also notes concerns about the use of PVCu windows and doors; suburban fencing; rooflights (particularly on front elevations which stand proud of the roof) and the presence of overhead powerlines and poles within parts of the town centre and along approach roads. Much work has been done since 2007 to remove rhododendron, montbretia and other invasive species, but more remains to be done, and constant management is required to prevent re-growth. It is a particular challenge in areas such as the Barle Valley with organic certification where conventional herbicides cannot be used. Incremental changes causing urbanisation of road corridors remain a concern, and fencing along stream banks is a localised issue. From fieldwork undertaken in 2016, commercial game shoots continue to be a landscape issue and there appears to be an intensification of associated land use with this. Shooting management guidelines have encouraged the re-siting of feeders and pens away from roads and footpaths on some sites, however, issues remain on other sites.

Parts of this LCT have limited road and footpath networks, and therefore it is not always easy to see landscape change, particularly when it takes place on private land or in woodland.

## Landscape Issues and Forces for Change in LCT G

Landscapes are dynamic and are constantly been affected by a variety of forces for change, which may be natural (e.g. coastal erosion) or man-made (e.g. development pressure and changes in farming practices). The following table illustrates the main forces for change acting on this LCT, and how they

will potentially affect the landscape. Recommendations for addressing these issues are provided in the following section. Please note that forces for change acting across the whole National Park are described in Section 2.9.

Issue/Force for Change	Landscape sensitivities and potential impacts	LCAs affected
Recreation, including campsites and honeypot sites	Concentrations of visitor facilities and popular sites can potentially impact on views; lead to increased traffic (particularly where there are bottlenecks on narrow lanes); change the character of the landscape to one dominated by recreation, and lead to loss of tranquillity. Small-scale effects such as litter and dog mess can have cumulative impacts. These are likely to be greatest where the landscape appears most natural, or where it is particularly open (e.g. around Wimbleball).	G3,G4,G5
Loss of historic features	Damage to buried archaeology and earthworks through scrub/ bracken/ tree encroachment. Woodland sites are particularly vulnerable (e.g. Iron-Age 'castles' along the Barle Valley). Loss of historic features around farms (e.g. catch meadow gutters) because they are no longer used, and understanding of them has been lost.	All
Game shooting	Cumulative impacts of game pens, feeders, tracks and birds in views from roads and footpaths, and pheasants in roads at some times of year. Game crops can create regular shapes or stripes in views which may be visible over a wide area and do not sit comfortably in the surrounding landscape. Vehicles can damage paths and ground surfaces, and consequently affect river water quality. It is important to note that shooting generally takes place on private land away from roads and public rights of way, and therefore the landscape impacts are not readily apparent. However, there can be effects on tranquillity as a result of noise from shooting (including guns and clients' helicopters). Sales of traditional farms to shoots may affect farming practices and the appearance of the landscape (e.g. lack of maintenance of hedgerows; reduction in grazing; increase in game crop planting). Game from nearby shoots can also affect native woodland.	All
Abandonment or change of use of valley floor pastures	Reduction in extent of valley floor pastures managed as grazing land, with pastures becoming overgrown. Potentially leads to loss of ecologically-rich wet meadows and hay meadows with resulting loss of biodiversity. Equestrian uses in some locations results in additional fencing and leads to changing composition of grassland.	All
Changes to field boundaries	Poor maintenance of traditional banks and hedges results in loss of landscape pattern, which can be particularly apparent in small-scale landscapes around settlements. Fencing alongside river banks can create a loss of physical and visual connectivity between rivers, banks and valley floor meadows, particularly where it occurs alongside footpaths.	All

Issue/Force for Change	Landscape sensitivities and potential impacts	LCAs affected
Changes in woodland management	Loss of traditional methods of woodland management resulting in reduced age and species diversity within woodlands. Large scale tree felling (either as part of planned forestry works, or in response to tree disease) has major potential impacts on the appearance of the landscape. Forestry tracks become eroded through use by vehicles, and although most are hidden within woodland, they can appear as linear scars when surrounding woodland is felled. Erosion of tracks is also linked to increased run-off and flooding. Conifer plantation on ancient woodland sites remains an ongoing issue, because the pace of generating interest in restoration practice remains low.	All
Changes to forestry and farming grants	Future changes to woodland and forestry grants will have a potentially large impact on the woodland character of this LCT.	All
Urbanisation of road corridors	Increased signage (e.g. successive speed limit signs), kerbing, road markings and other clutter along roads can create urban influences along road corridors, particularly around settlements and along main roads. Traditional signposts, milestones, phone boxes etc. become vulnerable to neglect.	G3, G4, G6
Development pressure	Housing extending out from traditional settlement forms, e.g. linear development along roads. This can occur in valleys (e.g. the outskirts of Dulverton) and also where villages have expanded up onto surrounding higher moorland/ farmland areas (e.g. Withypool and Brompton Regis).	G3, G4, G5
Flooding	Following heavy rainfall (particularly when the ground is already saturated), flooding can lead to scouring of river banks, soil erosion, damage to historic buildings and structures including bridges, mills and properties. New flood amelioration schemes may help to reduce the severity of flooding in the future.	All
Invasive species	Although much work has been done in clearing invasive species such as rhododendron, montbretia and Japanese knotweed, they remain an ongoing concern. Rhododendron is still an issue in the Haddeo Valley woodlands. The river Barle is adversely affected in some areas by invasive non-native plant species. Alien American signal crayfish are endemic in the river Barle, though recently subject to control measures.	All

Issue/Force for Change	Landscape sensitivities and potential impacts	LCAs affected
Pests and diseases	Woodlands are vulnerable to tree diseases such as phytophthora and ash dieback. Preventative felling to prevent spread of disease would also affect the landscape character and biodiversity.	All
Climate change	Woodlands are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts. They are likely to see an increased risk of pests and diseases which thrive in warmer conditions. These, combined with increased risk of drought, may result in a change of species composition in woodlands (for example beech replacing oak). Increased frequency and intensity of storms is also likely to lead to loss of trees, and a greater flood risk, with consequences on bank erosion, damage to paths and historic structures.	All



Rhododendron in woodland and pheasant pens cut into the valley side just above the river bank in the Haddeo Valley



Felled woodland in the Mole Valley



Housing in Withypool extending out of the village centre and up the valley side



Recreation facilities and non-native planting at Wimbleball Lake

## Landscape Management Recommendations for LCT G

### Landscape Strategy

The landscape character created by intimate, sheltered wooded valleys, pasture and natural river systems is conserved. A mosaic of linked habitats support thriving populations of fish, birds, plants, insects and mammals, with invasive species controlled. Woodland and farmland is well-managed, and the cumulative impacts of game shoots on the landscape are minimised. Ancient woodland is protected and the proportion of broadleaf woodland increased. Settlements are thriving, and the historic built environment is conserved and celebrated. The landscape is enjoyed by visitors, using facilities which do not detract from the scenic quality of the area. Roads and settlements retain their rural character and scale, and archaeological sites are undamaged by erosion or vegetation.

## LCT-Specific Management Guidelines for LCT G

### Protect

- Protect watercourses from silt pollution and retain the River Barle in its natural state as much as possible. Deal promptly with outbreaks of invasive water-borne vegetation such as Japanese Knotweed. Monitor pollution levels and species present.
- Protect archaeology, particularly wooded sites vulnerable to damage by trees, scrub and bracken.
- Protect historic structures such as mileposts, restoring them where appropriate to contribute to the historic character of roads.
- Protect ancient woodland from further conifer planting, and sensitively restore plantations on ancient woodland sites. Investigate opportunities to buffer/ extend ancient woodland to compensate for loss through tree disease. Protect veteran trees, and raise awareness of their presence.
- Protect dark night skies, minimising sources of light pollution.

## Manage

- Manage game shoots to minimise their impacts on the landscape (for example planting game crops to appear naturalistic, rather than in geometric shapes). Where possible, site game feeders, pens and crops away from public rights of way and roads in order to minimise the cumulative visual impacts of game shooting. Manage shoots to minimise detrimental impacts on native biodiversity.
- Manage woodlands, retaining the valuable mixture of woodlands and glades, and continuing with the removal of invasive species such as rhododendron. Respond to outbreaks of tree disease in accordance with best-practice guidance. Consider traditional management techniques such as coppicing in some locations.
- Manage riverside environments, encouraging appropriate grazing of riverside meadows and associated habitats to enhance their biodiversity. Minimise riverside fencing in areas with public access.
- Manage farmland, including maintenance of hedgerows and hedge banks to retain the small-scale pattern of the landscape.
- Manage recreation sites, ensuring that people can visit and enjoy the area, but that facilities do not detract from its character. This is particularly important around Wimbleball, where there are elevated views of the lake from Haddon Hill, and where there are opportunities to improve the landscaping around the visitor facilities (for example replacing non-native planting with native species). Ensure that any cumulative impacts from small-scale incidents such as littering are minimised.
- Manage valley-side areas which were formerly grazed but are now being encroached upon by scrub and bracken. In some areas, it may be preferable to re-introduce grazing to maintain a grassland/ heath environment. In others, management to allow natural reversion to woodland may be more appropriate.
- Manage sites in accordance with SSSI and SAC Management Plans.

## Plan

- Ensure that conversion of redundant agricultural buildings is done sensitively.
- Work with Highways Authorities to ensure that road signage and traffic calming measures are minimised and are as discreet as possible to reduce urbanisation of road corridors, particularly where A-roads pass through G4 and G6. This is also a potential issue around settlement edges.

NOTE- See also detailed recommendations in the following documents:

- *Unlocking Exmoor's Woodland Potential* (LRJ Associates and Sylvanus for The Exmoor Society, August 2013)
- *The Exmoor Guidelines for the Management of Game Birds in the National Park*, Exmoor National Park Authority. Available on the Exmoor National Park Authority website.

## Specific Planning Guidelines for Incised Wooded River Valleys in LCT G

This section describes the planning guidelines which are specific to the Incised Wooded River Valleys Landscape Character Type. See also the general landscape planning guidelines in Part 3.

Defining qualities which need to be protected should new development occur, and which any new development should reflect:

Defining Quality to Protect	Perceived Threats and Issues	Guidance
Strong historic association of towns/villages/hamlets with rivers both physically, at crossing points and in place names, such that they are often hidden in views from the wider landscape.	Expansion of settlements away from the rivers and onto higher valley slopes such that traditional association of settlement with watercourses is undermined and settlement becomes more visually obvious in wider landscape.	Ensure new development relates closely to existing nucleated form and association with the river on the lower valley floor and slopes, and is parallel to contours.
Distinct landscape context of settlements – wooded backdrop of steep valley sides and open spaces within the settlement form including small greens along watercourses.	Loss of open spaces within the settlement or blocking of key views from public spaces to valley side setting.	Protect key views to the wider landscape setting of the settlement which affords strong sense of place. Protect open spaces within settlements which form an important setting to listed buildings and reinforce the association of the settlement with the watercourse.
Dispersed pattern of farms on upper valley slopes set within folds of landscape associated with tributary streams.	New farm buildings which break the skyline or are reflective.	Ensure new farm buildings are set within the folds of the landscape. Locate new farm buildings such that they physically relate to existing farms, and do not appear as isolated structures in the landscape. Ensure that buildings respond to landform (for example through stepped rooflines), and that roofs and walls visually recede through use of suitable colour, materials that weather and that are non-reflective.
Pattern of traditional farm buildings providing strong connections to the landscape and sense of history.	Potential loss of farm buildings which are no longer needed for their original purposes. Poor quality conversion of buildings resulting in a loss of traditional features and character.	Ensure that conversions maintain the style and character of the original building in terms of form, scale, materials and detailing. Ensure consideration is given to curtilage treatment and avoid suburbanisation of the setting of the building.

Defining Quality to Protect	Perceived Threats and Issues	Guidance
Rural qualities of lanes which connect to settlements.	Widening of lanes, introduction of concrete kerbs, signage and road markings, linear expansion of settlements along lanes. Increase in cars and car parking.	Development should reinforce the settlement character and form to avoid linear development along lanes, and associated suburbanisation of these historic routes.
Dark night skies	Increased street lighting, and lightspill from buildings (including agricultural buildings)	Resist increasing in street lighting, and work with Highways Authorities to develop an acceptable lighting policy. Provide cowling on lights within agricultural sheds to minimise light spill from roof lights at night.



Dulverton in its wooded landscape setting on the side of the Barle Valley



Farmstead on valley side, with natural landform and existing planting providing mitigation to an extended farm building complex.



New agricultural building designed and sited to respect the landscape setting.



Example of naturalistic game cover planting (gorse on the right of the image)  
Photo: Hugh Thomas



Sensitive extension to accommodate tourist facilities, Tarr Farm



Traditional road signs still in use, Dulverton



Re-use of historic building. Dulverton Workhouse is now the Exmoor National Park Authority offices.