

R1 Upland Don River Valley

Landscape character area *B1 Upland Don River Valley* is distinguished from the surrounding landscape by its strong landform, sense of enclosure and dominant presence of the River Don. Topographically, the valley floor ranges from over 300m AOD at Dunford Bridge to 162m AOD at Thurgoland. The upper reaches of the river, west of the A616, have carved its course through the hard Millstone Grit of the open moorland. Here the river runs its upland course along a narrow floodplain and the valley sides form part of the wider dramatic upland landscape. East of the A616 the river has carved its course through the complex geology of the Lower Coal Measures formed of alternating bands of sandstone and shale, and this has resulted in an uneven valley. However, the course of the River Don, and the fertile pastures that have arisen on the alluvium alongside the river, unify the valley.

This is an upland river valley where the river runs fast and as a result has been exploited in the past for its power. Fulling mills were established anywhere there was a stream of sufficient power to drive the water wheel and, because they were already mechanised, often became the nuclei of later woollen factories. Mill races, sluices, weirs and old fulling mills are all features of this part of the Don Valley today, and the settlements of Penistone, Thurlstone and Millhouse Green all have connection to the woollen industry. For example, the centre of Thurlstone is a Conservation Area and traditional long wool weavers' windows may still be seen on the upper floors of cottages within the village. A dismantled railway follows the valley along its length and provides a visual clue to the importance of the valley as a transport corridor. The presence of disused mines and shafts on the valley sides are also clues to historic land use activity.

The topography of the valley evokes a strong sense of enclosure, particularly where valley side woodlands have survived. These deciduous woodlands, and unimproved riverside meadows, are particularly important habitats for wildlife. This is a rural upland landscape where pastures, bounded by stone walls, reach down to the waterside. Generally the fields are smaller where they abut the water, increasing in size as they ascend the valley sides. Scattered stone farmsteads are familiar features of the valley sides.

Minor roads follow the valley side, usually running parallel to the river, and linking the settlements of Oxspring, Penistone, Thurlstone and Millhouse Green. There are several crossing points of the river at these settlements, and distinctive stone bridges mark these. Stone as a building material unifies built character in the landscape with buildings and walls constructed out of the same local stone.