

## R2 Wooded Don River Valley

Landscape character area *B2 Wooded Don River Valley* is distinguished by its strong landform and land cover. Topographically, the valley floor ranges from 162m AOD at Thurgoland to 90m AOD at Oughtibridge. The river valley is defined by steep sides and a narrow valley floor along its length. The river has carved its course through the complex geology of the Lower Coal Measures from Thurgoland to Stocksbridge, reaching the more resistant Millstone Grit south of Stocksbridge. The Millstone Grit produces some dramatic scenery, the valley sides rising to some 150m above the valley floor at Wharnccliffe Crag.

The river has deposited alluvium along the valley floor and this is visible as fertile pastures along the valley bottom.

The narrow valley evokes a strong sense of enclosure and this is made particularly evident where woodland is a prominent feature such as at Todwick Wood, Redmires Wood and Oughtibridge Hagg. Here extensive wooded areas are an intense patchwork of deciduous and coniferous plantation, clothing the valley sides as a continuous block. These woodlands extend to meet Wharnccliffe Wood on the ridge, which defines the skyline.

To the north of the character area woodland, although a key landscape feature, takes on a different character and form. Unlike the solid and continuous swathes of the plantations to the south, woodland areas are smaller, more sporadic and interspersed with areas of open farmland that sweep down to the water side. There is also a transition from a mixed plantation to a softer deciduous character. The valley sides are also less steep here, but the sense of enclosure provided by the valley remains strong.

The valley is a detailed interplay of natural features and human infrastructure. Where the river changes its course, deep cutting meanders are apparent as the water traverses across the landscape. In conjunction with the winding pattern of the river, weirs, dams and areas of open water (used for fishing) are key landscape elements. Roads follow the valley side, usually running parallel to the river, with only one field's width separating road from river along much of its length. This allows channelled views up and down the river and a perception of being within the river valley. At junctions, the roads cross over the water and, at these points, stone bridges are a positive contribution to the appearance and overall character of the landscape. Stone as a building material unifies built character in the landscape, with buildings and stone walls of the same material.

In areas where the landscape is not under woodland cover, pastoral farming is the predominant land use activity with individual farmsteads such as Harper Hill, Woodman and Trunce Farms located on both the valley sides and floor; separated by a geometric but irregular network of field units of small to medium size. Generally the fields are smaller where they abut the water, increasing in size as they ascend the valley sides.

In terms of archaeology, a dismantled railway provides a visual clue to the previous industrial workings in and around the valley. The presence of quarries both on and over the character area boundary are also indicators of historic land use activity.