

## What is unique about this area which merits its designation as a National Park?

*“The Anglo-Scottish frontier is arguably the most beautiful, and certainly the most bloodstained, region of Britain, perhaps of all Europe. For centuries it was the scene of internecine warfare between England and Scotland, in which great battles were fought, vast areas scorched into wilderness, towns and villages and magnificent abbeys were destroyed, and countless Borderers on both sides were killed” (Fraser, 2000)*

We are collecting information about the Southern Borders which will shape the proposal for National Park designation. Drawing on our research we are going to post notes on this site on a series of relevant topics. The first note, presented here, is a brief introduction to the key concept of the **cultural landscape**, and to some of the unique characteristics of this area which together make it a nationally and internationally important cultural landscape. The UK National Parks are all recognized to be important cultural landscapes and we aim to demonstrate that this area compares favourably with the best of them. Please send us your comments and tell us about important facts we have missed.

*“More than fragile inward investment, the Borders needs ideas - ideas which have their beginnings and endings in these hills and river valleys, and which can reach out and touch the lives of anyone.” (Moffat, 2002)*

### Why this area?

The particular area of the Southern Borders (map attached) has been selected for this proposal because it is a uniquely important **cultural landscape**. Its striking geography includes a number of areas which already bear designations: several SSSIs, an SLA, conservation areas, designed landscapes, listed buildings and national monuments. In addition, it is extraordinarily rich in the partly-visible archaeological remains of the societies which have populated the area since the glaciers of the last ice age receded (Dent & McDonald, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001; C. Bowles, pers.comm.).

However, the integrated multi-dimensional entity which includes these physical areas and structures, together with the associated intangible elements of oral tradition, rituals and festivals, traditional skills and continuing cultural evolution, forms a coherent and unique *cultural landscape* which is much greater than the sum of its parts. Protection of this area would enhance greatly the value of each of these listed entities by safeguarding them within a wider context which would help to reveal aspects of their meaning arising from their role in the evolution of this cultural landscape.

Significantly, the communities in this cultural landscape continue to live on, renewing their ancient traditions and evolving their socio-economic structures. Here in this relatively undisturbed area we

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can see and understand the story of how the communities which developed here shaped the landscape of the Scottish Borders over the millennia and the centuries, and continue to do so.

### **The concept of the Cultural Landscape**

UNESCO has adopted the concept of cultural landscapes – “a continuing landscape which retains an active social role in contemporary society, closely associated with a traditional way of life and where the evolutionary process is continuing..... where human impact is evident and valued” (UNESCO).

The National Trust for Scotland articulated this more fully as follows : “The intangible associations of places or objects can be as important as more easily measurable physical features, and should be considered alongside more tangible qualities when evaluating the significance of a place or feature. These associations may relate for example to history, spirituality, culture, myth, legend, communal memory or identity... historical associations, particularly if of iconic status, can give ‘ordinary’ places extraordinary importance, even if they have no other significance” (NTS 2003).

The Scottish Historic Environment Forum (SHEF, 2015) has also emphasized the importance of this holistic approach to landscape as adopted by the European Landscape Convention (ELC) and signed up to by the UK and Scottish Governments i.e. landscape is “an area, **as perceived by people**, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of the natural and/or human factors”.

### **What are the unique characteristics and importance of this Borders cultural landscape?**

The answer is that there is an unrivalled opportunity to understand and appreciate the epic story of the evolution of the Scottish Border land and its communities in this relatively undisturbed area of spectacular landscapes and ancient settlements. There is a timeless quality to the landscape and yet it is still a living and working landscape which continues to be shaped by the people who live here.

The Scottish Border, the oldest border in the world established in 1237 by the Treaty of York (see e.g. wikipedia) runs for much of its length along the ridges of the Cheviot Hills. These formed a partial barrier against invaders. However this barrier was repeatedly breached. In addition to local incursions there were several major periods when Roman then Northumbrian then English armies crossed into Scotland but were ultimately repelled. The people who settled here always had to be prepared to defend their homes and stock. The architecture, the traditions, the folklore and the historical records from prehistoric times up through the time of the Reivers bear testimony to this.

Again and again the invaders retreated back over this border. Then the lands enjoyed periods of peace in which the communities were able to accumulate wealth from agriculture, manufacture and trading the distinctive local products. The hills on which the sheep were pastured yielded the wool which generated much of the wealth of the four great abbeys, Melrose, Dryburgh, Kelso and Jedburgh, in the mediaeval period. The fertile land of the river valleys supported agriculture. The abundant waters of the great rivers powered the mills and provided good transport to the port of Berwick, and the plentiful supplies of wool led to the growth of the Borders textiles industry, famed for the quality of its products. Today in spite of ups and downs the industry still produces some of the finest and most sought after tweeds and woollens in the world.

Much of this narrative can still be read by running the eye across the landscapes of the area. Cycling, walking, riding or driving around the area, takes one out of time, the layers of history are peeled back. The hills are marked by forts and cultivation going back to the pre-Christian era. The placenames, Abbotrule, etc, - recall the era of the great abbeys; Pennygant, Din, etc the p-celtic period, Chesters, Bonchester Bridge etc, the Roman era. The switchback roads e.g. the A68 south of St Boswells – reminds the driver that this is the path of a Roman road.

The architecture and layout of towns and other settlements reveal their origins and evolution to the visitor's eye. Jedburgh Abbey, burnt down by invaders then rebuilt. The house in Jedburgh where Mary Queen of Scots was staying when news of her wounded lover Bothwell reached her, and from whence she scandalously rode over the moors to visit him at Hermitage Castle, dropping her timepiece in the Queen's Mire at Braidlie, now a popular walking route which visitors can follow today.

The name Yetholm means "Gate Town", and the two villages bearing that name lay in **the debatable lands** during the various wars between England and Scotland. This turbulence meant that permanent settlement in Yetholm may only have started towards the end of the 16th century, but the area had long been home to the Yetholm Gypsies, who found that the border location made travel and avoidance of persecution easier. Most of the gypsies settled permanently in Kirk Yetholm when the laird built houses and a school for the community during the 1700s. The last true King of the Gypsies died in Kirk Yetholm in 1883, though in an early attempt to boost the local economy through tourism, a ceremonial Gypsy Coronation took place as late as 1898. The Pennine Way starts or (more commonly) ends in Kirk Yetholm, a mere 268 miles north of its southern terminus in Derbyshire. More recently, Kirk Yetholm has also become a feature on the St Cuthbert's Way, a 62 mile walk following in the footsteps of St Cuthbert from Melrose to Lindisfarne. The Border Hotel, once a drover's inn, is now a welcome sight for walkers on both trails.

Travelling the area and admiring the vistas as they unroll, the perception of the visitor is at the same time informed from within by the stories s/he has heard of Border families and their roots in this romantic but bloodstained landscape – the wicked Lord de Soulis of Hermitage Castle who stole Fair May of Goranberry, who was the sweetheart of the young Laird of Branxholme, ancestor of the Dukes of Buccleuch (Sir Walter Scott, Poetical Works, V.1). Lord de Soulis had his come-uppance when he was boiled in lead at Ninestane Rig ([ancient-scotland.co.uk](http://ancient-scotland.co.uk)), a small stone circle still visible on a nearby hill, for dabbling in witchcraft. The Borders telephone directory reveals how many of the people today bear names of historic Border families – Kerr, Scott, Elliot, Armstrong, etc. The story of the Borders is alive and continuing.

The prominent mound upon which Roxburghe Castle stood and which provided the stage for many a romantic drama, factual and fictional, is still readily recognisable today. History tells us that a king of Scotland (James II) died there when a cannon exploded in an effort to regain the stronghold from the English, romance tells us that lovers and hostages and intrigue all played their parts in the many sieges there.

### **Threats to the landscape**

This is an outstanding cultural landscape, redolent of millennia of its history. It is accessible, visible and understandable to local people and visitors alike. It is still a living landscape continuously moulded by the people who live and work here. However there is no certainty that it will be able to continue to evolve sustainably. Some of its key features are under threat. Farmers' and landowners'

activities, in combination with public services, have maintained the landscape in modern times. But farming and landowner incomes are under severe pressure and local authority budgets have been cut. Much of the area is suffering depopulation and in particular is losing young people and their families. Some schools are closing due to small numbers. Designation as a National Park brings a number of benefits to the businesses and communities who live there, including farmers, landowners and others in need of employment, and can lead to a moderate increase of the population. The neighbouring Northumberland National Park experienced an increase of 2.9% in its population between the censuses of 2001 and 2011, against national trends in rural population (NNPA, 2015).

The benefits and possible drawbacks to designation will be explored in another note to be published on this site.

Designation of this beautiful and important cultural area as a National Park is well-merited. It would protect the landscape and help sustain socio-economic viability.

You can help to develop this discussion further. Please email your comments and information to us.

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## Possible Boundary Map

