

Moorland

Summary of Dominant Character



Figure 1: Foulstone Moor in the 'Sheffield High Peak' Character Area
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This zone marks the western edge of Sheffield and continues to the north into Barnsley, and to the west and south into Derbyshire. It falls entirely within the Dark Peak Landscape Character Area (Countryside Commission 1998 111-115) and consists of areas of “[w]ild and remote semi-natural character created by blanket bog, dwarf shrub heath and heather moorland with rough grazing and a lack of habitation” (ibid, 111). The area is linked to lower ground to the east, within the ‘Surveyed Enclosure’ and ‘Assarted Enclosure’ character zones, by areas of plantation woodland and reservoirs, as well as by steeply incised valleys or cloughs cut into the underlying gritstone geology. Over most of the zone, ground cover alternates between vast areas of blanket bog, heather moorland and rough grassland grazing. Whilst classified by the HEC project as ‘Unenclosed Land’, i.e. the majority of the area is not subdivided by internal boundary features, this area was generally subject to Parliamentary Enclosure. This process generally involved:

“the removal of communal rights, controls or ownership over a piece of land and its conversion into ‘severalty’, that is a state where the owner had sole control over its use, and of access to it.” (Kain et al 2004, 1).

The enclosure of the land for the management of game has led to vast areas of managed heather moorland. Viewed from the air, these areas display a complex mosaic pattern, produced by controlled burning in order to encourage habitats suitable for red grouse. Without this management practice, much of the high moors could be expected to develop over time into birch scrub woodland. Management for grouse shooting is also visible in the walls enclosing the edges of the moors (designed to keep people out, rather than livestock in) and in grouse butts, constructed as shooting positions (Bevan 2004, 126).

This zone has also been frequently exploited for the extraction of minerals, since at least the medieval period, leaving a number of quarry sites visible.

Inherited Character

The prehistoric landscape of the upland moors is thought to have been quite different from the heather dominated moors of today. Environmental evidence, principally taken from the analysis of pollen sequences in the region, indicates that a mosaic of woodlands, scrub and grassland developed - with open woodland cover extending even to the high moors (Bevan 2003, Chapter 2, p3), following the retreat of the ice at the end of the last Ice Age. There would have been some more open areas within the denser vegetation, resulting from natural processes of lightning strike fires, tree falls, gales and wild grazing. These areas may well have been attractive to Mesolithic hunter-gatherer populations, due to their richer ground vegetation and their attraction to important game resources such as red deer (ibid, Chapter 2, p7). Occupation of upland areas during the Mesolithic (attested to by the many find-spots of Mesolithic tools recorded on the South Yorkshire SMR) was probably part of a seasonal round with visits made to this zone at times when it was particularly rich in resources (Barnatt and Smith 2004, 12).

A significant cultural and economic horizon has been detected during the Mesolithic, represented in this area by changes in the flint toolkits being used (ibid, 12), with an increasing specialisation and localisation of tool types interpreted as indicating more restricted seasonal patterns of movement. Associated with this material change is a horizon within regional pollen sequences indicative of increased clearance of woodland, probably by fire. This has been connected to the formation of blanket bog; as trees were removed from the landscape there was a reduction in transpiration rates resulting in waterlogging of the thin soils (Bevan 2004, 32). The rate at which this blanket bog grew and the relative importance of human influence and climatic change in its development are somewhat controversial subjects. It seems likely though that the earliest areas to lose their tree cover would have been the highest points of the moors.

The introduction of domesticated species into this zone in the Neolithic is unlikely to have been accompanied by dramatic cessation of either earlier

hunting practices or seasonal patterns of movement (Bevan 2004, 33). New practices such as the deliberate keeping, breeding and droving of animals were probably integrated into an existing seasonal round. The 'rituals' of daily and annual practice appear to have transformed and domesticated the landscape over many generations rather than in a dramatic change at the beginning of the Neolithic; changes to the character of the landscape as a whole may well have been imperceptible to individual generations. In this zone, clear archaeological indicators for more sedentary lifestyles do not generally appear until the Bronze Age. Field systems, which may date to this period, and associated cairns, barrows and hut circles are recorded on the South Yorkshire SMR in this zone, although generally these are restricted to the lower altitudes. Most Bronze Age monuments in this zone occur at below 350 - 400 m AOD.

Analysis of environmental samples taken from peat deposits at Stoke Flat, just west of the South Yorkshire border (Long *et al* 1998), allow a more detailed localised picture of the environment to be developed. The field systems and monuments of Stoke Flat are comparable to others found at similar altitudes (300m AOD) on the moors, such as those in this zone to the west of the Burbage Brook. The Stoke Flat data suggests that the Bronze Age field-systems found on the eastern moors of the Peak District may have stayed in use into the 1st millennium BC (ibid, 516) in a landscape still largely characterised, at this altitude, by open woodland punctuated with small scale field systems where there was some cultivation of cereal crops. A sharp decline in the remaining woodland cover becomes apparent in the period 373 BC - 223 BC (in the Middle Iron Age). Notably, this decline in tree pollen appears to be associated with a similar decline in the microfossils indicative of cereal cultivation - instead the pollen sequences have been described as indicating the establishment of "*a more open environment dominated by moor and grassland types*" (ibid, 511). The work at Stoke Flat suggests that during a period of climatic change the direct management of the fields and woodlands of the eastern moors was abandoned, leading to increased uncontrolled grazing that consequently left the woodlands unable to regenerate in the wetter climate (ibid, 517-518).

Later Characteristics

During the medieval period the moorland landscape is likely to have been more extensive than that of today, with many areas to the east having been 'improved' by enclosing and intensively grazing areas of former rough ground (see 'Surveyed Enclosure' and 'Assarted Enclosure'). The moors on higher land continued to be an important resource for the inhabitants of the valleys below. The moors were generally seen as a resource held 'in common', meaning not that they were owned by all but that particular groups held traditional rights to graze animals and gather resources such as bracken for thatch and bedding, and heather and peat for fuel (Bevan 2004, 89). Despite these common rights, the open moors remained the legal property of individuals, meaning that property claims and rights of access could be and were open to question. A legal battle over the precise line of

the boundary between Hallam and Hathersage Moors and the ownership of the commons and cottages at Moscar (which form the western boundary of the 'Hallam and Burbage Moors' character area), beginning in 1574, is an example (Bevan 2004, 114-115). The legalities of the case dragged on for over 150 years; the boundary was eventually formalised and marked (boundary stones still a legible feature along much of its length) to the Hallamshire side of Moscar. Something of the practical importance of what may seem legal technicalities can be garnered from the protests made by 'men of Bradfield' in 1705 that demanded the restoration of their rights of common on Derwent Moors.

By the mid 19th century the management of the upland moors for grouse shooting was generally seen by landowners in Derbyshire as "a more important and profitable use of the moors than livestock pasturing" (ibid, 126). Physical manifestations of this change in management form the basis of the present character (see above).

Significant modern influences on the historic character of the zone strongly reflect the influence of the nearby presence of a large urban population in Sheffield. This population began to grow in size exponentially from the 17th century onwards (Pollard 1956, 172), creating an increasing demand for resources such as water, minerals and open space for recreation. In this zone these demands are clearly manifested in the present landscape, most notably in the upper Rivelin Valley where the Rivelin Dam Reservoirs were built around 1845. Recreational influences are most apparent in the management of the moors by the Peak District National Park, set up in 1951 in order to "conserve the character of the Peak District landscapes and to enable visitors to enjoy them" (Barnatt and Smith 2004, 136). The foundation of the National Park, the first in the UK, was in part a tacit acknowledgement of growing claims of the importance of the landscape as a specifically recreational and cultural amenity. These claims were brought to the fore in the Peak District by direct action and information raising campaigns by groups of ramblers such as the Sheffield Clarion Ramblers and the British Workers Sports Federation (Bevan 2004, 164-167), culminating in the mass trespass of Kinder Scout in 1932. Groups often based their claims of access to the moors on detailed studies of history and archaeology, helping to demonstrate a history of 'common' access in order to legitimate their contemporary claims (often fiercely resisted by landowners and tenants). A legal right of access was finally established in the 2000 Countryside and Rights of Way Act.

Present day management of the moors for recreation is undertaken hand in hand with programmes of work to manage the historic elements of the landscape. Public access (largely operated, since the establishment of the National Park, by agreement rather than legal precedent) has brought its own lasting physical changes to the landscape, notably the provision of car parking facilities, hard wearing footpaths, interpretation noticeboards and signposts - as well as more intangible and potentially temporary intrusions such as traffic, pollution, litter and vandalism.

Character Areas within this Zone

'Hallam and Burbage Moors', 'Sheffield High Peak'

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