

**Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB
Historic Landscape Characterisation Project**

**HISTORIC LANDSCAPE TYPE
DESCRIPTION:**

TYPE 2 OPEN LAND



ENGLISH HERITAGE

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Open Land in the AONB: An Introduction

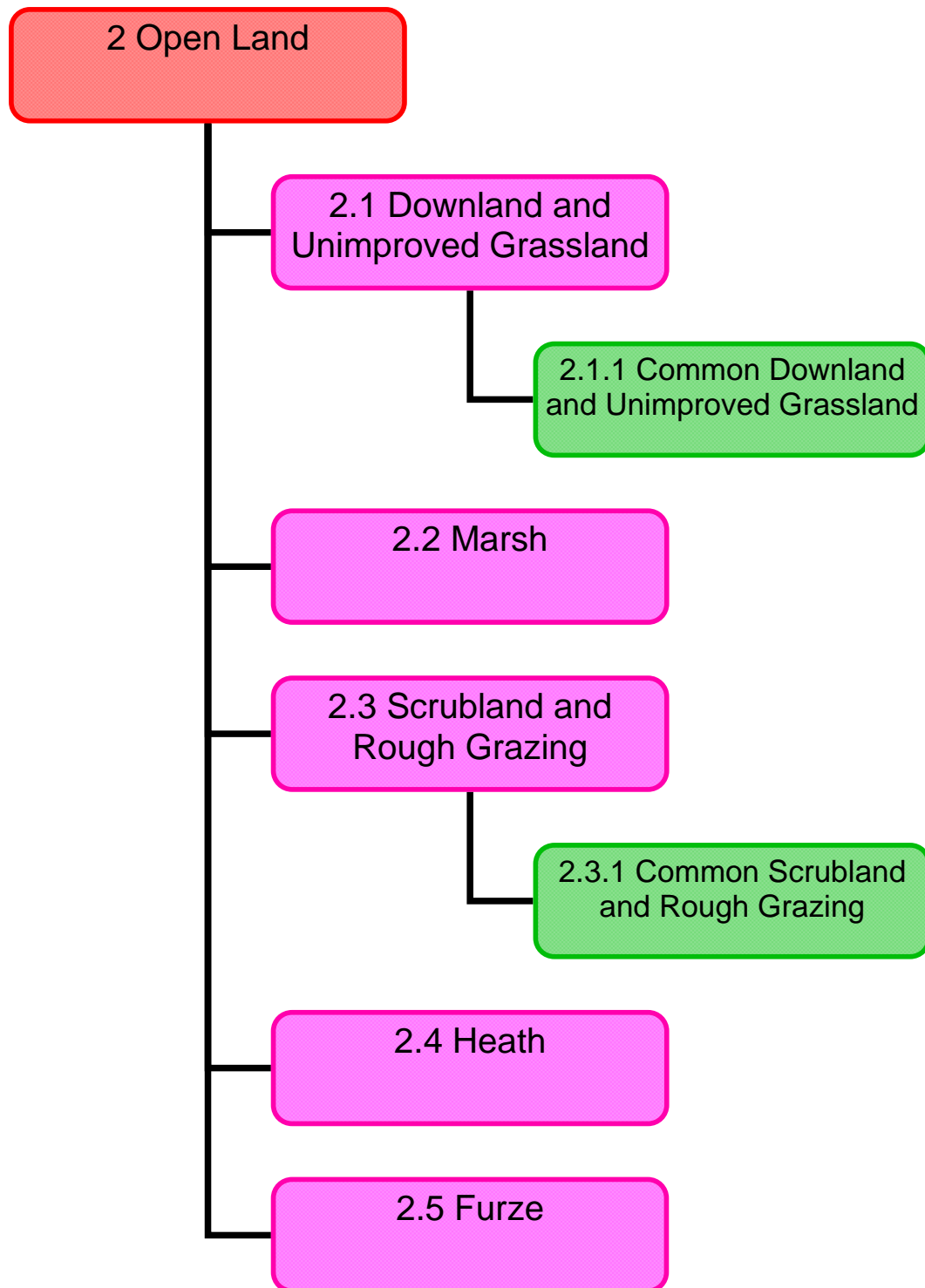
“The vast flocks of sheep, which one every where sees upon these downs, and the great number of those flocks, is a sight truly worth observation; 'tis ordinary for these flocks to contain from 3 to 5000 in a flock; and several private farmers hereabouts have two or three such flocks.”

(From Defoe. (1725) A tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain, divided into circuits or journies. G Strahan: London)

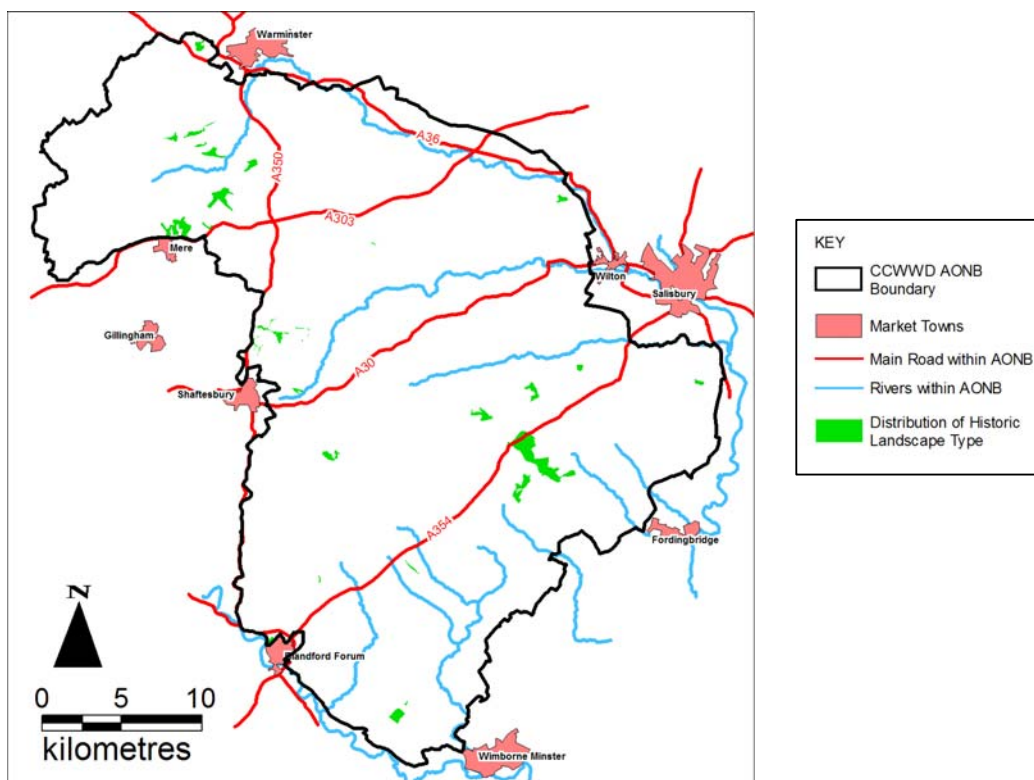
Today the open downland of the AONB is limited to small areas on the edge of escarpments, in steeped sided coombes or to nature reserves such as at Martin Down in Hampshire. However, historic ordnance maps show that as recently as 50 years ago the AONB was dominated by open downland and unimproved grassland. These high downlands were typified by vast uninterrupted vistas, lack of dwellings, few marked roads and very large flocks of sheep, all of which impressed Defoe in his travels across the area in the 18th century. The open downland, areas of rough grazing, furze and heath were all extremely important features of the landscape in the past, much of these areas were subject to common rights which gave people access to fuel, summer grazing and materials for construction. These more marginal lands were increasingly encroached upon as the land was more intensively farmed in the 19th and 20th centuries. These pressures meant that the open land in the AONB shrunk to a fraction of its former size. The locations where it is still found mark an important historical survival, therefore, which is often also of great ecological significance.



Organisation Chart illustrating nested Historic Landscape Types



Type 2 Open Land



Introduction

Surviving areas of Open Land in the AONB. These include areas of downland and unimproved grassland, scrubland and rough grazing, marsh, heath and furze. There are also remnant traces of heath land and former common land. The surviving open land only represents a fraction of the former extent of open land in the AONB, and the biggest impact of this type has been its influence on the later fields and woodland which were created from this land

Distribution

Open Land in the AONB has a very restricted distribution. There are distinct concentrations of surviving open land firstly in the area surrounding Martin Down, to the north of Mere and to the north of Shaftesbury around Semley Common. The area around Semley Common forms the only surviving common land in the AONB, and is an unusual feature in the 21st landscapes of England.

Principal Historical Processes

The surviving Open Land is present in the AONB for two reasons.

Firstly, the surviving open chalk downland represents traces of what would have once been large tracts of downland. In the 18th and 19th century this land formed a major part of the sheep/corn husbandry system of farming. Much of this land was transformed into fields in the 19th and 20th century, with only small areas remaining today.

The second process represents the survival of land, which would have been on the edge of settlements and fields in the past, and often was poor quality agricultural land such as marsh or heath. They did, however, represent an important resource in the past and much of the scrubland and rough grazing, for example, was subject to common rights. The escalating process of enclosure, culminating in the intensification of farming in the 20th century, meant that this land was increasing encroached upon until only fragments were left in the landscape.

Typical Historical/ Archaeological Components

Surviving Open Land is often irregular in shape and found on the edge of parishes, settlements or on steep or undulating ground. It is associated with a range of ground cover including furze, scrub, unimproved or short cropped grassland.



Rarity

Open Land is uncommon in the AONB and is only found in a few locations.

Survival

The surviving areas of this type only represent a fraction of the former extent of Open Land. However, former traces of this type survive fossilised within more recent land uses. These traces include the way formerly Open Land has affected the shape and morphology of more recent fields and woodland. This evidence suggests that while there is 1,095 hectares of Open Land surviving today, it previously covered an area in excess of 23,000 hectares in the early post medieval period. 15,000 hectares of this land still existed in the 19th century. Open Land was commonly found across the AONB, with the exception of parts of the Vale of Wardour, the greensand hills between Warminster and Mere, and the chalk river valleys.

Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components

The larger surviving areas of Open Land, especially in the area around Martin Down, would be recognisable to most observers. The smaller more marginal traces would probably not be recognised unless map base evidence was consulted.

Past interaction with other types

Open Land is often associated with areas of higher downland and with the edges of parishes.

Evidence for time-depth

Surviving Open Land is often associated with extant archaeological earthworks.

Contribution to the present landscape character

This type has a localised influence on the landscape character of the AONB. The surviving traces are very important as they represent fragments of a once much more widespread land use.

Key Statistics

Total Area:	1,095 hectares, 1.11 % of the AONB.
No. of Polygons:	This Subtype is comprised of 40 polygons, 0.90% of the total number of polygons digitised.
Av. Polygon Size:	Each polygon averages 27 hectares in size.
Occurrence:	Uncommon.
Previous Coverage:	24,719 hectares, 25 % of AONB was Open Land at the point when this type was at its most prevalent.
Total Recorded Coverage:	The total recorded coverage of this type is 28,286 hectares, 28 % of the AONB.

Constituent Types

[2.1 Downland and Unimproved Grassland](#)

[2.2 Marsh](#)

[2.3 Scrubland and Rough Grazing](#)

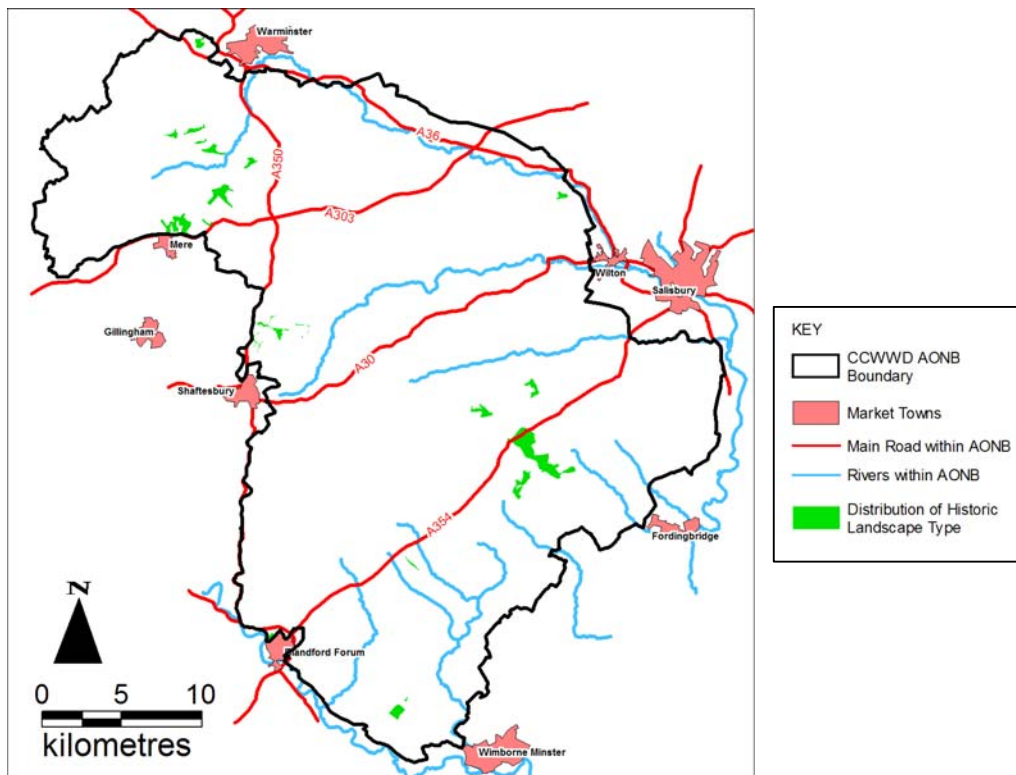
[2.4 Heath](#)

[2.5 Furze](#)

Parent Type

None

Type 2.1 Open Downland and Unimproved Grassland



Introduction

Open areas of predominantly close-cropped chalk downland.

Distribution

This type has a very restricted distribution. It occurs on the southern chalkland downland band in the AONB around Martin Down, and to the north of Mere. There is an outcrop of open chalk downland surviving at Cley Hill near Warminster but also unimproved grassland. In addition, there is a small surviving remnant of lowland unimproved grassland in the Wardour Vale around Semley Common, which forms some of the only surviving common land in the AONB.

Principal Historical Processes

The surviving areas of open chalk downland represent traces of what would have once been large belts of downland. In the 18th and 19th century this land formed a major part of the sheep/corn husbandry system of farming, that is a system of grain production made possible by the large sheep flocks which fed all day on the high open chalk downland and by night were folded on arable lands to enrich the soils. This allowed much greater yields of crops to be grown. It was the effect of the grazing of large flocks of sheep, which sometimes numbered in their 1000's, which maintained the short turf and plant rich ground cover which is so characteristic of this form of open land. The surviving areas of open downland are still used as sheep

pasture today. The small areas of surviving unimproved grassland seen in the Vale of Wardour around Semley have a different historical trajectory.

Typical Historical/ Archaeological Components

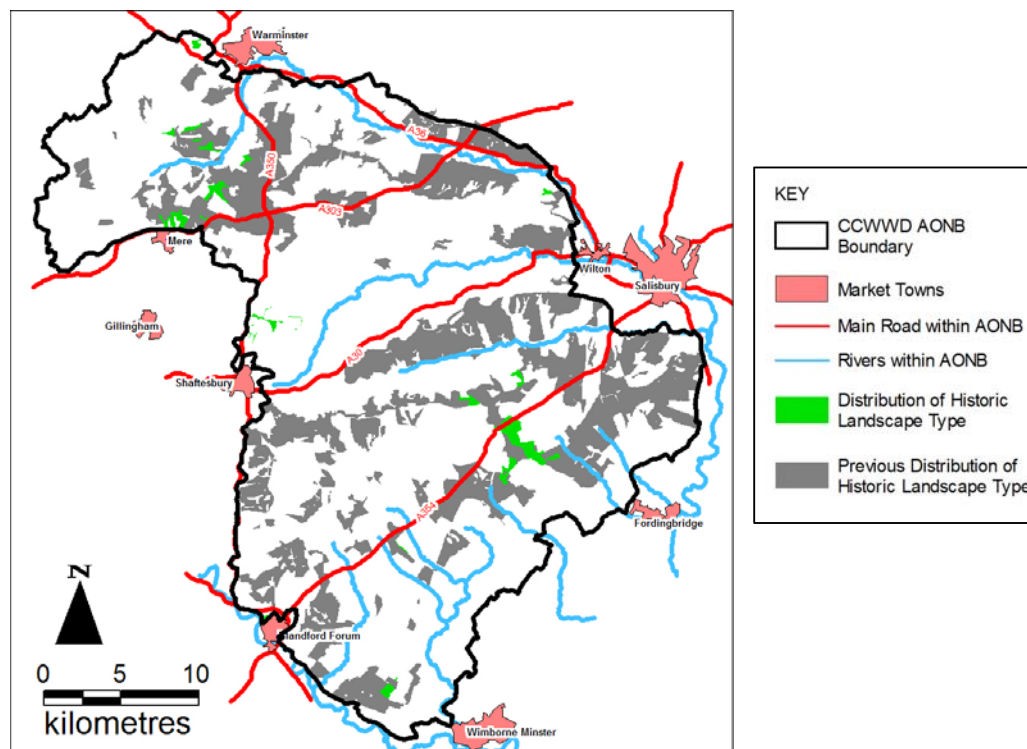
Open short cropped downland and unimproved grass. This is often associated with ancient earthworks which can be of prehistoric date. The land is also associated with small patches of scrub, gorse and open chalk track ways.



Rarity

Open downland and unimproved grassland as a group is uncommon in the AONB. However, in the two areas where it is mostly found, around Martin Down in Hampshire and along the chalk escarpments to the north of Mere, it is locally common.

Survival



The surviving open area of chalk downland only represents a fraction of the former extent of this downland. The previous evidence for past land uses recorded, which includes how former open land has affected the shape and morphology of more recent fields and place name evidence, suggests that there is 1,000 hectares of open downland and unimproved grassland surviving today (in green on the map on page 177). This previously covered an area in excess of 20,000 hectares in the early post medieval period (in grey on the map on page 177). In addition, 10,000 hectares of this survived into the early 20th century, demonstrating the dramatic effect that the intensification of farming and the creation of fields in the 20th century had on the landscape of the AONB. Much of this surviving area was transformed into large scale prairie fields at this point. Open chalk grassland was commonly found across the AONB, with the exception of the Vale of Wardour, the greensand hills between Warminster and Mere, and the chalk river valleys. Its distribution was also more broken across the wooded chalk downland of Cranborne Chase.

Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components

This type is very recognisable in the landscape, especially in the area around Martin Down.

Past interaction with other types

The type is associated with other pre 18th century types including ancient woodland, common land, open unimproved grass and ancient settlement. These all represent surviving remnants of older medieval and early post-medieval landscapes.

Evidence for time-depth

The open downland is scattered with a number of surviving earthworks, these date to all periods. These areas are also notable for the survival of prehistoric earthworks in particular due to the lack of modern ploughing, which has occurred in these areas.

Contribution to the present landscape character

This type has had a considerable influence on the landscape character of the AONB. This influence is dramatically increased when its distribution is combined with the semi-enclosed chalk escarpments which are formally fields but maintain much of their former open characteristics.

Key Statistics

Total Area:	1006 hectares, 11.9% of the AONB.
No. of Polygons:	This Subtype is comprised of 27 polygons, 0.61% of the total number of polygons digitised.
Av. Polygon Size:	Each polygon averages 37 hectares in size.
Occurrence:	Uncommon.
Previous Coverage:	22561 hectares, 22.91% of AONB was Open Downland and Unimproved Grassland at the point when this type was at its most prevalent.
Total Recorded	The total recorded coverage of this type

Coverage: is 25681 hectares, 26% of the AONB.

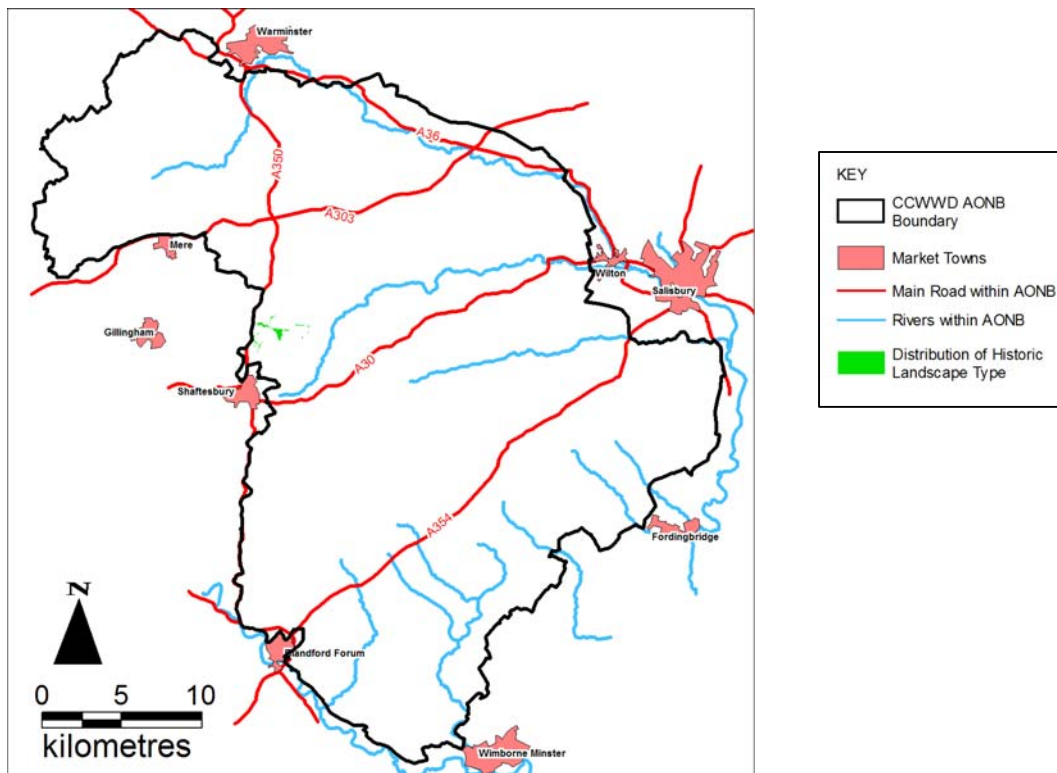
Constituent Types

None

Parent Type

[2 Open Land](#)

Type 2.1.1 Common Open Grassland and Unimproved Grassland



Introduction

Open areas of unimproved grassland which exist of zones of grassland common bordering roads which were formerly tracks.

Distribution

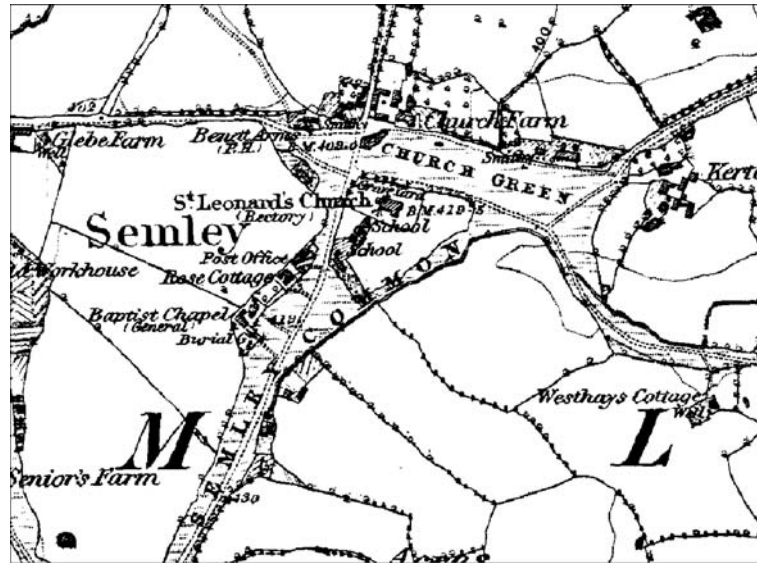
This type has a very restricted distribution. It occurs in the Vale of Wardour around Semley Common. This forms some of the only surviving common land in the AONB, and pre 1800 in date.

Principal Historical Processes

The small areas of surviving unimproved grassland noted in the Vale of Wardour around Semley represent the survival of marginal common land. The extent of former commons varies from manor to manor; they remained the property of the lord of the manor or major landowner in the areas. Their rights were constrained by long-established tenant rights, linked to particular estates and properties, generally these concentrated the rights to graze, to gather fuel, and to use material to make dwellings, hedges etc. On many of the commons the amount of grazing was strictly controlled or stinted (Muir 2000: 60). The registration documents for Semley would show which of these rights Semley Common is still subject too.

Typical Historical/Archaeological Components

Open unimproved grassland, often in widened areas beside roadsides, associated with indicative place names, often found alongside ancient route ways and on the fringes of parishes and settlements. It is often associated with earthworks dating to the prehistoric period onwards.

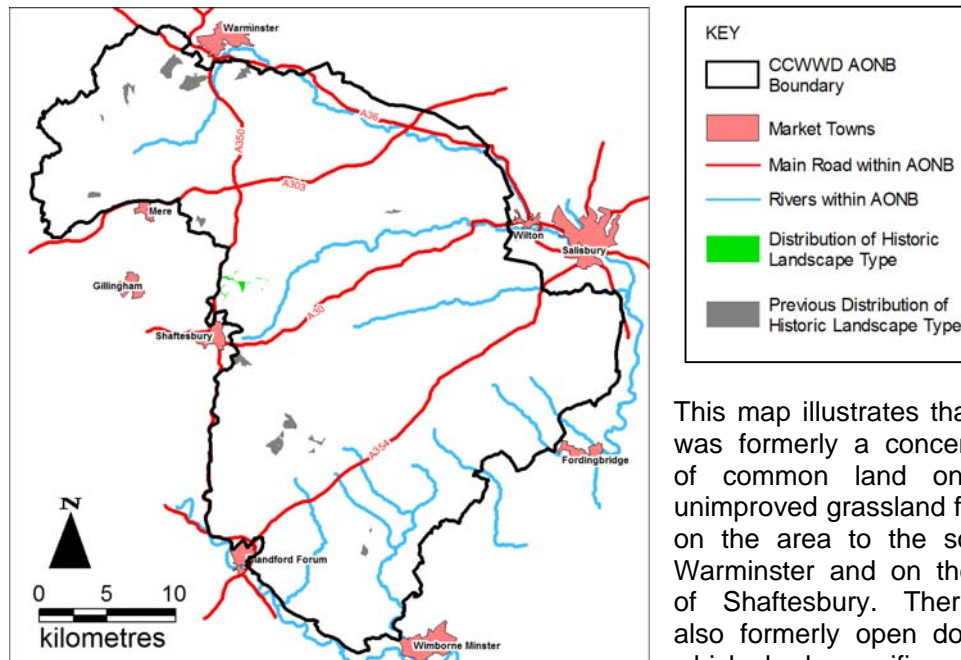


Rarity

Unimproved grassland common is very rare in the AONB and only survives in the area around Semley.

Survival

This is a very rare type, which was distributed much more widely in the AONB before the 18th century. This marginal land was increasingly encroached upon as the demand for agricultural land increased. The map below shows the former extent of this open common land (in grey) for which there is evidence surviving compared to its distribution today (in green).



This map illustrates that there was formerly a concentration of common land on open unimproved grassland focused on the area to the south of Warminster and on the edge of Shaftesbury. There was also formerly open downland which had specific common

rights attached to them, on the edges of the ancient parishes of Chettle, Tarrant Gunville and Ashmore. The majority of this common land has been identified through indicative place names. This former open land was replaced by fields by the 19th

century, and the majority had been enclosed during the early post medieval period. It still affects the morphology of fields to this day.

Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components

This type is very recognisable in the landscape; the area around Semley is unique in the AONB.

Past interaction with other types

The type is associated with other pre 18th century types including ancient woodland, ancient settlement, ancient assarts and pre 1800 fields. These all represent surviving remnants of older medieval and early post-medieval landscapes.

Evidence for time-depth

None of this open land preserves traces of previous land uses, demonstrating the antiquity of this land.

Contribution to the present landscape character

This type has a considerable influence on the landscape character of the area in which it is located.

Key Statistics

Total Area:	61 hectares, 0.06% of the AONB.
No. of Polygons:	This Subtype is comprised of 6 polygons, 0.14% of the total number of polygons digitised.
Av. Polygon Size:	Each polygon averages 10.19 hectares in size.
Occurrence:	Rare.
Previous Coverage:	736 hectares, 0.75% of AONB was Common Open Downland and Unimproved Grassland at the point when this type was at its most prevalent.
Total Recorded Coverage:	The total recorded coverage of this type is 895 hectares, 0.91% of the AONB.

Constituent Types

None

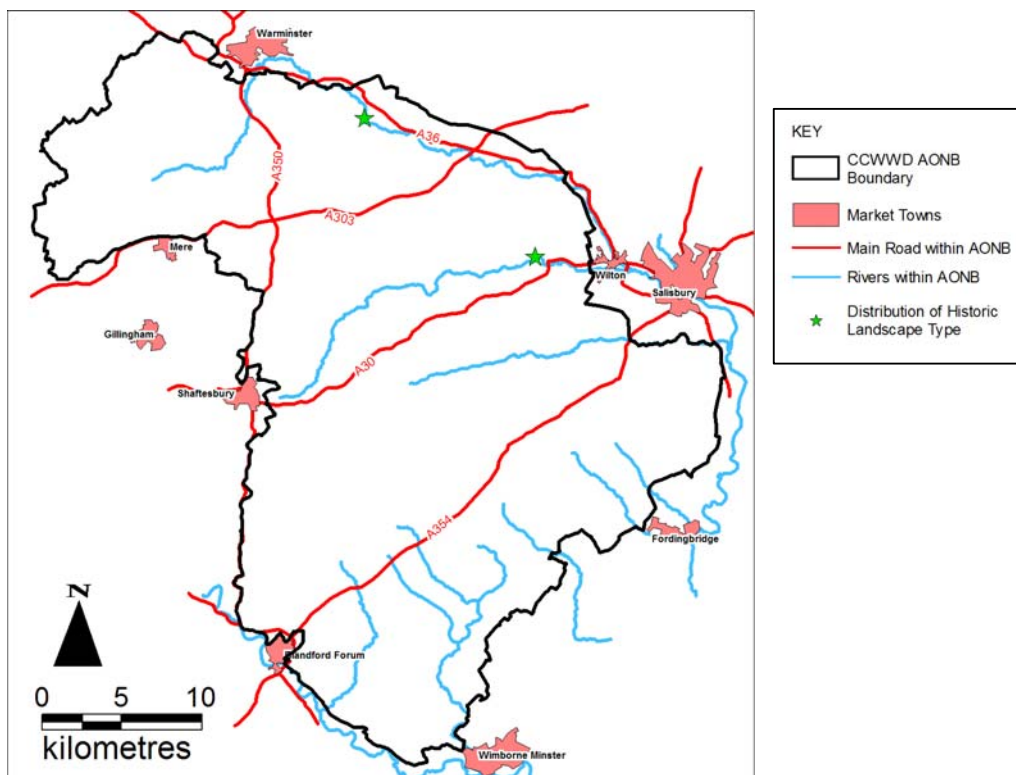
Parent Type

[2 Open Downland and Unimproved Grassland](#)

Suggested Sources

MUIR, R. (2000) The New Reading the Landscape. Fieldwork in Landscape History. Univeristy of Exeter Press: Exeter.

Type 2.2 Marsh



Introduction

Wet boggy areas unsuitable for agriculture, found in the base of valleys next to water courses. They are very small and often have been fenced off from the enclosed meadows around them. These have been identified on modern Ordnance Survey maps and historic Epoch 1 Ordnance Survey Maps. They existed in the 19th century and are probably much older in date.

Distribution

This type has a very restricted distribution. The two surviving examples exist in the Wylde and Nadder Valleys, alongside the river courses.

Principal Historical Processes

These represent areas which are so wet and marshy that it was not expedient or economic to drain them. The chalk river valleys in which they are found are, in general, well draining so they are very rare. They remain as isolated islands surrounded by a sea of valley fields and relic water meadows.

Typical Historical/Archaeological Components

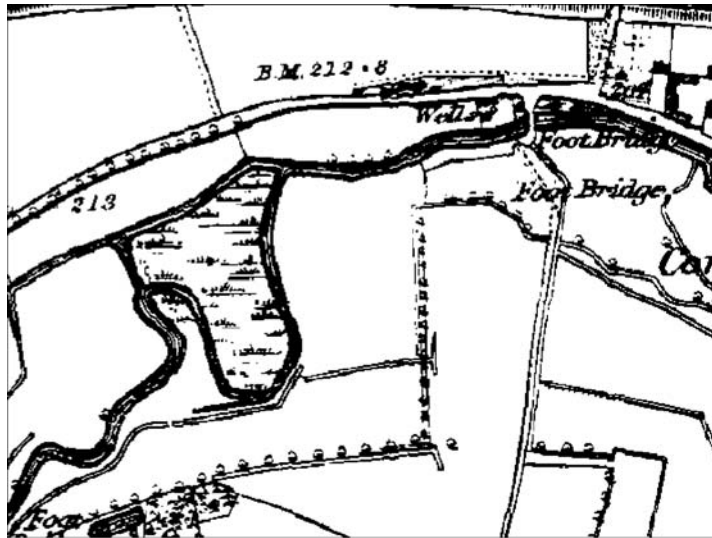
Marshy ground, often irregular in shape, associated with wet loving plant species. The land is often very overgrown, and only covers a very small area.

Rarity

Marshes are very rare in the AONB and are only found in two locations.

Survival

The surviving marshy areas were once slightly more common in the Nadder and Wylde Valleys, where the remnants of four other marshy areas survive. These traces include field names and woodland which are still very wet under foot.



Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components

These marshes would be very recognisable if you were in their vicinity, but would not be easily discernible from a distance.

Past interaction with other types

This type represents marginal land which has been isolated as the valley floors were enclosed by meadows. They were often found adjacent to water meadows.

Evidence for time-depth

The surviving areas of marsh contain no traces of any previous land uses.

Contribution to the present landscape character

This type has little influence on the landscape character of the AONB. They represent isolated and marginal areas of land.

Key Statistics

Total Area:	2.83 hectares, 0.01% of the AONB.
No. of Polygons:	This Subtype is comprised of 2 polygons, 0.05% of the total number of polygons digitised.
Av. Polygon Size:	Each polygon averages 1.42 hectares in size.
Occurrence:	Very Rare.
Previous Coverage:	7.79 hectares, 0.01% of AONB was Marsh at the point when this type was at its most prevalent.
Total Recorded Coverage:	The total recorded coverage of this type is 14.1 hectares, 0.01% of the AONB.

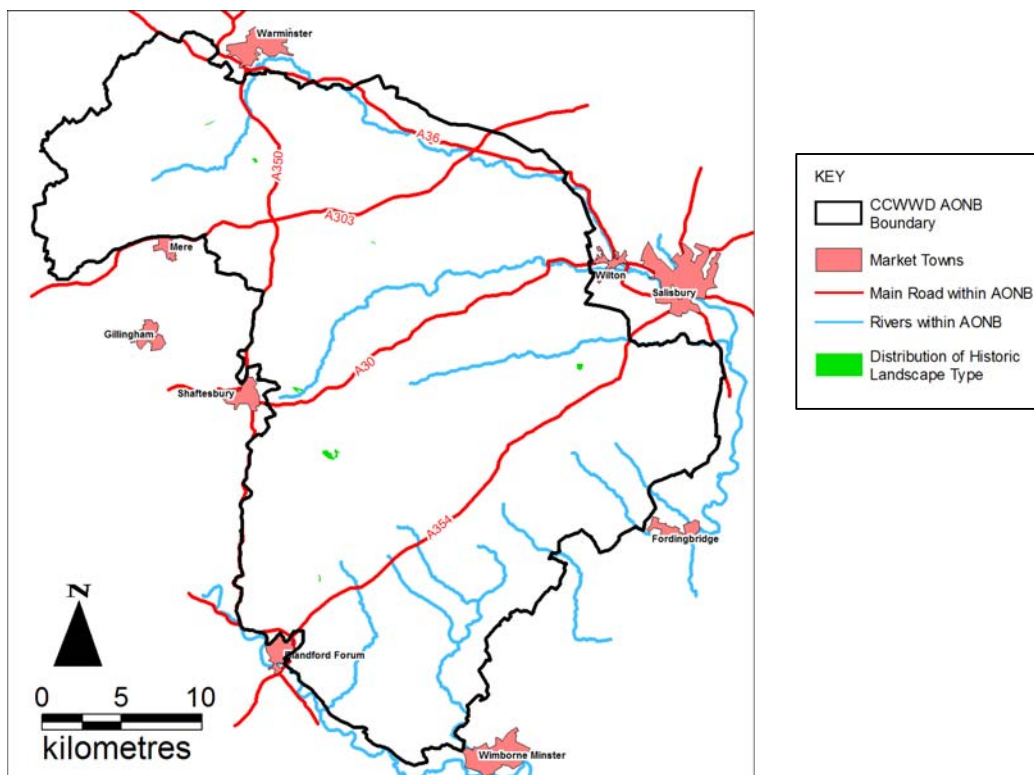
Constituent Types

None

Parent Type

[2. Open Land](#)

Type 2.3 Scrubland and Rough Grazing



Introduction

Surviving open areas of marginal scrubland and rough grazing, identified on modern day Ordnance Survey maps and aerial photographs.

Distribution

These occur across the AONB but there are slightly larger concentrations to the north of Ashmore and to the south-west of Donhead St Mary.

Principal Historical Processes

The surviving scrubland and rough grazing represent traces of what would have once been larger areas of marginal open land on the edges of settlement and fields. Approximately a fifth of this was common land with its associated rights. The majority of this marginal land was encroached upon in the 20th century and created into new fields.

Typical Historical/Archaeological Components

Rough ground often on steep or sloping ground surrounded by enclosed fields. These areas are often associated with long rough grass, and scrub.

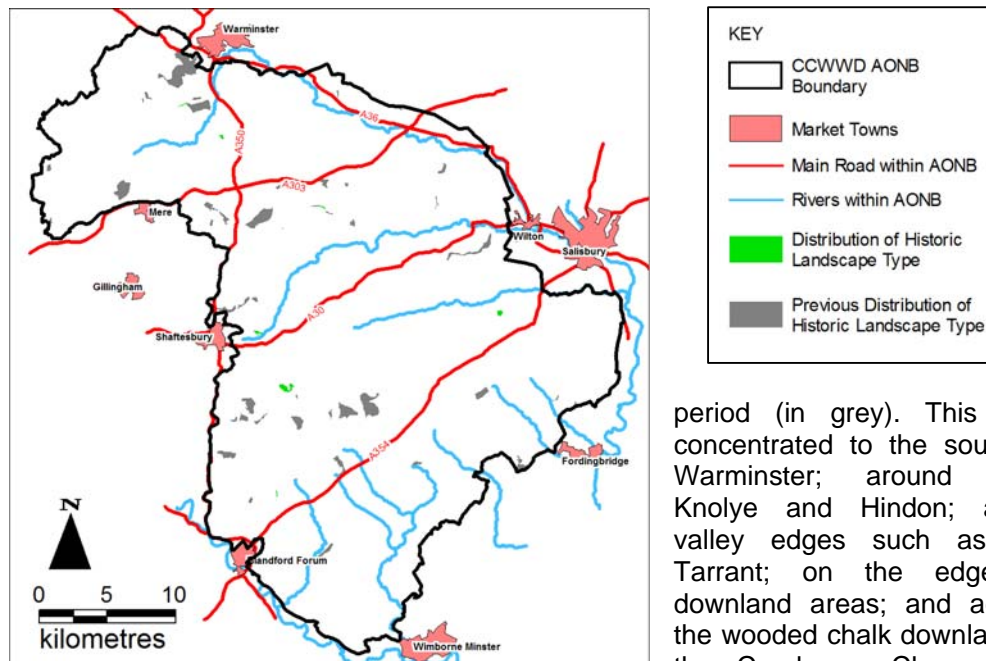
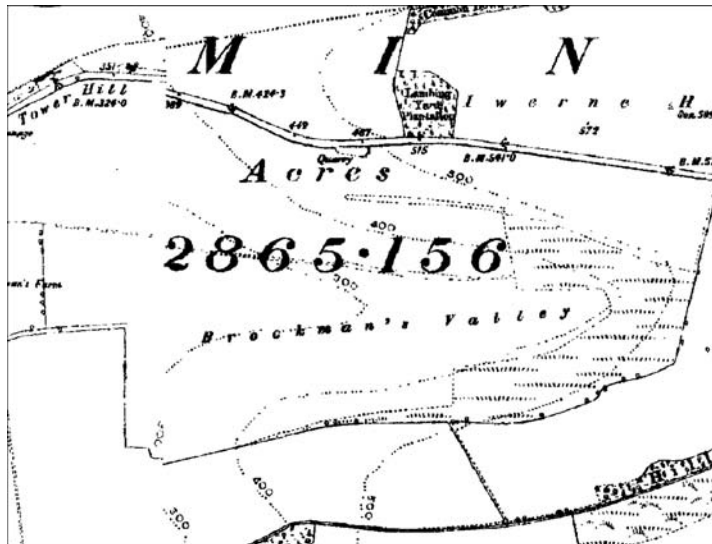
Rarity

Rough ground and scrubland is rare in the AONB and represents marginal and neglected land.

Survival

The surviving areas of scrubland and rough grazing represent a fraction of the former extent of this land type. The previous evidence for an area of land

formerly being scrubland and rough grazing includes place names evidence and how this former open land has affected the shape and morphology of more recent fields. This evidence suggests that where there is only 72 hectares of scrubland and rough grazing surviving today (in green on the map), there is evidence to suggest this previously covered an area in excess of 1,700 hectares in the early post medieval



period (in grey). This was concentrated to the south of Warminster; around East Knoyle and Hindon; along valley edges such as the Tarrant; on the edge of downland areas; and across the wooded chalk downland of the Cranborne Chase. In

addition, 1,000 hectares of this land survived into the early 20th century when the intensification of farming and the creation of fields encroached onto these surviving areas.

Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components

This type would not be very recognisable in the landscape, and only an expert familiar with the map based evidence would recognise it as a remnant of once much more wide spread land use.

Past interaction with other types

The type is associated with other pre 1800 types, including common land, and open unimproved grass and downland. These all represent surviving traces of marginal land dating to the medieval and early post-medieval landscapes.

Evidence for time-depth

A quarter of the surviving areas of scrubland and rough grazing preserve traces of having formerly been old woodland suggesting that these areas may have been cleared of woodland in the past but not subsequently turned into fields, perhaps due to their position or the quality of their soils.

Contribution to the present landscape character

This type has had small influence on the landscape character of the AONB in the present day, as it only remains in a few restricted locations.

Key Statistics

Total Area:	72 hectares, 0.01% of the AONB.
No. of Polygons:	This Subtype is comprised of 10 polygons, 0.23% of the total number of polygons digitised.
Av. Polygon Size:	Each polygon averages 7.24 hectares in size.
Occurrence:	Rare.
Previous Coverage:	1501 hectares, 1.53% of AONB was Scrubland and Rough Grazing at the point when this type was at its most prevalent.
Total Recorded Coverage:	The total recorded coverage of this type is 1769 hectares, 1.80% of the AONB.

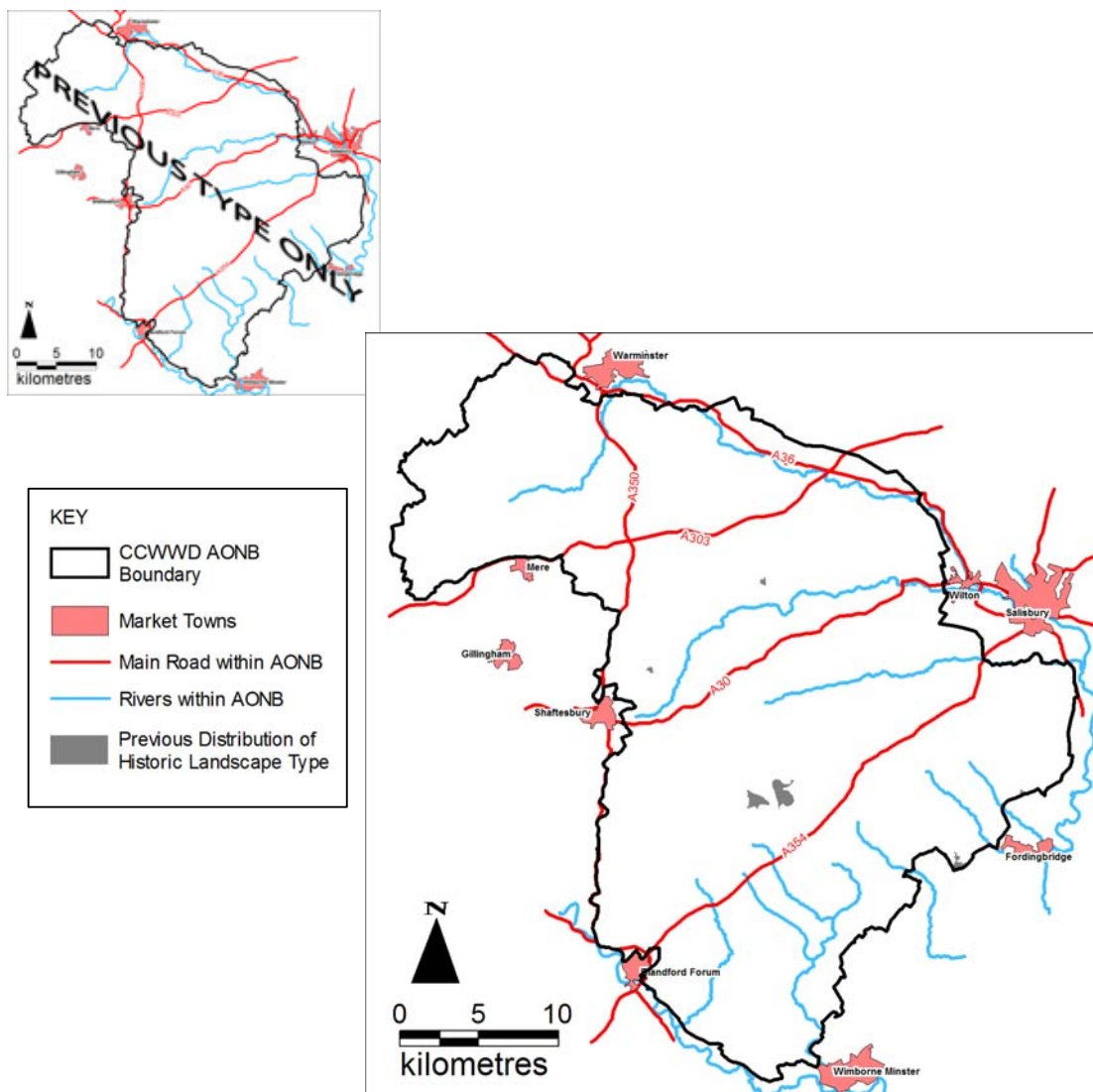
Constituent Types

None

Parent Type

[2 Open Land](#)

Type 2.3.1 Common Scrubland and Rough Grazing



Introduction

Surviving traces of areas of scrubland and rough grazing which were formally areas of common land. The traces of these survive in areas which are either 20th century fields or recent woodland, in these areas there is either place name evidence or the past land use has affected the morphology of the fields. They have been identified by comparison with historic Ordnance Survey maps. Semley Common is not included in this section as this represented a much more managed landscape, subject to regular grazing episodes, and is represented as a more closely cropped grassland on historic maps.

Distribution

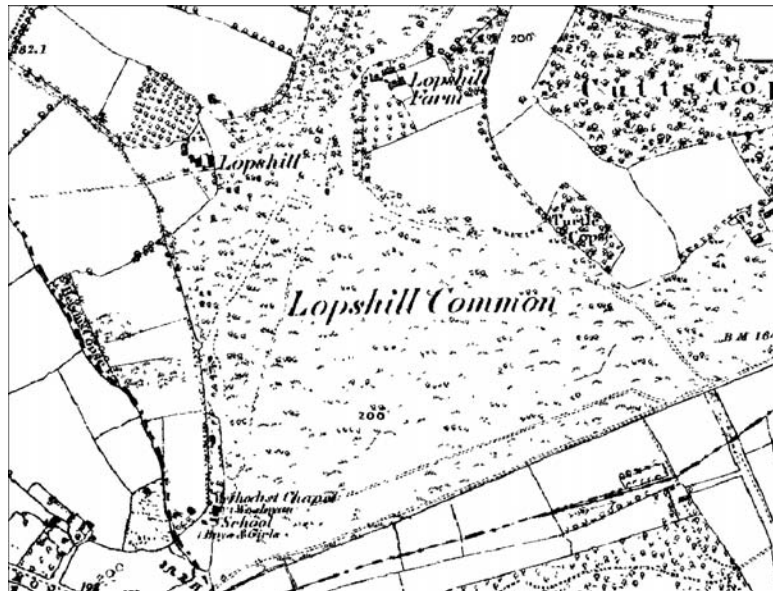
Traces for these occur in the Vale of Wardour, on the edge of the parkland at Tollard Royal and at Lopshill on the south-eastern edge of the AONB.

Principal Historical Processes

The small traces of scrubland and rough grazing noted represent the survival of marginal common land. The extent of former commons varies from manor to manor, they remained the property of the lord of the manor or major landowner in the areas. Their rights were constrained by long-established tenant rights, generally these concentrated the rights to graze, to gather fuel, and to use material to make dwellings, hedges etc. Further documentary research is needed but it is likely that the traces of this common land was previously subject to all these rights.

Typical Historical/ Archaeological Components

Traces of common scrubland and rough grazing within areas which are recent fields and woodlands. These traces include indicative place names, surviving small remnant areas of scrub and the effect on the morphologies of the more recent land uses.



Rarity

There are no surviving areas of common scrubland and rough grazing.

Survival

There are no examples of this type surviving in today's landscape. This marginal land was increasingly encroached upon as the demand for agricultural land increased or as new areas of woodland was created in the 20th century.

Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components

The traces of this previous land use would only become obvious through detailed comparison of modern and historic Ordnance Survey maps.

Past interaction with other types

The type is associated with the wider distribution of scrubland and rough grazing and other types of open land, such as downland and unimproved grass. These all represent surviving remnants of older medieval and early post-medieval landscapes.

Evidence for time-depth

N/A

Contribution to the present landscape character

This type has little recognisable impact on the landscape character of the area in which it is located.

Key Statistics

Total Area:	N/A
No. of Polygons:	N/A
Av. Polygon Size:	N/A.
Occurrence:	N/A
Previous Coverage:	312 hectares, 0.32 % of AONB was Common Scrubland and Rough Grazing at the point when this type was at its most prevalent
Total Recorded Coverage:	The total recorded coverage of this type is 312 hectares, 0.32 % of the AONB

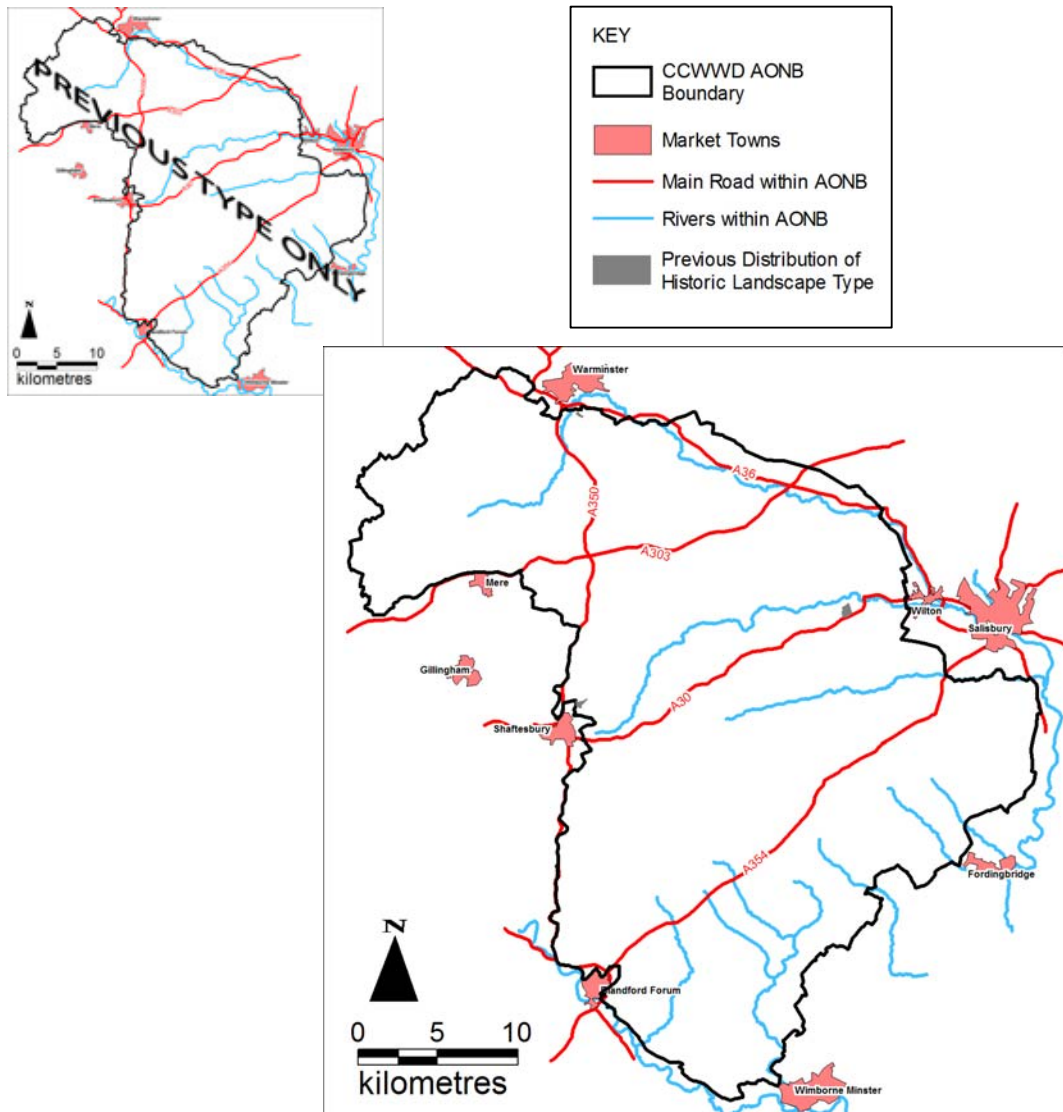
Constituent Types

None

Parent Type

[2.3 Scrubland and Rough Grazing](#)

Type 2.4 Heath



Introduction

Areas of heath land characterised by open, low growing woody vegetation found mainly in poor acidic soils. No heath land that is of sufficient scale to be recorded in this characterisation survives today in the AONB. They do, however, remain as traces in the modern landscape, mostly in the form of place name evidence. Their location has been mapped through comparison between the modern day Ordnance Survey maps and historic Epoch 1 Ordnance Survey maps.

Distribution

They have a restricted and scattered distribution. There were previously small areas of heath land in the greensand hills to the north of Longbridge Deverill, and on the greensand which is found running through the AONB between Donhead St Mary and

Longbridge Deverill. They tended to occur on higher ground and are associated with underlying greensand geology.

Principal Historical Processes

Due to their poor soils areas of heath remained as marginal and open elements in the landscape of the AONB into the 19th and early 20th century, until they were finally enclosed to form fields or small areas of woodland.

**Typical Historical/
Archaeological
Components**

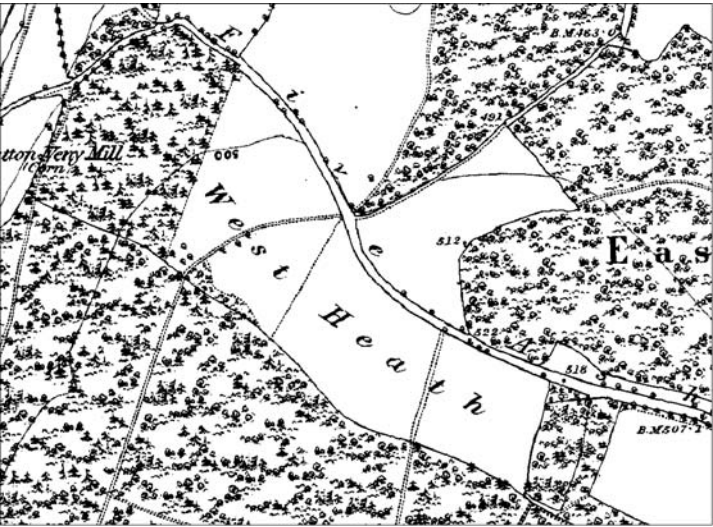
The traces of heath land in the AONB are associated with indicative place name evidence.

Rarity

N/A

Survival

No heaths survive in the AONB



Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components

The traces of heath would only be detected through an examination of the relevant map based evidence.

Past interaction with other types

This type represents marginal land which has been isolated in the landscape in the past as it was surrounded by pre 1800 fields and old woodland.

Evidence for time-depth

N/A

Contribution to the present landscape character

This type has had little influence on the landscape character of the AONB.

Key Statistics

Total Area:	N/A
No. of Polygons:	N/A
Av. Polygon Size:	N/A
Occurrence:	N/A

Previous Coverage: 74.4 hectares, 0.08 % of AONB was Heath at the point when this type was at its most prevalent.

Total Recorded Coverage: The total recorded coverage of this type is 74.4 hectares, 0.08 % of the AONB.

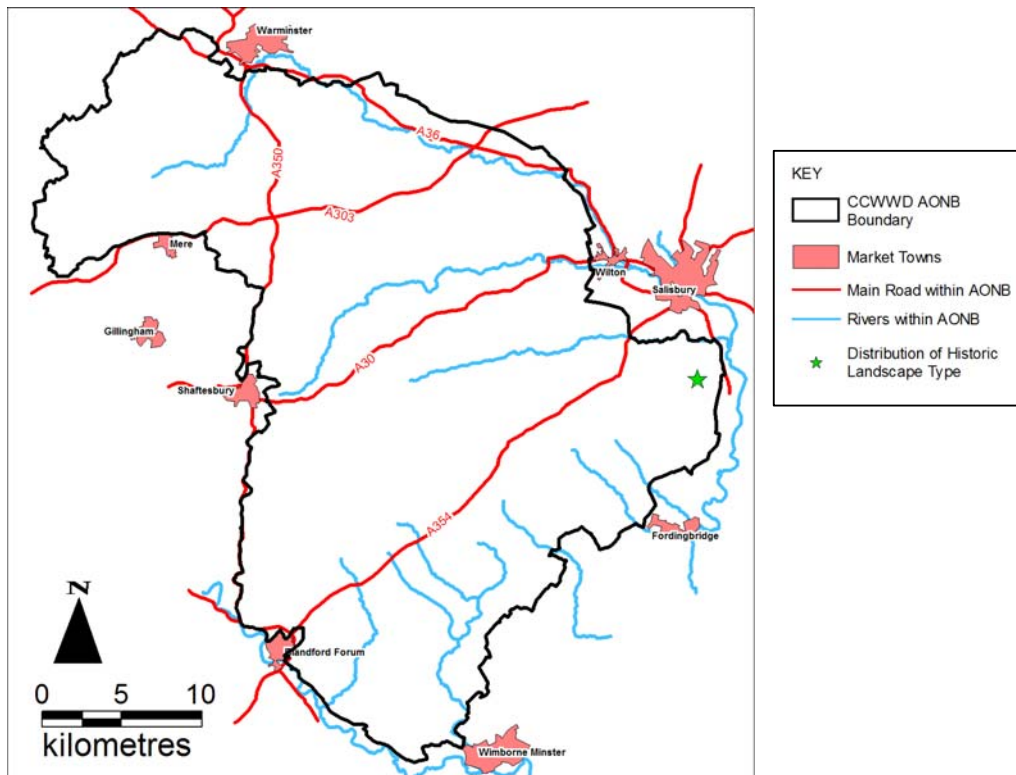
Constituent Types

None

Parent Type

[2 Open Land](#)

Type 2.5 Furze



Introduction: Defining/distinguishing Criteria

Areas of unenclosed land which are densely covered in furze (or gorse). The surviving example has been identified using modern mapping and aerial photographs. Areas which contain traces of having this land use type formerly have been identified through place name evidence and on historic Ordnance Survey maps.

Distribution

The one surviving example is found on Clearbury Down to the south of Nunton in the east of the AONB.

Principal Historical Processes

In the past areas covered with furze represented a useful natural resource in the form of fuel and fodder for animals (when crushed it can be combined with straw chaff to make animal feed). Areas of furze can also represent areas of formerly disturbed ground, indicating possible



areas of human activity in the past. Gorse also acidifies chalk downland soils making the land where they are found poor areas to cultivate.

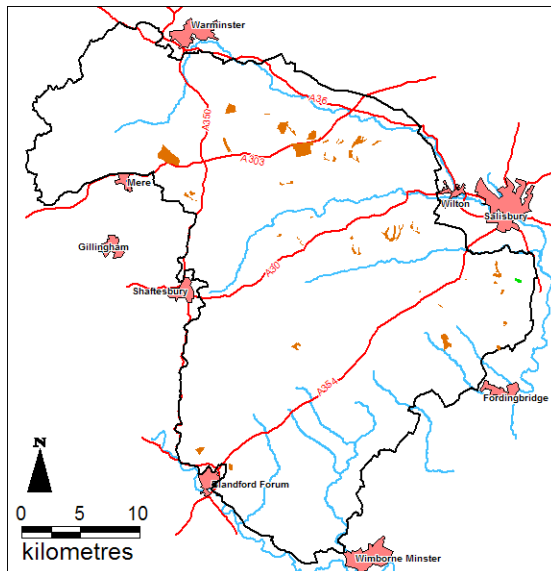
Typical Historical/Archaeological Components

Areas of furze are often irregular in shape and densely covered in gorse. The area surviving today has become fenced in through the creation of fields around it.

Rarity

Surviving areas of open ground covered in furze are rare in the AONB; the surviving element represents a fraction of the previous area over which it was found.

Survival



Traces of open areas which were once covered in furze existed across a wide area of the AONB.

The areas of orange represent places where traces of this land use still exist. This is primarily in the form of place names but is also represented by scattered clumps of gorse. Areas of furze in the past were associated with open downland and unimproved grassland. This explains for example its concentration across the West Wiltshire Downs.

Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components

These furze would be very recognisable if you were in their vicinity, but it would not be obvious that they represent a fragment of a once much more wide spread land cover.

Past interaction with other types

This type represents marginal land which has been isolated as the open downland was enclosed from the 19th century onwards.

Evidence for time-depth

The surviving areas of furze do not contain traces of any previous land uses.

Contribution to the present landscape character

This type has little influence on the landscape character of the AONB. They represent isolated and marginal areas of land.

Key Statistics

Total Area:	13 hectares, 0.01 % of the AONB
No. of Polygons:	This Subtype is comprised of 1 polygons, 0.02% of the total number of polygons digitised.
Av. Polygon Size:	Each polygon averages 13 hectares in size.
Occurrence:	Rare
Previous Coverage:	958 hectares, 0.97% of AONB was Furze at the point when this type was at its most prevalent
Total Recorded Coverage:	The total recorded coverage of this type is 1,239 hectares, 1.26% of the AONB

Constituent Types

None

Parent Type

[2 Open Land](#)

