

Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB
Historic Landscape Characterisation Project

**HISTORIC LANDSCAPE TYPE
DESCRIPTION:**

**TYPE 4 WATER AND
ASSOCIATED FEATURES**



ENGLISH HERITAGE

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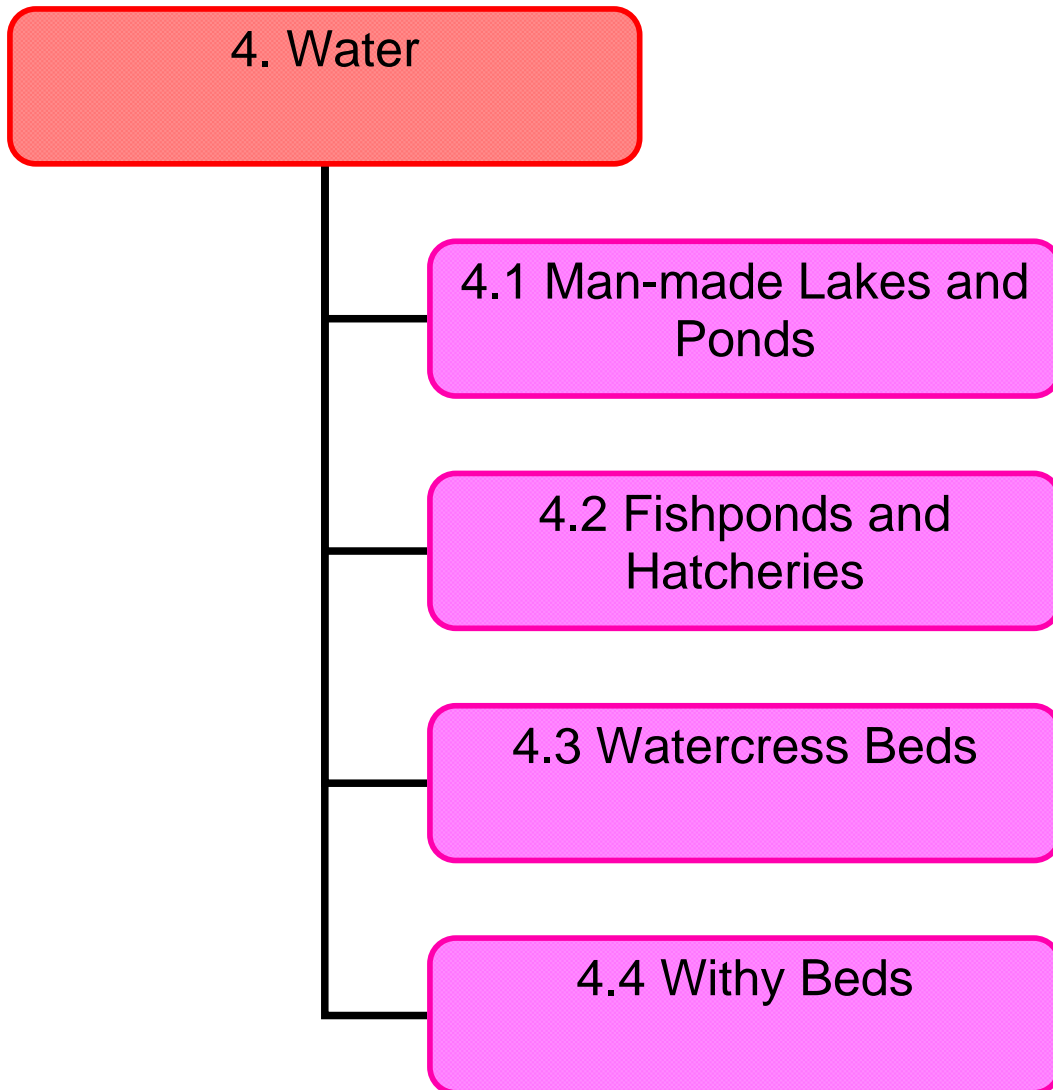
Lakes, Ponds and Water in the AONB: An Introduction

“On both flanks of the river, at Horton and in the Crichel villages, the Sturts lavished their wealth on the improvements that the eighteenth and nineteenth century favoured – the construction of large ornamental lakes, and the demolition and rebuilding of churches and rectories. The great lake at Horton covering 280 acres and more than a mile long, well stocked with carp and reputed to yield an annual catch weighing 16000 pounds, is now dry land; but the comparable lake at Crichel survives and contains a discarded rectory somewhere beneath its placid surface”

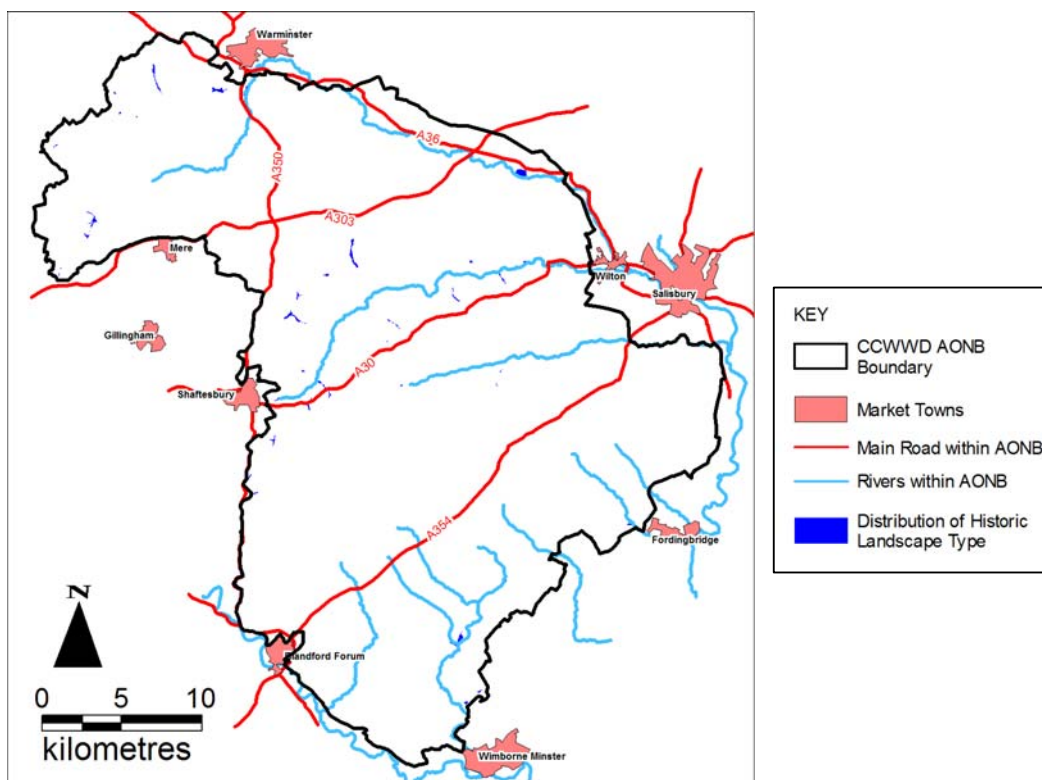
(From Hawkins, D. (1980) Cranborne Chase. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd. Pg 114)

The chalk river systems of the AONB are one of its most characteristic features. These have historically provided natural route ways through the landscape which is attested by the location of settlements which tend to snake down the valleys of the Nadder, Wylye, Ebble, Tarrant and Allan. The creation of features using water such as new lakes and ponds, and smaller scale features such as bed works for growing willow or watercress, have provided features in the landscape which have both aesthetic and economic value. These man-made constructions have the origins in the fish ponds of the medieval period. These features are still enjoyed in the modern day and have great recreational and environmental importance, whether they are found in the setting of formalised 18th century landscape parks, as an integral part of settlements, or along the lengths of the many chalk valleys found in the AONB.





Type 4 Water and Associated Features



Introduction

The chalk streams and rivers of the AONB and their associated valleys are a major feature in the landscape. The river valleys of the Wylde, Nadder, Ebble, Tarrant and Allen are exceptionally important as natural habitats and have had a major impact on human activity in the area. The dataset has not recorded the natural route of the rivers themselves, only where rivers and streams have been utilised in a variety of ways for both economic and aesthetic reasons. This includes the creation of new man-made lakes, fish ponds, and the channelling of the water into and through watercress beds and withy beds.

Watermeadows can be found in the section on [Enclosed Land in the AONB](#).

Distribution

Locations where rivers and streams have been utilised by man have a restricted distribution. These tend to cluster along the tributaries of the River Nadder and through the greensand hills. They have dispersed linear distribution in these areas.

Principal Historical Processes

The evidence that exists in today's landscape of the use of the rivers and streams for economic reasons dates back to the medieval period, or before, with the survival of fish ponds. This tradition continues in the modern day with the occurrence of more industrial scale fish farms in the landscape e.g. in the Deverills or at Damerham.

The earliest evidence of features which used the rivers and streams for the cultivation of specific plants dates to the 19th century. This includes the creation of Withered Beds for the growing of willow and new beds for the cultivation of watercress.

There is also a tradition of the creation of man-made lakes and ponds for aesthetic reasons which are linked to the formation of landscaped parks and gardens from the 18th century onwards. All of the largest bodies of water in the AONB, such as Fonthill Lake or Shear Water, owe their origins to this trend, with the exception of Langford Lakes. These form major landscape creations.

Typical Historical/Archaeological Components

These features have varying morphologies but follow natural contours in the landscape. In general the older features, such as the older fish ponds or manmade lakes are irregular in shape with sinuous morphologies, whilst more modern phenomenon, like modern fish farms or watercress beds, are much more regular in form.

Rarity

This type is scarce in the AONB, but is locally common through the Nadder Valley.

Survival

The larger features such as man-made lakes tend to have survived in the landscape while smaller scale features, such as wethered beds, have diminished in number.

Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components

The man-made lakes and ponds form major features within the specific locations where they are found.

Past interaction with other types

The type is often associated with other valley features such as water meadows; most lakes are associated with designed parks.

Evidence for time-depth

Less than 7% of this type contains evidence of previous types; these are associated with smaller features of ponds where in their environs traces of the valley bottom fields, from which they were created, survive. Some of the features have gone through several stages of use, for example, there is one fish farm which was originally created as watercress beds in the 19th century.

Contribution to the present landscape character

Features associated with water are rare in general in the AONB, although some of these, especially the man-made lakes, contribute greatly to landscape character. These types have had a greater contribution to the northern half of the AONB.



Key Statistics

Total Area:	246 hectares, 0.25% of the AONB.
No. of Polygons:	This Subtype is comprised of 60 polygons, 1.35% of the total number of polygons digitised.
Av. Polygon Size:	Each polygon averages 4.10 hectares in size.
Occurrence:	Scarce.
Previous Coverage:	246 hectares, 0.25% of the AONB was Water and Associated Features at the point when this type was at its most prevalent.
Total Recorded Coverage:	The total recorded coverage of this type is 252 hectares, 0.26% of the AONB.

Constituent Types

[4.1 Man made lakes and ponds](#)

[4.2 Fish ponds and hatcheries](#)

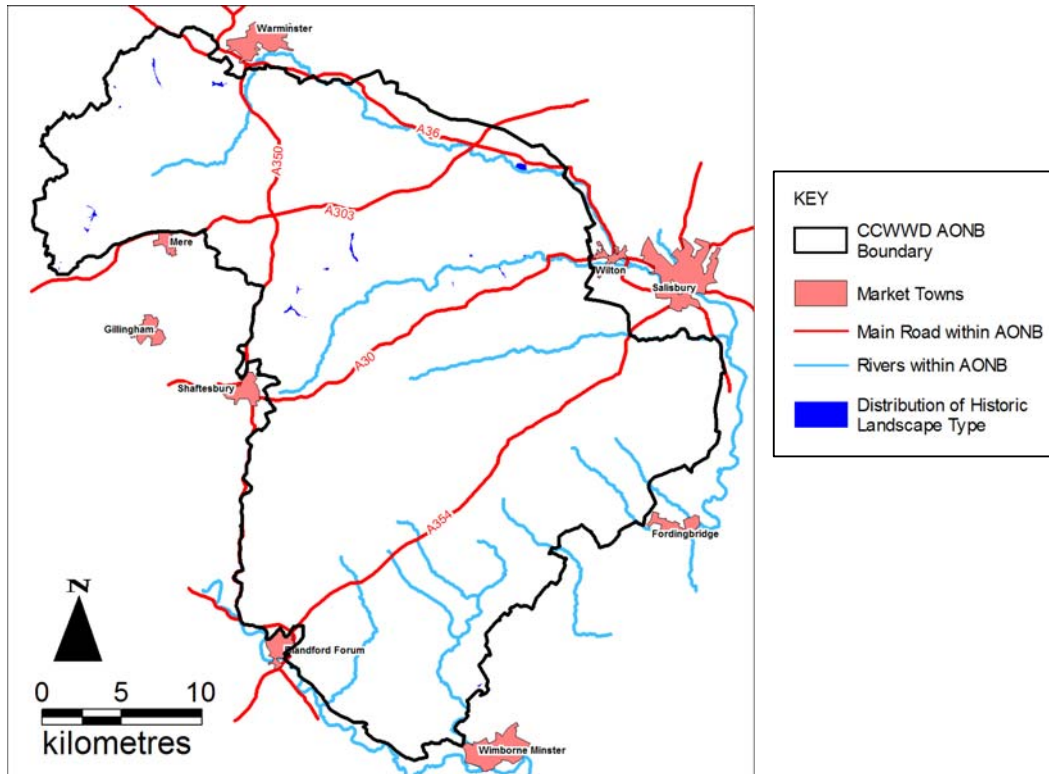
[4.3 Watercress Beds](#)

[4.4 Withy Beds](#)

Parent Type

None

Type 4.1 Man-made Lakes and Ponds



Introduction

Man-made lakes and ponds in the AONB. These have been identified on the modern day Ordnance Survey and aerial photographs and through comparison with historic Ordnance Survey mapping. In the present day they account for 153 hectares or 0.16% of the AONB. The HLC has identified 28 man-made lakes and ponds, these tend to cluster in the greensand hills, in the Vale of Wardour and in the Allen and Wylde Valleys. These do not represent all of the lakes and ponds in the AONB, only those which are at least 1 hectare in size.

Distribution

This type has a restricted distribution and tend to cluster in the greensand hills, in the Vale of Wardour and in the Wylde Valley. They tend to be in dispersed linear groupings.

Principal Historical Processes

The creation of artificial lakes and ponds dates back to the medieval period. The ornamental lakes at Wardour Castle, for example, were created from existing stepped medieval fish ponds. The majority of the lakes and ponds identified in the dataset have their origins in the creation of landscaped parks of the 18th and 19th century, although many of these no doubt have earlier origins. Impressive examples of these ornamental lakes include Fonthill Lake and the lakes at Stourhead. The latter forms the hub of the man-made landscape at Stourhead, as you progress

round the lake you are presented with a series of carefully composed views, of which the lake forms a central part.

The formal lakes within Longleat and Stourhead Parks are depicted on Andrews' and Dury's 1773 Map of Wiltshire, while Shear Water and Fonthill Lakes first appear on the Ordnance Survey 1820s surveyors maps.

Nine of the lakes recorded are 20th century in origin though many of these have been created for aesthetic reasons some have more utilitarian origins. Langford Lakes in the Wylde Valley, for example, is the result of gravel extraction.

Today many of the lakes still form a central feature in landscape parks. Many are also valued recreational assets, Shear Water, for example, is now a major fishing lake. Others, such as Langford Lakes, now form the centre of protected nature reserves.

Typical Historical/Archaeological Components

This type varies in size but tend to be thin and sinuous in their morphology, often following the natural landform/valley shape. They are often associated with features such as man-made dams, sluices and run offs, and ancillary structures such as fishing platforms, jetties and boat houses.



Rarity

This type occurs rarely in the AONB. In the immediate areas in which they are found they form key characteristics which can enhance the landscape considerably.

Survival

Created lakes and ponds tend to survive in the landscape, though it very easy for these to become quickly neglected.

Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components

This type would be very recognisable in the landscape, although the smaller ponds may be obscured by tree and scrub growth and infill by encroachment of marginal vegetation. They may also be frequently visited for recreational reasons.

Past interaction with other types

The type is often associated with historic parks and gardens.

Evidence for time-depth

None of this type preserves traces of previous land uses.

Contribution to the present landscape character

The lakes and ponds contribute greatly to the individual settings of the historic parks in which they tend to be found and have great biodiversity and recreational value. However, they do occur very rarely so their contribution to the landscape character of the AONB, as a whole, is fairly low.

Key Statistics

Total Area:	153 hectares, 0.16% of the AONB.
No. of Polygons:	This Subtype is comprised of 28 polygons, 0.63% of the total number of polygons digitised.
Av. Polygon Size:	Each polygon averages 5.49 hectares in size.
Occurrence:	Rare.
Previous Coverage:	153 hectares, 0.16% of the AONB was Man-made Lakes and Ponds at the point when this type was at its most prevalent.
Total Recorded Coverage:	The total recorded coverage of this type is 153 hectares, 0.16% of the AONB.

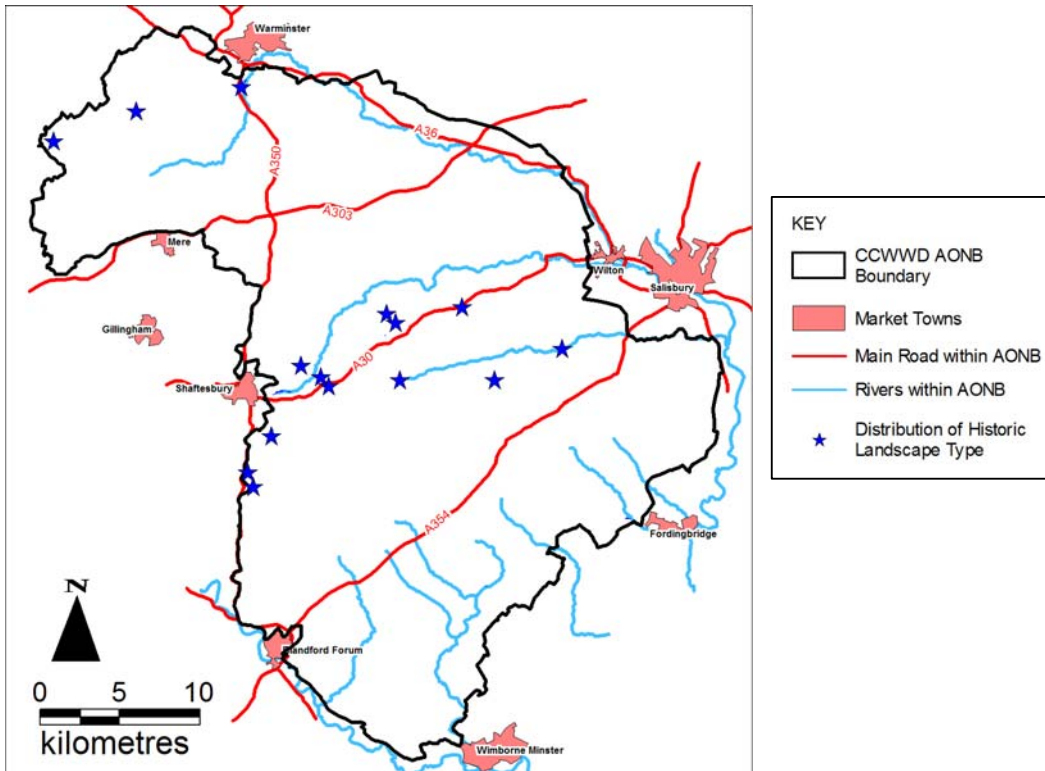
Constituent Types

None

Parent Type

[4. Water](#)

Type 4.2 Fishponds and Hatcheries



Introduction

Fishponds and Hatcheries in the AONB. These have been identified on the modern day Ordnance Survey and aerial photographs and through comparison with historic Ordnance Survey mapping. In the present day they account for 48 hectares or 0.05% of the AONB. The HLC has identified 23 ponds; these do not represent all of the fishponds in the AONB, only those that are at least 1 hectare in size.

Distribution

Fishponds have a restricted distribution. These tend to cluster in the greensand hills in the northwest AONB and around the Nadder tributaries.

Principal Historical Processes

The creation of fish ponds in the AONB dates back to the medieval period. This is especially true of those identified in the north west corner of the AONB which appear to be associated with abandoned monastic settlements, for example Witham Friary. The majority of the fish ponds are, however, 20th century in date and some of these for example at Brockington Farm near Knowlton in the southern half of the AONB, are commercial farms with formally laid out ponds.

Typical Historical/Archaeological Components

This type varies in size and shape, the older ponds are irregular in their morphology. The 20th century examples tend to be rectangular in a series of stepped stages, with

sluices in-between extending down the valleys in which they are found. The commercial ponds are often associated with ancillary buildings.



© Countryside Agency - Photographer Nick Smith 03-6886

Rarity

This type occurs rarely in the AONB but is locally common in the Vale of Wardour.

Survival

Created fish ponds tend to survive in the landscape, though it very easy for these to become quickly neglected and overgrown.

Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components

This type would be very recognisable in the landscape, although the smaller ponds may be obscured by tree and scrub growth. They may be frequently visited for recreational and commercial reasons.

Past interaction with other types

The type is often associated with other valley features, such as water cress beds and meadows.

Evidence for time-depth

Three of the examples of this type, which today are fish farms/ponds, started life in the early 20th century as watercress beds, an example being the trout farms at Bowerchalke. Three others preserve traces of the valley fields from which they were created in the form of relic boundaries.

Contribution to the present landscape character

The fish ponds and farms are scattered across the AONB so their contribution to the landscape character of the AONB as a whole is fairly low. There economic impact in a particular area may be quite high as they can attract visitors and trade.

Key Statistics

Total Area:	48 hectares, 0.05% of the AONB.
No. of Polygons:	This Subtype is comprised of 23 polygons, 0.05% of the total number of polygons digitised.
Av. Polygon Size:	Each polygon averages 2.10 hectares in size.
Occurrence:	Rare.

Previous Coverage: 48 hectares, 0.05% of the AONB was Fish Ponds and Hatcheries at the point when this type was at its most prevalent.

Total Recorded Coverage: The total recorded coverage of this type is 48 hectares, 0.05% of the AONB.

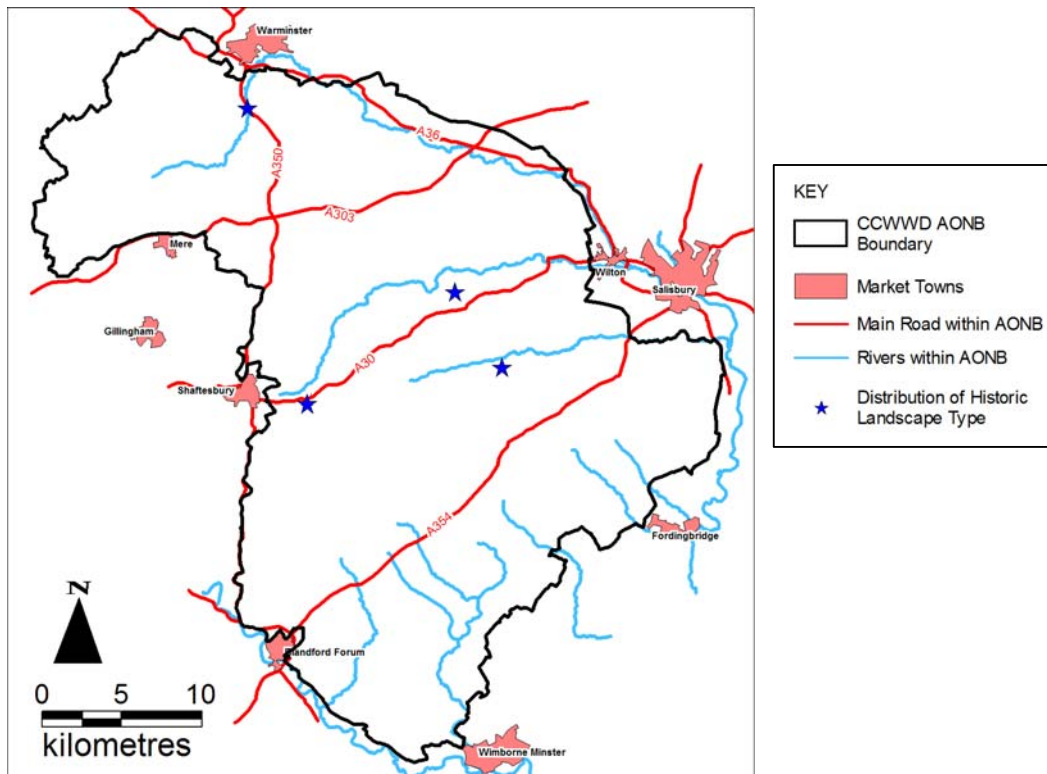
Constituent Types

None

Parent Type

[4. Water](#)

Type 4.3 Watercress Beds



Introduction: Defining/distinguishing Criteria

Watercress beds in the AONB. These have been identified on the modern day Ordnance Survey and aerial photographs and through comparison with historic Ordnance Survey mapping. In the present day they account for 16 hectares or 0.02% of the AONB. The HLC has identified 7 potential watercress beds.

Distribution

These have a restricted distribution and are found on the River Wylde, the River Ebbel, and in the Nadder Valley, and around the Nadder tributaries.

Principal Historical Processes

Watercress beds first appear at the beginning the 19th century. The first British watercress farm was opened in 1808 by William Bradbury at Springhead in Northfleet, near Gravesend in Kent. The heyday of Watercress production was the 19th century and there is one bed recorded in the AONB that is still in use that can be dated with certainty to this period, at Gurston Meadow in Bowerchalke. Since this period Watercress production has decreased. There are, however, 6 watercress beds in operation in the AONB today; three others have been converted into fish ponds.

Typical Historical/Archaeological Components

Watercress is grown in specially constructed beds and thrives in slightly alkaline water. This type is consistently associated, therefore, with groups of small rectangular beds and associated ancillary buildings at the head of chalk streams



© Countryside Agency - Photographer Nick Smith 02-8052

Rarity

This type occurs rarely in the AONB.

Survival

Watercress beds have slowly been diminishing in number since the 19th century. Their survival is linked to the economic viability of producing and selling the product.

Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components

This type would be very recognisable in the landscape; the beds required for the cultivation of watercress are a specialist, very distinctive, creation.

Past interaction with other types

The type is often associated with other valley features, such as fish ponds and meadows.

Evidence for time-depth

Three of the examples of this type exist only as previous types, being fish farms today which have used and reorganised the beds that were originally created, an example being the trout farms at Bowerchalke. One watercress bed preserves traces of the valley fields from which they were created, in the form of relic boundaries.

Contribution to the present landscape character

The watercress beds are rare in the AONB so their contribution to the landscape character of the AONB as a whole is fairly low. However, their economic impact in a particular area may be quite high as they can attract visitors and trade.

Key Statistics

Total Area:	16 hectares, 0.02% of the AONB.
No. of Polygons:	This Subtype is comprised of 7 polygons, 0.16% of the total number of polygons digitised.
Av. Polygon Size:	Each polygon averages 2.29 hectares in size.

Occurrence: Rare

Previous Coverage: 16 hectares, 0.02% of the AONB was Watercress Beds at the point when this type was at its most prevalent.

Total Recorded Coverage: The total recorded coverage of this type is 16 hectares, 0.02% of the AONB.

Constituent Types

None

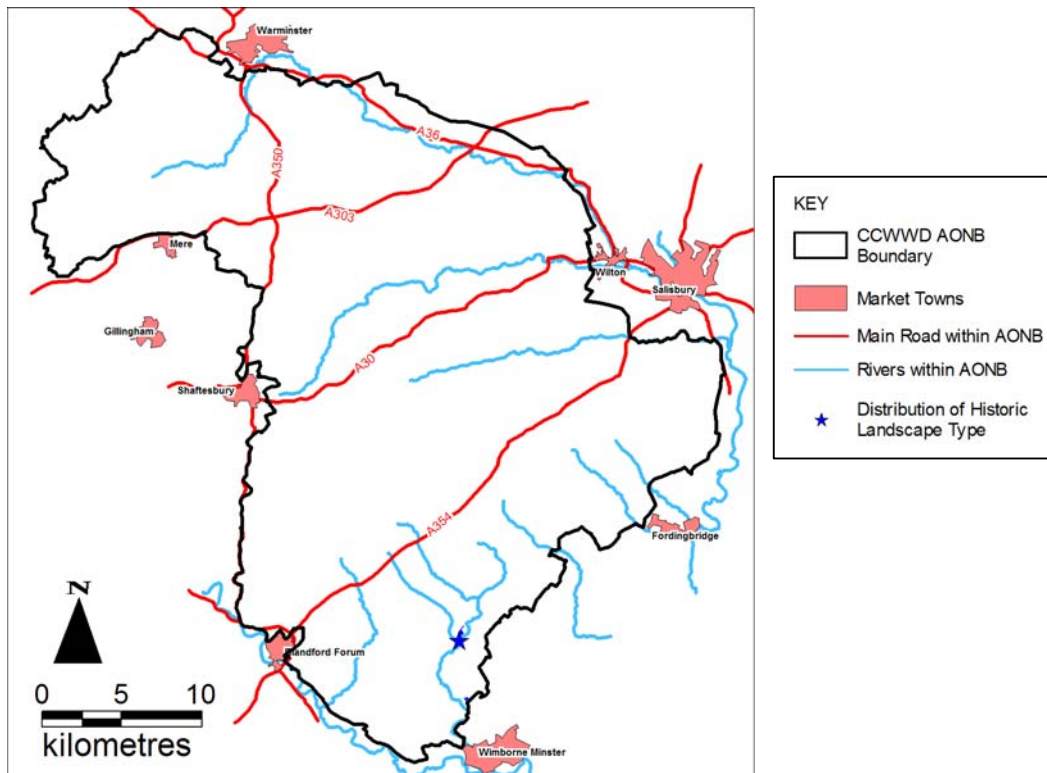
Parent Type

[4. Water](#)

Suggested Sources

<http://www.watercress.co.uk> [accessed last on the 23rd April 2008]

Type 4.4 Wither Beds



Introduction

Wither Beds in which rows of willow are purposefully grown and managed in the AONB. These have been identified on the modern day Ordnance Survey and aerial photographs and through comparison with historic Ordnance Survey mapping. In the present day they account for 2 hectares or 0.03% of the AONB.

Distribution

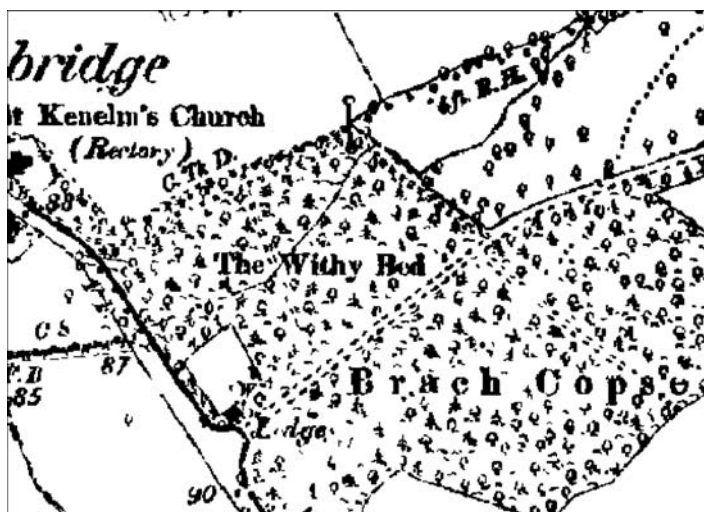
The HLC has identified two potential wither beds; these are found on the River Allen in the southern half of the AONB. They were once much more numerous and several other examples exist as previous types in the dataset.

Principal Historical Processes

The earliest evidence for wither beds in the AONB dates to the 19th century. Willow is planted in wither beds in rows and is cut as rods and wands for weaving and/or basket making every one or two years. The beds are found in low-lying locations as they need a constant water supply. This explains the location of these beds on valleys floor. This method of growing willow is extremely productive. The beds have been identified primarily through place name evidence. Other examples in valleys may not have been recorded as they would not have been distinguished from other natural river side tree and scrub cover.

Typical Historical/ Archaeological Components

The surviving withy beds are irregular in shape and are associated with man-made channels to facilitate their irrigation. They tend to be in disuse and to be associated with more mixed tree cover today



Rarity

This type occurs rarely in the AONB and has a low impact on the landscape.

Survival

Withy Beds have slowly been diminishing in number since the 19th century. Their survival is linked to the economic viability of producing willow. They require regular cutting and retain their distinctive form and productivity.

Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components

This type would not be very recognisable in the landscape; as the beds are in a much degraded state.

Past interaction with other types

The type is often associated with other valley features, such as water meadows, with which they appear to have shared water channels in the past.

Evidence for time-depth

Two of the examples of this type exist only as previous types, as today they are 20th century modern woodland which has replaced the willow. None of the existing relic beds preserves traces of previous uses.

Contribution to the present landscape character

The Withy Beds are rare in the AONB so their contribution to the landscape character of the AONB as a whole is fairly low, especially due to their degraded character.

Key Statistics

Total Area:	28 hectares, 0.03% 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 13.95 hectares in size.

Occurrence: Rare

Previous Coverage: 32 hectares, 0.03% of the AONB was Withy Beds at the point when this type was at its most prevalent.

Total Recorded Coverage: The total recorded coverage of this type is 34 hectares, 0.03% of the AONB.

Constituent Types

None

Parent Type

[4. Water](#)

