

South West Peak

National Character Area 53

The South West Peak is an area of upland and associated foothills in the south-west part of the Pennines. It is bounded by the distinctly different character areas of the White Peak to the east and the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain to the west. To the north it blends into the rest of the Dark Peak and the Manchester Pennine Fringe. There are no major settlements within the area which extends between Whaley Bridge and the outskirts of Macclesfield, Leek and Buxton. 2% of the area is urban and almost 6% is woodland. Over 65% of the area lies within the Peak District National Park.

SUMMARY

HISTORIC CHARACTER

- A very high density of dispersed settlement, most farmsteads being on medieval to 17th century sites and relating to fields enclosed from woodland or on a piecemeal basis over the same period. Nucleated villages are concentrated to the south-east adjoining the White Peak, where isolated farmsteads relate to more-recent phases of enclosure.
- Predominant pattern of linear farmsteads, some originating as medieval-16th century longhouses and others developing as parallel or L-shaped plans with later cow houses, cartsheds and stables.
- Small-scale courtyard plans, and dispersed plans which developed within the anciently-enclosed landscapes and on routeways to the moors, are another distinctive feature.

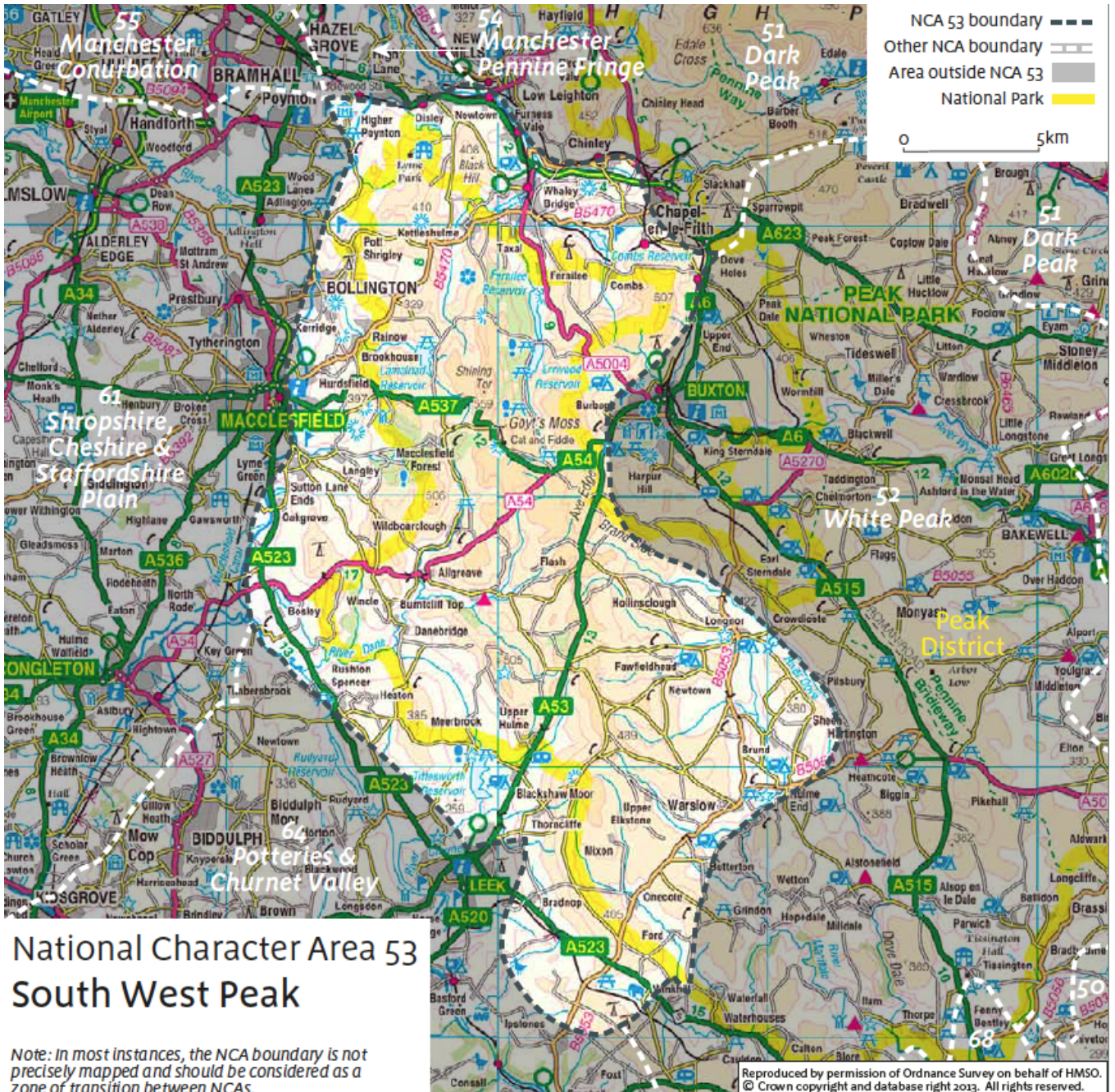
SIGNIFICANCE

- There is an exceptionally high survival of traditional farmsteads as in many of the other northern England uplands and upland fringes. The mapping of farmsteads in Staffordshire and the Peak District has recorded very high rates of survival of traditional farmsteads, with 83% recorded from late 19th century maps retaining more than half of their historic footprint.
- This significance is heightened by the fact that the farmsteads and working buildings, including their field barns, sit within a landscape which retains visible evidence for land use and settlement from the prehistoric period.
- Farmsteads and smallholdings that have a clear relationship with surviving areas of common land are significant.
- Working buildings with 18th century and earlier fabric. These are most likely to comprise threshing and combination barns, cattle housing of this date being of exceptional rarity.

PRESENT AND FUTURE ISSUES

- The rate of redundancy for traditional farm buildings has accelerated in recent years, as in other upland and upland fringe areas of England, due to the replacement of stalling by loose housing and the replacement of hay production by mechanised bulk handling.
- The West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscape

Project showed that the area (that part in Staffordshire) has a low economic mass and a high proportion of farmsteads remaining in agricultural use (45%) with relatively high diversification of farm business (numbers of holiday homes substantially exceeding regional expectations) but both relatively low residential use (51%) and relatively low participation in business.

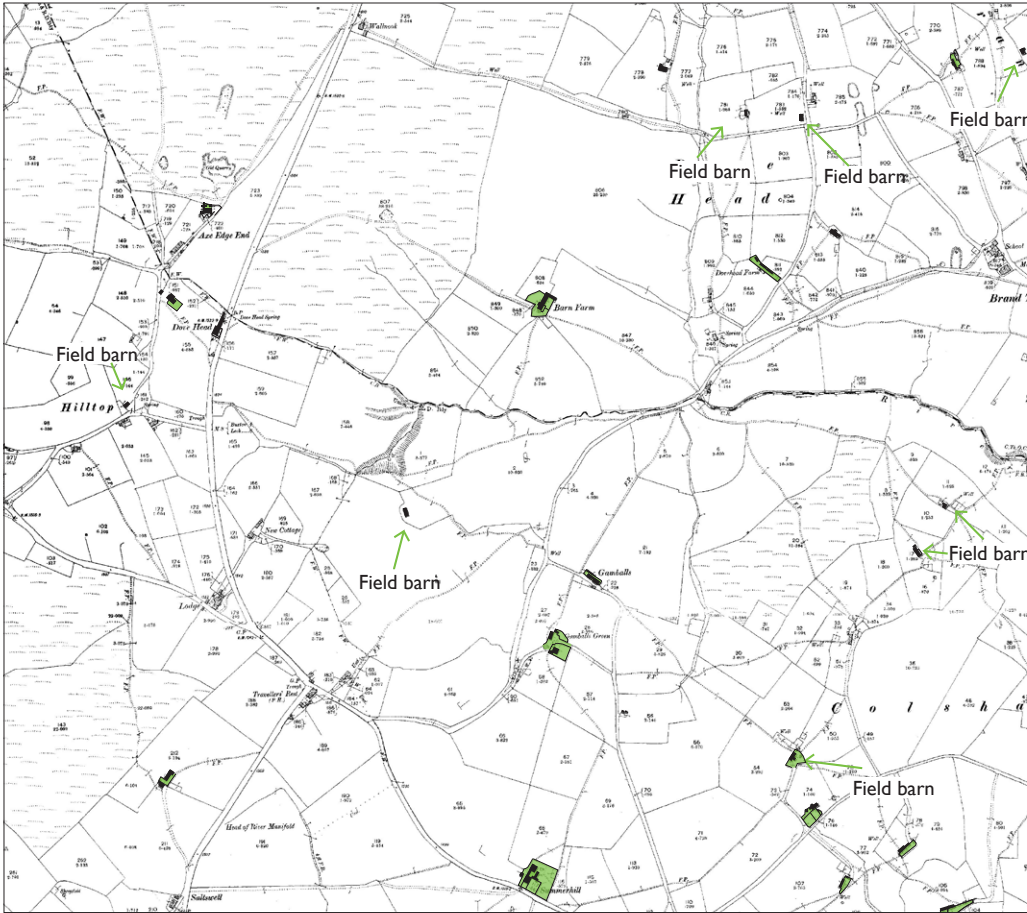


This map shows the South West Peak, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

- The Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a medium proportion in this National Character Area of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (21.4%, the national average being 32%).
- This reflects more restrictive policies for the area within the National Park. The sample was too small to determine the figures for structural disrepair. However, National Park designation has enabled the funding of maintenance and repair through the agri-environment schemes.


HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

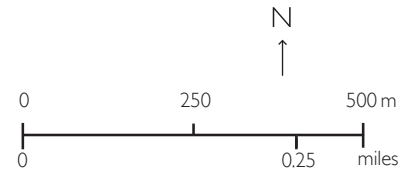
- The moors result from the clearance of the native upland forests from the Mesolithic and then Neolithic periods to provide hunting and grazing land. They have for centuries been utilised by surrounding communities for summer grazing, with peat, heather and bracken cut for fuel, bedding, roofing and fodder.
- Ecclesiastical and secular estates worked stock farms in the medieval period, and extensive areas were later managed by substantial landowners such as the Dukes of Devonshire and the Earls of Derby.
- Sheep farming, with the wool market at Macclesfield, developed as a key element of the agricultural economy, combined with cattle rearing, dairying and small-scale arable farming. The area (like other parts of the south Pennines further north) exported to the urban and industrial markets of Lancashire, east Cheshire and the Potteries, and in the 18th and 19th centuries increased productivity was enabled by the enclosure of substantial areas of moorland that had formerly served as communal grazing.
- Coal mining, from the medieval period to the early 20th century, was concentrated in the Flash and Goyt's Moss area: it was often combined with part-time farming.
- Copper was also worked from the medieval period, production peaking in the later 18th century.



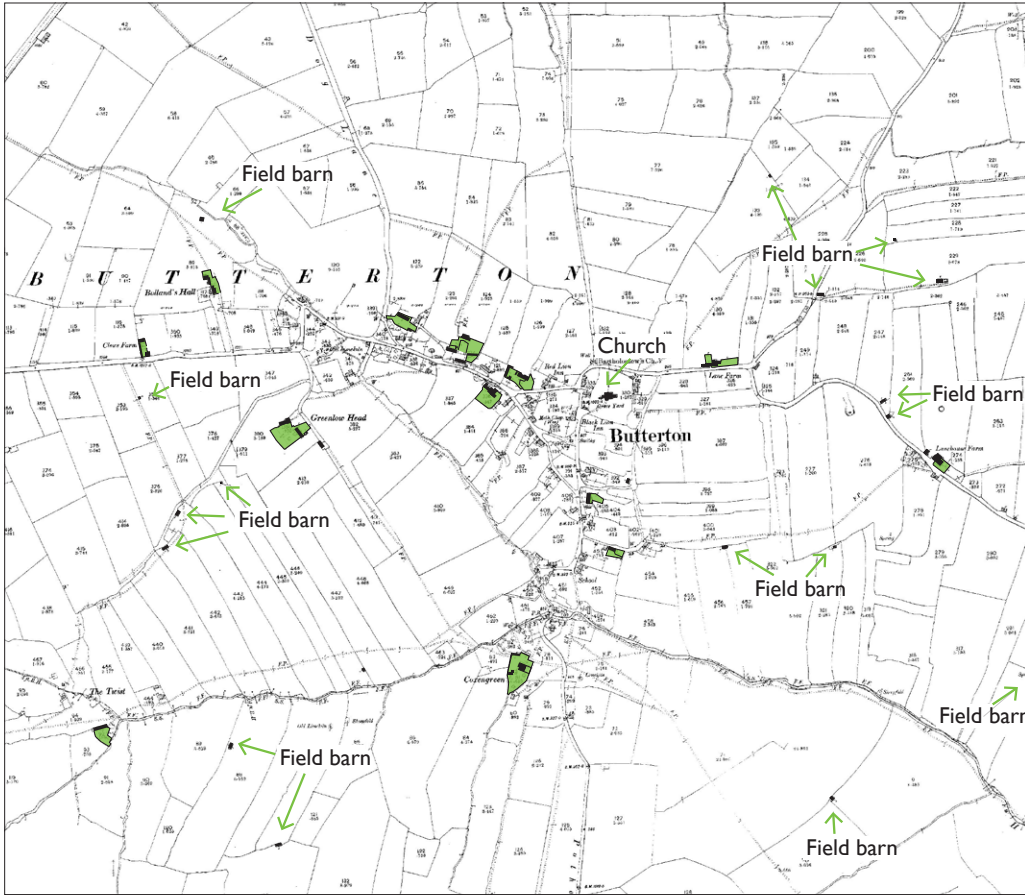
Dovehead

This reflects the largely dispersed settlement found across most of this area, with farmsteads and hamlets dating from the medieval period scattered across the landscape. In this area, settlement and fields have pushed out into the moorland and small areas of common, in tandem with a long process of piecemeal enclosure. This resulted in small irregular fields although some later enclosure may be identified by their straight boundaries. The farmsteads of this area are typically small in scale - many have linear and L-plans with the farmhouses attached to the working buildings or small loose courtyards. Field barns are also a feature of this landscape.

 Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.




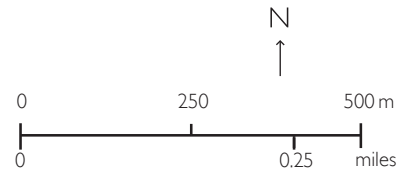
Moorland stands as a backdrop to a field barn and farmstead to the south of the area. Photo © Bob Edwards



Butterton

Butterton is a classic example of a nucleated village found in the south of this area. It is surrounded by the fossilised strips of its former open fields with more regular fields of enclosure from the common to the north-west. Apart from one or two farms, most of the farmsteads remained in the village core although by late 19th century the number of farms had dropped to five medium-sized farmsteads and numerous field barns had been constructed within the enclosed fields.

 Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT

- The area is characterised by a very high degree of dispersed settlement. There is a high density of isolated farmsteads, many of them in clusters or hamlets developing from medieval stock farms.
- Predominant irregular and semi-regular enclosure pattern, the result of medieval-17th century woodland clearance and intakes from the moor. There is some evidence for oval enclosures to medieval and earlier ring-fenced farms.
- Regular and large-scale enclosures associated with late 18th/19th century enclosure of the open moor and common hill pasture, found in patches throughout but concentrated to the south of the area.
- Nucleated villages are concentrated to the south-east, where farmsteads expanded within villages or were built on new sites in newly-enclosed land.
- Evidence of Medieval open field farming survives in small areas (e.g. around Warslow) where later boundaries perpetuate the broad outline of the long cultivation strips associated with valley settlements.

FARMSTEAD AND BUILDING TYPES

The present predominant pattern of stone and slate farmsteads results mainly from rebuilding in the 18th and 19th centuries. Earlier cores date back to the late 17th century but very rarely before.

Farmstead types

Predominant pattern of linear farmsteads, some originating as medieval-16th century longhouses and others developing as parallel or L-shaped plans with later barns, cow houses, cartsheds and stables.

- High numbers of small loose courtyard farmsteads with buildings to one or two sides of a yard, larger examples being uncommon.
- Dispersed clusters and, to a lesser degree, dispersed driftway and dispersed multi-yard plans are found across the area. These reflect their long development as sites for holding livestock en route to rough upland pastures and also into richer lowland areas for fattening.
- Regular plan farmsteads are, with the exception of L-plan layouts which are common, and a small number of U-plans found in the southern part of the area, almost entirely absent from the character area. This suggests little involvement by estates in landscape-scale improvement.

Building types

- Some rare surviving three- or four-bay cruck-framed barns of 15th to 17th century date survive. These are part of a group extending southwards from the South Pennines, and which survive on smaller farms or in barns retained as small working buildings on larger farms.
- Combination barns, occasionally dating from the 17th century but mostly of late 18th or 19th century date, either with a wide range of functions (threshing barn, cow housing, stabling, hay lofts) or comprising threshing barns with a full-height central threshing floor flanked by lofted bays for animal housing

at either end and external openings for pitching hay. These include a small number of bank barns, built into slopes and which are concentrated in south-west and north-west England. Blocked threshing bays indicate the move from arable to animal housing.

- Cow houses of 18th and 19th century date, including a small number with inscribed pre-1750 dates. These are typically two-storey ranges with lofts over cow houses.
- Stables are rarely built as free-standing buildings, and cartsheds are usually modest in scale and often attached to or built within a combination barn.
- Field barns with hay lofts above cow stalling and larger outfarms are typical features.

MATERIALS AND DETAIL

- Gritstone is the predominant traditional building material with some red sandstone used in the west. Heavy stone lintels over doors and windows (sometimes dated) and stone jambs to doorways are common.
- Brick was used in the 19th century on the western and southern edges of the area. Remnants of generally 16th century or earlier timber frame – the latter often surviving as cruck-framed buildings with later stone infill.
- Stone slate (gritstone) roofs and plain tile or Welsh slate roofs of 19th century date. Staffordshire blue tiles particularly seen in the west of the area.
- The use of mono-pitch roofs is common for smaller, ancillary buildings.



The relatively large scale of the farmhouse and combination barn, in comparison to the lower ancillary buildings of the steading, is typical of farmsteads in this area. Note the field barns to the rear. Photo © Bob Edwards

LOOSE COURTYARD PLANS



A loose courtyard group with ranges of two-storey cattle housing and combination barns to two sides of the yard. Photo © Bob Edwards

LINEAR PLANS



This linear arrangement of a house with a small cowhouse is typical of many smallholdings in the area. Photo © Bob Edwards

COMBINATION BARN



A large combination range, mainly cattle housing with a loft above but with full height crop storage in the end bay marked by the ventilation slits in the right gable end. Photo © Bob Edwards

COWHOUSING



A storeyed cowhouse of the early to mid 19th century later extended with a single-storey range. Photo © Bob Edwards

GRANARY



Steps to an upper floor granary and wool loft in the gable end of a combination barn. Photo © Bob Edwards

FURTHER READING

This document is part of the Peak District Historic Farmsteads Guidance [www.PeakDistrict.gov.uk] which includes:

- A *Peak District Farmsteads Character Statement* which provides illustrated guidance on the character and significance of the area's traditional farmsteads and buildings.
- A *Farmsteads Assessment Framework* to help owners and applicants consider the potential for change of traditional farmsteads and their buildings before any application for planning, and to inform any scheme as it develops.
- *Farmstead and Landscape Statements* for the other National Character Areas in the Peak District.
- The *Peak District Farmsteads and Landscapes Project Report* which summarises the results of mapping the historic character, survival and date of farmsteads across the Peak District National Park.

The West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project, led by English Heritage (now Historic England), has also mapped the historic character, survival and use of farmsteads across the whole region. For the Summary Report of 2009 see <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/west-midlands-farmsteads-landscapes/>

This document has been written by Jeremy Lake, formerly of Historic England, and Bob Edwards of Forum Heritage Services with contributions from Ken Smith, recently retired Cultural Heritage Manager from the Peak District National Park Authority. Ordnance Survey maps are 2nd edition maps of c.1900, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England. © and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2017).

For more on the National Character Areas see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles>

