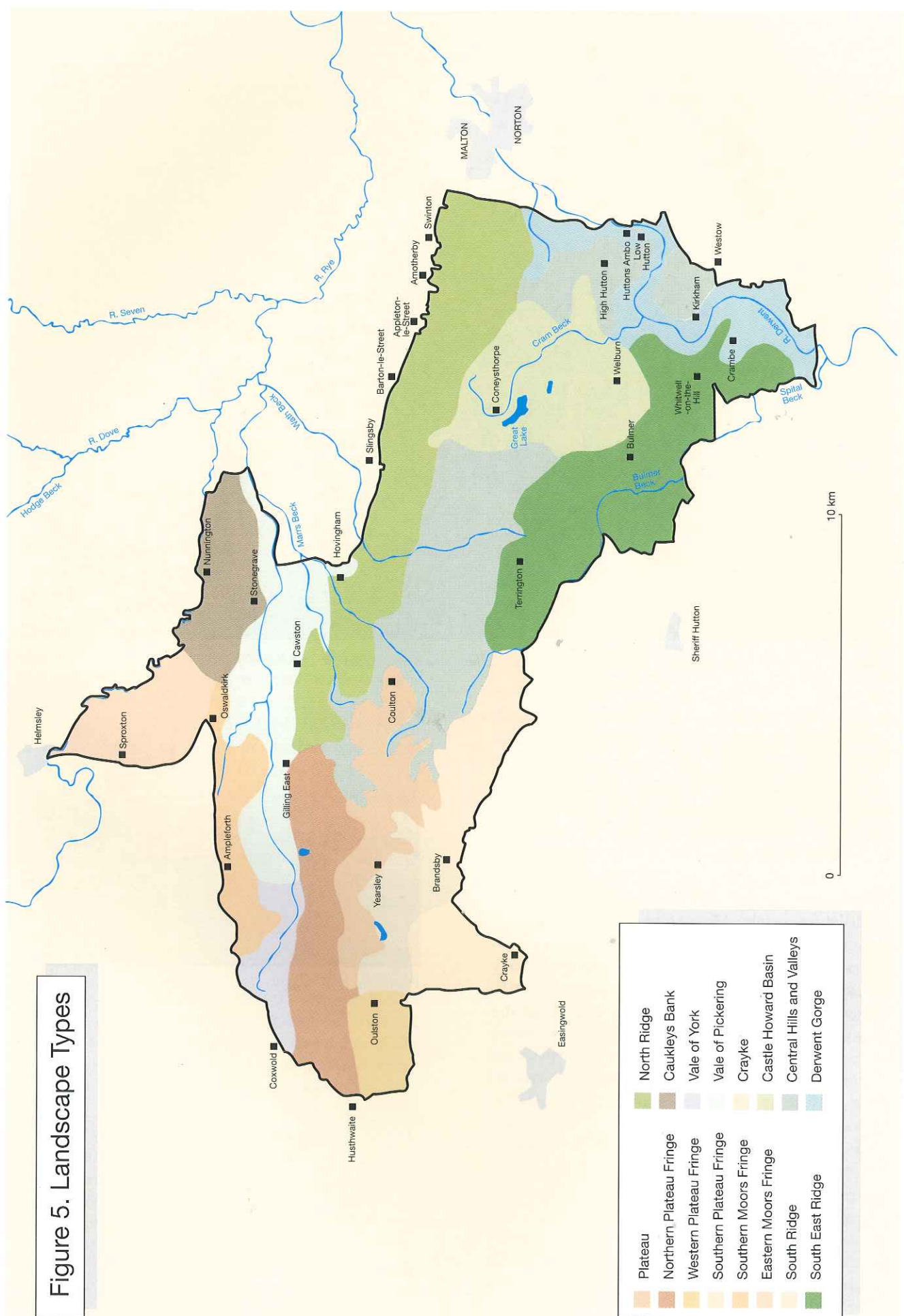


Figure 5. Landscape Types



3. VARIATIONS IN LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A sense of place

In assessing the character of the Howardian Hills today, it has been helpful to consider the landscape from several perspectives. Primarily we have looked upon it as a scenic resource, and hence its visual character is described in some detail. However, we recognise that the many features of nature conservation, historical or architectural interest already described also contribute to the natural beauty and the unique 'sense of place' that is the Howardian Hills.

The Howardian Hills have a strong unity of visual character, not least because they are physically separated from the surrounding countryside, but also because there are a number of common characteristics binding the landscape together. The strongest of these is the dominance of woodland, which seems to form a green web across the whole area. The open sweeping views from the ridge tops and the quiet intimacy of the enclosed valleys are experiences that constantly recur while travelling through the area. And the sheer complexity of the landcover, with its rich patchwork of crops, pastures, woods, trees and hedgerows is another consistent quality across most of the area.

Despite these common characteristics, there are also considerable variations in scenic character across the AONB, and an understanding of these variations is essential as a basis for future landscape conservation and enhancement. Differences in landscape character reflect many factors but in the Howardian Hills it is primarily topography that distinguishes one area from another, although the extent of woodland cover, the dominant land-uses and the influence of the designed landscapes have an important part to play. In simple terms, the landscape can be divided into seven broad areas of distinctive character (Figure 5):

- the elevated **plateau** landscape, which forms the central core of high ground in the western part of the AONB;
- the **upland fringes**, which form the transition from the higher ground of the plateau or, in the north of the AONB, from the boundary of the North York Moors National Park, to the vales below;
- the prominent landform **ridges**, with characteristically pronounced, often wooded scarp and dip slopes, which define the main block of hills to the north and south, and form the prominent Caulkleys Bank;
- the **vales**, which divide this main block of hills from the fringes of the Hambleton Hills to the north and the Crayke outlier to the south;

- the **Castle Howard basin**, which is distinguished both by landform and its formal landcover;
- the **central hills and valleys**, which extend eastward from the high ground in a distinctive but complex pattern of undulating, heavily wooded ground within the centre of the AONB and overlooked by the ridges;
- and finally and unmistakably, the dramatic landscape of the **Derwent Gorge** (or Kirkham Gorge), a distinct landform unit.

Within each of these areas there are local variations in character, described in more detail below.

The plateau landscape

The western half of the Howardian Hills contains the highest point within the AONB, Whinney Cross Hill at 172 m, which forms a core area of high ground between Oulston and Coulton, generally lying above 150 m. This flat or gently undulating plateau is dissected to the north and south by a number of broad valleys, and is dominated by large, uniform blocks of conifer woodland which interrupt long views and often spill over into adjoining valleys. Nevertheless, the plateau retains the distinctively elevated and exposed feel typical of 'upland' landscapes. Indeed, historical evidence suggests that large parts of the plateau were formerly heathland or moor and small fragments of heathland vegetation survive on the fringes of some plantations.

Beyond the large plantations, the landscape is characterised by a mix of improved pasture and arable farmland with a generally open character. Medium-sized fields are bounded in places by drystone walls which reinforce the upland character and are more or less unique to this part of the AONB. They are often in



Away from the large forestry plantations, the plateau landscape has a distinctively open, exposed character.

poor repair, however, and post and rail fences and close-trimmed or remnant hedges are now more common types of field boundary, with very few hedgerow trees. Settlement is generally sparse and is concentrated in the two small, linear villages of Yearsley and Coulton, which are attractive settlements built of stone. Farms are generally located on the fringes of the area and the absence of buildings reinforces the somewhat isolated, remote character of the plateau. Isolated features, such as the radio masts and storage reservoir to the east of Yearsley and a few prominent, unattractive modern farm buildings, intrude upon the otherwise unspoilt, rural character of the area.

The upland fringe

These are landscapes that form the transition between the high ground of the plateau or the North York Moors National Park and the low-lying vales. A number of sub-divisions have been made on the basis of local variations in character.

Northern plateau fringe

This area extends from Newburgh Priory in the west to Gilling Park. It comprises the north-facing slopes linking the plateau top to the low ground between the Vale of York and Vale of Pickering and affords extensive open views. Numerous undulations and small valleys result in a varied and complex topography but a distinct broad valley divides the landscape between Redcar House and Gilling Castle. Woodland is a dominant influence on landscape character along the slopes, and includes the mixed woodlands of the Newburgh Estate, a large area of semi-natural alderwood, belts of coniferous planting and large-scale commercial forestry. The uniform and sombre character of the plantations unfortunately reduces their value as features in the landscape.



Forming the transition between plateau and vale, the western plateau fringe is typically open and rolling, with fragmented hedgerows and ageing trees.

The historic buildings of Newburgh Priory and Gilling Castle have had an important influence on landscape character. The former, with its formal gardens and ornamental lake, clipped yew hedges, walled parkland and mature roadside tree belts, adds a particularly distinguished character to the landscape, while Gilling Castle and its grounds occupy a commanding hilltop position. Unfortunately, between them the formerly extensive parkland settings have been substantially modified by intensive agriculture and changes in woodland management and only echoes of their former character remain in the distinctive round copses, ornamental planting and chain of fishponds.

Western plateau fringe

At the extreme western end of the AONB a broad spur of high ground extends out from the plateau and slopes gently to the north, west and south towards the lower lying Vale of York. This area affords open, extensive views over the vale and towards the North York Moors. Steeper convex lower slopes contrast markedly with the flatter landscapes outside the AONB particularly along the north-western perimeter. Small valleys form indentations in the landform and together with the different slope aspects provide the landscape variety that is locally distinct to this area.

The area is one of the least wooded in the AONB. Woodland cover is limited to a very few deciduous plantations on steep slopes within an otherwise open, exposed landscape characterised by gappy and fragmented hedgerows and a few ageing hedgerow trees (mainly holly and oak). The lower, steeper slopes are mainly grazed, particularly in the north and west, whereas the higher more gentle slopes are under arable cultivation. In contrast, the small valley near Hushwaite, which penetrates the scarp slope, is characterised by an attractive patchwork of small fields, taller hedges and a denser pattern of tree cover. The predominance of holly and mature oak trees within the hedgerows, together with the network of attractive, winding country lanes and bridlepaths, which are often sunken below the surrounding fields or have broad road verges, are locally distinctive features and lend an air of antiquity to the landscape. The stone built village of Oulston nestles in the upper parts of a small valley on the southern slope but otherwise settlement is restricted to a few scattered farmsteads, mostly built from local stone.

Southern plateau fringe

This area on the south slope of the plateau represents the transition between the high ground around Yearsley and the lower ground to the north of Crayke, and is characterised by its complex topography and varied landcover. The southern edge of the AONB escarpment rises steeply from the plain but is broken by a number of tributary valleys carrying small streams which penetrate deeply into the plateau fringe. Spurs of higher land between have an open character, with medium-scale arable fields bounded by close-trimmed hedgerows and few trees, while the scarp slope has a more attractive hedged, pastoral character.

The three principal tributary valleys of Pond Head, Peel Park and Brandsby Dale contain more varied landscapes with smaller-scale pastoral fields, areas of semi-improved pasture and belts of woodland on the valley sides. These provide an attractive contrast to the more open landscape of the spurs. Within the Pond Head valley, the two Oulston reservoirs, combined with areas of mixed and coniferous woodland, provide landscape variety. The woodlands of Peel Park and Brandsby Dale are predominantly broadleaved in character and probably of ancient origin. Settlement is confined to a number of scattered farmsteads built in local stone.

Southern moors fringe

Along the north-western perimeter of the AONB between Ampleforth and Oswaldkirk, a fringe of high ground extends from the North York Moors National Park southward towards the lower ground of the Vale of Pickering and the Vale of York, offering extensive views over lower ground. Small streams have cut broad valleys in the slope creating characteristically undulating topography. In contrast to many other areas within the AONB, the farming character is strongly pastoral with relatively little arable land and there is a strong field pattern, with fields bounded by prominent hedgerows, many of which have been allowed to grow tall.

To the west of Ampleforth, frequent hedgerow trees, tree-lined stream courses and patches of scrub on steeper slopes, all reinforce the generally well-treed character of the landscape. This density of tree cover, small-scale field pattern and pastoral land use creates a very traditional landscape scene. In contrast, to the east of Ampleforth, hedges are closer cropped, more fragmented and trees fewer in number, especially on the outlying landform to the south east of Ampleforth College. Two large woodlands in the west are of ancient origin, although one has been replanted. Elsewhere woodlands are smaller in scale and comprise a mixture of coniferous

and broadleaved plantations. Most settlement is concentrated in a string of linear villages situated on a springline along the valley side. While most of these are built of local stone and pantile and retain their traditional character, modern estates, infill development and extensive recreational facilities at Ampleforth, appear as uncharacteristically suburban influences in an otherwise strongly rural landscape. The distinctive buildings of Ampleforth College itself, the Abbey and their associated buildings form prominent features in the landscape when viewed from the south.

Eastern moors fringe

This area extends from near Oswaldkirk to the outskirts of Helmsley in the extreme north of the AONB, encompassing ground which generally slopes from west to east into the Vale of Pickering. The landform is broken by a number of tributaries of the River Rye, which forms the AONB boundary along the eastern side. The landscape is generally open but has a pleasantly varied character, with an attractive balance between woodland enclosure and open farmland. Most of the larger woodland blocks are of ancient origin with several stands retaining a semi-natural character, although the character of others has been modified through replanting.



The eastern moors fringe slopes gently down into the Vale of Pickering and has an attractive balance of woodland enclosure and open farmland.

Tree cover is generally scattered and overmature but the River Rye is fringed prominently with alders along much of its length and is a distinctive landscape feature along the edge of the area. Land use is predominantly arable although concentrations of pasture occur along the River Rye and around farmsteads. The medium-sized fields are bounded by close-trimmed hedges which are often fragmented. Scattered farmsteads occupy the slope but, on the whole, settlement is concentrated in the village of Sproxtton

which sits on a prominent ridge overlooking a broad valley of a tributary of the River Rye. Extensive views over Ryedale and towards the North York Moors are possible from the Malton to Helmsley road.

The ridge landscapes

South ridge

Between Brandsby and Dalby, the southern perimeter of the AONB takes the form of a distinct, narrow ridge which extends south east from the northern plateau and terminates abruptly in the deeply incised valley of Dalby Bush Beck. The crest of the ridge has a distinctly elevated character with open skies and extensive panoramic views over the surrounding landscapes to the north and south. Despite the steepness of its slopes, most of the ridge is characterised by intensive arable farmland with medium-sized fields bounded by hedges. However, a chain of mixed woodlands, mature hedgerows, scattered trees, small copses and plantations give the scarp slope a well-treed character, especially in the west at Brandsby where the woodland extends down the slope towards the village. Around Dalby, a number of streams provide added variety, and Dalby Bush Beck forms a particularly attractive landscape feature, with its deeply incised valley and associated fen and woodland habitats. In places, culverting of small sections of streams has reduced landscape and ecological diversity.

In the west, the villages of Brandsby and Stearsby and intervening farms cluster along the foot of the slope while further east, the settlements of Skewsby and Dalby are perched high up on the ridge itself. Narrow country lanes along the top and foot of the

ridge, with links between, are an attractive and distinctive feature of this landscape but there has been a noticeable loss of roadside hedges along the southern boundary.

South-east ridge

This forms a large and complex area which embraces much of the south-eastern sector of the AONB from Terrington to Whitwell-on-the-Hill. As for the south ridge, the prominent, elevated landform is the unifying feature of this area and affords extensive views over the surrounding landscape. However, it is generally much lower, broader in width and more open and undulating in character, with a distinct pattern of dissecting valleys and intervening spurs. In the centre of the area, Bulmer Beck cuts through part of the ridge in a steep-sided, narrow valley leaving High Stittenham as an outlier to the west.

Woodland cover is relatively sparse and occurs mainly at the top of the scarp slope or in sheltered valleys. All the larger woods are of ancient origin but have been extensively replanted with a mixture of broadleaves and conifers. The farming pattern is strongly arable with areas of pasture confined mainly to the scarp slopes, tributary stream valleys and around villages, where smaller pastoral fields are bounded by taller hedgerows with hedgerow trees and form remnant pockets of traditional landscape. Elsewhere, fields are larger in scale and are bounded by close trimmed or fragmented hedges with sparse tree cover, notably on the flatter ground along the foot of the scarp slope and on the broad ridge top. In the south east, the mixed woodlands and parkland setting of Whitwell-on-the-Hill are particularly attractive features in the landscape.



The diversity of the ridge landscapes stems from the combination of landuse and landform, as shown here west of Nunnington looking towards Oswaldkirk.



The prominent, elevated landform of the south-east ridge is patterned by intervening valleys and spurs and the patchwork of open fields and wooded slopes.

Settlement is typically concentrated on the high ground in the attractive stone built villages of Terrington, Ganthorpe, Bulmer and Whitwell-on-the-Hill while, in contrast, most individual farmsteads are located either on the lower ground at the foot of the scarp slope or on the slopes of tributary valleys. The busy A64 trunk road is an intrusive element in the local landscape at the eastern end of this area.

North ridge

This area extends from Gilling East towards the outskirts of Malton, and takes the form of a long narrow ridge of oolitic limestone, over 100 m in height. The underlying rock strata dip to the north producing a convex slope which rises gently from the Vale of Pickering and terminates abruptly in a steep south-facing escarpment. However, in the west the ridge is broken by a series of steep-sided river valleys and between Gilling East and Hovingham the scarp faces to the north.

The topography produces distinct variation in landscape character. The uniformly gentle dip slope has rich, well-drained soils with the best quality agricultural land in the AONB. Large arable fields are divided by low, often gappy hedges with relatively few hedgerow trees and virtually no woodland, giving the landscape a distinctively open, exposed character and affording panoramic views over the Vale of Pickering. This homogeneous character begins to break down

around Hovingham where the dip slope contracts to form a broad-topped hill, and the open arable farmland is mixed with the amenity planting and parkland associated with Hovingham Hall. This area forms a transition to the more heavily wooded slopes to the west. In strong contrast with most of the dip slope, the steep southern escarpment face is heavily wooded along nearly its entire length, forming one of the most attractive landscape features of the AONB. The woodland is almost entirely ancient in origin but the majority has been replanted, mostly with conifers, to the detriment of its landscape and wildlife value.

Settlement is concentrated in the prominent line of villages which lie along the edge of the Vale of Pickering immediately outside the boundary of the AONB. Numerous ancient trackways, often with wide verges and sunken below the surrounding landscape are an attractive feature of this area, and the ridge-line road in the east offers impressive views over the Castle Howard basin. The limestone quarries to the east of Hovingham are intrusive features in longer distance views into this area.

Caulkleys Bank

To the east of Oswaldkirk, a narrow ridge of oolitic limestone forms high ground which extends out from the edge of the North York Moors National Park into the Vale of Pickering, and forms a prominent

escarpment and landscape feature. The ridge rises gently from the River Rye along the northern boundary of the AONB to a broad, flat summit and then terminates abruptly in a steep south-facing scarp slope which is clothed in woodland. Elsewhere small areas of more recent mixed woodland have been planted on the dip slope, mainly around East Newton. The summit of the ridge gives extensive panoramic views over the Vale of Pickering to the north and the wooded Howardian Hills to the south and is one of the most prominent viewpoints in the AONB.

Further to the east the landscape is more open and the broad summit of the ridge, the gentle dip slope and the flat valley bottom at the foot of the scarp are all under arable cultivation. Hedges are close trimmed, often gappy and contain relatively few individual trees, except towards the bottom of the slope where the alder-lined River Rye is visually prominent. The Hall and unspoilt stone-built village at Nunnington are attractive components of the landscape and their vernacular architecture is mirrored in the smaller village of Stonegrave at the western edge of the scarp slope and the small farmsteads scattered around the area.



The distinctive scarp face of the north ridge, seen from the opposite ridge (Caulkleys Bank) contrasts markedly with the flat, open expanse of the Vale floor.

Formal landscape features associated with Nunnington Hall occur in the form of a mature avenue of sycamore and a few remnant Scots pines along the crest of the ridge, part of a former avenue which is now fragmented and overmature. Other linear tree belts and avenues along roads, tracks and the River Rye are important landscape components.

The vale landscapes

Vale of York



The vale landscape.

In the extreme north-west corner of the AONB, a thin tongue of low-lying land extends from the Vale of York eastward into the AONB. This area forms a distinctive valley between, and in sharp contrast to, the undulating slopes of the southern moors fringe and the northern plateau fringe which contain and enclose it. A small stream, Thorpe Beck, follows the floor of the valley, which is underlain by boulder clay and is gently undulating. Fields of pasture border Thorpe Beck, but in general, land use is arable in medium- to large-scale fields bounded by low, close-trimmed hedges with relatively few hedgerow trees. Tree cover is denser along tributary streams and along sections of the disused railway. Woodland is confined to two small plantations in the west of the area, although the larger deciduous Craykeland and Thorpe Spring woods on the elevated edge of the Moors Fringe frame views to the north. Towards the east, the area becomes more undulating and gradually more pastoral in character with a stronger hedgerow structure. Settlement is dispersed between a few scattered farmsteads. There are long distance views to the scarp of the North York Moors, Byland Abbey and the White Horse.

Vale of Pickering

The Vale of Pickering connects with the Vale of York to form the continuous valley known as the Coxwold-Gilling Gap separating the high ground of the southern moors fringe from the main body of the Howardian Hills to the south. It differs from the Vale of York in that it is much more uniformly flat and is characterised by intensive arable farmland with little pasture. Both factors are related to the former extent of the proglacial Lake Pickering, which extended westward roughly as far as Thorpe Hall. This lake left behind deep layers of fertile lacustrine deposits which form flat topography, in contrast to the undulating landform of the boulder clay further west.

The contrast in relief between the broad flat-bottomed valley floor and the surrounding hills is

dramatic and creates a strong sense of enclosure. The valley floor has a predominantly open character and generally lacks diversity, with large arable fields, low hedges and few hedgerow trees. However, trees lining the network of minor streams in the valley floor and scattered broadleaved plantations provide some localised variety and incident. Settlement is strongly concentrated around the perimeter of the area in a series of attractive stone-built villages on the springline at the base of the surrounding hills. These include Gilling East, Cawton and Hovingham. In the latter, the strong vernacular building style, the lack of intrusive modern development and the parkland setting of Hovingham Hall are all particularly attractive and make an important contribution to landscape character.

Crayke

To the south west of the main body of the Howardian Hills, Crayke Castle sits on the summit of a prominent outlying landform knoll, which rises to a height of over 110 m. Crayke Hill is prominent in views from the western and southern plateau fringes, forming a distinctive local landmark, and the hill itself provides panoramic views of the southern scarp of the AONB as well as the surrounding agricultural plain. The village of Crayke, clustered around a green, is one of the most distinctive in the AONB and the village centre retains much of its historic character. Elsewhere, settlement is scattered between a number of individual farmsteads.

The hill is connected to the southern plateau fringe by a gently sloping lowland area underlain by boulder

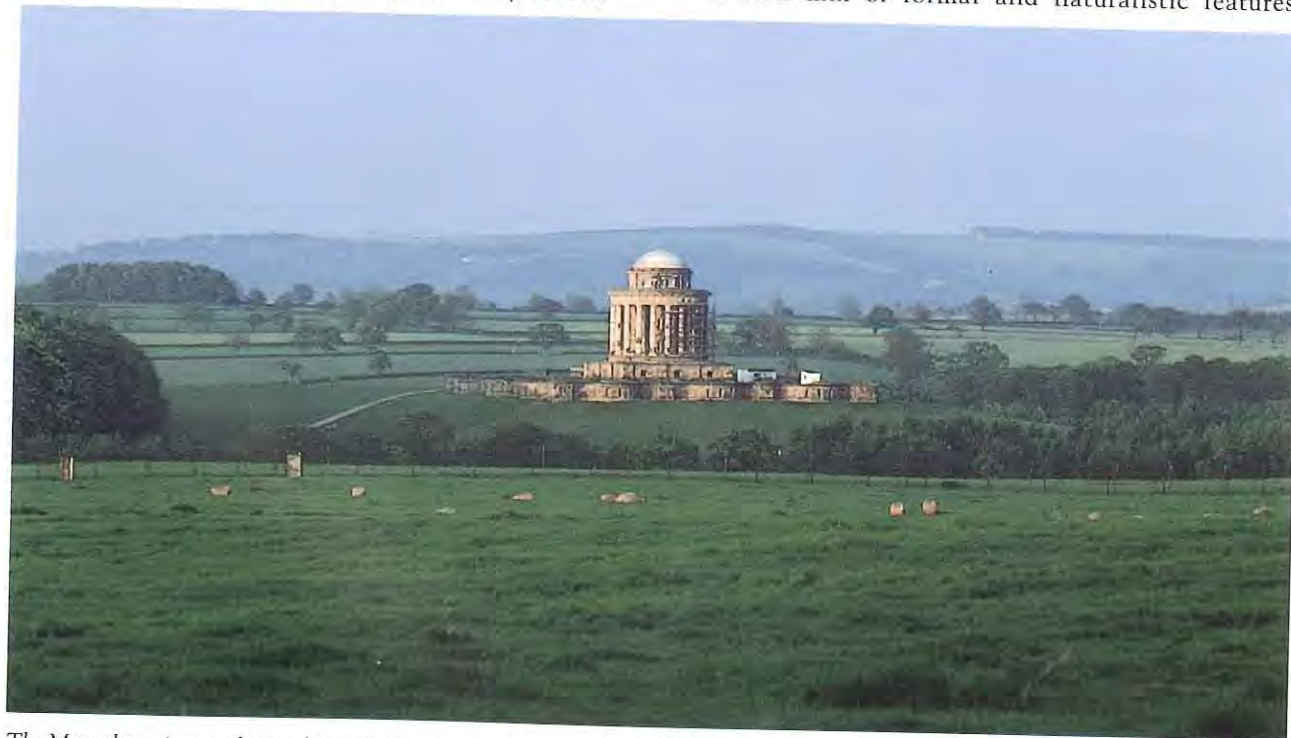
clay, draining to the south east through a network of small streams. A relatively large number of scattered small plantations of mixed woodland give the area a generally well-treed appearance, an impression reinforced by the tree-lined stream courses and many mature hedgerows. The area is generally characterised by a richer variety of land use and landscape features than the other vale landscapes, with an intricate mixture of arable and pasture and a characteristically small-scale field pattern and strong hedgerow structure. The area seems to have been less affected by farming pressures than many other parts of the AONB, although there is evidence of some loss of hedgerows which threatens to disrupt this strong landscape structure.

The Castle Howard basin



The Castle Howard Basin.

In the eastern half of the AONB, Vanbrugh's great masterpiece Castle Howard sits on a low ridge in the centre of a large natural basin. This basin was extensively landscaped in the 18th century to provide a rich mix of formal and naturalistic features.



The Mausoleum is one of several prominent monuments on the Castle Howard estate.

Dominating the landscape is the 6.4 km long avenue of lime trees, which traverses the basin from north to south and provides the principal approach to the house, past a series of monuments, gatehouses and a fortified wall. Further east, other great monuments, including the Temple of Four Winds, the Mausoleum, the New River Bridge and the Pyramid punctuate vistas radiating out from the house and, together with The Great Lake, form impressive landscape features in many long-distance views. Views from the road of the house on its wooded hill with the lake in the foreground are particularly memorable and for many people symbolise the landscape of the Howardian Hills. Around the house, the formal gardens and lakes add to the splendour of the landscape.

Around the estate, several of the larger woodlands are of ancient origin but were substantially modified as part of the 18th century parkland design. Most of the outer park has been converted from pasture to arable and this change is reflected in the land use of the outer parts of the basin which is chiefly arable in character, with a large-scale field pattern. Despite this, the landscape generally retains a well-treed character derived from the many mature hedgerow trees, scattered copses and larger woods. Settlement is concentrated in the two attractive villages of Welburn and Coneythorpe, the latter being an estate village which has retained its original character.

The central hills and valleys



The central hills and valleys.

In the centre of the AONB, to the west and east of the Castle Howard Basin, is an area of complex landform and landcover, overlooked by the higher ground of the plateau and adjacent ridges. A number of alternating hills, ridges and valleys produce a characteristically rolling topography and the varied relief, combined with the relatively dense covering of woodland, makes this area particularly attractive and distinctive. Intimate views and glimpses of wooded horizons are also particularly characteristic and result in an overall impression of richness and diversity in the landscape.

There is a great variety of woodland types typified in the extensive deciduous, coniferous and mixed plantations to the north and south of Cum Hag Wood. The woodlands and scattered tree clumps of



A rich tapestry of woods, pastures and arable fields clothes the complex landform of the central hills and valleys around Scackleton.

Wiganthorpe Park add to the richness of the landscape, extending tree cover down the western slopes of the Wath Valley. In the west of the area, in the valleys and on the lower slopes around Scackleton, several large stands of pure conifer have been planted and their uniformity has a detrimental effect on the landscape. However, other plantations around High Hutton and Firby are much smaller in scale and more diverse in character, comprising predominantly mixed or broadleaved stands. In between these areas, the many blocks of woodland provide strong enclosure for areas of arable farmland, which otherwise have an open character with a weak hedgerow structure and few trees.

The small villages of Scackleton, High Hutton and Firby sit on top of hills or on the higher slopes. Elsewhere, settlement is confined to individual farmsteads on the valley sides linked by a well-developed, dense network of rural roads, tracks and footpaths. The busy A64 trunk road is an intrusive element in the local landscape at the eastern end of the area.

The Derwent gorge

The deeply incised and winding gorge of the River Derwent cuts through the Howardian Hills on the extreme eastern boundary of the AONB and is one of the most dramatic landscape features in the AONB. The steep and winding valley slopes of the central section are clothed in dense woodlands, such as Howsham, Crambeck and Hutton's Bank Woods, which form prominent landscape features. In between are interlinking small fields of pasture bounded by tall bushy hedges, giving the landscape an attractive, pastoral and traditional character. The majority of the woods in the centre of the gorge are rich and varied in character and of ancient origin, with a high landscape and nature conservation value. However, those on the upper slopes have largely been replanted with conifers, with a reduction in conservation value. At the entrances to the gorge to the north and south, the valley floor broadens and its alluvial soils are used for more intensive arable cultivation.

The villages of Crambe and Low Hutton sit on higher ground above the floodplain, surrounded by a network of small fields of pasture divided by hedges with many hedgerow trees. The York to Scarborough railway line follows the river closely through the gorge but elsewhere the lack of vehicular access increases the sense of solitude in many parts of the valley and gives it a particularly secluded peaceful character, providing a perfect setting for the ruins of Kirkham Priory, a notable historical feature in the landscape. Visual access is also



Derwent Gorge and the River Derwent looking northward to Malton and the Vale of Pickering.

limited by the strong valley form and dense wooded slopes, and the landscape experience is enhanced by a number of brief glimpses and dramatic 'surprise views' which are obtained from the rim of the gorge. The busy A64 runs above the gorge to the west and has a locally intrusive influence on the otherwise quiet, rural landscape at Crambeck and to the north of this area.



Steep, wooded valley sides enclose an unspoilt pastoral landscape along the River Derwent.