

CORNWALL AND ISLES OF SCILLY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER STUDY



Landscape Character Area Description

LCA - St Agnes

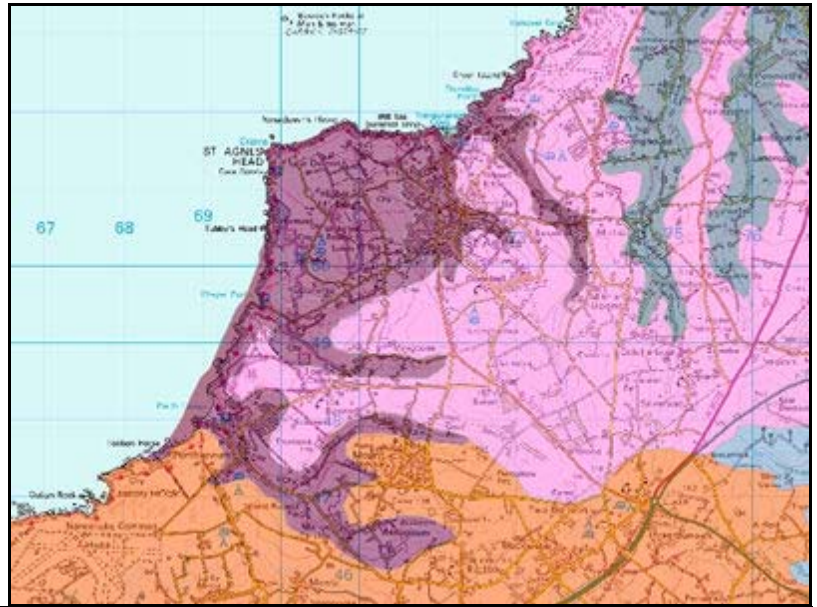
LCA No

CA12

JCA

Constituent LDUs

Total 9: 265, 266, 267U, 268U, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273



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Location Area around St Agnes on the north coast.

Designations AONB and Heritage Coast along the coastal strip [All LDUs 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273]; All LDUs WHS; All LDUs have SSSIs except 267; 6 LDUs have SMs and there are no CGS.SAC.

Description

This Landscape Character Area is dominated by St Agnes Beacon, a large, heath covered granite intrusion with a flat top, rising to 192m. The Beacon rises from an open windswept and undulating plateau that terminates in high cliffs and a string of low tide beaches and wave cut platforms at the coast. The plateau is incised by deep stream valleys that lead to sandy coves such as at Chapel Porth, Trevellas Coombe and Trevaunance Cove at St Agnes. The land on the plateau is a mix of recently enclosed, improved farmland and a derelict industrial landscape of hard rock mining. There are some small areas of medieval enclosed land but much of the enclosure came as a result of the need to feed the expanding mining population. The field pattern is typically small to medium yet regular, bounded by treeless Cornish hedges. To the south of St Agnes, around Goonvrea, the patchwork of small fields testify to their origins as miners' smallholdings. Significant areas of Coastal Lowland Heathland and scrub and bracken on unenclosed rough ground remain along the coastal strip, in the valleys and on top of the Beacon. In the valleys, the coastal Lowland Heathland grades to scrub and further inland, secondary woodland. Regenerating heath vegetation also exists on former mine sites, fringing areas of bare ground that reflect the latent toxicity of the ground, stained a rust colour with metallic ores. The coast and valleys of this character area are dominated by features associated with the relic mining industry; the engine houses of Blue Hills, Wheal Kitty, Wheal Friendly, Wheal Coates and the Porthtowan forming iconic landmarks. The quiet village of St Agnes (which some class as a small town) is the principal settlement of this character area with Porthtowan developed during the last century as a holiday destination. Although St Agnes is now mainly driven by the tourist industry this settlement grew up with the mining industry and has two separate foci - the first, centred on its church, stretches inland towards the Beacon; the second, at the seaward end of Trevaunance Coombe, developed around the harbour, constructed against the cliffs to the west of the beach to serve the mines of the district. The surrounding area is scattered with former miners' cottages within the quiet pastoral landscape which contrasts greatly with the area's heavy industrial past.

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Key Landscape Characteristics

Coastal plateau of slate killas with granite intrusion, rising to St Agnes Beacon.

High slate cliffs form a dramatic and varied coastline with sandy coves at the mouth of streams and sandy low tide beaches.

Open and exposed landscape with almost no tree cover on plateau and hill top.

Extensive evidence of past mining of tin and copper with derelict sites, bare ground and features such as engine houses, a harbour and mining tracks.

Extensive areas of Lowland Heathland and unenclosed rough ground of scrub and bracken on coastal cliffs and valleys, often associated with mine sites.

A mainly recent enclosure pattern of small to medium fields of improved permanent pasture and rough grazing with more recent farming over former miner's smallholdings.

Villages cluster as terraces on the steep valley sides at the coast with scattered former mining cottages and new farms on the plateau.

Geology and soils

The area is a plateau of Devonian slates, greywackes and siltstones, a slate killas, beneath which a granite intrusion at St Agnes Beacon has metamorphosed them to produce rich mineral veins of tin and copper. There is a small tertiary deposit of sand on the north side of the beacon. Soils are impoverished on the igneous and metamorphic rocks.

Topography and drainage

The plateau rises from the coast to 192m AOD at St Agnes Beacon and is incised by steep valleys at Porthtowan, Trevellas Combe and Chapel Coombe which have valley sides around 100m deep. The cliffs are high and unstable with some wavecut platforms and beaches at Porthtowan/Chapel Porth. Short fast streams drain the area down the narrow valleys.

Biodiversity

This Landscape Character Area has a narrow coastal strip of maritime cliff, bracken and scrub and significant areas of coastal Lowland Heathland, with some surviving and some developed with previous mining activity, with small areas of neutral grassland, and some broadleaved woodland along the small stream valleys. Much of the coastal strip forms part of the Godrevy Head to St Agnes SSSI which continues along the coast west into LCA 11 (Redruth, Camborne and Gwennap) and east into LCA 15 (Newquay and Perranporth Coast). Part of the SSSI around Chapel Porth is a SAC. Farmed land is predominantly improved grassland with little arable land, with low, mostly treeless Cornish hedges forming a network of ecological corridors between the farmed land and the semi-natural habitats.

Land Cover

The farmed area is dominated by improved grassland in enclosures with some arable on upper inland slopes of valleys. Enclosure tends to be post medieval. A significant amount of Lowland Heathland covers some of the higher ground, the coastal strip and the valley sides closer to the coast, and in places is associated with the derelict mine workings. In patches there is still bare ground on the tips associated with mining. This is rust-coloured in the Tywarnhayle Valley from the copper ore. There are large areas of scrub, bracken and some broadleaved woodland in the valleys. Tree cover is limited to valleys and

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settlement is clustered with small farms. A small area of sand dune lies at Porthtowan.

Land Use

The area is primarily in pastoral agriculture with some arable. Settlements are clustered in and around valleys. There are tourism and recreation uses on the coast, particularly at Porthtowan.

Field and woodland pattern

There are a few medieval settlements with associated field patterns in the upper parts of the valleys descending to Porthtowan and Chapel Porth. Enclosure elsewhere was predominantly carried out on former rough ground during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, strongly rectilinear in form and with straight, uniform boundaries. The enclosed field pattern has a strong visual influence on the landscape forming a matrix of small to medium scale fields enclosing both permanent pasture and rough grazing. This pattern of hedges, which contain only a few stunted trees, connects small patches of valley woodland along rivers and streams that flow to the coast.

Settlement pattern

The main settlements of St Agnes and Porthtowan are located on or near the coast, generally in the small river valleys, although the former has grown onto the plateau. In both, new urban development and the construction of white bungalows has taken place. Other settlements consist of dispersed farms and cottages, including areas of more closely grouped 'miners' smallholdings' as at Goonvrea, and some linear patterns along old roads and tracks. Many of the isolated buildings have a rough and rundown appearance complementing the already derelict nature of engine houses and other mining remains and the windswept, exposed nature of the landscape. Materials include stone and slate. As these valleys meet the coast they become incised and steep-sided, often containing important complexes of mining buildings and structures which give a very special feel to the landscape. At the coast, the valleys open out into small coves with sandy beaches. The exposed, ruined harbour at Trevaunance was once actively involved in shipping out copper ore for smelting in South Wales, as well as importing coal to fuel the mine engines. Trevaunance was the only harbour / port in the LCA and declined primarily because of the failure of mining and collapse of the harbour structures. The small villages are now attractive tourist spots and old ore loading sites have been replaced by modern housing developments.

Transport pattern

The area is served by one B road, the B3277/B3285 which runs through St Agnes. Other roads are minor. Many of the old mining tracks, tramways, railways and roads which connected villages to the mines remain, some as roads, others as footpaths crossing the honeycomb of subterranean industrial workings. The remains of harbours such as at Trevaunance Point indicate past links with South Wales and elsewhere.

Historic features

The historic features include the extensive interconnected mine workings since medieval times and include features such as engine houses, chimneys, shafts, spoil heaps, mining tracks and a harbour. To the west of St Agnes a group of ancient tin mines stretch from the dramatic openwork of Wheal Luna overlooking Trevaunance Cove through Seal Hole and Polberro towards St Agnes Head. To the south-west lies the iconic engine house of Wheal Coates, one of the best known Cornish mine sites, and the important copper mines of Wheal Charlotte and the Porthtowan mines. Wheal Kitty and Penhalls dominate the west of Trevaunance Cove, whilst Blue Hills occupies the seaward end of the nearby Trevellas Coombe, where tin stamps and small-scale dressing floors have now been restored to working order. Older archaeological features within the LCA include a group of Bronze Age cairns on St Agnes Beacon, the linear earthwork known as Bolster Bank, Tubby's Head cliff castle and the medieval religious cult site at Chapel Porth.

Condition

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Mineral workings and structures are in deteriorating condition. Cars and visitors have had an impact and there is a loss of tranquillity. There is cliff deterioration at Trevellas and footpath erosion is frequent. Modern development has risen onto the plateau from St Agnes. The development of tourist facilities such as caravan sites on the plateau has also resulted in a loss of tranquillity.

Pressures

- Residential development.
 - Tourism development.
 - Recreation along the coast with associated car parking demand and footpath use.
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Aesthetic and sensory

An evocative and exposed coastal landscape, focussed on St Agnes Beacon, with a coherent collection of mining features which together create a relic landscape. The past activity in this landscape is reflected in the remains of chimneys, engine houses, tracks and disused roads, spoil heaps and rough ground, the small terraces in the villages and old sea harbours between high cliffs. These features are visually prominent and give this landscape its unique quality and character.

Distinctive features

St Agnes Beacon, the coastal Lowland Heathland, remains of chimneys, engine houses, tracks and disused roads, spoil heaps and rough ground, the small terraces in the villages and old sea harbours.

Visions and objectives

A coastal landscape of cliffs and coves dominated by St Agnes Beacon and exhibiting remains of the mining industry. The objective must be to conserve the mining heritage as well as the areas of coastal and upland heath whilst managing settlement expansion and the demands of the tourist industry.

Planning and Land Management Guidelines

- Conserve mining heritage giving World Heritage Site areas priority.
- Encourage the conservation and development of coastal and upland heath and unimproved grasslands.
- Manage valley woodlands to retain character and extend where feasible.
- Manage tourism development to minimise impact.
- Limit tourism development on the exposed plateau.
- Restore eroded footpaths.
- Conserve field patterns including Cornish hedges.
- Manage housing development to maintain the valley clustered settlement pattern.
- Ensure development enhances the mining character of the villages and miners cottages.