



# **ESKDALE**

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Summary Description

## 2.c.5 THE ESKDALE VALLEY

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### DESCRIPTION AND DEVELOPMENT

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Eskdale begins in the highest mountains of the Lake District in the Scafell massif. This wild, craggy, remote and rugged scenery extends to England's highest mountain, Scafell Pike at 977 metres above mean sea level (the summit of which is on the boundary between Eskdale and Wasdale). The area forms the hub of Wordsworth's representative figure of the wheel with the 13 valleys radiating from these hard and most resistant volcanic rocks. From these lofty heights at the centre of the Lake District, Eskdale runs south west to the sea. This is the only location in England where mountains fall almost directly into the sea.

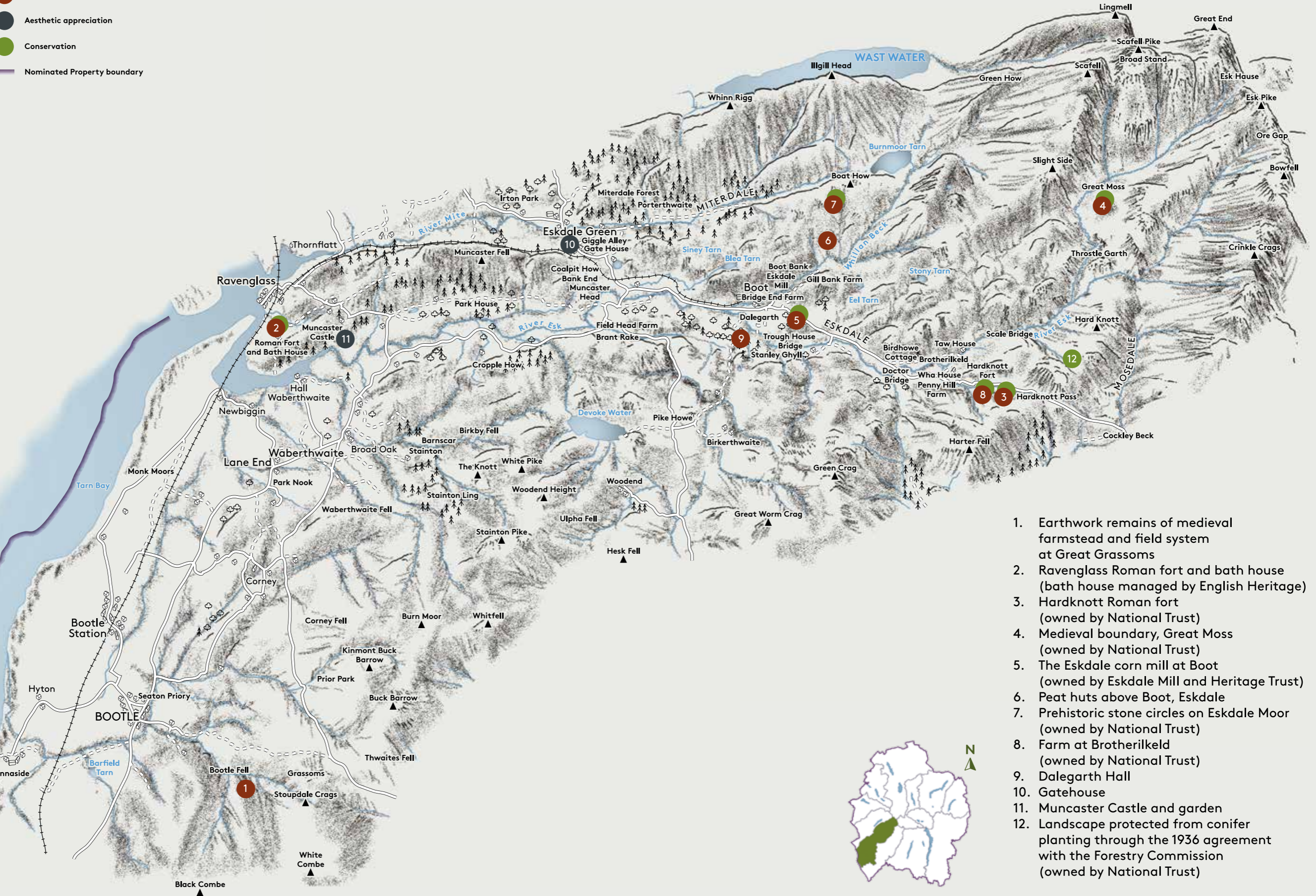
Its landscape changes from that of a cascading upland beck to that of a fast flowing river in its mid-section then becomes a coastal plain through which the Esk meanders slowly to the open, tidal landscapes of its estuary. The principal settlements of the valley, Ravenglass and Bootle, now small villages, are both sited on the coastal plain. Small farmsteads are scattered across the valleys.



FIGURE 2.c.5.1 Throstle Garth packhorse bridge crossing in the upper Esk valley

**Figure 2.c.5.2 Eskdale Valley Illustrative Map**

- Agro-pastoral landscape
- Aesthetic appreciation
- Conservation
- Nominated Property boundary



1. Earthwork remains of medieval farmstead and field system at Great Grassoms
2. Ravenglass Roman fort and bath house (bath house managed by English Heritage)
3. Hardknott Roman fort (owned by National Trust)
4. Medieval boundary, Great Moss (owned by National Trust)
5. The Eskdale corn mill at Boot (owned by Eskdale Mill and Heritage Trust)
6. Peat huts above Boot, Eskdale
7. Prehistoric stone circles on Eskdale Moor (owned by National Trust)
8. Farm at Brotherilkeld (owned by National Trust)
9. Dalegarth Hall
10. Gatehouse
11. Muncaster Castle and garden
12. Landscape protected from conifer planting through the 1936 agreement with the Forestry Commission (owned by National Trust)

EXAMPLES OF KEY ATTRIBUTES: As shown on the Eskdale illustrative map



NO. 1 FIGURE 2.c.5.3 Earthwork remains of medieval farmstead and field system at Great Grassoms



NO. 2 FIGURE 2.c.5.4 Ravenglass Roman fort and bath house (bath house managed by English Heritage)



NO. 4 FIGURE 2.c.5.6 Medieval boundary, Great Moss (owned by National Trust)



NO. 3 FIGURE 2.c.5.5 Hardknott Roman fort (owned by English Heritage)



NO. 5 FIGURE 2.c.5.7 The Eskdale corn mill at Boot (owned by Eskdale Mill and Heritage Trust)



NO. 6 NO. 1 FIGURE 2.c.5.8 Peat huts above Boot, Eskdale



NO. 7 FIGURE 2.c.5.9 Prehistoric stone circles on Eskdale Moor (owned by National Trust)



NO. 8 FIGURE 2.c.5.10 Farm at Brotherikeld (owned by National Trust)



NO. 9 FIGURE 2.c.5.11 Dalegarth Hall



NO. 10 FIGURE 2.c.5.12 Gatehouse (villa)



NO. 11 FIGURE 2.c.5.13 Muncaster Castle and Garden



NO. 12 FIGURE 2.c.5.14 Landscape protected from conifer planting through the 1936 agreement with the Forestry Commission (owned by National Trust)

The valley is a landscape of contrasts as the open, remote and rugged fells soften to a verdant, green, patchwork of pasture fields enclosed by distinctive pink granite rough stone walls and woodland. Traditional agro-pastoralism and the remains of past industries convey a strong sense of history in the valley and in the more fertile, western parts the wealth generated by these and other industries becomes evident in fine gentry houses, gardens and parkland. Many of the gentry houses of the 18th and 19th centuries are connected with maritime prosperity and both the natural and cultural landscape has a strong link with the sea. This transition from remote mountain scenery to settled pastoral then coastal landscapes takes place in a relatively short distance, with strong visual connectivity. These contrasting but complementary landscapes, all overlain with a powerful sense of history, give Eskdale a unique sense of place.



**FIGURE 2.c.5.15** Muncaster Castle, a 14th century fortified tower overlooking the lower Esk valley, was extensively re-modelled in the 19th century

Human inhabitation of Eskdale can be traced back to the remains of temporary settlements around the estuary of the Esk, dating to c. 8,000 BC. Later prehistoric ritual and burial landscapes intertwine with the earliest settlements and field systems from the Bronze Age (2,000-800 BC). Over 75 per cent of nationally-important scheduled monuments in the valley relate to prehistoric farming. In the Roman period forts were constructed on the coast at Ravenglass and at Hardknott. Adjacent to Ravenglass fort are the remains of a civilian settlement and a Roman bath house, the best-preserved Roman building in north west England. Ravenglass was also a port at this time. Place-name evidence throughout the valley and sculptured crosses from Waberthwaite and Muncaster are testament to the influence of Scandinavian cultures in the valley from the 9th to 11th centuries.

Following the Norman Conquest much of the valley lay within Copeland Forest. In the medieval period assarting (changing forest to arable land) of land from the Forest led, in Eskdale, to a pattern of small farmsteads with small irregular inbye



FIGURE 2.c.5.16 Cattle grazing on the Great Moss at the head of the Esk, beneath Scafell

enclosures, one which has persisted to the present day. Stock was put out to pasture on common grazing land on the higher, unenclosed fells and the choicest pastures on the valley floor produced winter fodder.

Milling was strictly controlled by the lords of the manor and a corn mill was provided at Boot, now known as Eskdale Mill, which was referred to in a document of 1470. Place-name evidence and the remains of medieval shielings mark out

where the summer pastures were located. The first half of the 14th century appeared to be an active period of colonisation of the valley, and while the presence of Furness Abbey's vaccary at Brotherikeld from 1292 may have prevented some colonisation of some part of the upper valley, the remainder is likely to have been settled in the century or so before the Black Death.

The market settlements of Ravenglass and Bootle on the coastal plain are both medieval in origin – Ravenglass has an early 13th century market grant and Bootle one from the 14th century. The port at Ravenglass gave Eskdale a link to the wider world.



FIGURE 2.c.5.17 The village of Ravenglass and its estuary, with Black Combe in the distance

Most of the valley was never enclosed; the barony of Copeland contained the highest mountains in England and the terrain was simply too steep and too marginal to make the investment of enclosure worthwhile. It was therefore the lower fellsides that were mostly enclosed. From the late 16th century the remaining open fellsides were allocated to each farm to provide grazing for dairy cattle close to the farmstead as part of a process of amalgamation of tenements and enclosures. Many ancient lonnings or outgangs, used by farmers to move stock from the valley floor to the fell are now preserved as public rights of way. Of the Eskdale farms that have survived to the present day, many display signs of having been rebuilt in the very late 16th or 17-18th centuries, indicating a period of major investment in buildings at that time.

In addition to grazing, the uplands were also used for peat cutting, wood and kindling collection and bracken gathering for thatch and animal bedding. Eskdale is unusual in the Lake District in having a large number of stone-built peat huts (also known as peat 'scales' – the Norse term for a shieling hut) in which peat was stored as fuel for the winter. Some of these remained in use into the 20th century. The woodlands in Eskdale contain numerous bloomery sites of medieval date which made use of the haematite and charcoal from the valley. Place-names such as Forge Wood also provide evidence of these past industries.

Although apparent in the coastal part of the valley, there is virtually no late 18th and 19th century planned enclosure in upper Eskdale, probably because of the steep terrain. At this time larger-scale mining and quarrying developed and a narrow gauge railway (known locally as the 'La'l Ratty') was built in 1875 to take iron ore away to the coast at Ravenglass. This survives, in much altered form, as the Eskdale Railway, a major tourist attraction.

Because of Eskdale's relative remoteness on the western side of the central Lake District Fells it did not have the degree of attention given to it by 18th century visitors compared with more accessible parts of the English Lake District. Coleridge visited Eskdale on his walking tour of the Lake District in August 1802 and his notebook reveals an intense engagement with the landscape of this part of the Lake District. Turner and Girtin painted Eskdale Mill but possibly without visiting it. Eskdale contains only relatively small upland tarns (Devoke Water, Burnmoor Tarn, Stoney Tarn etc) and despite exhibiting pleasant pastoral scenery it attracted almost no villa development. The principal (and very late) exception is Gatehouse (1896-1901), associated with a Japanese-style garden by Thomas Mawson.

The remoteness of the valley protected it from many of the 20th century development-related pressures of the outside world. The head of Eskdale was at the centre of the battle to prevent afforestation in the 1930s and was saved from this by a campaign led by the Friends of the Lake District. This threat reinforced the argument of the Friends that National Park status was required to protect the landscape from inappropriate development. Further pressure from these conservation groups resulted in a covenant between the Forestry Commission and the National Trust not to plant on the land of Brotherilkeld farm. The National Trust is now one of the major landowners of upper Eskdale having gone on to acquire many of the farms and much of the surrounding fell land. The National Trust now owns 4,959 hectares of land of which 4,160 hectares is inalienable. It also has an additional 801 hectares of leased land.

Today, Eskdale is still one of the key valleys in the English Lake District for native Herdwick sheep farming. There are 12 Herdwick flocks, and two Swaledale flocks registered with the relevant Sheep Breeders' Associations, and a total of 30 fell-going flocks in the Eskdale valley. The following registered Commons used for grazing fall wholly or partly within the Eskdale Valley: Eskdale Common, Birker Fell, Birkby Fell, Waberthwaite Fell, Corney Fell and Bootle Fell.

## QUALITIES

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Eskdale is one of the valleys on the western side of the English Lake District which form a distinct group both in their relative geographical isolation and their character determined chiefly by agro-pastoralism set with a rugged mountain landscape. Although it has no valley bottom lake, Eskdale has a section of coastline which contributes to its particular landscape character. Eskdale contains many attributes of Outstanding Universal Value and these are summarized in Figure 2.c.5.21. Examples of key attributes in the valley are shown on Figure 2.c.5.2.

Traditional agro-pastoral farming is still the dominant land use in Eskdale and there is clear evidence of its long persistence and development from the start of the medieval period. The pattern of stone-walled enclosures survives intact and still very much in use. Indeed Eskdale is one of the key valleys for Herdwick farming.

Eskdale contains a large and important group of early farm buildings, dating generally from the late 16th to the 18th centuries, which demonstrate the success of the agro-pastoral economy. The valley's concentration of peat storage huts, medieval in origin and rebuilt in the 18th century, attest to communal use of resources on the open fell in addition to grazing of stock.



**FIGURE 2.c.5.18** An example of a peat storage hut above the village of Boot. Examples of inbye and intake fields and open fell can be seen in the distance.



**FIGURE 2.c.5.19** An aerial view of Hardknott Roman Fort. Fields and open fell can be seen in the distance.

Evidence of the pre-medieval use of the landscape is particularly strong in Eskdale with a high number of prehistoric settlement and ritual sites distributed across the surrounding fells. The valley also contains two important Roman forts, at Hardknott and Ravenglass.

Although Eskdale is rich in the harmonious beauty which derives from the relationship of traditional farming with the natural landscape, its relative

isolation and lack of major lake rendered it less attractive than other Lake District valleys for the development of villas and landscape gardens. However, it did attract writers and artists including Wordsworth, Coleridge and Turner.

Eskdale illustrates the success of the conservation movement in the extensive National Trust ownership of the upper valley, the lack of conifer afforestation due to the 1936 agreement with the Forestry Commission, the continuation of large Herdwick farms in the valley and the continuing survival of key features of cultural value including the Eskdale Mill as a working museum managed by a community trust.

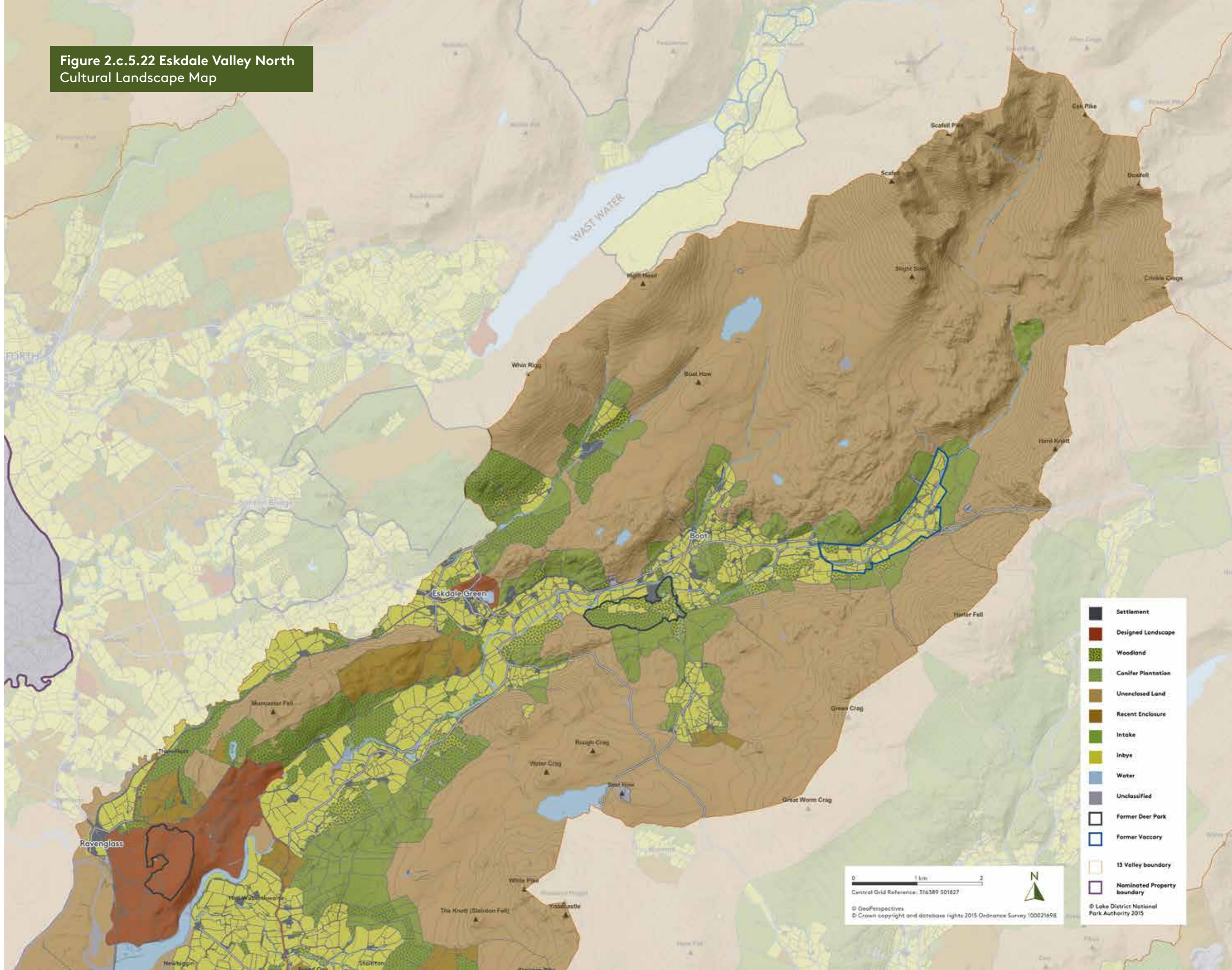


**FIGURE 2.c.5.20** The village of Eskdale Green with Miterdale and Scafell behind

FIGURE 2.c.5.21 The contribution of the Eskdale Valley to the cultural landscape themes identified

ESKDALE		
THEME	COMPONENTS OF ATTRIBUTES	SIGNIFICANCE
Continuity of traditional agro-pastoralism and local industry in a spectacular mountain landscape	Extraordinary beauty and harmony	
	Evidence of pre-medieval settlement and agriculture	
	Distinctive early field system	
	Medieval buildings (e.g. churches, pele towers and early farmhouses)	
	16th/17th century farmhouses	
	Herdwick flocks	
	Rough Fell flocks	None
	Swaledale flocks	
	Common land	
	Shepherds' meets/shows and traditional sports	
	Woodland industries	
	Mining/Quarrying	
	Water-powered industry	
	Market towns	
Discovery and appreciation of a rich cultural landscape	Viewing stations	None
	Villas	
	Designed landscape	
	Early tourist infrastructure	None
	Residences and burial places of significant writers and poets	None
	Key literary associations with landscape	
	Key artistic associations with landscape	
	Key associations with climbing and the outdoor movement	
	Opportunities for quiet enjoyment and spiritual refreshment	
Development of a model for protecting cultural landscape	Conservation movement	
	National Trust ownership (inalienable land)	
	National Trust covenanted land	
	Other Protective Trusts and ownership including National Park Authority	

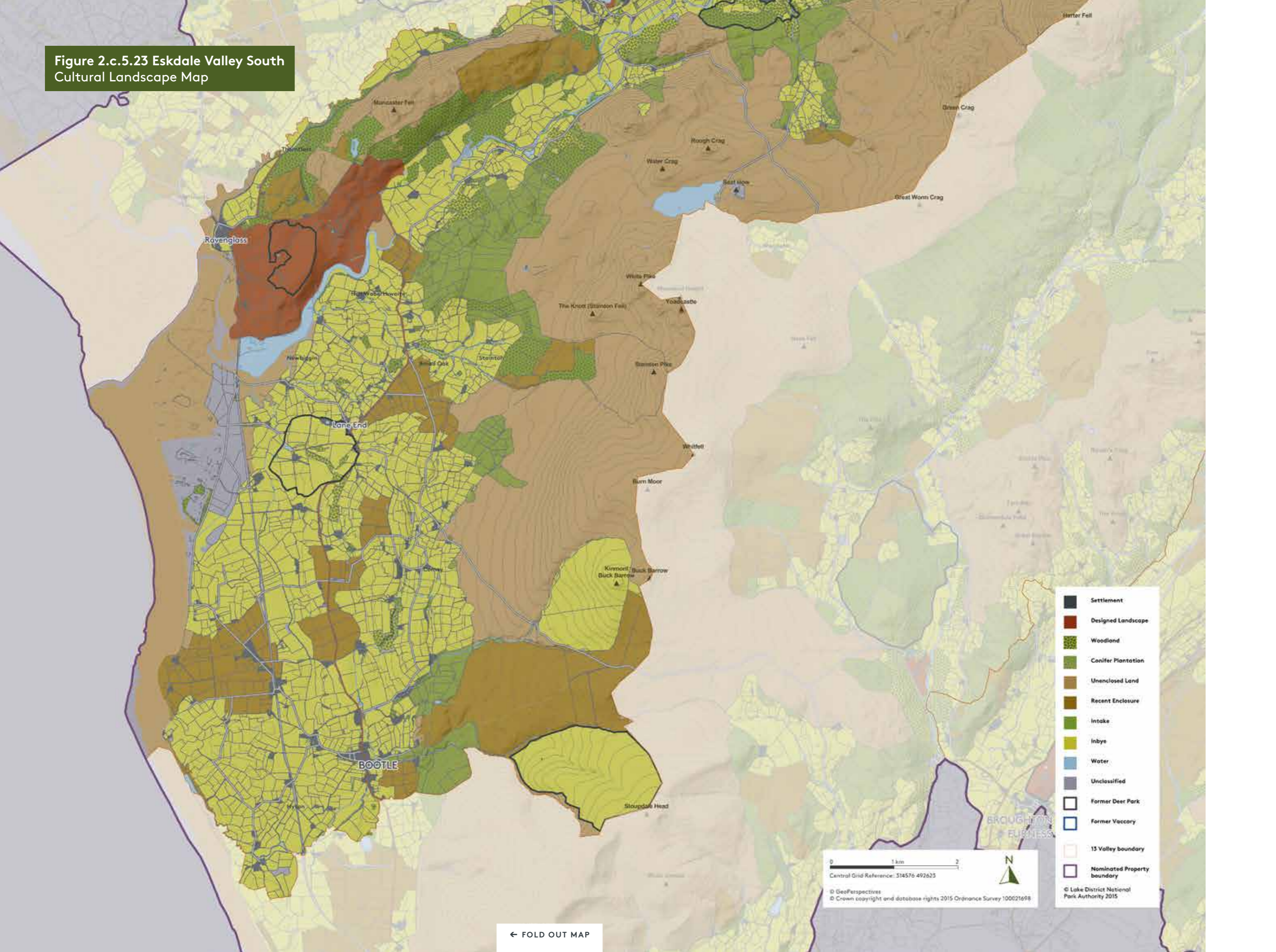
Figure 2.c.5.22 Eskdale Valley North Cultural Landscape Map



- Settlement
- Designed Landscape
- Woodland
- Conifer Plantation
- Unenclosed Land
- Recent Enclosure
- Intake
- Inbye
- Water
- Unclassified
- Former Deer Park
- Former Vaccary
- 13 Valley boundary
- Nominated Property boundary

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Figure 2.c.5.23 Eskdale Valley South Cultural Landscape Map

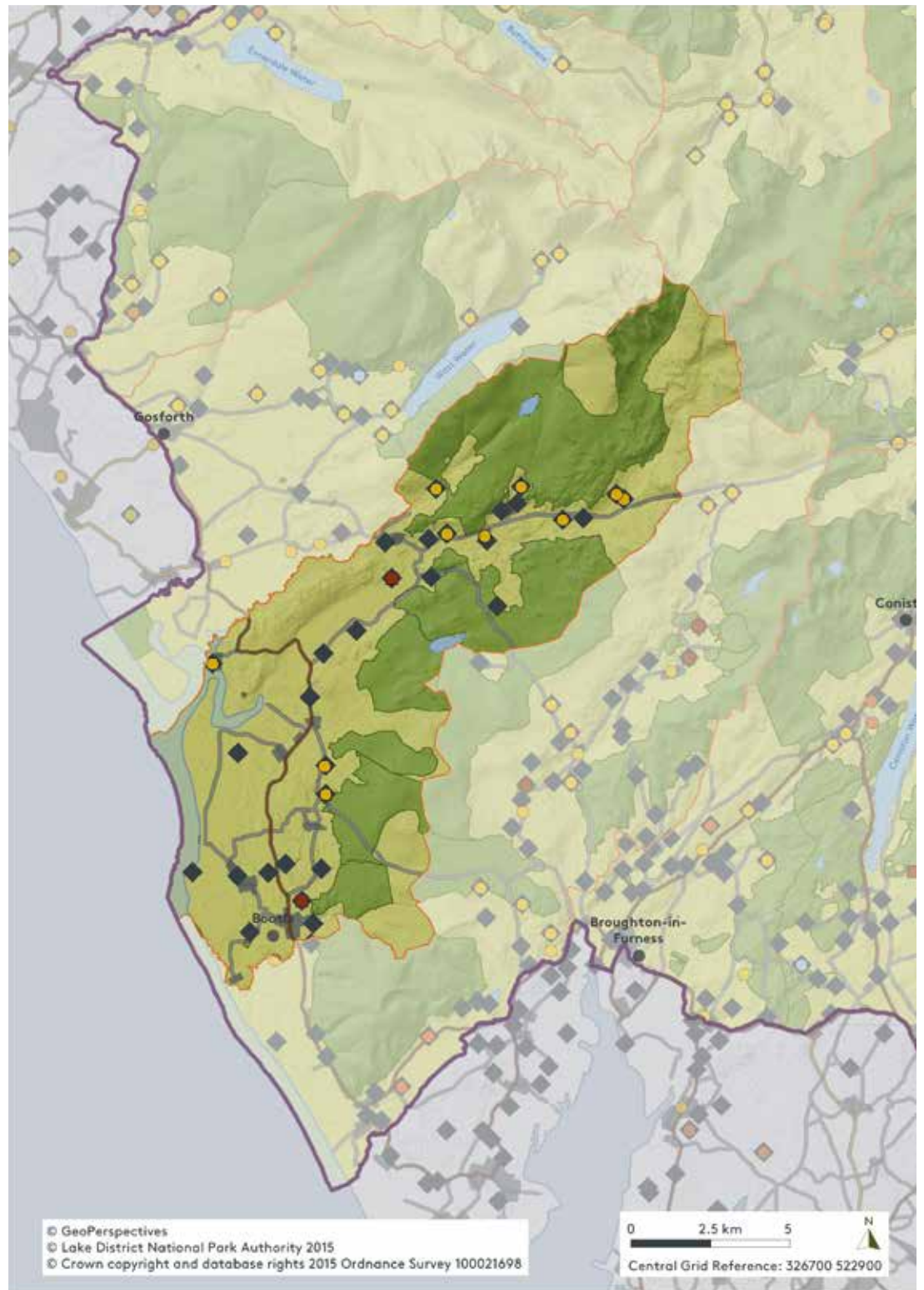


- Settlement
  - Designed Landscape
  - Woodland
  - Conifer Plantation
  - Unenclosed Land
  - Recent Enclosure
  - Intake
  - Inbye
  - Water
  - Unclassified
  - Former Deer Park
  - Former Vassary
  - 13 Valley boundary
  - Nominated Property boundary
- © Lake District National Park Authority 2015

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← FOLD OUT MAP

FIGURE 2.c.5.24 Shepherds' flocks and native sheep breeds in the Eskdale Valley



- Nominated Property boundary
  - Valley boundary
  - Registered Common Land
  - Fell-going Flocks
- Flocks registered with Breed Associations:
- Herdwick
  - Rough Fell
  - Swaledale
  - Multiple Breeds

Registered Common Land © Natural England 2015. Attribute data for Fell-going flocks: Lakeland Shepherds' Guide 2005.  
 Attribute data for flocks: Herdwick Sheep Breeders Association 2014, Rough Fell and Swaledale Sheep Breeders' Associations 2013.