

WASDALE

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Summary Description

2.c.6 THE WASDALE VALLEY

DESCRIPTION AND DEVELOPMENT



Wasdale is in the western English Lake District bordered by Eskdale to the south and Ennerdale to the north. It begins in the highest mountains in the central hub of the area and runs south west to the sea at the estuary of the River Irt flowing from the foot of West Water. The eastern, upper part of the valley is amongst the most wild and dramatic scenery in the United Kingdom including England's highest mountain (the summit of which is on the boundary between Eskdale and Wasdale) and deepest lake. Steep scree slopes

cascade down from the summits above the south shore directly into the dark depths of the lake. At the head of the valley the enclosing rocky fells create an iconic skyline. On the flat valley floor the intricate pattern of medieval field walls and the cluster of 17th century vernacular buildings form uniquely stunning scenery and create a strong sense of history and place. Further west, beyond the foot of West Water the valley opens to a gentler, wooded, pastoral landscape with scattered large country houses, gardens and parkland then on to the softer, more open estuarine landscape of the Irt estuary and imposing dune system at Drigg.

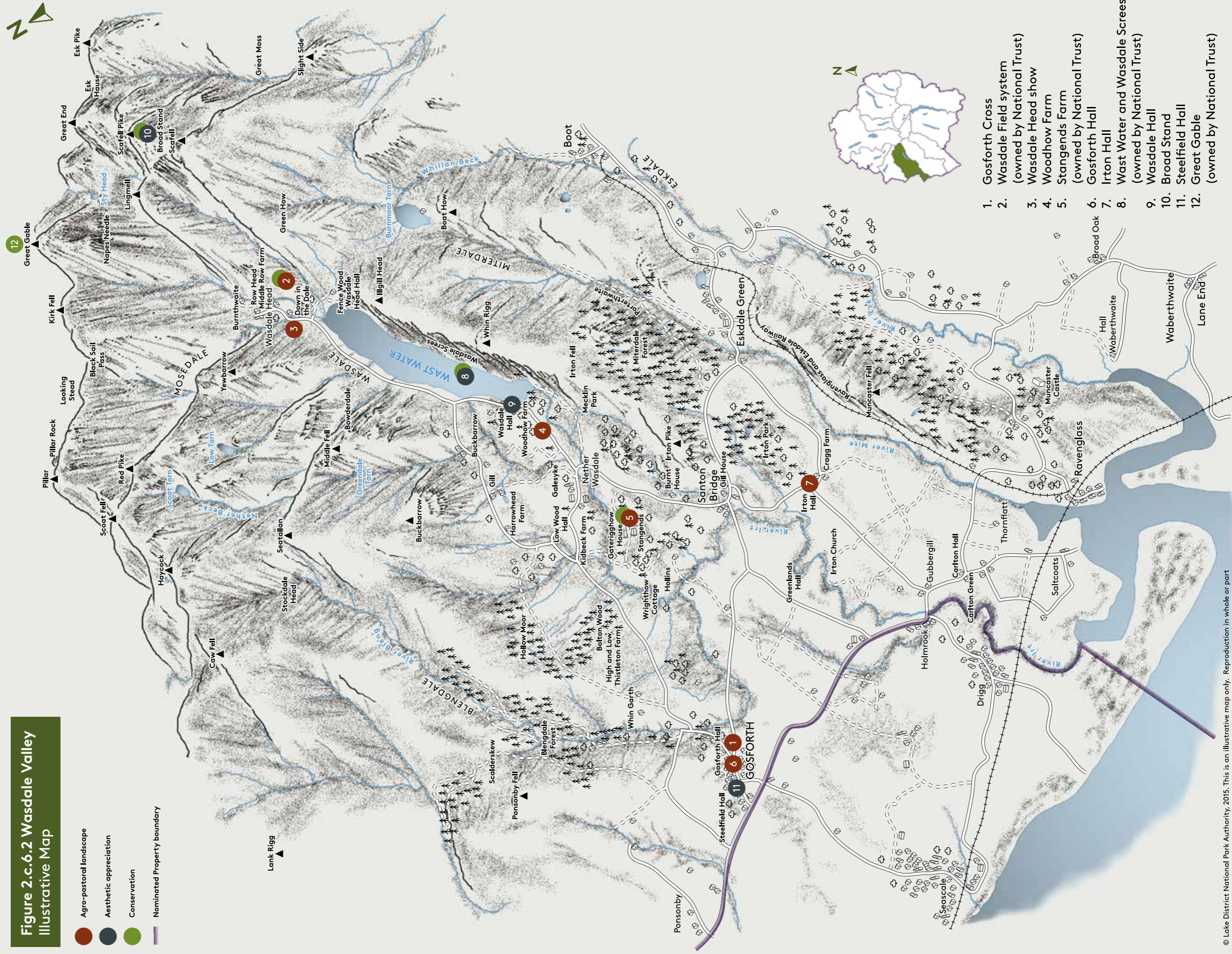


FIGURE 2.c.6.1 View of Wasdale Head, West Water and the Irish Sea from Great Gable.

The Wasdale landscape shows a strong continuity of farming from the medieval period through to today in its field patterns, farmsteads and buildings. This landscape has a clear north-east, south-west split, between the relatively simple and typical fell farming landscape of inbye, intake and open fell from West Water north east to the dale head and the more intricate patchwork of old fields, more recent enclosures, plantation and woodland at the south-west end of the valley around Nether Wasdale, Gosforth, Santon and Irton.

Figure 2.c.6.2 Wasdale Valley Illustrative Map

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



1. Gosforth Cross
2. Wasdale Field system (owned by National Trust)
3. Wasdale Head show
4. Woodhow Farm
5. Stangends Farm (owned by National Trust)
6. Gosforth Hall
7. Irton Hall
8. Wast Water and Wasdale Screens (owned by National Trust)
9. Wasdale Hall
10. Broad Stand
11. Steelfield Hall
12. Great Gable (owned by National Trust)

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



NO. 1 FIGURE 2.c.6.3 Gosforth Cross (10th century Norse design)



NO. 2 FIGURE 2.c.6.4 Wasdale field system (owned by National Trust)



NO. 3 FIGURE 2.c.6.5 Wasdale Head show



NO. 4 FIGURE 2.c.6.6 Woodhow Farm



NO. 5 FIGURE 2.c.6.7 Stangends Farm (owned by National Trust)



NO. 6 FIGURE 2.c.6.8 Gosforth Hall



NO. 7 FIGURE 2.c.6.9 Irton Hall



NO. 8 FIGURE 2.c.6.10 Wast Water and Wasdale Screes (owned by National Trust)



NO. 9 FIGURE 2.c.6.11 Wasdale Hall



NO. 10 FIGURE 2.c.6.12 Broad Stand (location of an early rock climb by the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge)



NO. 11 FIGURE 2.c.6.13 Steelfield Hall



NO. 12 FIGURE 2.c.6.14 Great Gable (owned by National Trust)

Wasdale is one of the key Lake District valleys for Herdwick sheep, with several noted farms managing 23 fell-going flocks. The importance of these farms has been recognised by the conservation movement and many key farms are now owned and managed by the National Trust. The two main areas of registered common land in Wasdale are Nether Wasdale Common and part of Eskdale Common (extending onto Wasdale Screes on the eastern shore of Wastwater and Scafell Pike) as well as a few other small areas of common.

Wasdale Head Show and Shepherds' Meet takes place in October every year; the Meet has been running for over 100 years. In all probability the showing of sheep started in the early years with the showing of shepherds' dogs and Hound Trailing. Cumberland and Westmorland wrestling, the Fell Race and other activities have all been added in the second half of the 20th Century.

The topography dictates that settlement is sparse, limited to occasional scattered farms, the hamlets of Nether Wasdale and Wasdale Head, small vernacular dwellings and a surprisingly high number of 18th and 19th century country houses towards the wealthier west end of the valley. The village of Gosforth is the principal settlement and local service centre, and includes the parish church of St Mary which has been an important site since the 8th century; it includes Viking Age sculptures dating to the 10th and 11th centuries.

Wasdale Head, located at the end of the road into the valley, is characterised by vernacular buildings of local slate. The diminutive St. Olaf's Church is often said to be England's smallest church while the Wasdale Head Inn is famous for its role in the birth of rock climbing as a sport in England. The hamlet is set amidst a unique and culturally important patchwork of ancient walls constructed with distinctive rounded stones and flat pastoral fields contained within the ring garth and enclosed by the steep high fells.



FIGURE 2.c.6.15 Row Head, Wasdale, in the winter



FIGURE 2.c.6.16 View of the ancient field system in the valley bottom at Wasdale Head

Nether Wasdale is a scatter of white-washed stone cottages and farms. By the village green is St Michael and All Angels Church, with 16th century origins. The buildings are characterised by a greater use of imported materials such as sandstone.

Wasdale did not feature strongly in Picturesque interest in the Lake District. This may have been in part due to its remote location on the west side of the region. It is the wealthier and more accessible west end of the valley that contains the fine, large houses built in

the late 18th and 19th centuries by wealthy ship owners of the West Cumbrian ports. All have mature gardens and extensive parkland with exotic trees forming notable features in the landscape and metal estate railings replacing walls or hedges.

The earliest surviving traces of human activity are Mesolithic (c 8,000 BC) and coastal. Later prehistoric remains have been found on the fell and the valley bottom, while the best agricultural land abutting the coastal plain is likely to have seen continuous use from early times. There is evidence of Norse influences on the local culture through place-name evidence and more tangibly from the unique carved crosses at Gosforth and Irton churches and the hogback stones at Gosforth.

The name Wasdall first occurs in 1301 and the Free Chase of Wastedaleheved is recorded in 1338. The upper valley around Wast Water seems to have been part of Copeland Forest under the direct control of the lord of the manor, whilst the lowland plains were sub-let to tenants. After 1338 the Free Chase was split between three heiresses into three wards – Ennerdale, Kinniside and Eskdale (including Eskdale and Wasdale townships). Enclosure of waste by ‘assarting’ and establishment of new settlement further inland was encouraged by the feudal lords to improve revenues from their tenants. The establishment of a pele tower at Irton Hall in the 14th century may reflect this pattern as it is surrounded by field names referring to enclosure and clearance.

By 1322, there were four vaccaries at Wasdale Head, apparently established by the lord of the manor and let to tenants-at-will. This differs from the usual pattern in Cumberland and Westmorland whereby vaccaries were established by monasteries. There is some indication that in the 16th century they became part of four tenanted farms. This was part of a general period of agricultural reorganisation in the 16th and 17th centuries. Former open fields were amalgamated and enclosed. The lower fells were divided into parcels with the upper fells retained for grazing with outgangs to move stock between farm and fell. The result was a marked difference between Wasdale Head and Nether Wasdale. Perhaps Wasdale Head’s unusual vaccary heritage strongly influenced the subsequent field patterns which are so distinctive from those found elsewhere in Copeland on areas of former open arable land. The housing stock was also renewed, establishing the origins of today’s familiar vernacular form. The more accessible Nether Wasdale had access to imported materials, while Wasdale Head retained its use of local materials.

The end of the 18th century saw the beginnings of planned enclosure on a large scale; land was brought into agriculture to supply rapidly-growing populations in the northern towns. In the lowland parts of the Wasdale Valley there are three examples of enclosure by Parliamentary Act, each on moorland with very large fields enclosed by straight-walls. Planned enclosure also seems to have improved the cultivation of huge stretches of estuarine marsh and mosslands, around Carleton Hall in particular. Closer to the coast the estuarine marshes were drained and higher up earlier inbye seems to have been rearranged in geometric fashion.

Famous for the sublimity of its screes descending from Scafell into the depths of West Water, Wordsworth celebrated Wasdale for the extreme simplicity of its pastoral economy. Wasdale Hall, built in 1829 for Stansfield Rawson, is the only villa to capitalise on views of West Water; William Wordsworth knew the Rawsons and visited Wasdale Hall in 1832. Coleridge also frequented Wasdale and he and Wordsworth took advantage of the local knowledge and hospitality of long established families such as the Tysons. Coleridge embarked on what is now considered to be the first account of ascending Scafell. This passion for rock climbing was to extend to many middle class Victorian gentlemen and a new sport of rock climbing developed here. Climbers and visitors flocked here to stay at the newly extended Huntsman's Inn, now the Wasdale Head Inn. Haskett Smith's ascent of Napes Needle on Great Gable in 1886 was a key event in the development of climbing. The Fell and Rock Climbing Club was established in 1906-7



FIGURE 2.c.6.17 Wasdale Hall from the Screens



FIGURE 2.c.6.18 Early rock climbers on top of Napes Needle, Great Gable, Wasdale Head

and the first formal meet was at the Wasdale Head Inn. In 1923 members of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club gifted 1,214 hectares (3,000 acres) of land including the peaks of Great Gable, Kirk Fell and Glaramara to the National Trust in memory of the members of the Club who had perished in the First World War.

The beauty and intrinsic value of the cultural landscape of Wasdale attracted concern for its preservation from an early period. Early moves to protect the valley and its farms brought together the National Trust, concerned individuals, local families, the Friends of the Lake District and the Youth Hostel Association who either purchased farms and land or joined campaigns to protect it from inappropriate afforestation, and to oppose the construction of a dam to provide water for the nuclear fuel industry. The special qualities of the valley were recognised in the 1970s when valley head electricity supplies were delivered by submarine cable along the bed of the lake to avoid landscape

impact. The National Trust has acquired 10 farms in Wasdale, the Nether Wasdale Estate and the Leaconfield Commons comprising 123 square kilometres of fell.

When the Lake District National Park was established in 1951 the iconic view looking north east from the lower reaches of Wastwater was chosen as the National Park's logo. The view has Wastwater in the foreground and looks to Great Gable in the centre, Yewbarrow Fell on the left and Lingmell Fell on the right. For over 60 years therefore, this view has been inextricably linked with the designation of the Lake District as a United Kingdom National Park. In 2007 the view was voted 'Britain's Favourite View' by the British public.



FIGURE 2.c.6.19 The famous view of the mountains framing the top of Wast Water, which has been adapted as the symbol of the Lake District National Park

QUALITIES

Wasdale is one of the best known valleys in the Lake District as a result of its spectacular landscape of lake, screes and surrounding high mountains and its adoption as the National Park's logo. Its landscape character has been shaped by centuries of agro-pastoral farming. The valley floor at Wasdale Head, with its organic pattern of small, thick-walled inbye fields is an iconic feature of the English Lake District.

This is one of the key valleys in the Lake District for Herdwick farming with 13 registered Herdwick flocks. The Wasdale Show and Shepherds' Meet is one of the principal events of the Herdwick farmers' year. Some of the farm houses in the valley date from the 17th century but most date from the 18th and 19th centuries. Their landscape disposition clearly follows that of the medieval period, and this is especially apparent at Wasdale

Head where four former medieval vaccaries were later subdivided into a number of separate tenements.

There is some evidence for early land use, particularly on the fells to north and south of the valley bottom land, including the archaeological remains of prehistoric agricultural and ritual sites and possible early medieval shielings. The evidence for Norse settlement is also strong in local place-names and in the extraordinary carved stone cross and tomb stones at Gosforth. There has been little industrial activity in Wasdale in the past, in contrast with most other Lake District valleys, with activity limited to small scale medieval iron smelting.

It is surprising, given the spectacular juxtaposition of lake and high mountains, that Wasdale did not attract more attention from early visitors seeking Picturesque experiences and views. Difficulty of access was certainly a factor and the starkness and severity of the Wasdale landscape may have been off-putting to 18th century taste. Villa building and landscape improvement was also extremely limited here. However, the valley was visited and celebrated by Romantic writers and artists including Wordsworth, Coleridge and Thomas de Quincey. Coleridge undertook and wrote about what is often described as the first rock climb on the crags of Broad Stand, and in the later 19th century Wasdale was one of the first centres for the development of climbing in Europe.

Concern for the protection of Wasdale resulted in early private purchase of land at Wasdale Head which eventually passed to the National Trust. During the later 20th century the National Trust purchased additional farms and now owns and manages almost all of the land in the north eastern half of the Wasdale Valley, including the farms, fell grazing, West Water, the famous Screees and the iconic mountains of Great Gable, Scafell and Scafell Pike. The National Trust owns 6,677 hectares of land in the valley, of which 6,547 hectares is inalienable. Proposals in the 1970s to increase the abstraction of water from West Water provoked one of the most recent and successful environmental campaigns in the English Lake District, thus continuing the tradition of landscape protection which began over 100 years previously.

The Wasdale Valley is therefore particularly significant for attributes of the first theme of Outstanding Universal Value, agro-pastoral farming, and of the third, the conservation movement.

FIGURE 2.c.6.20 The contribution of the Wasdale Valley to the cultural landscape themes identified










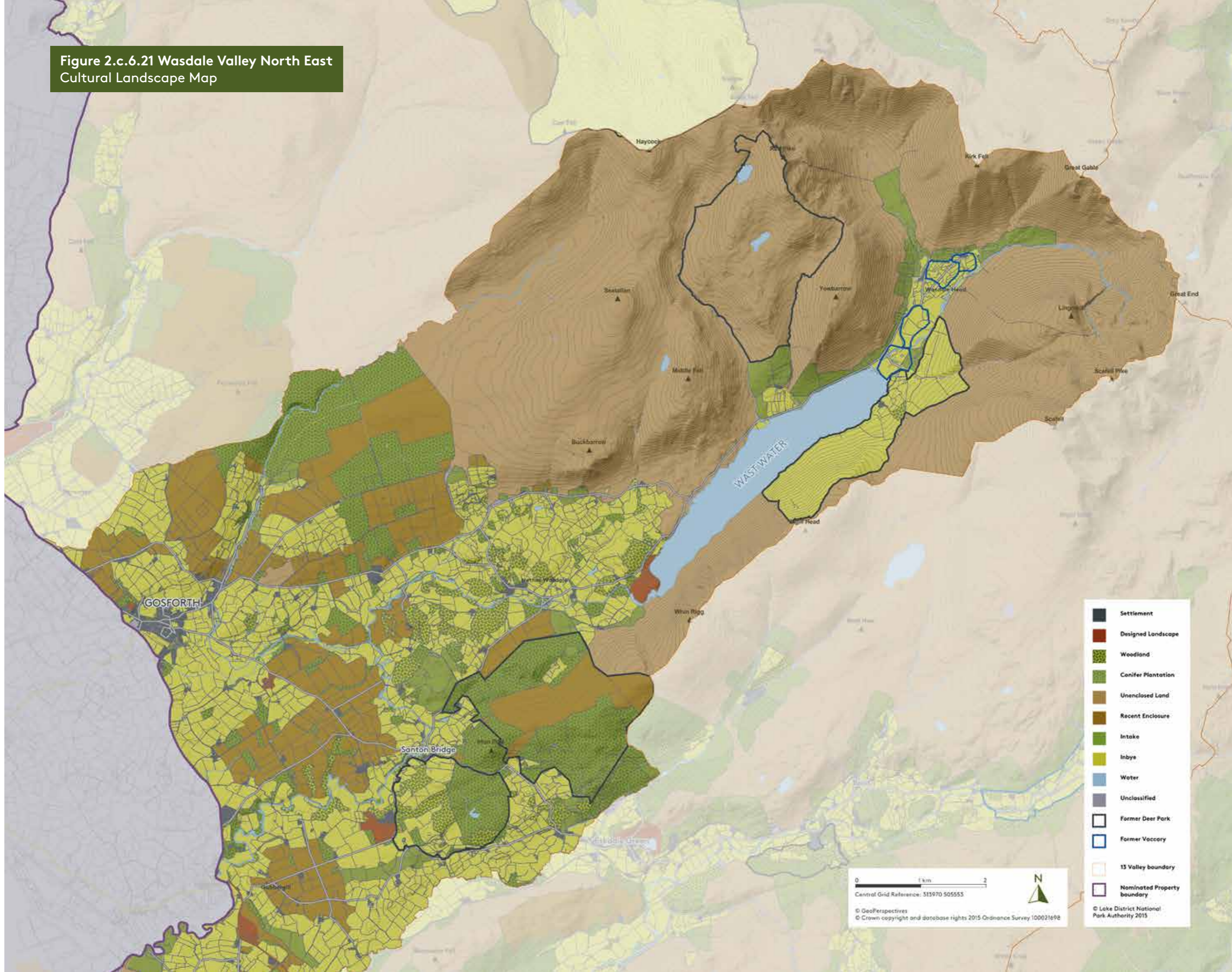
WASDALE		
THEME	COMPONENTS OF ATTRIBUTES	SIGNIFICANCE
Continuity of traditional agro-pastoralism and local industry in a spectacular mountain landscape	Extraordinary beauty and harmony	
	Evidence of pre-medieval settlement and agriculture	
	Distinctive early field system	
	Medieval buildings (e.g. churches, pele towers and early farmhouses)	
	16th/17th century farmhouses	
	Herdwick flocks	
	Rough Fell flocks	
	Swaledale flocks	None
	Common land	
	Shepherds' meets/shows and traditional sports	
	Woodland industries	
	Mining/Quarrying	
	Water-powered industry	None
	Market towns	None
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	None
	Other Protective Trusts and ownership including National Park Authority	

Figure 2.c.6.21 Wasdale Valley North East Cultural Landscape Map

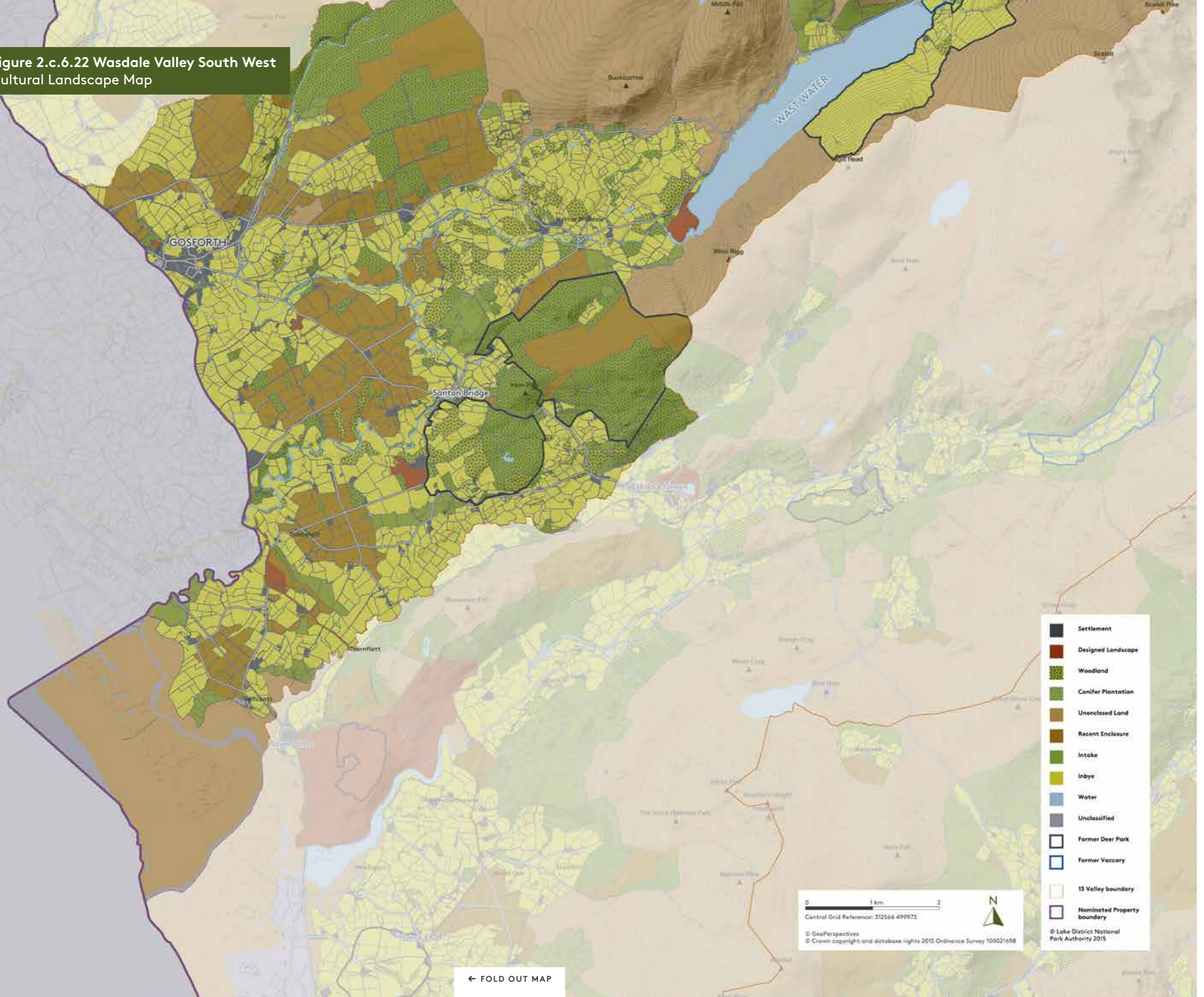


- Settlement
- Designed Landscape
- Woodland
- Conifer Plantation
- Unenclosed Land
- Recent Enclosure
- Intake
- Inbye
- Water
- Unclassified
- Former Deer Park
- Former Vaccary
- 13 Valley boundary
- Nominated Property boundary

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 Central Grid Reference: 515970 505553
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Figure 2.c.6.22 Wasdale Valley South West 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

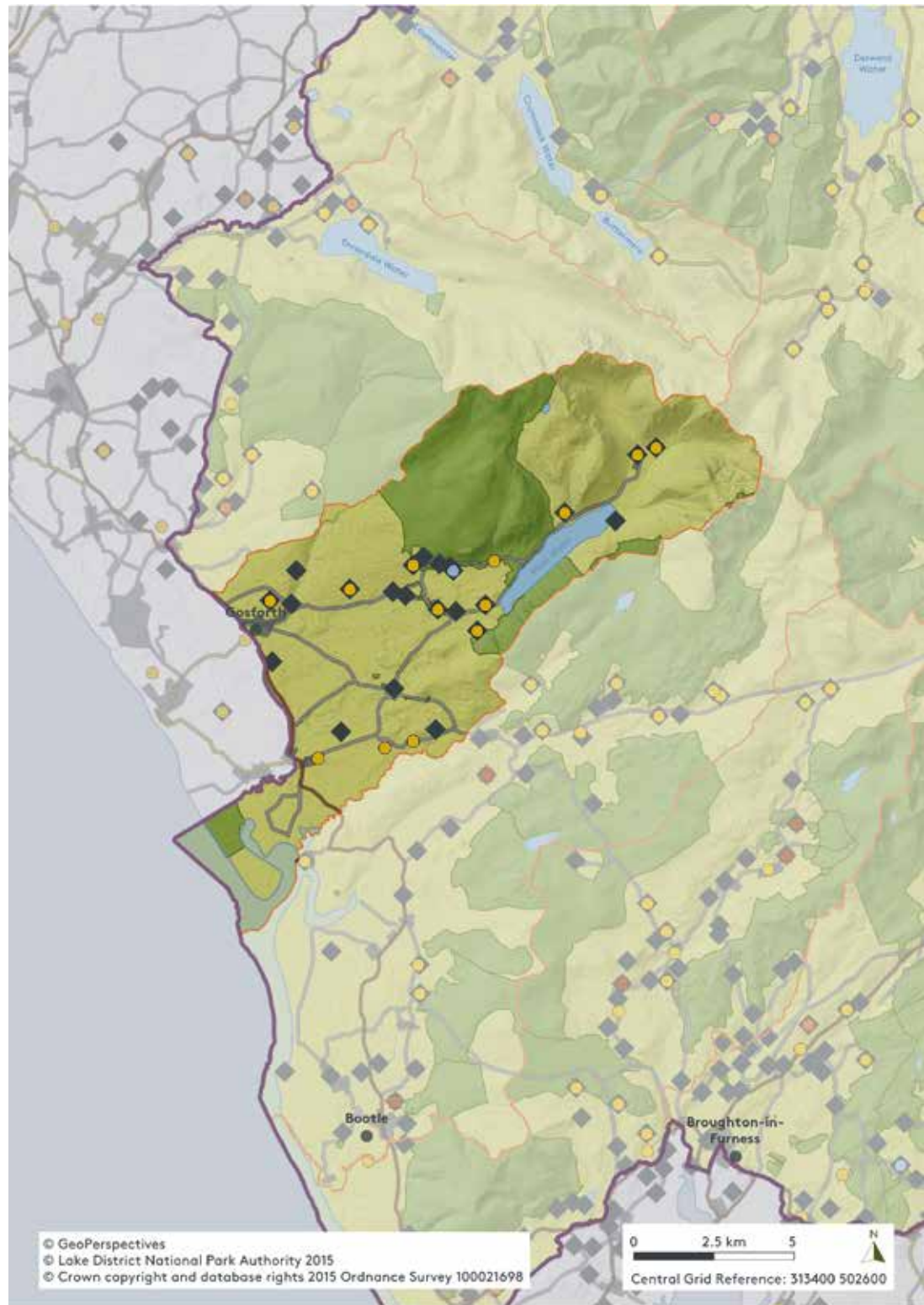
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← FOLD OUT MAP

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FIGURE 2.c.6.23 Shepherds' flocks and native sheep breeds in the Wasdale 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.