



Peat hut on Boot Bank, Eskdale



# 5. ESKDALE

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Description, History and Development

## 5. THE ESKDALE VALLEY

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“The fourth vale, next to be observed, viz. that of the Esk, is of the same general character as the last, yet beautifully discriminated from it by peculiar features. Its stream passes under the woody steep upon which stands Muncaster Castle, the ancient seat of the Penningtons, and after forming a short and narrow estuary enters the sea below the small town of Ravenglass”.

William Wordsworth, ‘Guide to the Lakes’ (1835)

### 5.1 DESCRIPTION

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#### 5.1.1 LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

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Eskdale begins in the highest mountains of the English 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 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. See Figure 5.1 for an illustrative map of the valley. Also see Figures 5.2 and 5.3 for an overview of the cultural landscape of the Eskdale Valley.

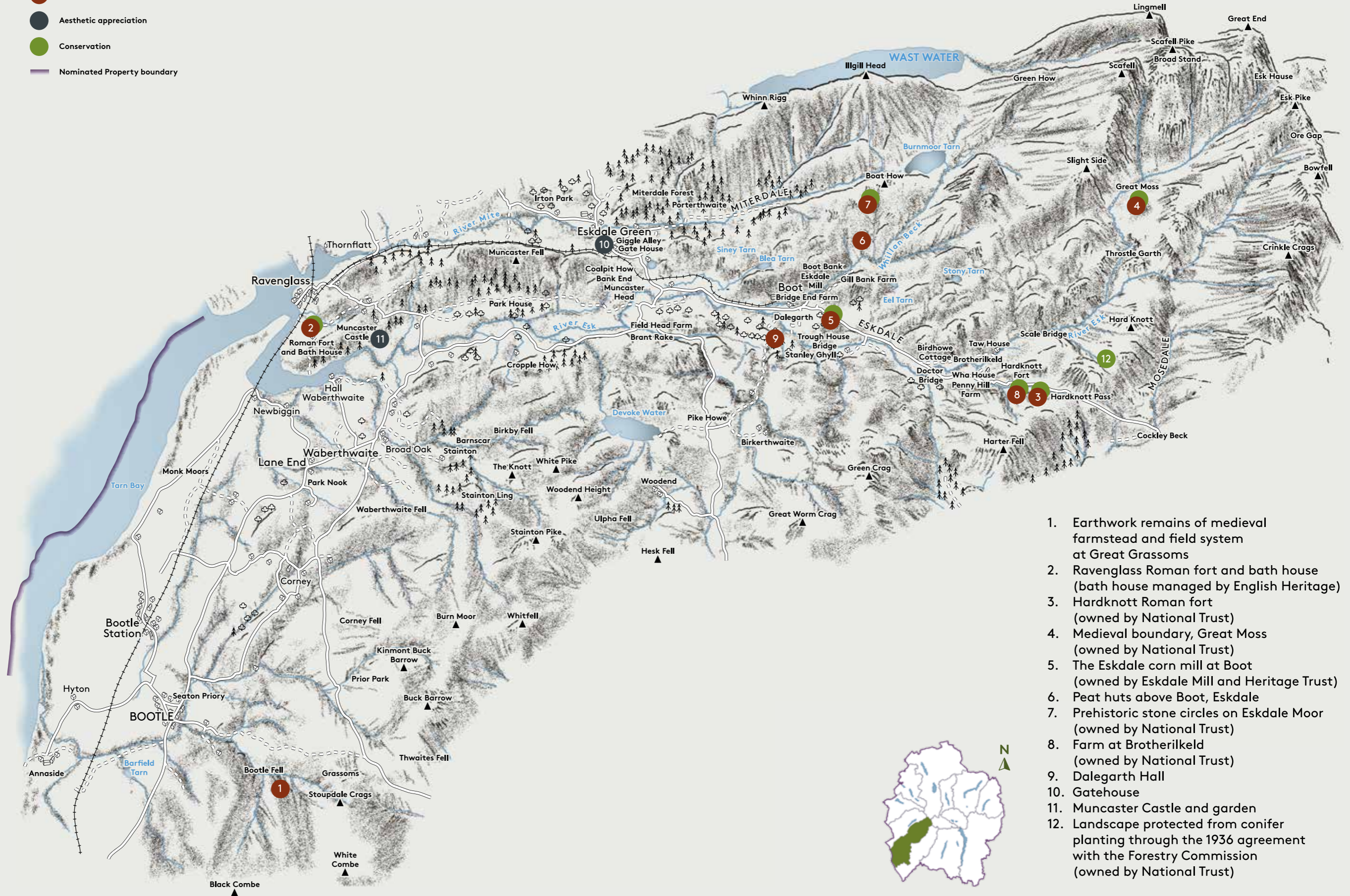
#### 5.1.2 THE INHERITED LANDSCAPE’S CHARACTER

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There is a sense of timelessness in the eastern, upland section of the valley where there are few obvious traces of human settlement and the changing effects of light, weather and season have such an effect on the appearance and atmosphere of the landscape. The U-shaped glaciated valley then broadens and softens into a verdant, green landscape with large patches of broadleaved, mixed and coniferous woodland giving it a well-wooded feel. The valley floor is strongly patterned with pink granite stone walls

**Figure 5.1 Eskdale Valley Illustrative Map**

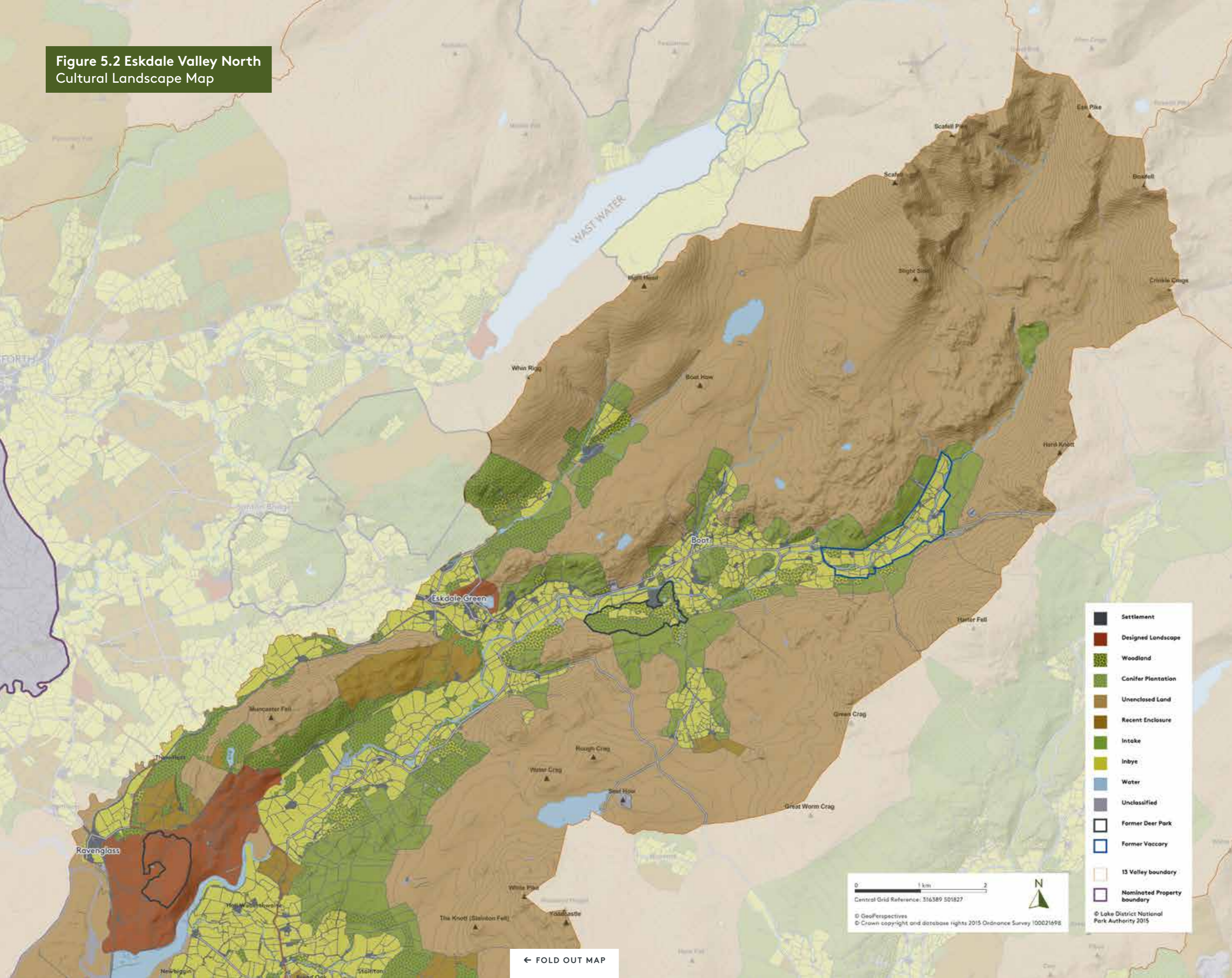
- Agro-pastoral landscape
- Aesthetic appreciation
- Conservation
- Nominated Property boundary



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 Brothelkeld (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)

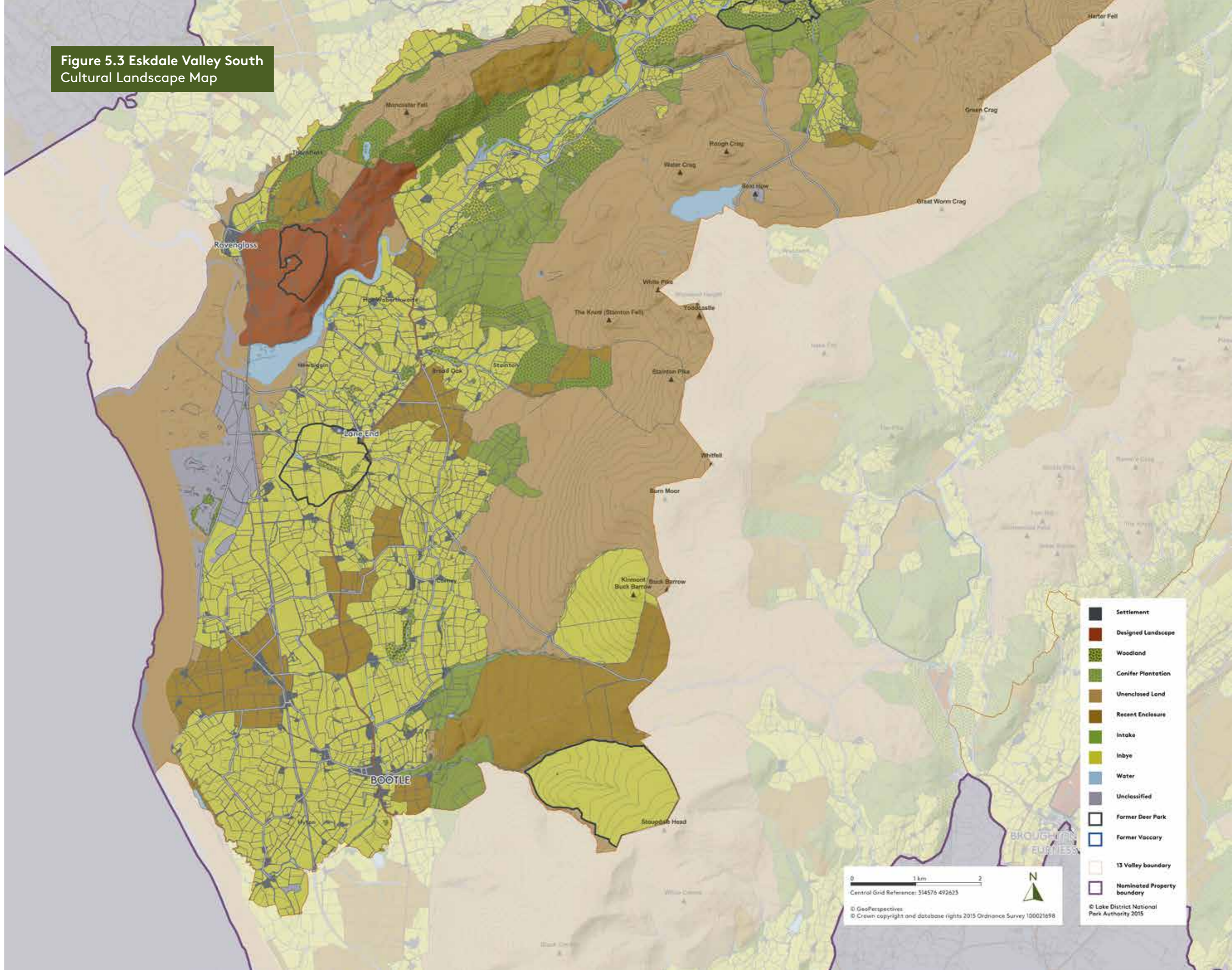


**Figure 5.2 Eskdale Valley North Cultural Landscape Map**



← FOLD OUT MAP

Figure 5.3 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

0 1 km 2  
 Central Grid Reference: 514576 492623  
 © GeoPerspectives  
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FIGURE 5.4 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 5.5 View of Eskdale from above Boot, looking south west towards the coast



FIGURE 5.6 View north across the Great Moss at the head of the River Esk, with Scafell Pike on the left

enclosing bright green inbye fields of improved pasture. In places these walls enclose larger intakes of rougher pasture on the valley sides.

As the valley widens to the south west the gently rolling topography falls away to a more open landscape with extensive views west across the Irish Sea and east up the valley to the imposing high fells. The deeper soils here are suited to more intensive farming including dairy, and walls gradually give way to hedges and hedgerow trees. Still further west the low lying coastal margins become a flat or gently undulating landscape of hummocky dunes, raised beaches and coastal mosses before morphing into the tidal mudflats, shingle beaches, saltmarsh and the big skies of the Mite and Esk estuaries where timelessness returns.



**FIGURE 5.7** Aerial view of Hardknott Roman Fort

The characteristic land use of the valley is undoubtedly agriculture with rough grazing on the open fell and steep valley sides and the higher quality, improved pasture of the inbye on the valley floor. There are many traces of earlier settlement dating back to the Mesolithic c. 8000 BC. Later prehistoric sites include an important group of Neolithic or Bronze Age stone circles and settlement remains on Boot Bank and around Devoke Water. There are also complex ritual and burial landscapes on Eskdale Moor, Bootle Fell, Stainton, Eller How and Great Grassoms. Evidence of early farming can also be found throughout the valley at Little Grassoms,

Birkerthwaite, Pike How, Corney Fell, Woodend Bridge and Waberthwaite Fell.

This evidence normally consists of field systems and clearance cairns which form physical evidence of land improvement, often Bronze Age in date. Such remains are often intertwined with funerary and ritual landscapes suggesting a relatively intensive form of ritual and farming land use. There are 69 nationally important (scheduled) monuments in the valley, 53 of them relate to prehistoric farming. There are two well preserved Roman forts, Ravenglass on the coast, and Hardknott near the head of the valley guarding its eponymous pass.

Industry, principally the mining of iron-ore, brought change to the valley and reached its peak in the mid 19th century. Other service industries flourished utilising the natural resources available such as woodland, while a well preserved corn mill at Boot uses the abundant head of water which provided a reliable power source. Other water powered industrial sites included a fulling mill at Gill Bank, and bobbin mills at Longrigg, Miterdale and Broad Oak, Birkby.

The signs of wealth are increasingly conspicuous moving further west down the valley and the small vernacular rough granite buildings rub shoulders with larger, grander houses built in dressed stone. Muncaster Castle with its 14th century fortified tower was extensively and lavishly re-modelled in the 19th century and overlooks the valley from a

high ledge where it has an imposing presence. Its extensive gardens and estate plantings give a notable appearance of designed landscape to western parts of the valley.

Ravenglass, the only coastal settlement in the Lake District and formerly a busy port and market centre dating back to Roman times, is characterised now by 18th and 19th century buildings. It has a unique atmosphere, a strong sense of history and a powerful relationship with the estuary and the sea. Because of the port and the estuary, Eskdale had more external contact than some other valleys.

Eskdale is a landscape of contrasts on its journey from the high fells to the sea which tells the story of the development of this part of the Lake District from prehistory to modern times. It has scenic beauty in abundance from the wild and rugged mountains through intimate farmed landscapes, vernacular buildings and designed landscape. It provides much evidence of past land use and industries which have shaped the landscape and add interest and depth to it. The past is entirely consistent and compatible with current land use which together help to drive another strand of the local economy which is tourism, helping to sustain communities and manage the land to conserve its interest and beauty.

### **5.1.3 FARMING TODAY – THE AGRO-PASTORAL LANDSCAPE**

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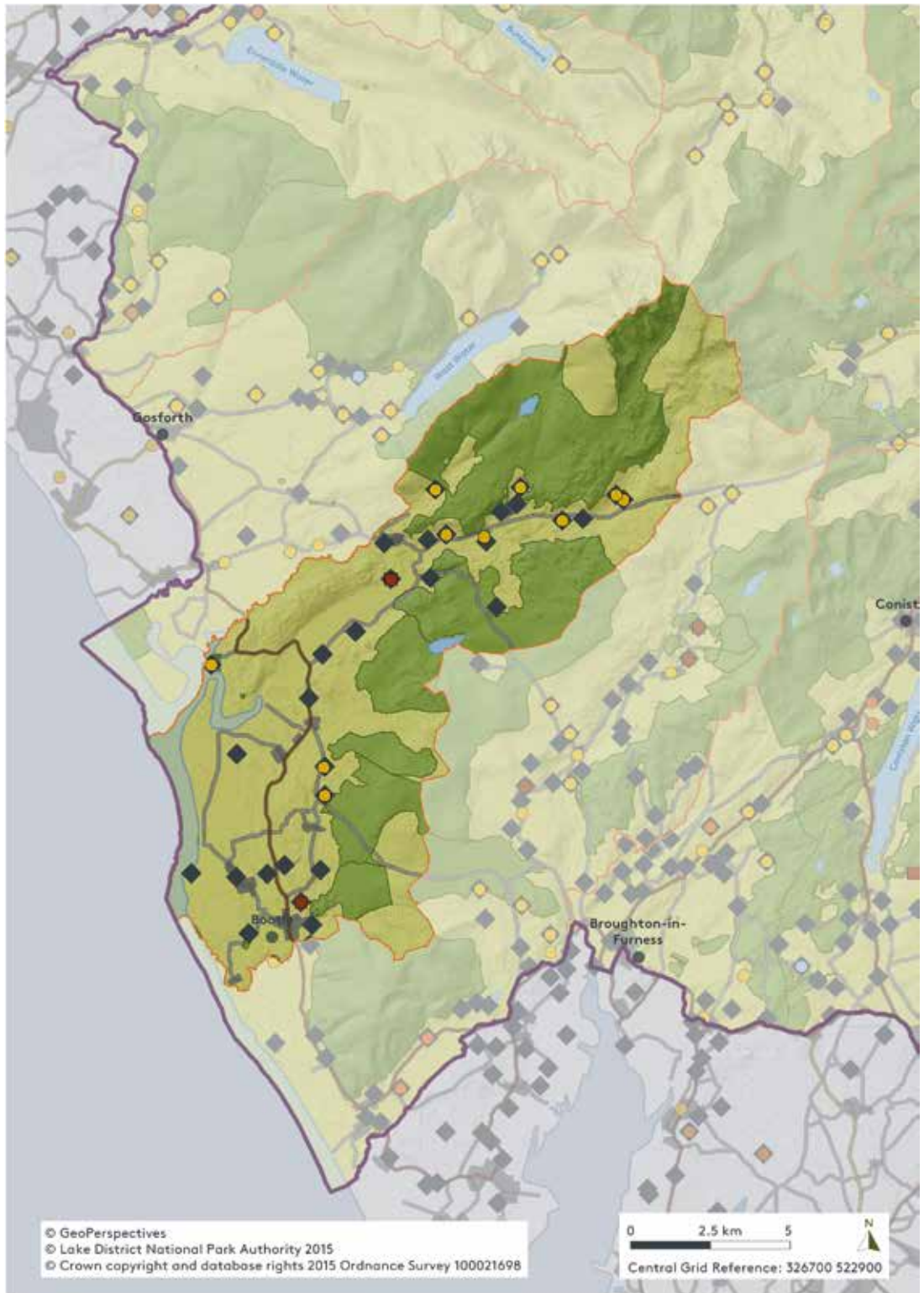
Agro-pastoral farming is the dominant land use in Eskdale and the present day landscape illustrates the strong continuity of farming from medieval times through its field patterns, farmsteads and buildings. Archaeological evidence for very early agro-pastoral agriculture which can be seen on the ground includes the earthwork remains of medieval shielings and enclosures at Great Grassoms and on the Great Moss, at the head of the River Esk. These sites represent two distinct types of pastoral use in the medieval period: large scale stock farming represented by the large enclosures at Great Grassoms (belonging to the lords of Millom) and the Great Moss (Brotherilkeld farm owned by Furness Abbey), and peasant use of hill grazing, indicated by the shieling sites.

The classic Lake District pattern of inbye, intake and open fell grazing is strongly represented in Eskdale and the stone field walls are constructed from the underlying pink granite. As in the head of Wasdale, many of the field walls in Eskdale are particularly massive in construction, indicating the need to clear huge quantities of stone from the land for cultivation. In Eskdale more than any other valley, the fellsides are scattered with the remains of small drystone huts, known as 'peat scales', in which peat was dried and stored. The largest concentration is the cluster of nine huts on Boot Bank. The huts are simple rectangular drystone structures made of local granite rubble having once been roofed, originally with bracken thatch and later with slate.

### **WORKING FARMS AND FLOCKS**

In 1819, William Green in his 'Tourist's New Guide to the Lakes', commented that he did not think that there was anywhere else in the in the district where as many sheep were kept in one small area as there were in the adjoining Eskdale farms of Taw House (Toes House, just under 2,000 sheep), Brotherilkeld (Butterilket, 3,000 sheep) and Black

FIGURE 5.8 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 2015.



FIGURE 5.9 Judging Herdwick Tups at the Eskdale Show

Hall (2,000 sheep). Today, Eskdale is still one of the key valleys in the Lake District for native Herdwick sheep farming. There are 30 fell-going flocks in the Eskdale valley area. There are 12 Herdwick flocks and, two Swaledale flocks registered with the relevant Sheep Breeders' Associations. There are no registered Rough Fell flocks. 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.

## CONTINUING FARMING CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

Eskdale hosts the premier annual Herdwick show on the last Saturday in September and the Herdwick Tup show in May. The Eskdale Show has classes for Herdwick sheep, foxhounds and terriers, along with hound trails where trained hounds race following the scent of aniseed over the surrounding fells, local handicrafts, children's sports events and fell races.

## FARMSTEADS

The local architecture in the upper valley is typical Lake District vernacular, with numerous examples of stone walled, slate roofed farm houses and barns dating from the 16th century and later. The signs of wealth increase towards the west where the more productive lower lying valley is settled with small vernacular rough granite buildings and larger, grander houses built in dressed stone.

Key examples of farm buildings include:

TABLE 5.1 Key farm buildings in Eskdale Valley



### DALEGARTH HALL

Manor house. Site occupied since 14th century but present building 16th century for the Stanleys; the dining-room ceiling was once ornamentally plastered, featuring the date 1599 and initials E. & A.S., for Edward and Ann Stanley). Later additions and alterations included partial demolition 17th century. Original oak stair now replaced; inglenook fireplace with chamfered firebeam; stop chamfered beams; queen strut roof trusses.

**DATE** 14th – 18th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 317004 500120



#### BUILDING WEST OF CROPPLE HOWE FARMHOUSE

A good example of a small Lake District farmhouse with accumulated alterations illustrating the development over successive centuries. It contains Cumbria's only known mid-to late 16th century totally intact wattle and daub smokehood complete with reredos and heck. The current Cropple How farmhouse is mid-18th century with later alterations.

**DATE** Mid to late 16th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 312854 497743



#### BROTHERILKELD

The farmhouse is of typical vernacular style, of rubble construction with white, lime-washed walls and slate roof. Brotherilkeld or 'Butterilket' was described in 1292 as a 'vaccary' or dairy farm by the monks of Furness Abbey on the site of an existing sheep farm. It later became an important 'Herdwick' farm. The farmhouse was rebuilt in the 17th century.

**DATE** 17th century  
**OWNERSHIP** National Trust  
**PROTECTION** Listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 321290 501410



#### YATTUS, ESKDALE GREEN

A roadside group of farmhouse and Forge House and buildings. Forge House itself is dated 1750. The buildings either side are late 18th or early 19th century.

**DATE** 17th – 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 314290 500130



#### LONG RIGG FARM

The best example of a complete planned farmstead in the Lake District, built by Lord Rea of Gatehouse, Eskdale Green, expanding on an existing farmstead, of which the house dates from the early to mid-19th century.

**DATE** Mid-19th – 20th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 313880 500620



#### FIELD HEAD FARM

Well preserved farmhouse of the late 17th century with parlour and firehouse which retains a fine stone firehood.

**DATE** 17th – 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** National Trust  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 315257 498981

**WHA HOUSE FARM**

17th century farmhouse altered in 1820 into a four-square, double-pile house.

**DATE** 17th and 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** National Trust  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 320030 500826

**TAW HOUSE FARM**

Taw House ('Taythes') is named in a list holdings drawn up in 1547, when it was held by William Vycars. The farmhouse dates from around 1806 but is on the site of an earlier dwelling with a press cupboard in the kitchen dating from 1723.

**DATE** 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** National Trust  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 321057 501589

**GILL BANK FARM**

Gabled, L-shaped farmhouse of the 17th century with later additions.

**DATE** 17th – 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** National Trust  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 318073 501802

**PENNY HILL FARM**

18th century farm gifted to National Trust by Beatrix Potter.

**DATE** 18th century  
**OWNERSHIP** National Trust  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 319376 500782

**BIRDHOW COTTAGE**

Almost square shepherd's cottage. This was originally a separate holding which was combined with Taw House in the late 18th century.

**DATE** 17th – 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** National Trust  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 320528 501118

**BRANT RAKE**

17th century farmhouse with associated barn containing re-used 16th century cruck trusses which suggest an earlier house on the site.

**DATE** 16th – 17th century

**OWNERSHIP** Private

**PROTECTION** Listed

**GRID REFERENCE** 314848 498768

**BRIDGE END FARMHOUSE**

House; probably 18th century with later additions and alterations. Whitewashed snecked rubble with quoins. Graduated slate roof with rendered end chimneys. two storeys, three bays.

**DATE** 18th century

**OWNERSHIP** Private

**PROTECTION** Listed

**GRID REFERENCE** 317631 501091

### 5.1.4 INDUSTRY

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While agriculture is the main land use of this valley, relict industry such as iron ore mining which reached its peak in the later 19th century, has left its mark too. The 19th century mines at Nab Gill at Boot produced evidence of grooves where ore had been extracted by earlier miners. There is a concentration of medieval bloomery sites in Eskdale, including at Scale Bridge in the Upper Esk and near Trough House Bridge, which has been radiocarbon dated to around 1275.

Other service industries flourished and a well preserved corn mill at Boot is testament to the exploitation of the valley's natural resources from at least 1547, but probably before. Industry has also provided the valley with one of its main tourist attractions – La'l Ratty is a narrow gauge railway built in 1875 to take the iron ore away to the coast at Ravenglass, although it was also used for passengers. In the 20th century it was used for tourism since the 1960s.

### 5.1.5 SETTLEMENTS

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Eskdale only has a few settlements; the principal ones are Ravenglass and Bootle on the coastal plain with small hamlets such as Eskdale Green and Boot further up the valley.

#### RAVENGLASS

Ravenglass lies at the head of the estuary of the River Esk at the point at which it is joined by the Rivers Irt and Mit. There was a port here in Roman times. From here a road ran up Eskdale and over Hardknott and Wrynose Passes to the head of Lake Windermere. The remains of the Roman fort of Glannaventa and its vicus (civilian settlement),

distinguished by the ruins of its bathhouse, the best preserved Roman building in north-western England, lie slightly to the south of the modern town which is of medieval origin.

In 1208 Ravenglass was granted a Charter to hold a market in Main Street and a fair each summer on St. James's Day. There was a cross in the street but that was taken away many years ago. Today there is a plaque to mark the spot where it is thought to have been.

The medieval street pattern which developed after the 13th century is still the basis of the present village layout. The open market place is enclosed by buildings with narrow pinch points at either end to restrain animals (possibly as a legacy of the important Ravenglass cattle fair of the 17th century) or for defensive purposes, with side lanes to ancient field



**FIGURE 5.10** View across the estuary of the River Esk to Ravenglass village. Black Combe is in the distance on the right.

systems and the shore. The present day historic building stock, mostly 18th/19th century in appearance, but often with earlier origins, is still constructed around this street pattern. The medieval village and port grew and flourished for 500 years. The port was used to transport slate, grain, cattle and other products from the Lake District but its importance ended when the other ports nearer to major centres of industry developed in competition and the railway introduced cheaper alternative transport.

The stone built mid/late 19th century railway buildings, notably goods and engine sheds, stations and signal box, are associated with both the Whitehaven and Furness Junction Railway and the Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway.

Ravenglass Conservation Area was designated in 1981 and extended in 2001 because of the architectural and historical value of the buildings and townscape. Almost all buildings have architectural and historic interest including two listed buildings (Pennington House and The Bay Horse).

## BOOTLE

Bootle is now a small settlement on the road leading to Millom. In the medieval period, it was sufficiently important to be granted a market in 1347. The remains of Seaton Priory are located to the north of the town. Its charter was renewed in 1567. It is said to be the smallest market town in England. The old village straddles the A595, with some sturdy 18th and 19th century buildings. St Michael's Church is quite large for a village of its size. At Bootle Station there is another separate settlement with mainly Victorian buildings and 20th century Ministry of Defence houses for Eskmeals.

## ESKDALE GREEN

Eskdale Green is a small 19th century settlement part-way up the valley whose growth is largely the result of mining, the railway and tourism. It is centred on the late 19th century St. Bega's Church, but dominated by Gate House villa.

## BOOT

Boot is a small attractive hamlet at a bridging point over Whillan Beck, at the start of packhorse routes. There are some vernacular buildings, especially the very fine working Corn Mill, dating from the 16th century, adjacent to a stone bridge. Prosperity came when Nab Gill mine opened for haematite extraction in 1875, the reason for the establishment of the Ravenglass and Eskdale railway. Its original terminus was at Boot, at the foot of an inclined tramway, now at Dalegarth Station. The railway is now a major tourist attraction. Nearby, St Catherine's Church, dates from the 14th century, but was substantially rebuilt in 1881. Dalegarth Hall dates from the medieval to the 17th century and was home of the Stanley family. Doctor Bridge, east of Boot, is a fine single span stone packhorse bridge of the 17th century which was widened in 1774 for a Doctor Tyson to accommodate his horse-drawn trap.

## WABERTHWAITE

Waberthwaite is a very small hamlet scattered alongside the A595 main road, with building groups at Broad Oak, Lane End and Hall Waberthwaite. It has a small, simple church near the estuary, with an ancient cross shaft. Prosperity came with granite quarrying at Broad Oak, specialising in granite setts for paving Lancashire town streets.

### 5.1.6 VILLAS, DESIGNED LANDSCAPES AND PICTURESQUE

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Eskdale does not have a lake in the valley bottom (only a number of tarns in the surrounding fells) and despite exhibiting pleasant pastoral scenery it attracted much less attention from the Lake Poets and others than some of the other valleys. As a result there is almost no villa development. The principal (and very late) exception is Gatehouse (1896-1901), a ponderous villa, tending towards Arts and Crafts, built for J. H. Rea by A. Huddart of Whitehaven, which is associated with a substantial man made lake. This villa replaced the earlier Esk Villa built by Rea's father in 1852. The associated garden at Giggle Alley was designed by Thomas Mawson in a Japanese style, including rhododendrons, specimen trees, rockeries and rills around an artificial tarn with boathouse. Lord Rea allegedly aimed to "create a garden to rival Lord Muncaster's estate". Gatehouse has been an outward bound school since the 1950s.



FIGURE 5.11 Muncaster Castle and gardens

The most significant house in the valley is Muncaster Castle, seat of the Pennington Family, at the coastal end of Eskdale. The present building incorporates parts of a 14th century pele tower and was substantially altered and extended by the architect Anthony Salvin in 1862-6. Within the castle grounds, the Church of St Michael and All Angels, Muncaster is 16th century with alterations by Salvin in 1874. A 10th century cross stands in the churchyard. Muncaster Castle is also surrounded by spectacular landscaped gardens (Grade II\* Registered Parks and Gardens), initially dating from the 18th century, which include an internationally important collection of rhododendrons.

**TABLE 5.2** Key villas in Eskdale Valley

	<p><b>GATEHOUSE</b></p> <p>Gatehouse is a large mansion in Arts and Crafts style built for Liverpool ship owner Lord Rea between 1896 and 1901. Associated garden by Thomas Mawson.</p> <p><b>DATE</b> 19th – 20th century  <b>OWNERSHIP</b> Outward Bound Trust  <b>PROTECTION</b> Listed  <b>GRID REFERENCE</b> 314357 500223</p>
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## 5.2 HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

### 5.2.1 ARCHAEOLOGY AND EARLY SETTLEMENT

#### PREHISTORIC

Human settlement in Eskdale can be traced back to the remains of temporary settlements of Mesolithic hunters around the estuary of the Esk, dating to c. 8000 BC. Later prehistoric sites include Neolithic or Bronze Age stone circles and settlement remains on Boot Bank and around Devoke Water. There are also complex ritual and



**FIGURE 5.12** Small Neolithic stone circle (4000 – 2000 BC) at Low Longrigg on Eskdale Moor

burial landscapes at Eskdale Moor, Bootle Fell, Stainton and Great Grassoms. Evidence of early farming can also be found throughout the valley. This evidence normally consists of field systems and clearance cairns which form physical evidence of land improvement often Bronze Age in date. Such remains are often intertwined with funerary and ritual landscapes suggesting a relatively intensive form of ritual and farming land use. There are 53 scheduled prehistoric farming sites in the valley.

## ROMAN

In the Roman period forts were constructed on the coast at Ravenglass and at Hardknott. Adjacent to Ravenglass fort are the remains of a 'vicus' (civilian settlement) which has been recently excavated, and a Roman bath house. These remains now form part of the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site. Five hundred cavalry originally from Dalmatia once occupied Hardknott Fort, which was built on a rocky spur where strategic views overlooking the river Esk were an essential part of its role to protect the route out of the valley linking the port of Ravenglass with its garrisons at Ambleside. The main road through Eskdale probably follows the course of a Roman road connecting these two forts and continuing on through the central Lake District to the fort at Ambleside.

### 5.2.2 THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CURRENT SETTLEMENT PATTERN

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Scandinavian and Norse place-names are common throughout the valley, such as Brotherilkeld meaning 'the booth of Ulfkell' and a number of Norse 'thwaite' place-names meaning a clearing. The Waberthwaite and Muncaster sculpted crosses, expertly intertwining Scandinavian and Anglian artistic traditions from the late 9th to early 11th centuries, are physical evidence of this occupation.

### 5.2.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FARMING LANDSCAPE

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By the 12th century much of Eskdale was part of Copeland Forest, and thus free chase or hunting land. Feudal barons ran their manors directly or through bailiffs, and although technically illegal, the enclosure of waste by assarting and establishment of new settlement was probably encouraged by the lords as a means of improving the revenues from their manors. Although impossible to trace most specific instances on the ground, some place-names recorded in 15th century rental documents refer to now abandoned Eskdale farmsteads which probably originated as a result of peasant colonisation during the period of population growth c. 1150 – 1350. These include Park House (1455), Yoad Park (1470, meaning 'old park'?) and Hethwaite (1470, meaning perhaps either clearing from the heath or high clearing). It is likely that nearly all current farmsteads running up the sides of the valley have been occupied since at least the 13th century.

Farmsteads consisted of small irregular enclosures and their tenants worked inbye field parcels close to their isolated farms as seen in the existing farms in upper Eskdale and recorded in the Percy Survey of 1578. Deserted examples include Bank End (1493) and Coalpit How (1587) on Muncaster Fell. Stock was put out to pasture on common grazing land on the higher, unenclosed fells. The name 'Scale Close' at the head of Eskdale at a cluster of huts probably refers to seasonal shielings (from Old Norse 'skali') common to much of the uplands in the 13th and 14th centuries but which were colonised as farms elsewhere in the Lake District. The remains of medieval shielings can also be found at Great Grassoms and Stainton Ling. There are also examples of 'islands' of improved fields on the low fell, for example, Birkerthwaite on Birker Fell. These may have earlier medieval origins and could have developed around shieling sites that became permanent. Possible

exceptions to this pattern can be found in Eskdale, nonetheless. Between the hamlet of Boot and the 14th century St Catherine's Church the flat space may have supported communal arable agriculture, and to the south of the road there are some strips which may have been enclosed from a small open field system. Dalegarth Hall's appearance at the southern end of this possible open field system may represent a relationship between a lord's holding and the open fields of tenants; that it too is 14th century seems to support this as a phase of active colonisation. Close to the coast, strip-shaped fields appear frequently around Middleton Place, Langley Park, Bootle and Annaside.

If these do represent relict open field systems then they may reflect denser populations along the coasts, as may the market settlements at Ravenglass and Bootle. Alternatively these fields could simply result from the opportunities afforded by better land, so that large open fields developed, shared between several farms. The clearest example of strip fields in the Eskdale valley has to be at Ravenglass. Here the railway has bisected each of the strips, which would previously have extended to the tenements along Ravenglass' main street in a classic medieval village pattern. The 'Grant of a Fair and Market' to Ravenglass by King John in 1208 affirms its importance as a port and town in medieval Cumbria.

Furness Abbey had established a vaccary at the head of Brothelkeld before 1292. This reflects well the reservation by the manorial lords of the dale head areas during the 11th-13th centuries. These choicest pastures had hay-meadows on the valley floor for amassing winter fodder and were mostly surrounded by a bowl of fellside summer pasture. The establishment of a vaccary here is one effect of the Hudleston family's grant of this particular dale head in 1242 to Furness Abbey. Land divisions belonging to the vaccary can still be seen at Great Moss.

The register of the Priory of St Bees, dated 1252, suggests that the land of 'Gresholmes' (Grassoms) was of some value and was therefore probably in agricultural use at that time. A second reference comes from the Millom Courtbook within which are details of a rental of 1510. This rental notes a tenement called 'Gresholmys' which was owned by the lords of Millom whose "shepherd remains on that place and guards the sheep". Documents of 1284 (the 'Furness Coucher') also record that the earthwork boundary on the Great Moss was constructed by the monks of Furness Abbey to prevent their stock straying into neighbouring land used for hunting.

Two emparked areas shown in the First edition Ordnance Survey map of 1860 up on the high fells which are otherwise undocumented are of unknown status – Prior Park on Corney Fell, which may have belonged to Conishead Priory, and a pair of parks at Little and Great Grisson on Bootle Fell, belonging to the lords of Millom.

Another religious establishment which was established in the valley was Seaton nunnery, founded just north of Bootle in the late 12th century. It was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and its nuns followed the Benedictine rule. It was a poor foundation that required assistance from a variety of sources from the 13th to 15th centuries. Today the site survives as ruins in the grounds of the listed Seaton Hall which appears to have been built in the 16th century after the nunnery's dissolution. There are slight surviving remains of the church and a fragment of the monumental grave slab of a prioress survives in a nearby farmstead. Seaton nunnery was dissolved in 1535.

On the coast the settlement of Ravenglass developed as a harbour and trading port due to its estuarine setting, nestled at the confluence of the Rivers Esk, Mite and Irt. Access to the sea and a safe harbour were essential for trading, transportation and fishing. The first written record of 'R'englas' was a gift of land for a hospital in the 12th century. In 1208 King John gave a charter to Richard de Luci, Lord of Egremont to hold a weekly market and annual fair. To its south on the coastal plain, Bootle also developed as a settlement with a market and fair granted in 1347.

From around the middle of the 14th century, economic decline associated with war, must have taken its toll. This may account for the abandonment of 'Banggarth' in Lower Eskdale, first recorded as abandoned in 1570. It was possibly also at this time that the vaccary at Brotherilkeld became a tenanted sheep farm, which it remains to this day.

The manor of Eskdale is notable for containing the highest mountains in England, and until the late 18th and early 19th century these mountainous areas contained an even greater proportion of waste than other Cumbrian townships. This waste was never enclosed as it consisted of land that was too steep and too poor to merit the investment. However, some enclosure did take place around the farmsteads on the lower fellsides. In 1587 a manor court order assigned open sections of the lower fellsides to each farm as a cow pasture, to provide grazing for milking cattle close to the farmstead. Initially the division of the fellside seems to have required no additional physical enclosures; the community seems to have been happy merely to respect the court order. Whether the 1587 order was defining something new or merely codifying existing and perhaps long-standing practice is impossible to tell. However, by 1701 many intakes were walled.



**FIGURE 5.13** The Eskdale Mill at Boot

Beyond the intake walls, the uplands provided vital summer grazing as well as various other resources. The most valued tenants' rights included the right to pasture on commons, the common right of turbary (peat cutting) and the right to collect wood for fuel, to make implements and to carry out house repairs, and also bracken for thatch and animal bedding – known as common of estovers. Pasture rights were – and remain – an integral part of the local farming system, both for 'great goods' (cattle and horses) and for sheep. Common of turbary was of vital importance as peat was the principal

fuel until the 20th century. Each farm in Eskdale had its own individual peat hut, as did the cornmill at Boot (Eskdale Mill). The peat huts were usually located on unenclosed common land near the marked break of slope between the peat-yielding plateau and the steep drop down to the valley floor. Many have been built close to carefully-graded sledge tracks which zigzag up the slope to the peat. Documentary evidence suggests that some were in existence by the end of the 16th century and oral evidence suggests that the huts ceased to be used for peat storage by the early 20th century. Each of the peat huts on the common land above Boot and Dalegarth Station are still allocated to individual commoners.

Other natural resources exploited included the underlying granite geology which provided rich sources of iron ore which was mined and smelted for hundreds of years. Evidence survives for a number of smaller extractive and service industries from the medieval period. In the medieval period iron ore was probably mined from surface veins and was smelted in local bloomeries using charcoal produced in the local woodland. A bloomery forge (water-powered bloomery) was established at Muncaster Head in 1630.

Mills in Eskdale and at Muncaster probably had medieval origins and their compulsory use was controlled by the lords of the manor. The double wheeled corn mill at Boot (now called Eskdale Mill) dates originally from the medieval period and was held by Robert Vychars in 1547. It is now listed Grade II\*. There were both corn and fullings mills at Muncaster by 1455.

## POST-MEDIEVAL ESKDALE

The distinctive Lake District farmsteads began to take their modern form from the close of the 16th century. While some farms such as Dalegarth Hall are known to have existed in the 14th century, many display signs of having been rebuilt in the very late 16th or 17-18th centuries suggesting a period of major investment at this time. Most of the surviving housing stock in the rural areas dates from the 18th to 19th century at the latest.

The period of the 16th to early 18th centuries in the Lake District was a period when tenements and enclosures were reorganised and consolidated. Some Eskdale farmsteads were clearly abandoned during this period – for whatever reason, perhaps connected with the growth of the Cumbrian iron industry. William Pennington was buying up tenements as they became available between 1619 and 1636. Bank End is last recorded in the first half of the 17th century. Coalpit How was last mentioned in a lease renewal of 1754 whereby all the farms at Muncaster Head were brought together under a single tenant – by 1767 Coalpit How had gone to be replaced by Coalpit Field. A lease of 1723 is the last references to Yoad Park and Park House. The abandonment of these farms and the collation of separate holdings under single tenants are indicators of how energetic individuals were responsible for reorganising the medieval farming landscape into the surviving parcels.

Thomas Donald's 1774 map is one of the earliest to include Eskdale and it appears to show a series of isolated farmsteads in the upper valley with the densest concentrations of buildings at Yester Field, Eskdale Green and 'Butter Ilket' (Brotherilkeld). Notably, Boot was still just a pair of farms along with the Eskdale Mill at Boot. The lowlands supported far greater concentrations at Park Nook, Corney, Stub Place and Muncaster, and the towns of Ravenglass and Bootle were the densest areas of settlement in the valley.

Whilst the lowland areas had already been turned over to agriculture long before 1800, late 18th and 19th century planned enclosure in upper Eskdale appears to be virtually non-existent. The historical reasons for this are unclear but it may be that the costs outweighed the benefits. Parliamentary Enclosure in the Eskdale Valley area is recorded, however, and the Bootle Fell Enclosure Award of 1857 carved up large swathes of the uplands above Bootle. There are some discrete areas which may have been enclosed by private arrangement – on the slopes of Birkby Fell above Knott End facing Muncaster Castle there are regular enclosures above earlier (16th-17th century?) parcels with ‘coppice’ place-names.

The 18th and 19th centuries brought in larger-scale industry which took advantage of new technologies. A narrow gauge railway (known locally as the ‘La’l Ratty’) was built in 1875 to take the iron ore away to the coast at Ravenglass. Passenger services also ran on the line and in the 20th century it was used for transporting granite from Eskdale’s quarries and now operates as a popular tourist attraction. The River Irt locomotive which runs on the line is the oldest working 15” gauge locomotive in the world.

#### 5.2.4 DISCOVERY AND APPRECIATION OF A RICH CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

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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 Lake District. J. M. W. Turner sketched Eskdale Mill at Boot in collaboration with Girtin, but neither Girtin nor Turner may have visited the site when it was drawn, but instead based it on an earlier composition by Edward Dayes. However, Eskdale does have literary associations from the early 19th century.

#### 5.2.5 ROMANTIC SITES, BUILDINGS AND ASSOCIATIONS

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Coleridge visited Eskdale on his walking tour of the Lake District in August 1802. His notebook reveals an intense blend of a local and particular engagement with the environment:

“I am sitting by Eskdale side-/O for wealth to wood these Tarns – weeping Birches with Mountain Ash & Laburnum/with Hollies for underwood/” with an equally intense emotional narrative:

**“A gentle Madman that would wander still over the mountains by the lonely Tairns (Lakes) – the like never seen since the crazy Shepherd, who having lost almost all his sheep in a long hard snow was repulsed or thought himself treated coldly by his Sweet-heart – & so went a wanderer (sic) seeking his Sheep for ever/in storm and snow especially”**

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Notebook’ (1802)

Just before entering the head of Eskdale, Coleridge unintentionally descended Broad Stand, dropping onto a ledge and then found that the distance above him was too high for returning, and so was obliged to take on the risks of further descents onto ledges. This is now recognised as one of the first recorded 'rock-descents' in the history of mountaineering. Immediately on completing his perilous descent Coleridge on the recommendation of Mr Tyson at Wasdale Head made for Taw House Farm and stayed the night.

Further down the valley, just beyond Brock Crag, Coleridge "came to the four-foot Stone/on which there are the clear marks of four feet, the first a beast's foot, so wide, the next a Boy's shoe...the third a [large] dog's Foot, the fourth a child's shoe..." (Coleridge, 'Notebook' (1802))

Wordsworth visited the area and it also featured in his 'Guide through the District of the Lakes'. He reflected on three periods of colonisation of the Lake District when at Hardknott Roman Fort; the 'druidic', the Roman, and the Scandinavian, all of which he showed to be elements of a more enduring terrain and natural environment:

**"...And into silence hush the timorous flocks,  
That slept so calmly while the nightly dew  
Moisten'd each fleece, beneath the twinkling stars:  
These couch'd mid that lone Camp on Hardknot's height."**

**William Wordsworth, 'Duddon Sonnets XVII' (1820)**

### **5.2.6 EARLY CONSERVATION – THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL FOR PROTECTING LANDSCAPES**

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The continuity of the romantic tradition for walking in the Lake District and the spiritual refreshment and self-discovery it afforded into the 20th century is exemplified in Eskdale in the extensive areas of open fell around the valley, much of which is Common Land with open access. The growing popularity of walking holidays in the early 20th century led to the expansion of the Youth Hostel Association (YHA). The Eskdale Youth Hostel was purpose built and designed by John Dower, one of the founding fathers of United Kingdom National Parks and Chair of the Dower Committee which reported to the Government in 1945 paving the way for the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Eskdale Youth Hostel opened in 1938, replacing Taw House (1933-38). Gatehouse at Eskdale Green was converted into an outdoor education centre in 1950 and is now run by the Outward Bound Trust.

A number of key assets in the valley have been acquired by conservation bodies. The National Trust now owns and manages a number of farms in upper Eskdale and much of the surrounding fell land, including Eskdale Common and Scafell Pike, which was gifted to the National Trust by Lord Leconfield in 1920 as a war memorial. National Trust farm acquisitions in Eskdale have included Wha House Farm (bought with legacy in 1942); Taw House Farm (bought with legacy in 1942) and, Penny Hill Farm (bought using Heelis bequest). Brotherilkeld was bought with a legacy in 1961; Field Head

was bought in 1974; Gill Bank Farm, Boot was purchased by Lake District Farm Estates in 1955 then gifted to the National Trust in 1976.

The National Trust now own 4,959 hectares of land of which 4,160 hectares is inalienable. They also have an additional 801 hectares of leased land and seven hectares of covenanted land.

The community based Eskdale Mill and Heritage Trust acquired Eskdale Mill at Boot in 2006. Stanley Ghyll and its waterfalls have attracted visitors since at least Victorian times. It was purchased by the Lake District Special Planning Board from the Ponsonby and Dalegarth Estate in 1994, with the object of preserving nature conservation interests and providing access opportunities for the public.

The remoteness of the valley protected it from many of the 20th century development related pressures of the outside world, but even here controversial proposals had to be resisted. The upper valley, around Hardknott, was included along with the upper Duddon valley in the controversial scheme for commercial forestry which was largely prevented through the 1936 Agreement with the Forestry Commission. Notwithstanding the agreement, the two ancient sheep farms of Brothorikeld Farm in Eskdale and Black Hall, UIpha were still included within the area to be planted. Further negotiations resulted in the establishment of a 'Hardknott Forest Park' (between 1943 and 1959) and as a result of further pressure from conservation bodies, particularly the Friends of the Lake District, in 1943 the Forestry Commission entered into a covenant with the National Trust and agreed not to plant on the land of Brothorikeld Farm. Brothorikeld was eventually sold to the National Trust in 1961.

The threat of commercial forestry was one of the catalysts for the formation of the Friends of the Lake District and the campaign in the central fells was their first major campaign.

In the 1940s Eskdale was threatened with a significant proposal for hydro-electricity generation. This would have consisted of two reservoirs in the upper valley, access roads and tunnels connecting to the Duddon valley. It did not proceed for economic reasons, but it reinforced the Friends of the Lake District's argument that a Lake District National Park with a strong planning framework was urgently needed.

### **5.3 CONTRIBUTION TO THE ENGLISH LAKE DISTRICT'S OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE**

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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 within 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 5.4.

Traditional agro-pastoral farming is 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 comprises small, irregular inbye fields attached to individual farms along with intakes on some of the lower slopes and extensive areas of open fell grazing, much of which is Common Land. Brotherilkeld Farm, at the head of the valley, was established as a vaccary by Furness Abbey in the 13th century and is now one of the key Herdwick farms in the Lake District. Indeed Eskdale is one of the key valleys for Herdwick farming.

Eskdale contains a large and important group of early farm buildings, dating in one case from the 14th century but generally from the late 16th to the 18th centuries. The valley also has a concentration of peat storage huts, medieval in origin and rebuilt in the 18th century, which attests to communal use of resources on the open fell in addition to grazing of stock. Compared to many Lake District valleys, there is a greater survival of the pre-19th century traditional pastoral landscape in Eskdale. This includes not only farmsteads but also the field pattern, coppiced woodland, and ancillary buildings such as the peat huts. The late arrival of villas and tourist development, combined with the lack of Parliamentary enclosure and the absence of resident gentry in the upper valley seem to have combined to preserve an older landscape. Traditional hill farming has survived particularly strongly and there was continued use of the 1587 rules governing the use of common land (the 'Twenty-four Book') right up to the mid-20th century.

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, of which the latter is part of the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site.

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 but, unlike some other valleys, there is little physical change as a result of their undoubted interest.

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.

The integrity of the landscape attributes is high with very little modern development and a working traditional agro-pastoral system. The authenticity of the attributes relating to farming and to conservation is very high.



FIGURE 5.14 Miterdale from the west, with Burnmoor Tarn and Scafell beyond