



The high fells at the head of West Water

A scenic landscape of Wasdale, featuring a calm lake reflecting the surrounding mountains and a large tree in the foreground. The sky is overcast, and the water is still, creating a mirror-like effect of the mountains. A large, dark rock is visible in the lower-left corner of the lake.

6. WASDALE

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Description, History and Development

6. THE WASDALE VALLEY



“Next, almost due west, look down into, and along the deep valley of Wastdale, with its little chapel and half a dozen neat dwellings scattered upon a plain of meadow and corn-ground intersected with stone walls apparently innumerable, like a large piece of lawless patchwork... Beyond this little fertile plain lies, within a bed of steep mountains, the long, narrow, stern, and desolate lake of Wastdale; and, beyond this, a dusky tract of level ground conducts the eye to the Irish Sea.”

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

6.1 DESCRIPTION

6.1.1 LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

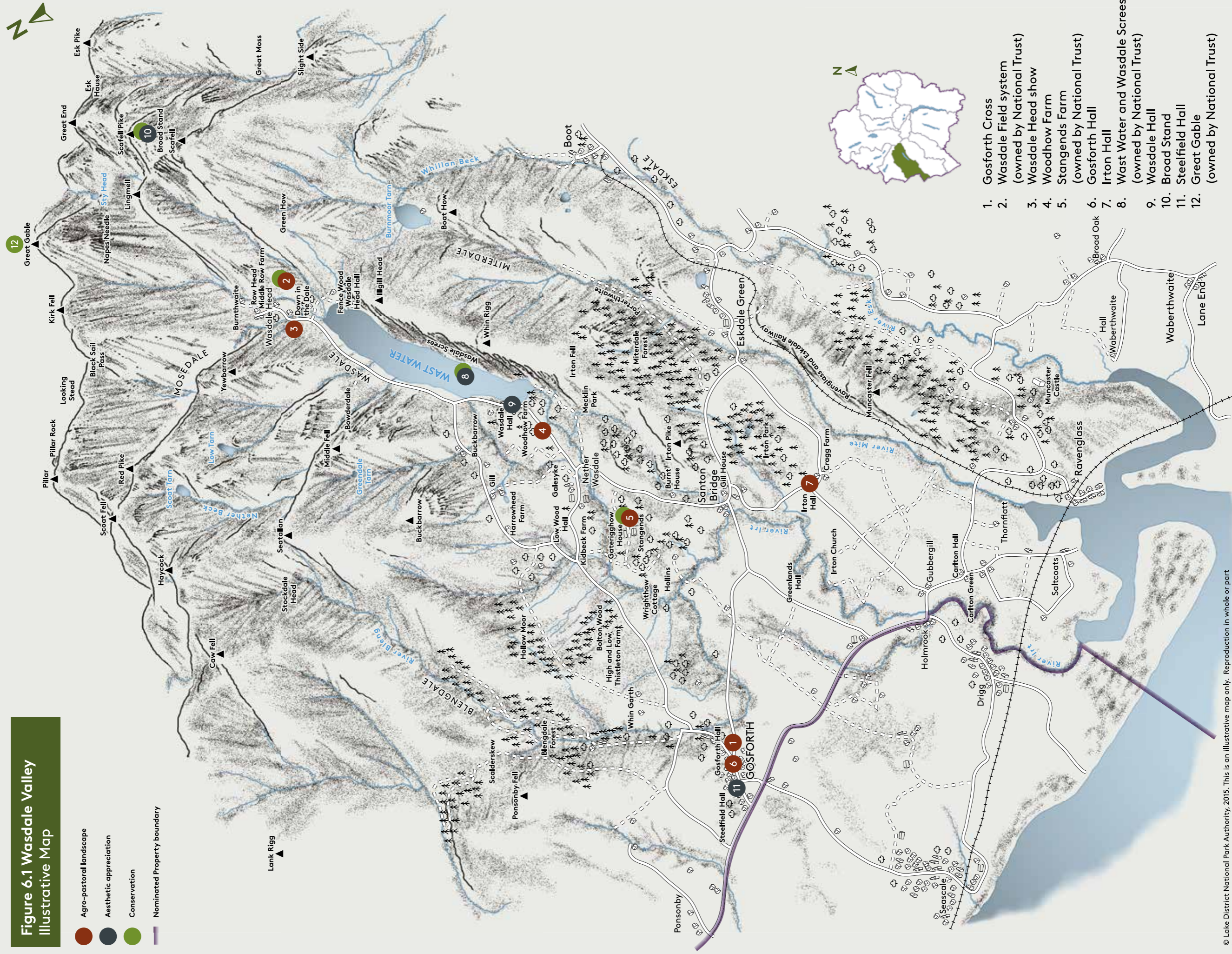
Wasdale is located in the western part of the English Lake District bordered by Eskdale to the south and Ennerdale to the north. It begins in the highest mountains in the central hub of the area and runs south west to the sea at the estuary of the River Irt flowing from the foot of West Water through a lowland landscape very different to that containing the large glacial lake and dramatic fells enclosing the U-shaped upper valley.

It is also a valley of contrasts with the imposing bulk and dramatic landform of Great Gable, Scafell, Kirk Fell and Yewbarrow enclosing the head of the valley which then runs south west and abruptly changes to a more gentle, wooded, pastoral landscape including large country houses, gardens and parkland then on to the softer, more open estuarine landscapes of the Irt and Mite.

The underlying geology of Wasdale is predominantly of the Borrowdale Volcanic Group, which accounts for the high jagged fells at the head of the valley and the spectacular ruggedness of The Screes. There is a fringe of sandstone at the start of the coastal plain, at the western end of the valley. The effects of glaciation are also evident here where moving glaciers have carved out the bed of England’s deepest lake. See Figure 6.1 for an illustrative map of the valley. Also see Figures 6.2 and 6.3 for an overview of the cultural landscape of the Wasdale Valley.

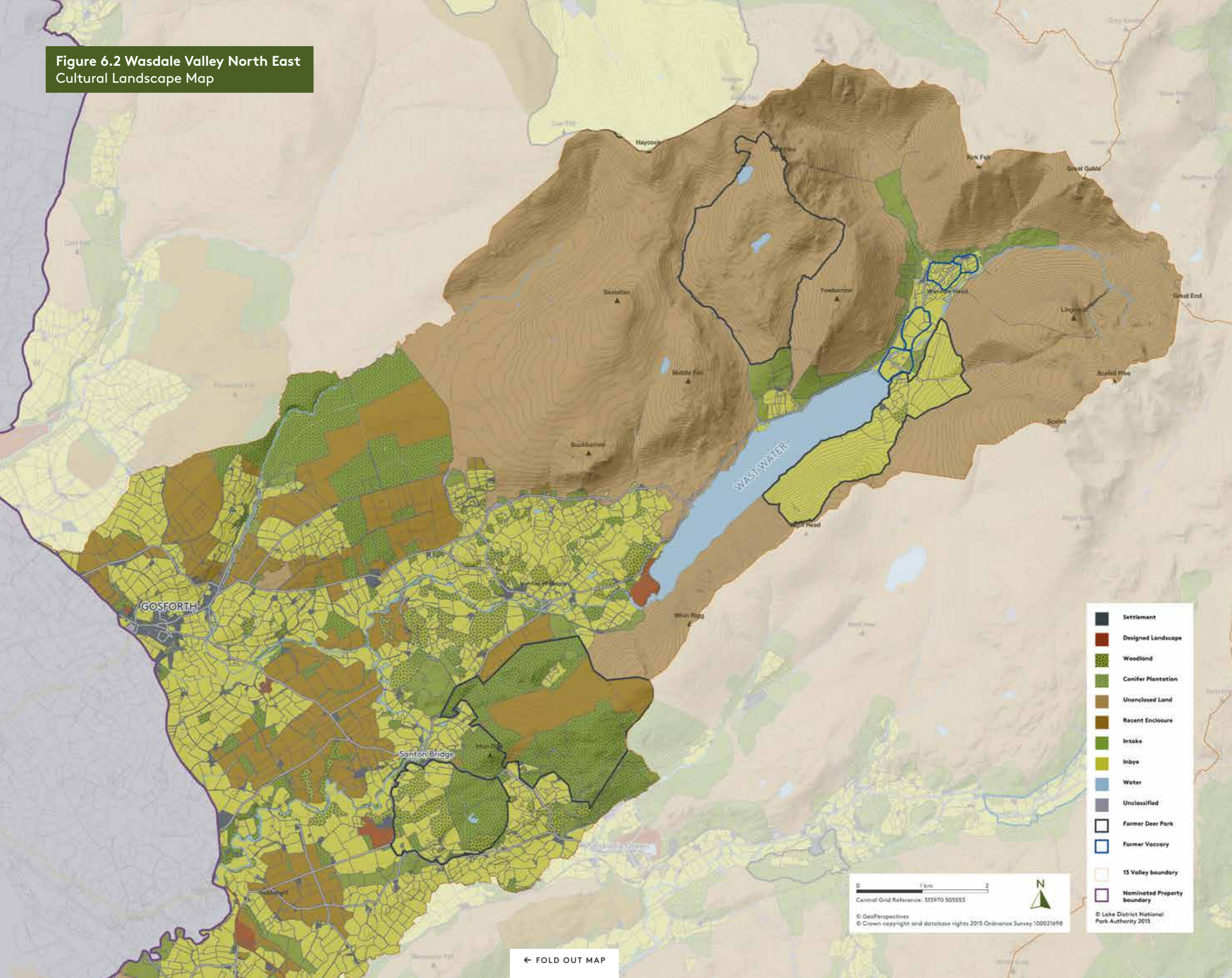
Figure 6.1 Wasdale Valley Illustrative Map

- 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)

Figure 6.2 Wasdale Valley North East Cultural Landscape Map



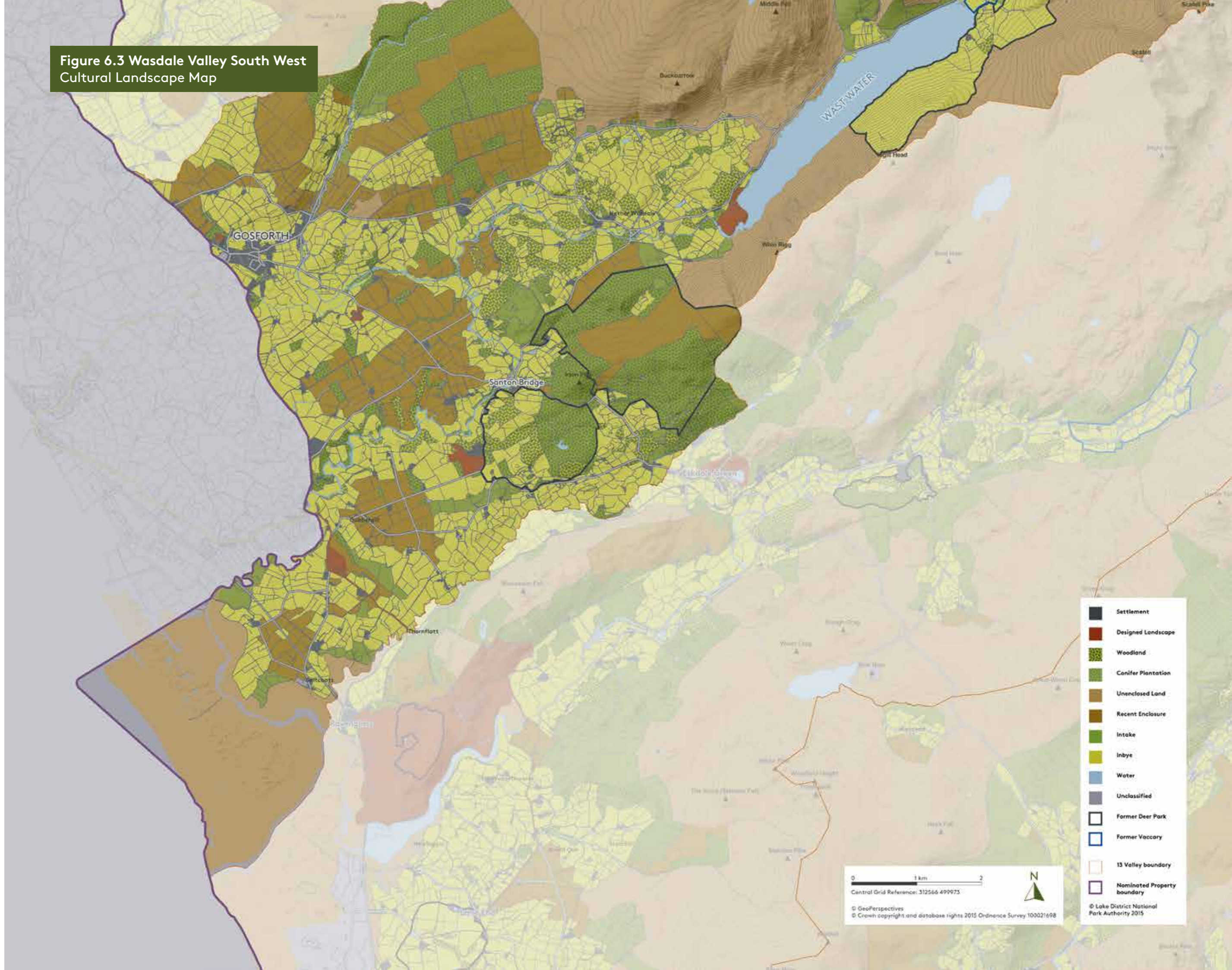
- Settlement
- Designed Landscape
- Woodland
- Conifer Plantation
- Unenclosed Land
- Recent Enclosure
- Intake
- Inbye
- Water
- Unclassified
- Former Deer Park
- Former Vaccory
- 13 Valley boundary
- Nominated Property boundary

0 1 km 2
 Central Grid Reference: 515970 505553
 © GeoPerspectives
 © Crown copyright and database rights 2015 Ordnance Survey 100021698

© Lake District National Park Authority 2015

← FOLD OUT MAP

Figure 6.3 Wasdale Valley South West Cultural Landscape Map



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

0 1 km 2
 Central Grid Reference: 312566 499973
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FIGURE 6.4 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 6.5 View of the Wasdale Valley from Great Gable showing the ancient field system on the valley floor at Wasdale Head, Wast Water, and the Irish Sea coast on the western edge of the Lake District



FIGURE 6.6 Wasdale Hall and surrounding parkland from the top of the Screes above Wast Water. Wasdale Hall is owned by the National Trust and is used as a youth Hostel.

6.1.2 THE INHERITED LANDSCAPE'S CHARACTER

The eastern part of the valley is amongst the most wild and dramatic scenery in the UK including England's highest mountain, Scafell Pike, 977 metres high, and deepest lake, West Water 79 metres deep. Sheer, grey scree slopes cascading down from the summit ridge of Whin Rigg and Illgill Head dominate the south shores of the lake and emphasise the steepness of the valley sides where they appear to plunge into the depths.

This is upland, ice carved scenery at its best, modified but certainly not tamed, by human influence which simply adds further layers of interest to the landscape.

At the foot of the lake is Low Wood, the first of many mixed and coniferous woodlands marking the beginning of a very different landscape. This is a peaceful landscape dominated by pastoral farmland and mixed or deciduous woodland further west and the large conifer plantations of Blengdale and Miterdale in the east. It contains the two river valleys and links the lowland plain to the upland fells set against the backdrop of the lower fell fringe with its crags, rock outcrops and extensive bracken beds. The rolling or undulating farmland continues west with the distinctive field boundary walls, built with rounded, beck bottom stones that appear to defy gravity and inspire awe at the skill of the wallers who built them. These give way to hedges and more frequent woodland cover creating an altogether softer appearance to the landscape. Further west still the land becomes flatter and woodland cover and hedgerow trees become less frequent leading to a more open landscape. West of the A595 the landscape has a distinct coastal feel confirmed by glimpsed views of the extensive Drigg Dunes system west of the confluence of the Irt and Mite.

One of the defining features of Wasdale is the single road in and out of the valley squeezed onto the narrow undulating margin between the lakeshore and the steeply rising fellsides enclosing the valley from the north. There is not even the space for a reasonable footpath on the south shore where The Screes plunge into the lake and negotiating the public right of way can be difficult. This all adds to the drama, and in high season, slow traffic, of the valley.

6.1.3 FARMING TODAY – THE AGRO-PASTORAL LANDSCAPE

The Wasdale landscape shows a strong continuity of farming from the medieval period to today in its field patterns, farmsteads and buildings. However, the farming landscape of Wasdale 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 valley 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.

Around Wasdale Head, in the upper Wasdale valley, the surviving pattern reflects much earlier arrangements. Irregular enclosures associated with surviving and abandoned farm tenements have been consolidated from open fields, themselves the result of the sub-division of four 14th century vaccary farms between the 14th and 17th centuries.



FIGURE 6.7 Row Head Farm at Wasdale Head with intake fields on the fell slope beyond



FIGURE 6.8 A clearance wall forming part of the ancient field system at Wasdale Head. Here the walls are widened into clearance cairns to accommodate the huge amount of stone that has been transported from the fellsides by water.

area to the north of the hamlet of Nether Wasdale. The farms are located on the edge of the inbye fields, just below the fell slope, probably surviving elements of a medieval settlement pattern. There are a few small, early intakes attached to the upslope sides of this system, but the higher land in the lower valley is generally enclosed with the large, straight-walled field of parliamentary or other planned enclosure. This is particularly clear on the south-facing slopes of Bolton Wood. West of Nether Wasdale village the dispersed farms are set within a more recent field system, comprising regular fields with straight boundaries. The frequency of hedges increases towards the coast.

WORKING FARMS AND FLOCKS

Wasdale is one of the key Lake District valleys for Herdwick sheep, with several noted farms. In the 1920s Middle Row was 'a noted ram-breeding flock of long-standing' and Burnthwaite was 'one of the oldest pure-bred flocks in the country. Many prize-winners, both male and female, can be traced back to this flock, which has been carefully handled

There is a limited extent of 17th and 18th century intakes encroaching onto the waste which add to this pattern.

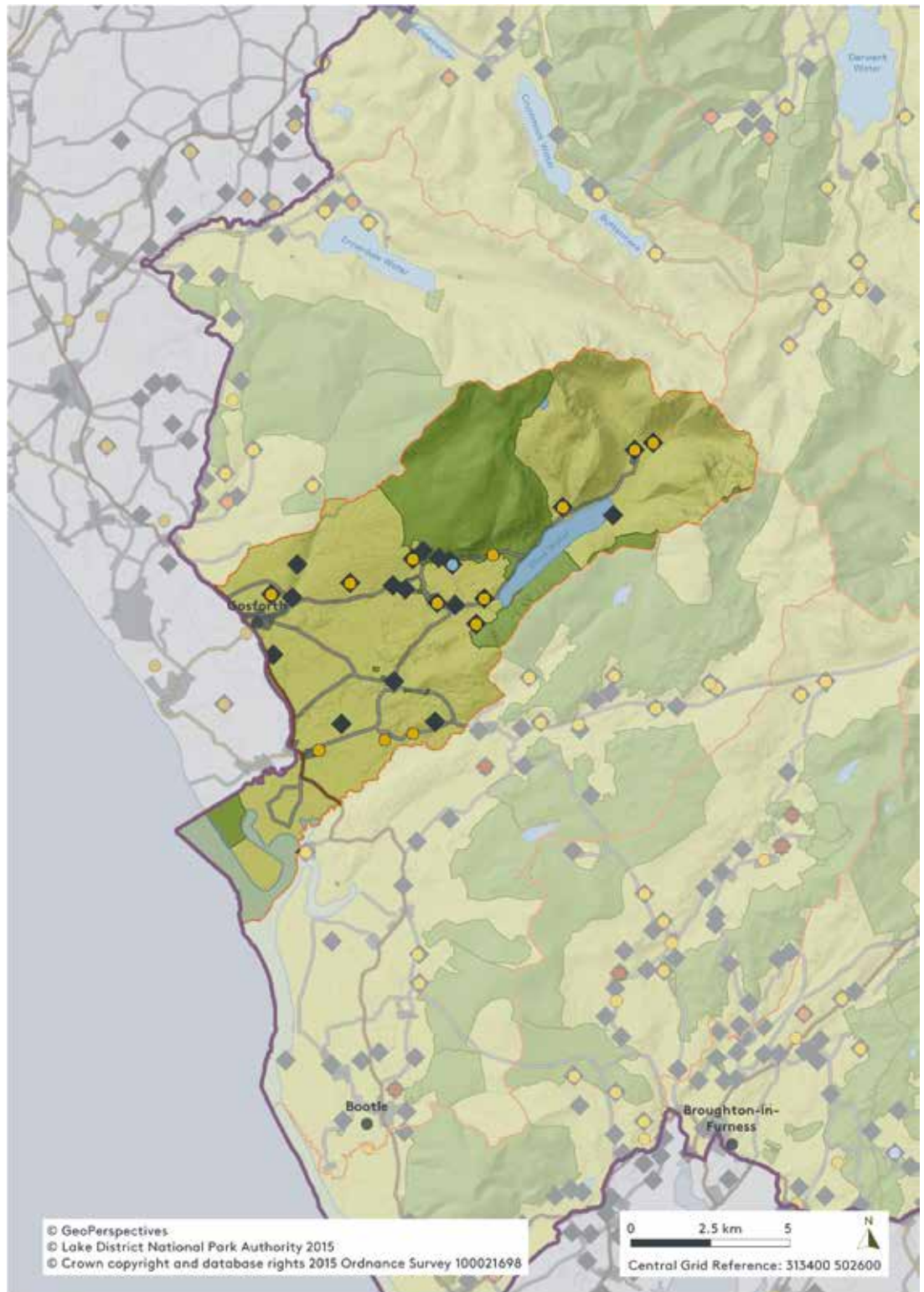
Intakes in the Wasdale Valley area seem to have extended the areas of enclosed agriculture in a modest fashion, constrained by unproductive land occupying steeper topography, and poorly-drained mosses and estuarine marsh. However the steeper slopes on the upland fells remain unenclosed.

The tightly constrained pattern of stone walled fields at Wasdale Head is one of the most spectacular and iconic sights in the Lake District, especially when seen from a vantage point on the surrounding fells, such as Yewbarrow.

The walls in the field system at Wasdale Head are extremely wide, reflecting the necessity of clearing the huge amounts of water-borne stone that have been deposited on the fields over hundreds of years. The inbye fields have the irregular pattern of medieval or earlier enclosure and are surrounded by later intakes on the valley sides. The stone walled remains of a medieval deer park can still be traced at the north-eastern end of The Screes.

In Nether Wasdale the pattern of the field system is typical of dispersed ancient single farms, particularly in the

FIGURE 6.9 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.



FIGURE 6.10 Burnthwaite Farm at Wasdale Head, with Great Gable behind. Owned by the National Trust.

for at least a hundred years.' 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.

There are 23 fell-going flocks in the Wasdale valley. There are 13 Herdwick flocks and one Rough Fell flock registered with the relevant Sheep Breeders' Associations. There are no registered Swaledale flocks. There are seven National Trust landlord flocks listed in the 'Lakeland Shepherds' Guide' (2005) in the Gosforth and Irton with Santon areas.

The two main areas of registered common land in Wasdale are Nether Wasdale Common and part of Eskdale Common (extending onto Wasdale Screes and to the eastern shore of West Water and Scafell Pike). There are a number of other small areas including Little Moor (a very small area near Santon Bridge) and Cat How, Berry How, School Green and Mill How (a small area near Nether Wasdale).

CONTINUING FARMING CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

Wasdale Head Show and Shepherds' Meet takes place on the second Saturday in October every year. There has been a Shepherds' Meet at Wasdale Head for over 100 years.

It is believed that the Shepherds' Meet started off with farmers from Wasdale meeting the farmers from the adjoining valleys of Ennerdale, Buttermere, Borrowdale, Eskdale and possibly Langdale, who walked their tups (rams) over to Wasdale Head to trade them, swap them or hire them. This is why the show is held so late in the year; Tup Lousing (letting the rams loose with the ewes) in the valleys happens in November so lambs are born in April. In all probability the showing of sheep also started in the early years and possibly also the showing of shepherds' dogs. Hound Trailing would also have been introduced in these early years. Cumberland and Westmoreland wrestling, the Fell Race and other trade stands and activities have all been added in the second half of the 20th century.

FARMSTEADS

TABLE 6.1 Key farm buildings in the Wasdale Valley

	<p>HALL SANTON FARMHOUSE</p> <p>Farmhouse with nearby cottage, barn, gingang and cart shed showing later farm development in the 19th century.</p> <p>DATE Mid-late 18th – 19th century OWNERSHIP Private PROTECTION Listed GRID REFERENCE 310130 501313</p>
	<p>WOODHOW FARMHOUSE</p> <p>Farmhouse of 1757 with attached byres, area walls and pump.</p> <p>DATE 18th century OWNERSHIP Private PROTECTION Listed GRID REFERENCE 314002 504214</p>
	<p>STANGENDS</p> <p>Farm with cottage and barn. The barn was remodelled and the house added in 1778.</p> <p>DATE Early to mid-18th century OWNERSHIP National Trust PROTECTION Listed GRID REFERENCE 311791 503664</p>
	<p>ROW HEAD FARM</p> <p>The core of the building dates from the early to mid-18th century but has been altered with 20th century facades. An 18th century threshing barn and byre is built against the southern wall of the main house. Contains a spice cupboard dating from the mid-18th century.</p> <p>DATE 18th – 20th century OWNERSHIP National Trust PROTECTION Not listed GRID REFERENCE 318713 508885</p>
	<p>HOLLINS</p> <p>Hollins is unusual in Nether Wasdale in having a more traditional 17th century ground plan than many of the other farmhouse which are 18th century in date and style. Shippon and hayloft at the south west end.</p> <p>DATE 17th century OWNERSHIP National Trust PROTECTION Not listed GRID REFERENCE 310807 503125</p>

**HARROWHEAD FARM**

18th century house with double pile plan which may have developed from an earlier structure. Most of the present fittings date from the third quarter of the 18th century.

DATE Mid/late 18th century
OWNERSHIP National Trust
PROTECTION Not listed
GRID REFERENCE 312577 505505

**BURNTHWAITE FARM**

Single farm amalgamated from three earlier farms. The present farmhouse was developed from earlier 17th or early 18th century structures.

DATE 17th/19th century
OWNERSHIP National Trust
PROTECTION Not listed
GRID REFERENCE 319285 509100

**HIGH THISTLETON**

The original farmhouse was a two storey building of the 18th century with early 19th century improvements.

DATE 18th – 19th century
OWNERSHIP National Trust
PROTECTION Not listed
GRID REFERENCE 309819 504703

**CRAG HOUSE**

Dairy farm of 18th and 19th century date. The access track crosses a Listed bridge, and the buildings include an 18th century barn and a large threshing barn of c. 1830, a cottage built in two sections (mid-18th century and c. 1830) and a pigsty and wash-house.

DATE 18th – 19th century
OWNERSHIP National Trust
PROTECTION Not listed
GRID REFERENCE 310855 499773

**BUCKBARROW BARN AND COTTAGE**

Originally an independent unit Buckbarrow was merged in the past with Scale farm and then with Ghyll Farm. The farmhouse, which dates from the early 18th century, is let as a climbing hut.

DATE 18th – 19th century
OWNERSHIP National Trust
PROTECTION Not listed
GRID REFERENCE 313657 505378

**KIDBECK FARM**

Double pile house of the late 19th century, little altered.

DATE 19th century
OWNERSHIP National Trust
PROTECTION Not listed
GRID REFERENCE 311527 504510

**BURNT HOUSE**

Farmhouse with 17th century core. Extended in 1894.

DATE 17th century with 18th and 19th century additions
OWNERSHIP National Trust
PROTECTION Not listed
GRID REFERENCE 311882 503068

**MIDDLE ROW**

This was a separate farm until it was sold to the National Trust and merged with Row Head. All of the buildings are 18th century to 20th century.

DATE 18th – 20th century
OWNERSHIP National Trust
PROTECTION Not listed
GRID REFERENCE 318659 508795

**WASDALE HEAD HALL**

Farmhouse of typical double-pile construction of the mid to late 18th century.

DATE 18th – 20th century
OWNERSHIP National Trust
PROTECTION Not listed
GRID REFERENCE 318036 506828

**GATERIGGHOW HOUSE**

18th century farm with 19th century stairs. Heavily renovated.

DATE 18th – 19th century
OWNERSHIP National Trust
PROTECTION Not listed
GRID REFERENCE 310825 503928

6.1.4 INDUSTRY

The remains of industry in the Wasdale Valley are limited to a number of medieval bloomeries in Nether Wasdale and at the southern end of the lake, located to take advantage of charcoal produced in the local woods. There are also the remains of mining activity on Irton Fell.

6.1.5 SETTLEMENTS

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.

GOSFORTH

The village of Gosforth is the principal settlement and local service centre, located outside the valley on the western edge of the National Park. It has a short main street of simple traditional houses, inns and shops, dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. The Parish Church of St Mary, Gosforth, has been an important site since the 8th century. The oldest parts of the existing fabric are 12th century. The early 10th century cross in St Mary's churchyard is a unique monument standing alone amongst English Viking Age crosses, not only in its size and complete survival, but also in the quality of its carving and its artistic inventiveness. Its decoration includes scenes from Scandinavian mythology unparalleled in surviving contemporary art. The churchyard also contains two rare hogback tombs of 11th century date at the latest. Gosforth Library is in a house dated 1628 which may incorporate the house known as Gosforth Gate mentioned in a 1598 survey. Gosforth Hall is an imposing 3 storey house of 1658 and Steelfield Hall is a prominent early 19th century classical mansion, built for the Senhouse family, who were famous for shipping and trade in west Cumbria.

WASDALE HEAD

At the end of the road into the valley lies Wasdale Head, a remote, isolated and historic hamlet of vernacular buildings including the 17th century inn and the diminutive St Olaf's Church, set in its quadrant of yews. The church is first mentioned c. 1550 but the building is considerably altered. The hamlet is set amidst a unique and culturally important patchwork of ancient walls constructed of rounded stones to create small pastoral fields, enclosed by the steep high fells. Wasdale Head is popular with walkers and climbers seeking challenge on the higher fells and this adds to the atmosphere at the valley head. Other notable features in the valley include Row Bridge, the packhorse bridge north of the Wasdale Head Inn, one of the best examples in the Lake District with its backdrop of high mountains around the valley head. The buildings and walls in Wasdale Head are characterised by use of the local slate for construction.

NETHER WASDALE

Nether Wasdale is a scattering of white stonewashed cottages and farms. By the village green is St Michael and All Angels church, with 16th century origins. In front of the church is a large maypole, now a listed structure, erected to celebrate the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria. The buildings are characterised by a greater use of imported materials such as sandstone which distinguishes it from Wasdale Head which relies on local materials.



FIGURE 6.11 Herdwick sheep on Row Bridge at Wasdale Head

6.1.6 PICTURESQUE BUILDINGS AND LANDSCAPE

Although in contemporary taste Wasdale is considered to be one of the finest landscapes in Britain, it did not feature strongly in Picturesque interest in the English Lake District. This may have been in part due to its remote location on the west side of the region. Wasdale is not included in Thomas West's 'Guide to the Lakes' but the comments of a later commentator, Thomas Wilkinson in 1824, give an indication of the likely reaction to the valley from an 18th century Picturesque perspective:

“When people go forth to see the world they are sometimes in search of beauty. If beauty is the leading object of their search, they need not go to Wast Water. The prominent features round Wast Water are sternness and sterility...”

Thomas Wilkinson, 'Tours to the British Mountains', (1824)

6.1.7 VILLAS AND ORNAMENTAL LANDSCAPING

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.

TABLE 6.2 Key villas in the Wasdale Valley



WASDALE HALL

Wasdale Hall was built in 1829 for Stansfield Rawson, of a Halifax merchant family, and extended a decade later; it is the only villa to capitalise on views of West Water and is precocious in its use of exposed timber framing at so early a date, perhaps deliberately evoking West Riding traditions. Stansfield Rawson purchased the property in 1811 and immediately began an extensive programme of tree planting. These included many exotic as well as native species and this landscaping was intended to form a landscape backdrop to the house, which was completed in 1829. This was followed by further work including the creation of gardens and further planting.

DATE 19th century

OWNERSHIP National Trust (leased to Youth Hostel Association)

PROTECTION Not listed

GRID REFERENCE 314467 504508



CARLETON HALL

Carleton Hall (17th century), built for Cuthbert Atkinson, steward to the 1st Lord Muncaster, and Irton Hall (redesigned and rebuilt in 1874 out of a 14th century pele tower, which may already have been renewed in the 18th century).

DATE 14th century and 18th – 19th century

OWNERSHIP Private

PROTECTION Listed

GRID REFERENCE 308240 498771



GALE SYKE

Charles Rawson, presumed to be Stansfield's son, had established a 'rural retreat' at nearby Gale Syke by 1847.

DATE 19th century

OWNERSHIP Private

PROTECTION Not listed

GRID REFERENCE 313312 503926



CARLETON GREEN

Carleton Green is a late 18th century house.

DATE 18th century

OWNERSHIP Private

PROTECTION Listed

GRID REFERENCE 308205 498595

**GOSFORTH HALL**

Gosforth Hall dates from 1658. Built for Robert and Isabel Copley and altered and extended in the 1670s.

DATE 17th century
OWNERSHIP Private
PROTECTION Listed
GRID REFERENCE 307158 503652

**GREENLANDS**

An 18th century farmhouse extended in 1820 for Thomas Brocklebank.

DATE 18th century
OWNERSHIP Private
PROTECTION Listed
GRID REFERENCE 308996 501143

**IRTON HALL**

Irton Hall is an 1874 enlargement of the previous hall, incorporating a 14th century fortified tower house, by G.E. Grayson of Liverpool for Jonas Burns-Lindow.

DATE 14th to 19th century
OWNERSHIP Private
PROTECTION Listed
GRID REFERENCE 310473 500563

**LOW WOOD HALL**

Low Wood Hall, a modest villa now a hotel, was built c. 1880.

OWNERSHIP Private
GRID REFERENCE 312250 504193

**STEELFIELD HALL**

Steelfield Hall at Gosforth, built in 1840 for Sir Humphrey Senhouse.

DATE 19th century
OWNERSHIP Private
PROTECTION Listed
GRID REFERENCE 306561 503774

6.2 HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

6.2.1 ARCHAEOLOGY AND EARLY SETTLEMENT

The earliest surviving traces of human activity in the area date to Mesolithic times (c. 8000 BC). These consist of flint finds on the coast at Drigg and evidence for clearance of woodland by fire. Other early remains are found on the fells including Neolithic stone axe production remains on Scafell Pike (c. 4,000 to 2,000 BC). In the valley there are clearance cairnfields, possible roundhouse remains and rudimentary field boundaries from the Bronze Age at Whin Garth (c. 2,000-800 BC). Bronze Age activity in the valley bottom is attested by a number of burnt mounds (possible cooking places). The lower reaches of the valley, abutting the coastal plain, contain the best agricultural land and are likely to have seen continuous use from early times. There are clearance and burial cairns dating to the Bronze Age on the fells surrounding Nether Wasdale.

6.2.2 THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CURRENT SETTLEMENT PATTERN

The area contains early medieval and Norse archaeology including the sculptural crosses at Irton and Gosforth churches, and the hogback stones at Gosforth church. Some limited place-name evidence suggests Norse and Anglo-Saxon influences too. The District of Copeland's name may derive from Old Norse *kaupa-land* ('bought land'). The only surviving 'Norse' place-name at Wasdale Head is Burnthwaite which is a combination of Old English 'burn' for a stream with 'thwaite' which is Old Norse for a clearing.

Some possible candidates for shielings and clearance cairns of this date have been identified through field survey, and a pattern of Scandinavian-style semi-transhumant agriculture seems to have been practised, with permanent lowland settlements supported by shielings in the uplands on summer grazing grounds. It has been suggested that Wasdale Head may have been upland grazing which was later settled permanently. The tightly-constrained pattern of stone walled fields here are likely to have very early, possibly (10th century?) Norse, origins, having developed from one or possibly two early common fields. A shift to permanent colonisation and settlement of inland areas, including the sites of former shielings, during the 10th to 12th century is shown by the occurrence of place-names including 'saetr' and 'scale', both indicating a shieling. The abandoned farm at Scale probably indicates early origins as a shieling which was then permanently occupied.

6.2.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FARMING LANDSCAPE

The name Wasdall first occurs in 1301, (in connection with the personal name 'de Matilld de Wasdall') in the Liberty of Saint Mary, York, Lay Subsidy. The 'Free Chase of Wastedaleheved' is recorded in 1338, and the upper valley around Wast Water seems to

have been part of Copeland Forest under 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 3 heiresses into 3 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 as a means of improving revenues from their tenants. Although it was carried out on a large scale, it is impossible to trace most specific instances on the ground. The establishment of a pele tower at Irton Hall in the 14th century may reflect this pattern; it is surrounded by field names including the word ‘frith’ (indicating a stock park enclosure) and ‘close’. Some place-names further inland (i.e. Marthwaite, Moesthwaite, Bengarth and Guards) also indicate clearance. Medieval inbye land certainly appears to be widespread across the lowlands.

In 1322 and 1334 there were four vaccaries (commercial cattle ranches) recorded at Wasdale Head. These seem to have been established by the lord of the manor and by 1334 they were let to tenants-at-will. This differs from the usual pattern in Cumberland and Westmorland whereby vaccaries were established by monasteries. It shows that the colonisation of inland areas by the manorial lords was beginning to extend into the uplands. The establishment of vaccaries by a lay lord may have released some pressure on lowland settlement; monastic vaccaries are thought to have restricted colonisation elsewhere of the upper valleys (i.e. Brotherilkeld in upper Eskdale).

Available evidence does not allow an interpretation of how these four former vaccary farms evolved during the 14th and 15th centuries, although demesne vaccaries such as those at Wasdale Head were replaced by peasant farms on which sheep were raised. A court book entry of 1547 suggests that the division of 19 tenements into four groups of regular rents at Wasdale Head may represent the survival of four of the original tenurial vaccary units.

By 1547 there were 19 farm holdings recorded in rent records. Other 16th century records indicate the existence of 18 farms including four at Burnthwaite, eight at The Row (Row Head) and six in Down in the Dale. The farms were clustered in small hamlets on the edges of what were formally the common fields. Only eight farms survived by 1808 and four survive today: Burnthwaite, Middle Row, Wasdale Head Hall and Bowderdale. Only Burnthwaite has surviving buildings from the 17th century – all the other farm buildings are from the 18th to 20th century.

Tenancy agreements for farmers included the right to cut peat from the fell and there is evidence of this on Green How. A cluster of seven ruinous peat huts (“peat scales”) are present just upslope of the south-east corner of Fence Wood. The huts are drystone built structures which would have been used to store cut and dried peat prior to moving for use in the settlements on the valley floor. There are a range of sizes and forms which indicate various phases of building, similar to those above Boot in Eskdale, only a few miles away. The smaller simpler huts probably ceased to be used by the 19th century and the two larger huts were probably out of use by the end of the 19th century, however Burnthwaite Farm still retains peat cutting rights in the area.

After the Dissolution of the Monasteries and into the 17th century opportunities arose to address the problems inherent in the feudal system of land tenure. Former open

fields had traditionally been sub-divided to the point of poverty, and these began to be reorganised by manor courts and petitions.

The former open fields became enclosed as strips on a piecemeal basis, with individual farmers or small groups enclosing formerly open areas. The strips might then also be combined into larger parcels as farms were abandoned or amalgamated. Small-scale enclosure of this type tends to be undocumented and a complex progression based on topography and wall inter-relationships has been proposed for parts of the former open fields at Wasdale Head. In lower Wasdale, although there are some trace elements of medieval organisation surviving as curvilinear boundaries and strip-fields, the surviving landscape is overwhelmingly a product of the 16th and 17th century.

In the 16th century, Copeland Forest was still manorial waste available to the tenants but the manor courts began to set out bye-laws dividing the fells into smaller units for specific purposes. The courts of the manors of Eskdale, Miterdale, and Wasdale Head, for instance, divided the waste into three: steep banks on the lower fell-sides; moors; and the higher fells. Banks and moors were most-suited to cattle pasture; as the areas of bank waste were most highly-valued they had often become enclosed by the end of the 17th century. Higher fells were more suitable for sheep in the summer months. Fells could be divided into 'heafs', which would be assigned to a farm or to a group of farms, but located some distance away. As a response 'driftways' or 'outgangs' developed, paths or tracks along which farmers moved their sheep up onto the fells, and these are often preserved in the landscape.

At Wasdale Head, the Percy Survey of 1578 shows that the tenants had between three and ten acres of arable and meadow in the common field called Wasdale Head field (which might have comprised several discrete spaces). Of the 46 occupants of Nether Wasdale, only six had shared rights in the common field. This has been taken to imply that the settlement of Nether Wasdale is generally later than Wasdale Head.

The field system at Wasdale Head was described in the same 1578 survey as "18 tenants at will each holding a tenement consisting of a small garth adjoining his farmstead and a share of arable and meadow land in Wasdalehead Field". In 1578 there were no enclosures referred to other than those garths attached to the farmsteads, and the pattern which appears in modern mapping today probably represents the reorganisation of the common Wasdalehead Field (or fields) between 1578 and c. 1850. There was accretion and amalgamation of farm holdings during this period which saw the 18 tenements of 1578 reduced to ten in 1750 and then five by 1850. The earliest reference to 'infield walls' at Wasdale Head is 1664, by which time some reorganisation of the open fields had certainly occurred. Along the Lingmell Beck and close to Burnthwaite, it is likely that the parcels formed at least in part from cleared stone, deposited along the steeper edges of palaeo-channels aligned from north north west to south south west on earlier courses of the Lingmell Beck. These formed the basis for field divisions which progressively changed from linear clearance cairns into enclosure walls.

Intakes enclosed only the lowest slopes, and in Wasdale Head there are no outrakes or driftways that connect farms to far-flung heafs or intakes. Field survey has again been able to propose a stratigraphic sequence for these intakes. Dating the sequence of intakes is difficult. There is some range within each phase, and the relationship between

intakes and the enclosure and reorganisation of the valley floor is unclear and so only a relative chronology can be established suggesting that the extent of intake between 1578 and 1795 was modest, extending the enclosed area by only around 20 per cent.

The deer fence shown on a plan of the Fence in 1795 is thought to date from the late 16th century. The 1578 Percy Survey describes it as "a walled enclosure of good ground and underwood preserved for the lord's deer". The name 'Newe Frith' suggests that in 1578 it was recently enclosed. The farm called Wasdale Head Hall, probably built by one of the 17th or 18th century lessees of the Fence (it was leased in 1618 to Sir Wilfred Lawson), was probably the first farm inside the lord's deer park. Other such stock parks do occur in the Wasdale Valley area, (Irton Park and Mecklin Park), and the place-name Frithgill occurs on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map as a watercourse at Irton Hall, issuing from Irton Park.

Building stock began to be replaced in more durable materials during this period. This represents the seeding of what is now considered to be the Lake District's vernacular architecture; stone walls, and farmhouses and barns newly built or rebuilt on earlier sites alongside more handsome residences for the wealthy, Gosforth Hall dates from 1658 and was subsequently altered in 1673. This reorganisation of farm land also resulted in some farm buildings being abandoned.

The end of the 18th century saw the beginnings of planned enclosure in large quantities; land was brought into agriculture to supply rapidly growing populations and their needs in the northern towns. In the lowland parts of the Wasdale Valley area there were three examples of enclosure by Parliamentary Act, each on moorland. Whilst Mecklin Park and Irton Park on Irton Fell both suggest deliberate emparking in medieval times they were progressively enclosed during this period for plantations. The first and second edition Ordnance Survey maps show sub-division of the larger, earlier stock enclosures. The modern Ordnance Survey edition shows what is presumably 20th century enclosure still higher uphill. Whereas in the upper Wasdale Valley the surviving pattern reflects earlier arrangements, in the lower Wasdale Valley area the higher slopes on Bleng Fell, Blengdale Forest and Hollow Moor are generally enclosed by very large, straight-walled field of parliamentary and other planned enclosure.

Intakes in the lower Wasdale Valley area appear to be very limited, around Craghouse Wood and Greengate Wood just north of Santon Bridge, at Pughouse Wood and east of Eastwaite at the southern end of Wast Water, a few small parcels to the south of Irton Hall, and some small episodes close to farms on the lower slopes of Nether Wasdale Common.

Early 19th century planned enclosure (or earlier) seems to have improved the cultivation of huge stretches of estuarine marsh and mosslands, around Carleton Hall particularly. Closer to the coast, drainage of the estuarine marshes left a field pattern of geometric shapes. Higher up (i.e. the fields north of Scattering Garth and higher up the River Mite) earlier inbye seems to have been rearranged in a geometric fashion and much intake land was used for woodland (for example at Porterthwaite and Irton Park).

6.2.4 DISCOVERY AND APPRECIATION OF A RICH CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

EARLY TOURISM

The location of the Wasdale Valley on the less accessible western side of the Lake District, together with its lack of a lake, resulted in little interest from early cultural tourists in the 18th century.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries Wasdale also became a significant early location for the development of the sport of rock climbing, in parallel with similar developments in the Dolomites and Saxony. Important figures included Walter Parry Haskett Smith, who visited Wasdale Head from the 1880s and the Abraham brothers of Keswick. Haskett Smith's ascent of Napes Needle on Great Gable in 1886 was a key event in the development of climbing and these early pioneers stayed at the Wasdale Head Inn, which is still a thriving centre for walkers and climbers.

William Ritson, friend of de Quincey and Wordsworth, was born at Row Foot in 1808. Visitors to the valley had often stayed at Row Foot, including a young William Wilberforce who "passed the night" here in 1776. Ritson became the first landlord of the newly enlarged 'Huntsman's Inn'. It later became the West Water Hotel and is now the Wasdale Inn. It became the place to stay for the Victorian gentlemen fell-walkers and pioneer mountaineers, mostly professional men and academics from the cities; indeed it is still marketed as the birthplace of British rock climbing. William Ritson gained a reputation for telling tall tales of country life to his gullible guests. His legacy is 'The Biggest Liar in the World' competition, held every November, at the Bridge Inn at nearby Santon Bridge.

Building on the popularity of rock climbing in Wasdale, the Fell and Rock Climbing Club, the premiere climbing club in the Lake District, was established in 1906-7 and the first formal meet was at the Wasdale Head Inn on 30th March 1907. In 1969 Wasdale Hall, owned by the National Trust, was leased to the Youth Hostel Association and became part of the Association's extensive network in the Lake District.

6.2.5 ROMANTIC SITES, BUILDINGS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Famous for the sublimity of its screes descending from Scafell into the depths of West Water, Wasdale was celebrated by Wordsworth for the extreme simplicity of its pastoral economy. However the Romantic view of West Water, as expressed by Wordsworth, Coleridge and others was very different to the Picturesque perspective. In his Guide Wordsworth described the lake as "long, narrow, stern and desolate", but also pointed out that it is "well worth the notice of the traveller who is not afraid of fatigue; no part of the country is more distinguished by sublimity".

In the third edition of his Guide (1822), Wordsworth included 'Excursion to the Top of Scawfell', an edited version of a letter by Dorothy Wordsworth written in October 1818, in which she described an ascent of Scawfell with her friend Mary Barker:

**“We now beheld the whole mass of Great Gavel
from its base, – the Den of Wastdale at our feet –
a gulf immeasurable”.**

In the summer of 1809 Wordsworth visited the lake on a fishing and camping expedition along with the writer Thomas de Quincey and John Wilson, editor of Blackwood’s Edinburgh magazine and a minor poet. Wilson’s poem ‘The Angler’s Tent’ describes this trip and includes some lines by Wordsworth describing

**“The placid lake that rested far below
Softly embosoming another sky”.**

When Wordsworth began his first version of the ‘Guide’ in 1810 to accompany Joseph Wilkinson’s set of prints of the region (and published as ‘Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire’, he drew attention to the screes of Wasdale and their distinctive colour tones:

**“This is a very striking feature: for these steeps,
or screes (as places of this kind are named), are not
more distinguished by their height and extent, than
by the beautiful colours with which the pulverized rock,
for ever crumbling down their sides, overspreads them.
The surface has the apparent softness of the dove’s
neck, and... resembles a dove’s neck strongly in its hues,
and the manner in which they are intermingled.”**

On Thursday morning, August 5 1802 Coleridge wrote in his notebook that “left T. Tyson’s at Wastdale Head where I had been most hospitably entertained”. He and Wordsworth had stayed with Thomas Tyson on their tour of 1799 and now, before he set off for the next dramatic section of his walking tour, he was given valuable information about the Scafells and recommended to stay at an ancient Lake District farm in Eskdale – Taw House – which was farmed by a relative of Tyson.

Having written what is believed to be the first account of ascending Scafell, Coleridge famously and dramatically recorded his descent of Broad Stand in a letter to Sarah Hutchinson:

**“it was in truth a Path that in a very hard Rain is, no doubt,
the channel of a most splendid Waterfall – So I began to
suspect that I ought not to go on / but then unfortunately
tho’ I could with ease drop down a smooth Rock 7 feet high,
I could not climb it / so go on I must / and on I went / the
next 3 drops were not half a Foot, at least not a foot more
than my own height / but every Drop increased the Palsy of
my Limbs – I shook all over, Heaven knows without the least
influence of Fear / and now I had only two more to drop
down / to return was impossible – but of these two the first**

was tremendous / it was twice my own height, & the Ledge at the bottom was [so] exceedingly narrow, that if I dropt down upon it I must of necessity have fallen backwards & of course killed myself. My Limbs were all in a tremble – I lay upon my Back to rest myself, & was beginning according to my Custom to laugh at myself for a Madman, when the sight of the Craggs above me on each side, & the impetuous Clouds just over them, posting so luridly & so rapidly northward, overawed me”.



FIGURE 6.12 'Distant View of Wasdale Head with Yewbarrow, Great Gable and Lingmell', Edward Lear, probably 14th September 1836

Throughout his journey, Coleridge had benefited from the intimate knowledge of shepherds and farmers for his route planning. His notebook interpretations were indebted to these men. The Tysons, in particular, were a widespread and important farming family in the Lake District with many descendents living in the region today. They were already well established in Irton, Birker, Egremont and in Eskdale by Elizabeth I's reign, and in 1578 a John Tyson became a tenant at

Wasdale Head where they became strongly represented over the next 250 years as they were in Ennerdale, Eskdale, the Duddon and the Langdales.

Thomas Wilkinson, in his 'Tours to the British Mountains' of 1824, compared the sublime Wasdale landscape to man-made pyramids: "...We have heard of the pyramids of Egypt, built by the hand of man; but these are the Pyramids of the world, built by the Architect of the Universe”.

The sombre beauty of the deepest lake in England contrasting with Wilkinson's pyramids of the world was also appreciated by Edward Lear who sketched Wast Water and Yewbarrow during his 1836 sketching tour.

6.2.6 EARLY CONSERVATION – THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL FOR PROTECTING LANDSCAPES

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 comprised purchase of properties by concerned individuals.

Wasdale is one of the most significant valleys in the National Trust portfolio in the Lake District. The Trust has purchased a number of farms in Wasdale in order to protect the landscape, including Row Head bought at auction in 1963 with funds from a legacy, and Bowderdale more recently. Burnthwaite was bought in 1975, using the National Trust's Lake District Funds, generated by appeals. The Trust was also gifted farms in the valley from the Lake District Farm Estates when the company was wound up in 1976,

including Harrowhead, Nether Wasdale and Gill, Broadgap and Buckbarrow in Wasdale. Middle Row and Wasdale Head Hall farms were gifted to the Trust in 1959 by the state under the National Land Fund procedures (from the Leconfield Estate in lieu of death duties) for 'permanent preservation'. The Nether Wasdale Estate, comprising 6 square kilometres, came to the Trust under terms agreed by the personal representatives of Mr J. B. Wrigley and the Commissioners of the Inland Revenue in 1965 and the Leconfield Commons, comprising 123 square kilometres of fell land on the north side of Wasdale was given by the State to the National Trust in 1979. The National Trust now owns 6,677 hectares of land in the valley, of which 6,547 hectares is inalienable. They also have an additional 1 hectare of leased land but no covenanted land.

The Fell and Rock Climbing Club bought 3,000 acres of land over the 1,500 foot contour to safeguard the interests of mountaineers, including the iconic fell of Great Gable, and donated it to the National Trust in the years immediately after World War One in memory of its members that died in that war. The small church at Wasdale Head, dedicated to St Olaf, is furnished with a stained glass window also dedicated by the Fell and Rock Climbing Club in memory of World War 1 victims, with the inscription 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my strength'.



FIGURE 6.13 The war memorial on the summit of Great Gable

A more recent threat to Wasdale was the attempt by British Nuclear Fuels to raise the level of Wastwater and to increase the abstraction water for the nuclear plant at Sellafield. Wastwater had been used as a water supply for industrial purposes since the Second World War and this continued at the same level with the construction of the nuclear reactor at Calder Hall. In 1979, parallel with the proposals to raise the level of Ennerdale Water, British Nuclear Fuels put forward a proposal to increase abstraction from Wastwater threefold. This would have involved construction of a weir or dam and other engineering works. A strong and vociferous group of objectors including local

farming families in the valley, the National Trust, Friends of the Lake District, the Youth Hostels Association and a large number of amenity groups, mounted a successful campaign against the proposals which were rejected by the Secretary of State for the Environment following a public enquiry.

Valley head electricity supplies were finally delivered in the 1970s by submarine cable along the bed of the lake to avoid landscape impact.

When the Lake District National Park was established in 1951 the iconic view looking north-east from the lower reaches of West Water 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. So for over 60 years this view has been inextricably linked with the designation of the Lake District as a UK National Park. In 2007 this view was voted by the British public as 'Britain's Favourite View'.

6.3 CONTRIBUTION TO THE ENGLISH LAKE DISTRICT'S OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

Wasdale is one of the best known valleys in the English Lake District as a result of its spectacular landscape of lake, screes and surrounding high mountains which are the basis for the design of the official logo of the Lake District National Park. 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. 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 many others 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, Wast Water, the famous Screes 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 Wast Water provoked one of the most recent and successful environmental campaigns in the 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 for those of the third, the conservation movement.



FIGURE 6.14 The mountain of Great Gable with Sphinx Rock on the right