

8 South Coast Western

St Michael's Mount to the Helford Estuary and The Lizard

Location

This section of the AONB is large, wide-ranging and diverse, extending from Marazion in the west to the outskirts of Falmouth (Maenporth) in the east and includes the entire Lizard Peninsula and the Helford Estuary.

Extent

This is the second largest section of the Cornwall AONB comprising an area of 192 square kilometres (19,300 hectares).

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Landscape Character Assessment 2005-2007

Character Areas: CA04 Mount's Bay; CA06 Mount's Bay East; CA09 Helford Ria; CA07 South Lizard peninsula; CA08 North East Lizard Peninsula; CA09 Helford Ria; CA10 Carmenellis.

Statement of Significance

Whilst this section of the Cornwall AONB is extensive, it falls into three distinct landscape areas and can be described separately notwithstanding that collectively the three areas form the South Coast Western section.

St Michael's Mount to Halzephron Cliff

The coastal landscape in this area of the AONB has a soft profile and benefits from the protection offered by the Penwith peninsula against the full force of the Atlantic storms. The iconic rocky granite intrusion of St Michael's Mount dominates Mount's Bay with its cobbled granite causeway leading out to the Mount at low tide.

The coastline stretching east is low-lying with earthy cliffs of 'head' (periglacial debris); the coastal strip provides evidence of previous much higher sea levels with a much-eroded and softened cliff line lying inland of the coastal fields. The rich soils around Marazion and Perranuthnoe support a wide range of arable crops in medium and large fields with many hedges of tamarisk. Further east the land rises and form steep cliffs of metamorphosed Devonian slate, veined with quartz. Cudden Point is a significant coastal landmark whilst Trewavas Head and Rinsey Head are distinctive for outcroppings of granite with the derelict mine engine houses forming eerie silhouettes perched on the cliff top as the sea mist rolls in.

Between the rocky headlands are some fine stretches of popular south facing sandy beaches such as Praa Sands, Porthleven Sands and Gunwalloe beach. Pengersick Castle can be found between the villages of Germoe and Praa Sands; a fortified tower house dating back to the early 16th century, although documentary evidence exists that the site has been occupied by a castle since the 13th century. The castle is now a grade one listed building and rests on the site of a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Farmland in this area is of medium sized fields with irregular boundaries that are typical of early enclosure mixed with other more recently enclosed larger straight sided fields that exaggerate a sense of openness, as seen on the larger arable fields close to Porthleven. To the south east of Porthleven there is an extensive shingle beach forming the unique Loe Bar, which is backed by the waters of Loe Pool a freshwater lake fed by the waters of the River Cober. Loe Pool is an important freshwater coastal habitat with reed beds and sheltered woodlands stretching inland with fertile cultivated farmland on the surrounding valley slopes.

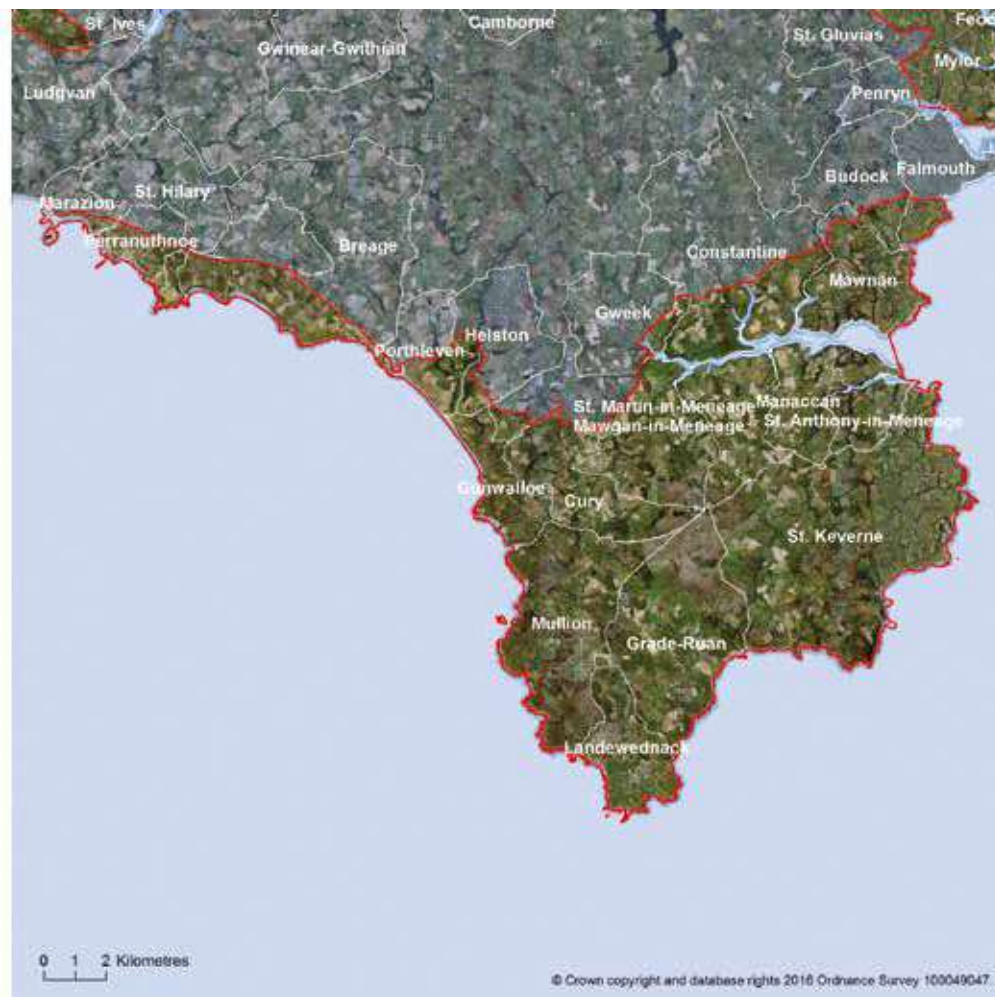
Many of the settlements around this area are linear in nature having evolved from hamlets at crossroads with small inns. Granite and slate killas are typical local building materials and settlements are linked by a network of many small lanes. Some more modern intrusive development has occurred in places. Porthleven forms the largest settlement having changed from a post-medieval fishing village to become a mineral port in the 19th century. Modern housing development has extended the

village in recent times and has now spread up the rounded hillsides behind the harbour. Other recent housing development can also be seen at Praa Sands and Perranuthnoe as well as in some of the small fishing coves. Praa Sands, with its wide sandy beach and popular beach bar is a tourist hotspot, popular with surfers. Due to its popularity with tourists, this section of coastline supports many touring caravan and camping sites significantly changing the character of the landscape in the summer months.

The Lizard Peninsula

The Lizard coast is comprised of tall cliffs with small coves beneath and is the most southerly point of mainland Britain where the distinctive towers of the Lizard Lighthouse warn of the hazardous waters off Lizard Point.

The geological variations of this peninsula have resulted in complex landforms. Inland of Gunwalloe and Mullion Cove there is a soft, undulating landscape spread over Devonian rocks with farmsteads and small hamlets interspersed with streams which reach the coast at Church Cove and Poldhu Cove. There are small pockets of woodlands on farms, which form a transition north-eastwards to the head of the Helford Estuary, which has a much more extensively wooded landscape. The elevated southeast plateau of the Lizard Peninsula is underlain with serpentine as can be seen from the outcrops at Kynance Cove. The landform to the west falls gently on the gabbro and hornblende schists toward the coast and is permeated with small streams, which have formed sheltered valleys along weaknesses in the rock.



The most southerly point of mainland Britain

The combination of geology, mild oceanic climate conditions and its southerly location has led to the development of a unique range of habitats with many rare species of local and national importance. There are significant areas of heathland/upland rough ground across Goonhilly Downs and on the west coast that are critically important from both historic and biodiversity perspectives. The Lizard National Nature Reserve stretches across nearly 2,000 hectares of the peninsula. The heathland, coastal cliff vegetation and temporary ponds are of international importance and accommodate a broad diversity of wildlife which thrives here, including especially rare and unusual plants. The wild, open nature of these expansive habitats is emphasised by the lack of tree cover with the exception of those found in the sheltered valleys and coves. Agricultural land is mainly pasture with some horticulture within small irregular enclosures of medieval origin, bounded by Cornish hedges, together with some larger, more regular fields of more recently enclosed land as the upland rough ground has been nibbled away.

Settlement is concentrated along the coast with villages such as Lizard Village, Coverack and Cadgwith which became established as fishing villages in late medieval times and in the 19th century when there was a buoyant pilchard fishing industry, nowadays, fishing tends to concentrate on crab and lobster. These villages are very popular with summer tourists providing a welcome seasonal boost to the local economy.

On the cliffs from Lowland Point to Porthallow are several large stone quarries

where excavations into the cliffs have significantly transformed the landscape of the area. The disused quarries have generally revegetated forming part of the cliff landscape although the possibility of future reworking exists due to long standing minerals permissions.

The Lizard has a strong sense of human history and evidence of long term human habitation in this area dates back to the Bronze Age. The upland rough ground at the coast and at Goonhilly Downs has a large concentration of ritual monuments, cairns, barrows and standing stones. In more recent times, this section has had a strong connection with the development of modern communications. The National Trust-owned Marconi Wireless Station at Lizard Point was where Guglielmo Marconi sent the world's first wireless broadcast. In another first for communications the BT Earth Station at Goonhilly is famed for receiving the first ever trans-Atlantic satellite TV images in 1962.

The Helford River

A marked contrast to the landscape of the Lizard Peninsula, the Helford River is an area of great individual character and tranquil beauty. Rounded landforms slope to deep, narrow valleys with dense woodland of predominately sessile oak and it is one of the few places in England where the ancient woodland meets the sea. The romanticism and ambience of the river with its hidden creeks provided a perfect setting for the famous Daphne Du Maurier novel, Frenchman's Creek.

The Helford River forms a ria (drowned river valley) which resulted from the rise in sea level following the last Ice Age. The network of small creeks extends the river system for several kilometres inland. At high tide, the water reaches up to the very edges of the oak woodland whilst at low tide the exposed greyish mud completely transforms the scene as at Polwheveral and Port Navas creeks, providing a haven for wading birds and wildlife.

Settlements on the northern side tend to be concentrated around Helford Passage where there is an eclectic mix of both modern and traditional property. The river and its creeks present a considerable barrier to traffic from the north and south and the only link is by passenger ferry from Helford Passage to Helford Village.

The landscape on the southern side of the river has a quite different character from the north; the south tends to be more remote due to the natural river barrier and in recent years has seen less development retaining the parkland landscape of the Trelowarren Estate and other ancient farms.

As a result of the sheltered aspect of this landscape it provides the perfect growing conditions and climate for the exotic collections of trees and plants found at the large gardens of Trebah, Glendurgan and Bosloe including, rhododendron, camellias, magnolias, tree ferns and palms further contributing to the special sense of place experienced when visiting the Helford landscape. The stony National Trust-owned beach at Durgan is an excellent place to launch a canoe and explore the river.

The seaward opening of the Helford River is marked by Nare Point on the south and Rosemullion Head on the north. The shallow angled cliffs of the river mouth exposed to the open sea of Falmouth Bay continue to support areas of coastal heathland whilst the steeper cliff face near Mawnan Church provides a perfect habitat for mature ilex oaks and the more prominent higher ground to Monterey pines further adding to the diversity of woodland species found in this attractive landscape.

Although there are no large settlements within the Helford River area there are many scattered smaller ones with villages clustered around the creek heads and crossroads such as at Mawnan Smith. The village of Gweek at the head of the Helford Estuary was once an ancient tin mining port possibly used during the early Iron Age.

St Michael's Mount - Alan Barker





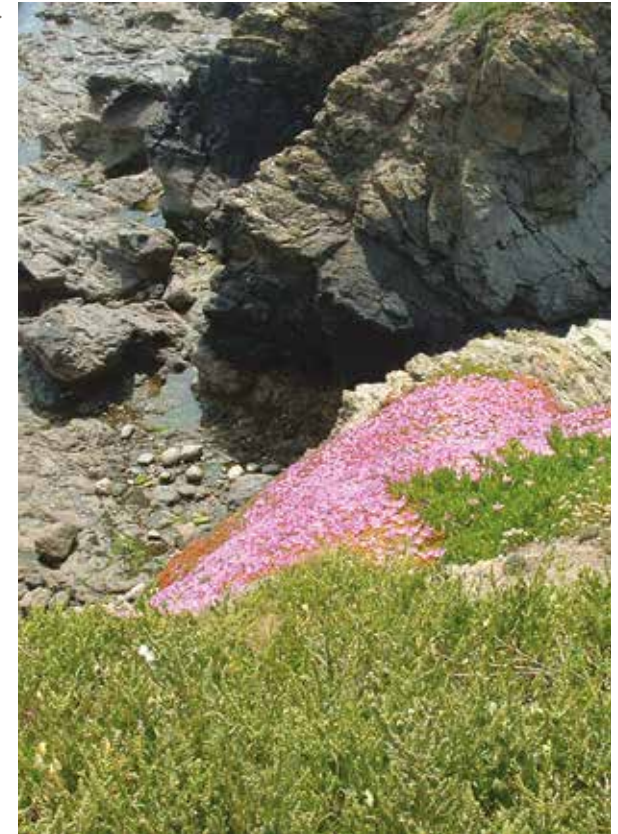
Management

- National Trust manages significant land and property around the coast from St Michael's Mount, Rinsey, Penrose, Mullion and Poldhu, Predannack and Kynance, Lizard Point, Cadgwith to Poltesco and Coverack as well as the north side of the Helford. National Trust grazing schemes exist to tackle scrub encroachment on coastal heathland.
- The Loe Pool Forum (LPF) is an environmental partnership working to improve water quality and reduce flood risk in the River Cober catchment. Recent work with South West Water on upstream thinking within the Cober catchment have had a good influence and are improving water quality at Loe Pool.
- Porthleven Town Council and Perranuthnoe Parish Council are current preparing Neighbourhood Development Plans.
- Parish Plans exist for; Cury, Grade Ruan, St Keverne, Manaccan and St Anthony, Mawnan and Mawgan-in-Meneage.
- Active quarrying operations are controlled under the terms of updated planning conditions approved under the 'Review of Mineral Planning Permissions'.
- The Linking the Lizard Partnership seeks to establish a landscape scale and co-ordinated approach to landscape and habitat management between the relevant partnership agencies and aims to extend the National Nature Reserve.
- This section contains the Lizard and the Fal & Helford Special Areas for Conservation and many SSSI's including Goonhilly Downs SSSI.
- Cornwall Wildlife Trust own and manage Windmill Farm Local Nature Reserve and have recently restored the historic stone windmill structure to include a small interpretation centre and viewing platform.
- Lizard Peninsula Heritage Trust has undertaken a survey of roadside heritage assets (milestones, fingerposts etc).
- Natural England manage the Lizard National Nature Reserve which includes much of Goonhilly Downs.
- Cornwall Biodiversity Initiative aims to include support for the Linking the Lizard Partnership and 'All of the Coast' habitat enhancements for birds.
- The Helford and Fal Estuaries are a recently designated Special Area of Conservation for their shallow inlets and bays; the designation also covers saltmarshes, intertidal mudflats and sub tidal sandbanks.
- The Manacles Marine Conservation Zone was designated in 2013 with two new MCZ's, The Western Channel, a large offshore area south east of the Lizard Peninsula and Mounts Bay both designated in 2016.
- The Helford Voluntary Marine Conservation Area was designated in 1987.
- The Lizard coast from Gunwalloe Fishing Cove around Lizard Point to Carrick Luz near Kennack Cove is also a proposed candidate for Special Area of Conservation status in respect of the submerged reefs.
- The Welcome to 'Wild Lizard' tourism group champions sustainable tourism that promotes nature as key USP for the Lizard.

Condition

- The satellite dishes and buildings at Goonhilly and the larger replacement wind turbines installed at Bonython wind farm have a far reaching visual impact across the local section and in particular impact upon the wild, remote and upland nature of Goonhilly Downs.
- The light pollution associated with Goonhilly Earth Station and RNAS Culdrose adversely impacts upon the tranquillity of the area.
- Airspace activities associated with RNAS Culdrose have significant impacts upon the enjoyment and tranquillity of the section.
- Recent housing developments and the replacement of individual dwellings at Porthleven and Perranuthnoe have had negative visual and character impacts.
- Caravan sites near the coast tend to be visually intrusive due to lay out and poor site design such as near Kennack Sands.
- Large-scale quarrying operations between Dean Point and Porthallow are poorly integrated into the surrounding landscape with potential future pressures anticipated on tranquillity, scenic beauty, wildlife habitat, flora and the adjoining Marine Conservation Zone.
- Future proposals for a super quarry including a breakwater at Dean Quarry have the potential for significant impacts upon the AONB.
- Future climate change effects such as rising sea levels could affect local harbours, fisheries and beaches such as Porthleven, Mullion, Gweek, Cadgwith and Coverack.
- Loe Pool is affected by 'run-off' from surrounding farmland as well as seasonal water level changes from the Helston flood alleviation scheme.
- Ancient sessile oak woodlands around Helford have fallen out of productive and economic management and sycamore has become more dominant in the natural regeneration of woodland.
- Significant loss through disease of hedgerow elm trees impacting on habitat connectivity and landscape character.
- Additional conifer plantations on the Lizard have resulted in adverse visual and character impacts upon the landscape.

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1. Goonhilly Downs - Sophie Hartfield
2. Lizard Point
3. Kynance Cafe



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