Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

FOREST OF BOWLAND

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 41

The Forest of Bowland is a westerly extension of the Pennines, mostly in the districts of Lancaster, Ribble Valley and Craven, lying to the east of the M6. The hills are not high – Ward Stone at 1841ft (561m) is the highest – but the flat-topped moors and steep, wooded valleys are a distinctive and pleasant landscape for walkers.



The Forest of Bowland to the east of Lancaster (Goggle Earth)

Three of the area's larger landowners are United Utilities (which uses the eastern part as the catchment for Stocks Reservoir); the Duchy of Lancaster (which owns the Whitewell Estate); and the Duchy of Westminster at Abbeystead, a well-known sporting estate. Guide 76 describes the origins of Lancaster's early water supply in the Forest of Bowland.

The landscapes of the area partly reflect its complex geology. This comprises hard rocks – a mix of limestones, shales, sandstones and millstone grits – which were laid down in two phases lasting around 40 million years during the Carboniferous era when the area enjoyed a more tropical climate.



Moors and wooded valleys (photo courtesy of Grosvenor Estate)

A northward drift of continents and repeated tectonic upheavals have moulded the rocks into the hills and valleys we see today. The glaciations of the recent past have rounded off the hills and left glacial debris in the valleys' bottoms and sides.

The landscape also reflects the history of its uses over the past centuries. The 'Forest' part of area's name refers not to extensive woodland but to the royal hunting rights in the area that lasted till 1507, when smaller estates with farming, sport and country houses took over. The farming has long included sheep and cattle which have kept the trees at bay in the grazed upland areas. The sport has focused on grouse shooting and from the air the tapestry of shorter and taller heather and the hill tracks to the shooting butts is unmistakable. By careful burning, the shorter, younger heather provides the grouse with food and the taller heather gives them shelter.



The heather patchwork of a Forest of Bowland grouse moor (Google Earth)

The scenic attractiveness of the area was officially recognised in 1964 when the Forest of Bowland was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. A Joint Advisory Committee of local public and private interests guides the management of the area, strengthened by tighter planning laws to prevent unsuitable development.

The AONB actively promotes suitable types of development for the area's 16,000 people. These focus on three themes – the wildlife, food and drink, and tourism.

The wealth of wildlife was one of the reasons for the area's designation as an AONB and it has been recognised as a Special Protection Area under the European Birds Directive. The hen harrier is the iconic local species, which appears in the AONB's logo. Nonetheless its breeding success rate is worryingly patchy.



The food-and-drink theme aims to raise the profile of local producers of, particularly, cheese and other dairy products, beer, beef, lamb and pork. Local restaurants feature them, and farmers' markets and local shops and supermarkets make them readily available.

The tourism theme is diverse, to appeal to as many market segments as possible. Walking and cycling are promoted through leaflets and routes as is long-distance riding with the 45-km North Lancashire Bridleway from near Lancaster to Chipping.

The birdlife is a real attraction as are the villages and their eateries. Guide 25 gives more details about birdwatching in the Lancaster area. The aim is to maximise the commercial benefits from visitors for local businesses. This prompted the area to bid for and be awarded a European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.



A lapwing (Forest of Bowland AONB)



Pendle Hill (Forest of Bowland AONB)

There is a Visitor Centre at Beacon Fell Country Park.

On the higher moorlands there is a general right of access for walkers only in the designated areas outlined in light yellow on the Ordnance Survey map OL41 (1:25,000, Forest of Bowland and Ribblesdale), which walkers should consult.

The Forest of Bowland can be accessed by train from the stations on the Lancaster to Skipton line and the line to Clitheroe – Community Rail Lancashire

The area is encircled by National Cycle routes – The National Cycle Network - Sustrans.org.uk

Buses into the area run from all the surrounding towns.

Further details about the Forest of Bowland can be found at the website of the Forest of Bowland AONB – Forest of Bowland AONB | Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
There are companion guides in this series on Hornby (Guide 10) and Wray (Guide 11) that describe these villages on the edge of the Forest of Bowland.

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