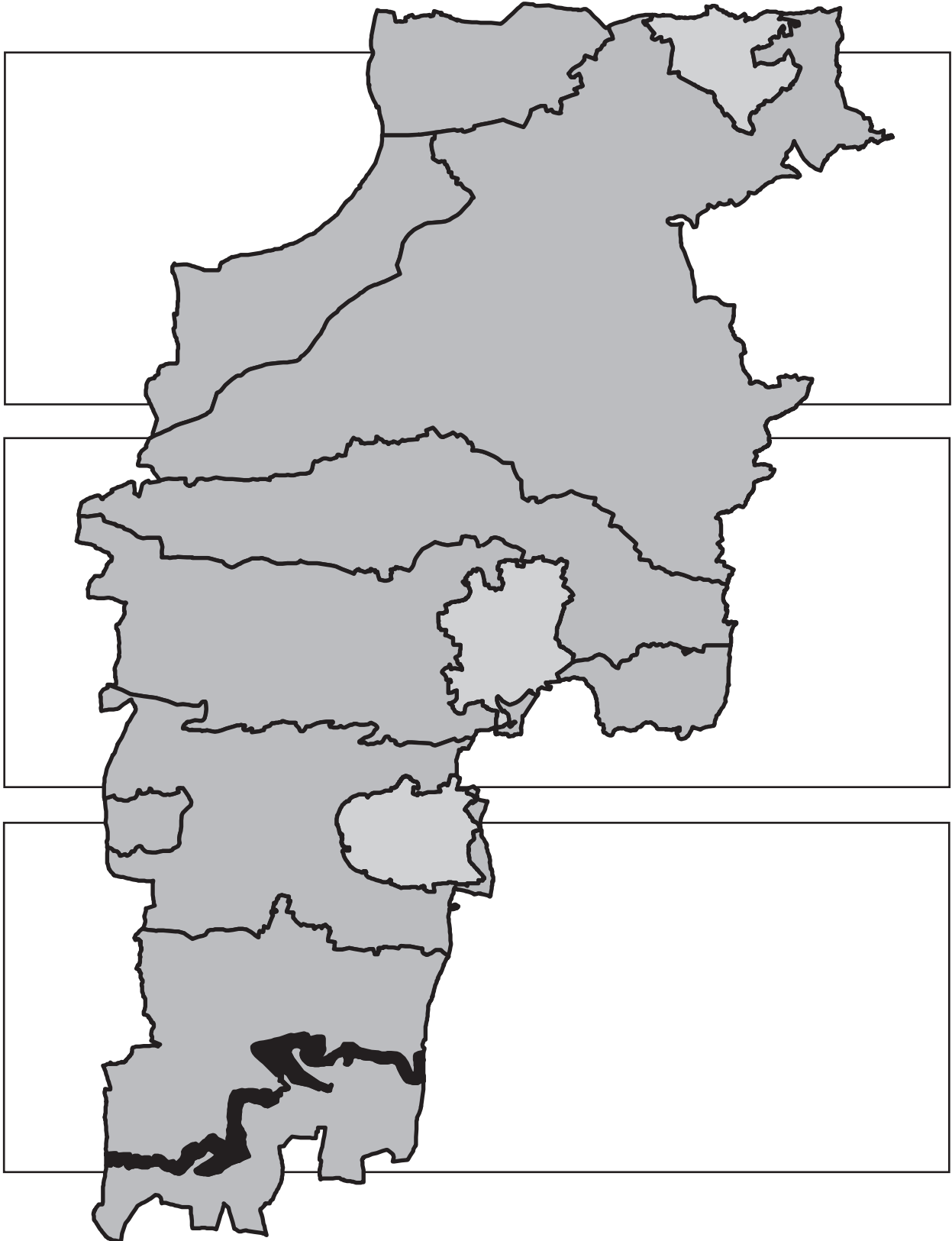


Landscape Character Area 2
Fulking and Clayton Scarp



Fulking to Clayton Scarp

CHARACTERISATION

Summary and key characteristics

Distinctive steep, abrupt chalk escarpment (scarp) with precipitous north-facing slopes and a dramatic, undulating ridgeline.

- Scarp edge gives panoramic, long views from the downland edge north across the Low weald to the High Weald, the Surrey Hills and the North Downs.
- Southern boundary of the downland area is fringed by the major coastal towns of Brighton, Hove and Shoreham-by-Sea.
- Wind gaps due to the headwater erosion of southerly draining dry valleys breaking through the escarpment.
- Twisting in the direction of the escarpment due to past geological movement and steep embayments or coombes imparting a rhythmic quality to the swing of the ridge.
- Predominantly open nationally important species-rich grassland with patches of scrub and woodland forms a highly characteristic land cover pattern.
- Spring-line villages and underhill lanes beneath the scarp.
- Farmland patchwork on the downland fringes tends to end at the abrupt break of slope of the escarpment.
- Ridge line was line of a major ancient routeway, today the *South Downs Way*.
- Other distinctive features ancient and modern include chalk quarries and pits, deeply etched zig-zagging bostal tracks, continuous underhill lanes, telecommunications masts, pylon lines and intensive recreational use at the Devil's Dyke.
- Prehistoric earthworks, in particular Iron Age hill forts, on prominent sites on the hilly crests of the ridge.
- Crossed by the busy A23 Trunk Road in the gap at Pyecombe, the A273 at Clayton, and the London to Brighton Railway Line via Clayton Tunnel, with much localised traffic noise from these and other roads beneath the scarp.

Description and experience of the landscape

5.1 Generally around 200 metres above sea level on the summit hills and ridges, the north-facing chalk escarpment (scarp) of the South Downs is a wonder of the southern chalk landscapes, stretching from Butser Hill near Petersfield in Hampshire to the west, to Eastbourne in East Sussex. In West Sussex, the scarp is wooded in the west and open in the east, crossing the southern part of the County in a seemingly unbroken, undulating line of steep chalk a few hundred feet high and roughly 40 miles long. It is cut through with wide valley gaps containing the Rivers Arun and Adur, escaping through the chalk from the Weald to the sea. This is a landscape of evocative contrasts, the open, monolithic scarp quite different to the secretive, secluded coombes, the whole assembly wonderfully scenic, especially when cast in deep shadow, whether seen from a distance or close to.

5.2 The steep slopes are an irregular mosaic of scrub, chalk grassland, rough grazing and occasionally, broadleaved woodland. Hedgerows are infrequent and the field network usually breaks down as the slopes steepen. Some of the arable fields at the foot of the scarp often extend some way up the lower slopes, emphasising the undulating line marking the break of slope between the rough-textured steep slopes of the ridge and the managed, relatively small-scale farmland patchwork below. Mature woodlands with a diverse range of species form irregular strips and patches along the lower scarp slopes. Stands of beech are found in sheltered locations, and oak stands wherever there are pockets of clay. Other species are ash, field maple, wild cherry and, more importantly, large-leaved lime, an indicator of semi-natural woodlands.

5.3 The chalk scarp east of the River Arun gap includes the section in Mid Sussex and has a largely open character. It is consistently dramatic, abrupt and very steep, embayments and dry valleys or *coombes* (open and shallow or deeply incised, some with distinctive 'bottoms') imparting a rhythmic quality to the impressive line and swing of the ridge. Wind gaps occur regularly due to the headwater erosion of southerly-draining dry valleys breaking through the escarpment. These create the sometimes steeply undulating line of the ridge. In some places, simultaneous dry valley erosion of the scarp and dip slope has met to produce major gaps which, apart from the river gaps, provide corridors for modern road and rail communications.

The scarp in Mid Sussex

5.4 The scarp in Mid Sussex runs for a few miles west-east across the southern part of the District. Marked by the telecommunications masts and buildings at Truleigh Hill in Horsham District, the section from the western District boundary at Edburton to Fulking runs straight, with shallow embayments and deeply-cut bostal tracks zig-zagging across the scarp. The downland is largely open, with scrub patches and small copses and groups of trees at the spring line, pasture fields separating the underhill lane from the base of the scarp. A power line crosses the scarp in a gap to the west of Perching Hill.

5.5 Between Poynings and Clayton, the scarp twists northwards, the result of past geological movement. This part of the scarp has been eroded in a complex fashion to create a delightful and scenic series of chalk hills, promontories, deep valleys and gaps. The Devil's Dyke Hotel lies within the ample ramparts of the Iron Age hillfort on a steep sided promontory, the scarp to the north and the equally steep, dry valley of the Devil's Dyke to the south, its setting enhanced by woodland and scrub on Summer Down. The Devil's Dyke is the most famous of all the chalk dry valleys. It is the largest single coombe anywhere in the chalk scenery of Britain and a remarkable example of chalk erosion.

5.6 East and south of Poynings are the wooded slopes of Newtimber Hill and the hedged pastures of the Saddlescombe Valley. Beyond Newtimber Hill, the steep scarp ground curves south at Cow Down, above the substantial valley gap in the chalk at Pyecombe. Beyond it lies the massive promontory of Wolstonbury Hill, appearing virtually free standing by virtue of the valleys and gaps around it. The lower promontory of The WARENNE, delightfully topped with a copse, encloses Wellcombe Bottom. Parts of the scarp foot around the hill are wooded and the west face extensively quarried. The face of the scarp is shallow at the Clayton gap but picks up steepness again, topped by the Jack and Jill Windmills, with a large, partly wooded, secluded coombe at Clayton Holt on the District Boundary.

5.7 Views from the scarp and the impact of roads crossing it are described in the section on the *Devil's Dyke to Clayton* Landscape Character Area.

Biodiversity

5.8 The area contains three substantial Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), two of which extend westwards and eastwards beyond the District boundary. They contain a long band of unimproved species-rich grassland, woodland and scrub running along the chalk scarp in two sections, between Truleigh Hill and Newfimber Hill, and a similar stretch from Clayton to Lewes. The third site includes chalk grassland and woodland at Wolstonbury Hill. Part of one Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCl) lies on the scarp.

Historic character

5.9 The historic character of the scarp resides in its open character, a remnant of unenclosed and unimproved chalk downland landscape of considerable antiquity. Most of the ancient monuments and archaeological remains are confined to the scarp top and are mentioned in the section on the *Devil's Dyke to Clayton* Landscape Character Area (*Area 1*).

Settlement form and local distinctiveness

5.10 The settlement pattern associated with the scarp comprises the distinctive string of spring-line villages stretching from Edburton to Clayton. These are described in the section on the *Hurstpierpoint Scarp Footslopes* Landscape Character Area (*Area 3*).

EVALUATION

Change – key issues

- The most extensive areas of species-rich downland grassland are confined to remnants on the scarp and a few other steep slopes, the significant loss of this habitat due to post-war intensive arable and grass production and scrub encroachment.
- Greater recognition of the value of restoring sheep grazing and restoring significant areas of downland grassland.
- Visual impact of encroaching urban development, new roads and modern farm buildings.
- Impact on the landscape of exposed pylons and telecommunications masts.
- Increasing pressures (including on the public rights of way system) for a variety of activities including walking, horse riding and land use associated with it, mountain biking, off-road vehicle use, hang gliding and golf.
- Increasing pervasiveness of traffic movement and noise within and close to the scarp.
- Damage to (and loss of) archaeological remains.

Landscape and visual sensitivities

- Highly distinctive chalk-edge landscape of national importance much valued for its open, scenic qualities, cultural associations and recreational potential.
- High sensitivity to the impact of development on the immediate setting of the scarp and its skyline including the cumulative impact of masts, pylons and roads (the scarp is crossed by a pylon line at Fulking) and scarring of the chalk.

- Views from the scarp are highly sensitive to visually prominent development both on the urban edge to the south and in the Weald to the north.
- The scarp contains the most extensive and precious survival of nationally-important species-rich downland grassland along the Sussex Downs. The survival of this grassland is not assured unless protected from further loss caused by scrub invasion and agricultural improvement; increased in extent to create a continuous habitat; and enhanced by grazing and other land management methods.
- The scarp slopes and top are highly sensitive to recreational pressures both visually and from usage by walkers, cyclists and horseriders.
- Numerous important archaeological remains are vulnerable to damage and loss.

MANAGEMENT

Management Objective

Conserve and enhance the open, elemental qualities of the downland scarp and its historic legacy, encourage landscape restoration and woodland management, and ensure that new development does not detract from the scenic qualities of the scarp and is well-integrated within the landscape.

Land Management Guidelines

- Conserve and enhance the essence of the open scarp landscape through scrub clearance and grazing.
- Ensure that any new development has a minimum impact on views from the scarp and is integrated within the landscape.
- Pay particular attention to the siting of telecommunications masts.
- Maintain and manage surviving species-rich chalk grassland and plan for the restoration of extensive new areas accordance with a long-term plan to be agreed by all partners.
- Protect and enhance the historic legacy of the scarp top, slopes and scarp foot including important archaeological remains and ancient routeways.
- Maintain, restore and manage scarp woodland and hedgerow landscapes, and visually important tree clumps and belts where this does not conflict with conservation of the historic and natural environment.
- Protect the character of the spring line villages and underhill lanes a beneath the scarp.
- Reduce the visual impact of recreational activities including car parks and enhance the landscape at Truleigh Hill and around the recreational facilities at Devil's Dyke.

This area is part of the downland east of the Adur Valley. The Management Objective and Land Management Guidelines above have been incorporated into the ***Planning and Land Management Guidelines Sheet SD6 (Eastern Downs)*** included in Part Three. As part of the set of County-wide Land Management Guidelines, the area covered by the Sheet is wider than the areas of downland in Mid Sussex and includes:

The *Devil's Dyke and Clayton Downs (Area 1)* and *Fulking to Clayton Scarp (Area 2)* Landscape Character Areas in Mid Sussex District.

The *Beeding Downs (Area A1)* and the *Beeding to Edburton Scarp (Area C1)* Landscape Character Areas defined in the unpublished **Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment** (October 2003).

The *Mill Hill and Southwick Downs* Landscape Character Area (yet to be included in a District Assessment) in Adur District.