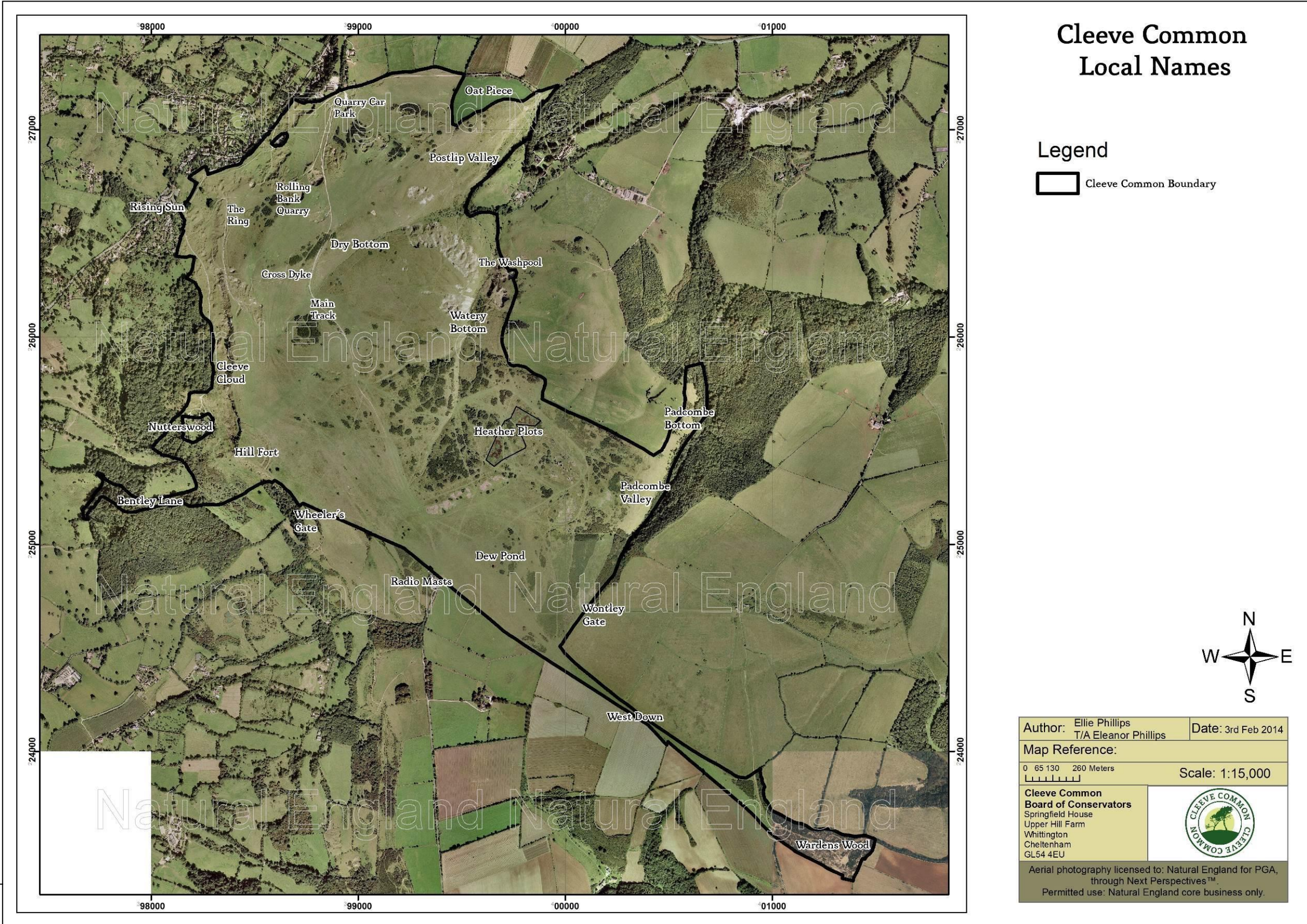


Section 2: Maps, statistics and Cleeve Common background info

Map: Areas of Cleeve Common



History

The paragraphs on the early history are from the 'Gloucestershire Uncovered' leaflet on Cleeve Common, by kind permission of the Gloucestershire Geology Trust.

Cleeve Common, like most of Britain, was once covered with dense woodland. The forests that covered the landscape were cleared by man around 6000 years ago to make room for farming that was gradually introduced during the Neolithic period. Evidence that Mesolithic and Neolithic people were active in the area comes from features such as burial mounds, flakes of flint and pottery fragments. So far, no evidence of people actually living on Cleeve Hill at this time has been found.

Bronze axes, tools and even swords have been found in the region, hinting at occupation of the hill prior to the Iron Age. Experts have suggested that some earthworks on Cleeve are the remains of Bronze Age boundaries and some of the current trackways were probably initiated during the Bronze Age as livestock farming and trade increased.

By the Iron Age, Cleeve Hill was nearly all open pasture. On the escarpment above Nutterswood the Iron Age hill fort provides the first direct evidence of habitation on the hill. It has now been partially quarried away, but what remains gives an impression of the scale of the fort, and of the subsequent quarrying. Clay pottery, post-holes and fragments of daub from the Iron Age have been found, providing evidence of a stable settlement on Cleeve. Finds of numerous types of animal bones with butchery marks further support this evidence and suggest the Iron Age inhabitants kept livestock as a source of food.

The steep edges of the hill have always been unsuitable for farming but instead have been extensively quarried to provide stone for various purposes. The first evidence of quarrying comes from the Roman period: quarry waste above one Iron Age site was found to contain two Roman denarii coins dated AD293.

'The Ring', a curious circular earthwork above the Rising Sun entrance, is probably the remains of a Roman animal pen. Excavations at nearby Haymes Farm show that it was once the site of a Roman settlement. Many other mysterious earthworks and embankments on the Common are probably the ancient boundaries of settlements or pasture. The most prominent is the 'Cross Dyke', a linear earthwork running up the escarpment and back into the Common. During the centuries following the Roman occupation there is little direct evidence of habitation on Cleeve, but many of the parish and manorial boundaries that originated at this time are still used today. A land charter from the time of the Iron Age hill fort Domesday Book describes a plateau used for grazing by wild and domestic animals, a more heavily wooded scarp than we see today but with a similar pattern of tracks criss-crossing the open Common.

Following the Norman conquest, the estate was administered by the Bishop of Worcester and better records start to be kept. The Common was divided between the manorial estates of Southam and Bishops Cleeve and old boundary stones can still be seen today.

The first records of Cleeve as 'common land' start in 1150, the names of people living on Cleeve appear from 1299. Records from 1389 show that the Common was heavily stocked with over 5000 animals, not only sheep and cattle, but also pigs, horses and donkeys. The competition for summer grazing led to community disputes even then. There was some regeneration of woodland which was coppiced and the present pattern of woodland established. Detailed records of quarrying also begin in 1389. The Abbot of Winchcombe used Lower Freestone from Postlip Quarries for his abbey and the building of Winchcombe Church. Stone from Cleeve Cloud was used in the construction of the Parish Church and Manor House in Bishops Cleeve below. Coarser stone was popular for roads and walls in the local parishes.

The agricultural way of life remained largely unchanged for hundreds of years. However, the first half of the 19th century saw Cheltenham boom as a fashionable spa town and the open spaces of Cleeve Hill became attractive for recreation. Horse racing, including the famous Cheltenham Gold Cup, was staged on the Common from 1818 until 1855, before moving to its present venue of Prestbury Park. In its heyday, many thousands of people made their way up from the town by carriage or on foot, to be greeted by a carnival of racing and sideshows. Local trainers still exercised their racehorses on the Common until very recently.

The settlement of Cleeve Hill flourished as a health resort at the end of the 19th and start of the 20th centuries. The first golf course was set out on the lower slopes of the Common in 1891. The original clubhouse dates from 1895 and today is the grey chalet (the former Youth Hostel) next to Rock House behind the Rising Sun Hotel.

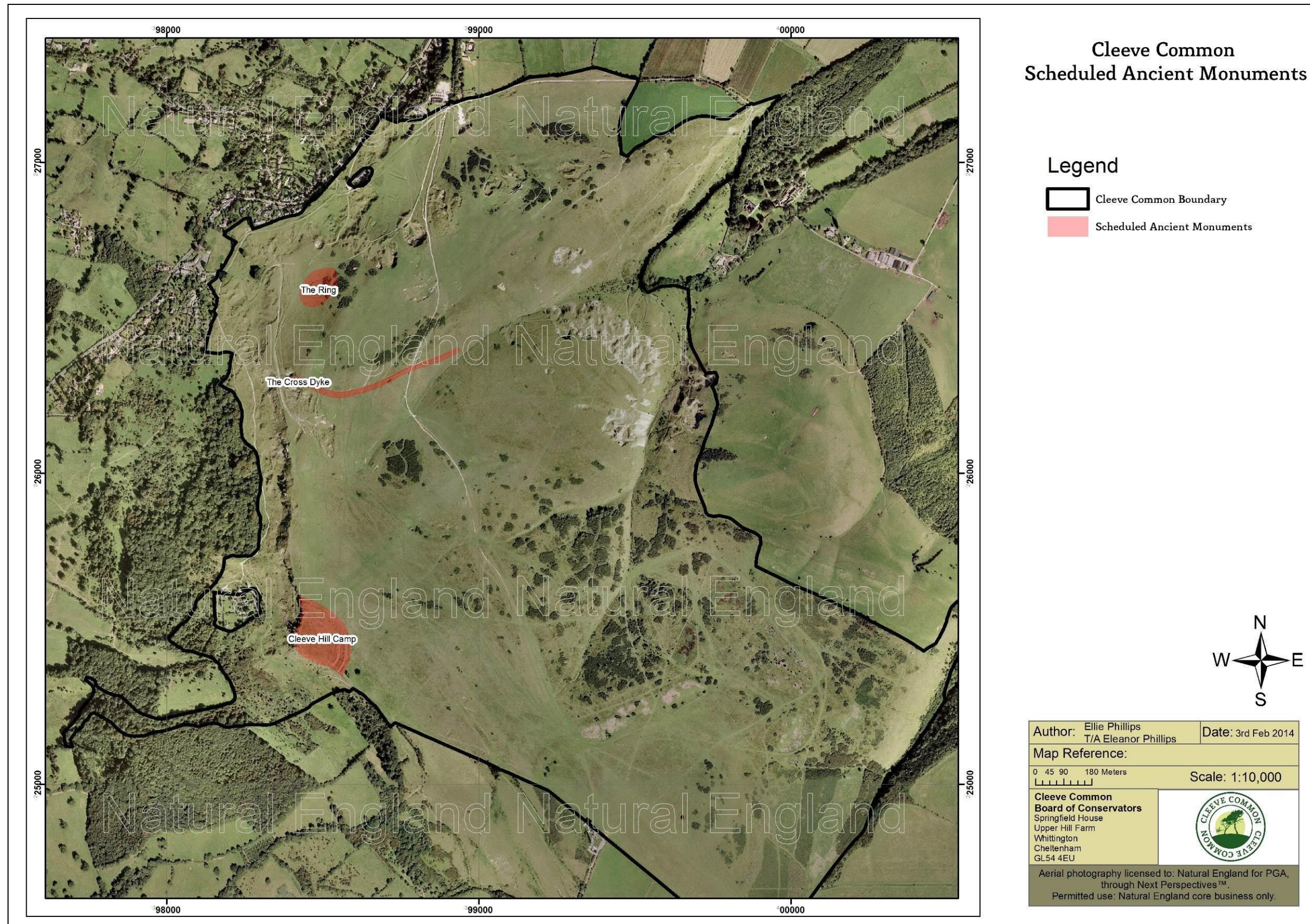
Growing pressure on the Common for diverse uses meant that more formal management structures were needed. Following a public parliamentary enquiry, the Board of Conservators (now called Cleeve Common Trust) came into being under the Commons Regulation (Cleeve) Provisional Order Confirmation Act of 1890. For £50 per year, Cheltenham Corporation bought the right of access to the Common for its inhabitants, along with 3 seats on the new Board that continue to this day.

In a far-sighted move, the Act required the Board to preserve the ancient earthworks and empowered it to make Bylaws to protect and manage the Common. The original Bylaws reflect the need to reconcile recreation with agriculture. They include many references to leisure activities, some quaint by today's standards, such as the prohibition on "gambling, betting, or playing with cards or dice at any time on the Common". The delicate balance of conservation,

agriculture and recreation persists right up to the present day. The aim of the Cleeve Common Trust is to ensure that the priceless natural heritage Cleeve Common is passed on to future generations.

Visit our website www.cleevecommon.org.uk for more information on the Common's history, geology, archaeology and how it is run today.

Map of Scheduled Ancient Monuments



Site of Special Scientific Interest

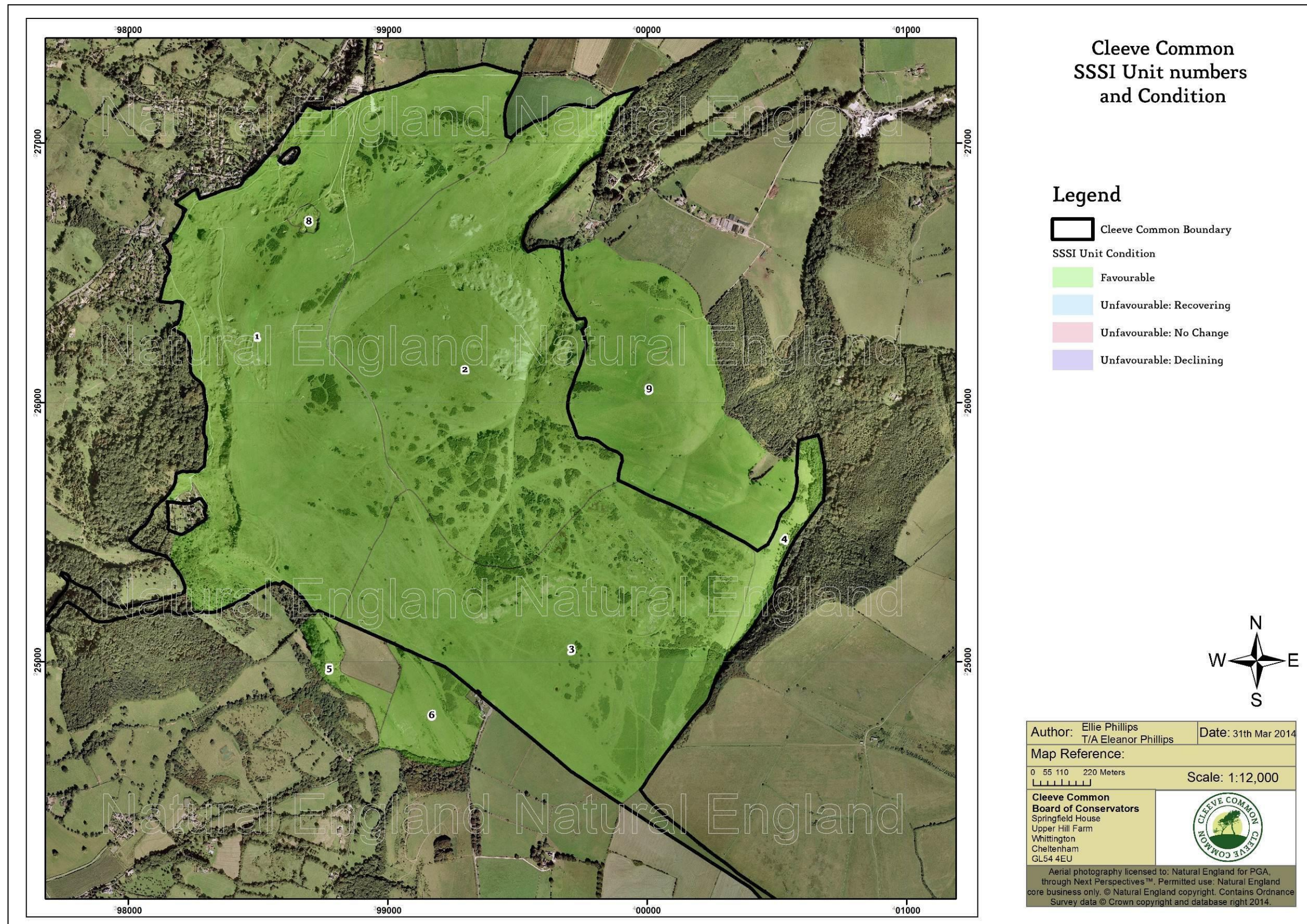
Cleeve Common is a SSSI for its limestone grassland and its geology.

There are several conditions that we need to meet to ensure the favourable condition of the SSSI. There is an annual inspection of the Common where key species are monitored. The most recent assessment of the grassland found the condition to be 'favourable recovering'.

Cleeve Common is a brilliant place to see orchids. As well as the Common and Spotted Orchids there are also strong populations of musk and ghost, wasp and bee orchid.

Typical limestone grasslands that are easy for students to find are: rock rose, common thyme, devils bit scabious, birds foot trefoil, carline thistle, kidney vetch, hawkbits, violets, cowslips.

Map of SSSI Units and their Condition



Geology

The true origins of Cleeve Common's geology goes back much further in time, back to the Jurassic period popularly known as the "Age of the Dinosaurs".

The rocks of Cleeve Hill were laid down in the mid Jurassic, about 170 million years ago. These rocks were formed from the sediments produced in warm tropical seas, in a climate similar to the Caribbean today. These rocks also contain abundant fossils.

Fossils are formed when dead organisms are buried in sediments and over geological time these buried animals (or plants) become mineralised or fossilised. Generally, only animals with hard shells, bones and teeth are robust enough to be preserved as fossils. Sometimes the fossil dissolves in situ and leaves behind a natural mould or impression of the animal in the rock. Many of the rock formations show distinctive layers and contain characteristic fossils. Given the unlikely series of events necessary to preserve animals as fossils, these distant seas must have teemed with life.

Many of the fossil animals found on the scree slopes of Cleeve Hill would be familiar to a child collecting sea shells on a beach during a summer's holiday. Many shells are bivalve molluscs like "oyster" and "scallop" shells. However, other common shelly fossils include "lamp shells" (or brachiopods), which are scarce in today's seas. The rocks of Cleeve Common also reveal many other types of fossil sea animals such as sea urchins, "bullet" shells (or belemnites), ammonites, "snail" shells (or gastropods) and corals. These fossil animals represent the remains of burrowers, grazers, filter feeders and free swimming animals. However, no dinosaur remains have yet been found on Cleeve Common.

Recent discoveries in one of Cleeve's quarries hint at a hidden world of fish, sharks and crocodiles. Finds in 2006-2009 revealed an undiscovered rock stratum containing abundant bone and teeth fragments. These fossil finds are small, in the order of a centimetre or so, but they reveal a time when Cleeve Common had a watery past where vertebrate animals roamed in profusion under a warm tropical Sun.

Currently these vertebrate fossil bearing rocks have been buried due to rock erosion, ironically a process which formed the very rocks of Cleeve Hill itself.

Rolling Bank Quarry is a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest (Pictured below)



Rolling Bank Quarry, located on Cleeve Common, provides exposures in several beds of the Middle Inferior Oolite that are confined to a very limited outcrop. These units, known as the 'Bouguetia' and 'Phillipsiana' beds after the fossils they contain, yield distinctive fossil faunas of bivalves, gastropods and brachiopods. The limestones were deposited in shallow, tropical waters, somewhat similar to the modern-day Bahamas Banks. There is a geological excavation site and interpretation board at Rolling Bank Quarry, high up on the front face of the Hill.

Along the hill top at Postlip Warren, there is an excellent example of a feature known as 'ridge-and-trough'. This is where the outcrop of the Inferior Oolite limestone has broken up into separate blocks along the lines of pre-existing joints, and these blocks have moved downslope over the underlying Lias Clay. The movement has probably involved both sliding, and squeezing-out of the clay.

The bedrock across the Common is predominantly oolitic limestone.

There is also a Harford Member, a layer of sandstone which forms the uppermost part of the Birdlip Limestone Formation, that produces an acidic soil of around pH 5 to 6 in an otherwise alkaline sequence (Owen 2011). These 'Harford Sands' give rise to acidic communities which are unusual in the context of the Cotswolds (eg. Heather, pictured belowright)

Other habitats on the Common include more neutral areas owing to outcrops of Lias Clays: bracken is locally dominant in places and much of the sward on the plateau of the Common is less botanically diverse; however these areas support a more diverse range of fungi, including several species of waxcap (*Hygrocybe* spp.)

Scree slopes are an artefact of the extensive quarrying on the Common, which ceased in the early 1900s; these areas support rarities and nationally restricted plants such as red hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis angustifolia*), pictured below right, and limestone fern (*Gymnocarpium robertianum*), pictured below left.



Woodland

There are several wooded areas on the periphery of the Common which are excluded from the SSSI area. Bentley Lane and Nutterswood are semi natural woodland. Primarily native broadleaf, with a dominant beech canopy typical of the woodlands in this area, but also with evergreens and a few exotic trees. Wardens' Wood was planted by the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens in the early 1990's and is mainly native broadleaf trees and shrubs.

Aquatic

There is a spring in Watery Bottom and a small stream from here through the Washpool Valley. It collects into a medium sized pond next to the 'Sheep Dip'. In addition there is the 'Dew Pond' located near the radio masts and the pond located on the Northern boundary, just north east of the Rising Sun Inn.

The animals of Cleeve Common

Cleeve Common supports a diverse fauna. Mammals include brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*) and lesser horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*) as well as fifteen other species of bat, voles and field mice.

Amphibians and reptiles recorded include great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*), smooth newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*), palmate newt (*Lissotriton helveticus*), adder (*Vipera berus*), slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*), common lizard (*Lacerta vivipara*) and grass snake (*Natrix natrix*).

A diversity of invertebrates has been recorded, for example the snail *Abida secale*, the spider *Tetragnatha pinicola*, dark green fritillary (*Argynnis aglaja*), wall (*Lasiommata megera*), lace border (*Scopula ornata*) and the Red Data Book bug *Hallodapus montandoni*.



Below is a list of all the birds that have been recorded at Cleeve over the last ten years.

Grey Heron	Lapwing	Peregrine
Canada Goose (Over)	Snipe	Red-legged Partridge
Teal	Woodcock	Grey Partridge
Mallard	Curlew	Quail (Heard)
Red Kite	Buff-breasted Sandpiper	Pheasant
Sparrowhawk	Black-headed Gull	Moorhen
Buzzard	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Stone Curlew
Kestrel	Herring Gull	Dotterel
Merlin	Common Gull	Golden Plover
Hobby	Stock Dove	House Martin
Cuckoo	Woodpigeon	Tree Pipit
Little Owl	Collared Dove	Meadow Pipit
Tawny Owl	Green Woodpecker	Grey Wagtail
Short-eared Owl	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Pied Wagtail
Swift	Skylark	Wren
Wryneck	Swallow	Dunnock
Willow Warbler	Ring Ouzel	Robin
Goldcrest	Blackbird	Black Redstart
Long-tailed Tit	Fieldfare	Common Redstart
Coal Tit	Song Thrush	Whinchat
Blue Tit	Redwing	Stonechat
Great Tit	Mistle Thrush	Wheatear
Nuthatch	Grasshopper Warbler	Treecreeper
Greenfinch	Blackcap	Great Grey Shrike
Goldfinch	Chiffchaff	Jay
Siskin	Reed Bunting	Magpie
Linnet	Corn Bunting	Jackdaw
Bullfinch	House Sparrow	Rook
Yellowhammer	Chaffinch	Carrion Crow
Starling	Brambling	Raven

Landscape

The landscape features at Cleeve Common are: Limestone grassland, woodland, stone walls, rolling hills.

Recreation

The Common also hosts a golf course; the greens and tees of which are excluded from the terms of the SSSI notification.

The official recreation area is the grassland in front of the radio masts. This is where people play with balls, kites, model aircrafts and where mountain boarding takes place.

The highest tree in the Cotswolds

This lone beech tree is believed to be the highest tree in the Cotswolds at 330 m above sea level. This is now the site for the 'Memorial Programme', where loved ones can be remembered with a commemorative plaque affixed to the stone wall.

It looks south-west to 'The Twins', the two remaining beech trees from the original 'Three Sisters', pictured below.



Climate

Rainfall 760 to 1000mm per year

Summers appeared to be dryer years ago. The water table is significantly lower than it was only a decade ago.

Designations

Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Cotswolds is one of the most beautiful areas of England, known and loved by people across the world. It is the largest of 40 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales: an area of warmth and clarity with stone walls and buildings, open skies, rolling grasslands, beech woods and captivating villages, which make it an outstanding English landscape - a landscape once experienced, never forgotten.

The Cotswolds was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1966 in recognition of its rich, diverse and high quality landscape. It is the largest of 40 AONBs in England and Wales, and the third largest protected landscape after the Lake District and Snowdonia. Covering 790 sq miles, the Cotswolds stretches from the City of Bath and Wiltshire in the South through Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire to Warwickshire and Worcestershire in the north.

Its central feature are the Cotswolds Hills which rise gently from the broad, green meadows of the upper Thames to crest in a dramatic escarpment above the Severn Valley and Evesham Vale. Rural England at its most mellow, the landscape draws a unique warmth and richness from the famous stone beauty of its buildings.

Jurassic limestone gives the Cotswolds their distinctive character, and an underlying unity in its use as a building material throughout the area. The limestone lies in a sloping plateau with a steep scarp slope in the west drained by short streams in deep cut wooded valleys, and a gentle dip slope which forms the headwaters of the Thames. This gentle slope has a maze of lanes connecting picturesque streamside villages built predominantly from local stone.

The Cotswolds are nationally important for their rare limestone grassland habitat and for ancient beechwoods with rich flora. Some Cotswolds plants are so rare that they have specific legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Five European Special Areas of Conservation, 3 National Nature Reserves and over 80 Sites of Special Scientific Interest testify to the great variety of wildlife and habitats found in the Cotswolds AONB.

Registered Common Land

This means the local people have historic rights to graze a certain number of animals on the Common in between April and November. The Common is privately owned.

Site of Special Scientific Interest (see page19)