

11.0 BATCOMBE DOWNS AND VALLEYS

11.1 The core of this landscape is one of the most distinctive in the district. However, to the north and east it merges gradually into the land sloping down from East Mendip and the high land forming the watershed between the Alham and the Frome. The narrow, steep-sided valleys which divide the ridges open into the shallow, wide-bottomed valley of the river Alham. The enclosed character that the ridges and the wooded valley sides give to this valley is gradually lost as the landscape opens out into the wide valleys of the Lias Lowlands and Ridges. The area can be divided into two (Figure 10):

- *the Downs, Slopes and Valley Heads* (D1)
- *the Upper Alham Valley* (D2)

11.2 The Downs, Slopes and Valley Heads

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| • Open downland ridges | • Steep, enclosed slopes with small fields |
| • Wide ridgetop views | |
| • Narrow, winding valleys | • Frequent oolite buildings on valley bottom |
| • Well-wooded valley bottoms | |

11.2.1 The slightly-domed ridges that ring the Upper Alham Valley have a distinctly downland character. There are large fields, generally with low hedges, and sometimes with post and wire fences. Wide views can be enjoyed across the area and beyond it to the Mendip Hills and the

Lias Lowlands (Photograph 17). The land is generally in pasture use, emphasising the downland character.

11.2.2 The land falls away very steeply from the ridges and the field sizes become much smaller. Overgrown hedges, frequent hedgerow trees, copses and small blocks of woodland as well as trees around the villages of Westcombe and Batcombe and close to the watercourses give a well-wooded character, emphasising the narrowness of the valley. Sunken lanes wind up the slopes and link the frequent settlements along the valley floors. The valleys follow sinuous courses with the changes in direction emphasising their narrowness and steepness.

11.2.3 The principal settlement is Batcombe, dominated by attractive buildings, some of oolite, some of conglomerate, which extend for nearly a mile along the valley floor. They are attractively interspersed with a good tree cover, tree lined lanes and occasional glimpses of the steep slopes beyond. The detailing of the older buildings, such as the hood moulding, is reminiscent of the Cotswolds.

11.3 Upper Alham Valley

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| • Enclosed valley character |
| • Dominance of surrounding ridges |
| • Willows and streamside vegetation |

11.3.1 From Batcombe as far as Milton Bridge, the Alham Valley gradually opens out, although it is still dominated by the downland ridges.

Farmsteads lie just above the river and Batcombe Bottom, and the wetter land along the riverside has willows, alders and patches of wetland vegetation.