

RESOURCE GUIDE

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty



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Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the John Muir Award

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are landscapes of fantastic diversity offering natural and cultural heritage to discover. This guide will help you find out more about AONBs.

Use of the John Muir Award is widespread in many AONBs across England & Wales, through schools, youth ranger groups, adult projects, families and individuals living in, near or visiting AONBs. These groups are sometimes supported by AONB staff-led activity. The John Muir Award is used to help people of all ages and backgrounds to connect with these special places, to enjoy their natural beauty and understand more about the primary purpose of all AONBs - to conserve and enhance the landscape.

What are Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is formally identified as an outstanding landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty is so precious that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it. Known as 'landscapes for life', AONBs are living, working landscapes, much loved and valued. They can be powerful symbols of national pride: places of motivation, excitement, pleasure and prosperity. [Natural England \(NE\)](#), [Natural Resources Wales \(NRW\)](#) and [Northern Ireland Environment Agency \(NIEA\)](#) are responsible for formally designating AONBs (Scotland: see below). They advise on policies for their protection, acting as national "watchdogs" to ensure that they are successfully conserved and enhanced. Visit [Landscapes for Life](#) to find out more about the AONB network and its purpose.

Where are Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

There are 46 AONBs in Britain (33 in England, 4 in Wales, 1 which straddles the English/Welsh border and 8 in Northern Ireland) covering 18% of the countryside.

Scottish National Scenic Areas (NSAs) take a similar role in protecting designated landscapes in Scotland. The 40 NSAs, with their outstanding scenery, represent some of Scotland's finest landscapes within and beyond existing national park boundaries, covering 13% of Scotland's countryside.



Accessible and Inspiring

Over two thirds of England's population live within half an hour's drive of an AONB and almost all of Wales' population can access an AONB within an hour. Steeped in history, culture and natural beauty, they are places of parks, mountains, fields and farms with many different landowners, as well as homes and gardens. (Your rights to go out onto some areas of open land may be restricted. Our [Outdoor Access Resource Guide](#) has more information about rights and responsibilities to aid your enjoyment of being in the outdoors.) Each AONB will have a variety of local information on events, opportunities and resources as well as where to go, what to do and ideas for great activities to get involved in.

Useful websites

National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Links to all 46 AONBs, further information and resources - www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/

NatureScot – National Scenic Areas

Links to Scotland's 40 NSAs, further information and resources - www.nature.scot/professional-advice/protected-areas-and-species/protected-areas/national-designations/national-scenic-areas

Resources from AONB websites

Each AONB has their own website with tailored individual information, things to do, resources and ways to get involved. Examples of some great AONB themed resources:

Forest of Bowland AONB - <http://forestofbowland.com/Birds-Bowland-Education-Resources>

South Devon AONB - www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/publications/

Shropshire Hills AONB - www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/help-to-look-after/resources/outdoor-learning

Natural England's Responsibility for AONBs in England

This publication explains duties that Natural England holds for AONBs in England and how these relate to those held by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and local authorities -

www.gov.uk/government/publications/areas-of-outstanding-natural-beauty-natural-englands-role

Visit Wales

Find out more about what is going on in and around AONBs in Wales, for local people and tourists -

www.visitwales.com/things-do/nature-and-landscapes/welsh-areas-outstanding-natural-beauty