



Upland Commons

Common land is farmed land on which a number of 'Commoners' share rights to use the land or take resources from it, such as grazing for livestock, collecting bracken (for animal bedding), or wood and peat (for fuel or other uses). The grazing rights are usually linked to farms and often passed down through generations of the same family. More than 80% of common land is in the uplands, including 3000 km² in England mostly on the hills and moors of Devon, Yorkshire, the Lake District and Shropshire.



The common land is not owned by the Commoners but by someone else – an individual or organisation, and often more than one landowner for the same piece of Common. For example, the landowner may be a private individual, but they are still bound by the legal arrangements of Common Land.

What makes Upland Commons and commoning uniquely different from other upland farming is the shared use of the Common and the collaboration required between commoners and with the land owner and manager to ensure everyone benefits. There are currently 3900 active commoners farming England's common land. Many aspects of rural life people enjoy today such as the Lakeland Shows with their sheep and shepherds crook competitions, Cumberland wrestling and fell races have their origins in such collaborative working.

Where are they?

Check the [Magic Map](#). Select Access, then Registered Common Land, then zoom in to view them. Anybody can walk on Upland Commons, they are free and open for access on foot and many are areas well known as beautiful places to discover, explore and to have adventures. There are many bridleways on commons for access on bikes and horses. You can enjoy upland commons to wildlife watch and for other recreation. But to really understand Upland Commons you should visit them and find out about what they provide both for society and for those who work on them – livestock grazing, biodiversity, carbon storage and water quality as well as for recreation. With the challenges of adaptation to climate change and loss of biodiversity it is more important than ever that we care for Upland Commons so that they provide improved habitat for plant and wildlife, water management, healthy trees and peat bog as well as livestock grazing. For local communities they also provide a sense of place which underpins rural life and traditional skills.

Although Commons now only cover 3% of England they have a high level of designation. In England 21% of all England's Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are commons and 10% of all scheduled monuments are found on common land. Some upland Commons are National Nature Reserves (NNR) including Moorhouse NNR (Cumbria) and Stiperstones NNR (Shropshire).

John Muir Award case study

Take a look at our case study to read how schools in Shropshire Hills Federation of Schools have completed their John Muir Award activity with a focus on Upland Commons and Commoning.



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Please see the following page for a list of useful websites

Useful websites

[Foundation for Common Land](#) – established to protect the public benefits of pastoral commoning.

They publish a series of [Fact Sheets](#) which cover wildlife, archaeology, tourism, rare breeds, carbon storage, water supply, uplands, agriculture and water and flood management.

If you are visiting a common for your John Muir Award you can contact the Foundation for Common Land who can help you contact one of the Commoners.

[Open Spaces Society](#) - they aim to be the guardian of all commons in England and Wales, and are notified of all applications for works on, and exchanges of, common land.

Local information and regional contacts for Upland Commons can be found at:

[Dartmoor National Park – The Commons](#)

[Dartmoor Commoners Council](#) – news and information

[Federation of Cumbria Commoners](#) – resources from hill farmers in Cumbria and Northumberland

Shropshire Hills AONB – [local aspects of the Our Common Cause: Our Upland Commons](#) project about valuing upland commons.

Whilst not focused on *Upland* Commons the [#RealNewForest](#) has an Educational Toolkit with many activities which could be adapted to the uplands

[Magic Map Application](#) As well as finding out where Commons are (see p.1) this map allows you to see many other aspects of commons using the various layers selected using the side menu. For example, look for: Historic Environment (under Countryside Stewardship layers), Designations (for example Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Nature Reserves), Habitats and Species.

Surveys are a great way for you to both find out a bit more about an Upland Common and can highlight how different commons produce different public benefits. Here are some which you may be able to complete on Upland Commons (many other Surveys including of birds, bugs and bees can be found in the [Surveys Resource Guide](#)).

MICCI – Moorland Indicators of Climate Change Initiative A survey on peat bogs recording peat depth, vegetation coverage and biodiversity, water table depth and coloration, along with location and weather data.

[Dark Sky Inspiration’s Light Pollution Survey](#) – discover how dark your night sky is.