

17 Limestone pavements

In northern England, limestone laid down in the Carboniferous period was exposed by the scouring action of ice sheets over 10 000 years ago, leaving smooth pavements. Since the retreat of the ice, water has dissolved the limestone along cracks to form a maze of grikes or crevices, separating clints, the remaining eroded blocks. Although pavements may be wooded at lower altitudes, the pavement surface may appear relatively bare higher up, yet the grikes provide protection for a rich flora of more typically woodland plants and mosses. The upper surfaces of the clints support lichens.

Status

There are only 2600 ha of this scarce, non-renewable resource in Britain, of which most (2350 ha) is found in England. The largest areas are in Yorkshire and Cumbria. This region is exceptionally important, holding 1359 ha, just over half of the British resource, all within the Yorkshire Dales National Park¹. Extensive tracts can be seen on Ingleborough, Wharfedale and Malham Tongs.

Threats

A 1975 survey estimated that only 3% of pavements were undamaged, though 61% of the remaining limestone pavement was considered intact. The main threats are from legal and illegal removal of limestone and overgrazing. Pavement stone is prized for decorative use in garden rockeries.

Map 21a: Percentage of the regional limestone pavements in each local planning authority area



Map 21b: Presence of limestone pavements shown by Natural Areas

