

Mansfield, Lois (2017) Upland resource management in Britain. *Geography*, 102 (3). pp. 141-152.

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Introduction

The uplands of the Britain are one of the most useful resources we have, but they are one of the most challenging to manage. Sandwiched between the intensively managed lowlands and the sparsely populated and utilised mountainous regions, 'uplands' represent a spatial and temporal battleground where many different land uses jostle for control of the resource base. They are often perceived as physically and economically marginal, with poor infrastructure, few job opportunities and isolated populations. Most of the attempts to address these issues over the last century have been only partially effective. If we are to manage uplands successfully for the people who live and work there, for the resources they provide for wider society and for those who visit them for relaxation and spiritual uplift, we need to be more aware of why resource management in these areas is not as straightforward as in other places, and plan accordingly. Uplands are excellent case studies to consider many of the themes covered in A level geography syllabi, including water cycle management, ecosystems under threat, changing places, governance systems, resources and scarcity, as well as the dynamic between population and the environment.

This article explores some of these issues. First, I investigate what 'uplands' mean as a concept (which is actually part of the problem). Second, I outline the main types of activity found on uplands and the ways different stakeholders perceive upland resources. Third, I explore some of the reasons for the conflicts that occur. Finally, I consider some of the solutions to resource management challenges in uplands.

Defining the uplands

Halford Mackinder (1902) considered that a broad division occurred between upland and lowland Britain, which could be identified by the 'Exe-Tees' line (Figure 1). Using this model, he noted that upland areas are generally found in the north and west of Britain, and the lowlands in the south and east. The divide is primarily a function of variation in geology and geomorphology, with the majority of uplands being made of igneous and metamorphic rocks and the lowlands a range of sedimentary ones. However, this generalised pattern does not help with resource management decisions because it is too vague.

Consequently a range of definitions have emerged over the last 70 years (see Figure 2) that reflect the work and objectives of different organisations. Physical attributes such as altitude (e.g. either the 240m or the 300m contour) and topography have been used (see e.g. Kapos et al., 2000). Organisations with interests in ecology and nature conservation have employed biological criteria, using classic 'upland' vegetation cover, ecological communities or habitats (see e.g. Countryside Survey, 2001). In some instances cultural parameters such as 'sense of place' or 'world image' have been incorporated. Other alternatives use legislation designed to provide targeted financial support - probably the best known of which is the European Union's (EU) 'Less Favoured Areas' (LFA) Directive (EC, 1975), now known as 'Areas of Natural Constraint' (ANC). This myriad of definitions leads to a huge variation of land areas (from 7989km² to 25,900km²) being classified as uplands, as Figure 2 demonstrates.

Recently there has been an increased focus to use the old LFA designation of the 'Severely Disadvantaged Area' (SDA) as the main geographical delineation tool (see Bodmin Moor example, Figure 3). While this helps to streamline upland policy and resource management activities,

a cynic may see it as simply a way to limit funding support to a smaller area.