

The Bigger Picture

Tracking landscape change in the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



The Concept

The project is based on photography taken from key vantage points throughout the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to capture changes in the landscape over the next twenty years. The use of a post mounted camera that can be taken from site to site ensures the same view extents are captured each time a visit is made. Each set of photographs contributes to the 'bigger picture' and will aid our understanding of landscape change over time.

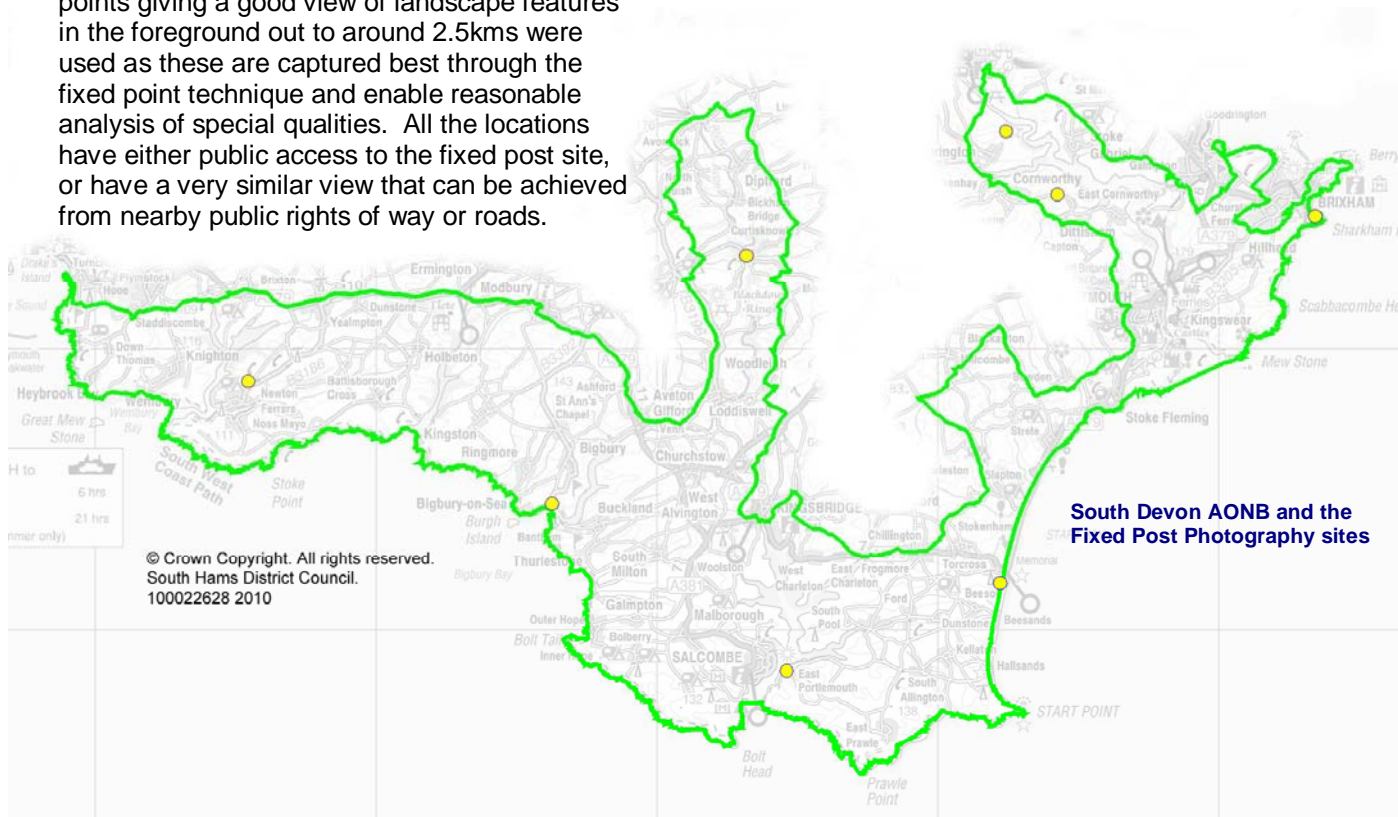
The Sites

Sites were selected across the AONB to ensure that each of the area's distinctive landscape character types were represented. A mixture of sites where landscape change is expected, possible and unlikely were chosen. Vantage points giving a good view of landscape features in the foreground out to around 2.5kms were used as these are captured best through the fixed point technique and enable reasonable analysis of special qualities. All the locations have either public access to the fixed post site, or have a very similar view that can be achieved from nearby public rights of way or roads.

We are particularly grateful to the AONB's private landowners and farming tenants for their support in this project. The following sites have been established to date as part of this project:

- Above Bridgend, Noss Mayo
- Avon Estuary Walk above Cockleridge Ham, Bigbury-on-Sea
- Coast Path above Torcross
- Curtisknowle
- East Cornworthy
- East Portlemouth
- Sharkham Point, Brixham
- Sharpham Estate, Ashprington

The yellow dots on map below show the geographic locations of the fixed post photography sites in use within the South Devon AONB.



South Devon AONB and the Fixed Post Photography sites



The river Dart, Stoke Gabriel and Galmpton Creek as seen from East Cornworthy

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South along the Avon valley from above Curtisknowle South Devon AONB Unit

The Kit

Apart from selecting the right sites, making the best of good weather and getting the photographic technique right; having a reliable set of kit is important for this project. We use a bespoke manufactured heavy duty demountable pole that attaches to base plates at each site.

The pole is topped off with a pole top camera mount that rotates a full 360 degrees and can be locked in place at 22.5 degree intervals. This enables shots to be taken at each of the 16 standard compass points.

Left: pole and camera in use; Top right: mounted pole; Bottom right: newly installed base plate

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The camera in use is a good quality 8 megapixel digital compact that comes complete with a range of useful features. The camera has its own locating wedge permanently attached to its base and the pole top mount can be tilted in 5 degree increments to account for locations that need the camera to be angled downwards. The kit is fully removable and when not being used on site leaves only a small base plate visible at each site.

Our recommendation to others considering a similar project but with a larger budget, would be to acquire a suitable high resolution digital SLR camera complete with a selection of fixed length lenses including 15mm, 28mm, 50mm, 80mm and 200mm. Consider using neutral density filters for skies on cloudy days and a UV filter to help improve clarity on hazy days.

The Photos

A prescribed number of photographs are taken at each site covering a set number of compass points. This process ensures that the same views are captured each time a site is visited. A minimum of 4 visits are made throughout the year to each site, timed to coincide with the changing seasons. Focal lengths are kept the same to allow accurate comparisons between pictures and the panoramic mode on the Canon Powershot Pro1 camera is used to ensure that exposure settings are consistent for the full set of images. This greatly assists with the later creation of panoramas.

In addition to the panoramic photo sets, extra point-of-interest photos are captured along with a short 30 second video burst. The video footage provides visual and audio clues to the levels of tranquillity experienced at the vantage points. To date the audio has only been recorded via our camera, so is limited in its quality. Future visits will utilise an MP3 format digital sound recording device for better quality sound.

Where possible, night time photographs will be taken for all sites in order to quantify the levels of night time scenic intrusion, visible dark night sky and sources of light pollution.

The Sharpham marshes and river Dart toward Totnes from the Sharpham Estate driveway

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The Results

Sets of images are created for each of the sites. These can be analysed separately and also joined together to form panoramas.

Panoramas are created by 'stitching' individual images together using the photomerge facility within Photoshop Elements 8.0 giving good results. Large expanses of sea or sky can prove problematic and an element of manual intervention is sometimes required in these cases to successfully stitch images. The end results are unusual and often dramatic.

hedgerow management practices, development levels, skyline installations, overhead wirescapes, scrub cover, coastal erosion, tree cover, livestock, grassland cover, wind turbines, campsites, agricultural buildings, moorings, obtrusive lighting, field boundaries, seascape, summer visitor infrastructure and farmsteads.

Other unexpected changes are also likely to occur and the photographic record for the project will capture these over time. Overall, the project will provide an interesting insight into 10+ years of South Devon's passing seasons.



Bantham and Cockleridge Ham from the Avon Estuary Walk

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Individual images can be compared against other individual images taken for the same site and compass point to assess the degree and type of change.

Notable changes can be transferred from the photographs and digitised over map bases within a Geographical Information System in order to measure distances or areas and provide a quantitative assessment of change. Notable changes will be recorded.

Where can I find out more?

As the project develops findings will be added to the project pages of the South Devon AONB website at www.southdevonaonb.org.uk

The Why?

Over time, the project will build real evidence of landscape change that can be analysed to assess whether or not the development and land management activities seen within the views have conserved and enhanced the special qualities of the AONB. This evidence will support and shape new plans, programmes and projects including the AONB's own Management Plan to safeguard our living, working landscape into the future.

We are expecting to see certain changes including amongst others: cropping patterns,

Farmsteads at Hazelwood in the mid Avon Valley

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