



Inbye fields at Wasdale Head

An aerial photograph of a valley. The foreground is a dark, steep slope. The middle ground shows a valley floor with a patchwork of green fields, some of which are divided by dark stone walls. A small cluster of buildings is visible in the distance. The background consists of dark, steep hillsides.

# SECTION 2

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Description

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH LAKE DISTRICT

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### A CABINET OF BEAUTIES

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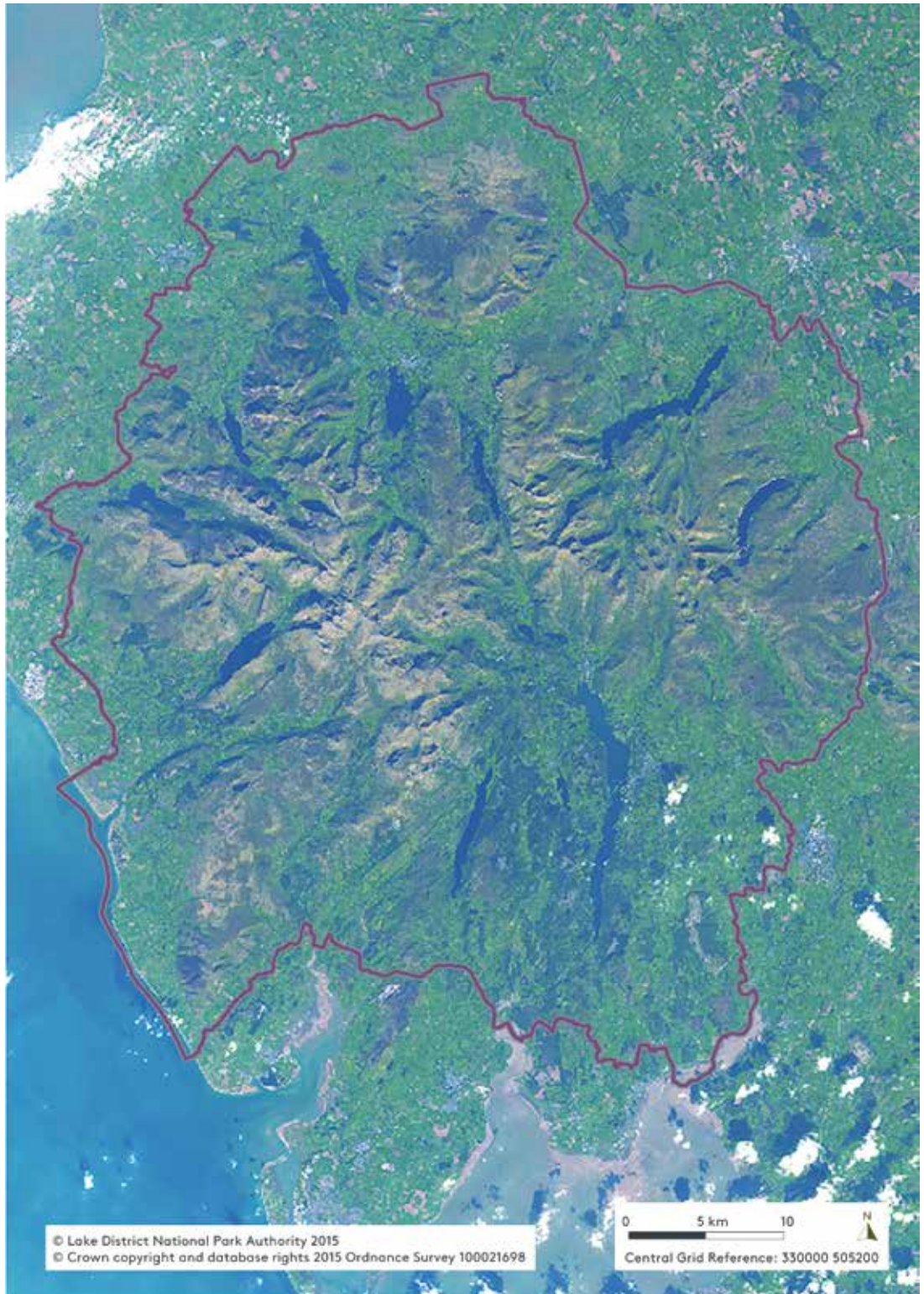
*“...in Cumberland and Westmorland there is a cabinet of beauties, – each thing being beautiful in itself, and the very passage of one lake, mountain or valley, to another, is itself a beautiful thing again.”*

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)**

The English Lake District is located almost exactly in the centre of mainland Britain, halfway between St Catherine’s Point on the south coast of the Isle of Wight and Cape Wrath in North West Scotland. Covering just under 2,300 square kilometres, it is a compact group of uplands (fells) and mountains which rise by more than 900 metres, overlooking a radial pattern of 13 verdant valleys, many containing long sinuous lakes. This distinct topographic arrangement is bounded by the Irish Sea coast on its west side and by a ring of lower-lying limestone country elsewhere. Most of the rocks of the English Lake District are 420 to 500 million years old; they were folded, faulted and raised into an ancient mountain range that lay south of the equator. On their long journey north, the mountains were eroded and folded again. Then in the past two million years they were shaped by ice.

This is a land which has supported continuous human settlement from the end of the last Ice Age. For the last 1,000 years a distinctive form of agro-pastoral agriculture has shaped the present day English Lake District. It continues to do so, creating and sustaining a landscape of great and harmonious beauty. This system of agriculture, based on the rearing of traditional hardy breeds of sheep long habituated to the Lake District, is adapted to the environmental constraints of its mountain setting. In the valley bottoms, lush pasture fields and hay meadows (inbye) are overlooked by fields carved from the surrounding slopes (intakes) and open pastures on the higher fells which are grazed communally. This agricultural system is also able, within its overall system, to adapt to external pressures such as changes in its market. The yearly cycle of sheep-rearing in the Lake District involves the movement of stock between these areas following long-established practices handed down over many generations. Farming families in the English Lake District can trace their histories back over several hundred years and there is great continuity of family names and persistence of local accent, dialect, customs and traditions. Farmhouses and field walls are built from local stone and slate using distinctive traditional techniques which have also developed over a long period and which continue today. The present settlement pattern, developing for the last millennium and established at least as early as the mid-17th century, comprises

FIGURE 2.a.1 Satellite image of the English Lake District



□ Nominated Property boundary

Data available from the U.S. Geological Survey

individual farms, small hamlets, villages and a small number of market towns which service the English Lake District agricultural economy. The towns developed from medieval settlements whose distinctive layouts are still apparent, despite re-building in later centuries.



**FIGURE 2.a.2** View of Dunmail Raise, located in the upper centre of the photograph between Grasmere and Thirlmere (top of photograph)

Unlike the Alps and other high mountain areas of the world, the fells of the English Lake District are compact and of a scale that is readily appreciated at a human level. All lie within a 24 kilometre radius of the central point of Dunmail Raise.

The beauty of the fells is enhanced by lakes set within the narrow, intervening valleys. The waters of the lakes are neither darkened by peat nor opaque with the mud of glaciers but have a wonderful transparency which often reflects the surrounding slopes and peaks. The higher fells support the rare remnants of a sub-arctic flora while the valleys and fell slopes support mixed oak woodland seasonally resplendent with wild daffodils and bluebells. The farm buildings and field walls merge into the spectacular natural landscape in both tone and colour, reflecting their rugged, functional character. In the English Lake District the combination of fells, valleys and lakes with the symbiotic adaptations of ancient agricultural practice has created a continuing cultural landscape of great beauty.

From the mid part of the 18th century this remarkable beauty was 'discovered' by travellers and tourists of the educated and moneyed classes who began to visit the region in increasing numbers. Initial interest in the beauty of the English Lake District was stimulated by the new 'Picturesque' aesthetic which was developing in England from the mid-18th century. The Picturesque was rooted in European traditions of landscape painting and was defined by William Gilpin, a native Cumbrian and perhaps its foremost proponent in Britain, as "that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a

picture" (Essay on Prints, 1768). Sir Walter Scott, the famous Scottish writer of this period, captured the Picturesque qualities of the English Lake District that were so admired in his novel 'Guy Mannering' (1815), in which Julia Mannering describes the region as having "All the wildness of Salvator here, and there the fairy scenes of Claude". The Picturesque beauty of the Lake District was rapidly communicated through guidebooks and prints, resulting in increased numbers of visitors to the area, many of whom sought out the viewing stations around the major lakes which the guidebooks recommended for optimum appreciation of the scenery. Most of these viewing stations can be visited and the same vistas appreciated today. Some of the towns and villages, including Keswick,

Grasmere and Ambleside quickly developed facilities to accommodate and entertain these early tourists, a process which accelerated after the arrival of the railway in Windermere and Keswick in the mid-19th century and which continues into the present.

The Picturesque interest also attracted wealthy admirers of the English Lake District scenery to purchase land to build villas and create landscape gardens, both for their own pleasure and generally to enhance the beauty of the area following Picturesque principles. These now form an important part of the Lake District landscape and are valued both for their historic interest and their contribution to



FIGURE 2.a.3 The villa on Belle Isle, Windermere



FIGURE 2.a.4 Lyulph's Tower, gothic style villa on the shores of Ullswater

the scenic beauty of the area. Early examples include the extraordinary cylindrical house on Belle Isle in Windermere and the 'gothick', turreted Lyulph's Tower on Ullswater.



FIGURE 2.a.5 Waterfall within the landscaped pinetum at Aira Force, Ullswater

By the end of the 19th century the tradition of villa building extended to include masterpieces of the Arts and Crafts movement by architects including Voysey and Baillie Scott.

The villas in the English Lake District were accompanied by landscaped gardens, Picturesque tree planting, pineta, arboreta and water features including modified waterfalls, all designed to enhance the Arcadian quality of the landscape.

The poet William Wordsworth influenced the design of some of the landscaped gardens in the English Lake District in the early 19th century and at the end of that century some significant examples were designed by Thomas Mawson, a native of the area who became one of the greatest landscape designers of his age.



FIGURE 2.a.6 The group of villas at the head of Windermere, built in the 18th and 19th centuries

The villas and landscape gardens of the English Lake District are concentrated in those parts of the area which afforded views of lakes and mountains most prized for their Picturesque qualities. These are principally around the northern end of Windermere, the Vale of Grasmere, Ullswater and around Derwentwater and they are now valued as some of the best surviving examples of their type in England.

By the end of the 18th century the English Lake District was becoming recognised as a landscape of national interest, valued for its scenic, harmonious beauty and increasingly visited by the cultural elite. At this point the development of the new artistic and philosophical movement of Romanticism, which in Britain was centred in large part on the English Lake District, laid the foundation for the elevation of the area to a landscape of iconic and international status. The key event in this was the return of the poet William Wordsworth from Germany to his native English Lake District. Resident there from 1799, Wordsworth was captivated not only by its congenial beauty but also by the qualities of independence, co-operative management and self-sufficiency of the local farming culture. Along with other Lake Poets who were attracted to the area, Wordsworth wrote poetry that was directly inspired by the English Lake District and its inhabitants, and which was based on a new and internationally-influential view of the relationship between humanity and landscape.

At the heart of the Romantic Movement was a strong belief in the importance of nature and landscape and the opportunities which these afforded for individuals to discover their sense of self. This cultural shift was even perhaps a precursor to recognition of the worth of individual freedom of action, thought and speech and thus contributed to the emergence of democracies in Europe and beyond. Like the French Revolution which Wordsworth witnessed at first hand, the core foundations of Romanticism were democracy and individual rights, and Wordsworth claimed that his Cumbrian upbringing instilled in him a sense of empathy and equality. Wordsworth's 'Prelude' (1805) is one of the most fundamental works in the creation of the modern popular mind and today's social mores and was directly inspired by the English Lake District landscape and his experience of it.



FIGURE 2.a.7 View of Derwent Water islands, Borrowdale and Bassenthwaite Valley





FIGURE 2.a.8 'Morning amongst the Coniston Fells, Cumberland' by J. M. W. Turner. Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1798. This was the first picture that Turner elevated by quoting poetry in the Royal Academy catalogue. He chose lines from Milton's 'Paradise Lost', describing the "mists and exhalations" of the atmosphere at sunrise.

Wordsworth's writings included other concepts developed from a deep knowledge and love of the English Lake District which have had widespread and fundamental importance for the landscape conservation movement. These included an early concept of human ecology – termed the 'economy of nature', which envisioned a harmonious relationship between humans and nature – and an expression of the idea of nationally-protected landscapes, which is widely accepted as the first iteration of the idea of national parks. This was included in Wordsworth's 'A Guide through the District of the Lakes in the North of England' (1835) which also set out his influential views on the management of landscape. Wordsworth's influence can still be seen in the design of the surviving houses and gardens of his friends and acquaintances to whom he provided ideas and advice.

The beauty of the English Lake District landscape which inspired Romantic philosophy and poetry also attracted painters and print-makers to the area to capture the special qualities of its harmonious scenery. These included artists of the stature of J. M. W. Turner, John Constable and Thomas Gainsborough, along with many other lesser known artists who also produced works of great value and interest. The English Lake District that is described in the writings of Wordsworth and his fellow Lake Poets and depicted in the paintings of Turner and his contemporaries can still today be experienced as a landscape of great inspiration and enjoyment.



**FIGURE 2.a.9** Yew Tree Farm, Coniston, a working farm with Herdwick sheep and Belted Galloway cattle, purchased by Beatrix Potter and now owned by the National Trust

Wordsworth's deep appreciation of the English Lake District led him to mount energetic campaigns against developments which he thought would harm the special qualities of the area. These included early proposals for railways into the English Lake District, the wholesale planting of non-native trees and the enclosure of common land. This campaigning zeal in defence of the Lake District was taken up by John Ruskin and others in the second half of the 19th century to oppose further railway proposals and, most significantly,

the proposal in the mid-1870s by the City of Manchester Corporation to create a reservoir at Thirlmere. Although the battle for Thirlmere was lost, the case was crucial in inspiring some of the leading objectors, all influenced by John Ruskin, to establish the National Trust in 1895 in order to purchase land for its protection in perpetuity. This important model of landscape conservation has been adopted widely around the world. Today over 20 per cent of the English Lake District, its place of birth, is owned and managed by the National Trust. Important elements of the National Trust property in the English Lake District were acquired through appeals and public subscription, including the much-visited viewpoints of Friar's Crag at the head of Derwentwater and Gowbarrow Park, which provides a magnificent view over the upper reaches of Ullswater. In addition, a significant number of hill farms were purchased by private individuals, including Beatrix Potter, the famous children's author, in order to preserve the traditional way of life in the Lake District, and were donated to the National Trust. These are still working today

and include some classic and well-known examples such as Glencoyne by Ullswater, Troutbeck Park and Yew Tree Farm, Coniston.

Following the Thirlmere case, further campaigns in the English Lake District in the later 19th and early 20th centuries against proposals for railways and commercial afforestation were largely successful in maintaining the scenic beauty of the area. These campaigns in defence of a landscape which is much cherished both in Britain and abroad also underpinned a further strand of conservation which was to lead to the formation of national parks in the UK. The English Lake District was at the heart of this movement and was designated as a national park in 1951. The protection of living, working landscapes as national parks – of which the English Lake District is the archetypal example – has been adopted in other countries around the world and has helped shape an international standard for the protection of landscapes and seascapes. The English Lake District, through its bids for World Heritage inscription in the 1980s, was also an inspiration for the definition and adoption of World Heritage cultural landscapes (11th and 14th sessions of the World Heritage Committee, 1987 and 1990, decisions on the Lake District nominations).

Coleridge's description of the English Lake District as a "cabinet of beauties" still holds good today. It is a cultural landscape of great value and interest in which all the elements of its long development can be seen and experienced. The mountains, lakes and valleys continue to support a vibrant agro-pastoral farming culture, practised by a local community with strong social and cultural traditions, which has adapted to economic pressures and new environmental concerns. Small market towns still play an important role in the agricultural and tourism economies. Villas and landscape gardens continue to provide highlights of picturesque interest within the surrounding farming backdrop. Artists and writers still find inspiration here and visitors continue to seek and find spiritual refreshment. Its concordant beauty is enjoyed by more than 15 million tourists each year, with increasing numbers from overseas. Conservation organisations including the National Trust, Friends of the English Lake District and National Park Authority continue to protect and conserve the landscape which inspired their formation.



**FIGURE 2.a.10** The mountains at the head of West Water, Wasdale Valley. This view has been adopted as the symbol for the English Lake District National Park.

## STRUCTURE OF SECTION 2

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“To begin with, then, with the main outlines of the country; I know not how to give the reader a distinct image of these more readily, than by requesting him to place himself with me, in imagination, upon some given point; let it be the top of either of the mountains, Great Gavel [Gable], or Scawfell [Scafell]... we shall see then stretched at our feet a number of valleys, not fewer than eight, diverging from the point, on which we are supposed to stand, likes spokes from the nave of a wheel.”

William Wordsworth, ‘Guide to the Lakes’ (5th edition, 1835)

Section 2.a provides the general description of the English Lake District as it is now, and Section 2.b the history of its development. The description of the Lake District and its history focuses on three intertwining themes which together combine to define its proposed Outstanding Universal Value:

1. A landscape of exceptional beauty, shaped by persistent and distinctive agro-pastoral traditions which give it special character;
2. A landscape which has inspired artistic and literary movements and generated ideas about landscapes that have had global influence and left their physical mark;
3. A landscape which has been the catalyst for key developments in the national and international protection of landscapes.

Section 2.a begins with an account of the present character and qualities of the English Lake District. The next three sections deal in turn with the present evidence for each the three themes listed above for the Lake District as a whole. Detailed description is needed to highlight the differing characteristics of the various parts of the Lake District. It is widely acknowledged that William Wordsworth’s likening of the English Lake District valleys to spokes from the hub of a wheel captures the essence of the topography of the area most aptly.

He identified 12 major valleys which could be seen from his vantage points of Great Gable/Scafell and the ridge of Helvellyn. In clockwise order these are, on the western side, Langdale-Windermere, Coniston, Duddon, Eskdale, Wasdale, Ennerdale, Buttermere-Crummock-Lorton and Borrowdale. Also in clockwise order, on the eastern side, Wordsworth lists the valleys of Wytheburn-St John’s Vale (Thirlmere), Ullswater, Haweswater, and lastly the Vale of Grasmere-Rydal-Ambleside. The coast serves as the rim of Wordsworth’s imaginary wheel on both the southern and western edges of the English Lake District, while the lowlands of the Solway Plain and the river valleys of the Eden and Lune perform the same function on the northern and eastern sides.

To support the general description of the property in Sections 2.a and 2.b and to help to organise the detail which needs to be described for this Nomination, Wordsworth’s subdivision of the Lake District landscape into its principal valleys has broadly been

FIGURE 2.a.11 The 13 valleys of the English Lake District, based on William Wordsworth's description in his 'Guide to the Lakes' (1835)



followed. However, Langdale has been treated separately from Windermere. This has helped to distinguish clearly between the valleys which meet at the head of Windermere, while Langdale, a major and distinctive valley, has a very different character from the main Windermere valley. Therefore 13 principal valleys are identified in Figure 2.a.11.

Wordsworth's descriptions of the major English Lake District valleys did not define their precise extents, but here, to facilitate the description of the nominated Property, boundaries have been defined by the surrounding watersheds, coast and National Park boundary. There is therefore a range in the size of the valleys from small to large and some, for example Windermere, contain a number of individual, smaller valleys which in another context might be listed separately. Nonetheless, the boundaries defined form a coherent and compelling division based on historical Romantic description.

Valley descriptions are summarised in section 2.c for ease of reference, but detailed accounts (description as now and history of development) – considered necessary to highlight the differences and similarities of the valleys – are also provided in Volume 2 of this Nomination.

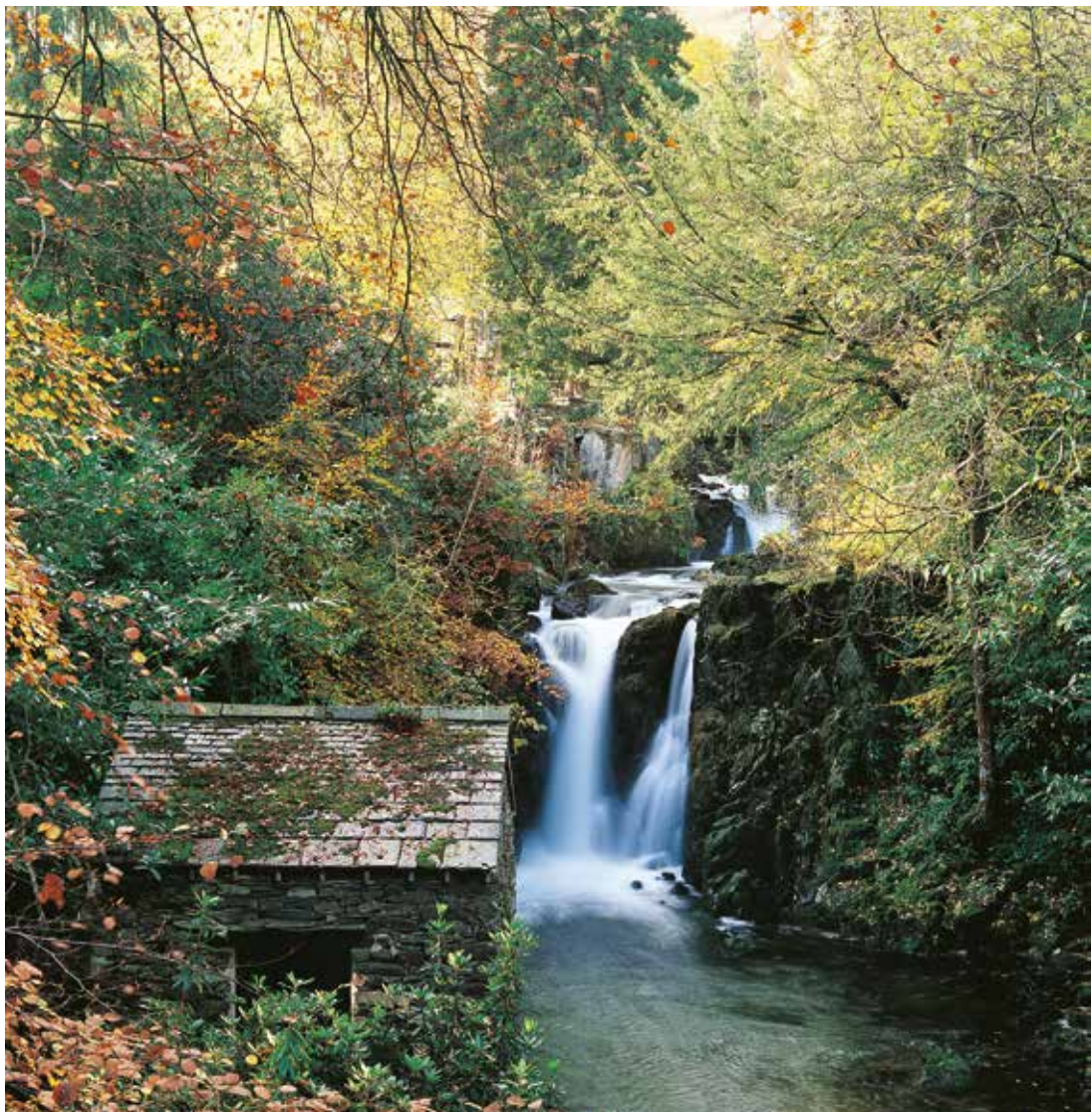


FIGURE 2.a.12 The picturesque 'grotto' in Rydal Park, Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley