The changing economic values of the ‘rough ground’ in West Cornwall

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The heathlands of West Cornwall have been extensively used for a variety of human activities over several millennia, but these uses have substantially diminished and changed in recent times. The area includes the West Penwith ESA (Environmentally Sensitive Area), which is a beautiful landscape in the far west of Cornwall of high landscape, historic and biodiversity value. This case study provides a valuation of its ecosystem services, and evaluates the incentive schemes (agri-environment schemes) that were set up by government to protect this valuable landscape. It provides recommendations for how the area should be managed in the future for maximum benefit, and the need for future rural development and reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

**Introduction**

For well over 3,000 years, from the Middle Bronze Age until the early twentieth century, the heathlands and other ‘waste’ grounds of West Cornwall were integrated in the rural economy. Human uses of these areas over this long period both created and maintained distinctive vegetation communities which are now, appropriately, described as ‘semi-natural’.

Here, we prefer to use the term ‘rough ground’, rather than heathland, as this term encompasses a range of mixed vegetation communities, made up of coarse grasses, heather and heath species, gorse (the Cornish use the word ‘furze’), ferns (bracken), and in wetter places, rushes, sedges and willow. Within this mosaic are also pools of open water, rocks, cliff faces and bare ground (Figure 6.4).