Developing the Landscapes of Scotland map

Background and Summary Method Statement

“..each facet of nature has an individuality so separate and strong, that if you live with it a little it becomes your friend” (George Douglas Brown, in “The House with the Green Shutters” (1901))

“In their rich diversity, Scotland's landscapes are a national treasure” (National Planning Framework, paragraph 94, Scottish Government, 2004).

Background

1. Place is important to people and we form strong bonds with the landscapes we live or grow up in; or which we like to visit or explore; or feel are an important part of our heritage. This project has sought to identify and describe the contribution of Scotland’s landscapes to this sense of place and cultural identity. The result is a new map of the Landscapes of Scotland.

2. The map reflects the great diversity of landscapes within the country, and the regional distinctiveness which that creates. Together with the accompanying descriptions and photographs, the areas identified should have a resonance with those who know these landscapes, and perhaps enable them to gain a feel for areas they don’t know so well. The project highlights what it is that gives familiar areas their distinctiveness and identity; suggests what might attract people to explore new areas; and should help instil a desire to ensure that the diversity of Scotland’s landscapes is not diminished. It is about place at the broad scale.

3. The map divides Scotland into 79 distinct areas at 1:250,000 scale - identifying areas that have a commonality of character that contribute to and define areas that are wider than the local sense of place, but smaller than broad geographic regions (such as 'the Highlands', or 'the Borders'). The areas identified should be recognisable to those who know the area (with some also being more widely known for their cultural connotations or reputation), and distinct from others. It aims to take account of the more intangible ‘sense of place’ as well as purely visual appearance in identifying these recognisable landscapes. It complements the existing more detailed (1:50,000) national programme of Landscape Character Assessments (LCA), which deals more with generic landscape types. For example, the character type “moorland plateau” occurs in several locations whereas the ‘Monadhliaths’ have a unique individuality; “lowland farming landscapes” are found in many places, but Banff and Buchan has a distinct and memorable character of its own.

4. Any map of Scotland’s landscapes will reflect the importance of relief and the major geological features such as the Highland Boundary Fault and the Cairngorms massif. But more subtle differences are also brought out, for example the transition from the Angus Glens to the more highland character of adjacent Atholl - they are broadly similar, but it’s apparent which one you’re in when you’re there. Or the hard-to-describe but evident differences between the mountain landscapes of Wester Ross and Knoydart. Thus some boundary lines are clear and sharp, while others locate more subtle transitions.
The map has been developed for several reasons.

a. It makes landscape easier to communicate. ‘Cowal’, and its landscapes and issues, can be envisaged and spoken about more immediately and succinctly than the generic description “steep ridgeland and moorland” with “hidden glens”.

b. It should raise people’s understanding and awareness of the diversity of Scotland’s landscapes, regional distinctiveness and the importance of place.

c. It is at a scale that should help with regional planning (city regions, Central Scotland Green Network), and nest with the existing Landscape Character Assessments.

d. It will be at a useful scale for monitoring some types of landscape change, such as forestry expansion and wind farms.

e. Travellers and visitors should be able to relate to the individuality and character of these landscape areas, as they enjoy their route or plan their visit.

f. It ought to facilitate stakeholder discussion and involvement, particularly at a national level, of large scale and ubiquitous change to Scotland’s landscapes;

g. It should serve to inform the development of national policy and strategy, and provide a vision for Scotland’s landscapes

h. It contributes a Scottish equivalent to the broad-scale landscape mapping already carried out in various European countries, most directly the “Broydd map” in Wales and the “Character Map of England”.

6. The map should raise awareness of landscapes at a personal level, and facilitate stakeholder understanding and involvement in managing this resource. This in turn should help inform the development of national policy and strategy. It should also make it easier to work towards European Landscape Convention goals – defining landscape quality objectives, or a vision that reflects the aspirations of Scotland’s people for her landscapes.

7. The new map will complement the technical information in the national suite of landscape character assessments. It echoes landscape character areas, and how they vary, rather than generic landscape character types.

Method Statement

8. An initial review examined what work had been done elsewhere, and also engaged with likely national and regional stakeholders to test the need for the map and its potential uses. A range of SNH staff with an understanding of Scotland’s landscapes then developed the map and descriptions using a heuristic mapping process (in which various individuals’ maps were combined in a collaborative way). This is an ongoing process that has now reached a stage where wider engagement is needed to add to the detail and depth of our understanding of the diversity of our landscapes and their contribution to our sense of place and cultural identity.

9. The process and methodology built on the findings of an independent review of SNH’s national landscape character assessment programme, and a research review of similar mapping undertaken in the UK and Europe. Our thinking drew on discussions with the Countryside Council for Wales and the approach they developed to produce the “Broydd map” which partly comprised a computer-based heuristic approach. In order to develop the map within the cost restraints, and best utilise the knowledge and expertise within SNH, the following five step process was developed.
10. **STEP 1 – Pilot Study**

**STEP 2 – creating the draft unit map**

2a Deciding an approach  
2b Creating the draft map  
2c Cross-checking the boundaries against the LCA dataset  
2d Drafting the descriptions (concurrent with 2c) & selecting photographs

**STEP 3 – Internal consultation**

**STEP 4 - Refining the Quality of Life unit map and descriptions**

**STEP 5 – Wider discussion and validation**

This process is ongoing and steps 4 and 5 are, in effect, combined at present.

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**Summary of main steps taken to produce the first Map** *(see also flow diagram)*

**Step 1 - Pilot study – September 2009**

11. It was agreed that informed discussion and agreement should be tested as a potential substitute for the computer-based heuristic analysis utilised in CCW’s Broydd work. About 30 SNH staff took part in this exercise. All had knowledge of some areas of Scotland, were based in a range of offices, and many had personal as well as professional experience of Scotland’s landscapes.

**Step 2 – Creating a draft map (November 2009 to May 2010)**

12. Based on the pilot study, a small sub-group undertook to create an initial map. The sub-group selected represented a range of landscape specialisms and, together, had extensive knowledge of most areas of Scotland.

**Step 3 - Validating the draft map and drawing up draft descriptions – June 2010**

13. The first draft map and a sample set of descriptions were tested at a meeting in which several groups of staff commented in relative detail on ‘quarters’ of the draft map. Boundaries and names were modified as a result.

**Step 4 – Refining the draft map and completing the descriptions -**

14. The next version of the map was digitised, and draft descriptions put in place for each Area. These were subsequently refined and added to by SNH landscape and recreation specialists. A set of representative photographs was compiled for the text descriptions.

**Step 5 – Testing the draft final map with others and more widely publicising the work**

15. The European Landscape Convention Coordination Group formed the initial audience (September 2011). Contributory text on cultural and historic aspects was provided by Historic Scotland and the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments in Scotland. These have been edited into the current version, which will be released via the SNH website for wider comment.
Flow chart to show broad stages in developing the Landscapes of Scotland map

Pilot stage 2009 – test the broydd approach.
Using pen on paper - a people-centred approach
Group maps created September 2009

26 individual ‘maps’ on A2 acetates

5 composite maps on A1 OS basemaps

Initial project work
November 2010
Boundaries drawn from scratch but informed by earlier maps.

Draft map and descriptions discussed and validated at internal event 2010

First draft map
Initial descriptions + photos

LCA comparison and validation

Second draft map – hand drawn

Description + Photos

Third draft map
Final descriptions + photos

Digitisation

Map and descriptions developed alongside each other: a parallel and iterative process.

Maps digitised and different presentations worked up.

Descriptions drafted by project team and relevant SNH Landscape Advisers

Editors refine text and smooths out inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies.

Landscape advisers feedback

Wider SNH and external consultation 2011-12

Map and descriptions ready for consultation

Footnotes: