



**SCOTTISH
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No 75

Cairngorms landscape assessment

Turnbull Jeffrey Partnership

1996

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R E V I E W

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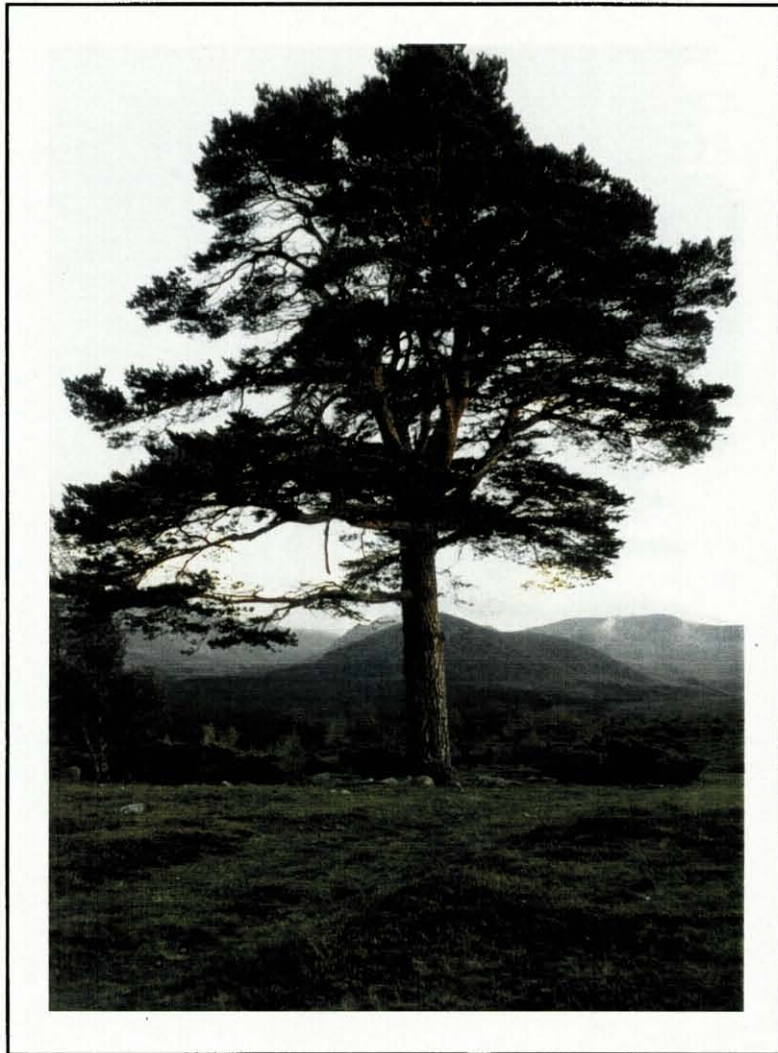
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**SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE
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CAIRNGORMS LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT



TURNBULL JEFFREY PARTNERSHIP

APRIL 1996



Preface

This report forms part of the National Programme of Landscape Character Assessment, which is being carried out by Scottish Natural Heritage, in partnership with local authorities and other agencies.

The National Programme aims to improve our knowledge and understanding of the contribution that landscape makes to the natural heritage of Scotland.

This study provides a detailed assessment of the landscape character of the Cairngorms, considers the likely pressures and opportunities for change in the landscape, assesses the sensitivity of the landscape to change and includes guidelines indicating how landscape character may be conserved, enhanced or restructured as appropriate.

The report will be of interest to all those concerned with land management and landscape change. More specifically, it is intended to provide the landscape context for SNH staff responding to planning and land use related casework, and also to inform the Cairngorms Partnership Management Strategy. SNH also hopes that the information it contains will be of use to local authorities in the production of their local and structure plans.

The views contained within this report represent those of the consultants and do not necessarily reflect the policies and views of the sponsors.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The scenic diversity of the Cairngorms owes much to its geology and distinctive landform; the high massif of the Cairngorms forming the core of the area, surrounded by extensive lower hill ranges and dissected by the broad straths of the Dee and Spey. It is a landscape of many contrasts, where the influence of man on the landscape is clearly evident in the settled and farmed Straths and Glens, but where natural processes are dominant, for example in the sub arctic environment of the Cairngorms massif. The area has a rich natural heritage with rivers and wetlands, birch and native pine woodlands, heather moor and the more rarefied arctic vegetation of the high mountains contributing to the character of the landscape. Man-made elements of the landscape are also important and the farmland of the straths and hills, estate policies and built heritage of the area are distinctive.

The scenery of the Cairngorms has long been celebrated, with tourism being a feature mainly from the 19th century onwards. The attractiveness of the area for a wide variety of recreational pursuits has resulted in significant increases in the numbers of visitors to the area in the last 30 years, with visitor pressure affecting landscape character in some areas. Changes in land use and land management have also affected the landscape character of the area, and continuing pressures for land use change and for new development, could bring about potential impacts on the landscape in the future.

The importance of the Cairngorms landscape, in terms of its scenic and natural heritage, has resulted in much field research and writing on the area and also much debate on the conservation of its special qualities and the future management of the landscape. A number of organisations and individuals have considered the management of the Cairngorms in the past and, most recently, the Cairngorms Working Party (CWP) was set up in 1990, to address the many complex issues which affect the area and to consider the future management of the landscape.

The CWP defined a study area which extends to the Hills of Cromdale in the north, includes upper Strath Don and Deeside and the mountain area of the Mounth to the east and clips the tops of the Angus Glens in the south (see Figure 1). To the south west, the study area runs parallel with the A9 to include Blair Atholl and Glen Garry and includes the watershed of the Spey. The boundary is aligned through the Monadhliath mountains to the west to include the broad strath of the Spey.

Following the publication of the CWP report, '*Sustainability and Common Sense*' in 1992, the Cairngorms Partnership was established by the Secretary of State to develop and implement a Management Strategy for the area. This landscape assessment study has been commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) with the dual purposes of providing baseline information towards the preparation of this Management Strategy and also forms part of SNH's ongoing programme of landscape character assessment throughout Scotland.

1.2 STUDY BRIEF AND AIMS

Although one of the main objectives of the Study will be to inform the Cairngorms Partnership in drafting their Management Strategy for the area, the Study will also aim to provide a tool for SNH staff to use in their day to day casework and in considering local planning and development control issues.

The Study brief requires the identification and description of landscape character within the Cairngorms study area, the consideration of the likely pressures and opportunities for change in the landscape and an assessment of the sensitivity of the landscape to such change. Guidelines indicating how landscape character might be conserved, enhanced or restructured as appropriate, are required to be drawn up and related to different areas of landscape character.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for the Study has been broadly based on that set out in '*Landscape Assessment Guidance*' published by the Countryside Commission (CCP 423). The assessment has used information gained through research, consultations and desk study, with field survey forming an important part of the definition of landscape character throughout the study area. Consultations have been held with local authorities, SNH Area Offices and other bodies, and this has provided information on the special landscape features of the area, enabling us to review pressures on the landscape and to assess possible future change affecting the area. A fuller account of the methodology used in carrying out the Study, is contained in the Appendix Volume which accompanies this report.

1.4 THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The report begins in Chapter 2, by outlining the main policies and initiatives which apply within the study area, while Chapter 3 describes how the landscape of the study area has been shaped by both physical and human factors. The landscape character of the study area is then described in Chapter 4, and a number of broad Landscape Types and Landscape Character Areas are outlined. Distinctive landscape attributes, common throughout the study area, are highlighted in Chapter 5. The cultural associations with the landscape of the study area are then described in Chapter 6, giving an insight into how the landscape of the area has been perceived and appreciated through time.

The second section of the study report analyses the background and survey information contained in Chapters 1 - 6, describing the Key Issues affecting landscape change in Chapter 7. Landscape Guidelines are then outlined in Chapter 8 and address Cairngorms' wide issues, issues affecting each Landscape Type and also provide more specific guidance for each Landscape Character Area. Chapter 9 provides the summary and conclusion to the study.

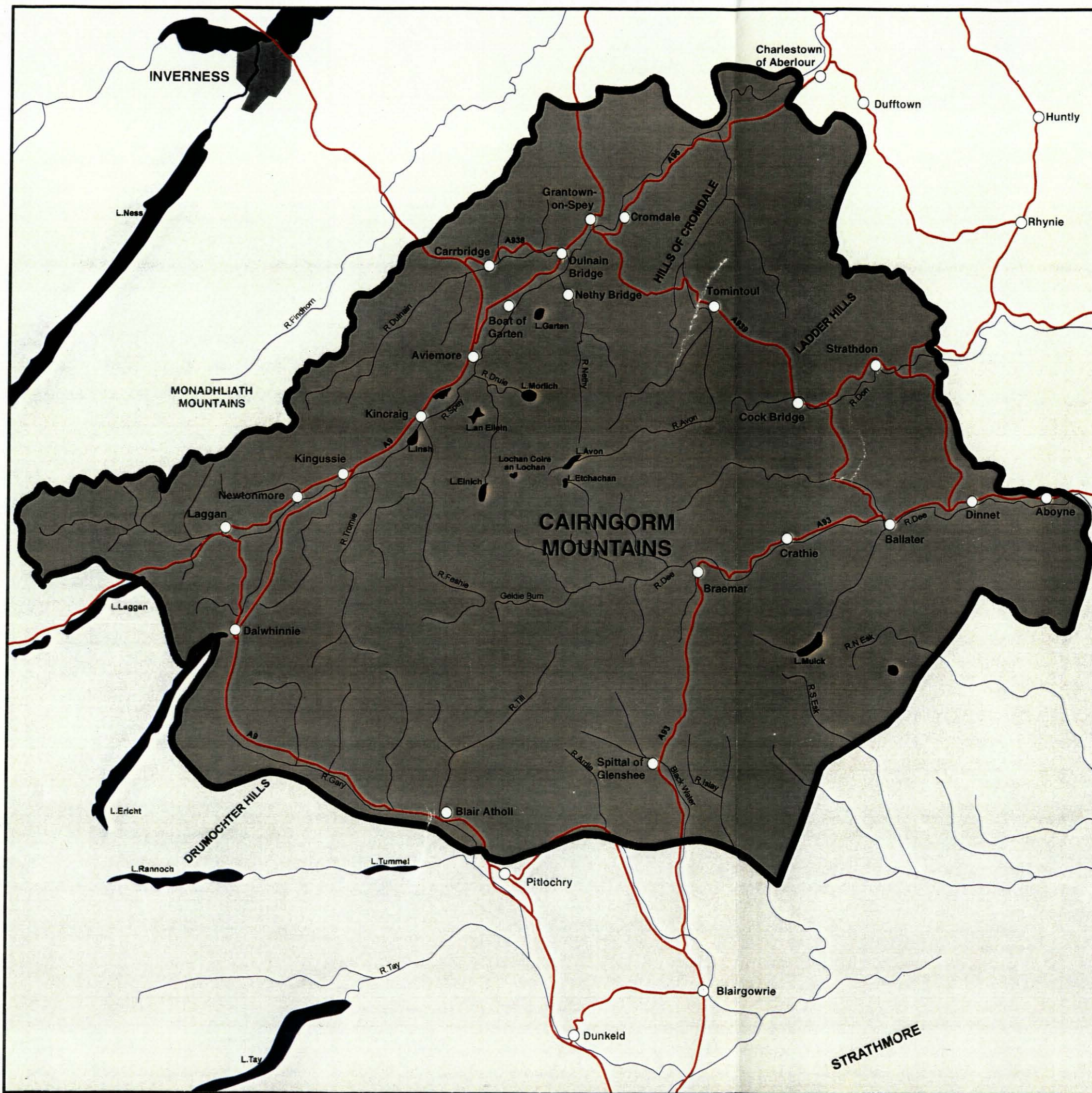


Figure 1
Location Plan

Legend

-  Cairngorms Study Area



Scale





2 LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS, POLICIES AND INITIATIVES

The Study Area is currently covered by a number of designations aimed at protecting aspects of the landscape. Some other designations, policies and initiatives are also briefly described where these may have an impact on the landscape of the study area. Principal landscape designations are shown on Figure 2.

2.1 INTERNATIONAL DESIGNATIONS

The Cairngorms were included on an outline list for World Heritage Listing submitted by the Government to the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO in 1990. Confirmation of the nomination for listing may be considered by the Government in the light of the advice that the Cairngorms Partnership will be offering to the Secretary of State within its Management Strategy. World Heritage Listing, if accepted by UNESCO, would be an indication of the universal heritage value of the Cairngorms and would underscore an existing commitment of the nominating government, rather than bring new protection.

Under the European Birds and Habitats and Species Directive a number of areas, mainly already Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), may be designated as Special Protection Areas (SPA) or as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). This will bring stricter conservation management for these sites. This Directive and the Pan European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy, which will provide a framework for landscape and biological diversity conservation, may well enable beneficial change to occur to the appearance of the landscape.

2.2 NATIONAL DESIGNATIONS

The Cairngorms and Deeside and Lochnagar, are designated National Scenic Areas in recognition of their nationally outstanding scenic value and beauty. Special planning requirements apply to NSA's in respect of proposed new development.

The Cairngorms Straths were designated an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) in 1992 and the existing Breadalbane ESA was extended into the Atholl area. The Cairngorms Straths ESA includes the Straths and the less mountainous land of the north east of the Study Area, and extends to cover Strathspey down to Loch Ericht. ESA designation aims to protect environmentally sound agricultural practices in the area, by offering financial incentives for sympathetic management of farmland for conservation in parallel with sustainable agricultural production. Some of the works funded under the scheme have potential to enhance the landscape, and include projects such as woodland planting, water margin management and rehabilitation of dry stone walls. It is understood that to date, take up of the scheme, which is voluntary, is limited and that the grant ceiling is possibly too low to attract larger farms and estates.

Six landscapes within the study area are identified in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes, published by Countryside Commission for Scotland (CCS) and the Scottish Development Department (SDD). These include: Blair Castle in Tayside Region; Inshriach Nursery in Badenoch and Strathspey; Candacraig House near Strathdon; and Balmoral Castle, Invercauld and Glen Tanar on Deeside. Development likely to affect such areas is subject to consultation by the planning authority with SNH and Historic Scotland.

Nature conservation notifications, aimed at protecting areas with a nature conservation or geological interest, include a total of 9 National Nature Reserves and 52 Sites of Special Scientific Interest. A Ramsar Site, a designation aimed at the active conservation of internationally important wetlands, also applies to a group of Cairngorms lochs.

2.3 LOCAL POLICIES

The planning responsibility of the Cairngorms study area is presently divided between the three Regional Councils of Grampian, Tayside and Highland and the District Councils of Moray, Gordon, Kincardine and Deeside, Perth and Kinross and Angus. Local Government reorganisation will come into effect on 1 April 1996, resulting in single tier local government. Within the study area, Grampian Region and Kincardine and Deeside District Council will disappear, with the new Aberdeenshire Council taking over responsibility, while Perthshire and Kinross and Angus Councils are planned to take over from Tayside Region. The new Moray Council will cover the same area as the former District Council, while the new Highland Council will replace Highland Region, with the same boundary remaining.

Structure Plans

All of the Regional Councils have policies which seek to restrict potentially environmentally damaging development within designated areas such as NSAs and SSSIs. The Tayside Structure Plan states that: "development proposals should seek to conserve characteristic landscape features and, where appropriate, to strengthen and enhance landscape quality", while Highland Region (Policy 97) gives a high priority to the preparation of a Regional Conservation Strategy which aims to identify where, amongst other aspects, "additional resources should be directed to sustaining land management compatible with maintaining features of conservation interest" and "the means of restoring damaged ecosystems and enhancing the Region's natural resources". Grampian Region consider the Cairngorms to be one of the most valued elements within the Region, defining a Cairngorm Policy Area within which there is a strong presumption against development.

Local Plans

Areas of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) are identified in the Moray, Badenoch & Strathspey and Perth & Kinross local plans, while Kincardine & Deeside identify similar Areas of Regional Landscape Significance (ARLS). Within these areas, the siting and design of new development receives special attention. Gordon District Council policies on rural development relate to their Countryside Landscape Assessment, which identifies 9 character zones throughout the Local Plan area and state that all development proposals will be considered in terms of the findings of the Assessment, with...." a strong presumption against development being permitted if it would adversely affect the established character of the local landscape...".

2.4 LANDSCAPE INITIATIVES

General Initiatives

Many of the general initiatives aimed at landscape enhancement apply to the Cairngorms study area. These include grants from some local authorities and SNH for countryside enhancement works, such as small scale planting and creative conservation schemes. A range of Forestry Authority grants within the Woodlands Grant Scheme (WGS), provide assistance towards the establishment of native pine, broadleaved and commercial

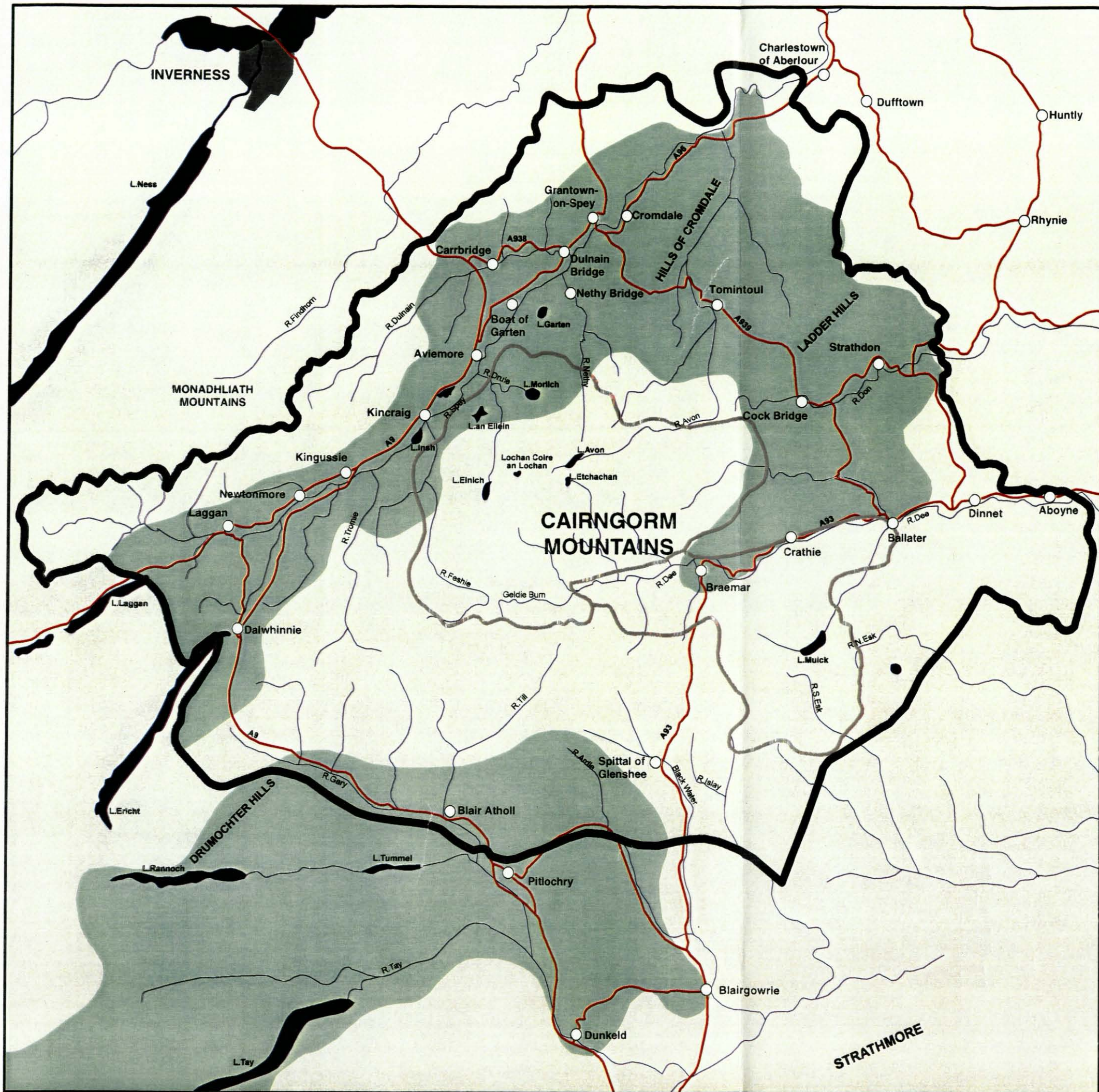
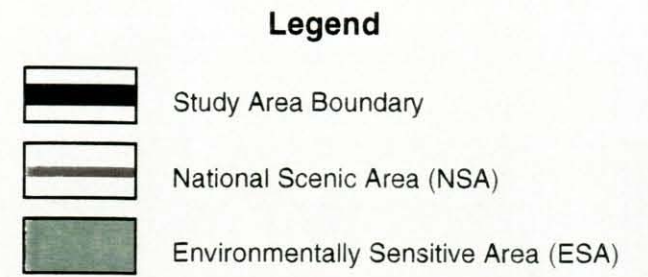


Figure 2
Principal Landscape Policy Areas



woodlands, these include incentives such as the Annual Management Grant, which aims to help fund the positive management of woodlands with a high environmental value, for example semi-natural woodlands; and the Livestock Exclusion Annual Premium, which encourages landowners to exclude stock from overgrazed native woodlands in order to aid natural regeneration.

Local Initiatives

There are a number of initiatives specific to the study area, with many set up to address the complex issues affecting the landscape and its management. Such initiatives tend to involve partnerships between local authorities, local enterprise companies, bodies and individuals with an interest in the landscape and its management and in tourism and recreation within the area.

The Cairngorms Partnership

The Cairngorms Partnership was set up in 1995 with the remit of producing a management strategy for the Cairngorms which seeks to address the two key priorities set out for the Partnership by the Secretary of State in his response to the 'Common Sense and Sustainability' report, prepared by the Cairngorms Working Party (CWP) in 1991. The key priorities are; the establishment of native woodlands and creation of new forests in Mar and Strathspey; and the protection and enhancement of the conservation value of the Montane zone, realising sympathetic management of recreational pressures.

The Cairngorms Project

SNH's own internal Cairngorms Project was set up to take forward the recommendations of the CWP, and to support the establishment and running of the Cairngorms Partnership. The Project has a 5 year programme, aimed at providing information to the Cairngorms Partnership, based on an inventory, monitoring and research programme.

The Cairngorms Project's involvement in survey work on woodlands and moorlands will enable practical advice to be given to both SNH area staff and to land managers with regard to recommendations for improved management and targeting of resources.

Initiatives aimed at enhancing and extending native woodlands

New planting of native woodlands throughout the study area is already underway. The Deeside Forest Working Group, which aims to pave the way towards extending native woodland in the area, has been set up and comprises as its members, landowners, SNH, the Forestry Authority and Local Authority representatives. It is understood that the Forestry Authority may consider the possibility of targeting the WGS to allow greater incentives for natural regeneration within the Cairngorms. Grampian Regional Council have recently appointed a Project Officer, funded under the Millennium Fund, whose role will be to persuade landowners to extend native woodlands. Initiatives to encourage native woodland protection, enhancement and expansion include Scottish Native Woodlands and Highland Birchwoods. In Tayside Region, the Loch Garry Tree Group and the Tayside Native Woodlands Initiative have been set up with similar objectives. Some of these bodies are now acting in co ordination with the Millenium Forest for Scotland, which has secured substantial European funding to promote native woodlands throughout the country.

Forest Enterprise own and manage native pinewoods in Glenmore and Inshriach, with a long-term aim of expanding these Caledonian Forest Reserves through natural regeneration. SNH are also involved in the management of native woodlands throughout the study area.

A number of individual landowners are also currently involved in 'estate' wide initiatives towards the extension of native woodlands and these include; the RSPB at Abernethy, where deer management and removal of exotic tree species has led to significant natural regeneration of native pine; Mar Lodge estate has become a focus for a range of initiatives since its acquisition by the National Trust for Scotland, these principally being aimed at landscape and nature conservation enhancement, and estates such as Balmoral, Blair Atholl and Rothiemurchus continue to manage and extend native woodlands.

Initiatives aimed at urban improvement and recreation

Other initiatives with potential to influence landscape change in the study area include the Aviemore and Glen More Corridor Improvements, funded by the Aviemore Partnership and concerned with environmental improvements to the urban fabric and the landscape setting of the town. Initiatives such as the Woodlands Recreation Strategy, involving Highland Regional Council, SNH, and landowners, aims to open up large tracts of plantations and woodlands for amenity in the Speyside area and create footpath/cycleway links between recreational facilities. Forest restructuring and expansion would be the principal impetus for this initiative and opportunities for relating the ESA grant scheme to the strategy may exist. A pilot scheme is being planned to centre on the woodlands between Carrbridge, Aviemore and Grantown.

2.5 DESIGN INFORMATION

More detailed design information applicable to the Cairngorms can be obtained from the following sources:

Landscape/Woodland Design

Community Woodland Design Forestry Authority 1992

Conservation on Farms - Case Studies of Good Practice in Scotland FWAG 1988

Creating New Native Woodlands - Bulletin 112 Forestry Commission, 1994

Design of Forest Landscapes, The OWR Lucas, Oxford University Press 1991

Farm Woodland Planning MAFF/Forestry Commission 1988

Forest Landscape Design Guidelines Forestry Commission

Lowland Landscape Design Forestry Authority 1992

Management of Semi-Natural Woodlands 8 Nr Forest Practice Guides, Forestry Commission

Rural Building Design

Farm and Forestry Buildings PAN Scottish Office 1993

Fitting New Housing Development into the Landscape PAN 44 Scottish Office 1994

Housing in the Countryside Moray District Council Local Plan 1993

Landscape and Building in the Countryside Mainstream Publishing 1991

Siting and Design of New Housing in the Countryside, The PAN 36 Scottish Office 1991

Urban/Roads Design

Aviemore Advertisement Sign Guidelines HRC 1996 (Similar guidelines planned for visitor information signs in future)

Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB), Volume 10, Environmental Design SOID 1993

Fitting Roads (Technical Document within DMRB)

3 THE EVOLUTION OF THE LANDSCAPE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Cairngorms study area includes one of the most notable mountain environments in Britain, comprising broad granite plateaux, with their steep sided glens and corries, surrounded by extensive uplands and the straths and valleys which cut into them. The diverse vegetation includes semi-natural woodlands, plantations and moorland and the farmland and wetlands within the straths. The area exhibits one of the fullest expressions of the ecological continuum in eastern Scotland, where the effects of underlying bedrock and of geomorphological processes, together with inter-relationships and associated wildlife of the various vegetation zones, can be appreciated.

This landscape which we see today, throughout the study area, has evolved over a prolonged period of time as a result of the complex interaction of various physical and human processes, some of which still continue today. Geological and geomorphological processes have played a dominant role in shaping today's landscape. Subsequent weathering has led to the development of particular soil characteristics, which in turn have influenced vegetation patterns. Man has further altered the landscape through settlement, farming, forest clearance and tree planting, along with other activities and developments. Throughout the study area, on-going geomorphological activity and changes in land use and land management, illustrates the dynamic and continually evolving character of the landscape.

This section explores the evolution of the landscape of the study area, broadly describing the principal physical and human influences which have shaped the landscape and contributed to the landscape character of the area.

3.2 PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

The Geological Foundations

Geological evidence, although incomplete, indicates that the evolution of the Cairngorms has been a long and varied process. Between approximately 800-600 million years ago, the geological foundations of the Grampian Highlands were created, with the laying down of great thicknesses of sediments on the floor of an ancient sea. Subsequently, great movements of the earth's crust with associated heat and pressure metamorphosed these sediments and folded them into 'Alpine scale' mountains. At the same time, large quantities of granite melt, contributed to the building of the mountains by rising through the crust and solidifying within a few kilometres of the earth's surface. Over many millions of years, erosion and weathering wore down the mountains to their foundations, revealing granite cores from beneath the encircling metamorphosed rocks (see Figure 3).

The central Cairngorm massif forms the largest homogenous granite mass in Britain. A series of these granite masses, surrounded by bands of metamorphic rocks, occurs throughout the study area. The variety of rocks occurring in the study area gives rise to different landscape characteristics. Where not modified by intense glacial erosion, granite landscapes are characterised by rounded, smooth landforms, with extensive boulder fields which are particularly prevalent throughout the Cairngorm - Ben Macdui - Braeriach plateau and the Lochnagar area. Granite landscapes also tend to be less fertile than those forming on underlying metamorphosed rocks, and therefore have a more barren character, whereas the mountains comprising metamorphosed rocks are characterised by 'knobbly' landform patterns, exemplified by the eastern edge of the Monadhliaths and the Ardverikie area (Figure 4). These areas are also influenced by the dominant geological pattern,

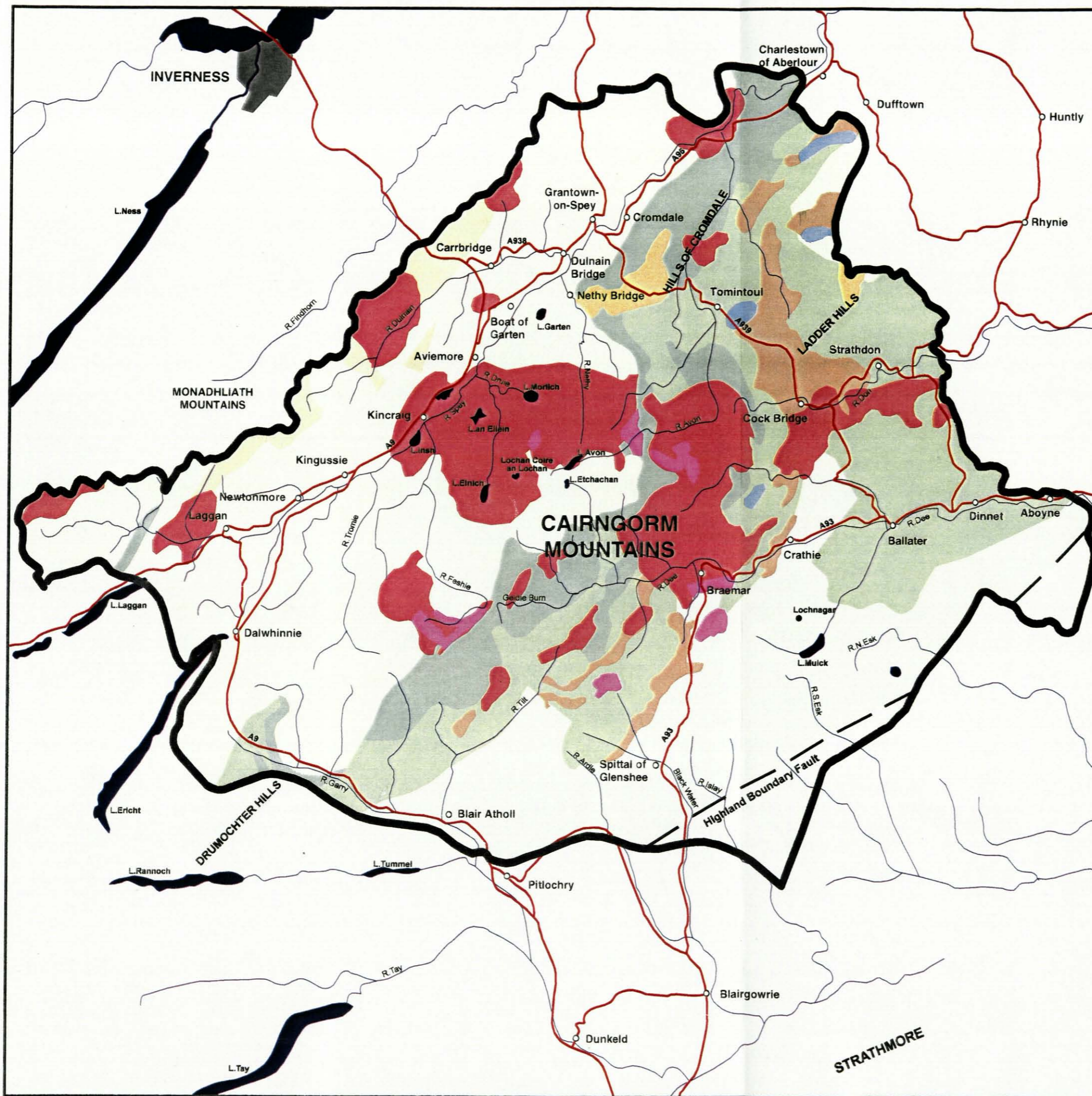


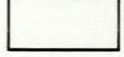



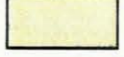







Figure 3
Geology

Legend

-  Study Area Boundary
- Sedimentary Rocks**
-  Devonian
- Metamorphic Rocks (Dalradian Super Group)**
-  Southern Highland Group
-  Argyll Group
-  Appin Group
-  Grampian Group
-  Central Highland Migmatite Complex
- Intrusive**
-  Acid
-  Intermediate
-  Basic
-  Ultramafic

Scale

0Km 10Km 20Km



known as the Caledonian trend, giving them a distinct north-east to south-west grain. Within the areas of schist, small pockets of limestone, such as at Inchrory in Glen Avon, produce a contrast through rock outcrop and scree colour with the surrounding landscape.

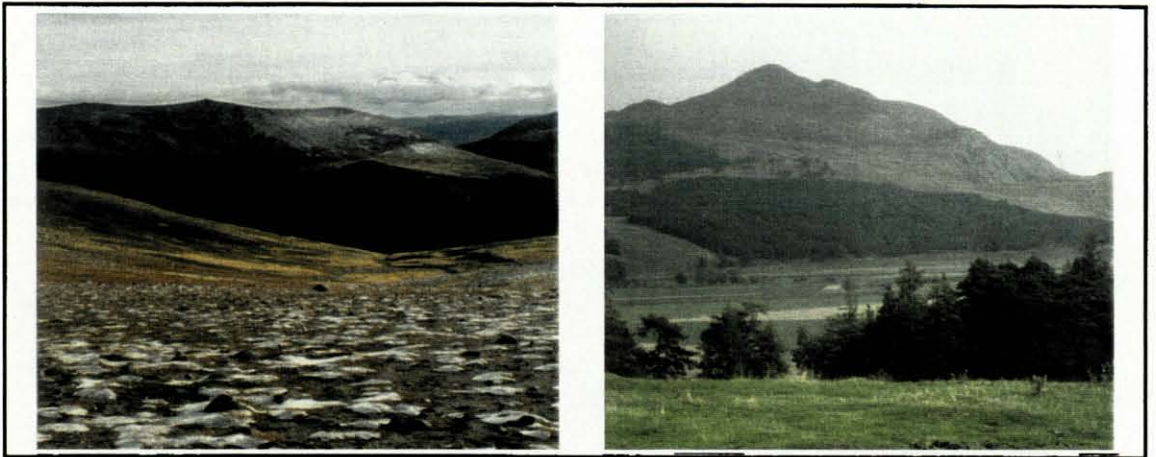


Figure 4

During the Tertiary Period, commencing 65 million years ago, rivers cut into the granite mass creating a network of steep valleys. The climate was considerably warmer than it is today, which assisted the chemical weathering of the bedrock. Such weathering was more intense where the jointing in the rocks was closely spaced. The weathered material was subsequently removed by glacial and periglacial processes during the succeeding Quaternary period, leaving the more massive, less weathered rock outcrops upstanding as tors. Such features are particularly distinctive on the summits and slopes to the north and east of the central mountain massif, for example on Ben Avon and Beinn Mheadhoin.(Figure 5)

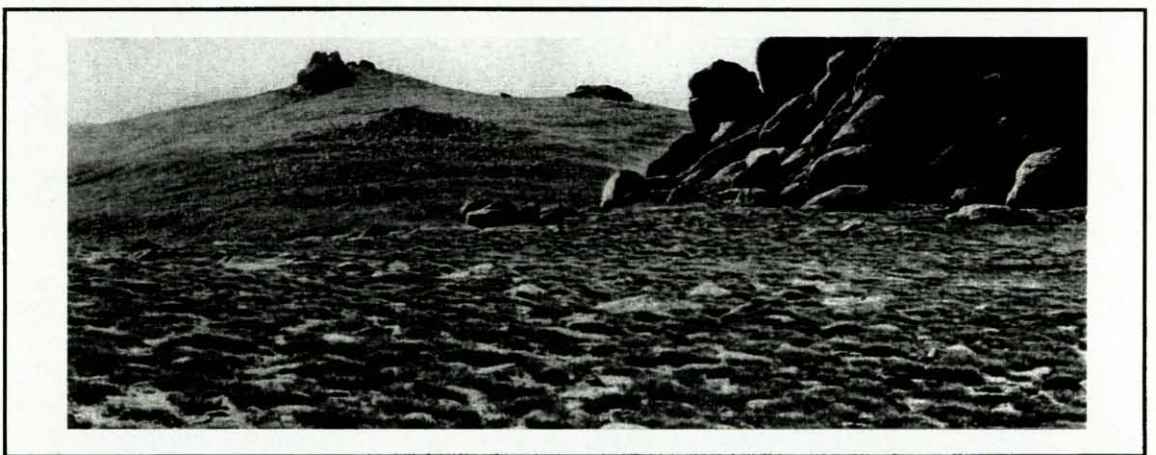


Figure 5

Before the on-set of glaciation, the landscape would have comprised broad plateau surfaces, rolling hills and shallow river valleys, with extensive occurrence of deeply weathered bedrock. Many of these features survive today on a scale that is exceptional in glaciated mountains of Northern Europe, suggesting that glaciation resulted in minimal modification of the mountain plateaux compared with the effect it had on the surrounding glens and straths within the study area.

The Influence of Ice

About 2.5 million years ago, there was a major cooling of the climate, heralding the onset of the Ice Age or Quaternary Period. Glaciers formed over the upland areas as snows built up, extending slowly out into the lowlands to create huge ice sheets. The Ice Age consisted of many glacial periods interspersed by warmer interglacial periods; many of the features of glacial erosion therefore reflect the imprint of successive glaciations.

The intensity of glacial erosion was much more significant in the areas surrounding the plateaux, producing a series of deeply eroded glens or glacial troughs which cut into and through the gently rolling pre-glacial landscape, exploiting inherent weakness in the underlying rock structure. Here the ice was thicker and faster flowing, making it very effective at eroding the granite. In places such as the Lairig Ghru, the ice carved through original watersheds to create spectacular glacial breaches, as well as creating truncated spurs where glens were straightened (Figure 6). These glacial breaches tend to cut across pre-glacial valleys such as the Dee and Geldie. Rivers like the Feshie were also diverted as the ice created new, or modified existing, landform patterns.

In the areas surrounding the central plateaux, glacial action tended to accentuate weakness in the more complex schist rocks, producing a more varied landform pattern. In the west of the study area, glaciers fed by ice from further west were larger and more erosive than those in the central core of the study area, resulting in generally lower mountains and hills.

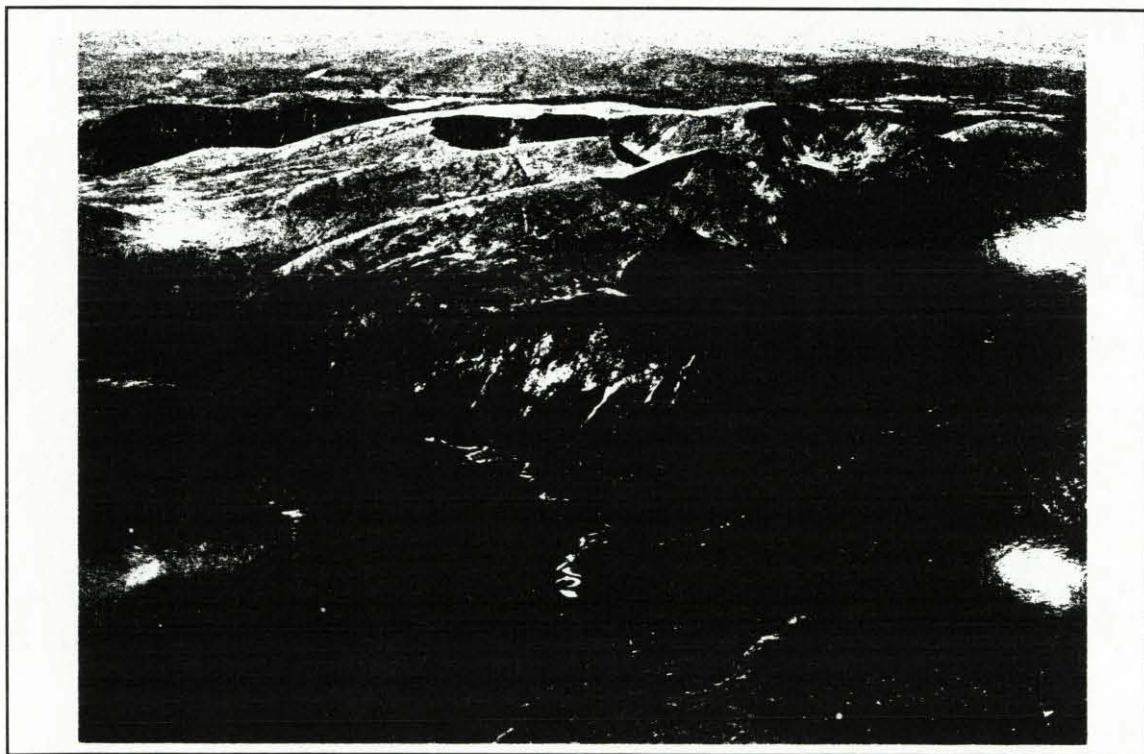


Figure 6 - The deeply carved glacial trough of the Lairig Ghru cuts through the rolling pre-glacial plateau

During times of slightly higher temperature or reduced snowfall, small glaciers formed, particularly on north-east facing slopes as a result of wind-blown snow and shading. These glaciers carved deep corries into the edge of the plateaux, such as the Northern Corries, Braeriach and Corrie Fee, creating distinctive headwall cliffs (Figure 7).

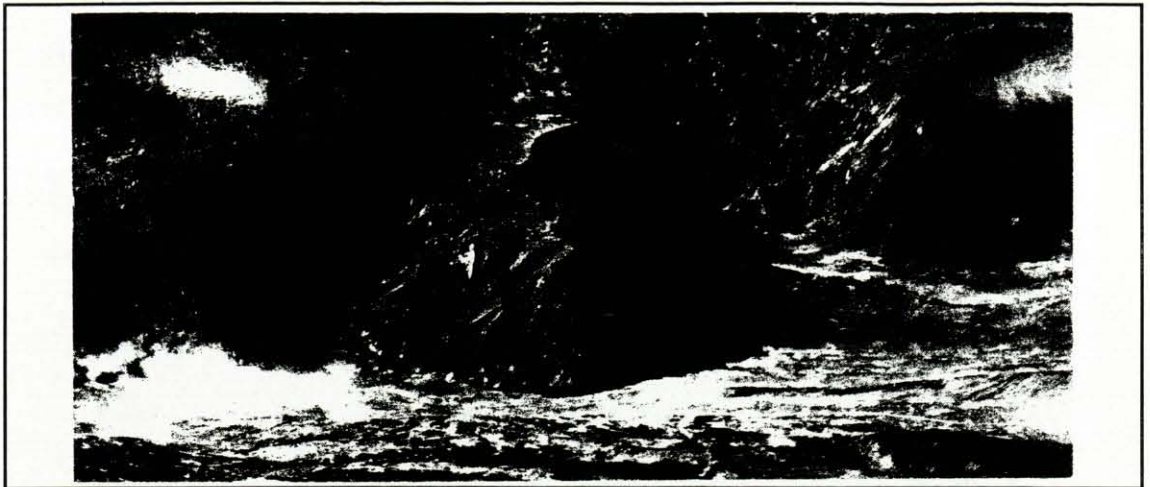


Figure 7 - The deeply gouged corries of Beinn a Bhuird

The Cairngorms were last fully covered by an ice sheet approximately 18,000 years ago. There is a marked contrast in the extent of glacial erosion between the essentially 'pre-glacial' plateaux and the surrounding glens. The ice on the plateaux was probably thin and slow moving and therefore incapable of much erosion.

Approximately 13,000 years ago, most of the ice had melted following climatic warming. However, analysis of plant and insect remains, as well as landforms, indicates that the Ice Age did not end in a smooth transition to interglacial conditions, but with a series of rapid climate changes. Glacial conditions returned around 11,000 years ago for about a further thousand years. Small glaciers reformed, their extents being marked by boulder moraines found in many corries. The extensive 'hummocky' moraine deposits at Drumochter were also formed at this time. (Figure 9)

Writings from travellers at the time also indicate that parts of Braeriach may have held perennial snow or ice as recently as the Little Ice Age which occurred between the 17th and 19th centuries. This certainly corresponds with known glacial advances elsewhere in Europe and with periods of worse climate and hard winters in Scotland.

The juxtaposition of 'pre-glacial' and glacial features within the Cairngorms massif, forms a landscape of selective glacial erosion which is internationally recognised and forms a landscape of considerable geomorphological interest.

Meltwater Activity

Many landforms in the Cairngorms were formed by meltwater rivers flowing beneath or off the ice sheets as they began to retreat and thin at the end of the Ice Age.

Highly mobile meltwater rivers, containing enormous volumes of water, carried large amounts of sediment and debris and changed the patterns of unstable morainic debris deposited by the glaciers. These have formed a number of characteristic features still found in today's landscape. In places, these rivers cut into underlying bedrock forming a series of channels which are now dry, such as the Chalamain Gap. Some rivers deposited sediment along the upper edges of glaciers as kame terraces or as eskers on the lower slopes. The northern flanks of the Cairngorms contain a nationally important assemblage of these features (Figure 8).

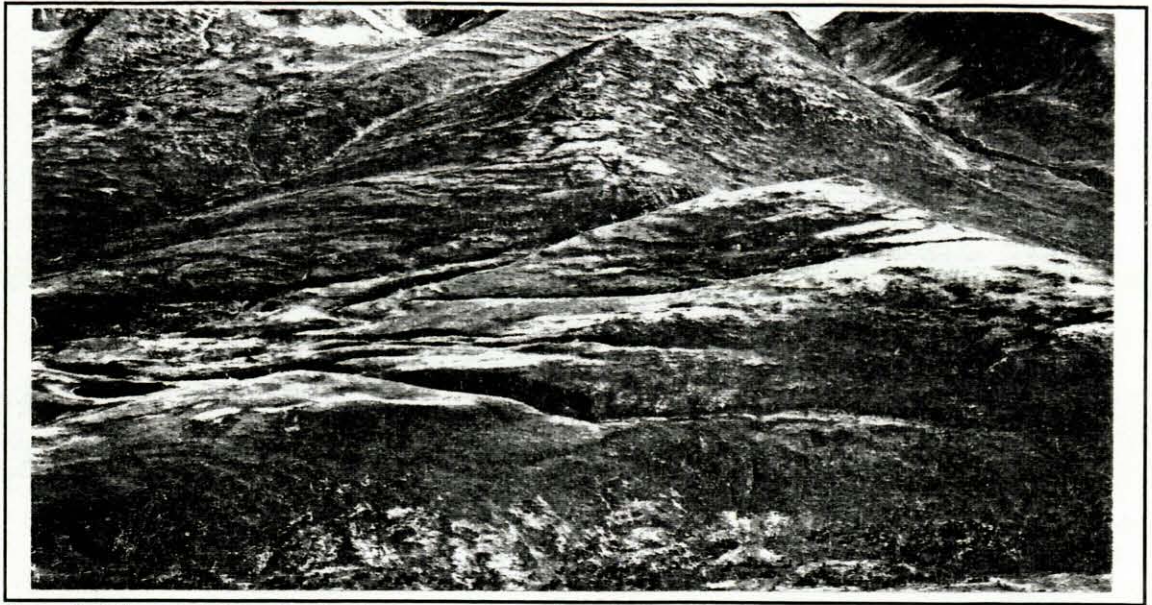


Figure 8 - Characteristic meltwater features on the northern flank of the Cairngorms

During the final stages of melting, areas of ice stagnated within the meltwater deposits, creating mounds and steep sided hollows, called kettle holes, as the ice melted. This process accounts for the 'hummocky' landforms evident in Strath Spey around Aviemore. Well beyond the glacier fronts, meltwaters deposited large areas of sands and gravels in many of the main glens, which were subsequently dissected as the discharge rate and carrying capacity of the meltwaters subsided. This process resulted in the formation of river terraces, as in Strath Spey and Glen More.(Figure 9)



Figure 9 - Hummocky landform pattern at Drumochter resulting from glacial deposition

Periglacial Landscape

Since the end of the glacial period, cold climate, non-glacial processes continued to modify the landscape to varying degrees. In particular, frost and ground ice shattered the granite bedrock, producing extensive areas of broken rock or blockfields which cover many of the plateau landscapes (Figure 10). On steeper slopes, frost weathering produced rock fall and the build up of scree. Elsewhere, soil flow processes carried loose boulders downhill to create distinctive sheets, terraces and lobes of debris. This process continues today to a limited extent.



Figure 10 - The Ben Macdui blockfield illustrate the effect of frost action on granite

Landscape Stabilisation

After the end of the glacial period, the relatively warm, temperate climate led to an increase in vegetation cover. Initially, sparse vegetation cover allowed the sands and gravels deposited by glaciers to be easily shifted by running water. However, areas of sedge and grass pioneer communities soon colonised the hill slopes and valley floors and the binding effect of their root systems helped to create more stable ground conditions and reduce the erosive effects of running water.

As the climate continued to become warmer, so vegetation developed further, with dwarf birch, crowberry and juniper dominating an arctic shrub tundra vegetation. The landscape at this time still retained a strong open character.

By about 9000 years ago, birch and hazel woodlands developed in the glens, with some oak and elm occurring in more local sheltered areas. Around 700 years ago, there was a major expansion of pine forest which dominated the more acid, well drained soils. These pine forests extended to a maximum tree line of about 800 meters during this time. During periods of significantly wetter weather, which waterlogged soils and led to an expansion of blanket bog, the extent of pine forest was reduced. As these bogs dried out, so birch recolonised only to be overwhelmed by further peat growth in wetter periods.

Increased vegetation cover, though, did not mean that the physical processes of landscape evolution ceased: rather the nature, rate and location of these processes changed. Wide, braided rivers continued to shift and erode sediments on the valley floors, creating large alluvial fans at the junctions of rivers (Figure 11). Debris flows from steep gullies created large cones of loose material, particularly after intense rainstorms.

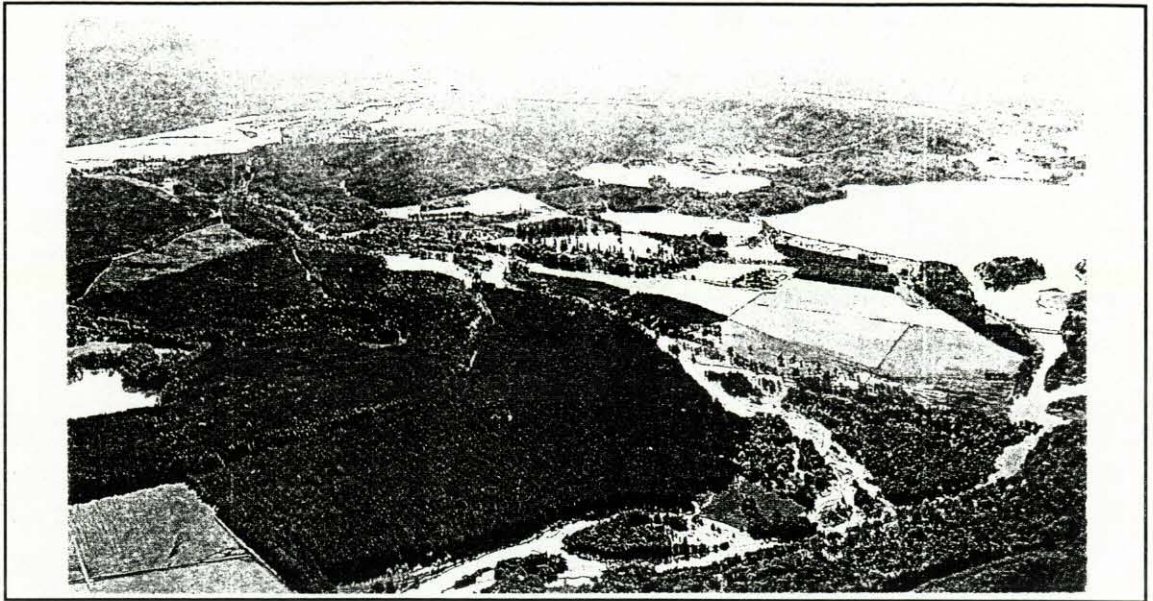


Figure 11 - The alluvial fan of the River Feshie at the junction with the Spey

Ongoing Physical Processes

Post-glacial modifications of the landscape are widely represented by a wide variety of landform features, created by processes which continue to be active today. The vagaries of the Cairngorm climate may result in natural hazards, such as landslides, avalanches and floods occurring. Periods of prolonged wet weather, followed by a single intense rainstorm can quickly saturate and overload the soil capacity, resulting in debris flows on steep slopes. This often massive movement of material leaves many slopes scarred by gullies and debris chutes.

Heavy snowfalls combined with complex air flow patterns increase the likelihood of avalanches. The effect of the avalanches are variable, but they can often sweep large areas of unstable debris into the corries and glens, forming extensive boulder tongues.

During periods of flood, gravel beds can be moved by the fast flowing water, which assists in the erosion of river edges and can result in abrupt changes in the course of a river. The River Feshie has altered its course on many occasions, indicating the dynamic character of rivers (Figure 12). The thin soils, steep slopes and largely impervious bedrock channel the rainfall rapidly into rivers and burns, causing rapid flash floods. These floods form extensive deposits along the length of the rivers. The steady build up of gravels on alluvial fans can often lead to sudden channel switching by rivers, relocating large areas of gravel.

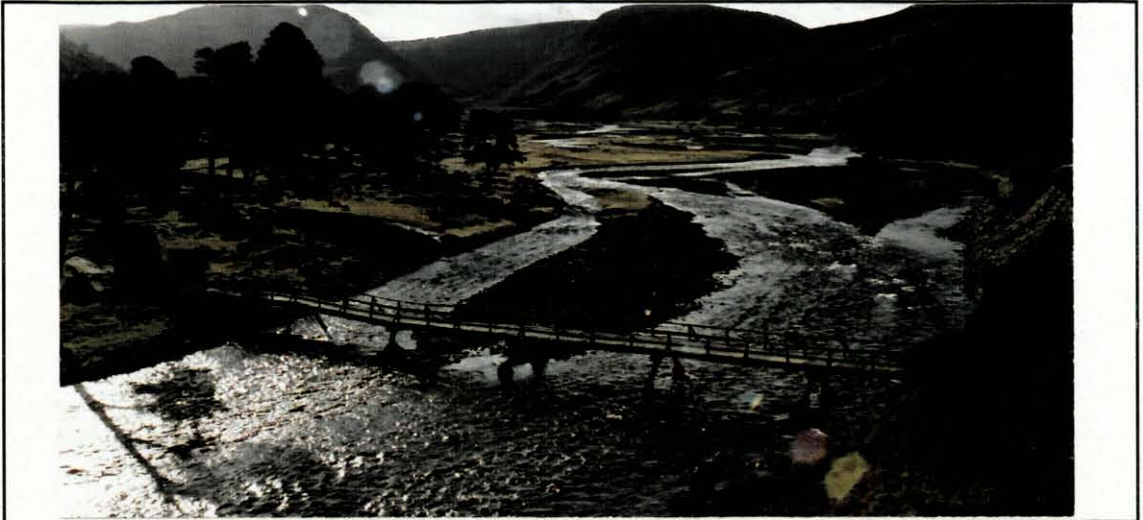


Figure 12 - The braided channels of the River Feshie illustrate a dynamic river system which frequently alters its course

This dynamic character is further illustrated by periglacial activities on the upper slopes. Wind eroded surfaces and frost shattered debris create a series of distinctive landforms such as stone stripes and circles and wind patterning of vegetation.

Soils

A rich variety of soil types occurs in the study area, usually reflecting the fertility of the underlying rocks. It includes those having arctic-like features on the high plateaux, pockets of fertile soils supporting many alpine flowers in sheltered corries and deep hags in the blanket peat which covers vast tracts from 450-750m. Soils greatly influence the form and colour of the landscape. They also largely determine the amount, diversity and nutritive value of the vegetation and so in turn affect the types and number of many wild animals.

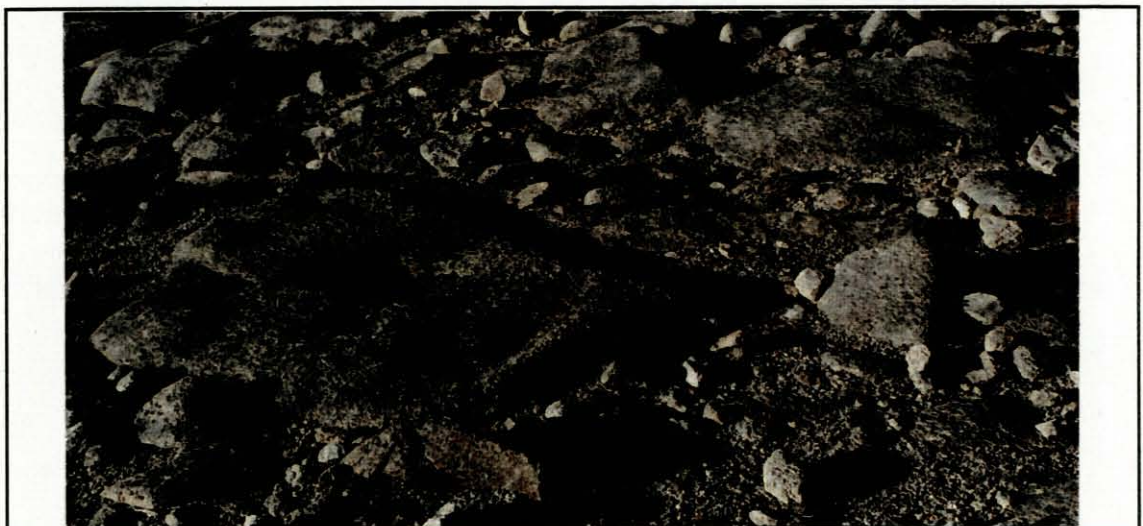


Figure 13 - Soils on the Cairngorm plateaux are at an early stage of development

Soils form by the interaction of parent material, climate, relief and living organisms, usually over a long period of time. Some soils in the study area are still at a very early

stage of their development (Figure 13). Examples are the soils forming on bare scree or exposed rock, colonised so far by lichens or even only by bacteria and other micro-organisms.

The soils forming on the granite bedrock of the area are thinner, more arid, more gravelly and thus more infertile than those forming on schists. Soils forming on the small lime-rich patches of limestone which occur, at Blair Castle for example, are even more fertile. Where rich and poor rocks make contact, spectacular changes from heather to grass moorland occur, such as in Glen Builg.

The farmland on granite generally looks poorer and stops lower up the hillside than on the richer rocks; that is why the farms of Strathdon are better than on the granite to the north of Lochnagar. Sheep have never done well in granite areas, but occur extensively on all other hills and moors underlain by schists, while the deeper, more fertile soils of Glas Maol, upper Glen Callater and Glen Fearnach are renowned for their hill sheep.

Present Landcover

Principal vegetation types are shown in Figure 15.

Due to the topography and climatic constraints of the study area, only a relatively small proportion of land is farmed, mostly concentrated in the straths. Livestock rearing is the principal agricultural activity with some production of winter fodder occurring on better land. Most farms include a proportion of rough pasture and areas of hill grazing.

Lochs and marshes are a feature of the middle reaches of the Spey and include the extensive Insh Marshes, which forms the largest flood plain mire in Scotland.

The study area is relatively well wooded with approximately 11.8% of the total land area being covered by woodland and with much of this being concentrated in Speyside and Deeside, where woodland coverage amounts to 18% of the total land area. Native woodlands cover approximately 8% of the study area, and these include remnant Caledonian pine forest, particularly located in the Glen Tanar, Rothiemurchus and Abernethy areas and extensive birch woodlands within Speyside and Deeside. Coniferous plantations include a high proportion of Scots pines and are mainly located in the Glenmore, Deeside and Strathspey, while plantations of spruce, larch and other exotics, principally occur in Strathdon, the Angus Glens, Glenmore and parts of Deeside.

Heather moorland dominates the upland landscapes of the study area, covering approximately 46% of the total land area. Mountain blanket bog occurs within the Drumochter Hills and Monadhliaths, while montane vegetation of the high mountain plateaux includes internationally important arctic flora and is one of the least modified landscapes of the study area.

3.3 HUMAN INFLUENCES

Background






The types of archaeological sites found within the area include examples more usual in the west of Scotland, as well as others with a predominantly eastern distribution. Geographically, this seems unexceptionable, given the study area's central location within the Highlands.

The known archaeological sites within the study area only represent a small fraction of




Figure 14
Topography / Drainage

Legend

-  Study Area Boundary
-  0 - 300m
-  Over 300m
-  Over 600m
-  Over 900m

Scale

0Km 10Km 20Km



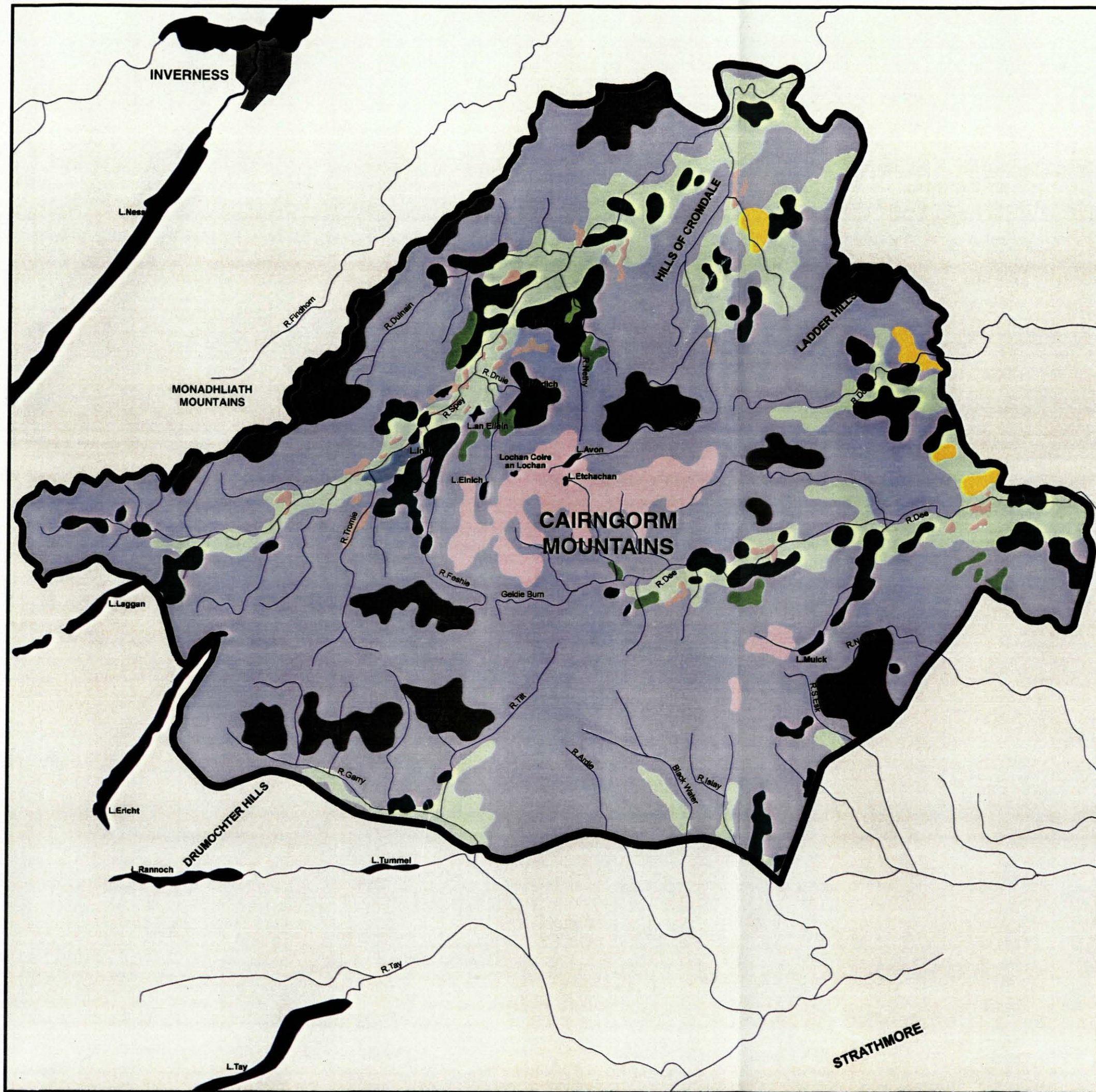


Figure 15
Principal Vegetation Types



Scale



those which once existed. Many probably remain to be identified, although in some areas - particularly those between the wetter lowlands (probably largely avoided by early inhabitants) and the steeper mountain slopes, later agricultural improvements, the insertion of communications infrastructure, and 19th and 20th century re-forestation, have probably resulted in the eradication of substantial numbers of sites. Initial examination of the National Monuments Records indicates that artefact finds are relatively few, and this accords with what would be anticipated on the basis of current land use practices.

Although the number of archaeological sites currently identified in the Caringorms area is relatively low, recent field survey carried out by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland on the Mar Lodge Estate, Glen Shee and in Newtonmore/Kingussie has indicated that field remains of human settlement dating from the prehistoric period to recent times in these areas are more numerous and extensive than was previously thought. Future fieldwork is likely to identify further areas, previously thought to be of little archaeological interest, which contain significant numbers of archaeological monuments or relict landscapes; such discoveries will lead to the re-evaluation of the importance of the archaeological/historical components of the landscape in these areas.

Prehistoric Settlement

The most detailed, chronologically fixed, palynological work relevant to human communities has been conducted on the eastern margin of the study area, at Loch Davan and Braeroddach Loch. Using this work as an example, it can be envisaged that progressive deforestation occurred during the later prehistoric period. For the first millennium AD, we have little palynological or bioarchaeological evidence to draw on, but cultivation, stock-raising, hunting and continuing exploitation of the forests may all safely be assumed to have continued in the study area, although the scale of these activities is unknown.

Hunter-gatherers and first farmers

It would seem likely that the presence of rivers and lochs, and the altitudinal range at the local scale within the study area, would have made portions of the landscape of the study area of considerable attraction to broad-spectrum hunter-gatherers. Based on evidence elsewhere in Scotland, it is probable that such communities would have been established here at least 8,000 years ago.

A bone harpoon head, recorded as having been found in Glenavon, would indicate at least the presence of a hunting party in this area at an early date. Scatters of flint debris, the most usual evidence for the presence of mesolithic communities, have been found in the Dee Valley in particular, and, whilst these are more abundant in the river valley around Crathes, there are reports of related finds well up the valley.

The Neolithic Period and Early Bronze Age: builders of monuments

In general, the major change which marks the fourth to second millennium BC in terms of the visibility of its archaeological record in Scotland, is the appearance of a series of funerary and ritual monuments - including chambered tombs, ring cairns, stone circles and stone settings, and round cairns. Examples of various of these monument types are present in the study area, but none can be described as numerous.

Later prehistory: farming and society in the last millennium BC

The first millennium BC, comprising the later Bronze Age and the pre-Roman Iron Age, is marked by major changes in the nature of the surviving archaeological remains. The burial and ritual monuments which characterised the earlier periods are superseded in the visible archaeological record by a variety of settlement sites, ranging from farmsteads consisting of groups of hut-circles to stoutly defended, stone-walled forts.

Dating from at least as early as the later Bronze Age, the hut-circles, and in some cases their associated field-systems, still survive within modern farmland but they are more characteristic of moorland areas which have not been cultivated since the prehistoric period. Their widespread distribution gives some indication both of the extent to which prehistoric man had occupied the area and the likely major impact of early agriculture on the forest cover.

In contrast with the open settlements represented by the hut-circles, the area also includes a number of enclosed settlements ranging from crannogs (lake dwellings), to palisaded sites, and the better known forts. Many of the more strongly defended sites occupy prominent positions in the modern landscape, and it is clear that these hill-top positions were carefully chosen by their builders for both their defensive advantages and their power to dominate the surrounding countryside.

The Historic Period

The Early Historical Period

The history of this area in the centuries after the Roman withdrawal is dominated by the groups known historically as the Picts. The Gaelic-speaking Scots extended their hold on Scotland steadily, but not without setbacks, during the second half of the first millennium, but Moray seems to have retained a measure of independence into the eleventh century. Another major strand during this period was provided by the expansion of the Irish form of Christianity: based on powerful abbots, rather than bishops with territorial sees to occupy them, and with an eremitic tradition that encouraged the foundation of outposts in new territory: an example of an early establishment in the Columbian tradition is represented by St Nathalan's, at Tullich on Deeside. Although there is evidence for Norse activity in the lowlands of Moray, there is no evidence of Norse settlement in the study area.

The Medieval Period

Throughout the medieval period, the area seems to have remained predominantly rural, and its inhabitants to have depended on the exploitation of its crops, livestock and forestry.

Access to the area from the south was always restricted by the scarcity of hill passes through the uplands, it is therefore unsurprising that many of the principal structures, both physical and territorial, associated with the consolidation of medieval kingship in Scotland are relatively infrequent in the study area or are sited near its borders. Relative isolation from the central powers to the south undoubtedly contributed to the power of the local paramount aristocracies. Thus the castle mounds called mottes, characteristic of the establishment of a Norman aristocracy are infrequent, and essentially confined to the principal valleys. Equally, with the exception of Cromdale and possibly Glenlivet, thanages - territories administered directly by a royal official - are absent from the area.

A number of Earldoms, including Mar (which encompassed the valleys of the Dee and Don and much of the intervening area) and Atholl, existed on a semi-independent basis while, from the 15th century onwards, control of Upper Strathspey, was divided between the Gordons and the Grants. Castles and ancient churches are still evident in the landscape from this period and include Kindrochit Castle in Braemar which was a hunting seat of the Kings of Scotland and located in a strong position close to the rocky gorge of the Clunie. The principal stronghold of Atholl, Blair Castle, originally consisted of a strong tower-like Kindrochit Castle, and was built from 1269 onwards, but considerably remodelled in later times. Other medieval strongholds included stark towers, like Drumin Castle in Glenlivet, set at the confluence of the Avon and Livet and commanding the Lecht route into Speyside and the island fortress of Lochindorb, which is a distinctive feature in the Strathdearn area.

Lairds also constructed stone castles during this period, for example, Castle Grant in Strathspey and Muckernach near Duthil, Abergeldie. The forests of the area provided sport for a succession of Scottish Kings and nobility, thus some of these castles served primarily as bases for hunting expeditions. The Earl of Huntly had Blairfindy built for his hunting parties in Glenlivet (from 1546), while the Erskines of Mar were responsible for hunting seats at both Corgarff in Strathdon and the Castle of Braemar (these examples were transformed into Government barracks after 1745, when garrisons were stationed at several places to ensure the Hanoverian hold on the area).

Although depletion of the forests to accommodate agriculture probably continued throughout this period, powerful landowners were anxious to maintain some degree of control over the forest, not least because of its role in providing a habitat for game, and could, as in the case of the Earls of Mar, make use of their feudal powers to achieve this. The forests of Mar and Atholl were favoured hunting grounds of the Royal House in medieval times, and the Earldom of Mar, when not under the direct control of the Crown, was normally strongly under its influence. Limited tree felling was tolerated, but on occasion, peasants cutting down trees were punished to ensure that such activities did not become too extensive.

The 17th and 18th Centuries

Significant landscape change would have occurred throughout this period as the forests of the area were exploited for timber on a large scale, and as agriculture expanded into the higher ground as the population increased. Communications were also considerably improved, largely due to the construction of military roads, and planned settlements were instigated by landowners interested in promoting new industry to the area.

Timber Exploitation and Other Industry

The first large-scale timber exploitation in Speyside was in Abernethy forest where all the pine woods in the parishes of Abernethy, Duthil and Kincardine were leased for four decades from 1630 without limit on exploitation. Although the activity was not on a modern scale, available technology and transport difficulties serving to restrict it, the landowners, the Grants, none the less realised that replanting was necessary and some was carried out. At the time, the pines of Speyside were described as stretching virtually uninterrupted for 24 miles. At the beginning of the 18th century, a substantial shipbuilding industry grew up at Kingston-on-Spey in Morayshire from 1785 using Abernethy Pine and lasted almost until the end of the succeeding century. Not all timber was however used for naval requirements: the area also produced timber for London's first piped water supply, installed in the 1770s, and charcoal was also in demand for ironworking for armaments manufacturing.

Commercial exploitation of the forests of Mar on the other side of the Cairngorm massif, did not begin in earnest until the 1770s when the Earls of Fife, felled a large part of the woods in Glen Luibeg and floated the timber down the Lui to a sawmill near Muir.

Other attempts to develop industry in the wake of forest exploitation followed. Thus, in 1728, the York Buildings Company purchased 60,000 of the finest pines from the Grants on Speyside and embarked on an ambitious programme of construction of sawmills, roads and blast furnaces for smelting iron ore, using local charcoal. Rocks were blasted from the bed of the Spey to facilitate the transport of timbers down the principal river course.

Rural Settlement and Farming Practices

Due to the exposed upland nature of much of the area, its use for arable agriculture, and more especially cereals, has always been restricted. In the uplands of Mar, sheep farming was traditional to supply the Aberdeenshire trade in woollen cloth. In the eighteenth century, the development of arable cultivation in the lowlands of Scotland, and access to the English markets, gave a considerable fillip to the export of black cattle from northern Scotland to the trysts at Falkirk and Crieff, and cattle droving through the landscape increased significantly. The drovers' dislike of tolls and of passing through countryside congested with buildings, walls and undergrowth led many from the north to favour the route via Strathspey, the Avon and Corgarff to Ballater, whence alternative routes to the south included Glen Muick or Braemar and Glen Calalter (Tollmouth) to the Angus Glens, or Braemar and Glen Clunie to Glenshee and Perthshire. The ancient passes through the central Cairngorms, the Lairig Ghru and the Lairig on Laorig were also used. Haldane notes that the former was still in use as late as the 1870s, when men were still sent up each spring to clear the path of stones. Glen Muick seems to have continued to be used for droving for a further decade. Indications of this activity are furnished by the eroded trackways, often particularly visible in the vicinity of stream crossings.

Traditional agricultural systems in the uplands, based around communal farming townships comprising several families, seems to have reached a zenith in the 1760s when, according to an eighteenth century legal case, never had so much land been under the plough. In numerous valleys, including Glens Ey, Clunie, Dee, Lui and Banchor, substantial areas of ground cleared of stone, and the footings of buildings and ancillary structures, like corn-drying kilns, indicate that crops were grown at up to 1350ft. Also apparent are the strips associated with the run-rig cultivation; extensive enclosed arable fields are uncommon beyond the lower valley sides. Indeed, in some parts of upper Deeside, unconsolidated strips of arable land persisted as late as the 1850s.

The practice of transhumance was carried out throughout the study area. Shielings, consisting of groups of huts constructed of varying combinations of wood, stone and turf, were in use between May and September for the inhabitants of the townships, in order to protect arable ground from the trampling and grazing of livestock.

Buildings and Communications

The major communications network present within the study area today, owes much to the network of military roads constructed in the wake of the 1715 rising and more particularly after 1745. The old A9 from Perth to Inverness followed the route of the Military Road built by General Wade in the 1730s, while a later road planned by General Caulfield and intended to connect the new coastal fort at Fort George with Blairgowrie passed through the area. These roads were designed to facilitate troop movements in what was essentially occupied territory, and were accompanied by outposts on either side of Drummochter (at Dalnacardoch and Dalwhinnie), Braemar, Glen Feshie, Glen Clunie on the Dee, Inchroary and Corgarff on the Don, and at Glen Muick and Glen Clova to control the throughways to the Angus Glens.

Many of the settlements in the area are planned villages, laid out by improving landowners for a variety of purposes. Ballater, established by the Farquharsons of Monaltrie, was explicitly created to house visitors to the spa at Pannanich. Tomintoul, on its high and isolated hillside, was laid out by the Fourth Duke of Gordon from 1770, with the aim of exploiting the "inexhaustible" peat moss and quarried slate in the vicinity, while Grantown was set out in 1776 by James Grant of Grant, with the aim of attracting carpenters and other craftsmen, in order to stimulate the demand for timber.

The 19th Century

Agricultural and Estate Improvements

From the middle of the 18th century, landowners began to invest in agricultural and estate importance, effecting a complete transformation of the rural landscape and creating the pattern of farmland that we recognise today. This included the layout of new farms, rectilinear enclosures, the drainage of wet ground, and other improvements, and led to the clearance of many townships in the highland glens and the concomitant abandonment of transhumance. This process entailed much migration of population, but many tenants, as on the Earl of Fife's Estates in Aberdeenshire, found employment elsewhere. However, the chronology of highland clearance is spread over a long period, for example, Glen Lui on Deeside was cleared in 1776, but Glen Banchor in Speyside was not abandoned until almost 100 years later: the one being the result of a single traumatic event and the other of a more gradual process as townships in upland locations became uneconomic.

By the time of the New Statistical Account in the 1830s/1840s, improvements in rural housing were under way. In Duthil, drystone and turf houses were replaced by gabled, stone and lime thatched cottages, with window glass. In Braemar, the larger farms had stone built houses with slate roofs, although the smaller buildings were still capped with heather sods. Prince Albert and Queen Victoria's improvements to the housing on the Balmoral estate stimulated other landowners to follow suit and less cramped stone and lime farmhouses and shepherds' and keepers' cottages appeared in the glens.

The introduction of sheep farming in the early nineteenth century met with success in some of the richer areas, such as Glen Shee and Glenlivet and around Corgarff, but was less successful in areas where available vegetation was less plentiful or unsuitable, as in Glen More and Glen Derry. However, the importance of hunting and timber production meant that sheep farming was never introduced on the scale of many other parts of the Highlands.

The Growth of Sporting Estates

The medieval practice of hunting within the forests of the areas had all but died out, partly due to the traditional nobility's forfeiture of its estates after 1745 and the widespread felling of the open Caledonian pine forests which had formed the principal habitat of the deer. Stalking in the modern form began around 1800. With the decline of sheep farming in the second half of the 19th century, the area of deer forest expanded, and numbers of deer increased. The 'adoption' of Deeside by Queen Victoria, played an important role in the growing popularity of the area for sporting activity. The freeing of further ground from sheep, from the mid 19th century onwards also allowed the development of grouse moors on the uplands surrounding the mountainous core of the Cairngorms.

The major development of deerstalking in Strathspey occurred later than in Deeside, and the lower deer population of the former area allowed considerable regeneration to take hold before the upper parts of Abernethy parish and Glen More were cleared of their farms and their families by their respective owners, the Seafeld and Gordon families, for deer. This occurred in the 1860s. Some of the younger stands of pine were however protected from the grazing activities of deer by fencing, including considerable areas in Abernethy and Rothiemurchus.

An Age of Building

As well as the upgrading of the housing stock which characterised the nineteenth century, places of worship were almost all renewed. Many old castles, as has been noted above, were given substantial extensions in the Victorian period and many of the planned villages, established in the 18th century, expanded to service the needs of sportsmen and travellers. The accent on hunting was accompanied by the creation of increasingly sumptuous lodges in which to accommodate the hunters, often with additional designed features in the landscapes around them. Thus the Duke of Fife's high Victorian Mar Lodge of 1898 (Smith, 1984, 6-7) was in fact the third such lodge on this estate, each one grander than its predecessor. The construction of shooting lodges occurred throughout the study area during the nineteenth century, and, whilst some were intended for year-round occupation (by the staff at least), others were intended solely for use during the summer season. Some, many of them now ruinous, were located in extremely inaccessible spots, for example Slugain Lodge, near Invercauld, Bynack Lodge, or Altanour Lodge in Glen Ey.

Many of the lodges built on sporting estates had designed landscapes created around them. The nearby Falls of Corriemulzie on the Dee were also rendered more picturesque by the planting of specimen trees in their vicinity, continuing a practice earlier exemplified by the Duke of Atholl around the Hermitage on the River Braan.

The development of railway links to the south attracted not only sportsmen but, later, tourists to the area. The line from Perth to Inverness via Forres through Drummochter was begun in 1861 by the Highland Railway. The Deeside line reached as far as Ballater in 1866 but an extension contemplated to Braemar and thence to Blair Atholl through Glen Tilt was most probably prevented by Queen Victoria's influence; she did not want her privacy further affected, or the native pinewoods of Ballochbuie interfered with.

Tourism to the area grew and was linked with the writings of early travellers and to the Royal associations with Deeside. Most of the area's hotels, built to accommodate increasing numbers of visitors date, from the nineteenth century, and were often the outcome of transforming small inns into massive Victorian structures, often aping the styles of nearby landowners' lodges.

Industry

Although forestry was not as important as it had been in the 17th/18th centuries, due to the value of open moorland for shooting and stalking, the reputation of Speyside timber ensured markets for timber and good forestry management practices continued. The planting of extensive forests mainly comprising exotic conifers was, however, an uncommon practice in the study area, although 19th century plantings of larch and spruce occurred on some estates in Strathdon and Deeside.

Industries other than quarrying, forestry and agriculture were not significant in the study area in terms of impacting directly on the landscape, with the exception of distilling. In the 1790s, the making and drinking of whisky was practised by all 37 families in Tomintoul, and in the 1820s there are reputed to have been at least 200 small stills in the

Glenlivet area. The earliest legal distilleries date to the early nineteenth century, and it is from this period that an industry, once secretive, begins to make its presence in the landscape felt. Nineteenth century distilleries normally display distinctive pagoda-like roofs, and associated clusters of buildings as drying barns and for storage. Examples include those at Pitlochry and Dalwhinnie, and, the sole example on Deeside, Royal Lochnagar (1884).

20th Century Change

The landscape of the study area has seen a number of land use and developmental changes since the turn of the century, many of these affecting landscape character to some extent and including changes to forestry and woodlands and the agricultural landscape, and consequent effects on semi natural habitats. Considerable landscape change has also occurred in the study area through new built development, including the expansion of settlements, recreation facilities and infrastructure.

Woodland

Although it would appear that the overall pattern and extent of woodland has not changed significantly in the majority of the study area since 1894, the management and composition of these woodlands has considerably altered as exotic conifers were increasingly planted, from the 1920's onwards, replacing what would have been predominantly Scot's pine, although some of this would have been 19th century plantings. Such replacement planting would have affected the character of the original woodlands, which comprised in the past both commercially managed woodlands and remnant semi natural Caledonian pine forest. Activities such as drainage, ploughing and a high stocking density would have disrupted the intricate pattern of glades and diversity of land cover throughout the native forest, which occurred as a result of natural regeneration, which was also used as a restocking method in the pine woodlands which were commercially managed from the late 17th century onwards.

Many of the large scale plantations of spruce and larch, present in Glenmore, Inshriach, the Angus Glens, Strathdon and Strathspey and Glen Livet, were planted on marginal hill farms from the 1940's onwards, although landowners in Strathdon and Deeside often planted such woodlands from the late 18th and 19th centuries. Although many of these new plantations often replaced Scots pine woodland some were established on heather moorland, thus diminishing the extent of this land cover, for example in Strathspey and Glen Clova. In Badenoch and Strathspey District between the 1940's and 1970's, semi natural coniferous woodland decreased by 39% and heather moorland by 11%, while coniferous plantations substantially increased from 76 square kilometres to 239 square kilometres over the same period. Similar increases in coniferous plantations have been estimated within Kincardine and Deeside District at the expense of semi natural habitats such as heather moorland and native pine woodland, the latter suffering an 70% loss between the 1940s and 1970s.

Many of these plantations, particularly the older ones in Strathdon for example, make a positive contribution to landscape character, however others were planted at a time when the objectives of planting were markedly different and when current design standards did not apply. This has resulted in some instances, in a legacy of forest planting which is often poorly scaled and shaped, and in a few areas, inappropriately located in the landscape.

The remaining semi-natural native pine forest is now considerably fragmented and small in extent and has been under decline in many areas, due to deer grazing pressure, since the late 19th and throughout the 20th centuries. Little or no natural regeneration is

evident in many areas and it is likely that in the long term, at worst these remnant woodlands will diminish further and at best, providing deer pressure is relieved, there will be large gaps in the age structure of the woodland.

Agriculture

The present century has seen agriculture in the area become less intensive, as hill farming has become less profitable. There is now relatively little cultivated land, and sheep and hill cattle now occupy areas lower down the hills and in the Straths. Policy and fiscal incentives are a feature of the later half of the century aimed to intensify farming methods and this often resulted in the decline of traditional features of the strath farmland, for example stone dykes, unimproved pasture, wetlands and broadleaved woodlands. Between the 1940's and 1970's, wet ground decreased by 40% within Badenoch and Strathspey District, while semi-improved and improved pasture significantly increased, indicating that considerable drainage of land occurred throughout this period. Arable land has also decreased by around 15% in this District over the same period while a 15% increase in sheep numbers occurred in some areas of Badenoch and Strathspey between 1946 and 1988.

Developmental Changes

The most significant changes that have occurred to the character of the uplands and high mountain areas, have been associated with the construction of access tracks for sporting use, and forestry and ski developments at Coire Cas on the Cairngorms in the 1960's and later at Glenshee and the Lecht. The increasing popularity of the Cairngorms for recreational activities, facilitated by the construction of tracks and roads, car parks, ski tows and runs, has combined to both diminish the 'wildland' quality of the mountains and to affect its natural landscape character by introducing man made elements into the landscape.

Built development has also increased considerably in parts of the study area throughout the 20th century, being mainly concentrated in the Speyside area, where Aviemore was substantially extended in the 1960's as a tourist centre. Expansion of other towns in the area also occurred, although not on the same scale. Rural housing increased in the Speyside area as people were attracted to live in the area, although in more remote parts of the study area such as the Angus Glens, upper Spey and Laggan, the population has gradually declined throughout the 20th century.

4 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The landscape of the study area is complex and varied, and cannot be viewed as a homogenous unit in terms of its landscape character. The great diversity of natural features such as landform, lochs and rivers and vegetation and the settlement and landuse patterns imposed by humans, have combined to produce a variety of different landscapes which can be defined as having a distinctive character.

The landscape character assessment of the study area was undertaken using a variety of techniques, including map overlaying and field survey. A fuller statement of the methodology used is contained in Appendix B.

Three broad Landscape Types were defined, principally by their topographic differences, and these are illustrated in Figure 16. Within these broad categories, twenty-one more detailed Landscape Character Areas were identified through examination of more subtle variations in landform and drainage and by differences in vegetation cover and settlement patterns (see Figure 17). The boundaries of these Landscape Types and Landscape Character Areas, should not be read as being definitive, but will be representative of a rather more gradual transition between distinctive combinations of different landscape elements. Similarly, the level of detail with which the landscape assessment has been carried out, is related to the scope of this particular study and it is important to therefore recognise that a finer grained study would undoubtedly define many more sub divisions of the Landscape Character Areas, identifying local variations in character.

Despite the disparate nature of some of the more outlying areas of the study area, a number of unifying features do occur, which have a direct or indirect influence on landscape character. These include the strong visual inter relationship between many of the different landscapes within the study area, for instance the upland nature of much of the landscape, results in views being an important feature, and the high Cairngorms massif dominates most views from the surrounding landscape. The influence of topography and climate also results in the area having a distinctive weather and seasonal pattern. Although this varies between the straths and high mountains, the domination of winter throughout the area, produces strong visual features such as snow on the high mountain tops, which can last for most of the year; the cooling effect of this influencing the climate of the straths below. The effects of both the climate and the dominance of unimproved pasture, are evident in the dull colour of the pasture of the upper straths, which can last for up to nine months of the year, and the short seasonal and colourful flush of green pastures or marsh and purple of extensive heather moorland in the summer months.

The landscape assessment of the study area was undertaken during the months of October and November and the following descriptions of landscape character therefore reflect the particular seasonal differences prevalent at that time.

4.2 LANDSCAPE TYPES

The Plateaux

This Landscape Type comprises the broad granite plateaux which form the high mountain areas of the Study Area. They consist of bare, boulder-strewn mountain summits, generally over 800 m in height and rising to over 1200m. The height and huge scale of the landform is the dominant feature of the Character Type, as is the distinctive

broadness and gentle slopes of the plateaux and individual summits, which are dramatically cut by deeply incised corries and sheer sided trough-like glens. The expansiveness and altitude of the plateaux are accentuated by ground hugging vegetation cover. The plateaux landscapes are unsettled and this, together with the huge scale of their landform contributes to the sense of them possessing a 'wildland' quality.

Uplands and Glens

This Landscape Type comprises vast ranges of rolling hills generally between 400m - 700m in height and partially surrounding the high mountain plateaux. These hills have smooth, rounded summits and evenly graded slopes, predominantly covered with heather moor and rough grassland. The extensiveness of the uplands is a striking feature, providing vistas of successive smooth ridges and summits from many viewpoints and accentuated by the general uniformity of the vegetation cover. Broad, gently sloping glens penetrate deep into these hill ranges. This Landscape Type has little human settlement and this along with the extensiveness of the uplands, gives the uplands and glens of the study area, a remote character.

The Straths

The straths contain the major river systems of the area and are relatively low lying compared with the other Landscape Types which border them. The main communications and settlements of the study area are contained within the broader straths, such as the Spey and the Dee, while the narrower and more upland influenced straths such as Glenlivet and Strathavon are less populated and consequently have fewer communications. The straths have long been cultivated and the landscape has been consequently strongly shaped by man. The straths often comprise a diverse mix of farmland, woodlands, forests and settlements, creating a variety of landscape patterns on the valley floors and lower hill slopes and providing a distinctive visual contrast with the other less man influenced Landscape Types adjacent to them.

The following section describes and illustrates each Landscape Character Area in detail.

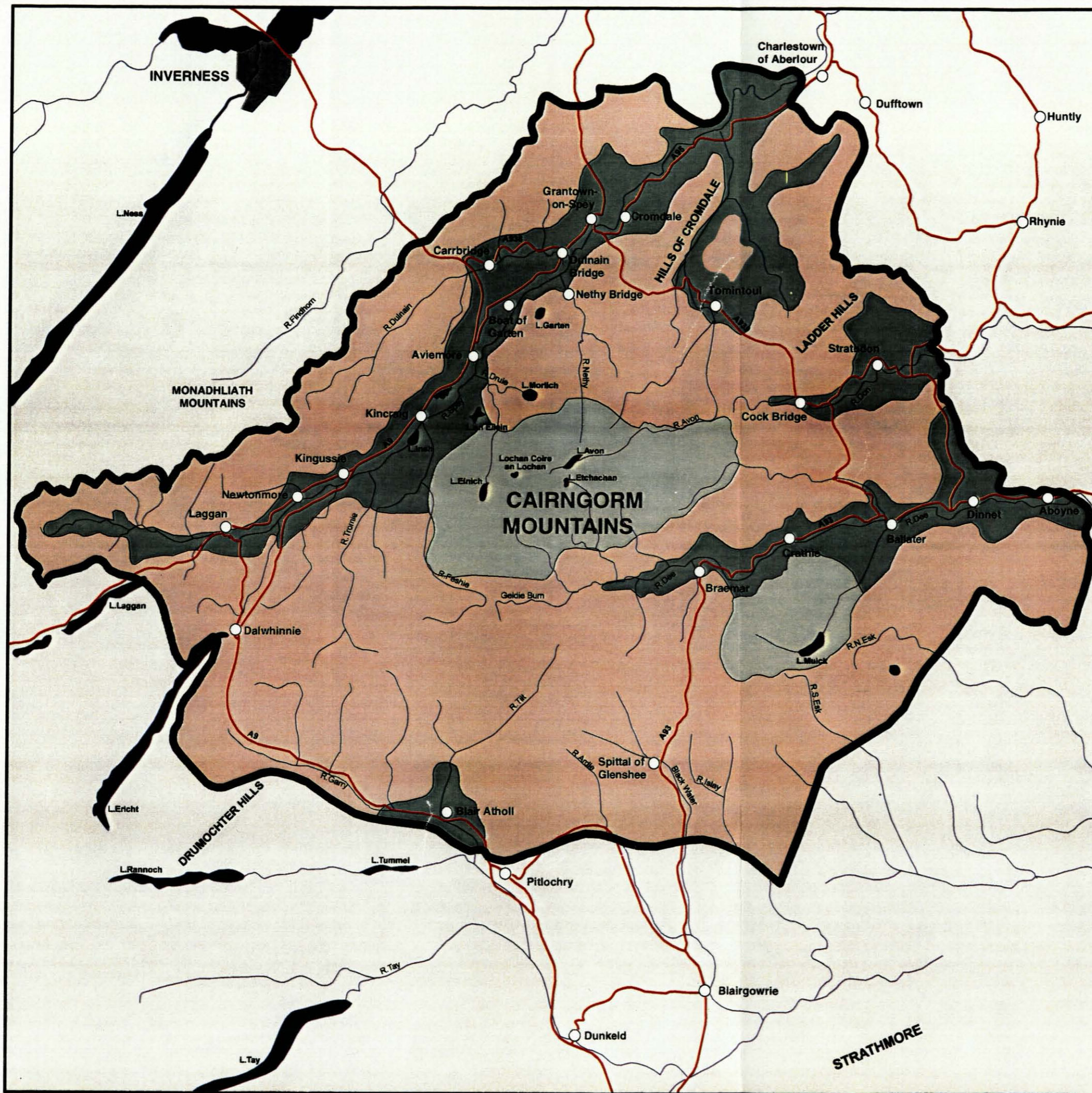
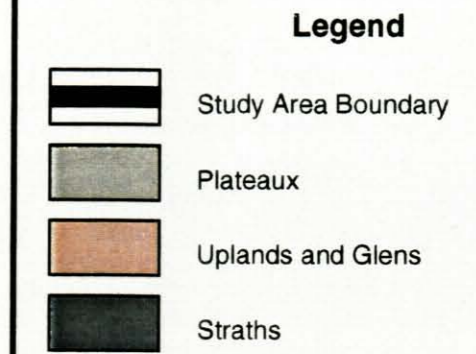


Figure 16
Landscape Types





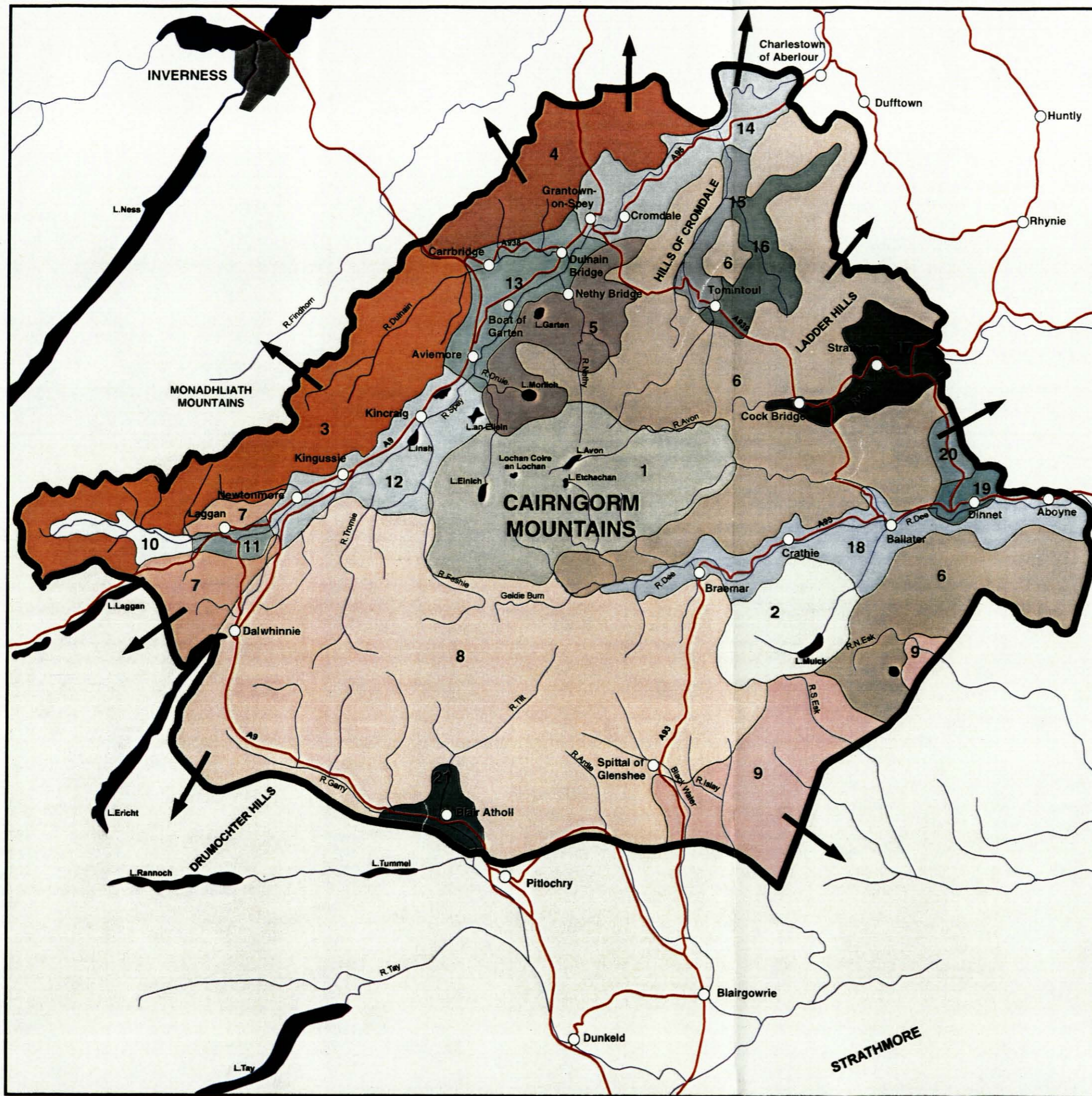


Figure 17
Landscape Character Areas

Legend

Plateaux

- 1 The Central Massif
- 2 The White Mounth

Uplands and Glens

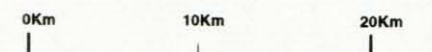
- 3 The Monadhliaths
- 4 Strathdearn Hills
- 5 Rothiemurchus / Abernethy
- 6 The North-Eastern Hills
- 7 Ardverikie
- 8 The Southern Hill Ranges
- 9 The Angus Glens

Straths

- 10 The Spey Headwaters
- 11 Upper Spey Farmlands
- 12 Badenoch
- 13 Strathspey
- 14 Lower Spey
- 15 Strath Avon
- 16 Glenlivet
- 17 Strathdon
- 18 Upper Deeside Estates
- 19 Muir of Dinnet
- 20 The Cromar Farmlands
- 21 Atholl Policies

➔ Character Area Extends Outwith Study Area Boundary

Scale



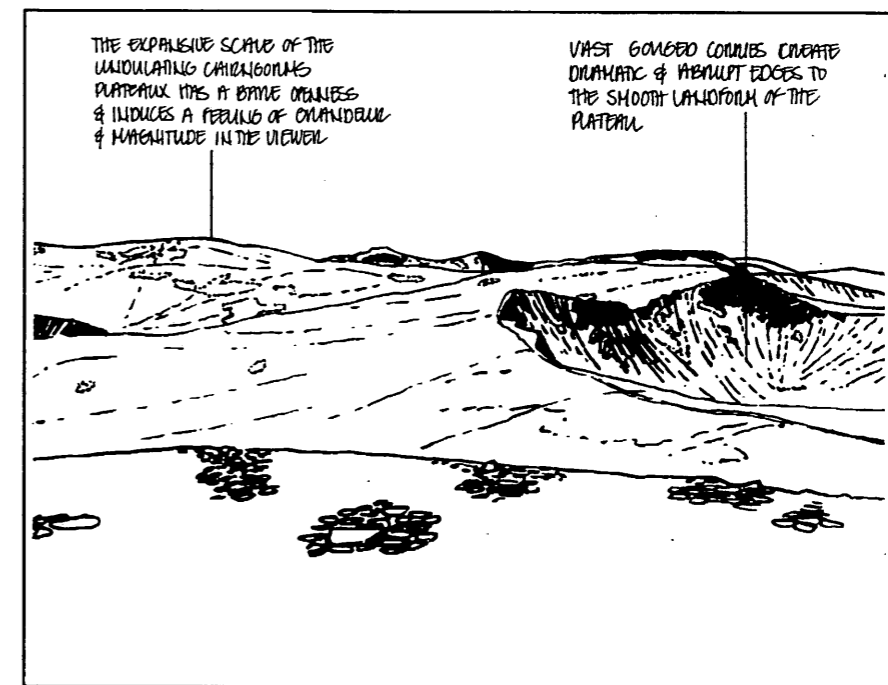
THE CENTRAL MASSIF

Area 1

Located at the core of the study area, the Central Massif contains the highest and most massive mountain landscape in Britain, comprising huge granite plateaux deeply incised by steep-sided glens and corries.

The extensive undulating plateaux of the Cairngorms have a bare, yet coarse textured surface, comprising huge boulder fields, shattered stones, gravel and sand slopes on a vast scale. The plateaux are cut by trough-like glens, such as the 'great gash' of the Lairig Ghru, and boulder-strewn corries which frequently contain dark lochs, often lie at the foot of sheer rock faces. The northern and eastern mountains of the area are distinguished by a series of summit tors, forming upstanding blocks of weathered granite up to 30m in height. These tors are striking features, visible from many parts of the surrounding landscape.

The general uniformity of the summit levels and the great height of the massif, provides extensive panoramas over plateaux, sky and distant hill ranges. From the surrounding landscape, the scale of the massif is evident in views from the Monadhliath, where the huge dark wall like edge of Feshie, rises above Strath Spey, and from Sliochd, where the massif is a focus of the view.



The massif is devoid of trees, except in the lower sheltered glens where some scattered remnants of native pine woodland occur. Ground vegetation on the high plateau is essentially sub arctic in character, forming an intricate pattern of tiny mosses and liverworts with occasional matt grass and dwarf willow, hugging the ground. In some places, snow lies for many months of the year, and tends to accentuate the smooth curves and cavities of the landform.

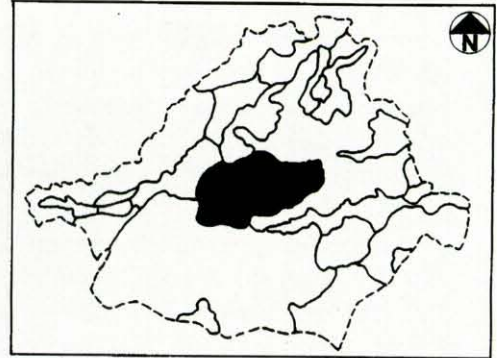
The few built elements throughout the area are restricted to a number of mountain bothies while the most popular mountains and glens contain well-worn footpaths with associated cairns and waymarkers. The main glens penetrating the massif also contain a number of vehicular tracks and some of these extend onto the upper slopes, becoming highly visible due to their contrast of colour and texture with their surroundings. On the northern edge of the plateau, in Coire Cas and Coire na Ciste, there are extensive ski lifts and tows for downhill skiing, roads and car parks. All these features introduce highly visible, man-made elements into a landscape of immense scale, where the overall perception is of the landscape's remote and unique mountain character and 'wildland' qualities.

THE CENTRAL MASSIF

Area 1



The uniform summit levels of the broad sweeping plateaux



Corries form deep scoops within gently undulating plateau



Steep sided glens penetrate the Massif



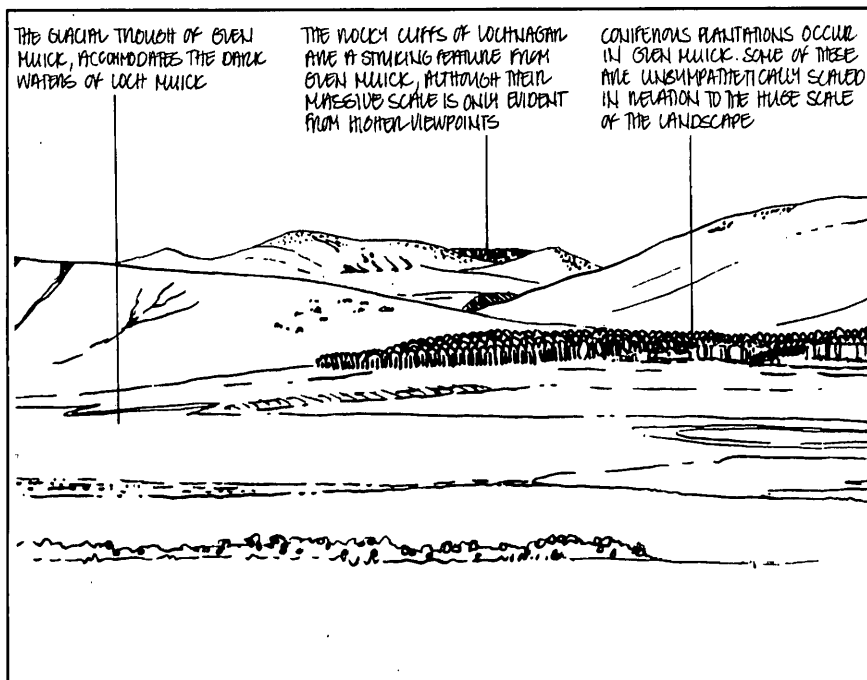
The blocky character of the rock outcrops and the distinctive Tors of parts of the plateaux

THE WHITE MOUNTN

Area 2

Containing the mountains of Lochnagar, Broad Cairn and Cairn Bannoch, the White Mounth is a broad, undulating plateau incised by steep sided glens and with deeply gouged corries. The many subsidiary hill tops around the high mountains contribute to an extensive large-scale landscape of long ridges and rounded landforms. The broad and open upper section of Glen Muick and the dramatic trough landform containing the dark waters of Loch Muick, is also part of the Character Area.

The underlying granite produces boulder fields and huge slabby rock walls, such as Lochnagar and the Creag-an-Dubh Loch, which have a massive scale, while the influence of the schist geology on the surrounding hills, results in less extensive boulder fields and produces more fertile soil on the lower slopes and hence a slightly richer vegetation pattern.



In north-facing corries and shaded areas, a variety of arctic-alpine plants thrive, but the area is generally characterised by larger tracts of high alpine grassland, patchy scree and gravels and deep tussocky heather on lower slopes. Clumps of purple/brown birch nestle amongst small-scale, jagged bluffs and rock slabs and isolated coniferous plantations are located on the hill sides within Glen Muick.

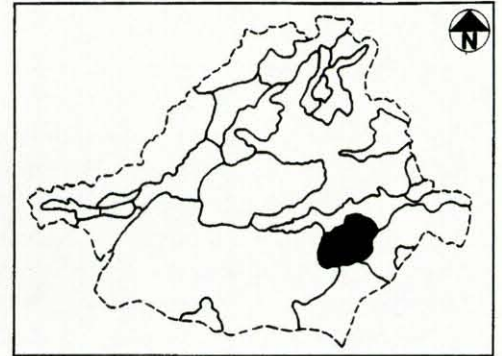
Numerous access tracks penetrate the area, linking Deeside with Glen Muick and extending close to the summit of Broad Cairn. Many of these tracks produce highly visible scarring of the landscape. Most mountain summits have well-worn footpaths with associated cairns and waymarkers and within Glen Muick, the well used public car park can also be intrusive from some viewpoints. There are several private stone built estate lodges close to Loch Muick, in particular the fine Glas-allt-Shiel, with its high stone wall and pine plantation. Despite these man-made elements, the area retains a strong sense of wildness and remoteness, due to its predominant and massively scaled physical features.

THE WHITE MOUNTNTH

Area 2



A large scale landscape of sweeping ridges and rounded landforms



The deeply gouged corrie below lochnagar with its huge slabby rock walls



The broad and open U-shaped valley of Glen Muick



Sheer sided Glens incise the hills of the Mounth

THE MONADHLIATH

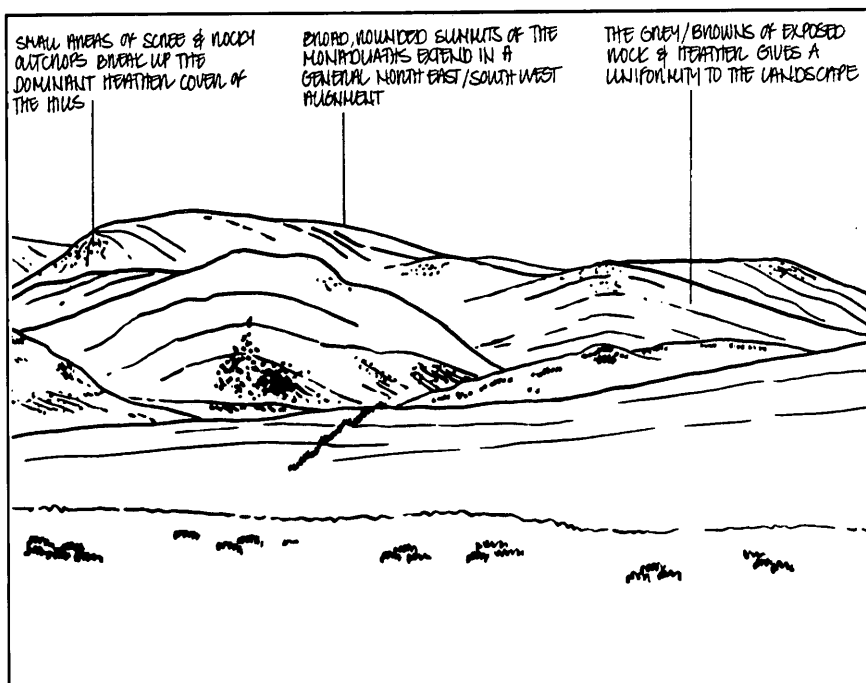
Area 3

The Monadhliath are an extensive mountain range on the north-western boundary of the study area and extend beyond the study area to Loch Ness.

The mountains form a massive bulk of peaks over 800 metres to the south, with this overall height tapering down to the north. The mountains, and glens which dissect them, have a distinctive north east/south west emphasis to their alignment, running parallel to the Highland Boundary Fault Line. A series of broad, smooth, rounded heather clad summits and slopes of generally uniform height, colour and texture occur, with small areas of scree patterning the upper slopes. The lower slopes often have a landform made up of small scale hummocks and hollows, and valleys have been created by numerous watercourses.

A number of isolated and remote glens run through the Monadhliath, improved pastures and woodlands in the larger of these, providing striking colour and textural contrasts with the simple form and vegetation cover of the mountains. The diversity of vegetation within, for example, the Dulnain Glen, includes tussocky grass moorland and rushes, the bright greens of the improved pasture on lower slopes and on the flat glen floor, stands of native pine, and extensive birch woodlands and coniferous plantation on the lower slopes and within the floor of the Glen.

Settlement is scattered and consists of isolated, traditional farmsteads which tend to lie on the lower foothills and flat floor of some of the glens. Numerous ruinous buildings and stone dykes are also located in some of these areas.

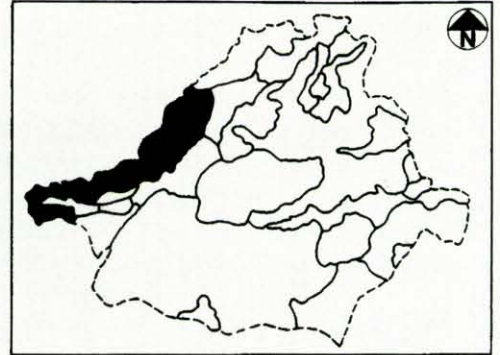


THE MONADHLIATH

Area 3



An expansive, remote mountain range of rounded summits and slopes



Undulating lower slopes covered with heather moorland



Rough pasture and coniferous woodlands feature in Glen Dulnain



Isolated traditional farmsteads are found in some of the larger glens

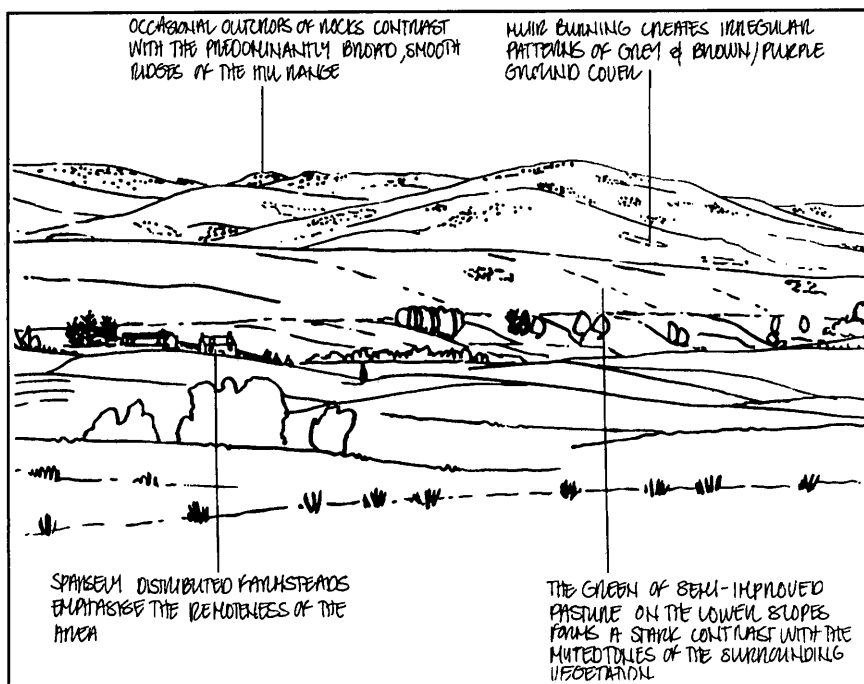
STRATHDEARN HILLS

Area 4

This area is characterised by a range of hills, up to 600 metres high, rising up from the wide valley of the River Spey and extending outwith the study area, into Morayshire. These hills have long, shallow slopes, broad smoothed ridges and rounded peaks which rise to similar heights. The smoothness of the terrain and sinuous shape of the hills, is broken in places by rocky outcrops which create uneven ridgelines and by small patches of scree and boulders, which punctuate the generally even hill slopes. A pattern of broad glens cut into the hills on a north/south alignment, creating intriguing views through, into the interior landscape of the area, from Strathspey. The Character Area also includes the expansive elevated moor of the Dava, to the west.

The hilltops and their upper slopes are covered with heather moor, and this smooth blanket emphasises the rounded, evenness of the landform. This smoothness is disrupted in places by pockets of native pine and by muir burning which creates irregular, and often geometric patterns of grey and purple/brown ground cover. The lower hill slopes and valleys comprise areas of rough grass and isolated, bright green fields of semi-improved pasture, which contrast with the muted tones of the surrounding vegetation. Coniferous plantations generally occur on the lower hill slopes, although these are not extensive, and natural regeneration of Scots pine is a feature on Dava Moor. Fragmented broadleaved woodlands are located next to farmsteads and on the fringes of water bodies.

The area has a remote feel derived from the sparse distribution of farmsteads and the 'marginal' appearance of much of the farmland, where fields of improved pasture are small and often encroached by rushes. The ruined castle on Lochindorb and the absence of major communications within the area, accentuate this feeling of remoteness.

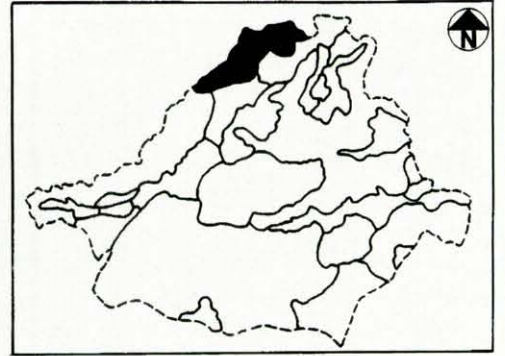


STRATHDEARN HILLS

Area 4



Long, smooth ridges cut by remote glens



Occasional rock outcrops produce an uneven skyline



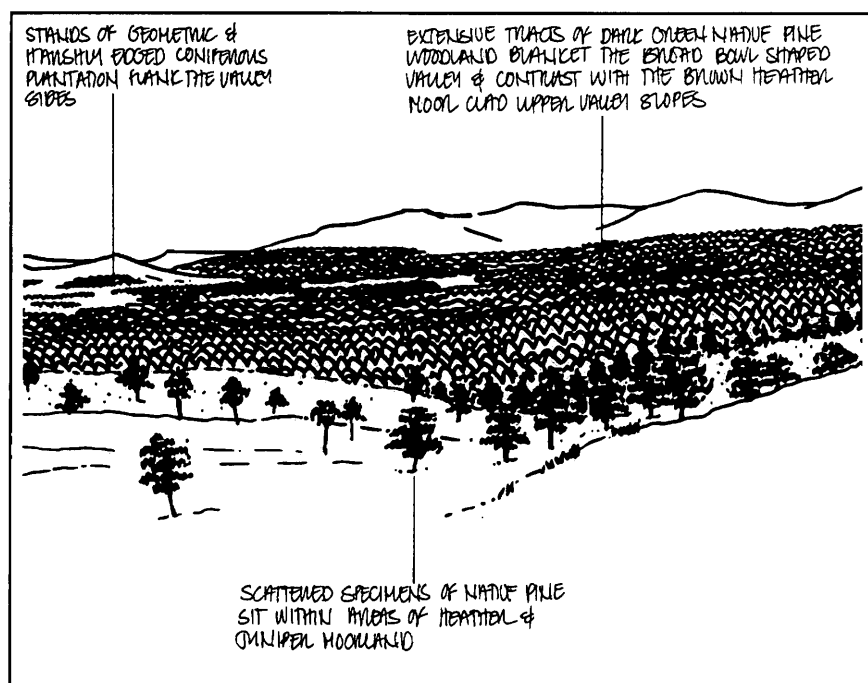
Improved pastures provide a strong contrast with surrounding moorland



Lochindorb Castle

These forested areas have a broad 'U' shaped glacial valley landform and lie at the foot of the Cairngorm massif forming gently undulating raised valleys above Strathspey. The valleys are partially contained by the massif and the Kincardine Hills, and this gives them a distinctive bowl shape. Numerous small, rounded lochs, catch the light and pattern the landscape. Loch Morlich, lying at the foot of the Cairngorms, forms a focal point within the area, while the more hidden Loch an Eilein, enclosed by forest and landform, has a more intimate scale and visually diverse character.

Both areas are dominated by extensive tracts of forest, much of this comprising Scots pine. These forests tend to have a more uniform spacing of trees, particularly in the lower areas, where they are managed commercially. On the higher ground however, a more irregular scattered matrix of naturally seeded pine, open space, juniper and birch scrub develops, which visually integrates and complements the rugged character of the nearby high mountains. A distinctive feature of the less managed parts of the forest, are the often fragmented boundaries between heather moor, rougher pastures and trees, where a coarse texture of scrub and widely-spaced and stunted trees grades and softens the edges of denser woodland areas.



Coniferous plantations on the southern slopes of the Kincardine Hills and within Glenmore, often have straight margins and these are particularly intrusive on the upper hill slopes. The density of these plantations contrasts with the random spacing of trees and open ground in the predominantly native pine forest areas.

Recreation and tourism facilities are most evident in the south, being centered on Loch Morlich and along the main road which is aligned through Rothiemurchas and links Aviemore to the Cairn Gorm ski area. Although many of these facilities are partially screened by the forest, their linear arrangement and occasionally, unsympathetic design, is evident from higher viewpoints outwith the Character Area.

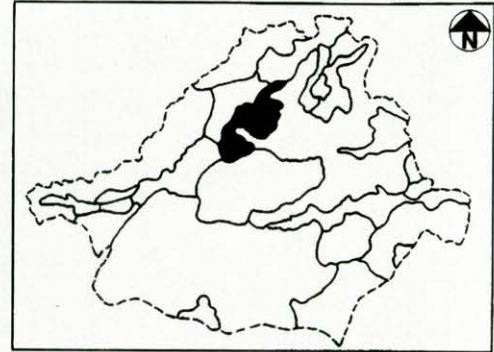
The extensive nature of the forests within the Character Area is an impressive feature, particularly when viewed from the surrounding hills and mountains, where the diverse pattern of glades, settlement, pasture and lochs becomes apparent.

ROTHIEMURCHUS / ABERNETHY

Area 5



The bowl shaped basin of Rothiemurchus and Loch Morlich at the foot of the Cairngorm Massif



The broad, gently undulating 'U' shaped basin of Abernethy



Juniper and birch scrub often fringe native pine forests



Open heather moorland areas with forested lower hill slopes

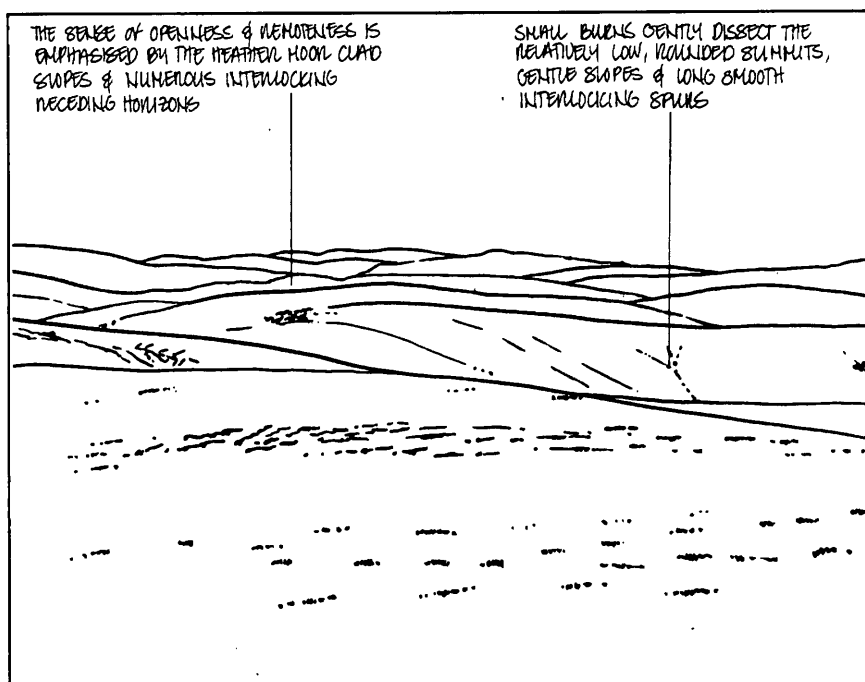
THE NORTH-EASTERN HILL RANGES

Area 6

This extensive Character Area forms foothills to the north and east of the Central Massif, and is incised by Strathdon, Strathavon, Glenlivet and edged by Deeside. The hills are characterised by their relatively low and rounded summits, gentle slopes and long, smooth interlocking spurs. Small burns lightly incise the hillsides and drain into rivers which flow within undulating valley floors, and these are often more deeply cut into the hills. Within these valleys, there are occasional mounds formed from sandy, glacial deposits which have been colonised by rough grass.

The upper slopes of the hills are predominately covered by heather moorland which forms an even, low-growing blanket and which emphasises the smoothness of the topography. In some areas, muir burning creates a distinctive pattern on the landscape. Large areas of peat hags also occur on the upper, shallow slopes. Although these hills generally have an open character, in places stands of native pine and birch pepper the hill slopes and small broadleaved woodlands colonise a few of the more sheltered valleys. The lower slopes and wetter, flatter areas along the valley floors are covered by rough grass and moss. Coniferous plantations are generally small-scale and many form geometric blocks which are poorly integrated with the rolling character of the hills.

Settlement is sparse, being confined to the valley floors and lower slopes. The majority of properties are of a traditional character, although inappropriately designed, modern housing on the periphery of Nethy Bridge is intrusive. Built development is limited to the numerous access tracks, which scar the hills in many areas and the Lecht ski area, which is generally well contained within a small glen, but where nearby power lines and the upland section of the A939 have a negative visual impact. The area exhibits a strong sense of remoteness, emphasised by the openness of the landscape and the extensive horizons of successive hill ranges, which coalesce in the distance and from which views to the Cairngorms massif are a special feature.

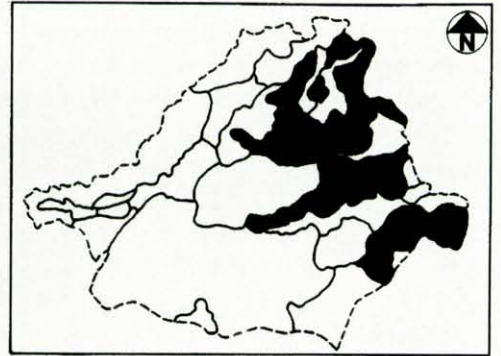


THE NORTH-EASTERN HILL RANGES

Area 6



The hills form an expansive landscape of successive, interlocking ridges



Lightly dissected hill slopes lead to broad undulating glens



Undulating valley floor, with scattered small tree groups

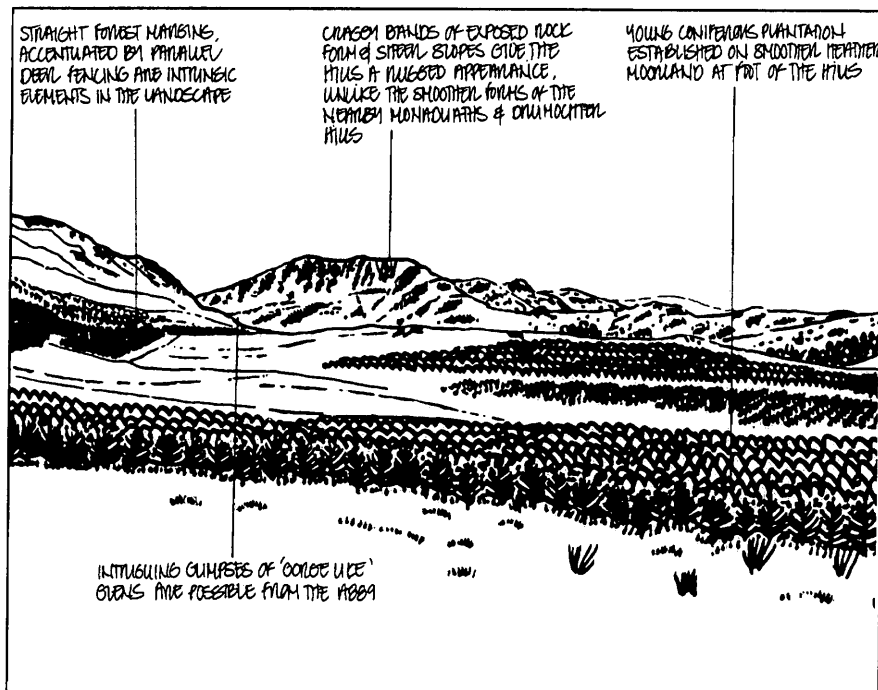


The geometric shapes of plantations conflicts with the gently rounded landform

Ardverikie straddles the U-shaped valley of the River Spey, west of Newtonmore and extends beyond the boundary of the study area to the south of Loch Laggan. It is a gently folded, upland landscape, where the underlying schist geology is evident in the rocky outcrops and screes of the landform and the distinctive, knolly, craggy summits of the hills. In places, the gentle upper slopes of the hills fall away steeply into a series of broad valleys and narrow, gorge like glens, giving the landform a dynamic quality. The irregularity of the landform is often accentuated by light and shade, and this contributes to the rugged qualities of the landscape which contrasts with the smoother, rounded forms of adjacent hills.

Heather and blaeberry moorland and patchy rough grass, cover the shallower lower slopes and broader valleys. Young coniferous plantations occur on the lower hill slopes and are generally well designed, with their upper margins fading out into the hillside to give a 'natural' edge. However, a number of straight forest margins, forestry access tracks and deer fences are intrusive linear elements in this landscape where the irregularity of the landform is a definitive feature. Broadleaved woodland has colonised many of the upper sections of the valleys, merging well with adjacent moorland and grassland.

Views into the glens and valleys, which penetrate the area, and distant panoramas to the Monadhliaths and Atholl Hills are a feature of the elevated and open plateau which is traversed by the A889. Ardverikie is very sparsely settled, with only a few isolated farmsteads and cottages being located on the lower fringes of the hills bordering the Laggan area. Footpaths and access tracks lead down into the narrow glens and forests and low voltage power lines, supported by timber poles, flank the A889 on the fringes of the Character Area.

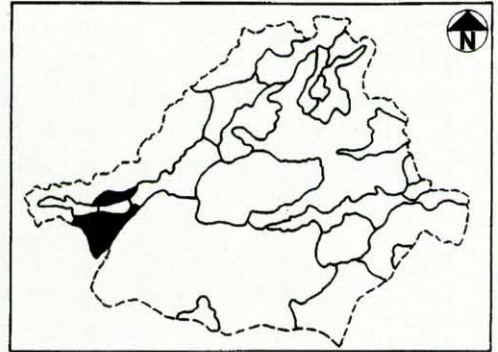


ARDVERIKIE

Area 7



Smooth lower hill slopes lead to broad valleys



Distinctive craggy summits rise above coniferous plantations



Rough grassland and heather of the lower valleys

THE SOUTHERN HILL RANGES

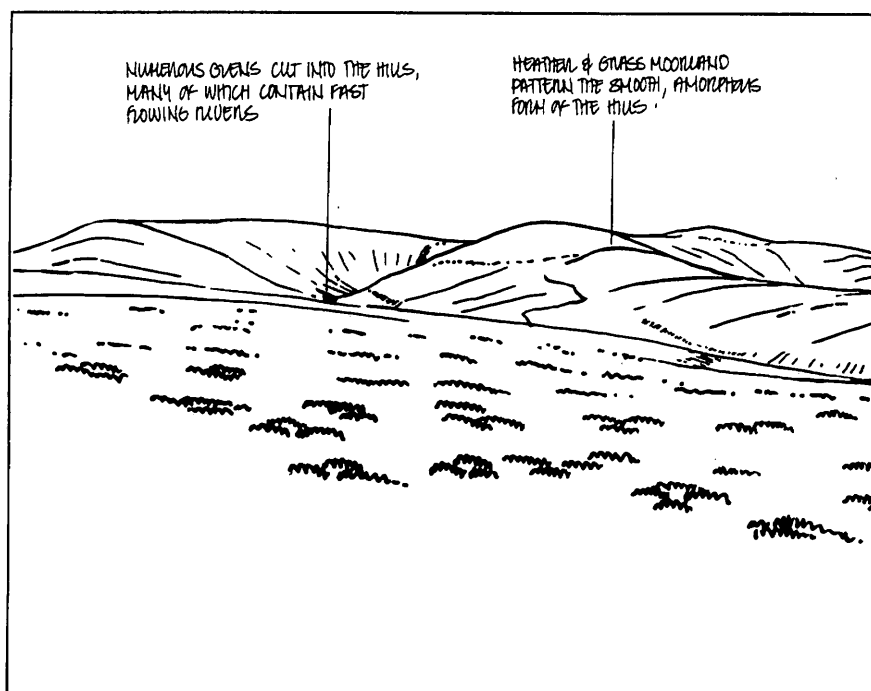
Area 8

This extensive area of remote, rolling uplands extends across much of the southern section of the study area. It comprises a vast series of smooth, rounded hills with broad ridges and mostly gentle slopes and is penetrated by many broad, open glens. The general uniformity of the summit levels is a distinctive feature of the area, as is the amorphous arrangement of the hills and glens and their smooth, rounded character. Extensive areas of scree occur on some of the steep upper slopes of the hills, particularly in the east of the area.

This gentle landform pattern has been lightly cut by numerous burns which flow off the upper slopes. These burns form frequently wide and fast flowing rivers in some of the glens. Many of the larger glens within the area have a distinctive character, such as the long straight form of Glen Tilt, the narrow gorge like Glen Feshie and the wide open strath of Glen Geldie.

The smooth nature of the landform is emphasised by the predominance of grassland, blaeberry and heather moorland which cover much of the ground. In certain areas, muirburning creates a distinctive pattern of contrasting texture and colour on the hill sides.

The area is sparsely populated, with only the occasional upland farmhouse, estate lodge or bothy within the more accessible glens and many ruined buildings within now uninhabited areas. Only at Glen Shee, with its ski related developments, and within the Drumochter Pass, where road, railway and powerlines are concentrated, is the obvious influence of man really felt. Elsewhere, the area retains a strong sense of remoteness experienced in few other areas on such a large scale.

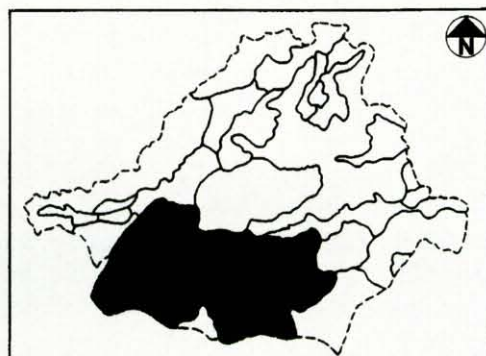


THE SOUTHERN HILL RANGES

Area 8



The rounded hills and ridges are mainly covered with heather moor



Muirburning and glacial moraine create intricate landscape patterns



The hills are cut by a number of broad open glens



Derelict farmsteads and shielings are evident in the remote glens

THE ANGUS HILLS AND GLENS

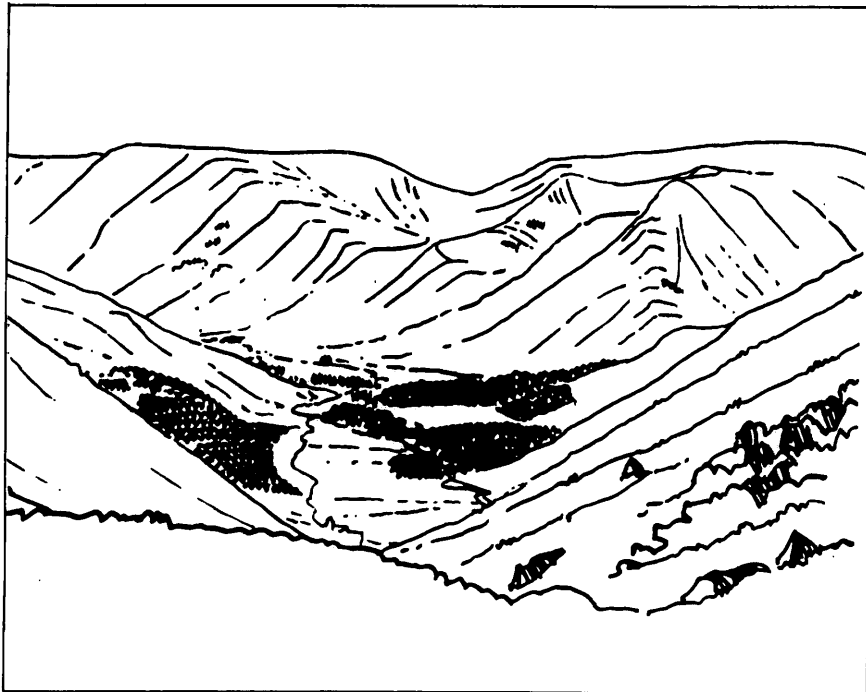
Area 9

The generally smooth, rounded Angus Hills rise from the rich rolling farmlands of the south and east and gradually increase in height to form a broad band of hills, many over 700m, towards the boundary of the Character Area at Glen Muick.

The heads of Glen Lee, Glen Clova and Glen Prosen cut into the high hills on a roughly north-west/south-east alignment. Each of these glens has a distinctive character: Glen Clova cutting a straight cleft and splitting at its head into two subsidiary glens, hemmed in by 'wall like' sheer sides of bulky hills, which are fringed with dramatic crags and scooped out rocky corries; Glen Lee having a more curving alignment with the hills containing it being more amorphous in character, yet having a striking landform at its head, where Loch Lee is contained by steep hills and sheer cliffs; Glen Prosen with a less dramatic character, being contained by sinuous hills and lacking the scale of cliffs and crags at its head.

The Angus hills are uniformly covered with heather and grass moorland, with large scale and often unsympathetically shaped coniferous plantations being located within Glens Clova and Prosen. Some improved pastures occur on the flat floor of the glens, close to the rivers, and are often enclosed by stone walls. Birch woodlands are a distinctive feature of the middle reaches of Glen Lee, being particularly extensive outwith the study area boundary.

The area is sparsely settled and the main communications, small farms and lodges are located within the glens. Many of the buildings have a unified appearance, being built by the estates which dominate land ownership in the area, for example, the dressed stone construction and green/grey painted timber details of properties in Glen Lee.

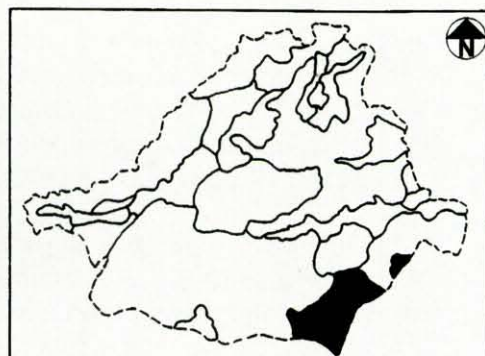


THE ANGUS HILLS AND GLENS

Area 9



The steep slopes containing Glen Clova are predominantly forested



Extensive Birch woodlands are a feature of Glen Shee



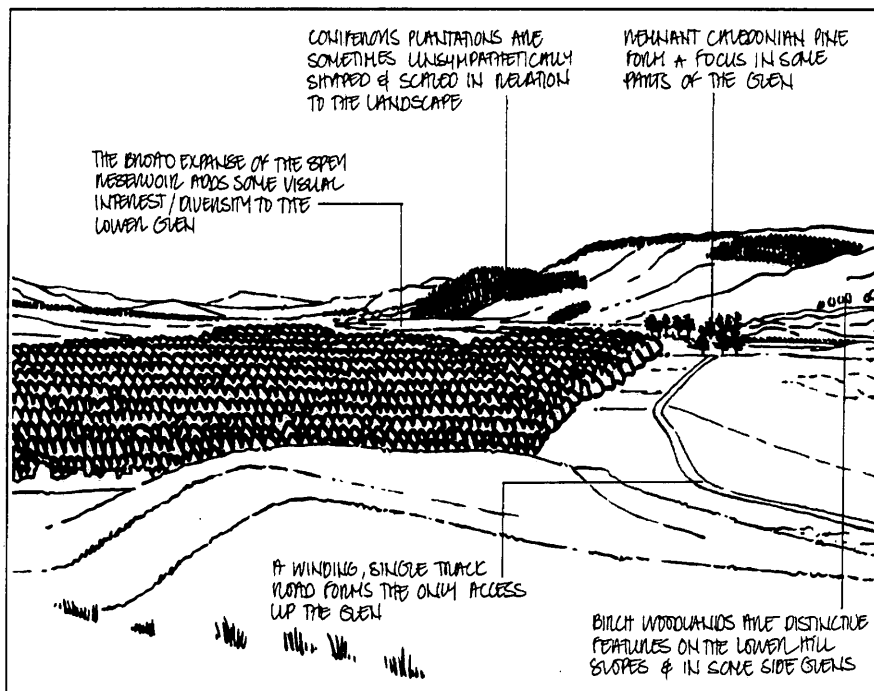
Settlement is sparse and is largely associated with the estates

THE SPEY HEADWATERS

Area 10

The headwaters of the River Spey west of Laggan, are characterised by a wide, gently undulating, U-shaped glen flanked on either side by low, occasionally craggy hills and opening slightly to form a wider basin at Garva bridge, before contracting once again. The broad floor of the glen is generally flat but in places contains glacial deposits which form low mounds, terraces and hillocks. The surrounding hillsides have smooth, gentle slopes, broken in places by steep, rocky sections.

The River Spey meanders across the floor of the glen, frequently dividing and encircling glacial mounds and small wooded islands. In its upper sections, where the valley floor narrows, the river almost fills the flat ground between the adjacent hillsides. A canalised tributary links Loch Crunachdan and the Shirra reservoir, which occupies most of the lower section of the Character Area. The geometric form of the steep engineered slopes which contain this link, strongly contrast with the irregularly shaped landform of the area and the meandering Spey.



Much of the glen has a fragmented vegetation pattern, comprising unimproved pasture and grass moorland interspersed with often visually intrusive, small-scale geometric shaped coniferous plantations which extend up the glen sides. Where hilltops and upper slopes are not forested, heather moorland predominates. There are significant birch woodlands on the north facing slopes of Meall an Sithein and within the valley of the Allt Coire a' Bhein and isolated Scots pine, often mixed with mature larch, add colour and interest within the landscape. The vegetation pattern becomes more uniform towards the west, as the mountain landscapes of the Monadhliath dominate.

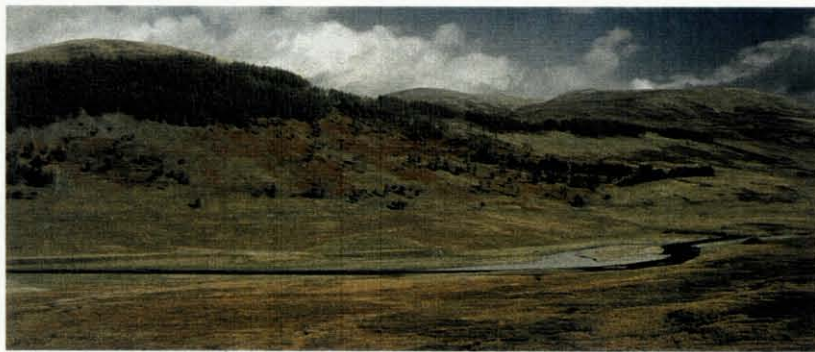
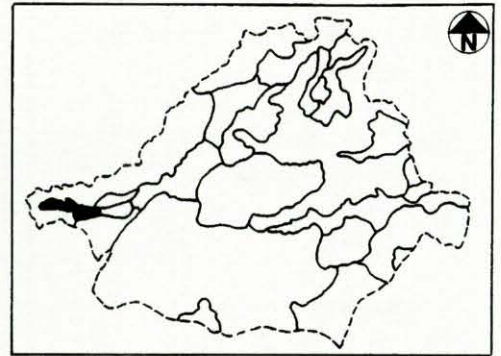
The area is sparsely populated with most settlement concentrated within the broader section of the glen, where isolated cottages, small country houses and shooting lodges are located. The country houses are often set within compact grounds, enclosed by plantings of mature exotic conifers. Within the far upper reaches of the glen, the presence of derelict farmsteads and sheilings and the degeneration of the narrow road to a rough mountain pass, provides a sense of remoteness.

THE SPEY HEADWATERS

Area 10



Broad 'U' shaped valley flanked by low hills



The River Spey meanders across the valley floor



The vegetation pattern of the area is often fragmented

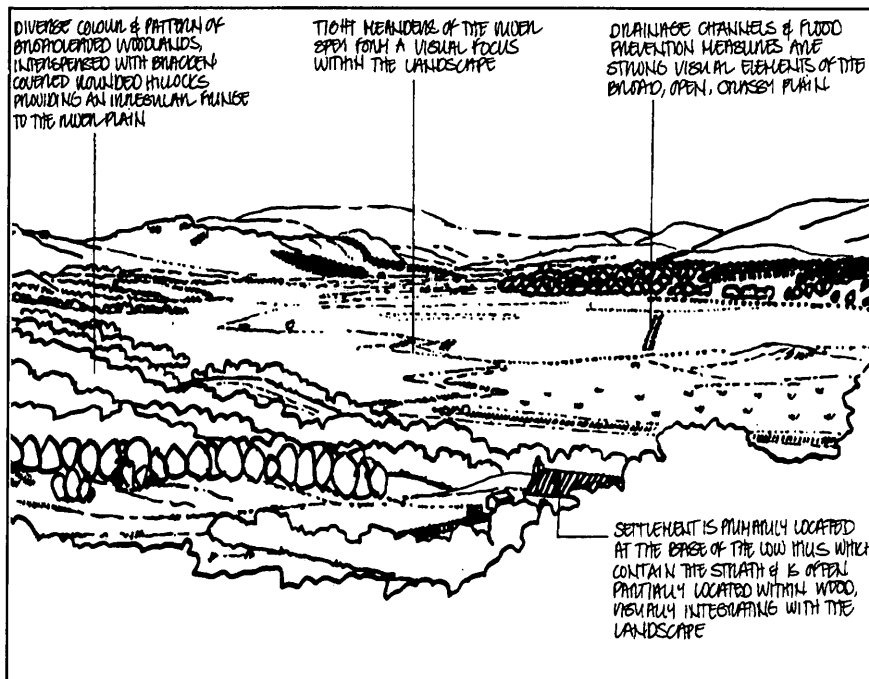


Estate lodge set amongst mixed woodland

The Spey lies in a flat bottomed, U-shaped glen which is at its broadest to the west around the village of Laggan, becoming narrower and more constricted at the Woods of Glentruim to the east. The glen is flanked on either side by low, rounded hills, many with rocky outcrops on or near their summits, these forming foothills to the high Monadhliath in the north. Occasional sheer cliff faces are also a feature of the eastern end of this Character Area. The glen floor itself is uniformly flat and open, containing the flood plain of the River Spey, which meanders between steep-sided flood protection earth bunds.

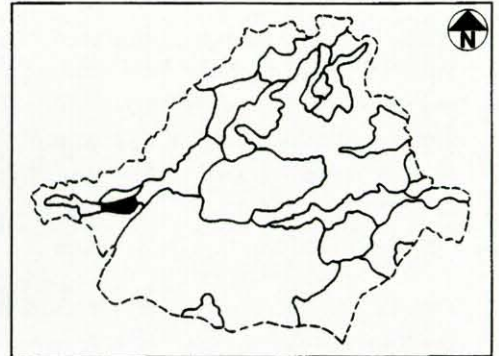
The floor of the glen has been extensively drained to provide some arable farming and improved pasture. A few small areas remain undrained, having a wetland character. Semi-improved and rough pasture, interspersed with mixed deciduous woodland and small-scale coniferous plantations, cover the lower hill slopes and create an intricate and diverse vegetation pattern, whilst heather moorland predominates on the upper slopes. Generally, coniferous plantations dominate the south facing slopes, with deciduous woodland occurring on the north facing slopes and at the mouths of tributaries flowing into the River Spey. In some cases, straight plantation margins visually conflict with the rolling landform and the less defined edges of broadleaved woodlands. The smooth open fields of the farmland on the glen floor, have a strong visual contrast with the coarser textures and the more irregular landform and vegetation patterns of the slopes containing the glen.

Settlement is largely located on the lower south facing slopes and comprises mostly traditional style farmsteads and cottages. Cluny Castle and Glen Trium House, with their small-scale policy landscapes give the area an added visual richness. An electricity transmission line crosses the southern part of the glen floor and is an intrusive element within the open agricultural landscape.



UPPER SPEY FARMLAND

Area 11



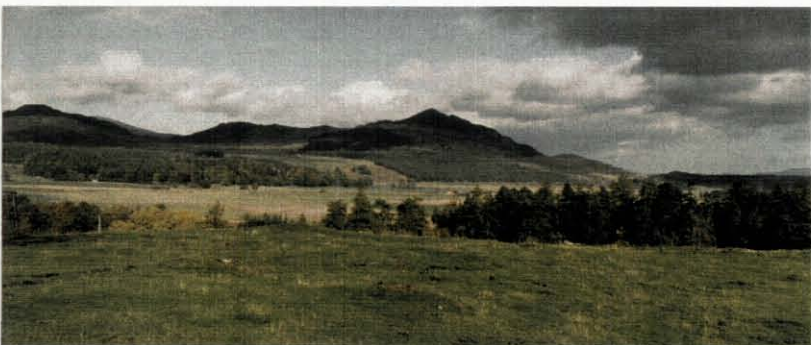
Drained valley floor of arable and pastoral fields



Semi-improved pasture, mixed deciduous woodland and bracken on lower slopes



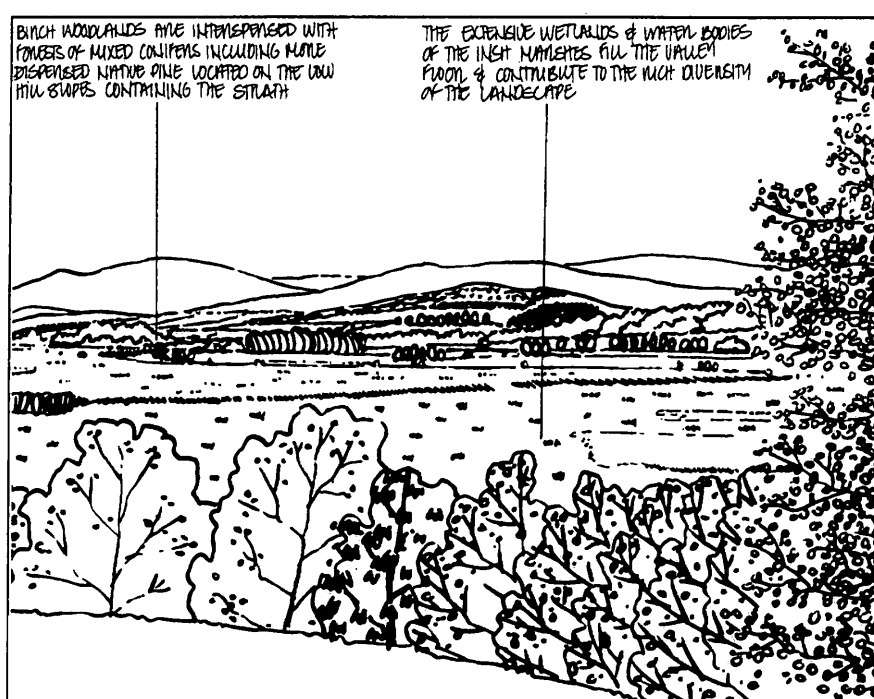
The broad valley floor narrows in the east



The transition from farmland to diverse woodlands and open moorland is a special feature of the landscape

This Character Area is situated between Newtonmore and Aviemore and comprises a broad, open strath flanked by gently undulating hills, leading to the Monadhliaths to the west and the steep slopes rising to the high plateaux of the Cairngorm massif in the north east. The flat open strath floor is a dominant feature, being particularly broad in the south and becoming narrower and more enclosed to the north, where knolls and small, rounded hills increasingly penetrate the strath floor. The flat, broad character of the floodplain allows extensive open views across the strath to the adjacent hills and mountains.

The River Spey meanders through the strath floor which contains extensive marsh and wetlands of northern fen, particularly between Kingussie and Kincaig. This area supports a rich bird life which gives an added sense of movement and sound. Scattered small water bodies predominate further northwards, culminating in the large water body and wet meadows of Loch Insh and Loch Alvie.



On the lower slopes of the Monadhliath and extending onto the flat strath floor, improved pastures are enclosed by small scale coniferous plantations; mixed and broadleaved woodlands and stands of native pinewoods extend onto the lower hilltops. Policy woodlands, surrounding stone estate houses, are also a feature on the lower hill slopes and knolls, east of Kincaig. These woodlands largely comprise coniferous species, merging with the extensive coniferous plantations and scattered native pinewoods of Inshriach Forest, which dominate the north eastern slopes containing the Strath. To the south, a pattern of improved and rough pastures lead to more open, heather moorland, covering the foothills of the Drumochter Hills. At the northern end of the strath, birch woodlands are a distinctive feature, particularly on the hummocks and knolls around Craigellachie.

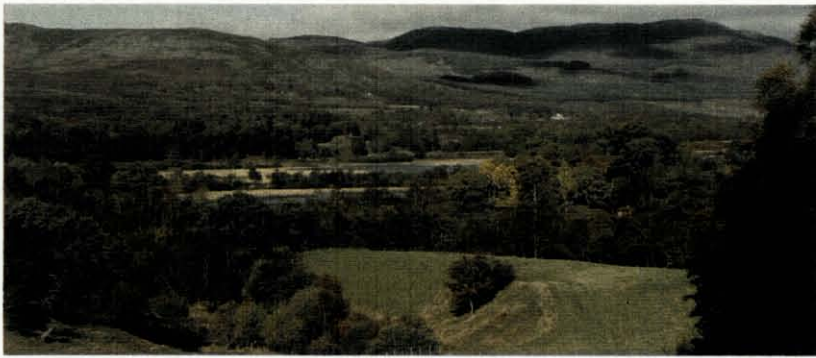
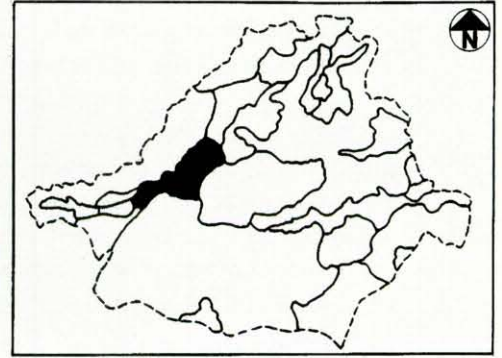
The settlements of Newtonmore, Kingussie and Kincaig dominate the landscape in the north west and have a backdrop of woodland, hills and high mountains. To the south east, the undulating landform of the lower hill slopes bordering the strath, accommodates a more scattered pattern of traditional farmsteads and cottages, partially enclosed by woodland. The area includes numerous tourist-related developments and features, many of these being well-screened within the Character Area. The ruins of Ruthven Barracks and the stone monument to the Duke of Gordon, both located on prominent knolls, form important visual foci within the area.

UPPER STRATHSPEY

Area 12



Broad meadows and wetlands prone to frequent flooding



Mixed pastures provide open space amongst broadleaved woodlands and native pine



Mixed woodlands and coniferous plantations flank the wetlands

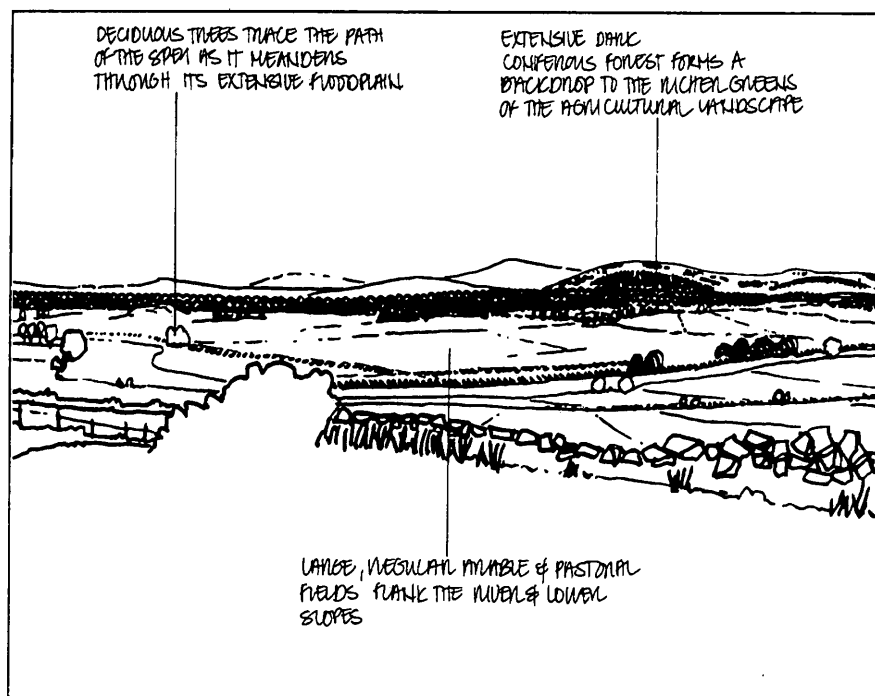


Estate houses and policy landscapes are a feature of parts of the area

The Speyside Character Area includes the long and expansive strath of the Spey and Dulnain rivers running in a north-eastern direction from Aviemore in the south-west to just west of Granttown-on-Spey.

Throughout its length, the landscape exhibits a diverse and well-balanced mix of open ground, extensive woodland, pasture, heather moorland and settlement. The strath is generally broad and open, interrupted only by a gently curving spur of predominantly wooded, low hills separating the Spey and Dulnain rivers. The strath is contained by the gently rolling open foothills of Strathdearn to the north and the dark expanse of Abernethy Forest to the south.

The broad and gently undulating strath floor is predominantly an agricultural landscape, with large regular shaped arable and pastoral fields bounded by post and wire fencing. Mixed woodlands align the Spey and many of its tributaries, forming distinctive patterns within the generally open farmland. Woodlands and small copses also form occasional field boundaries and often enclose farmsteads and cottages.



To the south of the flat strath floor, lower hill slopes display a colourful pattern of heather moorland broken up by areas of bracken, rough grazing, native pine and birch scrub, policy woodland and coniferous plantations. These plantations, often cloak entire valley sides and hilltops, forming a dark backdrop to the pale greens and yellows of the strath floor. Although these plantations generally provide a pleasing visual contrast with the agricultural land and are a distinctive component of the character of the area, geometric margins associated with some are intrusive.

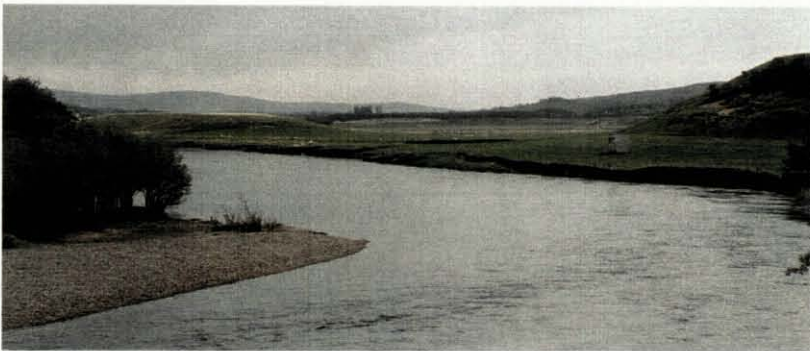
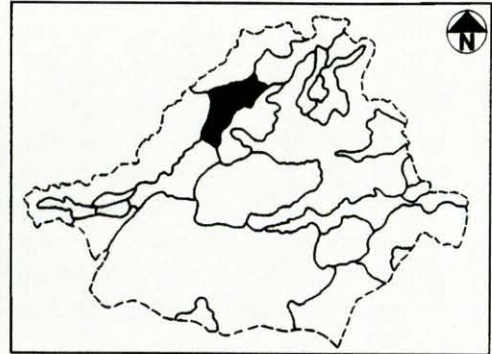
The strath is relatively well populated, the larger settlements of Aviemore, Boat of Garten and Carrbridge lying in the south-west within the gently undulating strath floor. Some recent housing development on the periphery of Aviemore and within the general rural area is intrusive, being unsympathetically designed and located. The design of some buildings within Aviemore town centre also appear incongruous and are prominent features in views from the wider landscape. In general terms however, the broadness of the valley and its well wooded character, screens and helps integrate much of the settlement within the strath, such that the area appears predominantly rural in character.

SPEYSIDE

Area 13



Expansive and open agriculture strath flanked by low forested hills



The River Spey is one of the key focal elements within the strath



The broad open character of the Dulnain strath



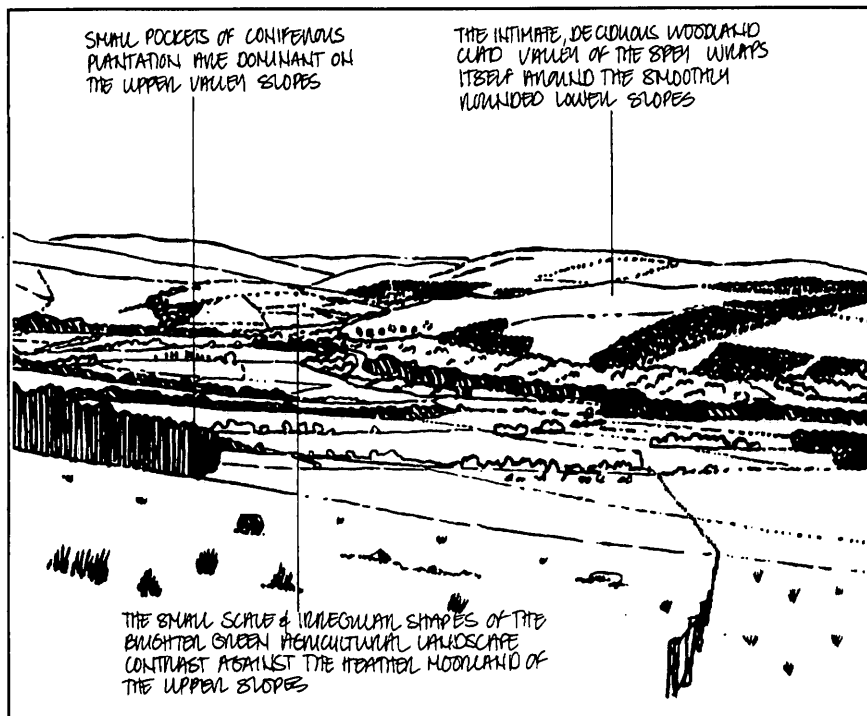
Typical settlement pattern of farmsteads set amongst mixed species tree groups

By way of contrast to the broad and open strath to the south, the lower Spey is contained within a more confined glen, as the gently rounded hills to the north extend in a spur from the north-west, and the foothills of Ben Rinnes and the Hills of Cromdale to the south constrict and form a relatively narrow, deep and winding river channel, which wraps around the rounded, wooded Hill of Phones.

The glen of the Lower Spey forms an undulating floor, merging with the hill slopes which contain it. The more enclosed nature of the landform is accentuated by the strong pattern of shelterbelts and woodlands, some of these geometrically shaped, which partially contain irregularly shaped, rolling fields of improved pasture and arable land which lie on the glen floor and lower valley sides.

The landscape has a visually diverse vegetation cover; broadleaved woodlands align the meandering Spey and extend onto the lower hill slopes to merge with more extensive coniferous plantations, generally covering the hill tops; native pine and the rich autumn colours of ornamental trees within policy woodlands provide visual accents; patterns of green and yellow pastures, some enclosed by stone dykes and shelterbelts, contrast with the coarser textures of unimproved pastures and duller hues of open grass and heather moorland on hill tops.

Settlement in the area contributes to the rich diversity of the landscape, with isolated traditional houses and farmsteads nestling on the fringes of woodland or, in some instances, set within policy woodland and parkland. The planned settlements of Grantown on Spey and Aberlour sit as if 'rooted' within the landscape, contained and partially screened by mixed woodlands, many of these comprising specimimum conifers. A number of distilleries are aligned close to the Spey and these are foci in the landscape. The distillery and associated housing of Carron is particularly distinctive in both its architecture and setting.

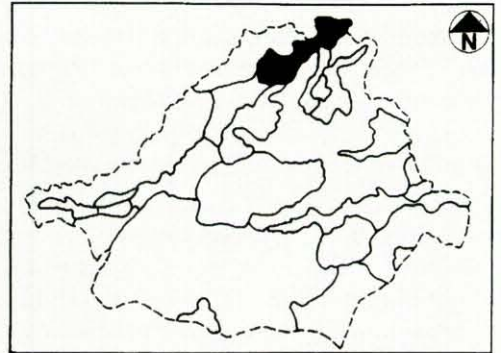


LOWER SPEY

Area 14



The valley landform of the area is patterned with woodlands, pastures and plantations



Mixed broadleaves and policy woodlands against the River Spey



Rough grazing, birch woodlands and heather cover many of the upper hill slopes



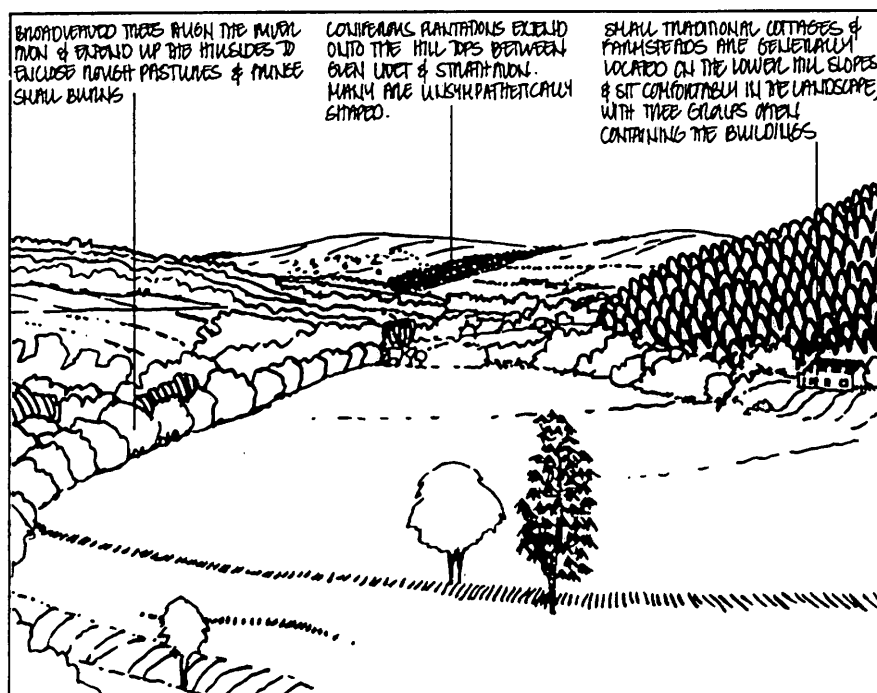
Traditional properties set amongst woodland

Strath Avon forms an enclosed, upland glen, flanked to the north and west by the smooth, gently rounded heather-clad Hills of Cromdale and separated to the south and east from Glenlivet by a range of predominantly forested lower hills. The glen has an undulating floor which merges with the lower hill slopes containing it. Small areas of flatter land occur close to the narrow, winding channel of the river and the smooth steep slopes of glacial raised river terraces, occasionally feature in these areas.

Mature deciduous and mixed woodlands are a distinctive feature of the landscape, aligning the Avon, snaking up burn sides on the hill slopes and forming small copses and woodlands. Coniferous plantations tend to dominate the eastern hill slopes and although many of these combine with the broadleaved woodlands to provide a colourful tapestry of vegetation patterns and strong enclosure pattern within the glen floor and lower hill slopes, the geometric margins and inappropriate scale of some of these plantations can be intrusive.

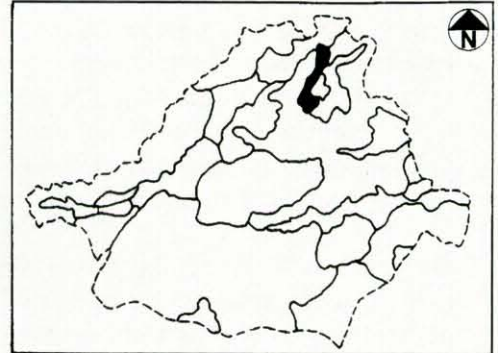
The land use of the lower valley floor is predominantly agricultural with gently undulating, irregularly shaped areas of rough grazing and arable land reflecting the underlying landform and contrasting with the open heather and grass moor of the higher slopes, both in terms of colour and texture. Well maintained stone dykes form many of the field boundaries and often enclose the scattered traditional properties and farmsteads and their associated woodland/trees which tend to be located on the upper margins of the cultivated valley floor.

Strath Avon contains a number of stone churches and graveyards, an estate at Drumin, and a small distillery. Towards the northern end of the strath, the landscape reflects the strong sense of history of the area, with archaeological landforms such as the geometric, mounded hill of Ring Cairns and the Tower at Drumin.



STRATH AVON

Area 15



Isolated farmsteads set amidst pasture and mixed woodland on lower slopes



Parts of the strath floor have an enclosed character and an intimate scale



The Ring cairn is a distinctive feature in the landscape



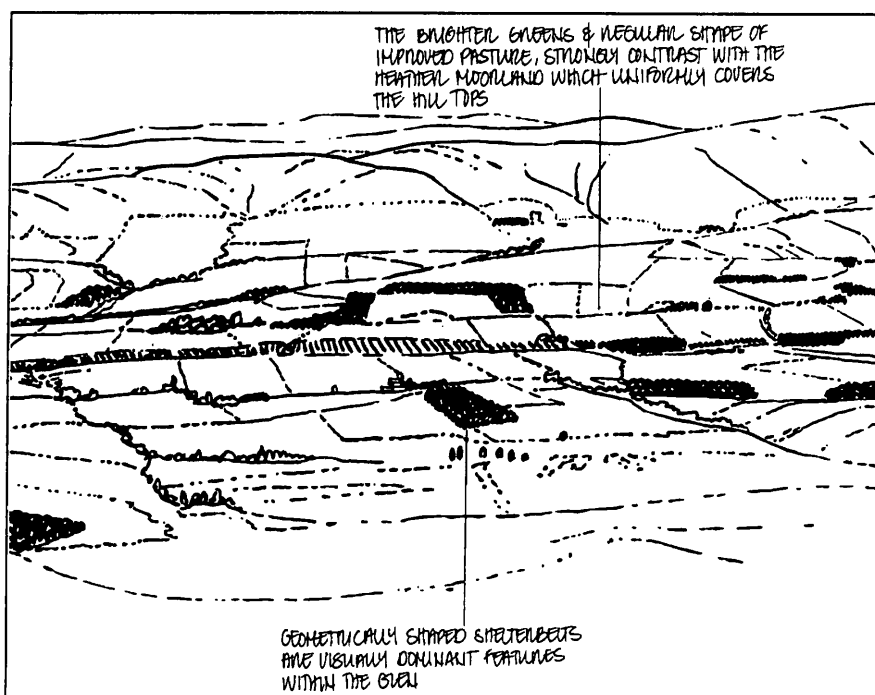
Traditional small stone church within the valley floor

This Character Area encompasses the predominantly agricultural, raised straths of Glenlivet and Glen Rinnes, which are both bounded to the east by the rolling, smooth heather clad foothills of the Ladder Hills. Both straths comprise broad, gently undulating glens with a strong sinuous character, resulting from a series of long rounded interlocking spurs which extend from the surrounding low hills into the floor of the straths. Small side valleys give these straths a greater apparent width. Ben Rinnes, with its long smooth slopes and summit tors, is a strong feature in views from the area.

On the strath floors and lower slopes, large-scale regular sized fields of predominantly improved pasture with small areas of arable farming are interspersed with small-scale geometric coniferous plantations to create a strong and simple pattern. Along the numerous burns which dissect these straths, dense pockets of mixed deciduous woodland occur, creating a more irregular and naturalistic pattern which contrasts with the geometry of the surrounding pastures and plantations. On the upper slopes, angular fields of improved pasture, often enclosed by stone dykes, abut open heather-clad hill tops and isolated coniferous plantations. The more diverse patterns of the strath floors and lower slopes contrast strongly with the simple shape and vegetation cover of the upper slopes and hill tops.

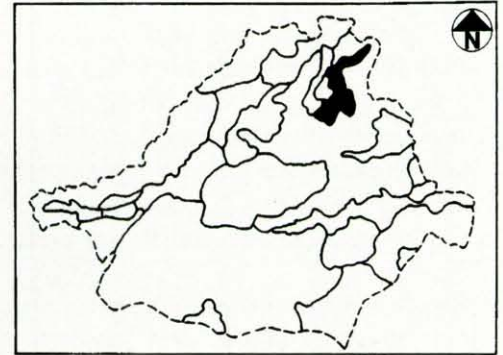
Traditional farmsteads and occasional large stone houses are scattered and well integrated throughout the foothills and strath floor, often enclosed by stands of mixed or deciduous woodland. A number of distilleries are associated with the Livet and include the incongruously designed buildings of Glenlivet and Tomnavoulin.

The planned village of Tomintoul sits on the high and exposed, ridge line lying between Conglass Water and the River Avon, amongst open moors and the low rounded hills bounding the strath. The influence of man is more noticeable in this area, with the A939 and power lines forming strong linear features in the landscape.



GLENLIVET

Area 16



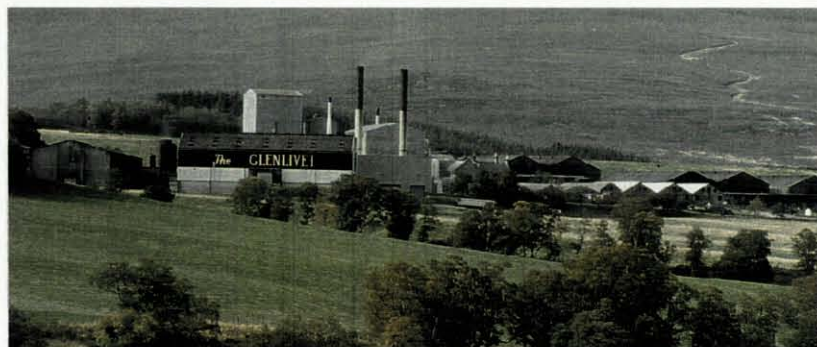
Long interlocking spurs and side valleys create a sinuous landform



The geometric patterns of pasture and coniferous plantations contrast with heather moor on the hill tops



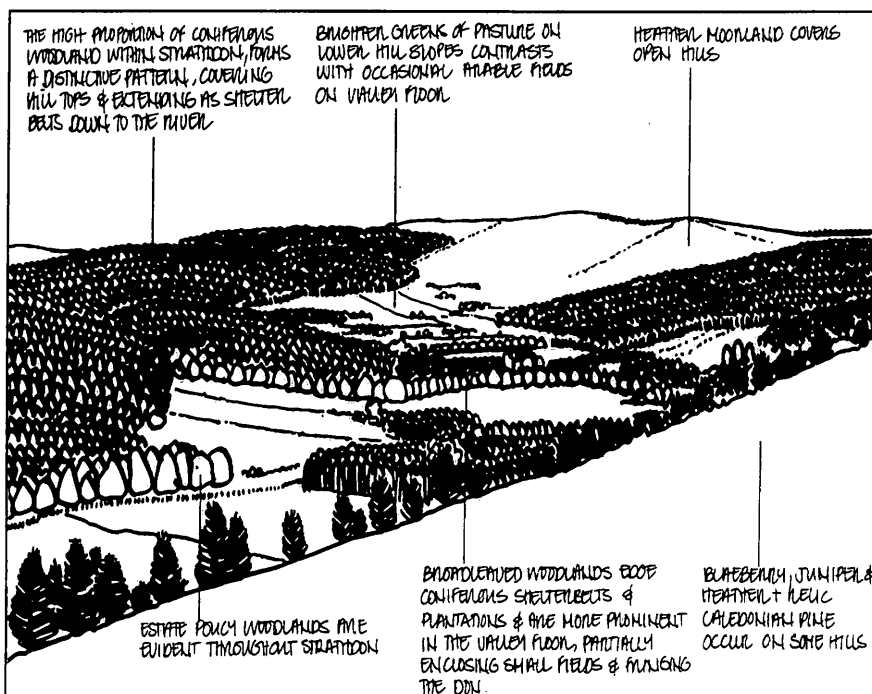
Mixed woodland along burns creates a more intimately scaled pattern



The large scale buildings and use of non-indigenous materials result in many distilleries appearing incongruous in their predominantly rural landscape setting

Strathdon forms one of the major eastern glens of the study area, comprising the narrow glen of the River Don contained on either side by a range of rolling, smooth, rounded hills. A series of broad, interlocking spurs give the glen a sinuous nature and create an intimate scale within the glen floor. A number of side glens containing tributaries of the Don give additional depth to this Character Area and provide intriguing glimpses of the Ladder Hills from the glen floor. The River Don itself has a diverse character; rocky constrictions form small waterfalls amidst wooded gorges, and broad meanders occur on the flatter open flood plain.

Strathdon has a diverse vegetation cover, the pattern of generally afforested hill tops and farmland on the lower slopes and strath floor being a distinctive feature of the Character Area. Improved pastures are dispersed amongst the arable fields within the glen floor and become the dominant land use on the lower hill slopes. The upper slopes and rounded tops of the surrounding hills are almost uniformly planted with spruce, with some larch. These plantations sometimes extend down the hills, forming a series of bold shelterbelts to the floor of the strath, where they merge with the smaller scale pattern of mixed woodlands enclosing agricultural land. Generally, this forestry is well integrated, however, in places, straight margins contrast with the rolling landform and the softer edges of broadleaved woodlands. Where the hills have not been planted, tussocky heather and blaeberry moor predominate, punctuated occasionally by dispersed stands of Scots pine and juniper, frequently having gnarled and twisted forms.



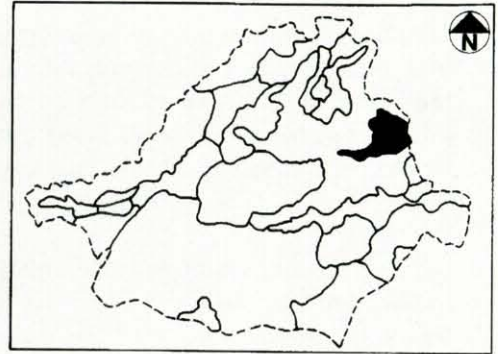
Strathdon is relatively well populated with a number of small settlements, isolated farmsteads and cottages being located within the valley floor and on the lower hill slopes. Many of the buildings are traditional in style and tend to have brightly coloured doors and window frames and large, decorative gardens. There are also several larger estate houses, set within policy plantations and with designed landscapes immediately surrounding the house. The majority of properties have a well maintained appearance and are visually integrated with their surroundings, often being located within the enclosures created by woodland. It has a diverse landscape character, comprising a visually balanced mix of woodland and open space and strong gradation of scale from the strath floor to the hill tops, emphasised and controlled by woodland planting. This, together with the landform, the land use pattern and the architectural mix of buildings, combine to create a distinctive landscape with much visual interest.

STRATHDON

Area 17



Pastures and policy woodlands enclosed by afforested hill tops



Upper Strathdon has a more open character



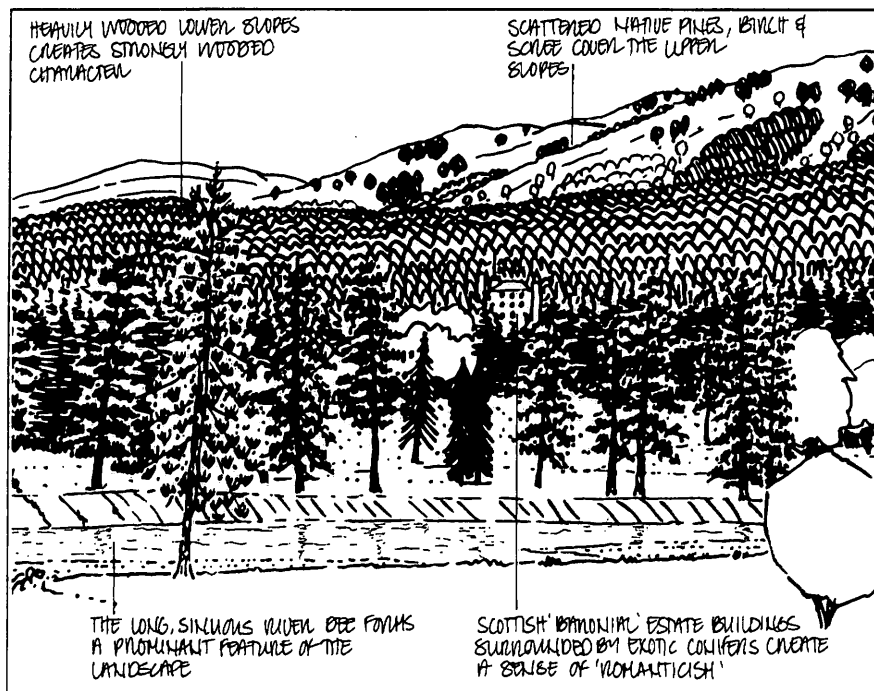
Small scale arable fields enclosed by mixed woodland within the valley floor



Estate gatehouses

This area is characterised by a long, curving strath, contained by relatively low, rounded, flat topped hills receding to mountainous peaks to the north and south. The broad River Dee is a prominent feature within the strath and its course is strongly influenced by small hills and rocky knolls which project out from the valley sides and cause the river to take a convoluted, meandering path. The hill slopes, forming the strath, are occasionally cut by tributary valleys which are in places deep and gorge-like, such as within Glen Tanar.

One of the dominant features of the Character Area, is the extensive woodland which covers the majority of the hills and often the flatter floor of the strath, and gives a unity and distinctiveness to the landscape character of the area. The pattern of woodland varies along the strath; in the east of the area, small pastures and occasional arable fields, often enclosed by stone dykes occupy the flat strath floor while woodland covers the hill slopes and sometimes extends on to the hill tops; in the central section of the strath, isolated pastures occur within extensive woodlands; to the west, this high proportion of woodland decreases and a more open character ensues as improved pasture and rough grazing dominate.



Much of this woodland comprises plantations of Scots pine, larch and spruce and forms policy woodlands associated with the large estates of Deeside. The commercial management of woodland is particularly evident in the stands of even aged pine, which occur on the strath floor yet the more managed appearance of these woodlands, provide an striking contrast with the gnarled billowing mature native pine and the ochres and russet colours of deciduous woodland, which fringe the Dee and cover many hillsides.

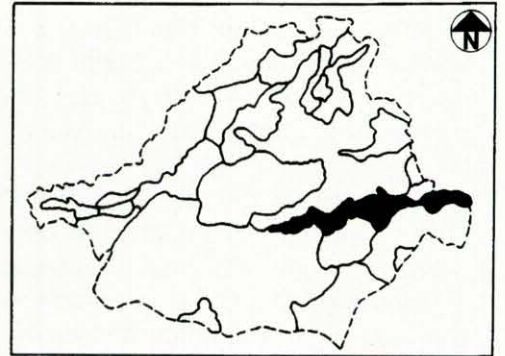
Outwith the settlements of Ballater and Braemar, the area appears relatively sparsely populated, with large country houses and castles being the main buildings. The design of many of these buildings, in the Scottish Baronial style and the planting of mature exotic conifers to form parklands around the building, reinforces the 'Romanticism' with which Deeside is associated and provide foci within the dense woodland which surrounds them. Stone walls, gate houses and the many bridges over the River Dee are also important features within the landscape.

DEESIDE ESTATES

Area 18



Small scale fields enclosed by broadleaved woodlands extend over the valley floor



The valley floor has a more open character west of Braemar

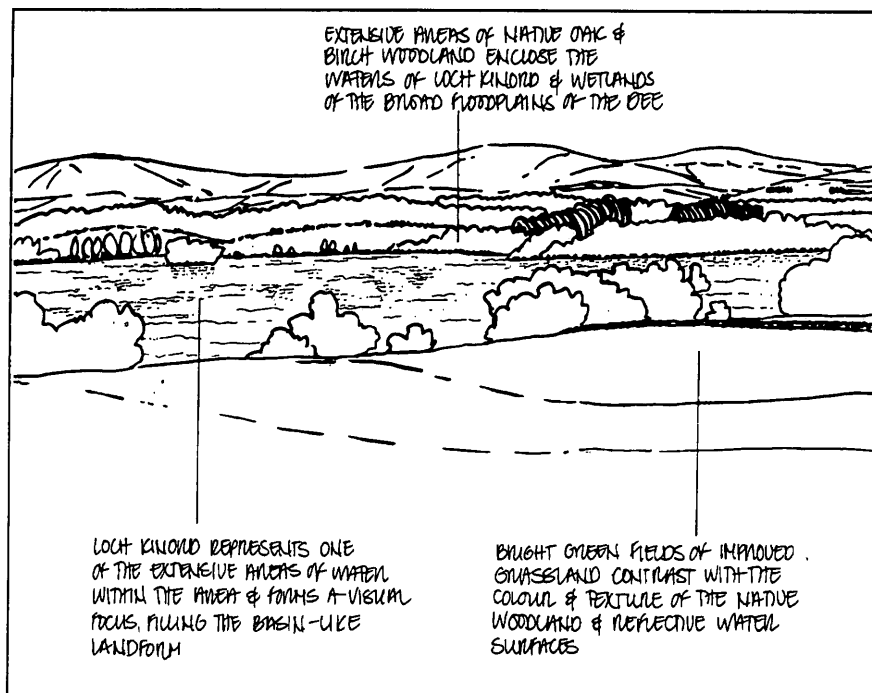


Native pinewoods flank the River Dee

The Muir of Dinnet is primarily a wetland area, comprising Lochs Kinord and Davan and the flat wetlands, moorland and heath which surround them. Although the core of the area is low lying, a number of low irregularly shaped hills punctuate the landscape and the Character Area is bounded by the long, gentle slopes of Morven and the south Deeside Hills.

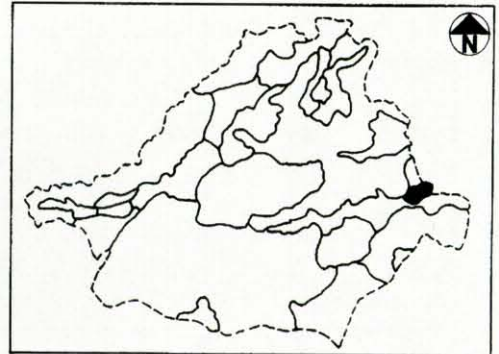
The lochs form the visual focus within the landscape, filling the basin-like landform. The indented edges of Loch Kinord and the small islands which pepper it, break down the expanse of water, creating an intimate scale which is enhanced by the presence of dense birch and oak woodland, surrounding the loch. This woodland extends to cover the small hills and lower hill slopes throughout the area. The rich golds and browns of these woodlands are speckled by the solid dark green of occasional Scots pine, and these pine increase to merge with extensive coniferous woodlands which clothe the higher slopes of Morven. To the east, lush green pastures abut the straw coloured reeds and scrub which fringe the lochs and are enclosed by thick hedgerows and woodland. Heather and bracken covers the tops of some of the small hills and areas of open ground within woodlands.

Isolated cottages and farmsteads are located on the fringes of Loch Kinord, but generally the area is sparsely populated. The vegetation and pattern of open, wooded and enclosed spaces, contribute to the diversity of this landscape, as does the contrast of light reflective water bodies enclosed by woodland. The presence of abundant wildfowl is a dramatic sight, producing an impression of a landscape dominated by nature.



MUIR OF DINNET

Area 19



Loch Kinord is located in a shallow basin surrounded by birch and oak woodland



Occasional dome shaped hills rise above the lowland pasture and wetlands



Loch margins contain many emergent species



Low forested hills and moorland enclose the loch basin

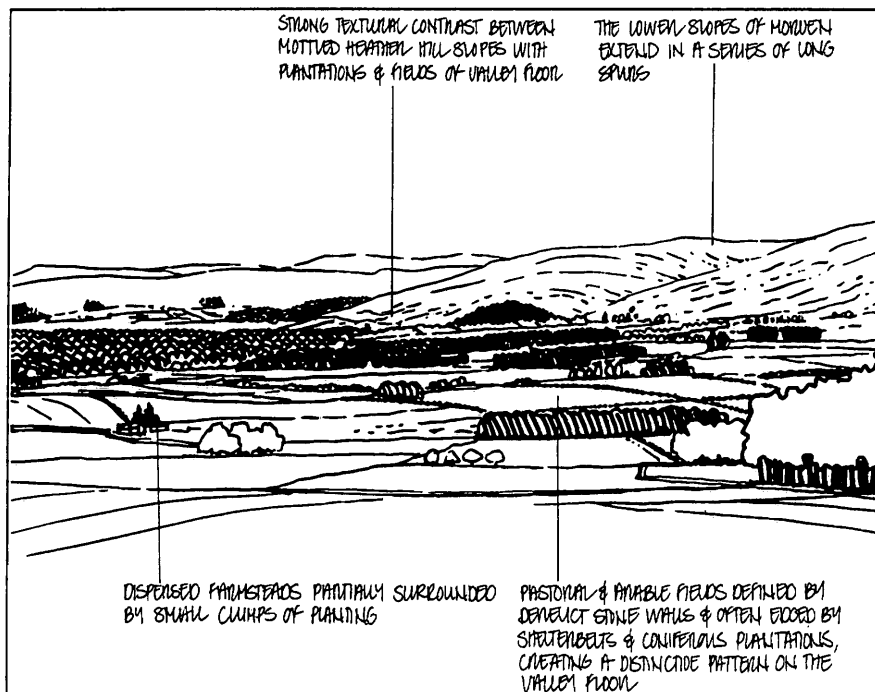
THE CROMAR FARMLANDS

Area 20

This Character Area lies on the eastern edge of, and extends outwith, the study area. It is principally an agricultural landscape, lying at the foot of the long slopes of Morven and is an area of low, rolling hills and broad, undulating valleys. The gentle undulation of the landform is occasionally interrupted by small knolls of sandy, glacial deposits, and these form focal points, often being colonised by Scots pine and birch.

Farming is predominantly pastoral and the bright green of improved pastures wraps around the rough, glacial hillocks and knolls, and sharply contrasts with the muted colours of heather and grass moorland on the hillsides and the dark coniferous plantations, which form shelterbelts and more extensive woodlands throughout the area. Fields of arable farming are divided by fences, tumbledown stone walls and occasional hedges and shelterbelts. The pattern imposed by fields is accentuated by the often geometric shape of shelterbelts and coniferous plantations. Birch woodland fringes and softens the margins of some of these plantations, and extends up the lower hill slopes of Morven, clinging to the steep banks of small burns, which cut these slopes.

Small farmsteads are dispersed throughout the landscape, and are often defined by clumps of tall conifers and broadleaves, planted around buildings. There are also a number of abandoned steadings, particularly prominent in the area at the foot of Morven, which suggest that the area was formerly more populated.

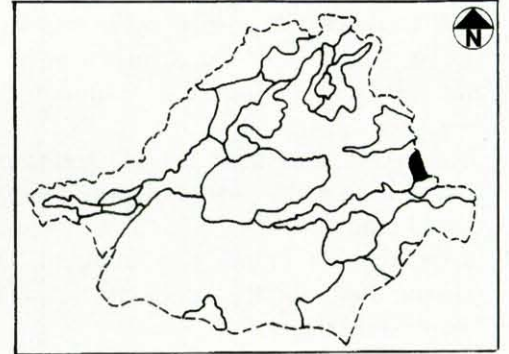


THE CROMAR FARMLANDS

Area 20



The agricultural fields covering the valley floor, have a strong geometric pattern



The farmland and plantations of the lowland area contrasts with the open hill slopes



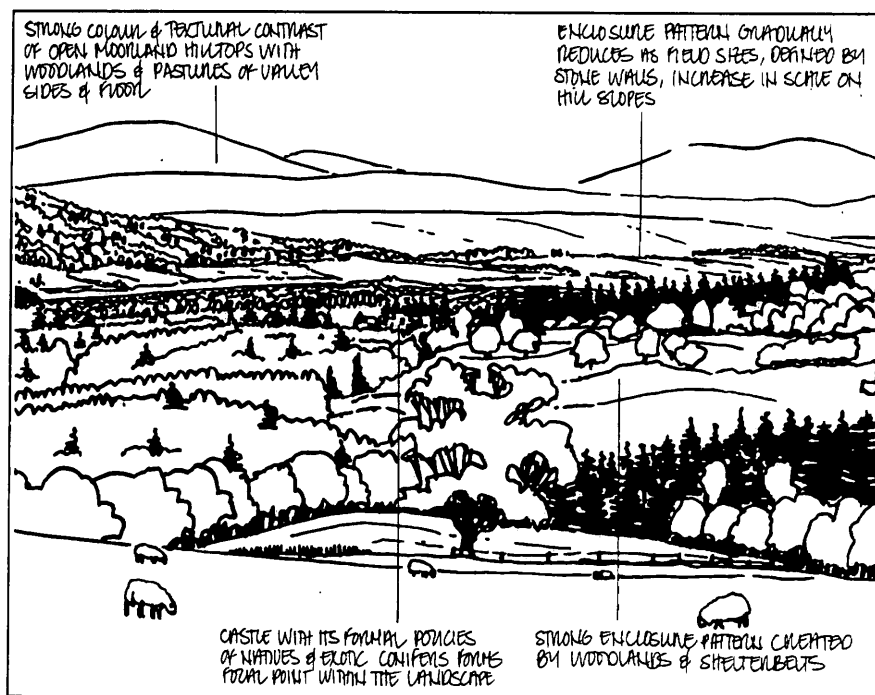
Farming becomes more extensive within the upper valleys

This Character Area comprises the strath of the River Garry between Killiekrankie and Calvine. The broad, flat floor of the strath is edged to the north by the rolling foothills of the Atholl Hills, and to the south, by steeper slopes above the River Garry.

The area is distinctive for its diverse mix of woodlands, forests and pastures, which principally form the policies of the Atholl estate and Ballentoul, within the flat land of the strath and lower foothills, to the south. These policies comprise a variety of native and exotic conifers, planted as shelterbelts, woodlands, avenues and parkland. The many individual specimen trees set amongst the paddocks surrounding estate buildings, are prominent features due to their rich autumn colours, their open form, and height.

The strong pattern of planting, enclosing the pastures and parkland close to Blair Castle, becomes fragmented higher up the hill slopes and towards Bruar. Here, stone dykes define irregularly shaped pastures, which are partially enclosed by mixed woodlands. Many of the upper hill slopes, and the deeply incised lower section of Glen Tilt, are cloaked in dense plantations of larch, fir and spruce. Above these plantations rise open hills covered with heather and rough grass and the huge bulk and high elongated ridges, of Beinn A' Ghlo and Beinn Dearg, tower above the strath, and provide a striking visual contrast between the strongly man influenced ornamental landscape below and the mountain landscapes above.

The village of Blair Atholl is the main settlement in the area and sits comfortably in the landscape, partially contained by the foothills to the south, while the white rendered, turreted Blair Castle forms a focal point in the landscape. The well wooded character of the area has allowed major communications routes and tourist related developments to be absorbed without undue adverse effect on the landscape character, however some recent built development on the fringes of Blair Atholl, intrudes on the open river plain and a quarry on the south side of the strath is also visually intrusive.

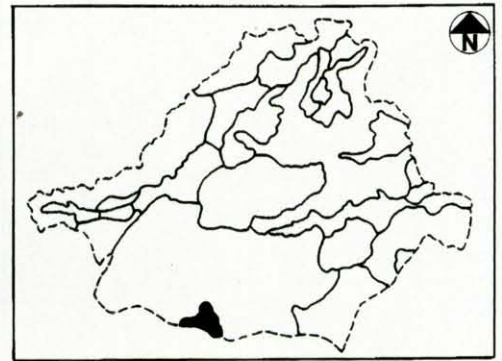


ATHOLL POLICIES

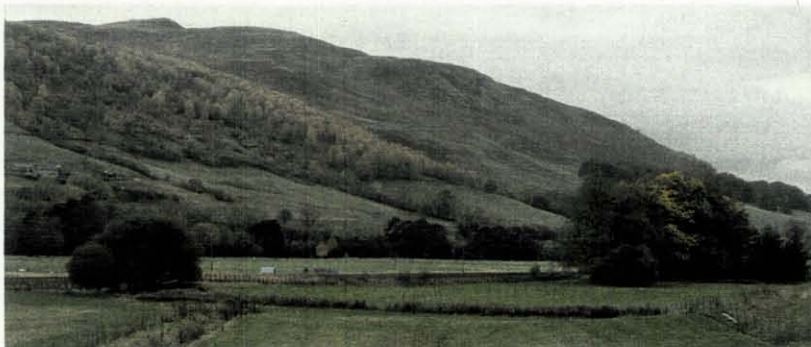
Area 21



Blair Castle set within its policies of parkland and mixed woodlands



A harmonious pattern of woodland, pasture, landform, with estate buildings forming visual foci



Native woodlands lead to heather/bracken on open upper hill slopes



Traditional buildings set within parkland

5 LANDSCAPE ATTRIBUTES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

An overview of the study area identified some key components of the landscape, which contribute to the distinctiveness of many parts of the area. These components can be seen in many of the Landscape Character Areas and when viewed together provide striking visual features, for example, the native pinewoods and forests of Inshriach, Rothiemurcus and Abernethy, and the extensive heather moorland covering the hills surrounding the Cairngorms massif.

Buildings are also important components of the landscape and this applies not only to the grand estate houses and lodges, often set within their own designed landscapes, but also the small farmsteads and cottages, which occupy the straths and occasionally some of Upland areas.

Some of the 'attributes' described and illustrated in this section, are considered later on in the report, in terms of the effect of potential landscape change on their integrity or conservation.

The Cairngorms Plateaux

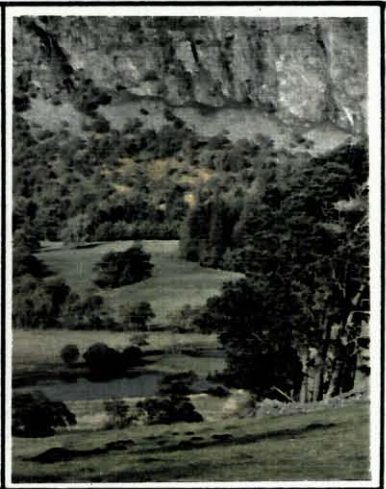
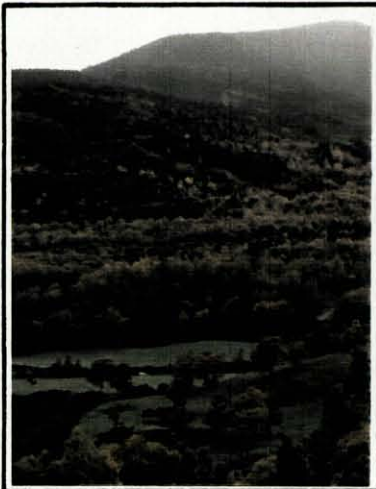
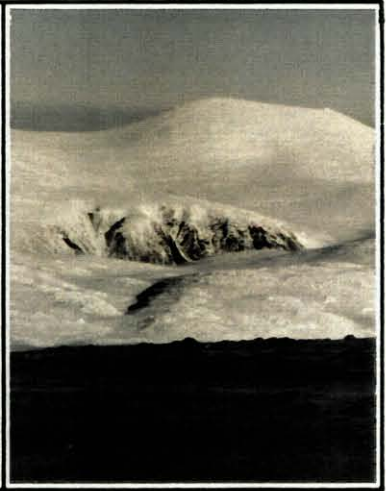
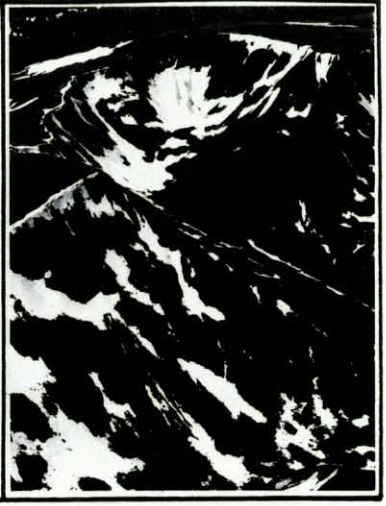
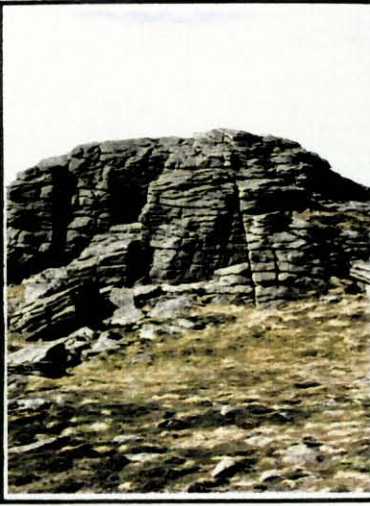
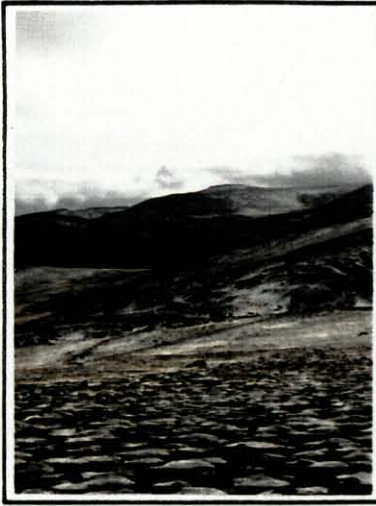
The summit plateaux of the Cairngorm mountains constitute the largest tract of high ground in Britain and form a landscape which is little modified by man. The plateaux are the nearest equivalent in Britain to the Arctic tundra, providing an important refuge for Arctic-Alpine flora and associated fauna. In visual terms, the mountains form the principal focus within the study area and although the appeal of the high plateaux are not immediately obvious from below, the huge scale of the landform and expansiveness of the horizon is revealed by exploration. On these plateaux the combination of gale, snow and mist and presence of permanent snowbeds, create a condition so dramatic it is like entering another world.

Mountains and Uplands

The mountains of the study area, which surround the central Cairngorms plateaux, form a vast, remote, tract of hills between 750-900m, comprising seemingly endless successive ridges of rounded summits, dissected by a series of penetrating wide open glens. These glens accommodate a number of passes, many of them ancient drove routes, which traverse this desolate and unpopulated area. The absence of any significant tree cover throughout the area, accentuates the smooth, gentle landform of these mountains and allows expansive views across summits. The mosaic of grass and heather moorland which covers the uplands, becomes an expanse of bright purple pink in late summer and is transformed in winter into an undulating frozen tussocky carpet, while the rounded summits of the mountain's broad ridges and shallow corries merge into a limitless snowscape.

Woodlands

The diversity and relatively high proportion of woodland within parts of the study area is a distinctive and attractive feature of the landscape. The extensive pine forests which includes the internationally important Caledonian pinewood of Speyside and Deeside, is the most striking of these woodlands, while the birch woodlands, many of these classified as being ancient in origin, which occur within areas such as the Dulnain Valley, Craigellachie and Dinnet, provide a stunning contrast with the dark pine woods, particularly in autumn. Larch and spruce and plantings of other exotic species are characteristic of areas such as Strathdon and an essential component of the designed landscapes and policies associated with the many estates of the area.



Rivers

Although the shingle edged Spey, with its distinctive broad floodplain, and the more enclosed Dee, strongly associated with the romantic image of Deeside, are the principal rivers of the study area, lesser rivers, such as the Don and Avon, have much variety throughout their course, changing from rushing mountain burns to rivers winding through small scale pastures and woodlands, and unusually, forming deep limestone gorges, as in the case of the Ailnack. Many of the mountain burns and rivers form key visual features within the glens which cut the expansive north east and southern hill ranges, for example, the boulder strewn rivers Tilt and Feshie.

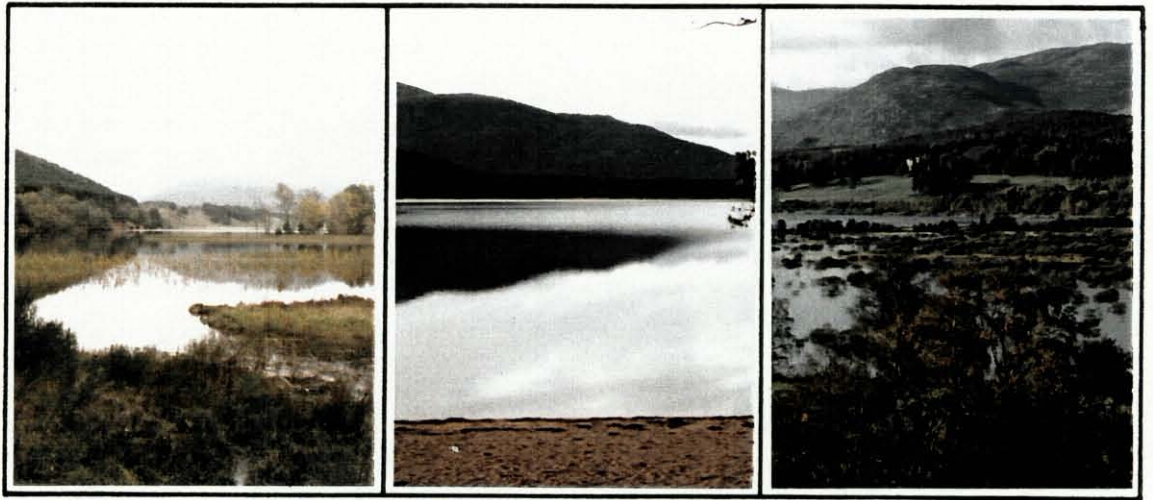
Lochs and Wetlands

Lochs feature in some parts of the study area and include the elongated trough-like lochs found high within the Cairngorms plateaux and the rounded basin lochs found in Speyside and Deeside.

Bog pool complexes occur through the forests of Rothiemurchus/Abernethy and the Dee and in parts of the Ladder Hills, while most wetlands are associated with lochs, streams and rivers of the area. The Insh Marshes within Strathspey are particularly important, being the only example of an extensive river marsh complex in the study area and having a rich flora and providing a breeding ground for several protected bird species. Wetland areas such as this, and those associated with the Muir of Dinnet on Deeside, also enrich the character of the landscape. Acidic springs and flushes occur within the moorland and high mountains, and these have a distinctive upland flora of wet heath species, liverworts and mosses.

Upland Vegetation

Of the range of upland vegetation types present in the study area, heather moorland is the most visually prominent, due to the extensiveness of cover, and presents one of the largest areas of such moorland in Scotland. It is particularly striking during the summer months when huge expanses of purple-pink colour the hills. The vegetation types of the high mountains are also a distinctive feature, particularly when viewed closely. On the high mountain plateaux, ground-hugging arctic and alpine flora colonise tiny crevices and pockets within the vast fields of boulders and gravels and produce an intricate pattern of varied plants.



Agricultural Landscapes

The man-made geometry of open fields and strong settlement patterns of the agricultural landscapes within the straths provide a striking visual contrast with the more physically dominated uplands and mountains.

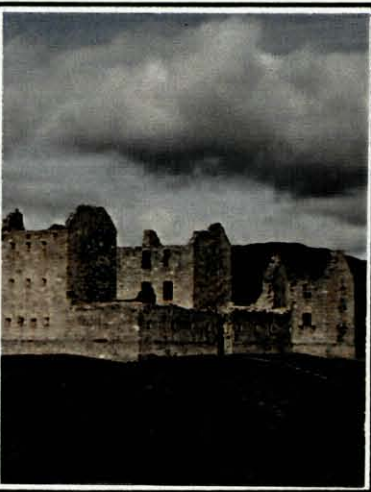
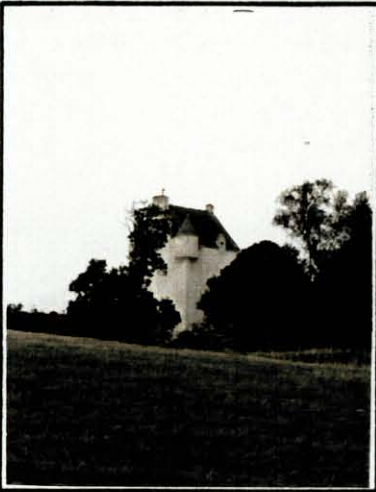
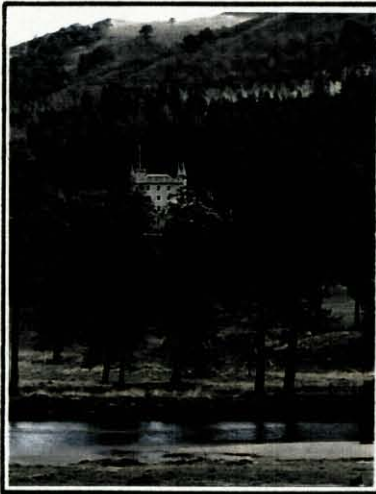
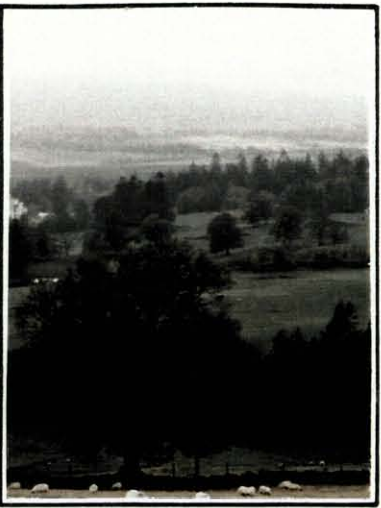
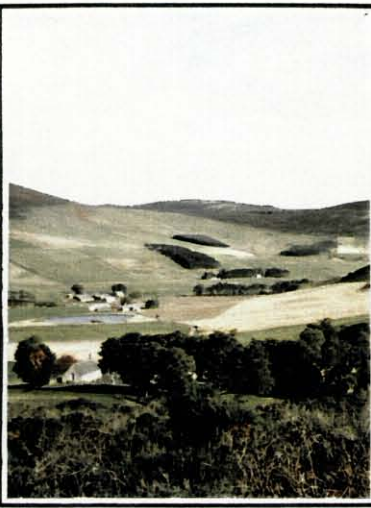
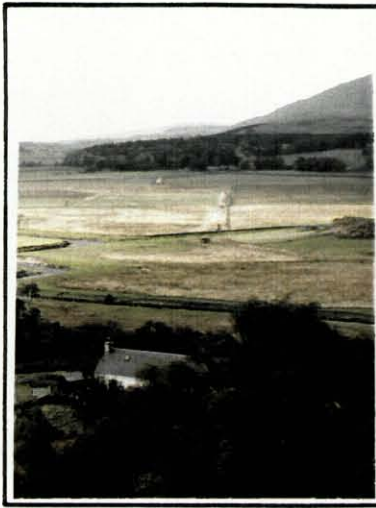
These landscapes are most distinctive within the broad strath of the Spey, where farmlands with flat, large, open fields of improved and semi-improved pasture, few field boundaries and punctuated by large farmsteads, storage sheds and barns, have an openness which contrasts with the woodlands and forests edging the flood plain. Agricultural practices become more traditional in the smaller straths and on the lower foothills of the hill and mountain ranges. Here, smaller, irregular fields of semi-improved and unimproved pasture nestle on the lower slopes bounded by stone dykes and woodlands with traditional farmsteads characteristically sitting on the margins between the lower valley agricultural land and the woodlands and moorlands of the upper slopes.

Policy Landscapes

The greatest concentration of estate policies lie in Strathdon, Deeside and at Blair Atholl and range from the extensive and outstanding 18th and 19th century scenic landscapes of Blair Castle, Balmoral, Invercauld and Glen Tanar in Deeside, to the smaller, no less scenically prominent estates of Tillyprovie, Candacraig House and Kildrummy Castle in Strathdon. All of these landscapes make a significant contribution to the landscape character of these straths providing a diverse pattern of woodland and parkland, including deciduous, exotic and coniferous woodlands. The policy landscapes of the study area vary in their character. For example, the larch, birch and Scots pine woodland and parkland of Invercauld and Glen Tanar make a major contribution to the naturally beautiful and romantic surroundings of Deeside, while the planting of more diverse exotic species at Blair Atholl has resulted in a colourful and more obviously designed landscape.

Archaeological Features

A number of historic built features remain visible in the landscape today forming important features and landmarks. The majority of these date from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries and include visually prominent ruins, such as Ruthven Barracks in Strathspey and the castles on Loch-an-Eilein and Lochindorb. In the uplands, there are clear signs of past human settlement from the medieval period to the 18th/19th century, including, for example, the ruined sheilings and townships in Glens Lui and Clunie.



Estate Architecture

As the majority of the land within the study area is estate owned, the architecture and style of many of the buildings, particularly within the major straths, such as Deeside, Speyside and Strath Don, is greatly influenced by the style of architecture of the mid to late 18th and 19th centuries, when the vast majority of houses were improved, as the popularity of sporting estates grew in the area.

The estates include not only the main house, but estate cottages, farms, and gatehouses. For example, the Balmoral and Invercauld Estates in Deeside are both fine examples of Scottish Baronial houses built in the mid to late 18th century with numerous gatehouses, cottages, hamlets and farmsteads in a complementary style, influencing the architectural character of the area.

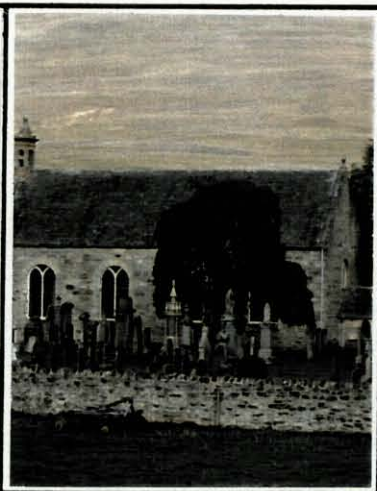
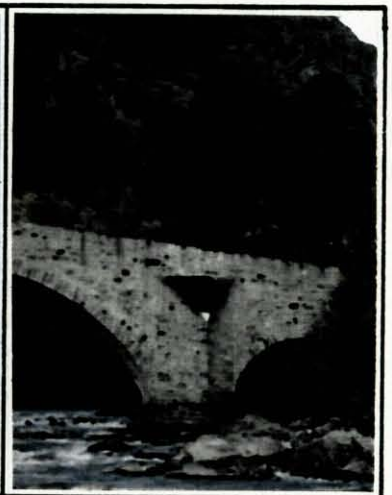
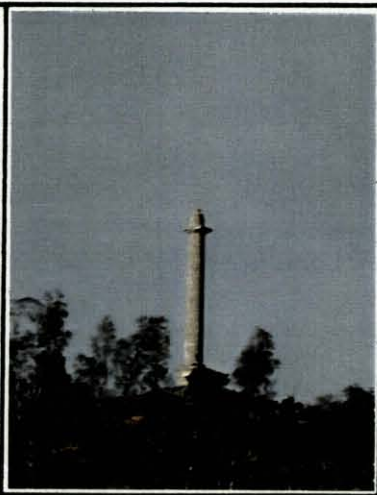
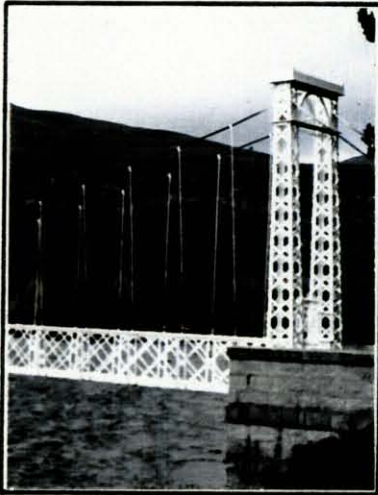
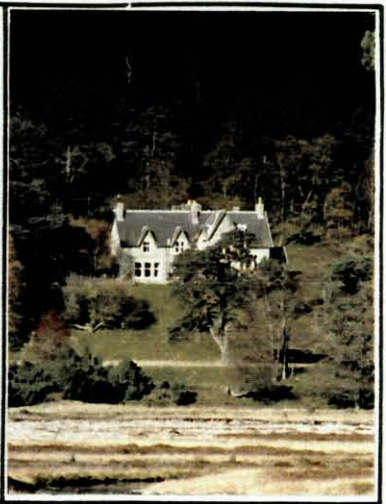
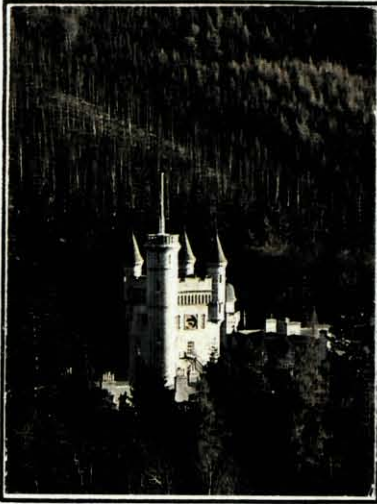
Bridges and Monuments

The legacy of estate architecture within the study area extends to the numerous bridges, follies and monuments erected as intrinsic visual and architectural elements within the landscape. The influence of the military presence within the area, particularly in Jacobean times, has resulted in a legacy of roads, bridges and forts being evident in the landscape.

This includes visually prominent features within the Cairngorms landscape such as the follies and cairns of Balmoral; the Duke of Gordon's Monument in Strathspey; Brunel's stone bridge across the Dee (1857); the old Invercauld Bridge and the numerous monuments and follies within the Blair Atholl Estate including the Obelisk (1742) and the Gothic Folly or 'Whim' which forms a key focal feature on the hill to the north of the Castle.

Vernacular Buildings

Many of the vernacular buildings of the area are influenced by the estates and reflect the wealth of farming in different areas. Although the majority of smaller cottages and houses are traditional one and a half storey, there is often a distinct difference in the materials used in local areas. Within Deeside, the past prosperity of the estates is reflected in the use of faced stone and slate, whilst in the more remote valleys many of the houses are of rough stone and with some roofs and porches in corrugated iron. White rendered cottages and small farmsteads occur in the Upper Spey area, while more substantial stone houses are located within the policy landscapes of the middle section of the Spey. A particular feature of Strathspey and the Rothiemurchus/Abernethy area and parts of Deeside, is the use of rough tree trunks to form rustic porch supports. Colour can also be a distinctive feature of traditional buildings, with bright blues, ox blood reds and blue/greys being commonly used for details such as doors, eaves and window frames.



6 CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The areas encompassed in this study have, in relatively recent centuries, often displayed rather distinctive traditions, which can be coarsely characterised as firstly those of the Spey and its catchment; secondly of the great rivers (the Dee and the Don) of the North-East which debouch at Aberdeen; thirdly, of the headwaters of the southward-trending river valleys (such as the Tummel and South Esk) and lastly the Grampian massif centered on the Cairngorms themselves.

The name Cairngorms is, in the present day, applied to a large area of mountainous country which is somewhat vaguely defined, as it has been since the term came into common use some two hundred years ago. The original name for the central Cairngorms massif was in Gaelic, *Monadh Ruadh*, ie, red mountains, a name given to these mountains by the people of Badenoch, in contrast to the *Monadh Liath* (grey mountains), lying nearer to the Great Glen of Inverness-shire.

The remoteness and unchanging character of the Cairngorms in terms of both their landscape and their culture has impressed many visitors over the centuries. One of the greatest experts on the Cairngorms, Seton Gordon (e.g. 1928), believed the principal qualities of the Cairngorms to be their emptiness, the extensive views from them, and their rapidly changing and extreme weather conditions. These factors are all recurrent themes in depictions, both literary and artistic, of the area, and also pervade accounts of the characteristics of the populations inhabiting these areas. More recently, the entry for the Cairngorms in *Collins Encyclopaedia of Scotland* (1994, 121 - 22) notes "Their extent (c. 300 sq miles) and elevation, ... flora and fauna ... and recreational facilities ... are distinctly more exciting than their profiles. Even the four summits over 4000ft are literary nonentities compared with Scott's Trossachs, Ben Lawers or Schiehallion." As regards the weather, Andrews (1989) in remarking how the early phase of cultural tourism to Scotland in the eighteenth century rarely extended beyond Perthshire, noted that mists and rain were already a factor discouraging penetration through Drummochter, or over the other upland passes into the area here considered.

Greater remoteness from southern centres of literary and artistic elites, external perceptions of the area more especially after the Second Jacobite Rising in the mid-18th century, and the relatively late (and incomplete) penetration of the area by both roads and subsequently the railways, may all be considered to have contributed to the somewhat retarded upswing in interest in the landscapes of the areas. To these factors must be added matters of taste in terms of landscape appreciation. Compared with the Trossachs, for example, much of the landscape in the study area under consideration does not seem to have corresponded to eighteenth century perceptions of "the picturesque", fuller appreciation of these landscapes being developed in the nineteenth century and having continued until the present day.

Amongst nineteenth century figures, the celebrity of the area, particularly the eastern sector, owes much to Prince Albert and Queen Victoria's discovery of the Central Highlands. Although this royal endorsement, and the influence and artistic patronage which ensued from it, were important for the subsequent popularity of parts of the Cairngorms, the prospect of impressive sights had already drawn visitors to the area considerably beforehand and instances of accounts of early tourists will be given below.

If travel and the killing of game are two major aspects in the discovery of this area, another major influence - attributable to the presence of the Cairngorm massif itself - has been the development of mountaineering. Here, perceptions of the landscape as offering

a physical challenge to mankind produce a distinct, but not wholly different, emphasis.

6.2 EARLY TRAVELLERS' ACCOUNTS WITHIN THE STUDY AREA

The appreciation of the qualities of some of the landscapes of the Cairngorms is relatively recent. Thus, the improving Midlothian landowner and antiquary, Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, wrote in 1739 that in travelling "from Dalwhinny about 10 or 12 miles we came to Riven {Ruthven} in Badenoch... I could see nothing but a barbarous tract of mountain on both hands and scarce a stalk of grass to be seen" (quoted by Smout, 1983, 99).

Two centuries later, Nan Shepherd, author and poet, writing in the 1940s (published 1977) about the Cairngorms plateau and the clear waters it gathers and disperses, wrote:

"water so dear cannot be imagined, but must be seen. One must go back, and back again, to look at it, for in the interval memory refuses to re-create its brightness. This is one of the reasons why the high plateau where these streams begin, the streams themselves, their cataracts and rocky beds, the corries, the whole wild enchantment, like a work of art is perpetually new when one returns to it. The mind cannot carry away all that it has to give, nor does it always believe possible what it has carried away".

These two contrasting views encapsulate altering perspectives of landscapes through time. In Chapter 2 we detailed some of the landscape changes - notably those of settlement and population, and of deforestation and subsequent reafforestation - that have complemented varying attitudes to the austere beauty (the "Sublime" of writers from the mid-18th century onwards) or of "desolation" and "wilderness" as substantial parts of the area have also been considered.

One of the earliest accounts of a visit to the Cairngorms comes from the pen of John Taylor (born 1580). Wyness has described him as "Deeside's first 'tourist' to write an account of his visit to the valley". Taylor was invited to Deeside as a guest of the Earl of Mar, and later published an account of his experiences, under the title, *The Pennyless Pilgrimage* (1630). Taylor stayed at Doldench, on the site of present day Braemar Castle, arriving after "extreme travell, ascending and descending" in the "Brea of Marr". He was most impressed with the height and steepness of the surrounding hills, observing "mount Benawe, with a furr'd mist upon his snowie head instead of a nightcap, for you must understand, that the oldest man alive never saw but the snow was on the top of divers of those hills, both in summer, as well as in winter." (quoted by Hume Brown, 1891, 120). He also noted the abundance and quality of the pines in Mar, and also visited Speyside (Alexander, 1938).

Thomas Pennant passed north through the Glen Tilt-Glen Feshie route to Braemar on his way to Aberdeen in 1769. In his *Tour in Scotland* (1771) he comments, of the pine forests of Braemar (reached after crossing what he described as "dreary wastes"):

"Some of the trees are of a vast size: I measured some that were ten, eleven and even twelve feet in circumference... the prospect above these forests is extraordinary, a distant view of hills over surface of verdant pyramids of pines" (Pennant, 1770, 130).

Other characteristic observations of the highland landscapes include the "horrible grandeur" of the Garry at Killiecrankie, and the size and number of the stags on the Duke of Atholl's estate, where they occur in "the forests, or rather chases (for they are quite naked), which are very extensive...". Pennant's comments on the quality of the woodland, are already peppered with commercial references, but he notes too the range

of wildlife present and comments on the impoverished lifestyles of the more lowly inhabitants, and the ugliness of their womenfolk. Such observations become part of the stock-in-trade of subsequent commentators. On the whole, the population and its humble architecture did not lend itself to incorporation into the "picturesque", as sought by succeeding generations of aesthetically-informed visitors.

In the late 18th century, despite Government attempts to integrate the Highlands with the rest of Great Britain, much of the mystique surrounding the area remained in the minds of educated Southerners. The construction of roads and the compilation of maps, gave travellers more confidence in planning journeys. Military officers stationed in the Highlands in the aftermath of Culloden, spread curiosity about the Highlands and their 'primitive' people amongst the southern upper classes, who also came into contact with the major Highland landowners as they took up residence in London.

Many travellers were appalled by the barrenness of the Highland landscape, and not only English ones. Burns, visiting the Falls of Bruar on the Duke of Atholl's estate in 1787, appealed to the Duke to enhance the beauty spot by planting trees, a wish that was soon to be fulfilled. The large number of published accounts of tours and Government investigations into the Highlands raised the profile of the area among the then rather select circle of potential visitors. The first guide specifically devoted to the mountains themselves appears to be *Scenery of the Grampian Mountains* written George Fennell Robson (1814), republished with coloured plates five years later. This was not matched by a true mountaineering guide to the area for half a century (Alexander, 1938).

6.3 LITERARY INFLUENCES

Other factors contributed to the rise of external interest in the central Highlands. The popularity of the poems of Ossian, collected and embellished, if not wholly composed, and published by James Macpherson of Ruthven (Badenoch) from 1760, led many to tour the locations traditionally associated with the legendary bard, in order to have a fuller appreciation of the settings of his work. Ossianic poetry evoked acts of Highland chivalry set against a background of mountainous scenery which, if "ridiculously melodramatic to modern ears" (Smout, 1983, 102) was far from so at the time of their publication. Acclaimed by Professor Blair of Edinburgh, the Ossianic cycle prompted cultured tourists to venture further north to identify the literary context and associations of that work and simultaneously to view landscape, not then conventionally beautiful, but rather "sublime" ... "that would fill them with the *frisson* of inspiring terror" (Smout, 1983, 102), but from which they were relatively cocooned.

Alongside the sublime, the late eighteenth century saw the development of the multiple concepts of the "picturesque", most associated with William Gilpin, whose observations on the Highlands (though he did not come north of Perthshire), were published in 1792 - and just at the time when continental travel was becoming more difficult as a result of the French Revolution and the subsequent development of Napoleon's continental bloc. These added another dimension to the search for scenery and, although Gilpin was less than wholehearted in his endorsement of the Highland landscapes, feeling they did not often match his criteria, he offered a corrective to Johnson's vision.

Henceforth, the sublime, the picturesque, and the beautiful, all required to be considered by the discerning tourist, only in due course for the distinctions amongst them to be lost. By the late eighteenth century an agenda for Highland visits had been clearly set. Robert Burns described his tour of 1787 in a letter thus: "I have done nothing else but visited cascades, prospects, cascades and Druidical temples, learned Highland tunes and pickt up Scotch songs, Jacobite anecdotes etc, these two months" (quoted by Andrews, 1989, 206).

However, other early 19th century commentators, notably Sir Walter Scott's friend, John MacCulloch, whose four volume *The Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland* was based on his own travels and published in 1824, displayed a readier appreciation of the realities of Highland landscape as perceived by the inhabitants of the area, as opposed to the aristocracy, wealthy members of the bourgeoisie, or inquisitive intellectuals:

"If a Highlander would show you a fine prospect, he does not lead you to the torrent and the romantic rocky glen, to the storm-beaten precipice or the cloud-capt mountain. It is to the strath covered with hamlets and cultivation, or to the extended tract of fertile lowlands, where the luxuriance of vegetation and wood depends on the exertions of human labour" (quoted by Withers, 1992, 147).

The development of the fascination of outsiders with Highland scenery and landscape has coincided with the decline, through clearance and other economic processes, of much of the agrarian component of these landscapes.

Romanticism was a strong element in the makeup of early 19th century literature and art, and the Highlands offered landscapes which engendered emotion and imagination and brought the visitor close to nature. The novels of Sir Walter Scott were important in eulogising the Clan society which by the 1820s was but a distant memory. Highland traditions, in a sanitised and peaceful form, began to reappear in the Cairngorm area, largely as a result of the influences mentioned above.

6.4 HIGHLAND SOCIETIES AND GATHERINGS

The Highland Societies, such as the Lonach Highland and Friendly Society (1823), the Braemar Royal Highland Society (1832; originally set up after the Napoleonic Wars in a different guise to help those rendered destitute by that conflict), initiated the revival of Highland Games which had originally been clan based, and encouraged the perpetuation of Highland dress and music and the Gaelic language. These games featured the march of the clansmen, the groupings being associated with the surrounding estates, e.g. Farquharson, Duff and Balmoral men at Braemar. Such events not only underpinned the new social and economic orders of these areas, but helped manufacture new traditions against the backdrop of their respective landscapes. The Duke of Atholl thus retained his own ceremonial private army, based at Blair Castle. The strong Jacobite associations of the area, particularly Mar, were recalled by 19th century authors.

6.5 ROYAL ENDORSEMENT: LANDSCAPE & HUNTING

The young Queen Victoria was most impressed with Scott's historical novels, and after several visits to Scotland, the Prince Consort leased Balmoral Castle, largely because the scenery was strongly reminiscent of his native Thuringia, and the weather was noted to be drier than further west. The Royal family enjoyed not only deer stalking and fishing, but also tours through the mountains on horseback. Queen Victoria later published her diaries from her Scottish sojourns (*Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands*). Her description of Balmoral, on arriving for the first time, is as follows:

"The scenery is wild, and yet not desolate; and everything looks much more prosperous and cultivated than at Laggan ... we walked beside the Dee, a beautiful, rapid stream, which is close behind the house. The view of the hills towards Invercauld is exceedingly fine." (p. 66).

Within half a century, popular guide-books to the area (e.g. Eyre-Todd, 1895, 184) would

have titles such as "In the Queen's Country", for their accounts of this area. The Royal enthusiasm for Deeside encouraged a more widespread interest in Highland sport (ie shooting, stalking, and fishing) than ever before.

The artist Sir Edwin Landseer was the most prominent Victorian artist associated with the area, and his importance led to plagiarism in others in terms of subject and treatment (Irwin, 1985, 27), some more calculated perhaps than others, given the market for prints which rapidly became established (Smith, 1990, 89). Some of his most successful work, depicting stalkers in action, was painted in Glen Feshie, where Landseer resided in a primitive hut over several summers. He is well known for his portraits of the Royal Family and their rugged Highland retainers, set in the landscapes of the area.

Along with Landseer, Horatio McCulloch (1805 - 67) was amongst the most influential artists in the creation of the Victorian image of Highland landscapes, and crossed the country widely, carrying out his painting on the spot. The landscapes of the study area have remained popular subjects for artists into the present century. The work of Joseph Farquharson, R A (1846 - 1935), Laird of Finzean on Deeside, may stand as an instance of this.

Photography

Victorian tourists often came to the Cairngorms area with the intention of viewing famous beauty spots and from this trend in landscape appreciation, there grew a large trade in souvenir albums and postcards, which were mass produced. The large number of sites on the Balmoral estate associated with royalty were popular subject matter for this, for example Crathie Church, Glas Allt Shiel, Loch Muick, and Balmoral itself.

More recent landscape photography, such as that carried out by Colin Baxter, often portrays the unusual weather conditions of the Cairngorms massif and focuses on specific landscape features, such as the native pine and birch woodlands of the area. (Illustration)

6.6 FOLKLORE

The folklore of the Cairngorms is very rich, and is intimately associated with Gaelic place names. The Gaelic language was once universal in the area, but steadily declined from the late 18th century.

By the 1920s, the survival of Gaelic in Deeside was restricted to the older people in Mar. Gaelic declined more slowly in Strathspey and Atholl, but even in these districts, it was all but extinct by the post war period. Gaelic place names were given to the smallest details of the landscape by the people, particularly in areas where the much-romanticised practice of taking cattle to high pastures was carried out and the farming families dwelt in shielings. In areas such as Mar, Gaelic place names relate to the presence of extensive forests, where none now survive.

The most famous legend of the Cairngorms concerns the Big Grey Man (An Fear Liath Mor) who reputedly haunts the top of Ben Macdui. Several legends connected with Celtic missionaries, for example St Monire and St Nathalan are connected with upper Deeside. A less well known legend concerns the attempt of the men of Mar to cut a trench in order to divert the waters of the Tilt into the Dee. The attempt was unsuccessful, for they were attacked by the men of Atholl, who prevailed in the battle which ensued.

The name of Coire Bhrochain on Braeriach commemorates an episode involving cattle being taken through the twin passes of the Lairig Ghru (Lairig Chruidh or pass of the

stirks) and Lairig an Laigh (pass of the calves), strayed up the mountainside and subsequently plunged en masse to their deaths over the cliffs of the corrie, which was named Coire Bhrochain (corrie of porridge) from the crushed cattle. The Gaelic poets often dwelt upon the rapidly changing weather during journeys through the Cairngorms, such as in the following:

"Cuir is cathadh am Bealach Dearg
Sneachd is reoth air Charna Bhalg
Cul ri gaoth air Lairig bhealaich
Ghrian gheal am Maoilinn"

"Snowing and drifting in Bealach Dearg
Snow and frost on the Cairnwell
Back to the wind on the Lairing pass
Bright sun in Moulin"

(Watson, *Cairngorms*, 219)

Particular landscape features are often held to have associations with the unseen world of spirits. Two rocky pinnacles in Gleann Einich called Am Bodach and A'Chailleach have their counterparts in many parts of the Highlands and are thought to derive from the idea of a pagan god and goddess living on in the form of stone. A widespread idea in the Cairngorms is of the fairy hillocks, small mounds which were the abode of the little folk. Such features are found, for instance, in Glen Lui (near the Black Bridge).

Healing properties were often associated with particular places, for instance, as late as the mid 19th, century pregnant women were taken to bathe in the water collected in the hollows in the granite tors on the summit of Ben Avon (called the Clach Bhan), and by doing so it was believed that they would not suffer painful travail.

Cattle stealing, with its associations of inter-clan rivalry, is the subject of many traditional tales collected by the Reverend J G Michie in his *Deeside Tales* at the end of the nineteenth century. The lower passes between Mar and Speyside, notably the upper Avon near Inchroty, provided ideal backdoor entries for cattle reivers stealing stock from summer shielings.

6.7 HILL-WALKING, MOUNTAINEERING AND RECENT ACTIVITIES

Discussion of this theme will distinguish between ascents of individual mountains and the crossing of these formidable uplands for a variety of reasons, with mountaineering, narrowly conceived here to mean the use of ropes and other accoutrements to climb to summits that are in all cases attainable by strong walkers. The underlying theme of this and other similar involvements is that humankind (on a rope, skis, or suspended below the aerofoil of a hang-glider) is appreciative of landscape as something against which to pit physical strength and personal expertise. Although early interest in climbing within the Highlands existed, with the Scottish Mountaineering Club being founded in 1879, the development of this activity has become more significant since the 1930's.

There are numerous accounts of individual feats of endurance simply traversing the massif. Thus, Professor William MacGillvray, author of the *Natural History of Deeside and Braemar* (1855), recounts that he walked homewards to the Hebrides in 1819, stopping to sleep near the foot of Braigh Riabhach, before continuing next morning straight out of the corrie westward (Shepherd, 1977, 5).

Mountaineering itself has produced its own literature, in part purely technical, on the physical challenges offered by the descent and ascent of the peaks in the area from Lochnagar westward. The first real mountaineering guide appeared in 1864: the historian John Hill Burton's *The Cairngorm Mountains*. *The Scottish Mountaineering Club's Guide* followed in 1928 (Alexander, 1938), and the Cairngorm Club, founded in 1889 with the aim of exploring and fostering a love of the Cairngorm Mountains, published its *Journal*

from 1893.

A significant growth in mountaineering occurred in the Cairngorms and Lochnagar from the mid 1940s. Climbing activity generally concentrated on the southern and eastern hills such as Beinn a' Bhuid and there are strong climbing associations attached to bothies on the Mar Lodge Estate. These include Corroul, Bob Scott's bothy at Luibeg, Altanaour, Bynack and the shelterstone, where eminent climbers of the time stayed and which have become important in climbing folklore.

As access has become easier, aside from the features discussed above, the area has now become "valued for the first time as an obstacle course" (Smout, 1983, 100). To the list of activities Smout identified in the early 1980s, we may now add the burgeoning use of off-road vehicles and mountain bikes, so that, once again, transport changes are contributing to the ways in which the Cairngorms are perceived and used.

7 KEY ISSUES AFFECTING LANDSCAPE CHANGE

7.1 BACKGROUND

An appraisal of potential change which may affect the landscape in the future, is an important aspect of this study, as it provides background information towards the formulation of landscape guidelines for the study area. Information on the potential factors influencing future change has been principally obtained from the Cairngorms Assets Study and through our consultations with local authorities, government bodies and individuals, with an interest in the landscape of the study area and its management.

7.2 POTENTIAL LANDSCAPE CHANGE

Future changes may not necessarily have a detrimental effect on landscape character and some will present opportunities for enhancement and for increasing landscape diversity throughout the study area. Potential landscape change within the study area will focus on the future management and use of land and is likely to continue to be greatly influenced by grant incentives and policy changes, and by the many initiatives relating to the Cairngorms area.

Forestry

The current and future felling and restocking of plantations is likely to present a significant change throughout the study area and will offer opportunities for landscape enhancement. Both private and Forest Enterprise (FE) commercial forestry will be affected by this change.

Forest Enterprise have a programme of redesign within the Priority Forest Areas of Glenmore and Inshriach forests with an overall objective of conversion to native species in these areas. The future intention is to continue to manage these forests on a commercial basis, although nature conservation will be the prime objective in the Caledonian Forest Reserves within these forests. FE design proposals aim to promote a naturalistic structure, mixing natural regeneration with planting and allowing scrub vegetation to develop. Stands of mature pine are to remain to maintain an age structure and to encourage more open space within the forests. FE forests are generally not extensive elsewhere within the study area, but include holdings in the Angus Glens and Strathdon. Future restructuring/redesign of these forests, which will be managed in accordance with FE multipurpose objectives, should also bring about landscape benefits in the future, although outwith the Priority Forest Areas design plans have only been completed for Glen Isla to date.

Privately owned commercial plantations are extensive in Deeside, parts of Strathspey and Strathdon and future felling and restocking of these also has potential to enhance the landscape, as is the case at Invercauld estate on Deeside, where many of the mature plantations comprising exotic species will be restocked with native pine. The construction of access tracks to facilitate the felling of plantations throughout the study area and the temporary visual effects of the felling operation, may impact on the landscape, although these are likely to be short term and FA Design Guidelines will be adhered to in this respect. The effect of multi tenancies governing the future of some plantations, for example within Glenlivet, may present difficulties towards future restructuring/redesign in some parts of the study area.

New Planting and Extension of Woodlands

According to the FA, uptake of the WGS Native Pine Supplement has been significant in the study area, with applications for such woodlands being largely concentrated within the Deeside estates, the Cairngorms foothills, and within the Atholl Estate. If such proposals are implemented they will bring about considerable beneficial change in those areas. Some of these forests will be established principally for amenity and nature conservation objectives, while others may be managed on a commercial basis. Potential visual impacts may arise in some areas where deer fencing is used to establish new woodlands as the regeneration is consequently dense and 'thicket' like with little age and species diversity and forms abrupt margins. This can be seen already in some parts of the study area.

Future expansion of native woodlands in Speyside and Deeside as part of the CWP proposals, is likely to be a long term project where natural regeneration is to be the principal establishment method and where effective deer control throughout the area will be essential. The proposal to extend existing native pine woodlands to recreate the Forests of Mar and Strathspey, where the prime objective will be nature conservation, offers an opportunity to build on one of the key landscape attributes of the study area. The location of these 'Reserve' Forests at the foot of the Cairngorm massif, will complement the gradation of managed to more naturalistic landscapes; from the straths to the mountains, and would enhance the scale and character of the massif. These forests would also have great visual significance due to their high visibility, surrounded as they are, by many vantage points.

The targeting of Forestry Authority funding for Native woodlands may occur in the future by means of introducing a 'locational supplement' to encourage particular types of woodlands in specific areas and to make best use of limited resources.

Agriculture

Possible changes in agricultural policy are likely to be influential in determining the pattern of land use in the area, which could, in turn affect landscape character. Future changes to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) aimed at limiting livestock numbers are likely to inhibit any expansion of sheep and cattle rearing and there is consequently limited scope for farm improvement in the area.

Future CAP reform is also likely to include initiatives on environmental measures, including the encouragement of forestry on farmland, and these along with the range of grants offered towards the protection of environmentally sensitive farming practices within the Cairngorm Straths and Breadalbane ESA's, has potential to increase the visual diversity of the agricultural landscape in future. There is currently a low uptake of the ESA scheme, this being due to a variety of factors, and some consultees felt that conservation projects connected to the scheme are likely to be small scale and therefore have limited visual effect, although the cumulative effect on the landscape over time may be significant.

The amalgamation of farm units is also likely to continue in the future and this may form a mechanism for landscape change, through the intensification of land use which may affect nature conservation and visual interest on farmland. The selling of farm stock quotas may also result in the decline of hill sheep farming on some land and possibly instigate land use changes such as a switch to forestry in the future.

Semi-Natural Vegetation

Semi natural habitats such as wetlands, peatland, heather moorland and native woodlands are distinctive components of the landscape of the study area and are important in providing visual diversity within the landscape. Whereas in the past, many of these features have declined through pressures such as agricultural improvements, over grazing and development, the future appears more assured due to the protection of designated conservation sites, policies such as the ESA and potential policy relating to European Directives on nature conservation. Future agricultural policy is likely to change the emphasis towards managing the countryside for its conservation value, and this may have the effect of both protecting existing semi natural habitats and aid the creation of new ones. Initiatives such as the management of deer numbers in areas like Abernethy, have also had results in terms of increased natural regeneration and future deer control in other parts of the study area, could bring about similar successes in the long term.

Heather moorland, which is a distinctive feature of the landscape, may continue to slowly decline in some parts of the study area, as the viability of shooting on estates is affected by decreasing grouse numbers. This decline is likely to be connected with continued poor management of the heather, increased grazing pressures and the possible establishment of new woodlands, mainly on former grouse moorlands.

The Deterioration of Distinctive Man Made Features

Features such as policy woodlands and designed landscapes associated with the grand estates of Deeside and the less prominent estates in Strathdon and other parts of the study area are distinctive components of the landscape, adding visual interest when isolated and relatively small scale, and a dominant landscape structure, as in the case of Deeside, when extensive. Although many of these landscapes are well managed and have been invigorated through restoration, for example the Hercules garden within the Atholl Estates, some are deteriorating as parkland trees and woodlands become over mature and decay, with little replacement planting being carried out. There is also danger that the original design of some may be lost due to a lack of management and also because of inappropriate 'improvements'.

Archaeology

Recent field survey carried out by RCAHMS on the Mar Lodge Estate, Glen Shee and Newtonmore/Kingussie has indicated that archaeological sites are more numerous and extensive than first thought in these areas. Afforestation schemes, built development and farming practices are likely to have reduced the archaeological record of the study area in the past and future threats to both identified and, as yet, undiscovered archaeological sites include plans for significantly increasing woodland cover throughout the Cairngorms.

Built Development

Large scale industrial development is unlikely to be situated within the study area in the future, largely due to its scenic importance and the landscape designations and planning policies which apply to much of the area. Smaller scale industrial development is likely to have only a localised effect on the landscape, this includes developments such as a proposed extension to the sawmill at Boat of Garten. Roads construction is likely to be limited and involve minor improvements and will be carried out under the 'Fitting Roads' policy which aims to encourage sensitive alignment and use of materials in roads within rural areas. Although further dualling of the A9 is not presently considered a priority by

the Scottish Office, it may occur in the future and could bring about considerable landscape change within parts of the study area.

Pressure for new housing will continue to focus on the Aviemore/ Boat of Garten and Carrbridge area and on settlements such as Ballater on lower Deeside. Highland Regional Council's Local Plan proposes the creation of a new settlement at Cambusmore on the fringes of Aviemore by the year 2005, to accommodate between 500 - 800 new houses plus associated infrastructure and community buildings. This proposal would be subject to an Environmental Assessment, following the outcome of the Public Local Plan Inquiry, held in 1994. Demand for individual houses throughout rural Speyside is likely to continue, although new HRC policies on the location of housing in the countryside might restrict this trend to some extent.

Elsewhere in the study area, the remoteness of the area from work centres and main communications means that demand for new housing is expected to be insignificant. Depopulation in the more remote areas of the Angus Glens, the Upper Spey and Laggan area, may affect existing housing stock in these areas, possibly with increasing dereliction of property, which may in turn bring about changes to the character of the landscape.

The potential growth of tourism and recreation in the Cairngorms will influence pressure for built development. The proposed extension of skiing facilities at Cairn Gorm to include a funicular railway and visitor centre is currently being debated and if implemented could instigate significant landscape change. Year round tourist facilities associated with the Glenshee Ski Centre are also currently being considered and these are likely to be located further down the glen, away from the Ski Centre. Demand for holiday accommodation will probably continue in the Strathspey area and some consultees expect an increase in the number of applications for new visitor centres in both rural and urban locations throughout the study area, prompted by Objective 1 and 5b Structure 1 Funding from the European Community.

Recreation

The popularity of the Cairngorms massif, the Mounth and individual hills in parts of the study area, has resulted in localised visual impacts associated with paths and vegetation erosion, ski tows, signage, car parks and other recreational facilities. The survey and future management of well used paths, for example the reconstruction work carried out at Lochnagar, along with rationalisation of signs, waymarkers and bothies, as currently being considered by the National Trust for Scotland within the Mar Lodge estate, may minimise present erosion and will reduce the visual clutter of elements which detract from the 'wildland' character of these mountain areas.

The enforcement of controls on the construction of upland tracks is still difficult to ensure, and these are still being implemented in some areas, albeit on a much smaller scale than has previously occurred. Proposals to restore intrusive hill tracks within Mar Lodge estate and at Abernethy are currently being considered and should in time, allowing for the difficulties associated with revegetation at high altitudes, significantly reduce the visual impacts associated with these tracks. The research carried out as part of these proposals will also provide expertise towards the future restoration of other hill tracks within the study area.

7.3 OVERVIEW OF ISSUES

The table overleaf summarises the principal changes affecting each Landscape Character Area and forms the basis of the issues examined in more detail in the next chapter, which outlines a series of Landscape Guidelines for the study area.

Landscape Character Area	Major Forest Restructuring	Woodland Expansion	Potential Loss of Agricultural Land	Recreational/ Visitor Pressure	Pressure for Built Development	Potential Loss of Semi-Natural Habitats	Potential Decline of Policy/Designed Landscapes
PLATEAUX							
1 Cairngorms Massif		•		•	•		
2 The White Mounth				•			
UPLANDS/GLENS							
3 The Monadhliaths		•	•			•	
4 Strathdearn Hills		•	•			•	
5 Rothermurchus/Abernethy	•	•		•	•		•
6 North-Eastern Hill Ranges		•				•	
7 Arderikie							
8 Southern Hill Ranges		•					
9 Angus Hills and Glens		•	•				
STRATHS							
10 Spey Headwaters		•	•				•
11 Upper Spey Farmland		•	•				•
12 Upper Strathspey		•	•	•	•		•
13 Speyside		•	•	•	•		
14 Lower Spey		•	•				
15 Strath Avon	•	•	•				
16 Glenlivet	•	•	•				
17 Strathdon	•	•	•				

Landscape Character Area	Major Forest Restructuring	Woodland Expansion	Potential Loss of Agricultural Land	Recreational/ Visitor Pressure	Pressure for Built Development	Potential Loss of Semi-Natural Habitats	Potential Decline of Policy/Designed Landscapes
18 Deeside Estates	•	•	•	•			•
19 Muir of Dinnet				•			•
20 Cromar Farmland		•	•				
21 Atholl Policies							•

8 LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The principal objective of recommending Landscape Guidelines for the Cairngorms, is to address the key issues, defined in chapter 7, which presently and potentially affect the appearance of the landscape within the study area. These Landscape Guidelines aim to inform decision making on the many initiatives which are being considered for the study area and on policy and design aspects relating to specific issues. The Guidelines principally outline measures which address the following:

- the conservation of landscape elements which make a positive contribution to the landscape character of the area;
- the enhancement of the landscape, where this is necessary;
- the sensitive accommodation of new development in the landscape.

The formulation of Guidelines requires consideration of the potential for new development and landscape change and an exploration of how these need to be strategically planned and sensitively located, in order to avoid any detrimental effects on the special landscape character of the Cairngorms study area. Many of the measures relating to land use change, have a strong inter-relationship, for example the planting of new woodlands can potentially affect both semi natural habitats as well as agricultural land.

The Guidelines are organised to initially address common issues which apply to the whole of the Cairngorms study area, then outline guidance for issues which apply within each Landscape Type. More specific guidance is then given for each of the Landscape Character Areas, this being presented in tabular form for easy reference.

8.2 STUDY AREA WIDE ISSUES

The Establishment of New Woodlands

Concern was expressed by some consultees that the proposals for the Mar and Strathspey forests would focus on one part of the study area at the exclusion of other areas, where the establishment of native woodlands would also bring about landscape enhancement. A number of such areas where the visual diversity of the landscape should be increased through the establishment of extensive woodlands, were defined as part of our field survey. In such areas, the establishment of both native and in some locations, well designed and located mixed commercial plantations, could be encouraged, and this is discussed in more detail under the relevant Landscape Types and Character Areas.

One of the key characteristics of the landscape of the study area, is the diversity of landscapes which occurs, from the settled and agricultural landscapes of the straths; the moorland and forest of the uplands; to the open seemingly 'untamed' landscape of the high plateaux. The gradation between these landscapes is often subtle, with vegetation types merging into one another, and is particularly striking in views from Strath Spey and Rothiemurchus, where the full diversity of the landscape can be appreciated. This diversity of landscape character should be conserved and enhanced and in doing this, it will be important to balance land use within the study area when considering the location and scale of new woodlands.

The subtle gradation between landscapes should also be considered and this will effect the objectives for establishing new woodlands and the method of establishment. A strategy of establishing Reserve Forests where the main objectives will be nature conservation and where the forest will appear as natural as possible, within the plateaux and upland landscapes, grading down in altitude to commercial woodlands, fitting in with the more settled landscapes of the straths would be appropriate and enhance the overall diversity of the landscape (Figure 18).

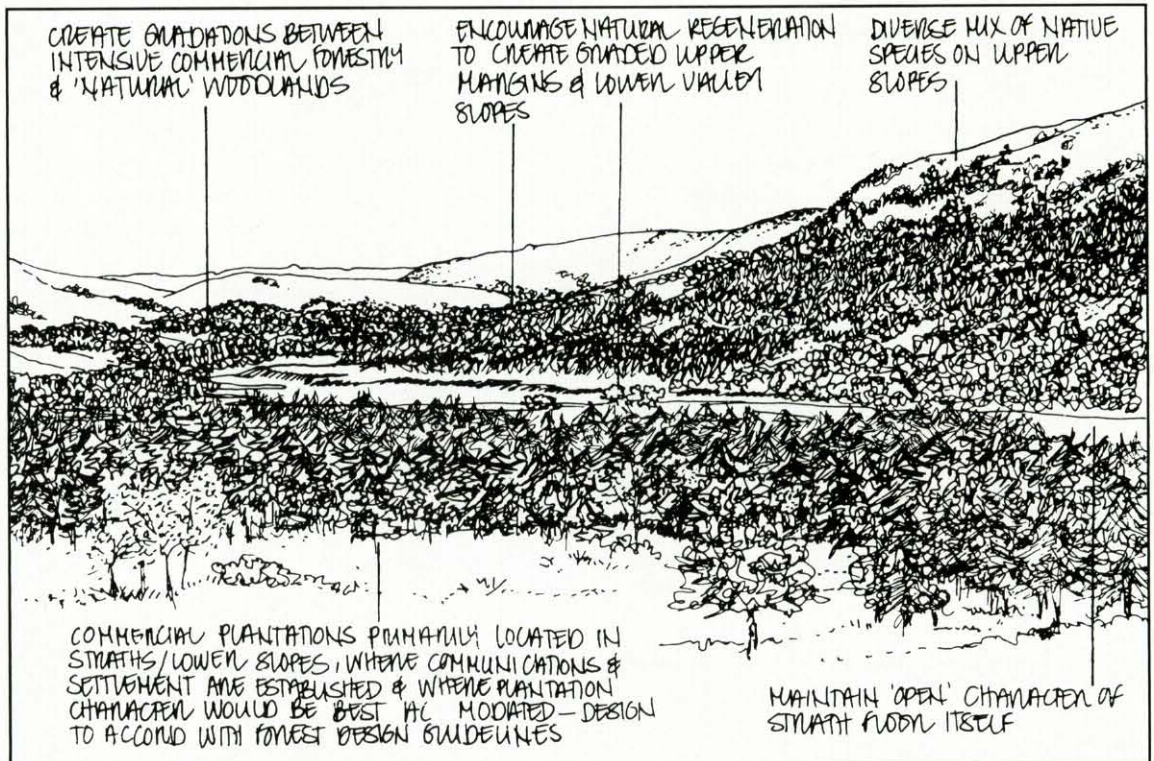


Figure 18 - Forest Gradation within Landscape Types

The Conservation and Enhancement of Semi-Natural Vegetation

Semi natural vegetation is an important element of the landscape of the study area, as well as being ecologically sound it contributes to visual diversity. Future planting of new woodland needs to be carefully considered in order to balance the visual benefits of increasing woodland cover, against potential losses of open heather moorland. The cumulative effect of new planting on the landscape needs to be considered on both a local (Landscape Character Area) and study area wide level.

New initiatives should be encouraged to instigate the extension of semi natural vegetation types on a large scale in certain areas. This might include joint initiatives between conservation and agricultural bodies, to create large scale wetlands in the Spey flood plain for example, and to conserve heather moorland through better management practices.

Future Forest Restructuring/Redesign

As the rotation age is reached, the felling and restocking of commercial forests primarily located within the Uplands, Glens and Straths, offers opportunities to ameliorate unsympathetic margins and to diversify the species and age range of such forests. The Forestry Authority will be instrumental in overseeing restructuring/redesign proposals for both Forest Enterprise and privately owned forests and woodlands and in this respect, FA Design Guidelines and directives on multi purpose forestry will apply. In some cases a

radical approach to restructuring/redesign will be needed in order to remedy geometric margins or inappropriately scaled or located forestry and additional incentives maybe needed to encourage this, especially where premature felling or not replanting a particularly intrusive plantation is the preferable option. The construction of access tracks associated with felling and restocking proposals need to be carefully considered in order to minimise visual impact.

Recreational Development

A study area wide strategy is needed to consider the potential demands for visitor/recreational facilities and to give advice on the location and design of such facilities. In general, recreational facilities should be located away from the Plateaux and Upland Landscape Types in order to minimise the visual clutter of man made elements in these physically dominated landscapes. The overall number, location and design of built elements associated with visitor/recreation activities, should be carefully considered within the straths, particularly their potential effects on landscape character.

Conservation of Archaeological Features

It will be important to consider the significance of archaeological features and their appropriate landscape setting in determining the extent and location of natural regeneration/new planting proposals in order to both conserve such features and also enhance their contribution to landscape character.

8.3 GUIDELINES FOR EACH LANDSCAPE TYPE

Plateaux

Woodland Expansion

The natural regeneration of the Mar and Strathspey forest is recommended in its proposed upper reaches where a transition occurs between the more settled straths and the seemingly less man influenced mountain area, as this would reduce any visual clutter associated with deer fencing and would provide opportunity for achieving a naturally diverse structure to the future forest which would be more sympathetic with the landscape character of the Cairngorm mountains.

The visual impacts of deer fencing associated with the planting of new native woodlands is an obvious concern, particularly close to the mountain landscapes where few man made elements exist and where the natural components of the landscape are dominant. Significant reduction in deer numbers will however be necessary, requiring the cooperation of landowners throughout the area. If a coordinated approach to deer management proves impossible, the short term visual effects of fencing, may need to be accepted in some less visually sensitive areas, for long term gains achieved through establishing woodland cover. The location of deer fencing will need to be considered and the thinning of resultant dense regeneration and removal of the fencing as soon as establishment has been achieved, will be necessary in order to minimise visual effects.

Recreation

New development should be restricted within the Plateaux landscapes. The removal of existing intrusive elements should also be considered, although an approach is needed which balances the needs and safety of people using the hills for recreation with a

strategy for the removal of man made artifacts such as bridges and signs. The cultural associations of the area, with for example climbing history and the links of personalities with particular bothies, should also be considered in the formulation of any such strategy. The visual clutter of existing built elements could be reduced without compromising safety, for example by replacing bridges with stepping stones and by reducing the visual impact of erosion, through the sensitive management of footpaths, as has been carried out on Lochnagar.

Hill Tracks

The restoration of intrusive high level tracks should be a priority within this Landscape Type. The research work currently being carried out on the Mar Lodge Estate may be useful in providing information towards the practical implementation of restoration techniques.

Uplands and Glens

Woodland Expansion

The establishment of new woodlands within this Landscape Type would bring about considerable visual and nature conservation benefits. Extensive native and well designed commercial woodlands could be established in areas such as the Drumochter/ Atholl Hills and the Upper Spey Headwaters. Parts of the North Eastern Hill ranges could also accommodate new woodlands, particularly in the glens, so avoiding the hill tops where the coalescence of successive, heather clad, ridges is a distinctive feature of the landscape and should be retained.

Where woodlands are intended to be managed on a commercial basis, they should be located in the more accessible and settled lower ground, thus reducing the visual effects of new access tracks, fencing and a more regular and managed appearance which would be more intrusive on higher ground.

Tracks

A phased programme of rationalisation of existing intrusive high level hill tracks should be implemented with long term restoration being an option.

Upland Farming

The support of upland hill farming should be encouraged, in order to maintain the valuable contribution of both open pasture/rough grazing land and traditional farmsteads to the diversity of the landscape. Support of farming particularly within glens and on lower hill slopes will be important in order to conserve the contrast of open ground with often densely wooded upper hill slopes.

Recreation

Recreation within this Landscape Type presently centres on the Rothiemurchus/Abernethy area. Recreation is limited to popular individual hills and to the ski areas of the Lecht and Glenshee, within the extensive uplands which form the remainder of this Landscape Type. Future expansion of these ski areas should be limited to ensure that the present 'visual containment' of the facilities remains. Recreational facilities within the Rothiemurchus/Abernethy areas should continue to be based on the sensitive interpretation of natural features, with new built elements being appropriately designed and largely screened by the forest.

Straths

There are comparatively more issues affecting the Strath landscapes, due to the variety of land uses and pressure for built development in the area.

Expansion of Woodlands

The balance of woodland to open space and the conservation of agricultural landscapes, where this is a distinctive component of the landscape, are issues more prevalent in the Straths and any proposals should be carefully considered for their effect on this balance and the potential loss of distinctive agricultural landscapes.

New mixed species woodland planting could be accommodated within Glen Avon and Glenlivet, the Spey Headwaters and the more settled parts of the Angus Glens, where this would reverse the existing fragmented nature of woodlands and provide a distinctive planting framework, relating to the landform. Coordinated design plans could be carried out where possible for some Landscape Character areas, for example, Glen Livet, Strathdon or Strathavon, where an overall 'visionary' framework is needed to plan the felling, restocking and possible extension of existing plantations, the conservation of distinctive landuse patterns or features and to prepare an outline strategy for the location of new woodlands. Such design plans should aim to balance other land uses and the requirements of landowners/tenants, could aid the FA in targeting WGS applications, where applicable and in giving advice on felling/restocking proposals and could also inform other landscape initiatives (Figures 19a and 19b)

In the Strathspey area and particularly close to Aviemore, the establishment of new woodlands could perform the dual functions of landscape enhancement and increasing the capacity of the landscape to visually 'absorb' people and future built development.

The Importance of Agricultural Landscapes

The agricultural landscapes within the Straths, are important in providing open space and a visual contrast with the woodlands and more rugged hill tops. Where such landscapes are essential components of the landscape character of an area, for example the smooth flat fields of the Spey floodplain at Laggan, they should be conserved and traditional farming practices supported. The ESA designation may help in this respect although wider agricultural policy changes may also be necessary to ensure the economic survival of many of the farmers in the area, should agricultural policies change in the future.

The generally open character of much of the Spey flood plain should be retained yet a framework of broadleaved scrub and woodlands should be encouraged in some areas where forestry is a significant landscape component, to create visual links and a more gradual change in vegetation between coniferous woodlands and the farmed valley floor. Opportunity also exists in some areas, to create wetlands, utilising farmland where flooding regularly occurs. The visual benefits of wetland creation on a grand scale could be tremendous, retaining the overall openness of the landscape of the straths yet considerably enhancing the diversity of texture and colour which is already a feature of parts of Strathspey.

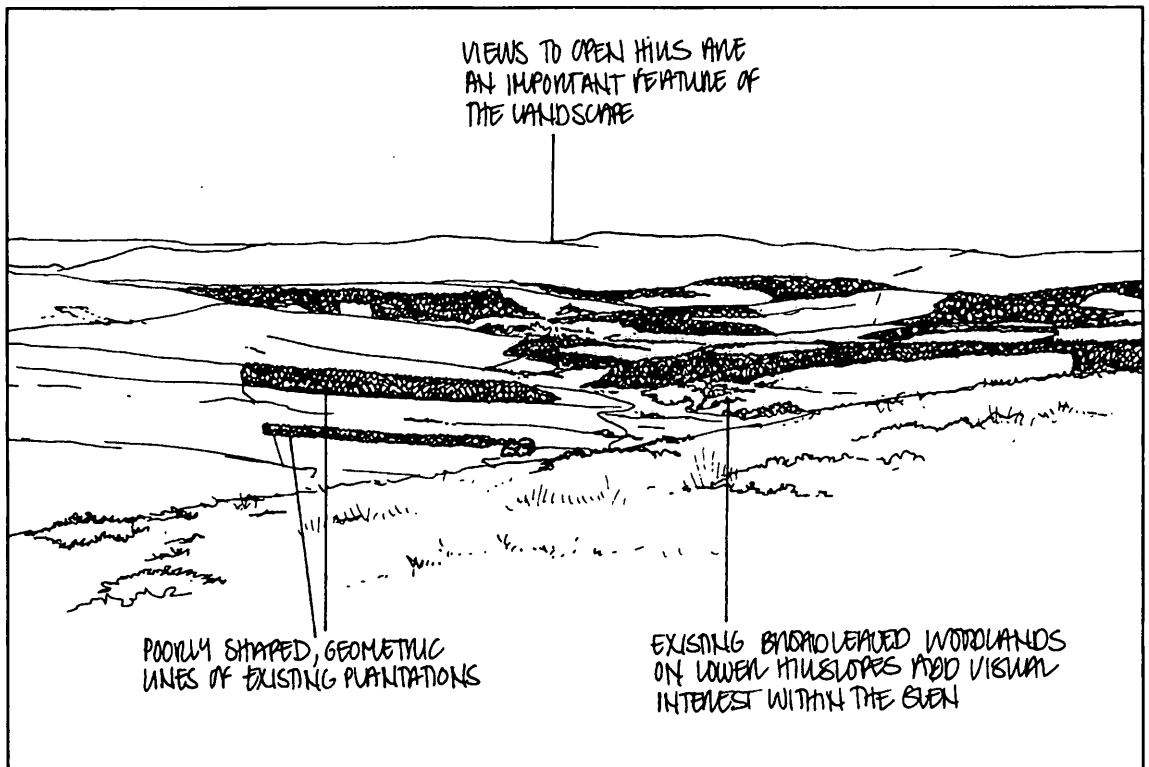


Figure 19a - Existing Landscape Features

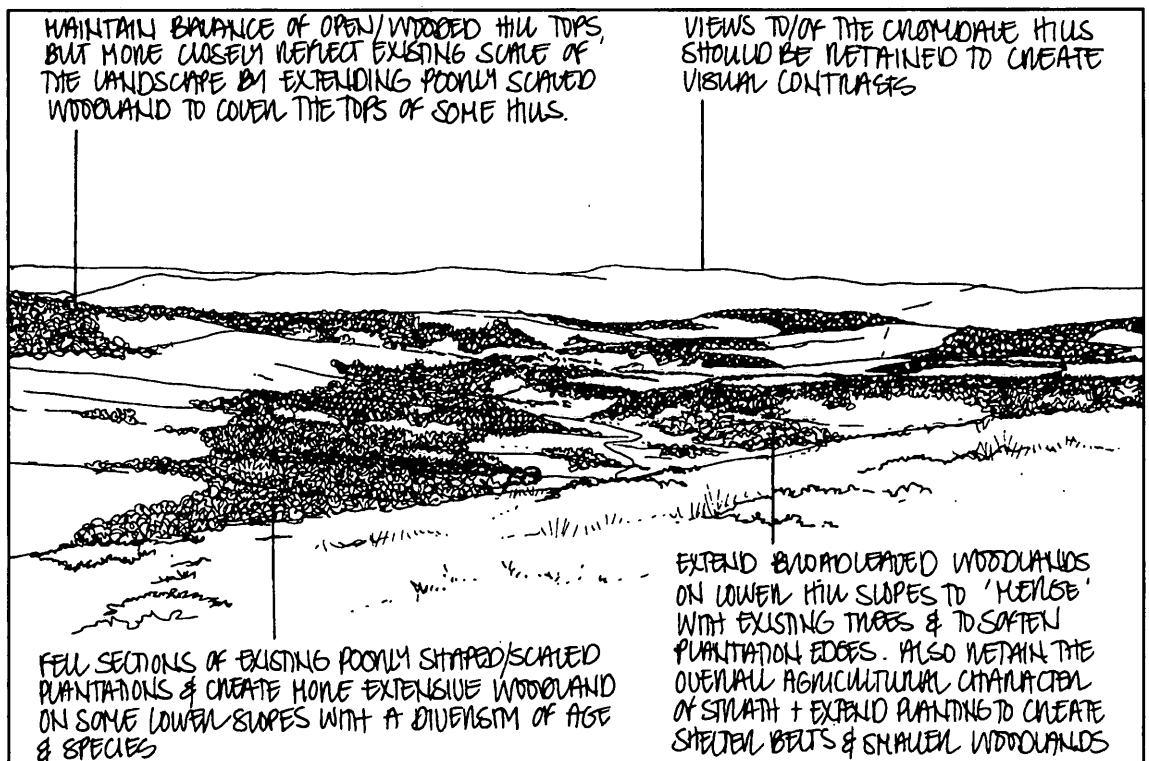


Figure 19b - Proposed Planting Framework

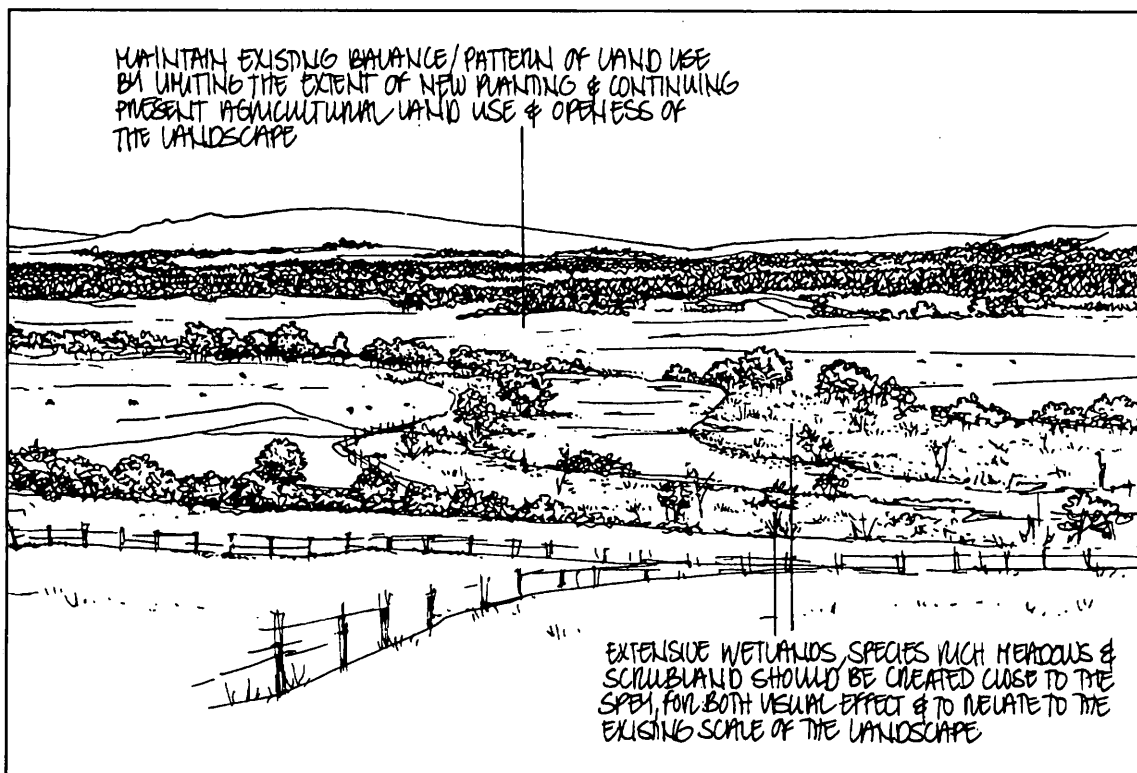


Figure 20 - Enhancing Landscape Diversity

In many of the smaller straths, the pattern of improved pastures with the valley floor, leading to rougher pastures and woodlands of lower hill slopes and open moorland of the hill tops is distinctive. In Strathdon and Glen Avon, pastures in the valley floor are typically contained by mixed shelterbelts and woodlands. Conservation of this landuse pattern should be encouraged in these areas, through the protection and management of such woodlands and through the conservation of agricultural practices, in most areas. A new framework of woodlands and shelterbelts should be established to create visual interest on farmland in other straths and glens including, for example, some of the Angus glens, Glenlivet, Glen Garry and upper Strathdon, and this is described in more detail in the specific guidelines relating to each Landscape Character Area.

The Conservation of Designed Landscapes

Policy woodlands and Designed landscapes make a valuable contribution to the landscape character in many parts of the study area, and the recognition and protection of such landscapes should be encouraged. The evident decay and inappropriate modification of some Designed landscapes within the study area should be arrested through incentives targeted towards a programme of management and planting, which revitalises over mature woodlands and specimen trees and restores significant features of these landscapes. The conservation of built features, such as gate houses, walls and monuments, should also be protected and conserved throughout the area. The preparation of historic landscape management plans will have an important role to play in identifying key features of these landscapes and recommending a strategy towards their enhancement.

Impacts of Existing Built Development

Some relatively recent built development within the study area, such as the unsympathetic urban expansion of Aviemore, some rural housing and recreational facilities, has an obvious visual impact, being either poorly located or designed in relation to the landscape character of the area. The subsequent integration of unsympathetically

located and designed building, needs to be achieved through a package of environmental improvements, such as those currently being implemented for Aviemore. Existing intrusive housing located on the fringes of Aviemore and other settlements, could be further screened by extensive woodland, fitting in with the character of the landscape in the area. Opportunities should also be taken to radically improve significantly intrusive development, for example, high rise building in Aviemore, which can be seen from a large part of the surrounding landscape.

Accommodation of New Built Development

Future pressure for new development within the study area is likely to focus on demands for new housing and visitor and recreational facilities.

In visual terms, new housing development could be sensitively accommodated within many of the Landscape Character Areas provided it is carefully located to conform with local settlement patterns and overall building densities and is carefully designed using appropriate materials and detailing. Window, door and roof proportions and the use of colour are particularly important aspects to consider. Indeed in many areas the development of new sensitively designed housing would bring about visual benefits, introducing built features which would enhance the visual contrast of man made and natural elements within the landscape, which is already a feature of many parts of the study area.

Housing pressure however is likely to be centred on the Aviemore area and its environs. The open flood plain of the Spey is particularly sensitive to development in this area, offering little opportunity for visual integration. The traditional settlement pattern generally avoids the flood plain of the Spey in favour of the slightly elevated ground bordering it. As this area is often well wooded (a characteristic feature of much of the Strathspey landscape) built development is generally partially enclosed or has a backdrop of woodland, which offers both screening and enclosure for the ground surrounding the house. It is therefore recommended that new development conforms to local traditional settlement patterns and that the creation of a new framework of woodland to contain and screen new building should be an integral part of all development proposals.

More detailed guidance on the siting and design of building in the study area is required and this should reflect the local differences which presently occur in the traditional settlement pattern and building styles. Such differences include, for example, a simpler vernacular form in the Laggan, Strathspey and Glenlivet and Glen Avon area, generally comprising small single and one and a half storey farmsteads and estate cottages, often rendered white and with limited colour detailing; a stronger estate influence in Deeside, parts of Strathspey and the Angus Glens, with a tradition of rustic porches, exposed stone work and baronial influence in larger buildings. A package of incentives needs to be targeted in conjunction with more specific design guidance, in order to promote good siting and design throughout the study area.

8.4 SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

Specific guidelines for Landscape Character Areas are summarised in the following tables.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA GUIDELINES

Landscape Type: Plateaux

CHARACTER AREAS	SPECIFIC LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES			
	Extension of Woodlands	Amelioration of Existing Woodlands	Accommodation of New Development	Enhancement of Existing Development
1 The Central Massif	Continue the initiative of extending native pine forest within the glens and lower hill slopes, avoiding the use of deer fencing where possible.	Encourage the removal of poorly scaled and shaped plantations, principally located within the southern glens. Where these are important for deer management, redesign and substantially enlarge. Where it is essential to use deer fencing, a naturalistic edge and irregular internal spacing should be created through management techniques such as thinning.	Discourage future expansion of the Cairn Gorm ski development and proliferation of any additional highly visible artifacts such as bridges, cairns and signs in order to conserve the distinctive 'wildland' character of the massif.	<p>Instigate a programme for the removal and revegetation of intrusive access tracks on Beinn A' Bhuid and within Glen Feshie.</p> <p>Encourage a programme of environmental improvements to the Cairn Gorm Ski Development, including a strategy for access and relocation of car parks and roads away from highly visible upper slopes.</p> <p>Consider the removal of some visually intrusive bothies and replacement of bridges with stepping stones in the least easily accessible parts of the massif in order to heighten the 'wild land' character of the area.</p>
2 The White Mounth	Encourage the establishment of extensive new native woodlands particularly to enhance the area fringing the north and west banks of Loch Muick and to interlock with existing commercial plantations.	Redesign and substantially extend existing coniferous plantations within upper Glen Muick in order improve integration with the scale and landform of the area.	Encourage the establishment of screening woodland, in advance of any planned extension to the existing car park.	Rationalise intrusive access tracks, encouraging their reduction to footpath widths where possible in order to limit visual impacts.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA GUIDELINES

Landscape Type: Uplands and Glens

CHARACTER AREAS	SPECIFIC LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES		
	Extension of Woodlands	Amelioration of Existing Woodlands	Enhancement of Existing Development/ Accommodation of New Development
3 The Monadhliath	Encourage the establishment of extensive native woodlands throughout the area, but prioritising within the larger glens and lower slopes bordering Strathspey, for best visual effect. Ensure care is taken in considering the visual balance of open space and woodland and conserve farmland within the glen floors where this is a positive landscape feature.	n/a	n/a
4 Strathdearn Hills	Encourage the establishment of large scale native and sensitively designed commercial woodlands in order to enhance the visual diversity of the landscape, yet conserve a high proportion of heather moorland, hill tops and pasture within the lower glens, where it provides open space and visual contrast.	n/a	n/a
5 Rothiemurchus/Abernethy	<p>Conserve and extend native pine woodlands up to the natural treeline within the glens of the Cairngorms plateaux, (also refer to Area 1 guidelines), to enhance the gradual transition from forest to open hill tops and encourage the grading of forest edges through the establishment of 'ecotones' of widely spaced trees, shrubs and ground flora with a diverse age structure. Deer fencing should be located away from highly visible slopes.</p> <p>Create textural and colour variety within the forest through the introduction of broadleaves and enhance the forest against Loch Morlich, creating a more irregular and less dense edge.</p>	Redesign existing coniferous plantations on the southern slopes of the Kincardine Hills, to ameliorate geometric margins, grading out upper margins by thinning or through widely spaced planting.	<p>Instigate a phased programme of environmental improvements for the Cairn Gorm Ski Development, (see Guidelines for the Central Massif), considering the relocation of existing car parks to within the lower, less visually sensitive parts of the forest.</p> <p>Endorse the policy stated in Highland Regional Council's Local Plan, of limiting new development in the area aligning the Glenmore Road, and allow the sensitive development of small scale clustered new housing, within set limitations, away from this corridor and located within forest clearings, following the traditional settlement pattern of the area.</p>
6 North Eastern Hill Ranges	Encourage the establishment of both native and sensitively designed commercial woodlands on lower hill slopes with the aim of enhancing the visual diversity of the landscape, yet conserve the distinctive character of heather clad hill tops and extensive open views over them.	Redesign existing intrusive plantations, to improve diversity and scale and ameliorate geometric margins.	Consider the relocation or undergrounding of intrusive power lines and towers close to the Lecht Ski Development in the long term as opportunities arise.
7 Ardverkie	Encourage the extension of existing native woodlands on lower hill slopes and within glens.	Encourage the amelioration of geometric margins of young coniferous plantations through redesign and premature felling where possible, aiming to conserve present views from the A889 into the hills. Realign or remove existing deer fencing against this road in order to avoid the present tunnel effect.	

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA GUIDELINES

Landscape Type: Uplands and Glens

CHARACTER AREAS	SPECIFIC LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES		
	Extension of Woodlands	Amelioration of Existing Woodlands	Enhancement of Existing Development/ Accommodation of New Development
8 The Southern Hill Ranges	Encourage the establishment of extensive native and sensitively designed commercial woodlands within some glens and on lower hill slopes.	Redesign or remove inappropriately designed plantations, for example poorly scaled linear shelterbelt planting against the A9.	Carefully locate any future development connected with the Glen Shee Ski area, ensuring that its present visual containment within a high level valley is retained. Instigate a programme of environmental improvements within the Dalwhinnie area, carefully locating new development within the village, to create a more compact settlement and establish mixed woodlands in the area, with the aim of visually integrating both the A9 corridor and the urban edge of the village. Rebuild stone dykes in key locations where they are a feature of the landscape, for example, on the south western fringes of the Character Area.
9 The Angus Hills and Glens	Conserve the birch woodlands which are a special feature of Glen Lee and extend native broadleaved woodlands within the other Angus Glens.	Encourage the redesign of coniferous plantations within Glens Clova and Prosen, aiming to substantially increase broadleaves within these plantations and to ameliorate inappropriately shaped upper and side margins.	Conserve the distinctive architectural details of buildings within the Glens, for example paint colours and the use of indigenous materials.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA GUIDELINES

Landscape Type: Straths

CHARACTER AREAS	SPECIFIC LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES						
	Agricultural Landscapes	Semi-Natural Habitats	Extension of Woodlands	Amelioration of Existing Woodlands	Conservation of Designed Landscapes	Accommodation of New Development	Enhancement of Existing Development
10 The Spey Headwaters	n/a	Aim to locate new woodlands and wetlands close to the Shirra Reservoir and within the flat valley floor in order to enhance the area	Enhance landscape diversity by encouraging the establishment of medium and large scale mixed woodlands within the valley floor and on lower hill slopes	Restructure and in some cases, extend existing plantations to achieve a satisfactory visual integration with the landscape	n/a	n/a	n/a
11 Upper Spey Farmland	Aim to retain the agricultural character of the glen floor in order to maintain the striking visual contrasts within the landscape	n/a	Extend native woodlands on lower hill slopes and interlock with existing coniferous plantations	Ameliorate geometric margins and unsympathetic scale as opportunities arise	Specifically at Glen Truim House and Cluny Castle. Rehabilitating the stone dykes which are a feature of the agricultural and parkland landscapes around Glen Trium House.	n/a	n/a
12 Upper Strathspey	Conserve the agricultural landscapes of the area which provide open space and visual contrast with other land uses.	n/a	n/a	Restructure coniferous plantations to create a visual link with existing broadleaved woodlands	Conserve the designed landscapes and policy plantings which are a significant landscape feature of parts of the Character Area.	Guide any new development to conform with the traditional pattern of siting away from the strath floor in favour of the wooded lower hill slopes.	Encourage environmental improvements to the north eastern urban fringes of Kingussie. These should include measures such as planting to screen intrusive development.
13 Lower Strathspey	n/a	Enhance the visual diversity of the strath floor, yet still retain its openness, by encouraging the creation of wetlands and meadows on a large scale within the flood plain.	Increase mixed woodlands on lower valley slopes and within parts of the valley floor, keeping these medium to large scale, yet limiting the extent of new planting to retain the overall open character of the landscape.	Reshape coniferous landscapes and the northern margin of Abernethy Forest, as opportunities arise, aiming to extend existing broadleaved woodlands to interlock with coniferous plantations where they occur on the lower hill slopes	Conserve and enhance policy landscapes on the banks of the Spey, close to Aviemore.	Carefully locate new development to reflect the traditional pattern of generally siting away from the open strath and within or against woodland.	Establish extensive new woodlands to surround and screen existing intrusive development on the fringes of Aviemore.
14 Lower Spey	n/a	n/a	Seek to attain a visual balance between open space and woodland, when considering the design and location of any new planting proposals	Restructure geometric shelterbelts and plantations to reflect the rolling landform of the area.	n/a	n/a	n/a
15 Strath Avon	Encourage the conservation and repair of stone dykes.	Conserve and extend the broadleaved woodlands which are a feature of parts of the landscape	Aim to retain the small scale agricultural landscape within the strath floor and the generally open character of the hills which provide a backdrop to Strath Avon when considering new planting proposals	Consider the felling and possible non restocking, or substantial enlargement of inappropriately scaled plantations	n/a	n/a	n/a

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA GUIDELINES

Landscape Type: Straths

CHARACTER AREAS	SPECIFIC LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES						
	Agricultural Landscapes	Semi-Natural Habitats	Extension of Woodlands	Amelioration of Existing Woodlands	Conservation of Designed Landscapes	Accommodation of New Development	Enhancement of Existing Development
16 Glenlivet	n/a	Conserve broadleaved woodlands aligning water courses	Encourage the extension of mixed woodlands onto farmland, interlocking with existing broadleaved woodlands.	Consider the felling and/or non restocking of inappropriately scaled plantations or substantially extend to form extensive mixed woodlands on some hill slopes	n/a	n/a	Reduce the visual impacts of distilleries by encouraging the use of appropriate materials and more compact design in any future building and encourage the establishment of woodlands to screen outlying yards and buildings
17 Strathdon	Conserve the distinctive pattern of small scale pastures within the strath floor and encourage the retention of the existing strong pattern of shelterbelts and woodlands enclosing them and extending on to the lower hill slopes.	n/a	Aim to retain the overall pattern and balance of forested hill tops and farmed strath floor in considering new planting proposals	Reshape existing forestry, particularly on the hill tops to ameliorate geometric margins and introduce more species and age diversity	Encourage the protection and rehabilitation of gatehouses and estate walls within any conservation plans for Designed Landscapes, as they are a distinctive component of the landscape of Strathdon.	Promote the use of traditional materials and reflect the style and proportion of traditional estate houses, cottages and farmsteads in the design of new housing.	n/a
18 Upper Deeside Estates	Aim to conserve the farmed landscapes of the strath floor in order to retain visually contrasting land uses within the Character Area.	n/a	Retain the predominantly wooded character of the landscape, yet carefully consider the balance of open ground to woodland should new planting proposals occur	Encourage the sensitive felling and restocking of existing plantations in order to minimise visual impacts in this highly visible landscape.	Conserve the Designed Landscapes as a priority, taking care to conserve original features and remove any inappropriate additions.	n/a	Encourage the retrospective screening of intrusive housing on the fringes of Ballater, by planting woodlands which fit with the overall pattern of planting in the area.
19 Muir of Dinnet	Support and conserve agricultural land in the area in order to retain the diversity of the landscape.	Continue to conserve the diverse vegetation of the area, retaining areas of open land to provide visual contrast with the woodlands.	n/a	Encourage the amelioration of unsympathetic margins of coniferous plantations on the surrounding hills and interlock with the broadleaved woodlands within the basin landform	n/a	n/a	n/a
20 The Cromar Farmlands	n/a	Conserve the open character of the upper slopes of the hills bordering the Character Area, retaining a high proportion of the heather moorland covering them	Encourage the planting of medium to large scale mixed woodlands within the agricultural landscape to increase visual diversity	Ameliorate geometric margins of existing coniferous plantations, introducing native species and, where possible, linking with existing birch woodlands in the area.	n/a	n/a	n/a

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA GUIDELINES

Landscape Type: Straths

CHARACTER AREAS	SPECIFIC LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES						
	Agricultural Landscapes	Semi-Natural Habitats	Extension of Woodlands	Amelioration of Existing Woodlands	Conservation of Designed Landscapes	Accommodation of New Development	Enhancement of Existing Development
21 Atholl Policies	Encourage the restoration of stone dykes containing pastures in the strath floor and lower hill slopes	n/a	Consider the overall balance of open ground and woodland and aim to retain the diverse vegetation patterns of the area when assessing any new planting proposals.	n/a	Encourage the conservation of the Designed Landscapes and policy woodlands which are such a vital feature of the Character area.	Promote the sensitive siting of any new building, avoiding the open strath floor and aiming to partially screen development by woodland	Encourage woodland planting on the fringes of Blair Atholl to screen intrusive chalet development Ensure the sensitive restoration of the quarry on completion of extraction.

9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

9.1 THE CAIRNGORMS LANDSCAPE

The Cairngorms has a varied landscape character ranging from the uninhabited and physically dominated high mountain plateaux to the settled and farmed landscapes of the straths. The variety of Landscape Character Areas and their visual inter-relationship, create a diversity rarely seen elsewhere in Scotland. Other distinctive features which occur in the study area, include the huge plateaux of the Cairngorm massif, the extensive uplands which surround it and the variety of vegetation cover, including native pinewoods and broadleaved woodlands, lochs and wetlands, heather moorland and montane plant communities. The landscape of the area is also considerably enriched by the built heritage of castles, estate architecture and traditional buildings.

9.2 LANDSCAPE CHANGE

The present day landscape of the study area has been shaped by physical and human forces over many centuries. The landscape of the study area continues to evolve, with many factors both currently and in the future, influencing landscape change. Much of this landscape change is likely to be related to the use of the land and its management, this largely being controlled by national and, increasingly, European policies. Continued pressures related to tourism and recreational use of parts of the study area and pressures for new housing, may also influence landscape change.

Not all landscape change is necessarily detrimental in its effect on the landscape, and many of the initiatives which apply to the Cairngorms, are already enhancing the landscape of the area. Examples of such initiatives include the redesign of existing commercial plantations and regeneration of native woodlands. Some other factors affecting landscape change need careful consideration in order to conserve existing special landscape features, enhance landscape character where possible and sensitively locate new development to reduce impacts on the landscape.

9.3 A LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

A landscape strategy for the Cairngorms should seek to conserve the special character of the area, through the protection of distinctive features such as native woodland, wetlands, traditional farmland and the built heritage of the area and to build on these features in order to achieve landscape enhancement. The strategy should also aim to evaluate appropriate change and consider the visual balance and inter-relationship of the different elements which make a contribution to landscape character, in addition to considering the relationship between different landscape character areas. In summary the following issues need particular consideration:

- **Forest restructuring/redesign** will be an important catalyst for wide spread change throughout the study area and has the potential to considerably enhance unsympathetically located and shaped plantations. In some parts of the study area it may be necessary to create a framework for new woodland planting in order to encourage the amelioration of existing woodlands and promote and target the planting of new woodlands which will enhance the landscape.
- **Initiatives towards the extension of native pinewoods** within Speyside and Mar, will enhance the landscape of those areas, although such initiatives would also bring about substantial benefits if extended to many other parts of the study area, where

over grazing has produced an often uniform landscape. New planting needs to be sensitively located, designed and established. A gradation of woodland types should be encouraged so that commercial plantations are largely located within the strath and lower areas of the uplands and more naturalistic and 'Reserve' forests are particularly located in the upland and plateaux landscapes.

- **Agricultural landscapes** within the straths are relatively rare and make an important contribution to the diversity of the landscape. Where open farmed landscapes are a vital component of the landscape character of an area, they should be conserved and special consideration should be given to the effects of landownership and landuse changes, especially those initiating increased woodland cover as the economic viability of agriculture is threatened.
- **New built development** could be sensitively accommodated within many parts of the study area, such development needs to be appropriately sited and designed and specific guidance and incentives are required to achieve this. The amelioration of existing intrusive development is also needed in some areas and a programme of environmental improvements should also be instigated.

9.4 THE WAY FORWARD

This Landscape Assessment of the Cairngorms has aimed to provide an overview of the landscape of the area and to make recommendations for the conservation and enhancement of the special landscape features of the area. Other factors also affect the landscape of the Cairngorms and it is hoped that this study will make a valuable contribution to the wider appraisal of issues, currently being considered by the Cairngorms Partnership, SNH and other bodies and will help in forming a framework within which future changes to landuse, land management and potential new development can be sensitively planned.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX B - STATEMENT OF METHODOLOGY

- 1 The study was undertaken in accordance with the methodology set out in Landscape Assessment Guidance (CCP423) by the Countryside Commission, and followed the broad sequence of work defined in SNH's brief of August 1995.
- 2 The landscape character of the study area was defined through a combination of desk study, consultations, field survey and graphic and written description.
- 3 A brief literature review was undertaken, examining general guides to the study area and studying documents such as 'Common Sense and Sustainability' by the Cairngorms Working Party. This initial review broadened our knowledge of the area and aided our understanding of the key factors which have shaped today's landscape.
- 4 Broad areas of similar landscape character were defined by overlaying 1:50,000 scale simplified geology, topographic and land cover classification maps. Three Generic Landscape Types were identified at this initial stage and these subdivided into eighteen more specific Landscape Character Areas.

These broad zonations were then used as the basis for undertaking the field survey and between two and three view points for each Character Area were also defined as part of this desk study. Viewpoints were selected on the basis of their ability to give an elevated view over the Character Area and to enable us to see the visual relationship with adjoining Character Areas and therefore define boundaries. Other, more popular viewpoints were also defined, near a road or footpath, for example.

- 5 Consultations with bodies such as the Regional and District Councils, the Forestry Authority and Scottish Natural Heritage were undertaken between October and November 1995 and these provided information on landscape character, special features, past landscape change and the issues currently and potentially affecting the study area.
- 6 In view of the short timescale in which we had to carry out the field survey, we used two teams of surveyors, each comprising two experienced Landscape Architects, to verify and assess in detail the broad Landscape Types and Landscape Character Areas identified in the desk top study.

The field survey was undertaken in a cyclic manner, making best use of time and weather conditions. Both teams met regularly during the course of the field work, in order to check the consistency of their assessment and further refine Character Area boundaries. A 'visual checklist' was used from each viewpoint to record principal landscape features, attractors and any detractors and assess the sensitivity of each Character Area to change.

Following the field survey, a total of three generic landscape types are confirmed and twenty-one Landscape Character Areas were identified.



SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE

Scottish Natural Heritage is a government body established by Parliament in 1992, responsible to the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Our task is to secure the conservation and enhancement of Scotland's unique and precious natural heritage - the wildlife, the habitats, the landscapes and the seascapes - which has evolved through the long partnership between people and nature.

We advise on policies and promote projects that aim to improve the natural heritage and support its sustainable use.

Our aim is to help people to enjoy Scotland's natural heritage responsibly, understand it more fully and use it wisely so that it can be sustained for future generations.

