

Context

One of four WLAs in Wester Ross, extending over 137 km² of the north and east of the Applecross peninsula. Flanked by a main road to the east and otherwise minor single track roads, it is relatively distant from large population centres.

There is a range of high, dramatic mountains in the south that tower over deep U-shaped glens and Loch Kishorn, extending to more undulating peatland and hills within the centre and north of the WLA and, finally, a band of rocky cnochan towards the north coast with Loch Torridon. This composition represents the underlying geology - the mountains formed of hard Torridonian sandstone that rise above older Lewisian gneissⁱ and deep glens, corries and shattered rocks formed during glaciation.

Land within the WLA is used mainly for deer stalking, stock grazing, fishing, nature conservation and recreation. This is influenced by ownership and management of much of the area by The Applecross Trust who state they are: *'...committed to ensuring that the special character of the peninsula is preserved in a responsible and progressive manner whilst acknowledging its wilderness heritage...'*ⁱⁱ

The area is uninhabited, but contributes significantly to the visual backdrop of a number of small and dispersed harbour and crofting settlements just outside, including Kenmore, Ardheslaig and Shildaig around the north coast, Londain on the west, and Rassal and Achintraid in the south. The WLA is also viewed from outside its edge along the coast road between Shildaig and Applecross Bay, and between here and Kishorn over the Bealach na Bàⁱⁱⁱ. This is a famous pass over which a single-track road twists and turns around hairpin bends and up slopes of 1:5 to rise 626 metres – described as Scotland's best example of an alpine-like pass^{iv}, and offering access to an upland landscape for many who would not otherwise experience this. The undulating peatlands are also viewed locally from the coastal roads and settlements, as well as from two historic paths across the interior between Kenmore or Inverbain and Applecross Bay. Beinn Bhàn is one of two Corbetts popular with hillwalkers, whilst its sheer cliffs attract rock climbers, and many of the rivers and lochs are popular for fishing.

The mountains are designated within a Special Area for Conservation whilst the scenic value of the WLA is recognised by its eastern half being within the Wester Ross National Scenic Area whose description notes: *'...much of the mountain landscape is renowned for being wild and remote, with a natural vegetation cover and few, if any, buildings or structures'*.

The broad extent of this WLA is marked on all sides by public roads, although these are mainly single-track and often screened from within the WLA itself. Further afield, the Applecross peninsula is also surrounded by sea to the south, west and north and there are views to the Coulin and Ledgowan Forest WLA (26) to the east, and the Flowerdale, Shildaig and Torridon WLA (27) to the north across Loch Torridon. This setting allows the WLA's wild land qualities to be shared with neighbouring areas and vice versa.

Key attributes and qualities of the wild land area

- **A cluster of arresting mountains with long linear ridges and towering rocky cliffs, scalloped around deep enclosed corries**

This WLA includes a dramatic group of arresting, rocky and rugged mountains. These are irregular in form and have contrasting faces – typically with rocky peatland slopes on one side, steep precipitous cliffs and corries on the other, and a smooth mountain ridge in-between.

The rocky ridges offer open, panoramic views of extensive mountain ridges and peatland that continue beyond the WLA's margins to distant hill ranges and the sea (including across Kinloch Damph to the Coulin and Ledgowan Forest WLA 26 to the east). The smoothness of the mountain ridges allows unimpeded access along the exposed tops; however, these are precipitous at their edges, with sheer cliffs plummeting below, resulting in a perception of *high risk*.

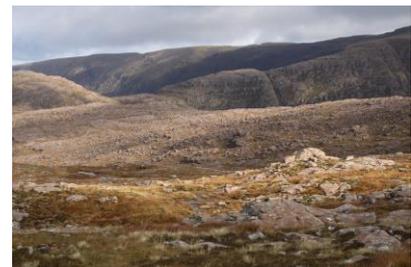


The mountains are mainly rock-covered and possess a striking range of glacial features, including colossal U-shaped glens, corries, glacial lochs, scree slopes and extensive mounds of moraine. These indicate a strong influence of erosion and weathering and contribute to the *sense of naturalness*. The towering rocky cliffs are extremely *arresting* in their vertical dimension; these can be experienced from both above and below, from where the juxtaposition of open tops or glen floors allow you to get close in to the sheer faces to fully experience their imposing and *awe-inspiring* qualities.



The mountains are high, *rugged* and steep, meaning they are *physically challenging* to cross. The exposed rock cliffs are particularly difficult to ascend and, for this same reason, attract rock climbers to the area. Some faces are so steep that they seem impenetrable, but this also contributes to the *sense of remoteness* and *sanctuary*.

In addition to clearly defined peaks and glens, the mountains include areas of extensive undulating and rocky slopes. These are rock strewn and extremely *rugged*, which makes them very *physically challenging* to cross, particularly due to an absence of paths. Traversing these areas is something like a rollercoaster ride, scrambling through deep undulations and over large slabs and boulders.



Visibility is also limited by the mid-ground rocky horizons that, in combination with appearing random in pattern and a difficulty to estimate scale, result in the area seeming more *extensive* than it is.

There are a number of steep-sided U-shaped glens and corries that divide the mountain ridges and create a scalloped eastern side, their contrast of aspect highlighted by different faces being in sun or shadow. The wide and almost flat floors of these glens, as well as horizontal waters where waterbodies occur, emphasise the height and steepness of the surrounding slopes and vice versa, appearing highly *arresting*. Between the glens, there are also narrow bealachs with sheer drops either side, resulting in a strong *sense of awe* and *risk*.



The floors of the glens and corries are partially enclosed, almost like an amphitheatre, offering shelter and a strong *sense of sanctuary*. Some of the glens and gentler slopes are also covered in piles of moraine as well as lochs, lochans, pools, rivers and waterfalls, which all contribute to the *sense of naturalness*, although this is diminished where fences or conifer plantations can be seen.



- **Extensive, open, gently rugged and undulating peatland slopes and hills**

There is an area of open and undulating peatland slopes and hills that are gently *rugged* and extend between the mountains in the south, to the sea in the north and west, and to Glen Shieldaig in the east. This area is expansive and predominantly simple in composition at a broad scale, but it has a mosaic of rock, bog, peatland vegetation, lochans and burns at a local level that contribute to the *sense of naturalness*.



In some places, the peatland includes native woodland that tucks into the undulations and lee slopes and contributes to the *perceived naturalness*. In other places, where stock and deer fences are seen, this attribute may be diminished as human intervention is indicated as well as the fences appearing as an *artefact*.

The undulating nature of the landform means that, as you move through the area and go from low to high points, there is intermittent screening and revelation of views, with a strong sense of exposure upon the tops and a greater sense of shelter within the depressions. This means it is difficult to follow a direct path and, in addition to the *ruggedness* of the landform and need to avoid bogs, lochs and watercourses, results in access being *physically challenging*.

Despite the peatland being relatively low in elevation and with an overall horizontal emphasis, there are occasional steep hills such as Croic-bheinn, Meall an Doireachain and An Staonach that have *arresting* qualities at a local level. In some places, the openness of the landscape also allows views to distant mountains such as in Torridon and on Skye which contribute to the wild land qualities where intervening developed areas are screened.



In the north and east, the area is rockier with deeper undulations and more lochs – some of the latter very large, such as Loch Lundie. Within these areas, the greater prevalence of exposed rock and the ‘raw’ appearance of this contributes to the *sense of naturalness*. Conversely, in the west, the landform is much simpler, with fewer undulations and an *awe inspiring* horizontal emphasis in combination with the sea.



- **A remote interior with few artefacts and a strong sense of sanctuary and solitude, with distant views from high ground and along glens to human elements around the coast**

The interior is largely free of *human artefacts* and *contemporary land use*, and views of these elements outwith the area are typically screened by the intervening landform. This contributes to a strong sense of *remoteness* and, with few visitors to the interior, also a *sense of sanctuary and solitude*. This absence of human elements as well as a consistent mosaic of vegetation means that it is difficult to perceive distance, resulting in the area appearing from some places to *extend* much further than its edges.

Most of the roads and settlements around the south, west and north of Applecross are located near the coast. Whilst these tend to be screened from the interior, due to being tucked down low, they can often be seen from the mountain tops, along glens leading to the sea and from slopes around the WLA margins. From these places, *human artefacts and contemporary land use* include crofts as well as roads, forest plantations, fish farms and the industrial base at Kishorn.



These elements are particularly clear from hill and mountain tops just inside the WLA and, although appearing minor in scale in comparison to the surrounding landforms, nonetheless separate the area from the surrounding sea and indicate its limited *extent*.

An exception to the typical distribution of human elements around the coast is the large mast upon Sgùrr a’ Chaorachain which can be seen across a large proportion of the Applecross peninsula and further afield. Not only does this appear very prominent as a *human artefact*, but its elevated location means it seems to diminish the perceived *awe-inspiring* qualities of the surrounding mountains, by highlighting that they are surmountable.

- **Historic routes along which there is an experience of the dramatic landforms and extensive peatland interior**

The Bealach na Bà, located just outside the southern edge of the WLA, is well-known for its steep, zig-zag, single track road, and it is from this route and the viewpoint at the top from which many people view the WLA. The proximity of the road to the cliffs above allow an experience of some of the wild land attributes, such as a *sense of naturalness* and *awe* from the *rugged* and towering cliffs, even if other attributes are not so strong (for example, sanctuary, solitude and lack of human artefacts).



In addition to views from just outside the WLA along public roads, there are two old paths that cross the interior peatland between Kenmore or Inverbain and Applecross Bay (joining on the south side of Croic-bheinn). It is along these routes that many people experience the qualities of the peatland interior, such as its *arresting* openness, *perceived naturalness* and *ruggedness*, with the paths themselves easing the *physical challenge* of crossing the peatland.



Endnotes and select references

ⁱ The Torridonian sandstone is known as the 'Applecross Formation' and is from the lower part of the sequence of these rocks which includes abundant pebbly layers.

ⁱⁱ Information available at: http://www.applecrosstrust.org.uk/applecross_estate.asp

ⁱⁱⁱ Also known as the Bealach nam Bó

^{iv} Websites:

- <http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/applecross/peninsula/>
- http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g551815-d4106283-r231143476-Bealach_na_Ba_Road-Applecross_Ross_and_Cromarty_Scottish_Highlands_Scotland.html
- <http://www.scotlandinfo.eu/applecross-peninsula-and-bealach-na-ba.html>