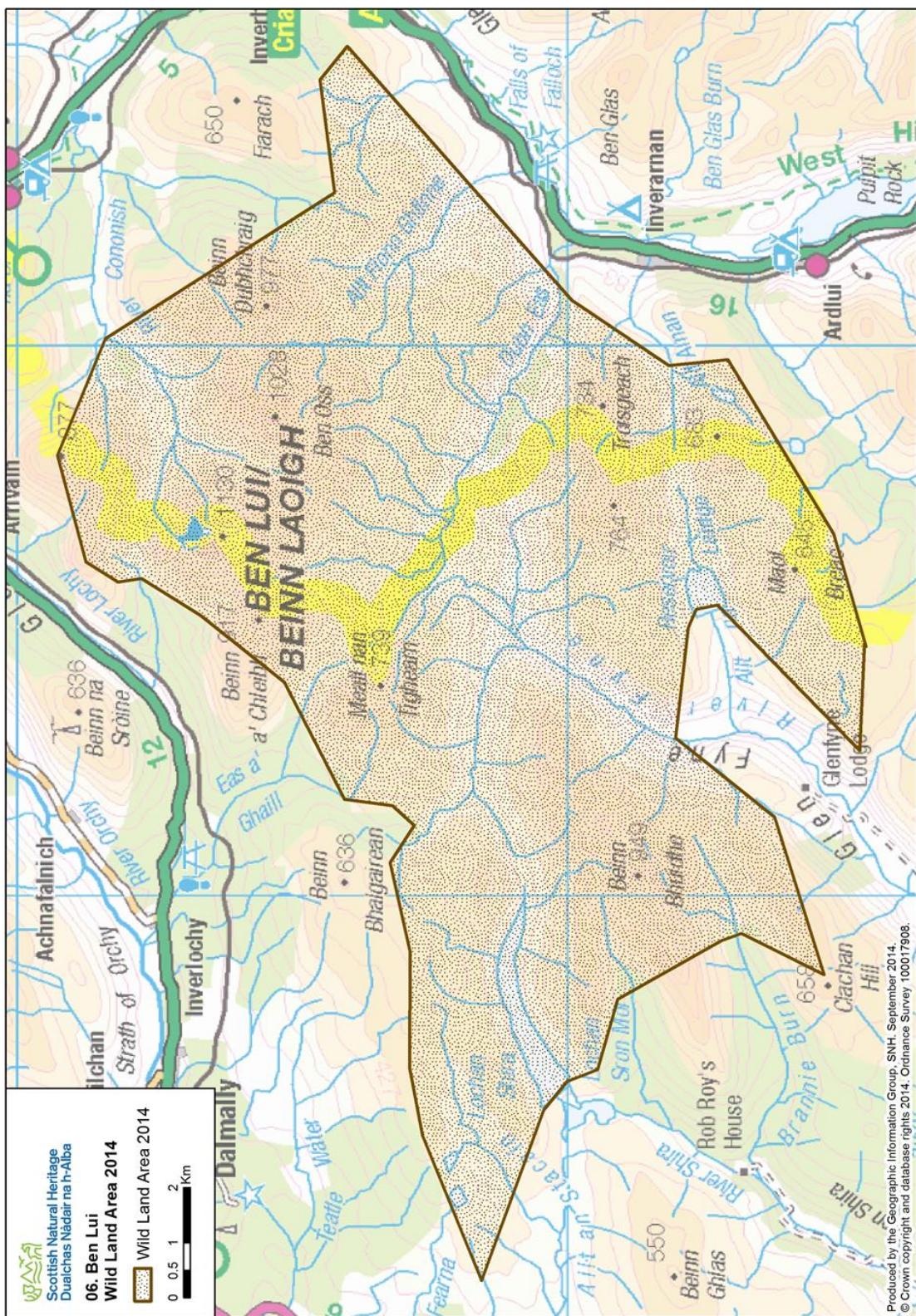


Ben Lui Wild Land Area



Context

The western half of this relatively small WLA lies within Argyll and Bute and the eastern half is in Stirling. It has an area of 145 km² and is roughly rectangular in shape, extending some 23 km from east to west.

It consists of a complex range of steep, high and sometimes craggy hills, composed of mostly quartz and mica schists with pockets of limestone and slate, penetrated by several steep glens and surrounded by grass and heather moorland. The hills are generally more massive in the south-west, but those in the north-east, including Ben Lui, appear more prominent, both from within and beyond the WLA.

The area is readily accessible from the Central Belt and none of the WLA lies over 10 km from a public road. Private tracks follow most of the larger glens, including Glen Fyne, which lies outside the WLA to the south of Inverchorachan. Extensive forest plantations define much of the northern edge and also extend partly along the west and southern boundaries. Busy glens with roads and rail lines lie beyond the WLA on three sides: Glen Falloch to the south-east, Strath Fillan to the north-east and Glen Lochy to the north. Crianlarich, Inverarnan and Tyndrum serve as gateways for visitors to the area.

The WLA is uninhabited, although it contains shielings in some more sheltered areas such as upper Glen Fyne. The land is used for deer stalking, sheep grazing, hill walking and hydro-electric power generation. Hydro infrastructure includes part of the Loch Sloy – Glen Shira scheme which, together with high-voltage electricity transmission lines that cut through the WLA, noticeably reduce the strength of the wild land attributes in places.

The Munro Ben Lui, which is often described as the '*Queen of Scottish Mountains*' and '*probably the most Alpine-looking mountain in the Southern Highlands*' lies in the north of the WLA.ⁱ The WLA contains four other Munros and two Corbettts, with dedicated car parks located just outside the WLA at Clachan on the A83 and near Inverlochy and at Dalrigh on the A85.

The eastern portion of the WLA lies within the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. The Special Qualities Reportⁱⁱ describes this as a '*great tract of hills and mountains rising steeply and dramatically from the glen floors...the bare upper hillsides and summits appear untouched, remote and wild, rising above the long glens where farming, forestry and infrastructure are found.*' The part of the WLA which lies within Argyll and Bute is designated as an Area of Panoramic Quality.ⁱⁱⁱ

The WLA lies immediately to the west of Ben More - Ben Ledi WLA (07) and from some summits and upper slopes, where intervening human elements are screened from view, the wild land qualities appear to extend into this area. By contrast the Loch Etive Mountains and Breadalbane-Schiehallion WLAs (09 and 10) lie to the north-west and north-east respectively but appear clearly separate due to some extensive intervening conifer plantations and settlements.

The extent and shape of the WLA is generally difficult to appreciate from surrounding areas as forest plantations, woodland and landform often screen views into the WLA, but there are some intermittent views of the north-eastern hills from sections of the A85 east of Dalmally and the A82 south-east of Tyndrum and north of Ardlui. The West Highland Way skirts the eastern boundary between Inverarnan and Crianlarich, providing intermittent views of Ben Lui and the adjacent hills for over 30,000 walkers a year.^{iv}

Key attributes and qualities of the wild land area

- **Contrast between the more massive and remote hills in the south-west and the arresting, more visible and popular hills to the north-east**

The mountains in the north-east, including Beinn a Chleibh, Ben Lui, Ben Oss and Beinn Dubhchraig, are particularly steep, individually distinctive and angular in form. Views of these hills are *awe-inspiring*, especially when seen from below. Ben Lui is a very imposing hill, its massive north-eastern corrie, Coire Gaothaich and steep rocky spurs appear *arresting*, accentuated by the horizontal emphasis of the moorland below, especially on the approach from Cononish.



The hills to the south-west of the WLA, including Stac a Chuirn, Beinn Bhuidhe and Ceann Garbh, are more massive and complex, with interlinking ridges. Where there are views of Beinn Bhuidhe and the south-western hills, although obviously *rugged*, they appear much more rounded and less *arresting* than those to the north-east.



The proximity to nearby settlements makes Ben Lui and the adjacent peaks popular with walkers and climbers which can reduce the *sense of solitude*. Although the area is readily accessible and nowhere is more than 10 km from a public road, the hills to the south-west are generally more difficult to access than those to the north-east, generally requiring a long walk in along private roads and tracks and less frequented by walkers. They consequently provide a greater *sense of solitude*, although constructed access tracks reduce this in places.

While the north-eastern hills are more *arresting* than those in the south-west, both ranges are *rugged* and *physically challenging* to climb, due to the combination of steep slopes, crags, cliffs and scree. Although there are few recreational facilities, footpaths generally follow ridgelines and are most obvious on the more popular hills in the north-east, highlighted by path erosion, with numerous stone cairns and some signs, fences and stiles at lower levels. Once away from the more popular hills, there are extensive areas with no paths or tracks, especially within the hills to the south-west, allowing a stronger *sense of remoteness and sanctuary*. Poorly drained flatter areas, some containing bog holes and peat hags increase the time needed to access the interior, while craggy and exposed bealachs and ridges with sudden drops increase the *sense of risk*.

- **Rugged and highly natural mountains, penetrated by steep-sided glens that contain well-used routes and provide arresting views**

Both upland areas have a high degree of *naturalness*, with many obvious glacial landforms and exposed rock, cliffs, boulders, scree and crags. Where rock is not exposed the mountains support rarer alpine species in short swards, while lower slopes are covered by a mosaic of rough grass and heather with blanket bog on plateaux and flatter areas.

Some striking v-shaped glens cut deep into the mountain massif, exposing *arresting* craggy glen sides. Fast-flowing natural burns cut deep into the rock, waterfalls and small upland lochs contribute to the strong *sense of naturalness* of the area. Several glens contain fluvio-glacial landforms and small areas of native woodland, including some riparian woodland along the burns. Larger broadleaved woods of an open character also occur within some glens, enhancing their *sense of naturalness*, although deer fences around these woods diminish this attribute in places.



The majority of stock and deer fences are restricted to lower ground, but can be prominent, introducing linear *human artefacts* and vegetation patterns that contrast with the *rugged* landform. ATV tracks also indicate active management of grazing regimes, introducing *evidence of contemporary land use* and reducing the *sense of naturalness*.

The steep sides of the glens provide a strong sense of enclosure, channelling the eye along the glen to create *arresting* views. The proximity and massive scale of the enclosing hills are *awe inspiring*, and the corries, waterfalls, rock and scree faces provide a strong *sense of naturalness*. These side slopes also screen *human artefacts* and *contemporary land uses* within the surrounding landscape. With the absence of any indication of the *extent* of the WLA, this results in a strong *sense of solitude, sanctuary and remoteness*.



Many glens have long been used as passes and the drove road from Dalmally to Inverarnan follows Gleann nan Caorann. Shielings are common in more sheltered areas; some are now used as sheep or cattle shelters but most are difficult to distinguish as buildings at any distance. Some areas have been drained and the brighter green of fields around the shielings indicates former cattle grazing. These isolated *human artefacts* and *contemporary land uses* have a localised effect on the *sense of naturalness, sanctuary and remoteness*.



- **A landscape that generally well-defined by surrounding human elements in views from higher slopes**

From the tops and upper slopes there are *arresting* views in all directions and the eye is drawn by the adjacent hill ranges - Ben Cruachan from the hills to the south-west and Ben Challum and Ben More from the north-eastern hills. Although views of these extensive *rugged* mountain ranges contribute to the *awe-inspiring* qualities of this area, intervening forest plantations to the north, west and south form dark homogenous areas that interrupt the sense of a continuous mountain landscape and emphasise the limited extent of the WLA.



Its relatively small *extent* is also evident from the various *human artefacts* that are generally visible around the margins. The busy A82 and A85, rail lines, the mine and farm buildings at Cononish and adjacent settlements of Crianlarich and Tyndrum also affect the *sense of remoteness and sanctuary* of the eastern part of WLA, where traffic noise is audible from the slopes above Strath Fillan and Glen Lochy. From the western parts, hydro-electric dams, power stations, pipelines and high voltage electricity transmission lines are noticeable around the periphery. Access tracks for several run of river hydro schemes are visible from parts of the WLA and power stations lying just beyond the WLA also affect the *sense of sanctuary* when visible from within it. Wind farms impinge little on the wild land qualities, although Clachan wind farm affects the *sense of sanctuary* from nearby Beinn Bhuidhe.

There is a stronger visual connection with Ben More-Ben Ledi WLA (07) from some parts of the north-eastern hills where the intervening road, rail route and transmission line are concealed by the steep sides of Glen Falloch, allowing the wild land qualities to appear to extend into the neighbouring hill range.



- **Few human artefacts within much of the upland area, in contrast to some of the glens where hydro development is a recurring feature**

Within much of the upland area, fences, fence posts, stone cairns and walkers' paths are the only obvious *human artefacts*. These isolated, minor elements have only a localised effect on the *sense of remoteness, sanctuary and solitude*.

Some glens within the WLA contain extensive hydro-electric infrastructure, introducing very obvious *human artefacts* and *contemporary land use*. This includes dams, reservoirs, tracks, intakes, pipes, tunnels and aqueducts, many of which extend deep into the glens. Above ground pipelines are especially noticeable, forming strong linear elements that contrast with the rocky moorland slopes. Although intakes appear as *human artefacts*, diminishing the *sense of remoteness and sanctuary*, some are well-integrated, which limits the extent of the effects on the wild land qualities.





Lochan Shira and Allt na Lairige reservoir lie within the WLA and are both dammed. The variable water levels are evident from the exposed mineral soil along the shorelines, affecting the *sense of naturalness*. High-voltage electricity transmission lines cut through this WLA, appearing as very obvious *human artefacts* that also diminish the *sense of sanctuary*, particularly when they are experienced at close range within the confines of the glens.

These *human artefacts* have a cumulative effect on the *sense of sanctuary* within these glens, especially where access tracks connecting a series of intakes extend along both sides of the glen or where there is combined visibility of, for example, tracks, power lines and hydro infrastructure. When viewed from the upper slopes and summits, the more noticeable dams, pipes and tracks that lie within the WLA have the effect of reducing its apparent *extent*.

Constructed access tracks are mostly restricted to the glens, although some of the more recently constructed tracks climb into the open lower hills and have a wider influence on the *sense of sanctuary* as a consequence. Access tracks allow walkers a quicker option to access the hills, so reducing the *physical effort* required as well as the *sense of risk, remoteness and solitude*, especially when the tracks are used by maintenance vehicles.



Endnotes and selected references

ⁱ Cameron McNeish (2002). *The Munros. Scotland's Highest Mountains*

ⁱⁱ Scottish Natural Heritage and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority (2010). *The Special Landscape Qualities of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park*. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No.376

ⁱⁱⁱ Areas of Panoramic Quality are identified by Argyll and Bute Council as areas of regional importance in terms of their landscape quality, previously identified as 'Regional Scenic Areas' in the former Strathclyde Structure Plan

^{iv} Peter Scott Planning Services (2010). *Developing the Network of Longer Distance Routes*. SNH Commissioned Report No 380

Site assessment carried out May 2016