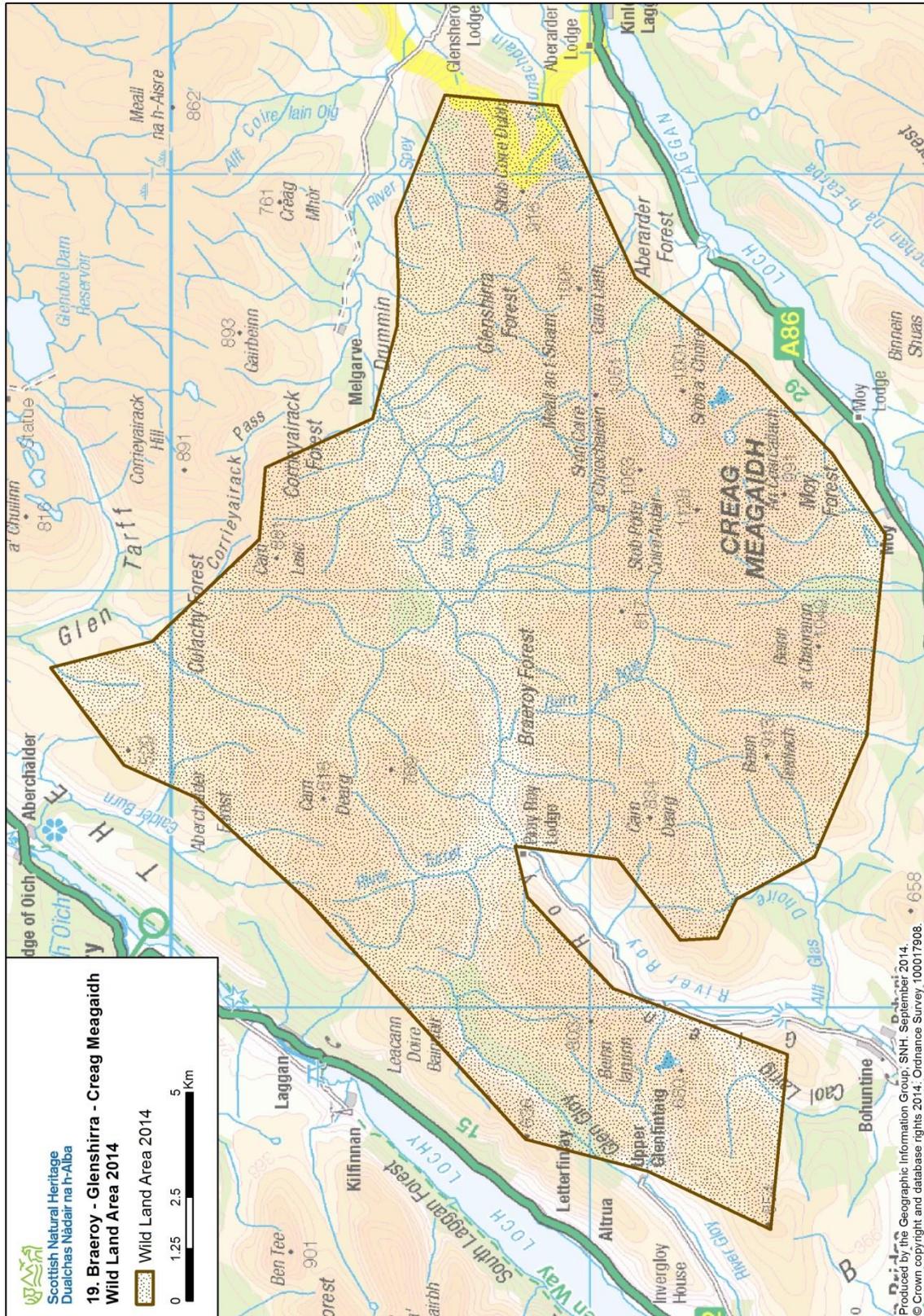


Braeroy, Glenshirra and Creag Meagaidh Wild Land Area



Context

This WLA extends 265 km² across south Inverness-shire, west Badenoch and Strathspey and north Lochaber. Bounded by major roads to the east, south and west that provide links to the Central Belt, Inverness and Fort William, to the north the Corrieyairack Pass separates it from the main range of the Monadhliath hills.

The area comprises a group of hills divided by the rivers Roy and Spey that run east-west through the centre. It includes open rolling moorland hills and plateaux formed of hard, intrusive igneous and metamorphic rocksⁱ which were eroded by glaciation and later fluvial activity, including the carving of a series of deep penetrating glens. All the hills are large in scale, but the northern hills tend to be more notable for their simple, open and sweeping slopes; whilst the southern hills tend to be steeper and higher and include some remarkable corries, cliffs and crags. From outside the WLA, the outward-facing hill slopes form a fairly simple visual backdrop to surrounding settlements and routes, whilst screening views into the interior.

Land within the WLA is used mainly for deer and game shooting, fishing and recreation, with some areas of stock grazing and forestry around the margins. The area is largely uninhabited, although there are some estate houses located just outside the edge and some isolated bothies within the interior glens, including the Mountain Bothies Association bothy at Luib-chonnal. The area is edged on all sides by hills; but beyond these, there are public roads or tracks which facilitate access, including the A82 in the north west, minor roads up glens Gloy and Roy in the south west, the A86 in the south east, and General Wade's Military Road in the north east (forming the Corrieyairack Pass (non-vehicular) and a minor public road between Melgarve and Laggan).

The landscape and scenic qualities of the WLA are recognised by its south eastern part lying within the Ben Alder, Laggan and Glen Banchor Special Landscape Area (SLA)ⁱⁱ, as well as its eastern tip being located within the Cairngorms National Parkⁱⁱⁱ. In addition, part of the area lies within the Lochaber Geopark^{iv} and includes the Glen Roy National Nature Reserve (NNR) and part of the large Parallel Roads of Lochaber SSSI, whose glacial features attract many visitors due to their uniqueness within the UK and their relatively easy access. The area also includes the Creag Meagaidh NNR, which is valued partly for showcasing native woodland regeneration.

The interior attracts visitors for recreation, particularly for hillwalking, climbing, shooting or fishing. Many walkers and climbers target the five Munros and four Corbetts, and corries, particularly around Creag Meagaidh and Coire Ardair (which are served by a visitor car park at Aberarder).

The WLA is located near other areas of wild land, so that it appears to extend uninterrupted into these when viewed from its elevated interior, from where intervening human elements are screened. This relationship is particularly strong with the Monadhliath WLA (20) to the north east, the Rannoch, Nevis, Mamores and Alder WLA (14) to the south west and the Cairngorms WLA (15) to the east, highlighting the area's relatively central position within the Highlands. The higher peaks within these surrounding areas contribute to the awe-inspiring qualities of this WLA where seen rising up above and beyond its landform horizons.

At a local level, the WLA margins are clearly marked on all sides, especially by forest plantations, roads or tracks, and the Beaully-Denny high voltage powerlines. From inside the WLA, these edges are visible mainly from the outward-facing slopes of the hill edges; but they can also be visible from longer distances where viewed through the glens that run from the interior out to the edges.

Key attributes and qualities of the wild land area

- **Rounded hills and plateaux that are awe-inspiring in their massive scale and simplicity, whilst geological features and rivers contribute strongly to the sense of naturalness**

This WLA comprises a range of high, rounded hills and plateaux. At a broad level, the scale of these appears *awe-inspiring* due to their sheer massiveness, although it is often difficult to appreciate their actual dimensions because of the simplicity of the landform and land cover. Nonetheless, their scale may be clearer to appreciate where there are local vertical features, such as deep corries, cliffs or waterfalls, or contrasting horizontal features such as lochs and lochans. Here, it is possible to not only experience the *arresting* qualities of the features at close proximity, but also use scale reference to appreciate better the immensity of the surroundings. In addition, the altitude of the hills and plateaux is emphasised at times by snow upon the tops in contrast to lower surroundings.

The *awe-inspiring* simplicity of the hills and plateaux is influenced by the open and sweeping nature of their slopes, as well as a similarity of height and prominence of the tops which mean that no single peak dominates and they are seen, alternatively, as a collective range with linking ridges.



There is a strong *sense of naturalness* across much of the interior, partly due to the prominence of geological features such as corries and glacial deposition, but also dynamic features such as land slips, deep cut gorges and watercourses.

The parallel roads of Glens Roy and Gloy are particularly remarkable for their extensive scale and regularity of horizontal lines that cross the hill slopes, highlighting the influence of past glaciation^v.

Within some areas, unfenced native woodland also contributes to the *sense of naturalness*; particularly at Creag Meagaidh, where extensive native woodland extends up the hill sides from low to high elevation. In contrast, in other places, this attribute is diminished where there is clear evidence of human intervention, for example as a result of muirburn or fences (highlighted by a strong difference of vegetation despite similar ground conditions).



- **A strong contrast of experience between the hills and plateaux with the straths, glens and corries, varying in their accessibility, exposure and visibility of human elements**

Steep side-slopes and convex tops to the hills and plateaux limit visibility and there is a strong contrast of experience between these tops and the straths, glens and corries below.

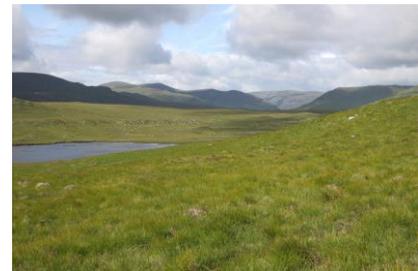
Upon the tops, where the adjacent straths, glens and corries are screened by the landform, an open platform offers views over an *awe-inspiring* succession of elevated hill horizons that extend far into the distance. These views include mountains and ridges within other wild land areas such as the Monadhliath WLA (20) to the north east, the Cairngorms WLA (15) to the east and the Rannoch, Nevis, Mamores and Alder WLA (14) to the south west. Furthermore, the *sense of remoteness* upon the tops is often heightened because *human artefacts and contemporary land use* (including access routes) located within adjacent glens and straths are screened by the intervening landform.



In contrast, from the floors of the glens, straths and corries, outward views are screened by the side slopes. Here, the towering slopes appear *arresting* in their steepness, emphasised in places by waterfalls or near straight cascading burns plummeting down the slopes. The containment within these areas increase shelter and heighten the *sense of sanctuary*.

- **A hidden interior that is simple in landform and land cover, contributing to a perceived 'emptiness' and a strong sense of remoteness and sanctuary**

The interior of the WLA is concealed from the outside, and vice versa, due to screening by the outer hill slopes. In addition to a lack of *human artefacts or evidence of contemporary land use* within most parts of the interior, this contributes to a strong *sense of remoteness* and *sanctuary*. Furthermore, the simplicity of the landform and vegetation across the interior, combined with few landmark features, conveys a sense of 'emptiness'. This means that it is often difficult to navigate within the landscape or perceive size or distances, influencing the *sense of risk*.



Despite the prevailing absence of human elements within the interior, some are located just outside the WLA, for example the Beaully-Denny high voltage powerlines and access track through the Corrieyairack Pass. In addition, a few *human artefacts* and some *evidence of contemporary land use* occur within the area itself, for example access tracks, fences and forest plantations. These diminish the wild land attributes individually and cumulatively, and tend to appear most prominent and intrusive where contrasting in line, colour or pattern to the simple landform and vegetation cover.

- **Access and recreation focused around the margins, with an interior that is visited by few and possesses a sense of solitude, physical challenge and risk**

The combination of elevated hill ground, remarkable geological characteristics and a number of access points and routes around the margins of the WLA attracts various types of visitor, such as for hillwalking, winter climbing, ski-touring, mountain-biking, fishing and to visit geological features. Recreational activity tends to occur most frequently within the outer parts of the WLA (both within and outside the boundary) or upon the Munros and Corbetts, particularly as accessed from the Aberarder visitor car park (serving Creag Meagaidh NNR) and General Wade's Military Road through the Corrieyairack pass. In contrast, away from the margins, there are fewer visitors to the interior, with just one through-path across the WLA between Brae Roy Lodge and Melgarve (with a MBA bothy

in-between at Luib chonnal), contributing to a strong *sense of sanctuary and solitude* within the interior.

Although the openness of the landscape means there tends to be few obstructions to walking off-path over the interior hill slopes, this walking is *physically challenging* and takes a long time due to the rivers, burns, bogs and peat hags that have to be negotiated. In combination with the openness and exposure within most parts of the area, this also increases the *sense of risk*.

- **Long, remote glens that penetrate far into the hills and plateaux: some arresting by virtue of their narrowness and steep side-slopes, and some because of their openness against a surrounding backcloth of towering mountains**

The hills and plateaux are penetrated by a number of deep glens that facilitate access, whilst their long length also provides an experience of increasing *remoteness* with distance.

The glens contain dynamic rivers, tributaries and waterfalls as well as glacial and fluvial deposits that contribute to the *sense of naturalness*. Some also appear *arresting* because of their narrowness and steep towering side slopes, whilst for others it is their wide openness which emphasises the *awe-inspiring* contrast of topography and scale of the surrounding hill backcloth.



From the glen floors, the surrounding slopes screen views to the hill tops and plateaux above (especially where wooded), so the edges and full *extent* of the wild land area are not clearly apparent, meaning it may be perceived as being more *extensive* than it actually is. The glen side slopes also create shelter and can contribute to a strong *sense of sanctuary*, especially where the glen is terminated at its end by corrie cliffs or steep slopes.

Historic features occur within many of the glens, for example old enclosures, buildings or shielings. These often create foci as *human artefacts*, but they tend to have localised effects where seen as isolated and low-key in siting and design.

Some of the glens within the margins or just outside the WLA include more extensive areas of *human artefacts* or *contemporary land use*, such as estate buildings, forest plantations, electricity power lines, fences or access tracks.



The effects of these elements may be limited where they appear contained within the glen floor; whilst, in contrast, their effects tend to be more intrusive where they are large, or extend up the glen side slopes or over bealachs.

Endnotes and select references

ⁱ Scottish Natural Heritage (2006) *Cairngorms – A landscape fashioned by geology*. Redgorton, Scottish Natural Heritage.

ⁱⁱ The Highland Council (2011) *Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas*. Inverness, The Highland Council.

ⁱⁱⁱ Information available at: <http://cairngorms.co.uk/landscape-toolkit/special-landscape-qualities> and http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/375.pdf

^{iv} Information available at: <http://lochabergeopark.org.uk/>

^v Ice dams creating different lake shoreline levels