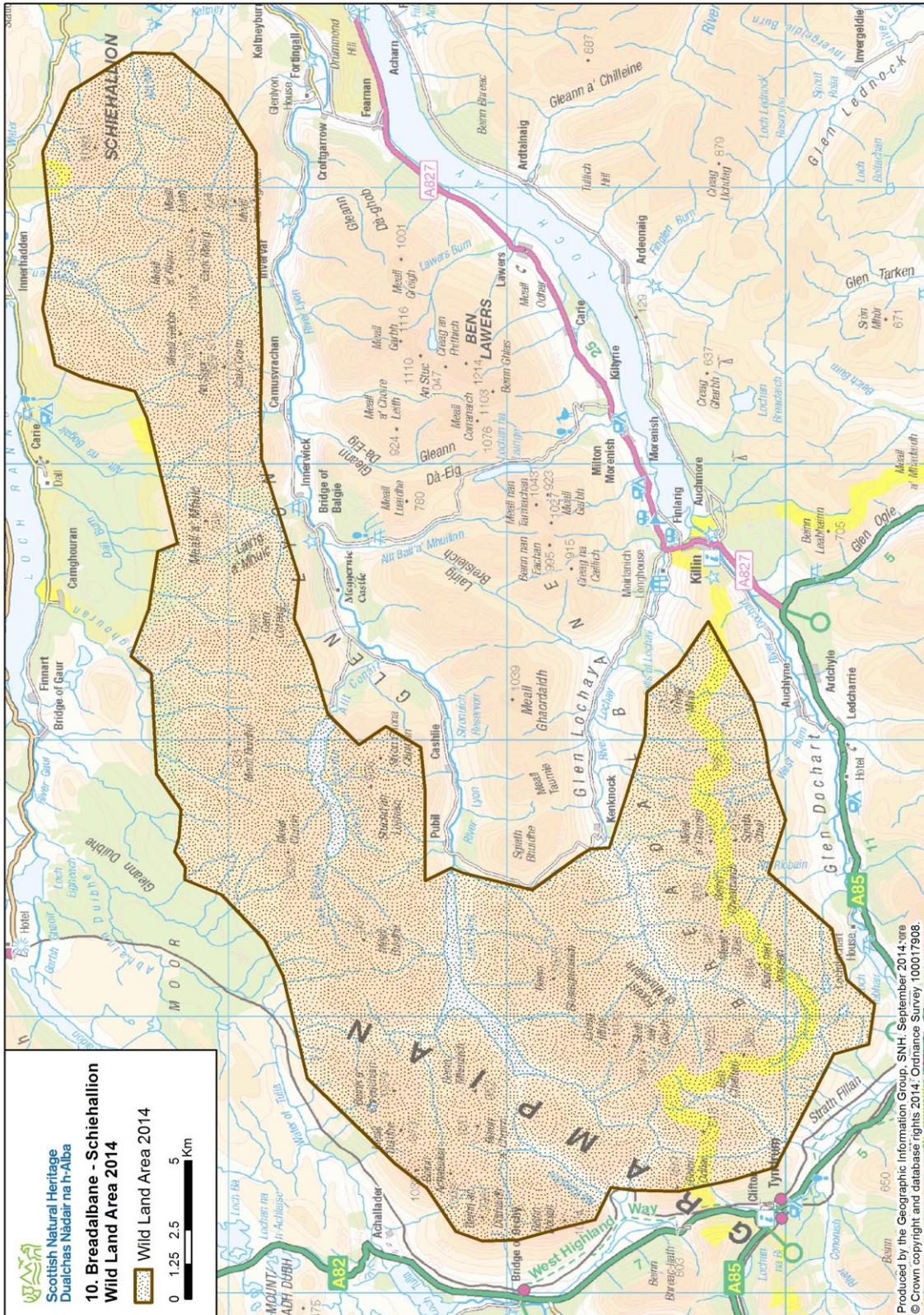


# Breadalbane-Schiehallion Wild Land Area



## Context

This large (448 km<sup>2</sup>) WLA lies mainly in Perth and Kinross, but the south western part is within Stirling and, to the west, a small area north of Beinn Odhar near Tyndrum lies in Argyll and Bute. It is part of a larger area of wild country between Lochs Tay and Rannoch, separated only by minor roads from the Lyon-Lochay WLA (11) and the Ben Lawers WLA (12). The northern part extends east, to Dun Coillich, east of Schiehallion and over 46 km from Beinn Odhar. Major roads provide direct access to its southern and western edges from the Central Belt.

It consists of a core of steep, high and sometimes craggy hills, composed of schist, locally rich in calcium, with some outcrops of metamorphosed limestone. The broad massif of interlocking summits, plateaux and ridges is deeply penetrated by steep glens and surrounded by hummocky moorland slopes. The hills are generally higher in the west, with more exposed rock, crags and cliffs and are uninhabited, mostly managed for deer and sheep. The adjacent glens run east-west and contain isolated farmsteads set amongst pasture bounded by stone walls, broadleaved woodlands, a few rectilinear conifer plantations and some prominent hydro-electric infrastructure.

Its relative narrowness means that none of the wild land area is over 10 km from a public road, giving many visitors the opportunity to view the area from its margins; from the West Highland Railway line and A82 to the west, the A85 to the south and from the single track, no-through roads along Loch Rannoch, Glen Lyon and Glen Lochay. The West Highland Way skirts the western boundary, following the route of the railway line between Tyndrum and Bridge of Orchy and providing dramatic views of the western hills for over 30,000 walkers a year.<sup>i</sup> The outer slopes and nearby woodlands sometimes screen views of the interior hills from the adjacent roads, adding to the drama when these are revealed.

The WLA contains 17 Munros and 10 Corbetts, attracting many hillwalkers, which is evident from the extensive car parking provision, signage, cairns and some path erosion. Invervar is a popular starting point as the five Munros to the north are readily climbed in one excursion and there is a designated car park at Braes of Foss, which caters for the many walkers taking the main route to Schiehallion and at Kenknock.

The northern part of the WLA, east of Loch an Daimh lies within the Loch Rannoch and Glen Lyon National Scenic Area (NSA). The NSA description notes this as a '*wild landscape of ridges, corries and cliffs, seemingly remote from civilisation and at the mercy of the elements*'. In relation to the views from Loch Rannoch and Glen Lyon, it describes how '*the enclosing mountains create a monumental backdrop, dwarfing the more intricate, human-scale and detailed features at loch side, glen floor and lower slopes*'.<sup>ii</sup> Part of the area within Argyll and Bute and west of the Beinn Achaladair ridgeline lies within Ben Nevis and Glen Coe NSA. The south eastern area, north of Glen Dochart between Tyndrum and Killin is within Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park and the eastern part of Schiehallion, including Gleann Mòr, is owned by the JMT.

The WLA lies adjacent to Lyon-Lochay and Ben Lawers WLA (12) and from many places appears to extend uninterrupted into these areas, especially where intervening human elements are screened from view. Loch Etive mountains WLA (9) and Rannoch-Nevis-Mamores-Alder WLAs (14) lie to the north but extensive conifer plantations and settlements create a more defined edge in this direction. Equally, the *ruddy* and *arresting* qualities of this WLA can be experienced from the adjacent mountains.

## Key attributes and qualities of the wild land area

- **An extensive range of massive, high hills with some steep rocky peaks and ridges, including the distinctive peak of Schiehallion**

The hills that form the centre of this WLA extend from those above the Bridge of Orchy in the west to Schiehallion in the east. They are generally more rounded towards the east and steeper, more craggy and rugged to the west of Stuc an Lochain, but all are massive, high, exposed and *physically challenging* to climb or cross, providing a strong *sense of risk*.

The vast *extent* of the range is best appreciated from the north, from across Loch Rannoch, where the *ruggedness* and scale of the hills, amplified by the smooth horizontal plane of the loch is *awe inspiring*.



When seen from directly below, the massive corries, waterfalls, rock and scree faces are *arresting*, the raw glacial features providing a strong *sense of naturalness*.

Schiehallion is a prominent landmark, a shapely, symmetrical conical peak with a long east-west axis. It is widely visible, easily recognised and one of the more popular Munros, with a large dedicated car park and a high grade footpath. These do affect the wild land qualities, particularly at lower levels, but the hill is nonetheless very steep and *physically challenging* to climb and the fractured rock and scree and exposure of the upper slopes contribute to the *sense of naturalness and risk*. Seen from the remote Gleann Mòr the massive bulk of this solitary mountain is *awe-inspiring*, accentuated by the horizontal emphasis of the moorland landscape below, which is empty apart from occasional tracks, ruined shielings and bothies.



- **The extent of the WLA is not always obvious and the higher slopes provide panoramic views to adjacent wild land areas that seem to form a continuous mountain landscape**

From Glen Lyon, Glen Dochart and Strath Fillan, which surround the WLA, the lower hills around the perimeter often obscure views of more rugged mountains of the interior, so concealing the *extent* of the WLA from the outside.

Within the WLA, the hummocky landform of some of the lower moorland slopes creates a strong sense of enclosure and also hides the *extent* of the WLA. This landform screens views of *human artefacts* and *contemporary land use* in the surrounding glens and, without long distance views, there is a greater focus on nearby details, so increasing the *sense of remoteness and sanctuary*. Once away from the more popular routes the hummocky landform makes navigation harder, increasing the *sense of risk*.



The influence of the surrounding glens decreases on climbing higher into the mountains as human elements, such as roads and forest plantations, become concealed by the steepness of the landform. From the tops and upper slopes there are panoramic views in all directions and the eye is drawn by the adjacent hill ranges that form an *awe-inspiring* succession of *rugged* mountain ridges. The mountain landscape appears to *extend* well beyond the boundary of this WLA, to include adjacent WLAs.

Lyon-Lochay WLA (11) and Ben Lawers WLA (12) appear continuous from the central and eastern parts,



and from the northwest there is a strong connection with Loch Etive mountains WLA (9) and Rannoch-Nevis-Mamores-Alder WLAs (12 14), especially where intervening transmission lines and extensive forest plantations are hidden from view by hummocky landform. Equally, the *arresting and rugged* qualities of this WLA can be experienced from the adjacent mountains.

- **Few human elements within the WLA but adjacent forest plantations and hydro infrastructure are visible from the upper slopes and tops**

Within many parts of the interior, fences, stone cairns and walkers' paths are the only obvious *human artefacts*. Shielings are common in some more sheltered areas such as Gleann Mòr, but are often difficult to distinguish as buildings at any distance. Iron fence posts are scattered across some of the hills to the north of Glen Lyon, some of which have been used to construct hill top cairns. These isolated elements have a localised effect on the *sense of sanctuary and remoteness*.



*Human artefacts and contemporary land use* are more evident around the margins. These include rail lines, busy roads and settlements to the south, extensive forest plantations, including Rannoch Forest to the north, and a large number of hydro developments.

The power station at Stronuich and pipelines at Kenknock, scattered buildings, power lines on timber poles and tracks within the lower parts of Glen Lyon and Glen Lochay have a noticeable effect at close range and are also visible from the adjacent slopes within the WLA. Rectangular conifer plantations and the bright green of enclosed fields contrast strongly with the form and colour of the open moorland of the hills. Where visible, these human elements can have a cumulative effect on the sense of *naturalness, remoteness and sanctuary*, but the steepness of the glen sides generally limits their visibility from the upper slopes and tops.



The busy A82 and A85 rail line and settlements of Crianlarich and Tyndrum affect the *sense of remoteness and sanctuary* of the south western part of WLA, where traffic noise is distinctly audible when ascending the south-facing slopes above Strath Fillan and Glen Dochart.



Wind farms are only clearly visible from the eastern tops and east-facing slopes; pylon lines can be seen to the north of Bridge of Orchy and south of Tummel Bridge from the eastern and western-most parts but some extensive forest plantations, the largest of which is Rannoch Forest, are more widely visible. These are particularly noticeable when seen against grass moorland, with which the dark conifers contrast strongly, reducing the otherwise strong *sense of naturalness*.

The effects of isolated features may be limited, but where there is combined visibility of, for example, tracks, power lines and forest plantations or where these are sufficiently extensive, they can disrupt the visual connection with adjacent WLAs and reduce the *perceived extent* of the wider mountain landscape.

- **Rugged and highly natural mountains, penetrated by long and deep glens that are more influenced by estate management and human artefacts**

Much of the interior has a high *degree of naturalness*, with glacial landforms and exposed rock, cliffs, boulders and scree at higher elevation and hummocky landform lower down. Where rock is not exposed the mountains support arctic-alpine vegetation, with grass and heather dominated moorland and some bracken on lower slopes and bog vegetation in wetter areas, adding to the *sense of naturalness*.

There are many natural watercourses although some, such as those above Loch an Daimh, are used for hydro power, introducing *human artefacts* that reduce the *sense of naturalness*, as well as affecting the *perceived remoteness and sanctuary*.

Sheep graze throughout the area, although numbers reduce with altitude. The majority of fences are restricted to lower ground but some extend higher up the mountain sides. Fencing in more open ground can be quite prominent, introducing linear elements that contrast noticeably with the *rugged* landform, indicating active management of grazing regimes and introducing *human artefacts* that reduce the *sense of naturalness*.

The upper reaches of the glens penetrate deep into the WLA. The proximity and massive scale of the enclosing hills is *awe inspiring* and the absence of any indication of the limits of the WLA increases the *sense of solitude and sanctuary*.

These areas are generally less affected by human elements than the lower parts of the glens, but stock



management, tracks, fencing, rectilinear conifer plantations and some new enclosures affect the sense of *sanctuary, remoteness and solitude* in some places.

Loch an Daimh and Loch Lyon are both dammed and the variable water levels are evident from the exposed mineral soil along the shorelines. There are constructed tracks along both shores of Loch Lyon, creating a though route from Auch to Pubil. Tracks adjacent to Loch an Daimh are restricted to the eastern end and, to the west, Eas Daimh has a much stronger *sense of remoteness*.



Large native woodland projects within the upper parts of Glen Lyon, Glen Lochay and Strath Fillan are underway. The woodlands within Gleann a Chlachain above Strath Fillan are well advanced, beginning to form a canopy and the woodland flora is returning. This developing woodland contrasts strongly with the massive corrie of Beinn Challuim above, enhancing the *sense of naturalness* and *awe inspiring* qualities of the mountain. It also screens views of human elements within Strath Fillan, although nearby tracks, fencing, interpretation and visitor facilities, such as picnic tables affect the wild land qualities, particularly lower in the glen.



Recent native woodland enclosures, such as those in upper parts of Glen Lochay, are evident from the pock marked appearance of the planted area as well as fence lines which introduce obvious *human artefacts* and reduce the *sense of naturalness*.

- **Comparatively remote in parts, despite the accessibility and popularity of the hills**

Although the entire WLA is readily accessible and less than 10 km from a public road, many parts have a strong *sense of remoteness* due to the length of time needed to cross very rough, steep or sometimes boggy terrain, with some difficult burn crossings that add to the *sense of risk*. Long, single track no-through roads, such as that along Loch Rannoch, also increase the *perception of remoteness* of some areas.



Constructed tracks are mostly restricted to the glens and once beyond these and into the lower hills, only occasional ATV tracks and some paths are evident. These isolated human elements have less effect on the *sense of remoteness*, especially where there are no views of constructed tracks within the glens.

Paths leading to and between popular tops are generally clearly evident from the erosion by walkers, with some signage at lower levels and numerous stone cairns, but once away from these there are extensive areas with no paths or tracks, allowing a stronger *sense of remoteness and risk*. Within the interior, there is a real sense of getting away from it all; especially within enclosed glens or in areas of hummocky terrain that allows few views of any *human artefacts* or *contemporary land use*.



The bealachs and ridges are exposed and the steep, rocky slopes and crags hold snow late into the season. At lower levels the hummocky, often boulder-strewn moorland that surrounds the mountainous interior can be disorientating and the tussocky grass and heather with boggy sections make the going arduous. These add to the *sense of risk* and make access *physically demanding*, adding to the length of time needed to reach the interior and its consequent *sense of remoteness*.

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**Endnotes**

- <sup>i</sup> Peter Scott Planning Services (2010). *Developing the Network of Longer Distance Routes*. SNH Commissioned Report No 380
- <sup>ii</sup> SNH (2010). *The special qualities of the National Scenic Areas*. SNH Commissioned Report No 374

**Site assessment carried out May and June 2014**