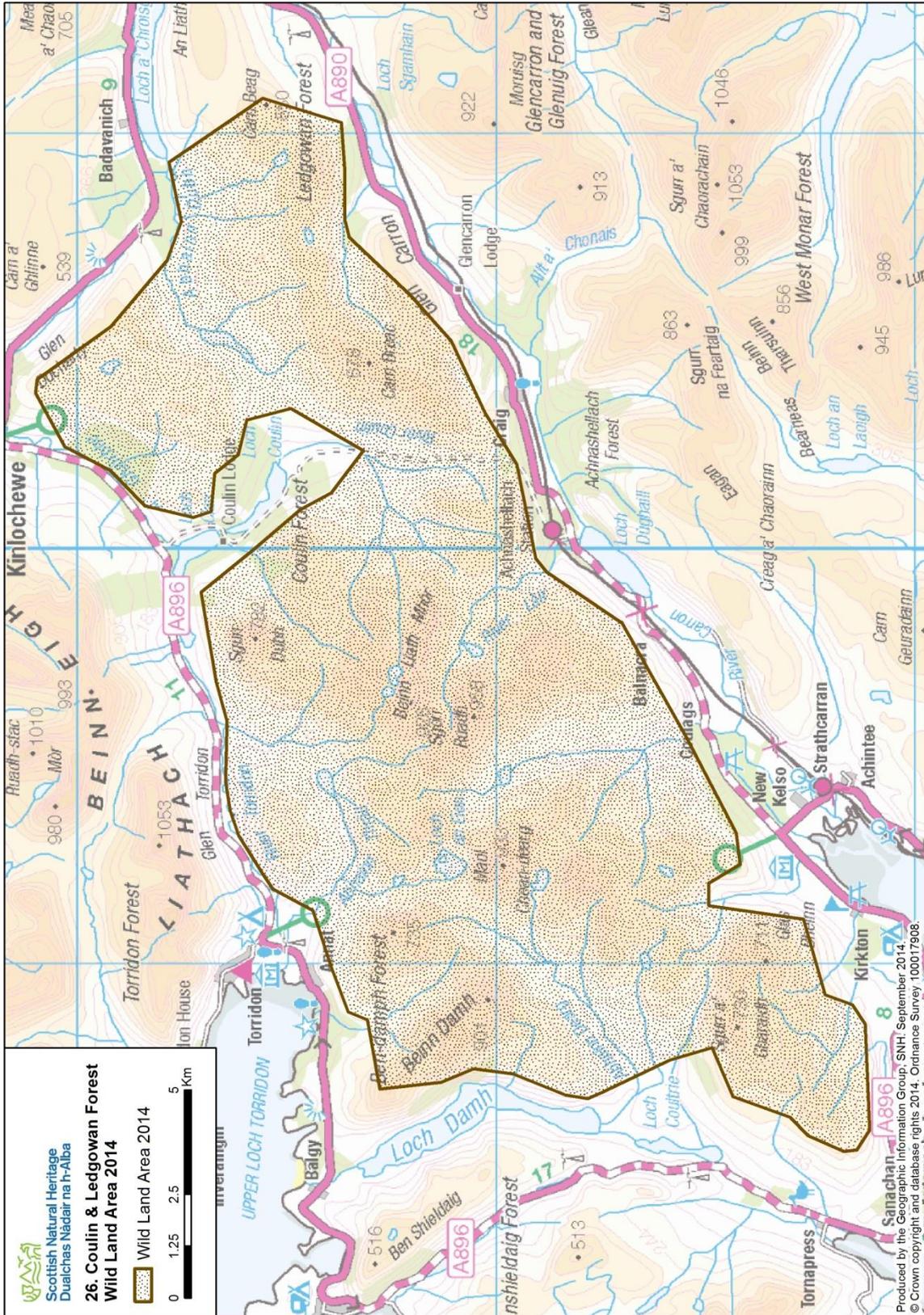


# Coulin and Ledgowan Forest Wild Land Area



## Context

One of four WLAs in Wester Ross, extending over 209 km<sup>2</sup> of Wester Ross from Torridon in the north west, to Lochcarron in the south west, and Ledgowan in the east. Flanked by main roads to the east and south, it is relatively distant from large population centres.

The central and western part of the WLA includes steep and high rocky mountains, glens and corries that extend into a wide expanse of open peatland to the east. This variety reflects complex geology, with the high rocky mountains formed of hard Torridonian sandstone and Cambrian quartzite, and lower areas of cnochan and open peatland overlying Lewisian gneiss and Moine schists. These rocks have also been shaped by glaciation and later fluvial erosion, forming for example large corries, U-shaped glens, glacial lochs, waterfalls and moraine, including Coire a' Cheud-Chnoc - the 'Corrie of a Hundred Hills'<sup>i</sup>.

Land within the WLA is uninhabited and used mainly for deer stalking and fishing. However the area wraps around three sides of the Coulin Estate settlement, as well as bordering other areas of more intensive land use; for example, large conifer plantations to the north, east and south, and fences, power lines and buildings around Kinloch Damph.

Many people view the WLA from outside its edges, such as from the settlements of Torridon, Annat and Lochcarron, as well as along the A832 in the east, the A896 in the north and west, and the A890 in the south. From these low-lying locations, the outward-facing hill slopes form a fairly simple visual backdrop, screening the interior mountains or plateau beyond; however, in contrast, panoramic and elevated views of the area can be gained from nearby mountains outside the WLA such as Beinn Eighe and Liathach.

Within the WLA itself, three Munros and five Corbetts attract hillwalkers, including Ben Damh<sup>ii</sup>, that is popular for its landmark qualities and proximity to Loch Torridon. Some people also walk through the area via a number of paths across and within the interior, including from Coulin, and between Annat in the north and Coullags or Achnashellach in the south.

The WLA includes a number of Special Areas of Conservation and SSSIs that reflect its geological and ecological value. Its scenic qualities are recognised by the majority of the area 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*'.<sup>iii</sup>

This WLA is surrounded by other areas of wild land and is thus influenced strongly by the qualities of these and vice versa. In the north, it is divided from the Flowerdale – Shieldaig - Torridon WLA (27) and the Fisherfield – Letterewe - Fannichs WLA (28) by just narrow glens, so there is a strong exchange of qualities between the areas. There is wider separation with the Applecross WLA (25) to the west and the Central Highlands WLA (24) to the east extending into Glencarron and Monar; but nonetheless the upper slopes and ridges of these are still prominent where undistracted by views to human elements within intervening glens.

## Key attributes and qualities of the wild land area

- **A jumbled composition of high, arresting, angular mountains that are rocky, incorporate various waterbodies and encompass a remote interior**

This WLA contains a cluster of high, rocky and rugged mountains. These are of variable shape and elevation – some being Munros, Corbetts, and lower – but all remarkable for their superlative and *awe-inspiring* scale, distinct profiles, steepness and striking glacial features. These include colossal U-shaped glens, corries, pyramidal peaks, scree slopes and extensive mounds of moraine which indicate a strong influence of natural processes and contribute to a strong *sense of naturalness*.



The mountains are steep-sided - sometimes in a *rugged* form and sometimes with more sheer, sweeping slopes. They are also open and *physically challenging* to ascend, which all combines to result in high exposure and *risk*.

There is a predominance of exposed rock that creates a ‘raw’ image and amplifies the *sense of naturalness*, often highlighted by the light grey-colour of quartzite in contrast to darker vegetation.

Most of the mountains are arranged within a jumbled composition, with glens running in different directions and curved. This means it is often difficult to orient within the interior, and there is a changing, complex array of different mountains as you move through the area, increasing the *sense of remoteness and risk*. The exception is Ben Damh, within the north western margins of the WLA, which stands out slightly on its own adjacent to Loch Torridon.

Within the glens and upon the lower slopes, views out of the WLA are limited, and there is a predominant lack of visible *human artefacts* or *evidence of contemporary land use*, contributing to a strong *sense of sanctuary* and *remoteness*. In contrast, open and distant views are gained from the mountain tops and ridges, offering *awe-inspiring* panoramas that include a succession of mountain tops and ridges extending far into the distance. From here, *human artefacts and contemporary land use* located just outside the WLA can be seen in the distance, particularly around the ends of Loch Torridon and Loch Carron. These appear minor in comparison to the large scale of the surrounding mountain landforms and sea and do not seem encroaching upon the WLA; nonetheless, they indicate clearly the limited *extent* of the area and its separation from the sea.

Some of the lower slopes and glens within the mountains are covered in numerous piles of moraine that are highlighted when there is a low angle of sun. The mountains also include some striking rivers and waterfalls, and native woodland extends along some of the watercourses and up some of the steep



rugged slopes. These all contribute to the *sense of naturalness*, whilst the rivers may also limit access through the landscape and thus increase *remoteness* and *risk*.



Within the mountains and glens, there is a range of lochs at various elevations that fill depressions carved out by glaciers or blocked by moraine. The horizontal waters of these highlight the contrasting vertical aspect of the mountains and vice versa, emphasising the *awe inspiring* qualities of both.



In addition to clearly defined mountain peaks and glens, the WLA includes a few areas of lower, rocky undulating slopes and hills. These incorporate a number of lochs and lochans tucked into the undulations and, with a predominance of rocky ground, there is a strong *sense of naturalness*. Within some marginal areas, however, this attribute and the *sense of sanctuary* are diminished where *human artefacts* and *contemporary land use* extend into the area, for example fences, tracks or dense conifer plantations.

- **Elevated views extend to other wild land areas, whilst surrounding glens offer more contained views to arresting mountain edges**

This WLA is surrounded by other areas of wild land on every side and is thus influenced by the wild land qualities of these and vice versa. From the WLA margins, neighbouring glens can be seen containing human elements that indicate the division between the separate wild land areas; however, from elevated locations within the mountain interior, views pass over the ridges and tops from this WLA directly across to the elevated mountains within the neighbouring areas. These combine to create views of many mountain horizons seen receding far into the distance.

The road corridor through Glen Torridon, just outside the WLA boundary, divides a particularly strong relationship with the Flowerdale – Shieldaig - Torridon WLA (27) to the north, influenced by the narrowness of the glen and the strong similarity either side of landform and rock between Beinn Eithe and Sgùrr Dubh, and between Liathach and Seana Mheallan. In addition to the road corridor, there are powerlines, ring fences, and isolated forest blocks; but the effects of these are mainly concentrated within the glen floor. This means it is possible for motorists and cyclists travelling along the road to experience some of the *arresting* qualities of the surrounding towering mountain slopes.

- **Arresting mountains and a sense of remoteness and sanctuary are experienced by many along a network of paths and tracks through the glens**

There are a number of discrete stalkers' paths and tracks that pass through the mountains via the glens, many of these being long-established and used for deer stalking and recreation. Along these routes through the glens, views out of the area are limited by landform screening, partly due to their changes in direction, slope and elevation, which increases the *sense of remoteness* and *sanctuary*. However, towards the margins, human elements can often be seen in the far distance when



looking through the glens towards the edge of the WLA and beyond.

There are historic features within some of the glens, such as old enclosures, bridges and cottages, for example the Coire Fionnaraich MBA bothy. These create prominent foci as a *human artefact*, but they tend to appear isolated, concentrated, and low-key in siting and design and have thus localised effects.



- **Extensive peatland slopes and hills that are rugged at a local level and provide wide open views to elevated features**

To the east of the Coulin Pass, the WLA includes a range of open peatland slopes and hills. These are predominantly covered in a mosaic of rough vegetation, in addition to burns, lochans and bogs which result in a *rugged* ground cover at the local level, despite the simplicity of the broad scale landform.

All these elements, and their seemingly random pattern, contribute to the *sense of naturalness* as well as *physical challenge* and *risk*, as it is very difficult to walk over the peatland.



Within this eastern area, there is open visibility and a strong sense of exposure, with panoramic views to elevated landscape features. These include *arresting* mountain landforms to the west; whilst, in other directions, views include *human artefacts* and *evidence of contemporary land use* within, at the edge, and outside the WLA. These include upper sections of conifer plantations, the mast on Bidean Clann Raonaid and the prominent, long estate track over the Ledgowan hills. These features also have cumulative effects.



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#### Endnotes and select references

<sup>i</sup> SNH (2001) Northwest highlands: A landscape fashioned by geology. Redgorton, SNH.

<sup>ii</sup> Information available at: <http://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/torridon/Beinndamh.shtml>

<sup>iii</sup> SNH (2010) *The special qualities of the National Scenic Areas*. SNH Commissioned Report No 374.

Site assessment carried out October 2014