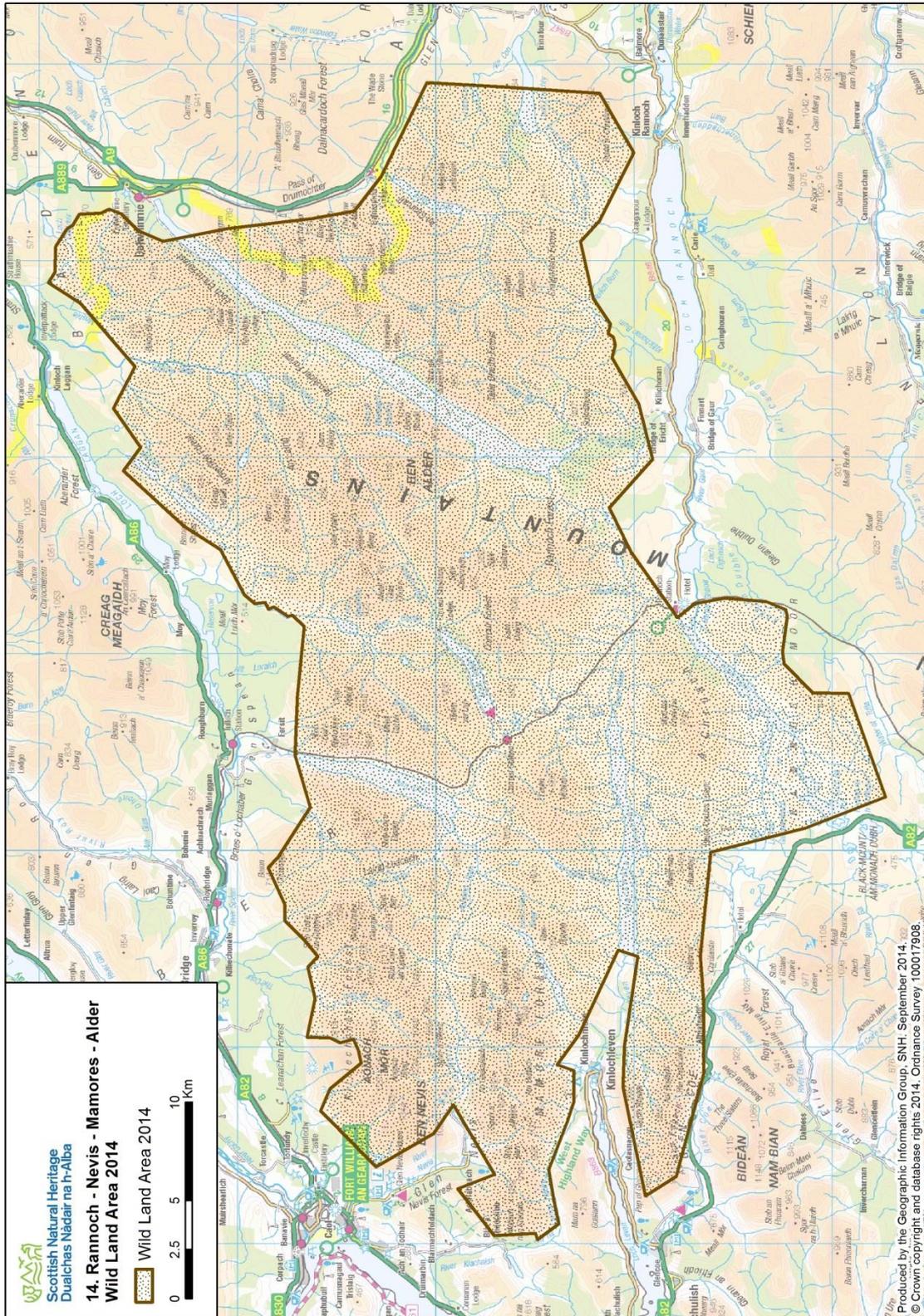


Rannoch – Nevis – Mamores – Alder Wild Land Area



Context

This very large area (at 1180km²) is the third most extensive WLA, separated only by the Drumochter Pass from the largest, Cairngorms (WLA 15). Flanked by major roads to the east, north and west that provide links to the Central Belt, and north and west, its sheer extent emphasises the challenge of accessing the area. However, uniquely of the WLAs, access into the interior is also provided by the Glasgow to Fort-William railway line at the isolated station of Corrour.

Land within the WLA is used mainly for deer stalking, fishing, forestry and habitat conservation. It contains a number of mountain ranges and peatland areas, such as the Nevis Range and Grey Corries, the Mamores, Aonach Eagach, Rannoch Moor, Ben Alder and Loch Ericht, and Drumochter, reflecting its wide geographical and altitudinal range. The area includes some of Scotland's most renowned mountains, including its highest, and is popular for a wide range of recreation.

With 40 Munros and 13 Corbetts, many hillwalkers and climbers target the mountain tops, ridges and cliffs. Others, including mountain bikers, are attracted to lower-lying estate tracks and paths. The West Highland Way long distance route also crosses one western arm of the area, over the Devil's Staircase. Many people access the WLA individually or within small groups, but the area also hosts a number of organised outdoor events, for example charity walks up Ben Nevis or the Tour de Ben Nevis MTB event.

Many parts of the WLA are of high scenic valueⁱⁱⁱ, recognised by being within the Ben Nevis and Glen Coe National Scenic Area (NSA), the northern edge of the Loch Rannoch and Glen Lyon NSA, the Ben Alder, Laggan and Glen Banchoir Special Landscape Area (SLA), and overlapping with the Cairngorms National Park in the far east. Descriptions for these areas recognise the distinctive characteristics of the peatland, lochs and mountains.

This WLA is surrounded by other wild land areas. Some seem almost contiguous, for example to the south-west into the Etive (WLA 9), only interrupted by the line of the A82 and the ski centre. In contrast, there is greater separation from Creag Meagaidh to the north (WLA 19), the Cairngorms to the north east (WLA 15), Breadalbane to the south east (WLA 10) and Ardgour to the west (WLA 13). These are typically divided by extensive forest plantations and/or road corridors, although there is often closer visual links between elevated parts of the WLAs where the glens below are screened by the intervening landform.

Key attributes and qualities of the wild land area

- **Mountain ranges and glens of varying landform, but all arresting, with towering, steep and rugged slopes and striking physical features**

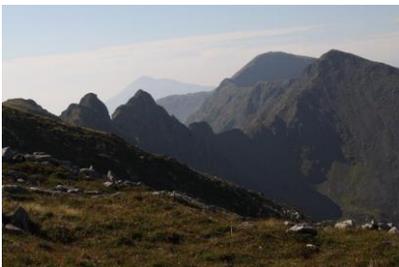
This WLA includes an exceptional variety of different mountain ranges. These differ in their landform and geology, but they consistently comprise high, steep-sided, rugged mountains that appear *awe-inspiring* in their number, *extent* and juxtaposition.

The mountains include superlative features such as towering crags, cliffs, scree slopes and high mountain plateaux. These appear *arresting*, both individually and cumulatively; in combination with the huge scale and irregularity of the mountains, they also contribute to a strong *sense of naturalness*.



The large scale, high elevation and steep slopes, crags, cliffs, boulder fields and scree that occur over the different mountains makes them *physically challenging* to ascend, with a perceived high *risk*.

The influence of geology is clearly evident throughout the mountains, with strong contrasts of different rock and landform. Many of the physical features also indicate geological processes, for example with deep corries, U-shaped glens, pyramidal peaks and piles of moraine, which contribute to the *sense of naturalness*. Furthermore, rivers and waterfalls indicate the ongoing dynamic nature of the landscape, for example with water-sculpted river banks and deeply gouged gullies down the steep mountain sides.



Seasons and weather have a strong influence within this WLA due to its openness, exposure and high altitudes and, consequently, these affect the *sense of naturalness* and *risk*. The high elevation of the mountain peaks and the *arresting* qualities of these is often highlighted by snow cover between autumn and spring, whilst lower elevations remain snow-free.

The mountains within this WLA are divided and edged in many places by a range of glens that create framed views with their towering slopes. The main glens are *awe inspiring* in their large scale and striking glaciated forms, with some occupied by lochs, whilst others contain a central river, side tributaries and waterfalls.

The main access routes through this WLA tend to be along the glen floors or around the loch edges, ascending to link between these over bealachs. Within the interior, most of these routes are fairly discrete and low-key and some follow heritage pathsⁱⁱⁱ. In contrast, some tracks are of high grade construction for vehicles, especially around the margins of the WLA, and these appear more prominent as *human artefacts*.

Within some parts of the WLA, glen and loch slopes harbour native woodland that increases shelter and contributes to the

sense of naturalness, especially where extensive and tied to the *rugged* landform and features such as burns and shorelines. Historic features can also be found within many of the glens, indicating past settlement, for example ruined buildings and enclosures. Whilst these appear as obvious *human artefacts*, their effects tend to be localised where small, isolated, discrete in siting and low-key in character. Some old cottages are also maintained as bothies, providing temporary shelter and accommodation for hillwalkers and stalkers, and facilitating access to remote locations.



- **A strong contrast of wide open peatland, lochs and steep-sided mountains that highlight the visibility and awe-inspiring qualities of each**

Some of the mountain ranges within this WLA are seen adjacent to wide open expanses of peatland with lochs and lochans. At a broad scale, the stark contrast of the horizontal emphasis of the peatland and the vertical form of the mountains emphasises the awe-inspiring qualities of each. Their juxtaposition allows the elevated slopes and tops to offer aerial views over the surrounding peatland, allowing an appreciation of its complex composition of lochs and lochans. In reverse, from the peatland below, the steep mountain profiles appear strongly *arresting* in relation to the open, horizontal surroundings.

This composition of mountains and peatland is experienced by many visitors over Rannoch Moor, particularly at its western edge where the peatland expanse is seen in contrast to the towering mountains that mark the entrance to Glen Coe. Conversely, the effect from within the centre of the moor is of an extensive, open peatland expanse that is encircled in the distance by an outer edge of mountains.

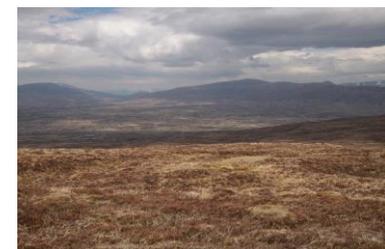


- **An extensive and remote mountain and peatland interior with a strong sense of sanctuary, appearing even larger due to distant views to surrounding wild land areas**

Within this WLA, there is an *extensive* interior of mountains and peatland that is very *remote*. Access across this interior thus requires long and time-consuming journeys, whether via bike or on foot. Moving through the landscape, the *sense of remoteness* is further amplified by the *ruggedness* of the landform which makes routes circuitous and undulating over the landform and around water bodies and bogs, whether surfaced or off-path.

The perceived large *extent* of the interior contributes to a strong *sense of sanctuary and solitude*, and can also increase the *sense of risk*, particularly where exposure and/or altitude are high.

From low-lying vantage points, the peatland areas often seem far greater in *extent* than their actual size. This perception is influenced by visibility being limited at low levels by the subtle screening of landform undulations, as well as the effects of visual foreshortening over a simple peatland expanse, and there being few markers or landmarks to act as distance cues.



From elevated locations within the interior, the *extent* of the WLA may also seem amplified; but, from here, it is because views extend far into the distance over a series of mountain horizons with no obvious far edge. Many of the mountains within these views are actually located outside this WLA, but seem contiguous where the glens in-between are screened by the intervening landform. This includes the Loch Etive mountains (WLA 9), Braeroy – Glenshirra – Creag Meagaidh (WLA 19), the Cairngorms (WLA 15) and Breadalbane to Schiehallion (WLA 10). Collectively, these mountains appear *awe inspiring* in their number and extent.



There are some glens and loch sides within the interior of this WLA where *human artefacts* and *evidence of contemporary land use* are located, for example estate settlements and forest plantations, hydro-electric dams and pipelines, and high grade constructed tracks. Although these do not diminish the experience of the physical *remoteness* within these locations (and some of the elements may contribute to scenic qualities), they nonetheless diminish other wild land attributes by appearing as human elements and diminishing the *sense of sanctuary*.



Within the interior, human elements are often visible over large distances due to the openness of the peatland and lochs and the presence of key vantage points upon elevated slopes and tops. The openness of the landscape also influences the effects of activity and noise on the *sense of sanctuary*, for example as made by vehicles.

In contrast to the *remoteness* and strong *sense of sanctuary* within the interior, the outward-facing mountain slopes and tops around the margins of the WLA often reveal views to *human artefacts and contemporary land uses*. Whilst most of these tend to be distant, some can be more imposing if they are extensive, have cumulative effects, or appear to expand onto elevated ground.

- **A large area which is visited by many people to experience wild land qualities in different ways, whilst maintaining a sense of remoteness, sanctuary, challenge and risk**

People experience this WLA in a wide variety of ways. For example, many view it from outside the area, such as along the A9 main road, whilst others enter the area via the railway line that crosses the WLA and alight at the remote Corroul station, and some walk in along the West Highland Way long distance route over the Devil's Staircase.



Hillwalkers and climbers often aim for the interior and highest peaks and crags, such as within the Grey Corries, Mamores, Glen Coe and Ben Alder. Ben Nevis draws the largest number of visitors each year, attracting many for being the highest mountain in the UK. This means that the main path to this peak can be very busy at times, diminishing the *sense of solitude*. Nonetheless, concentrations of visitors occur over a very small proportion of the WLA, and few visitors are seen within the large majority of the area, contributing here to a strong sense of *remoteness, sanctuary and solitude*.

The A82 road is located outside the WLA, but runs in-between it and the Loch Etive Mountains WLA (9). This route offers motorists the opportunity to experience some of the *awe-inspiring* qualities of the adjacent peatland and mountains, due to its direct views into the landscape either side of the road, as well as its proximity to the towering slopes of Glen Coe. Nonetheless, the road itself appears as an

obvious *human artefact* and the activity and noise of vehicles can be seen and heard upon the mountain tops and ridges above, diminishing the *sense of sanctuary* in these places.

- **An extensive pattern of lochs, lochans, burns and bog that highlight the ruggedness of the landform, limit access and contribute to the sense of naturalness**

The *ruggedness* of the mountain and peatland landforms is highlighted by a large number and range of different waterbodies, watercourses and bogs occurring throughout the WLA. The irregularities of these amplify the *sense of naturalness*, whilst they also limit access and increase *remoteness*. Within peatland areas, bogs and waterbodies often seem hidden within the low, subtle undulations, so it is difficult to know ahead where these lie in order to select a direct line. This means that routes tend to be circuitous and the *sense of remoteness* and *physical challenge* is increased.



Whilst most of the lochs and lochans within the WLA have formed naturally, the area also includes a number of dammed waterbodies associated with hydro-electric schemes, for example the Blackwater Reservoir, Loch Treig and Loch Ericht. These vary in their scale and range of associated *human artefacts*; however the drawdown scars around some are very prominent, particularly from elevated viewpoints, and these indicate human intervention so that the *sense of naturalness* is diminished.

Endnotes and select references

ⁱ SNH (2010) *The special qualities of the National Scenic Areas*. SNH Commissioned Report No 374.

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

ⁱⁱⁱ Information available at: <http://www.heritagepaths.co.uk/>

Site assessment carried out May and June 2013 and June and September 2014