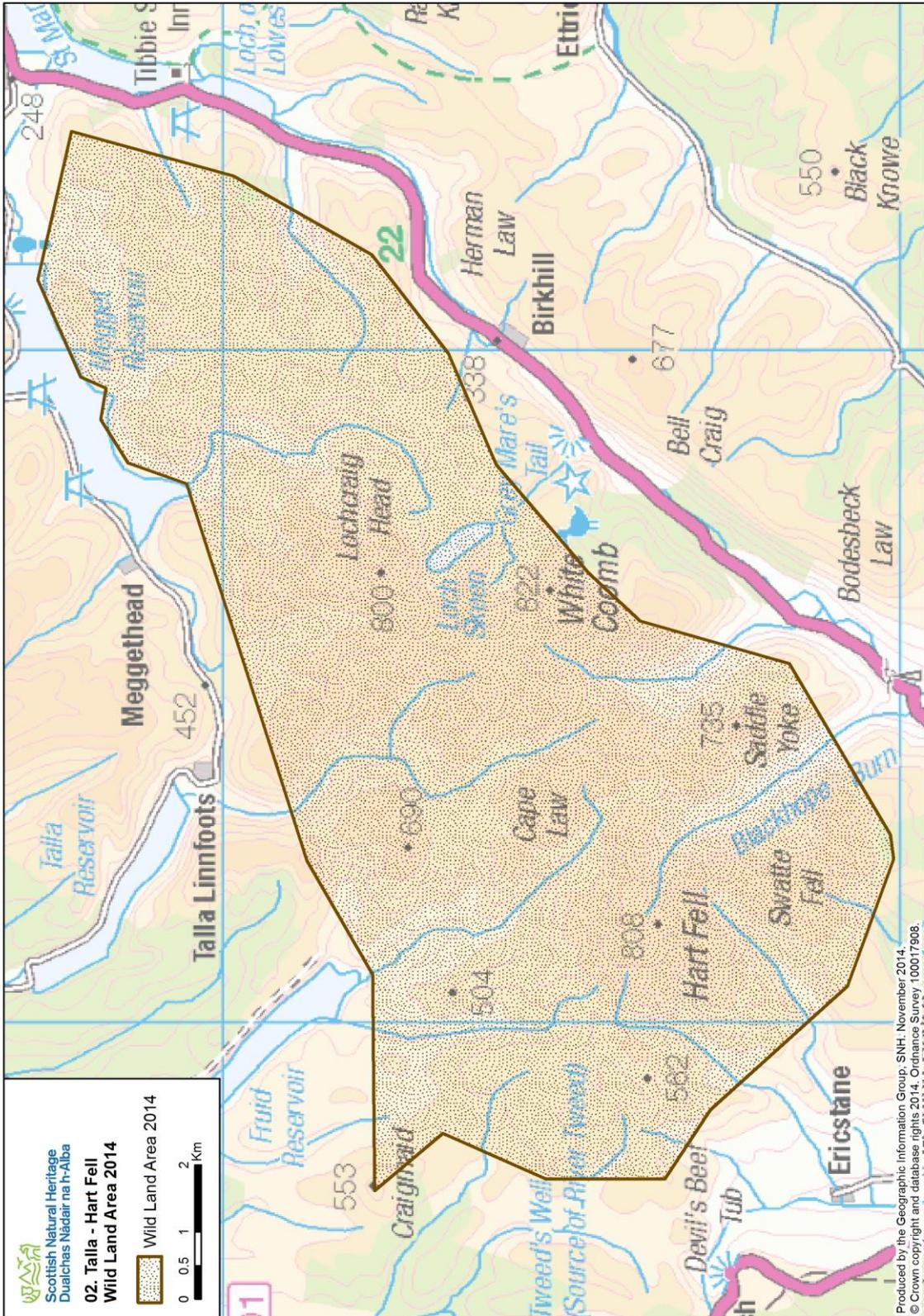


Talla – Hart Fells Wild Land Area



Context

Tall - Hart Fells is one of only three WLAs to the south of the Highland Boundary Fault, all of which are relatively isolated and small in extent (this WLA is 93 km²). Lying to the north of Moffat, the closest WLA to Edinburgh and within 2 hours of much of the Central Belt, on the boundary between the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway, it forms an elongated triangle of upland (some 17 km long and up to 9 km at its widest point), between the larger glens of the Megget Water to the north and the Moffat Water to the south.

It consists of a range of rounded moorland hills which are incised by several deep clefts and steep-sided glens. From the adjacent public roads, the WLA is mostly experienced as a simple, open moorland backdrop which contrasts strongly with the more diverse settled glens that surround it. Where these glens are narrow, for example along the Moffat Water, views towards the WLA are often reduced to glimpses, whereas from the west, the wider glen of the River Annan allows more continuous views towards the large mass of Hart Fell. From the north, the Talla, Fruid and Megget reservoirs form obvious human elements, but allow striking views across the water towards the moorland hills.

There are a number of established walking routes, including the horseshoe ridge walk to the Corbett of Hart Fell. White Coomb (another Corbett) and Lochcraig Head (a Donald), are also well publicised destinations featuring rugged terrain and the proximity to the Central Belt and Cumbria makes the area readily accessible to hill walkers.

NTS manages Loch Skeen and the Tail Burn which feeds the Grey Mare's Tail waterfall, celebrated by Sir Walter Scott. The route to the loch past these falls is well marked by a constructed path that leads from the designated car park beside the A708, climbing 275 m to Loch Skeen. NTS removed the visitor centre at Grey Mare's Tail in late 2009 as it was considered a '*permanent and unnecessary visual intrusion to what is a spectacularly beautiful part of the countryside*'.ⁱ

Borders Forest Trust owns the Carrifran Wildwood, which lies to the south west of Grey Mare's Tail. In 2013 the Trust secured possession of part of the adjacent Talla and Gameshope estate, which will also be managed for conservation. Within Dumfries and Galloway, an area that includes Black Hope and Loch Skeen is designated as the Moffat Hills Special Area of Conservation, as it contains some fine examples of upland vegetation.

The landscape and scenic value of the area is recognised by both Councils. Within Dumfries and Galloway it lies within the Moffat Hills Regional Scenic Area (RSA) and within Scottish Borders it forms part of the Tweedsmuir Uplands Special Landscape Area (SLA). The SLA citation notes that '*This is a highly scenic area of dramatic landform, and has a significant degree of wildness. The more rugged, rocky summits in particular have a strong sense of remoteness, with little overt human influence on the landscape*'.ⁱⁱ

Although this WLA is surrounded by glens where the influence of human activity is strong, the steepness of the valley sides allows strong visual links to be made to the Ettrick Hills to the south and the Tweedsmuir Hills to the north, which often appear to form part of the same area of wild land. In places the relatively small *extent* of the WLA is not always obvious from within, concealed by the complex topography.

Key attributes and qualities of the wild land area

- **Rounded moorland hills, deeply incised by glens and deceptively challenging to traverse**

These rounded hills are deeply incised by several steep-sided glens, ravines and corries. Very steep slopes, combined with large areas of deep bog at lower levels, on bealachs and on the flatter tops make access more *physically challenging* than their rounded appearance suggests.

Once climbed, access across the drier hill tops is easier, although many of the upland routes are pathless, making navigation on the rounded summits and plateaux harder, consequently increasing the *sense of risk*.

Although not as high as mountain ranges further north, parts are very exposed, with *arresting* views into steep-sided glens and glacially sculpted corries which contribute to a *sense of naturalness*.

From the glens and corries and within some lower-lying parts of the flatter tops, there is a stronger sense of enclosure and a focus on nearby detail, such as the hummocky topography formed by fluvio-glacial deposits, giving a greater *sense of remoteness and sanctuary*.



- **A strong perception of naturalness that contrasts with the surrounding forest plantations**

A rich mosaic of rough grass, heather, bracken and bog vegetation covers most of the WLA, with montane grassland on higher slopes. Exposed rock outcrops, fast flowing burns and waterfalls also contribute to the strong *sense of naturalness*. Sheep grazing is evident in places, with some stock fences and ATV tracks. These indicate *contemporary land use* and introduce *human artefacts*, but are not sufficiently widespread to noticeably affect the overall *sense of naturalness*.

Some small forest plantations lie on the slopes above the Chapelhope Burn and there are other plantations, just outwith the WLA. These are mostly along the hillsides above the Moffat Water and the largest is at Emblem Brae. The rectangular conifer blocks can be seen from some south-facing hillsides, where they contrast strongly with the colour and rounded form of the moorland slopes and detract from the *sense of naturalness, sanctuary and remoteness*. These effects are limited by the steepness and complexity of the moorland slopes, which restricts the overall visibility of the plantations.

From the tops and upper slopes there are longer, more widespread views to more distant forest plantations. Those on the Etrick Hills and to the south of Tweedsmuir are noticeable, with extraction tracks and areas of clear fell visible. Even where seen at a distance, these extensive plantations can diminish the *sense of remoteness and sanctuary* of the interior.



A large area of native tree planting within Carrifran Glen has a positive effect on the *sense of naturalness*, accentuating the *rugged* nature of the open moorland hills visible above. Some tree shelters are evident and fencing around the planted area emphasises the woodland edge. These introduce *human artefacts* that detract slightly from the *sense of naturalness*, although these effects are likely to diminish as the trees grow.



- **A well-defined area of wild land that contrasts with the surrounding glens, but with strong visual links to adjacent hills**

The WLA is surrounded by larger glens that contain roads, settlement, forest plantations, improved fields and other signs of human activity. From the adjacent public roads, the WLA is mostly experienced as a simple, open and *rugged* moorland backdrop, which contrasts with these more diverse, enclosed, managed and settled glens. From the glens of the Moffat Water and, to a lesser extent, the Megget Water, the steep sides tend to limit views to glimpses, often along the smaller tributary burns that incise the hills, such as at Black Hope and Carrifran. Although from the west, the wider glen of the River Annan allows more continuous views towards Hart Fell and White Coomb, the interior is generally screened from view by the outer slopes, so that the *extent* of the WLA is not obvious from outside.

The influence of these settled glens quickly diminishes towards the interior. From within the hills, the steepness of the valley sides and complex topography often conceal views of the settled glens and allows stronger visual links to be made to the Ettrick Hills to the south and the Tweedsmuir Hills to the north, which can appear to form part of the same WLA.



Within the lower-lying parts of the interior, the complex hill topography often prevents views of surrounding human activity altogether, so concealing the *extent* of the WLA and providing a stronger *sense of remoteness and sanctuary*, than the proximity to main roads would suggest, notably around Loch Skeen, for example.

- **Few human artefacts, mostly historic settlements that are restricted to sheltered glens**

Most habitation was in the past concentrated along the sheltered glens, leaving the uplands relatively undeveloped. Some dwellings and agricultural buildings at Winterhopeburn and Syart are accessed by constructed tracks which have a localised effect on the *sense of remoteness*, but are not extensively visible.

There are very few other *human artefacts* within this WLA. The steepness of the landform means that tracks are mostly restricted to the base of the minor glens that penetrate the hills and do not provide through routes. These tracks are generally well integrated and often grassed over, so reducing their effect on the wild land qualities.



Stone sheep shelters (stells), enclosures, shielings and dykes are common within these glens, providing reminders of past use of the land. They are usually small, isolated human elements and some are ruins, only just discernible as *human artefacts*, with little consequent effect on the *sense of remoteness and sanctuary*.



Although there are few human artefacts within the WLA, several large, operational wind farms are visible from upper slopes and hill tops. Clyde and Glenkernie are the closest of these, approximately 10 km to the west and 14 km to the north of Hart Fell respectively. These have a cumulative effect, particularly where the turbines are highlighted against the backcloth of dark forest plantations, reducing the *sense of remoteness and sanctuary* of the interior.

Endnotes

ⁱ NTS (2010). *Grey Mare's Tail Nature Reserve Newsletter*

ⁱⁱ Scottish Borders Council (2012). *Supplementary Planning Guidance. Local Landscape Designations.*

Site assessment carried out October and November 2013