



Location and Context

This Landscape Character Type continues the *Cliffs and Rocky Coast – Moray & Nairn* Landscape Character Type, extending eastwards to Fraserburgh, forming a stretch of cliffs and predominantly rocky shorelines. The cliffs of this character type are generally higher than in Moray, culminating in the dramatic Troup Head east of Macduff. The inland extent of this Landscape Character Type is marked by a series of small hills and ridges which provide a rim of slightly higher ground containing the hinterland of open and gently undulating farmland of the *Gently Undulating Coastal Farmland* character type.

Key Characteristics

- Fragmented coastline featuring caves, numerous jagged islets and arches.
- Raised beaches, some with distinctive small former fishing villages.
- Colonisation of every available sheltered area by short creeping grasses and win-pruned gorse.
- Deep rocky ravines cut by small water courses (known locally as dens) with lush vegetation.
- Farmland extending to cliff edges.
- Historic towns, often where rivers join the sea.
- Lighthouses, and ruined castles and coastal churches occur infrequently along the coast and form landmark features seen from roads and coastal footpaths.
- Absence of development along more remote stretches of coast.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Cliffs and Rocky Coast* Landscape Character Type extends along the Moray Firth coastline from the Moray boundary in the west to Fraserburgh in the east. It is an area of high headlands, sheer cliffs, occasional narrow inlets and sheltered bays along this rocky coastline. They form higher cliffs than in Moray, with Troup Head east of Macduff forming the highest and most dramatic feature. The fragmented coastline features caves, numerous jagged islets and arches, including the celebrated Needle's Eye and Hell's Lum, a sea tunnel which forms a spectacularly deep gash on the top of cliffs north-west of Pennan.

Cliff-edged headlands are frequently fissured and bitten into by narrow inlets, small rocky coves and occasional sheltered sandy bays. Variations in geology are evident in the Old Red Sandstone of Troup Head where cliffs form a 110 metre high drop and the metamorphic cliffs west of Gardenstown which have a less uniform lithology. Raised beaches occur between Cullen and Portsoy and within narrow inlets. Cliffs taper down to the east forming a low rocky platform near Sandhaven.

Landcover

Short creeping grasses and occasional wind-pruned gorse colonise every available sheltered area with even the most vertical cliff-faces rarely free from vegetation. Small water courses cut deep rocky ravines (known locally as dens) which harbor lush growth of herb-rich grassland and scrub. Farmland commonly extends close to the cliff edge although rough grassland, gorse and remnant areas of coastal heath cover some headlands. Field patterns are very simple, and field boundaries are limited to low gorse hedges. There are few trees, the area being open and windswept.

Settlement

Small, distinctive 19th Century former fishing villages sit on small areas of raised beaches associated with inlets hard against the coast. These feature distinctive rows of tightly huddled stone built and harled or white-washed cottages with red pantile or slate roofs, often set gable-end against the sea, and historic harbours. The narrow, linear settlements of Crovie and Pennan are constrained in small coves, lying dramatically at the foot of sheer sandstone cliffs while the villages of Gardenstown and Rosehearty have expanded onto upper slopes above the coast. The historic coastal towns of Banff and Macduff are located astride the mouth of the River Deveron, which includes the northern part of the 18th Century designed landscape of Duff House and its scenic focal point and viewpoint, the Temple of Venus, on the Hill of Doune. The historic Banffshire seaport of Portsoy includes an outstanding 17th Century harbour surrounded by a fine grouping of mostly 17th to 18th Century traditional buildings. The working fishing port of Fraserburgh is sited on the rocky headland of Kinnaird Head, including the landmark, historic Kinnaird Head castle and lighthouse.

The coastline has many other historic features including the ruinous Findlater Castle west of Portsoy; Pitsligo Castle, Rosehearty; the remains of the Bronze Age fort at Fiddes, which is set on a narrow promontory near Pennan; and the old parish church and burial ground of St John's, west of Crovie and Gardenstown. These add to the scenic character of this section of coast, although built features are rare outside of the tightly contained fishing villages.

Perception

The North Sea Coastal path extends along this coast and provides interrupted views out to sea across the Moray Firth and, on clear days, to the distant Sutherland Hills. A number of headlands offer vantage points of the renowned fishing villages, and their dramatic setting.

There is an absence of development along more remote stretches of coast, with limited views to offshore shipping, and a strong sense of naturalness. This is heightened by wheeling and nesting seabirds which, together with the exposure to the elements and the drama of elevation, create pronounced wild character.



This is one of 390 Landscape Character Types identified at a scale of 1:50 000 as part of a national programme of Landscape Character Assessment republished in 2019.

The area covered by this Landscape Character Type was originally included in the Banff and Buchan LCA (Cobham Resource Consultants), published 1994; and Aberdeenshire Landscape Character Review (Carol Anderson Landscape Associates), published 2014.