



Location and Context

The *Fragmented Rocky Coast* Landscape Character Type extends from the rocky headland of Peterhead southwards to the small village of Collieston, and from Aberdeen, southwards to Inverbervie, on the east North Sea coast of Aberdeenshire. The areas form a relatively narrow band close to the coast with steep rugged slopes and cliffs. A gradual transition occurs between the gently undulating pasture and often narrow band of rough grassland and heath at the top of cliffs and the broad and low-lying *Coastal Agricultural Plain* which forms the hinterland. South of the rocky headland which contains the large natural harbour of Peterhead Bay, the sea has eroded the pink Peterhead granite into a fragmented coastline of fractured angular cliffs between 20-60 metres high, narrow inlets and jagged reefs.

Key Characteristics

- Fragmented rocky coastline.
- Dramatic coastal features, including rugged cliffs, caves, arches, stacks and numerous broken islets.
- Sandy beach and sand dunes at Cruden Bay which interrupt the cliffs.
- Grazed fields extending close to the top of the cliffs.
- Coastal settlements limited to small fishing villages and occasional larger towns.
- Isolated castles and lighthouses occur infrequently along the coast and form landmark features seen from roads and coastal footpaths.
- Strong sense of naturalness, heightened by wheeling and nesting birds, together with exposure to the elements, giving a pronounced sense of wild character, particularly in more remote areas

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Fragmented Rocky Coast* Landscape Character Type forms a relatively narrow band close to the coast. It has rugged, dramatic geological coastal features including caves, arches, stacks, numerous broken islets, including the renowned Bullers of Buchan, a collapsed sea cave which in stormy weather forms an awe-inspiring chasm of crashing

waves. In some areas on the south east coast softer rocks present a gentler edge, often grass-covered and frequently erode, exhibiting land-slip.

Between Peterhead and Collieston the cliffs are interrupted by the Bay of Cruden, a rare arc of sandy beach which marks the transition to a slightly lower rocky coastal edge found in the south of this character area. Large sand dunes back this beach and partially contain the small settlement of Cruden which is tucked into a narrow inlet.

Landcover

The steep rugged slopes and cliffs merge quickly into the fields which extend close to the top of the cliffs, leaving only a very narrow band of rough grass with rare patches of heath and acid peatland. Brackish flushes are found within the immediate hinterland to the Bullers of Buchan.

Settlement

There are few settlements along the majority of this coast, although the area north of Stonehaven is more densely inhabited where the foothills of the Grampians extend almost to the sea, forcing the main road, railway, industrial development and settlement into a narrow corridor of land. Small former fishing villages such as Boddam, Cruden, Bullers of Buchan village, Findon, Muchalls and Catterline sit within sheltered coves, often located on wave-cut platforms of raised beaches below cliffs or perched on cliff tops. Modern expansion often extends back from these old villages into the farmland, including substantial areas of new housing, for example at Portlethen and around Stonehaven. Larger settlements are often sited at the mouths of major rivers or on rocky headlands focused on natural harbours, such as Peterhead and Stonehaven, which retains a distinct core which descends to the sea. Peterhead power station lies on inland edge of this coastal character area and a large quarry is also in operation at Boddam. The A90 and A975 are aligned close to the coast, as well as the east coast mainline railway. The ruinous Slains Castle, originally dating from the 16th Century but substantially remodeled in the 19th Century, and the Buchan Ness lighthouse, form key built landmark features along this coast. Most notable is Dunnottar Castle, which sits high on a promontory south of Stonehaven.

Perception

Sea views are fundamental to the character of the cliffs, providing an immense sense of scale when viewed from cliff tops. Glimpsed views of the coast and sea are possible from main roads and also from the Buchan Coastal Path, which offers exhilaratingly close views over precipitous cliffs.

This fragmented rocky coastline, exposed to violent North Sea gales, has strong elemental qualities. The presence of nesting sea birds also heightens the sense of naturalness although the proximity of Stonehaven, Aberdeen, Peterhead and its power station, and major roads can lessen the sense of remoteness experienced in places. The tall power station chimney is a pronounced feature in wider views.

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 Banff and Buchan LCA (Cobham Resource Consultants), published 1994 and South and Central Aberdeenshire LCA (Environmental Resources Management), published 1998; and Aberdeenshire Landscape Character Review (Carol Anderson Landscape Associates), produced 2014.