



Location and Context

The *Farmed Moorland Edge - Aberdeenshire* Landscape Character Type lies on the edge of higher moorland *Summits and Plateaux - Aberdeenshire*, forming a transition between these upland areas and the lowland agricultural heartlands of Aberdeenshire, sharing many characteristics with both.

Key Characteristics

- Low rolling hills and valleys with some rocky ridges on higher slopes.
- Dark heather-clad and forested hills often form the backdrop to these upland fringe areas.
- Areas of moorland are interspersed with farmland on higher slopes.
- Marginal upland farming, sheep grazing and patches of gorse scrub, birch and willow occurs at the transition with the uplands.
- More intensive farmland is present on softly rolling ground..
- Areas of waterlogged ground and small bogs in places, particularly at the transition with moorland or in wetter valley bottoms.
- Scrubby patches of birch, willow and Scots pine occur in more marginal areas.
- Clumps of broadleaf trees and shelterbelts pattern farmed lower slopes.
- Mixed policy-influenced plantings more common in some areas. .
- Farm buildings of grey/brown stone are often marked by clumps of trees.
- Derelict buildings are particularly evident on marginal upland areas.
- Prehistoric monuments and artefacts, including stone circles, carved stone balls and souterrains.
- Strong sense of history and culture, giving the landscape a timeless character.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Farmed Moorland Edge - Aberdeenshire* areas frequently occur as a narrow buffer between the higher moorland plateaux and the lowland agricultural heartlands. They mainly occur where softer rocks, such as gabbros and sandstone, have been weathered into rolling upland plateaux. These are often remote upland farming areas where large fields are mostly

absent. They are generally small to medium scale landscapes, characterised by an intricate pattern of fields and woods and a tightly undulating relief often including areas of hummocky landform at the foot of steep slopes but also narrow flat-bottomed valleys. Landform is more complex and hummocky in some areas, for example in the Lumsden Valley where glacial features such as moraines and eskers are evident.

Landcover

Essentially an agricultural landscape, livestock farming with small enclosed fields predominates, although more intensive mixed farmland occurs at the core of the Cromar Uplands. These fields are enclosed by extensive dry stone dykes, sometimes derelict, reinforced by fences and encroached by gorse. Woodland cover comprises broadleaf clumps and shelterbelts. Coniferous woodlands are small, scattered as block plantings within the field pattern.

Settlement

Settlement is relatively sparse in many of these landscapes with older vernacular stone buildings widespread. Derelict buildings are evident in the marginal upland areas. The Kincardine Plateau and the Cromar Uplands are more densely settled. The Kincardine plateau features more modern housing and built development, influenced by its proximity to Aberdeen. Farm buildings tend to be larger in the Cromar uplands. This is land that has been marginal in the past and this has led to the survival of archaeological features that would otherwise be lost had agricultural regimes been more intense. Souterrains occur, as do wider remnants of prehistoric settlements and field systems. The Lumsden valley contains a concentration of stone circles and later carved stones, probably associated with the early power centre at nearby Rhynie. The Cromar uplands contain the Peel Ring of Lumphanan, a medieval power centre that controlled access and routeways through the area.

Perception

The boundary between *Farmed Moorland Edge - Aberdeenshire* Landscape Character Type and the adjacent moorland plateaux areas is marked by the contrast between bright smooth pasture in one and dark heather and forest in the other. The transition to the adjacent *Undulating Agricultural Heartlands* areas is generally less distinct, characterised by a gradual change in agricultural patterns.

In this Landscape Character Type views focus on more pronounced hills in the *Outlying Hills and Ridges*, such as Tap o'Noth and The Buck, that lie within the surrounding *Summits and Plateaux - Aberdeenshire* which backdrops these fringing landscapes.

The area has high scenic quality, and a rich and diverse 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 South and Central Aberdeenshire LCA (Environmental Resources Management), published 1998; and Aberdeenshire Landscape Character Review (Carol Anderson Landscape Associates), published 2014.