



Location and Context

The *Outlying Hills and Ridges* Landscape Character Type lies at the transition between the high mountains of the Cairngorms and the low farmland of the north-east coastlands in Aberdeenshire. It comprises a series of moorland spurs that extend from the central massif of the Cairngorms into the farmed landscape of Garioch and Formartine, forming prominent areas of high ground.

Key Characteristics

- Long and often narrow undulating ridges, punctuated with occasional pronounced hills, which stand proud of surrounding low-lying farmland.
- Distinctive and recognisable profiles of occasional dramatic outcrops of rock, creating local landmarks which are visible and ever-present across wide expanses of Aberdeenshire.
- Extensive tracts of coniferous woodland cover slopes, these interspersed with varying degrees with heather moorland.
- Green fields of pasture cover often gently folded lower slopes and this merges gradually with more intensively managed lowland farmland.
- Communication masts and wind farms are dominant features on parts of these outlying ridges.
- Important prehistoric and cultural heritage.
- Spectacular views across the surrounding lowlands of Aberdeenshire from these promontories of higher ground.
- Strong visual relationship with wider Cairngorm massif.
- Relatively remote and wild landscape character.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The moorland spurs which comprise the *Outlying Hills and Ridges* form an interrelated system of highland ridges and peaks which include various promontories, each integral to Aberdeenshire's landscape identity, such as Bennachie, Hill of Foudland, Tap o'Noth, Coreen Hills, Hill of Fare and Hill of Tillymorgan. They are usually smooth rolling hills of both

gentle and step relief, with occasional dramatic rocky outcrops such as Bennachie, Mither Tap and Tap o’Noth. The varied lithology can be seen where rocky outcrops emerge at the surface, for example the knobbly granitic peak of Bennachie and the dark gleaming slates along the Ridge of Foudland.

Landcover

While each of these spurs has its own distinct character they have simple, bare moorland tops with a common land cover of heather and coniferous forest on ridges, conifer planted slopes, and distinctive fields at their base. Extensive coniferous forest and wind farm development is present at Clashindarroch over hills west of the Bogie Strath. Gartley Moor and the Hill of Tillymorgan are also heavily wooded.

Settlement

Settlement is limited to steadings at the base of slopes in sheltered locations. The *Outlying Hills and Ridges* have strong cultural importance with important archaeological features, especially Iron Age and early historic period hillforts and defended settlements. The topography and landscape are very much the reasons why these monuments are located here – they were deliberately sited in prominent locations that conveyed status and allowed for control of the landscape below. Notable examples include the forts of Tap o’Noth and Bennachie.

Although wind energy development is largely limited to the edges of these spurs, there are views of turbines encircling views from summits, impacting on the hill settings in views to these hills. There are communications masts on several of the hills which are very visible in skyline views.

Perception

Some of these more prominent and distinctive outlier hills are popular for recreation where they provide commanding views over the lowlands of Aberdeenshire. This landscape is also integral to the character of the surrounding lowlands providing outstanding focal points whose colours change according to the weather and the seasons.

The rocky outcrops of these *Outlying Hills and Ridges* are distinctive landmarks, integral to the landscape identity of Aberdeenshire. Wildness and remoteness can be experienced in these areas due to their elevation and rough terrain. The outliers have a high degree of landscape integrity.

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.