



Location and Context

Lying on the edge of the high mountains of the Cairngorms National Park, the hills of the *Summits and Plateaux - Aberdeenshire* Landscape Character Type extend almost to the coast at Stonehaven.

Key Characteristics

- An expansive upland plateau with a smooth rolling landform and rounded hill summits. Landform is more complex along the Highland Boundary Fault.
- Foreground to the Cairngorm massif and Cairngorms National Park.
- Backdrop in views from the north from Lower Deeside and the fringes of Aberdeen city.
- Extensive central and western ridges covered with expansive heather and grass moorland.
- Regionally prominent hills.
- Coniferous forested lower hills, particularly extensive in the north-east. Wind farm development also present in this area.
- A patchwork of green pasture extends high into narrow valleys on the fringes of these uplands.
- Unexpected pockets of farmland and isolated farms and estate buildings associated lower ground in part of the core of these uplands.
- Derelict grey stone cottages are occasional features amidst open moorland.
- Numerous old routeways popular with walkers and these, and the B974 Cairn o'Mount road, offer commanding views to the Howe of Mearns and the coast, and to Deeside.
- Wild character experienced in the less modified central and western parts of this landscape.
- Dramatic juxtaposition of the steep scarp slopes of these rugged uplands with the expansive low-lying farmed and settled Howe of the Mearns.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

This landscape is mainly underlain by granite and comprises smooth rounded hills. Its

distinct southern edge which marks the line of the Highland Boundary Fault, a location where the dramatic change from lowland landscape to mountains is most visible, is, however, composed of quartz-mica-schist with intrusions of slate giving rise to steeper slopes. This upland landscape provides a dramatic backdrop and contrast to the expansive low-lying Howe of the Mearns to the south-east. The north-eastern foothills, which tumble down to the coast, are less dramatic and form a more gradual transition with surrounding farmland. There are occasional rocky outcrops such as Clachnaben (589 metres), visible from many parts of Lower Deeside topped with a granite tor, and Mount Battock (778 metres) from which panoramic views of Aberdeenshire can be gained.

Landcover

Lower slopes are extensively forested but the plateau itself is covered by heather moorland which extends westwards into the Cairngorms National Park revealing a strong and simple rolling relief where successive ridges recede into the distance. This smooth landform is dissected by deep gullies which are often lined by mossy clumps of birch and rowan.

The high plateau top is an exposed and largely uninhabited upland landscape and a strong wild character can be experienced in less accessible and modified areas.

The plateau foothills have a more diverse mix of farmland and grazed moors. There is a patchwork of heather, bracken, gorse, scrubby birch and pine woodland. Unenclosed green pasture extends up from the valleys and small clustered farms are located on lower slopes, enclosed by broadleaf shelterbelts, sometimes illuminated by their whitewashed walls. This area assumes a smaller scale and more intricate character.

Settlement

There is an almost complete absence of habitation on the upland ridges and the area is only crossed by two roads. The A974 Cairn o'Mount road emphasises a drop in elevation on the eastern side of the plateau and has panoramic views over the Mearns and the coast. There are also a number of long-distance footpaths. Large scale wind farm development is a significant presence in the central and eastern sections of the upland part of this Landscape Character Type. There are also medium and small scale turbines at the edges at the base of slopes.

The archaeology of the area includes concentrations of prehistoric settlements and farm systems as well as pre-improvement farmsteads on the lower slopes of some of the hills. Of note is the Kincardine Deer Dyke, at the southern margin of the character type above Fasque/Fettercairn, which is the remains of a medieval deer management system.

Perception

The hills have a wild, remote and windswept character, although this reduces from the higher western parts to the less high eastern areas, which have been affected by wind turbine development. Distant views of the farmed landscape in the Howe of the Mearns emphasise the sense of isolation of the area.



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.