



Location and Context

The *Plateau Moorland - Argyll* Landscape Character Type is found on the islands of Islay and Jura, forming the uplands and highest hills on these islands. On Islay the massif extends from Port Ellen on the south coast, to Port Askaig with a further smaller outcrop on the Oa peninsula. It is also found on Jura, forming the extensive hinterland to the famous Paps.

Key Characteristics

- Upland plateau with an undulating landform and rocky outcrops.
- Predominantly open moorland, broken by rock outcrops and upland lochs.
- Massive scale.
- Inaccessible and relatively uninhabited, with special wildness qualities and sense of remoteness.
- Conifer plantations on fringes of upland moor.
- Extensive areas of blanket bog.
- Broadleaf woodland limited to a few sheltered coastal cliffs.
- Occasional farmsteads and fields on edge of moor.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Plateau Moorland - Argyll* Landscape Character Type is defined on the islands of Jura and Islay, and cover the uplands, embracing stretches of coastline, areas of rugged inaccessible and remote interior hills including the more remote and exposed stretches of coast on both islands, and smaller stretches of farmed and settled land. These hills form the backdrop to a number of farmed and settled low-lying landscape character types. The hills are irregular and interlocking, divided by glens and narrow river valleys, as well as corries and saddles which often contain lochans. The *Plateau Moorland – Argyll* provides the higher relief and backdrop to the Coastal Parallel Ridges, as well as to extensive areas of Upland Fringe Mosaic.

The *Plateau Moorland – Argyll* areas are underlain by Dalradian schists of the Argyll Group. These metamorphic rocks contain a high proportion of quartzite, giving the rock faces and scree slopes a shimmering quality. The high, rocky plateau has an undulating landform and a massive scale. The steep slopes are broken by numerous rocky outcrops and massive boulders and by upland lochs. The northern half of Jura is characterised by a rock surface feature known as 'cnoc and rock'. The steep summits of the Paps of Jura are a dramatic anomaly, standing out from the surrounding plateau.

The plateau forms a steep, rocky coastline, often with cliffs, caves, stacks and arches cut into the hard rocks by the waves. However, the sheltered coastline of Loch Tarbert on the island of Jura has a more indented character, with narrow bays, shingle beaches and rocky off-shore islands. The highest summits contrast with these undulating plateau areas with their expanses of smoother, gentler slopes.

Landcover

This is an exposed, windswept upland moor with a vast scale. The vegetation is dominated by moorland and wet heath. Extensive areas of blanket bog are broken by rocky outcrops and upland lochs. There are conifer forests on the lower slopes towards the edge of the moorland, with evidence of much recent planting, but many areas show no signs of habitation. A few of the lower, sheltered coastal cliffs, such as those at Port Askaig, are clothed in steep broadleaf woodland.

The moorland is maintained to some extent by burning and there are signs of peat-cutting in some areas.

Settlement

There are a few crofts on the lower fringes of the moor, with occasional pastures enclosed by broken stone walls in the lower glens, but the moorland is mostly unenclosed. Pylons and transmission lines follow the narrow roads along the fringes of the upland.

There are areas of *Plateau Moorland – Argyll* with farmland on the slightly more extensively farmed and settled landscapes of Islay. This extends across the lower foothills within the interior glen stretching from Port Askaig to Bridgend and on the Oa Peninsula. Relief is lower, with generally rounded landform and some low rocky hills. These areas form the lower foothills of the Landscape Character Type and they are largely, but not exclusively, farmed with some moorland, especially on exposed coasts. Overall the landscape is more diverse and settled than the other areas of *Plateau Moorland - Argyll* and there are few roads. The relative relief and height difference between the floors of some of the glens and the surrounding hills is often low. Landform features shallow glens, gently graded slopes and occasional more steep-sided and prominent hills, although it is more complex and contained on the Oa peninsula. The landscape is relatively open with some conifer woodland, and is partially farmed as improved pasture, the remaining land being moor and upland grassland. Dispersed farms are scattered across sheltered glens and along lower slopes. The coastline is characterised by rocky cliffs and small exposed headlands, bays, indentations and islands. It is relatively secluded and has a sense of naturalness which is reinforced by its exposed setting.

Perception

The *Plateau Moorland – Argyll* ridgelines and hill profiles are prominent features in wider views from adjacent areas, including the mainland.

These moorland areas are valued for their remote, natural qualities. The edges of the uplands are the most prominent and therefore the most visually sensitive parts of the *Plateau Moorland - Argyll*.



This is one of 389 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 Argyll and the Firth of Clyde (Environmental Resources Management), published 1996