



Location and Context

The *Upland Parallel Ridges - Argyll* Landscape Character Type is found in two areas in the uplands of north Knapdale, on the west coast of Argyll, to the north and south of Moine Mhor. The landscape comprises a distinctive series of linear ridges aligned in parallel with the south-west/north-east grain of the coast.

Key Characteristics

- Upland landscape of long, parallel ridges and narrow, linear lochs and glens.
- Tightly packed ridges follow a south-west/north-east alignment.
- Steep, sharp ridge-tops, with dramatic rocky outcrops.
- Extensive conifer forests.
- Deciduous, largely ancient oak woodland on steep, sheltered slopes of ridges and on loch edges.
- Small marginal pastures or moorland in isolated patches between the un-forested ridges.
- Dramatic, scenic upland landscape.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

This dramatic, scenic upland landscape is underlain by metamorphic rocks of the Argyll Group, with some slightly older formations of the Southern Highland Group on the west coast. The rocks are tightly folded to form a series of parallel linear ridges, divided by narrow glens and ribbon lochs. There is a gradual transition to the lower coastal parallel ridges, where the long, rugged peninsulas and chains of small islands indicate the continuation of the ridges under the sea. However, the coastline of this upland landscape is less indented, with an almost sheer drop to the coast of north-west Knapdale and to the edge of Loch Sheen.

The landform follows the south-west to north-east alignment which is apparent throughout

the study area, but in Knapdale it is more pronounced as the result of tightly folded rocks which have been over-deepened by glacial scouring and subsequently invaded by the sea. The glaciers have etched out narrow depressions in the limestones between the more resistant outcrops of quartzite rocks.

Landcover

Landscape pattern is one of very large-scale mosaic of conifer plantations and open moorland. Conifers predominate in North Knapdale, but the landscape becomes completely open to the south, revealing the complexity of the landform and the rocky, linear ridges. These remaining pockets of open land between ridges are important in that they provide an opportunity to understand the scale, complexity and form of the topography which is elsewhere masked by dense tree cover. The upland areas of north-west Knapdale are particularly distinctive, showing the gradual transition to the “ribby” peninsulas and chains of islands of the coastal parallel ridges

Broadleaf oak-birch woodland is found on the sheltered slopes of the ridges, with mature oak woodland on the lower slopes and, in particular, on the edges of the narrow ribbon lochs. At higher elevations, this oak woodland becomes sparser, but there are also rather stunted oak trees on the sheltered side of the ridges in upland areas. Birch woodland extends high up the mountain slopes, giving visual emphasis to the alignment of the narrow ridges and linear glens.

There are sometimes narrow strips of marginal pasture between the forested ridges. They are typically enclosed by stone walls or wire fencing and many show signs of poor drainage, with patches of rushes and tussocky grass. At higher elevations, the rocky ridges are often separated by areas of open moorland, with rough, unenclosed grazing, patches of bog and small lochs.

The vegetation has a strong, distinctive linear pattern, following the landform. The parallel ridges produce a layering of rock and tree cover, emphasising the grain of the landscape.

Settlement and Perception

Access is difficult through much of this character type. There are very few settlements, with occasional groups of buildings at the edges of the larger lochs, linked by narrow roads with numerous hairpin bends. Views are restricted from roads by the incised landform. The coastal edge against Loch Craignish is particularly rough and impenetrable. This character type is important in forming the setting to the archaeologically rich landscapes within Moine Mhor and the Glens of Kilmartin and Kilmicheal.

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 Firth of Clyde LCA (Environmental Resources Management), published 1996