



### Location and Context

The *Stepped Rocky Coastlands* Landscape Character Type is found on Mull (where it generally occurs along the coastal fringe of the Sound of Mull, in the Gruline area and along the southern coast of Loch Scridain) and on the southern tip of Bute.

### Key Characteristics

- Distinctive coastal low stepped headlands and sheltered bays.
- Undulating, eroded moorland on lower fringes of the high stepped basalt.
- Low ridges broadly follow a south-east/north-west alignment, with ribbon lochs in the glens.
- Indented coastline; low headlands have a distinctive stepped profile.
- Open moorland broken by rocky outcrops and ledges.
- Extensive conifer forests on lower slopes of plateau.
- Diverse, patchy mosaic of woodland, bog and marginal pasture on lower fringes of moor.
- Scattered small-holdings and cottages on edge of moor.
- Small estates influence the landscape character in some sheltered coastal bays.

### Landscape Character Description

#### *Landform*

The *Stepped Rocky Coastlands* Landscape Character Type is found on the lower fringes of the high stepped basalt on the Isle of Mull. There is a further outcrop on the southern tip of the island of Bute, where the underlying basalt originated from volcanic eruptions on the Isle of Arran.

As basalt weathers, it produces slopes with a distinctive stepped profile. A sequence of flat terraces is separated by low vertical rock faces. This profile is clearly defined on the high stepped basalt of Mull, but is also apparent on the lower fringes of the basalt, where the ledges stand out as rocky outcrops and the landform has a distinctly horizontal grain. Here the plateau has been eroded to form a series of low ridges, averaging approximately 170

metres in height, which broadly follow a northeast-northwest alignment. There are sometimes ribbon lochs in the glens between the ridges, giving visual emphasis to the grain of the landform. However, at a detailed scale, the landform is uneven, rocky and often rather disorientating. A narrow outcrop of limestone to the east of Craignure provides a pocket of fertile land and the setting for the Torosay estate.

The plateau has a deeply indented coastline, with ledges of flat, dark grey rock jutting into the sea. The distinctive stepped profile shows up clearly on the small headlands which separate coves of dark-grey mudflats and shingle. There are numerous outlying rocks and off-shore islands.

#### *Landcover*

The upper plateau is open moorland with patches of heather between rocky outcrops and tussocky moorland grass. There are extensive conifer forests on the lower slopes to the south of Tobermory and in Glen Aros.

The lower fringes of the moorland are a diverse, patchy mosaic of gorse, bog, moorland, scrubby woodland, scattered cottages and pastures. Many of the fields are partially derelict and enclosed by the broken remnants of stone walls. Most are rough pasture, with patches of rushes. The edges of the low-lying bog are fringed with scrubby woodland.

#### *Settlement*

There is generally an increase in the proportion of pasture towards the coast, where there are scattered small-holdings and simple, white-painted cottages in sheltered sites beside the steep rocky outcrops. The flat terraces on the coastal headlands are often rough pasture, broken by clumps of gorse on the low rocky cliffs and along small gullies. There are numerous crofting townships in this area, closely associated with areas of rectilinear fields and pasture. Medieval and post-medieval settlement and agriculture remains are common, often by way of field systems and building footings. Earlier archaeological remains are also varied with some late prehistoric relics such as cairns.

Sheltered indented coastal bays, such as Carsaig Bay and Calgary Bay, have a more domestic landscape character, often influenced by the grounds of small country houses and estates. Here there are often stands of mature woodland trees, a more complex network of stone walls and short avenues of beech trees which are distinctive features. Rhododendron is endemic on the valley slopes near Lochbuie, having 'escaped' from the grounds of the small estate on the coast.

The *Stepped Rocky Coastlands* are highly visible from key roads (such as the A848 on Mull) and the sea. The designed landscape of Torosay Castle is listed in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes. There is also evidence of a designed landscape on the west of the island.



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.