



Location and Context

The *Coastal Parallel Ridges* Landscape Character Type forms a distinctive landscape of narrow, linear ridges on the east coasts of Islay and Jura, on the island of Gigha and on the coastal edges of Knapdale where there is a gradual transition to the upland parallel ridges inland.

Key Characteristics

- Narrow rocky ridges with a strong south-west/north-east alignment, which break down to form chains of rocky islands at the coast.
- Horseshoe-shaped, narrow sandy bays and extensive mudflats.
- Stunted oak-birch woodlands on the rocky ridges separating narrow marginal pastures, marsh or lochs.
- Small blocks of conifers.
- Stone walls enclosing fields and along lanes.
- Small settlements, concentrated at coves.
- Rich variety of archaeological sites.
- Small estates.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Coastal Parallel Ridges* Landscape Character Type forms rocky ridges at the coastal margins of the Knapdale area, where the metamorphic Dalradian rocks have been tightly folded to form a series of narrow, parallel ridges with a strong south-west to north-east alignment. The landscape was subsequently deeply scoured by glaciers during the Ice Age, emphasising the ridges landform and over-deepening the narrow glens so that the coastline was flooded by the sea. The *Coastal Parallel Ridges* represent the remnants of this flooded coastline.

The narrow, rocky ridges separate low-lying areas, which may be marsh, small ribbon lochs

or boulder strewn mudflats. At the coastline, the ridges extend out into the sea as long, narrow peninsulas which continue intermittently as a chain of rocky islands. There are horseshoe-shaped bays between the ridges. The volcanic influence from eruptions on the island of Mull is evident in the narrow volcanic dykes, which are intruded into the rocks, and by occasional volcanic plugs, such as Cnoc Rhaonastil, a steep, conical hill on the coast of south-east Islay.

Landcover

The rocky ridges are relatively well-wooded, with scrubby birch, willow and hawthorn and stunted oak woodlands. There are pockets of heather, gorse and moorland grass between the rocks, as well as a rich mosaic of mosses and lichens. The gullies or glens between the ridges tend to be badly drained, particularly near the shoreline. Here, there are areas of marsh or mudflats surrounded by tussocky marginal pastures, but on higher land the ridges separate a series of small pastures, divided by broken stone walls which allow cattle and sheep to wander freely.

Settlement

Narrow roads follow the long coastal peninsulas, linking the scattered cottages and the small settlements which, given the generally poor agricultural ground within this landscape, are clustered at the narrow coves. Historically, this would have provided inhabitants with better access to waterways and marine resources. Most end at the tip of the peninsula and there are few link roads. Crofts are generally small and there are derelict cottages along the length of the coast. Some of the villages on Islay are centred on small distilleries, such as that at Ardbeg.

Small estates are important landscape elements, often occupying their own coastal bay. The landscape in these areas is relatively wooded, with mature stands of oaks, Scots pine and sometimes other exotic species. Estates such as Ardlussa, on the eastern coast of Jura, provide a domestic wooded character in an otherwise wild and natural landscape.

There are numerous archaeological sites, particularly on Islay, where this landscape was an important centre for Bronze Age settlement, and where there are also some important Early Christian sites. For instance, the cross at Kildalton Church, on the south-east coast of Islay, is one of the best preserved early Celtic crosses in Scotland.



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.