



Location and Context

The *Lowland Hills - Ayrshire* Landscape Character Type occurs in one place in Ayrshire, in the centre, to the east of the coastal town of Troon in South Ayrshire. These low hills rise from lower-lying farmlands of the *Agricultural Lowlands – Ayrshire* and provide a backdrop to the coastal towns of Troon and Prestwick.

Key Characteristics

- Series of low hills which rise in limited extent almost imperceptibly from the surrounding pasturelands, culminating in a series of bluffy summits.
- Mixed geology with the hills reflecting the presence of igneous intrusions in the surrounding coal measures.
- Land cover dominated by pastures, enclosed with hedges (many with gorse) and post and wire fences. Exposed, higher and steeper ground tends to be covered in gorse.
- Many archaeological features including defensible sites in an otherwise lowland landscape.
- Exploitation as a source of hard rock and as a location for reservoirs and communications masts.
- Prominent feature in the landscape, contrasting with the coastal lowlands and cutting them off from much of the lowlands further inland.
- Views from this area tend to be longer distance and panoramic, which from the western facing slopes and summits focus on the Isle of Arran over the Firth of Clyde.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Lowland Hills - Ayrshire* Landscape Character Type lies in the heart of the Ayrshire lowlands as a series of low hills which rise almost imperceptibly from the surrounding pasturelands, culminating in a series of bluffy summits inland from Troon. The hills are relatively low, standing at just under 150 metres, and most slopes are comparatively gentle.

Of mixed geology, the hills reflect the presence of igneous intrusions in the surrounding coal measures. Landform can be complex, with small-scale knolly hills and narrow valleys occurring in places, although smoother, gently graded hill slopes are also present, particularly to the east where these hills merge with undulating farmland of the lowlands.

Landcover

Land cover is dominated by pastures, enclosed with hedges (many with gorse) and post and wire fences. The pattern of dairy farming which characterises the Ayrshire lowlands extends over much of the lowland hills. There are also small woodlands. The exposure created by the elevation and proximity to the coast is reflected in the poorer soils and the bluffy summits and the steeper slopes tend to be covered in gorse.

Settlement

Historically, the hills would have provided defensible sites in an otherwise lowland landscape. They are rich in archaeological features. Some of the hills are crowned with the sites of forts, while Dundonald Castle lies on the hills' northern slopes. More recently the hills have been exploited as a source of hard rock and as a location for reservoirs and communications masts.

The hills are crossed by the dual carriageway A77 before it descends towards Prestwick and Ayr. This major communications route carries considerable volumes of traffic, creating visual and aural impacts on the surrounding landscape. They are well-settled with a regular dispersal of farms, houses and small settlements.

Perception

Despite their relatively low relief the hills form a prominent, significant feature in the landscape, contrasting with the coastal lowlands and cutting them off from much of the lowland basin. This is especially so from the M77, Troon (where the steep slopes of Wardlaw Hill form a distinctive backdrop) and Dundonald. The hills also provide a setting in views from the west including the coastal town of Troon. Views from this area tend to be longer distance and panoramic, with the Isle of Arran over the Firth of Clyde likely to draw the eye from the western facing slopes and summits.

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 Ayrshire (Land Use Consultants), published 1998.