



Location and Context

The *Rugged Moorland Hills and Valleys* Landscape Character Type occurs in two places in Ayrshire. It is located to the far north, focused around the North Ayrshire Hills, and in the south of Arran. Both parts of this Landscape Character Type comprise large areas. These areas cover Haupland Moor, the Crosbie Hills, the Loch Thom area, Duchal Moor, Queenside Muir, Waterhead Moor and Mistylaw Muir.

Key Characteristics

- Series of rounded hills and moors rising to form a dissected plateau.
- Combination of comparatively gentle hills/ shallow slopes and steeper craggy escarpments.
- Exposed Red Sandstone dykes, sills and intrusions give the moorlands a degree of ruggedness.
- Land cover dominated by moorland vegetation, grading from heather and grass moorland, through rough grazing and abandoned pastures to improved pastures on the lower slopes.
- Higher moorlands have very extensive areas of coniferous forest.
- Field boundaries are marked by drystone dykes, post and wire fences and some hedges on lower slopes.
- Some Iron Age hut circles and hill forts occur within the hills and a line of castles mark the boundary with Garnock Valley.
- Modern development is generally scarce, comprising little more than a scatter of farmsteads.
- Tall structures (masts, pylons and turbines) are beginning to erode some of the characteristics of remoteness from certain areas.
- Where woodland does not foreshorten views they tend to be long distance and panoramic, focused towards the islands and peninsulas in the Firth of Clyde and Kilbrannan Sound.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Rugged Moorland Hills and Valleys* Landscape Character Type occurs between the section of raised beach north of Ardrossan and the Garnock Valley, forming a series of rounded hills and moors which rise to create a gently undulating, dissected plateau 300-500 metres. The hills are formed of carboniferous basalts with intrusive agglomerates and dolerite sills.

The hills form a broad triangle, with the scale of the landform declining to the southern point. South of Largs a series of harder intrusions stand as isolated; or semi-isolated, bluffy hills. Examples include Law Hill, and the Knockewart Hills. While south eastern hill slopes tend to be comparatively gentle, blending into the Garnock Valley, to the west they are steep, forming a craggy escarpment (the dramatic, former coastal cliffs described in relation to the Raised Beach landscape type) above the coastal strip. The hills are cut by two principal valleys - Camphill valley between Kilbirnie and Largs, and Brisbane Glen to the north-east of Largs.

On Arran the southern part of the island comprises an area of rugged moorland, underlain by red sandstone with numerous, more resistant Tertiary dykes, sills and intrusions which give the moorlands a degree of ruggedness. In contrast to the orientation of the North Ayrshire Hills, the bedding planes dip gently towards the south-west, creating comparatively shallow slopes in the south-west and steep, almost craggy escarpments in the east, towering above Brodick and Lamlash. A series of valleys cut into the upland mass, providing routes for 'the String' and 'the Ross', two high passes across the southern part of the island.

Landcover

Landcover on the north Ayrshire Hills is dominated by moorland vegetation, grading from heather and grass moorland, through rough grazing and abandoned pastures to improved pastures on the lower slopes. Agriculture is dominated by sheep grazing with enclosures on lower slopes and rough unenclosed grazing on upper slopes. Field boundaries are marked by drystone dykes, post and wire fences and some hedges on lower slopes. There is evidence of abandoned enclosures on some of the upper slopes. Lines of mature or semi-mature beech trees indicate lines of outgrown, sometimes abandoned field boundaries. There is very little natural woodland. In addition to the remnant lines of beech there are a small number of coniferous woodlands, especially on more sheltered eastern slopes.

On Arran, much of the higher moorlands have been afforested, creating very extensive areas of coniferous forest, most of which extend down to the road which encircles the island. The valleys show a transition from upland with stands of semi-natural oak and birch where shelter allows, to more settled, pastoral lowlands with regular, hedged fields and a predominance of beech, chestnut and field maple. The upland areas have networks of drystone dykes constructed from rounded boulders. The diverse and sparsely settled lower hill slopes and valleys have smaller scale than the higher moorland.

Settlement

Historically, most settlements would have avoided these exposed uplands in favour of the more sheltered and fertile lowlands, and this is reflected in the pattern of surviving sites. A

few Iron Age hut circles and hill forts occur within the hills and a line of castles mark the boundary with Garnock Valley, but the majority of evidence of human activity in the North Ayrshire Hills is small in scale and found in the valleys of the area, such as those of the Gogo Water and the Greeto Water. More extensive evidence survives on Arran, particularly in the form of prehistoric sites and remains such as the chambered cairn at Carn Ban, but with the same clustering of sites around streams and valleys in the area. Modern development is scarce, comprising little more than a scatter of farmsteads. Certain areas provide the backdrop to adjacent larger settlements – for example Haupland Muir creates the backdrop to Ardrossan, Saltcoats and West Kilbride. Hilltop masts are prominent in the landscape. Even more prominent is the double line of electricity pylons which lead from Hunterston Power Station across the southern part of this landscape type and into the Garnock Valley. Windfarm development to the south, on the hills to the north of Ardrossan and south-east of Largs - Kelburn, Dalry and Millour Hill wind farms occupy core areas of the Landscape Character Type on the mainland - has also altered the character of this landscape.

Several of the valleys have been dammed, creating reservoirs to serve surrounding urban areas. Muirhead and Camphill Reservoirs alongside the A760 are perhaps the best known. Others include Knockdown, Caaf and Munnoch Reservoirs. The dams and other water supply infrastructure comprise an important element of the landscape of these upland valleys.

Perception

Large scale, remote, open and exposed upland areas, although largely undeveloped tall structures are beginning to erode some of the characteristics of remoteness from certain areas. Views tend to be long distance and panoramic. From the western facing slopes and summits the islands and peninsulas in the Firth of Clyde are the focus of seaward views. On Arran, where woodland does not foreshorten views panoramas over the Firth of Clyde and Kilbrannan Sound can be obtainable. The area can also inform scenic skylines from the surrounding coastal edge of Arran and a setting in views from and to Lamlash.

On the mainland peripheral hills, such as Kain Hill, provide the backdrop and setting to the raised beach coast and the wide Forth of Clyde, even though they are small and well defined.

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.