



Location and Context

The *Southern Uplands - Ayrshire* Landscape Character Type are focused on the mainland to the far south of Ayrshire, along the boundary with and extending into Dumfries and Galloway south-east of Glen App, south of New Cumnock and south of South Balloch.

Key Characteristics

- Steep, smooth slopes rising to rounded summits.
- Series of distinctive valleys cut into the uplands created by glacial erosion, with U-shaped cross sections, precipitous side slopes, hanging valleys, waterfalls, crags and screes.
- Relatively simple landcover.
- Heather-flecked grassland on summits.
- Scarce semi-natural woodland is, limited to a few more sheltered glens, gullies and clefts.
- Occasional forested areas and shelterbelts on lower side slopes leaving the domed peaks exposed.
- Absence of modern settlement in these exposed uplands, it being concentrated in river valleys and the larger glens.
- Expansive, remote and largely untamed landscape, most parts of the uplands are accessible on foot only.
- Long distance and panoramic views encompass the settled Ayrshire lowlands to the north and west and remote Galloway Hills to the south and east.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

Immediately south of the Southern Upland Fault lie a number of bold upland areas which have a character very different to the lower moorlands and hills to the north and west. This is derived from the hills' height (up to 575 metres), their geology (Ordovician rocks, predominantly more resistant greywackes) and the influence of glacial erosion.

The hills are characterised by steep, smooth slopes rising to rounded summits. Cut into the uplands are a series of distinctive glacial valleys, with u-shaped cross sections, precipitous side slopes, hanging valleys, waterfalls, crags and screes. The combination of these features, and the contrast with lower moorlands and the lowlands to the north, gives an impression of uplands which are more extensive, remote and higher than is actually the case.

Landcover

Many areas are little modified. Landcover in the *Southern Uplands - Ayrshire* is typically coarse grassland, though the highest areas often comprise heather moorland. Areas of rough grazing generally lack walled enclosures. Semi-natural woodland is scarce, limited to a few more sheltered glens, gullies and clefts. There are also occasional areas of conifer forest, particularly around the fringes of the higher hills leaving the domed peaks exposed. The coniferous forest is predominantly Sitka spruce, the main variations being in mixes with larch which provides colour contrasts between the dark green of spruce and the light greens to browns of larch. The rotational nature of forest management provides long term textural and colour changes related to the felling and replanting coupes.

Settlement

Modern settlement is absent from these exposed uplands, being concentrated in river valleys and the larger glens. It is likely that settlement was more extensive during milder periods in the past, and some evidence of prehistoric settlement survives across the areas. The hills do, however, form the backdrop to nearby settlements such as Dalmellington.

Wind farms have altered the character of the landscape from the Southern Uplands to the east of Ayrshire, south-west of New Cumnock, and to the far south of Ayrshire, to the west of the Duisk Valley.

Most parts of the uplands are accessible on foot only, though a minor road climbs up to the Nick of Balloch providing spectacular views and another runs along the valley of the Afton Water, south of New Cumnock.

Perception

This is an extensive, remote and largely untamed landscape. The *Southern Uplands - Ayrshire* often create landmark features when seen from adjacent hills and roads. The area south-east of New Cumnock is highly visible from settlement and roads within the *Upland Basin - Ayrshire* to the north, and peripheral hills form prominent hill summits when seen in views to the north-west. Views are long distance and panoramic and encompass the settled Ayrshire lowlands to the north and west. The area adjacent to Glenn App contains views to the extensive lower lying upland plateau in both South Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway.

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.