



Location and Context

The *Southern Uplands with Forest - Ayrshire* Landscape Character Type occurs in three locations in Ayrshire; a large area to the east of Dalmellington in East Ayrshire and two smaller areas in South Ayrshire at Strawarren Fell south-west of Barrhill and the eastern edge of the Carrick Forest south of South Balloch. Forestry is the dominant landcover.

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: coniferous forest is dominant. It generally extends over the summits or is concentrated on the side slopes leaving the domed peaks exposed.
- Heather-flecked grassland on unforested summits.
- Scarce semi-natural woodland is limited to a few more sheltered glens, gullies and clefts.
- Absence of modern settlement in these exposed uplands, it being concentrated in river valleys and the larger glens.
- Network of upland tracks, often associated with the forestry.
- Enclosure and foreshortened views created by forest cover contribute to create a remote, isolated character.

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 is 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

Landcover in the *Southern Uplands with Forest - Ayrshire* is typically dominated by extensive areas of coniferous forest which extends over the summits or is concentrated on side slopes leaving the domed peaks exposed. This 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.

In some places the hill tops are not forested, leaving the domed peaks exposed. Landcover here comprises coarse grassland, though the highest areas are often covered with heather moorland. Semi-natural woodland is scarce, limited to a few more sheltered glens, gullies and clefts.

Settlement

Most parts of these uplands are accessible on foot only, or by forestry or wind farm tracks, though a minor road climbs up to the Nick of Balloch (on fine days providing spectacular views).

Modern settlement is absent from these exposed uplands, being concentrated in nearby 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 form a contrasting backdrop to nearby settlements such as Dalmellington. Wind farms occur in some parts of this Landscape Character Type, and some can be seen in neighbouring areas.

Perception

This is a relatively remote landscape. Forestry limits and foreshortens views, increasing the sense of isolation, although access for wind farms and the presence of wind turbines has reduced this in places. These uplands often create landmark features when seen from adjacent hills and roads.

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.