



Location and Context

Located in the central areas of the Cairngorms National Park, the *Mountain Massif – Cairngorms* Landscape Character Type comprises two main mountainous areas – the Cairngorm Massif and White Mounth. They represent the most massive mountain landscapes in the United Kingdom, and form the backdrop to adjacent mountain areas to the north and south, and lower lying areas of Deeside to the east and Badenoch & Strathspey to the west.

Key Characteristics

- A massive scale landscape.
- Extensive, high-level sweeping plateaux, with smooth domes and corries among the rounded landforms
- Distinctive tors on some summits, and occasional rocky cliffs.
- Trough-like glens, some with ribbon lakes.
- Open, exposed, boulder-strewn summits rising above deep scooped corries, some with elevated lochans.
- Arctic-alpine environment of low-growing vegetation including rare plant communities.
- Absence of trees, except along burns, scattered along glen sides and around outer fringes.
- Lack of settlement, just one or two steadings and the recreational infrastructure of ski centre, and tracks and footpaths.
- Exposed, remote and wild character.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Mountain Massif – Cairngorms* Landscape Character Type forms the most extensive area of high mountains in the UK. It is underlain by granite and includes relict landforms that pre-date the last glaciation. The two expansive areas are characterised by domed summits and vast sweeping plateaux with a bare, yet coarse textured surface of boulder fields, shattered stones, gravel and sand slopes, as well as huge, slabby rock walls within

enormous corries. The massive bulky mountains of the main central massif area rise to a height of 1300 metres; the highest peak of the White Mounth area, to the south of Deeside, is Lochnagar which has a height of 1100 metres. The arctic-alpine environments often hold snow throughout the winter, with long-lasting snow patches a feature of shaded hollows for much of the year, accentuating the smooth curves and cavities of the landform.

The plateaux of central Cairngorms massif are cut by trough-like glens, such as the 'great gash' of the Lairig Ghru, and boulder-strewn corries which frequently contain dark elevated lochans, often lying at the foot of sheer rock faces. Some of the long, narrow, deepened glens contain elongated lochs – classic ribbon lakes of glacial scenery. The northern and eastern mountains of the area (such as Ben Avon and Beinn A'Bhuird) are distinguished by a series of summit tors forming upstanding blocks of weathered granite up to 30 metres in height. These tors are striking features, visible from many parts of the surrounding landscape. The headwaters of the Spey, Dee and Don all rise in this massif.

The influence of the schist geology on the surrounding hills of the White Mounth results in less extensive boulder fields and produces more fertile soil on the lower slopes, hence a slightly richer vegetation pattern. The area is surrounded by lower hills. Domed summits and tors are pre-glacial. Subsequent glacial activity has produced cliffs, huge corries (with elevated lochans) and deep troughs. Post-glacial weathering and frost action has formed boulder and scree slopes. Tributary valleys hang along upper edges of the deeper glens where waterfalls are a feature in wet conditions.

Landcover

The landcover of the *Mountain Massif – Cairngorms* is a typical arctic alpine mountain environment, with shallow, fragile Alpine soils and rankers supporting fragmented montane habitats of sedge, rush and moss heath, as well as distinctive and rare plant communities. The White Mounth has larger tracts of high alpine grassland. Patchy scree, gravels and heather are present on lower slopes. Woodland is sparse, limited to riparian woodland and remnant scattered Scots pine and birch along glen sides. Clumps of birch nestle amongst small-scale, jagged bluffs and rock slabs.

Human Influence

There is sparse settlement in this area, limited to very occasional estate and farm buildings on former shieling sites at the heads of shallow glens extending south from Deeside into the heart of the White Mounth area. Until recently there were mountain bothies used by mountaineers in the central massif. There is no upstanding evidence for historic or prehistoric settlement, other than at the extremities of the area, in the uppermost reaches of the Derry and Gairn rivers, where there are the ruins of shielings below Derry Cairngorm and Ben Avon. There are also small areas of pre-improvement field systems with remnants of irregularly shaped, walled enclosures in lower reaches of Glens Girnock and Gelder.

Access is largely limited to a path network which extends up the narrow glens and passes, linking to footpaths heading into the mountains and up to the summits. Most mountain summits have well-worn footpaths reflecting the area's popularity with hillwalkers. There are also occasional private vehicle tracks which sometimes extend up hillsides to allow for stalking access.

The infrastructure of public road, car parks, buildings, the funicular railway and snow fences, metal gantries and ski lifts associated with the Cairngorm ski centre extend over the north facing slopes of Cairngorm and Cairn Lochan.

Perception

The overall perception of the *Mountain Massif - Cairngorms* landscape is one of a remote and distinctive mountainous area, with very strong wild character. Features are of massive scale

The great height of the massif provides extensive panoramas of plateaux, sky and distant hill ranges. From the surrounding landscape the scale of the massif is evident in views from the Monadhliath Mountains, where the huge wall-like edge of Glen Feshie rises above Strath Spey, and from Slochd, where the massif is the focus of the view. There are dramatic framed views along the lengths of the deep steep-sided glens, which are revealed in stages when travelling through the passes or long narrow glens.

Within the mountain interior of the White Mounth the dramatic, towering cliffs, huge corries and deeply cut valleys create a spectacular landscape of complex topography. Views from the very high peaks of Lochnagar and Broad Cairn range widely. There are dramatic views along deep valleys from elevated passes. The interior is secluded.

This is one of 390 Landscape Character Types (LCTs) identified at a scale of 1:50 000 as part of a national programme of Landscape Character Assessment republished in 2019.

More detailed Landscape Character Areas have been identified by the Cairngorms National Park Authority and can be viewed as part of their wider Landscape Toolkit at

<http://cairngorms.co.uk/caring-future/cairngorms-landscape/landscape-areas/>

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This area was originally covered by the -----insert name----- Landscape Character Assessment, -----insert date-----, -----insert consultant-----

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