



### Location and Context

The *Lone Mountains* Landscape Character Type comprises individual mountains which lie isolated within large expanses of lower-lying open moorland. They possess distinctive profiles which are visible far beyond the edge of the Landscape Character Type, being seen on the horizon of many key views across Caithness and Sutherland.

### Key Characteristics

- Individual mountains forming landmarks seen widely and at considerable distance across expansive lower-lying *Sweeping Moorland and Flows* and *Cnocan – Caithness & Sutherland*.
- Mountains possess a distinctive profile, usually comprising steep, sweeping, concave slopes, making them look quite elegant and graceful.
- Height of mountains varies, but even the smaller mountains can appear high because of their isolation, steep-sided profiles and when seen in juxtaposition with lower-lying *Sweeping Moorland and Flows*.
- Peaks generally topped by exposed rock and sparse dwarf vegetation which gradually merges into the moorland surrounds.
- Ribbons of broadleaf scrub woodland associated with the many water courses that tumble down steep glens.
- Largely uninhabited, creating a distinct sense of remoteness, although some of its peaks attract significant numbers of hill walkers, especially during the summer months.
- Peaks offer extensive views of the surrounding area including the distinctive watery landscapes of the Flows.

### Landscape Character Description

#### *Landform*

While isolated and prominent mountains and hills occur elsewhere in Scotland, the recurrence of the *Lone Mountains* within Caithness and particularly north-west Sutherland, together with the strong contrast which exists between their steep-sided form and the expansive low-lying moorland which surrounds them, merits their definition as a separate Landscape Character Type.

These mountains were formed because of their resistant geology. They are typically located within areas of *Sweeping Moorland and Flows* and *Rocky Hills and Moorland*. In west Sutherland they are surrounded by the complex and highly pattern *Cnocan – Caithness & Sutherland* Landscape Character Type. These mountains have distinctive profiles which usually feature steep, sweeping concave slopes and some also have complex and narrow radiating ridges and multiple peaks. This makes them quite elegant and graceful in appearance, and deceptively steep to climb. The mountain profiles sometimes vary from one side to another, often being very steep on one side and gently rising on the other. Morven, Scarben and Ben Hope exhibit this character. This profile is most obvious when viewed from a distance.

Ben Stack and Maiden Pap both have a simple, steep-sided and symmetrical conical form with pronounced pointed summits, while Ben Loyal is more complex with narrow ridges and distinct rocky granite peaks forming a dramatic focus at the head of the Kyle of Tongue.

The Assynt *Lone Mountains* are formed from banded Torridonian sandstone capped with resistant pale grey Cambrian quartzite. Sulven has a tall and strikingly narrow profile and sheer slopes when seen ‘end on’ from the east and west where it abruptly rises from the surrounding *Cnocan – Caithness & Sutherland* and *Rocky Hills and Moorland*. Quinag with its multiple ridges and rocky buttresses is a massive looming presence in views from the A894 above Kylestrome.

Ben Griam Mhor and Ben Griam Beg are both relatively small but very isolated, standing out amidst low and simple *Sweeping Moorland and Flows* within the remote core of Caithness and Sutherland. The long ridge of Ben Klibreck and its steep slopes dominate views from the A836 and from low moorland to the north-east.

#### *Landcover*

Vegetation is limited to sparse dwarf vegetation on the peaks, which gradually merges into the surrounding moorland. Trees are limited to broadleaf scrub on the many watercourses which tumble down steep glens.

The isolation of these mountains within surrounding lower lying and often simple moorland landscapes allows their form to be fully appreciated (very different to the interlocked nature of most mountain ranges) and this makes them prominent landmark features.

#### *Settlement*

These landscapes are largely uninhabited with only a limited number of historic environment features, such as the Ben Klibreck campsite and survey station, Meall nan Con.

#### *Perception*

The height of these mountains varies, the definition of *Lone Mountains* being more closely linked to their isolation within open surroundings and their dominant focus rather than their elevation. These hills form a focus for walkers, their solitary position offering extensive panoramic views across Caithness and Sutherland.



This is one of 390 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 Caithness and Sutherland LCA (Stanton, C) published 1998; and Caithness and Sutherland Landscape Character Review (Carol Anderson Landscape Associates), published 2015.