



Location and Context

The *Lowland Hills – Central* Landscape Character Type occurs within five areas, defined by the lowland hill ranges of Uamh Bheag, the Ochil Hills, the Fintry, Gargunnoch and Touch Hills, the part of the Campsie Fells within Stirling Council area (including the Strathblane Hills), and eastern Kilsyth/Denny Hills.

Uamh Bheag (665 metres) and Beinn Odhar located to the north of the Teith Valley are separated from the dramatic landscape of lochs and mountains to the north-west by the Highland Boundary Fault.

The prominent hill mass of the Ochil Hills forms an abrupt northern boundary to the Forth Valley, stretching eastwards from Sheriff Muir and Bridge of Allan and continuing north and east into Perth and Kinross.

The major outcrop of Lower Carboniferous lavas which straddles the southern boundary of the area is bisected by the valleys of the Endrick Water and River Carron, to the north of which lies the unified group of the Fintry, Gargunnoch and Touch Hills.

The Campsie Fells form part of the larger hill-group which also comprises the Gargunnoch, Touch and Fintry Hills and comprise the highest ground within the grouping, rising to 578 metres at Earl's Seat.

The eastern Kilsyth/Denny Hills form a small area comprising the eastern extreme of the Campsie Fells/Kilsyth Hills north of Glasgow and east of Denny.

Key Characteristics

- Prominent, open, large scale character, of predominantly smooth, gently rounded upper slopes and hill summits.
- Simplicity and unity of landform.
- Hills covered in rolling expanses of peatland, rough grass and heather moorland.
- Occasional, widely scattered blocks of coniferous forest.
- Almost entirely uninhabited landscapes, with any dwellings widely dispersed, often located to the edge of single-track roads which zigzag across lower ground.
- Recreational use is mainly restricted to the fringes of the hills and higher tops, which provide greater visual interest.

- Important close visual interrelationships between the hills and escarpments, and neighbouring lowland and carseland areas.
- Open character, absence of current settlement and limited penetration by roads or hill tracks create a refuge of remoteness in close proximity to densely settled areas.
- Hills often act as a buffer between more intensively used and populated areas. They create a strong contrast to these areas, and provide a sometimes dramatic backdrop.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Lowland Hills - Central* form the highest ground of the area south of the Highland Boundary Fault in the region, often with rounded hilltops and gentle slopes, dissected by burns and streams forming faint, visible incisions in the hillsides. The dominant feature of the hills (with the exception of Uamh Beag) is often the striking contrast between the abrupt, steep scarps, and the broad, level carselands below, while the interior hill plateau of often conceals several small to medium scale reservoirs in dips and depressions.

The Uamh Bheag, and Beinn Odhar hills are underlain by sedimentary bedrock. The rounded hill tops cap smooth and gentle southern slopes, which become more irregular and broken to their western extremity due to conglomerated outcrops of the Highland Boundary Complex.

The Ochil Hills form a tightly-knit hill plateau, capped by smooth, rounded tops which are strongly fissured by the deep cuts of minor water courses. They reach a peak at Ben Cleuch (721 metres). The stream courses of the upper plateau slopes converge and carve into the south-facing perimeter of the hills, plunging through steep-sided glens to reach the valley floor. The precipitous slopes are broken through by numerous rocky extrusions, further contrasting with the smooth adjoining fields, and form a prominent backdrop to the contrasting farmed, settled floodplains of the Devon and Forth rivers.

The northern and western edges of the Fintry, Gargunnoch and Touch Hills are dramatically defined by steep, precipitous slopes, topped by the exposed rock of horizontally banded lava flows, which are notched deeply by a fault-line which demarcates the division between the Fintry and Gargunnoch Hills. The cliff-edged plateau reaches its peak, at 485 metres, above Black Craig in the Gargunnoch Hills, where the hill-mass becomes less unified, and the rock banding becoming fragmented and interspersed with isolated dolerite outcrops, as the Touch Hills drop down to the east.

The dense mass of interwoven rounded hilltops varies in profile to the north and south. Long ridges of rock extrude from the upper slopes of the Strathblane Hills, in contrast to the more broken silhouette created by the deep carries on the northern boundary of the Campsie Fells.

The small area of the eastern Kilsyth/Denny Hills is underlain by basalts which are more resistant to glacial and fluvial erosion than the surrounding rocks. They have distinctive stepped or terraced slopes formed from lavas which cap the extrusive volcanic rocks, and distinctive, open or semi-open, medium to large scale, lowland hill character created by the combination of elevation and rugged landform. They are drained by a series of minor burns falling northwards or eastwards to the River Carron.

Landcover

The hill summits are often defined by a near continuous blanket of peatland, with rolling expanses of heather moorland and grassland, gradually becoming fragmented by rough grazing, and bracken across the lower slopes. The summits and higher ground of the hills are largely free of afforestation, however large scale coniferous forests are evident across

the lower slopes of the hills, often extending across the adjacent hill fringes and valley slopes, or closely associated with the reservoirs within the interior of the hill masses.

Across the Uamh Bheag area, as the hills merge with the Braes of Doune, a few large scale coniferous forests of spruce and larch occur, edged by thin drifts of birch along watercourses. Low stone walls occasionally divide the large fields of the lower hill slopes; field boundaries are absent across the remaining higher ground.

Across the rolling upper hill summits, peaty ground and extensive stretches of grass and heather moorland are the dominant landcover, with a few localised areas of improved grazing on the periphery. Towards the western edge of the Ochils, on the boundary with Sheriff Muir, there are a small number of largely coniferous shelterbelts and forests. Many of the glens along the southern slopes are lined with broadleaf woodlands, which feather out across the lowest slopes, intermingling with bracken and rough-textured grassland. There is also thick conifer forest above Dollar, with edges obvious against the surrounding hillsides.

The lower ground of the Touch Hills gradually gives way to semi-improved grassland broken up by dilapidated or remnant stone walling. The large coniferous forests, of which there are several within and adjoining the Carron Valley, are generally associated with the reservoirs towards the east of the hill-mass, creating a more diversified landscape of moorland, forest and water. Infrequent groupings of birch and Scots pine contrast with the more monotonous commercial forests.

The blanket of heather moorland and rough grassland across the Campsie Fells is broken by patchy bracken on rockier slopes and clumps of wiry rushes in damper depressions. Few of the glens are lined with broadleaf trees, which tend to be limited to the valley edges of the river below.

The eastern Kilsyth/Denny Hills have moorland vegetation, including pockets of heather and rough grassland, on the more open, exposed tops and lower slopes, with extensive conifer forests in various stages of maturity, felling and replanting in between which reduces the scale and openness of the landscape. Large rough grassland fields are sheep-grazed, with post and wire fencing or drystone dyke boundaries and lack of trees or hedgerows.

Settlement

The hills are predominantly uninhabited, with any dwellings widely dispersed, often located at their margins, with farmsteads accessed by long winding farm tracks located across the lower slopes of the hills. Pylon lines and commercial scale wind farm development is evident within the Uamh Bheag, Fintry, Gargunnoch and Touch and the Ochil Hill ranges. There are a limited number of separate wind farms, for the most part located in the undulations of the plateaux, where the turbines do not breach the distinctive hill edges or escarpments. The Braes of Doune Wind Farm, south of Beinn Odhar, is prominent.

The core area of the Ochils is now a predominantly uninhabited landscape, forming a stunning backdrop to the contrasting farmed, settled floodplains of the Devon and Forth rivers. A single-track road leading northwards from Bridge of Allan separates the shelving slopes of Sheriff Muir from the Ochil's, and is edged by a few modern and traditional farm cottages, and a prominent pylon line. There are also scattered dwellings on and near to the road which passes through Gleneagles. Several tracks and walking routes penetrate the hill-mass, accessed along the glens from the valley below. A number of the hill tops are popular walking destinations with regionally important views to both north and south. There are also important views to these hills from the Stirling area and beyond, including those from Stirling Castle, the Wallace Monument, settlements on the carse to the east and south, major roads and the railway line. There is a prominent quarry site on the hill face above Tillicoultry, and

Burnfoot Hill wind farm sits to the north of Ben Cluech, although this is not visible from the south side of the hills. Castle Campbell is a popular visitor attraction within the hills behind Dollar. Considerable evidence of earlier human settlement is focused on Menstrie Glen, although forts (such as Castle Law), and numerous cairns are found across this part of the Landscape Character Type.

Within the Fintry, Gargunnock and Touch Hills, dwellings are restricted entirely to the edge of the two single-track roads which zigzag across the lower ground of the south-east Touch Hills, leaving the higher plateaux of the Fintry and Gargunnock Hills unoccupied. A number of duns, forts, hut circles and cairns demonstrate earlier human activity.

The Campsie Fells are crossed north-south by the B822 between Fintry and Lennoxton, while elsewhere small tracks occasionally crawl up the lower slopes, one winding further into the hills through the Gonachan forest. The forts at Dunmore and Dunbeg are evidence of earlier human activity. Features relating to the Glasgow Corporation Water Works are found west of the Strathblane Hills.

In the eastern Kilsyth/Denny Hills settlement is limited to isolated properties at Doups and Linns on a middle hill terrace. Wind farms at Craigengelt and Earlsburn are located to the north-west of this area, in the Gargunnock Hills, and are conspicuous features from some parts of these hills. Reservoirs, both extant at Faughlin and disused at Overtown and Broadside are further examples of intervention in the landscape.

Perception

The powerful sense of contrast between the hills and the nearby flat carselands and valleys often creates a dramatic backdrop in views towards the hills from the surrounding landscapes, further emphasised by the change from the rough vegetation and craggy outcrops of the steep scarp slopes to the man-made grid of the carselands. The distinguishable features of the serried steep profile of the hills and the flat valley is further emphasised by the change from the rough vegetation and craggy outcrops of the scarp slope to the man-made grid of the carselands.

Despite their proximity to well settled areas the hilltops seem remote, emphasised by the simple expanse of moorland and general lack of human influence. Panoramic and sweeping views of the carselands and the hills to the north can be obtained from higher ground. The presence of modern man-made elements including wind farms, telecommunication masts and power lines within the interior of these lowland hills has eroded the open hill character evident in some areas.

The overall smooth profile of the long, shallow southern slopes of the Uamh Bheag hills, occasionally given localised textural interest by knobbly outcrops to the west, set them back towards the periphery of most views from within the area, imbuing the landscape with a distant, remote, subdued character, somewhat in contrast to that of the Ochils, the Fintry, Gargunnock and Touch Hills and the Campsie Fells, where the sharply stepped and rippled profile of the hills, produced by the long stretches of near-continuous rock bands, creates a strongly bound and contained edge to the hills.

The unity of the Campsie Fells is accentuated by the encircling and enclosing sweep of the converging river valleys of the Endrick and Blane Waters. The farmed and wooded undulating land which surrounds the valleys forms a strong visual and physical integration with the hills, tending to soften their dominant impact. Viewed from the north, the hills present a distinctive hunched profile due to the interruption of the northern slopes by prominent crescent-shaped corries. From the craggy border of the hills, views are gained into the river valleys sheltering below, and further afield to the surrounding carseland, hills

and mountains.

The terraced landform of the eastern Kilsyth/Denny Hills provides a variety of views, ranging from panoramic (such as from the TacmaDoon road in North Lanarkshire just beyond the Falkirk Council boundary) to confined by dense woodland. There is some sense of remoteness, naturalness and wild character, but this is limited by the proximity to large population centres, visibility of wind farm development, the presence of forestry and the small extent of this part of the hills.

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 Central Region LCA (ASH Consulting Group), published 1999.