



Location and Context

The *Upper Dale – Dumfries & Galloway* areas are located in the upper reaches of two main river valleys in Dumfriesshire. They are narrower, and more enclosed in their transitions to *Middle Dales – Dumfries & Galloway* or *Flooded Valley*, but widen to larger scale further up. The areas identified as *Upper Dales - Dumfries & Galloway* are Upper Glenkens and Upper Nithsdale.

Key Characteristics

- Wide valleys, enclosed by high peaks and moorland.
- Open with long views.
- Notable narrower section of Upper Nithsdale between Thornhill and Mennock.
- Improved valley pastures becoming rougher up the valley sides.
- Medium to large scale enclosures with dry stone dykes.
- Riparian woodlands along the main river and up tributary channels.
- Medium to large scale forests on the valley sides and extending over horizons from higher ground.
- Large scale wind farm development characteristic of some adjacent upland fringes and backdrop skylines.
- Mining settlements and remnants of industrial activity such as mine ruins and bings.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Upper Dale - Dumfries and Galloway* Landscape Character Type is found in the upper stretches of two of the main river valleys in the region – Upper Glenkens (the Ken/Deugh above Dalry) and Upper Nithsdale (the Nith above Mennock). These are contained by much higher hills, including the Southern Uplands and other upland Landscape Character Types. The gently undulating and flat valley floors give way to either uneven, but gently graded side slopes, or to more steep-sided and enclosing slopes. Outcrop hills form key pinch points within the valleys. The section of Upper Nithsdale between Thornhill and Mennock is

narrower than other stretches of this *Upper Dale - Dumfries & Galloway*, having some characteristics of the *Upland Glens – Dumfries & Galloway*. Much of the *Upper Dale – Dumfries & Galloway* landscapes are covered by Regional Scenic Area designations.

The *Upper Dale - Dumfries & Galloway* landscapes coincide with more resistant geology and differ in their profiles from the lower and middle dales, becoming a simpler u-shape with some flat areas on the valley floor. The effects of glacial erosion are more evident and the relationship with the uplands is stronger with upland peaks forming the main horizons.

Landcover

The landscape is less cultivated and woodlands less extensive, although forming key features. The agricultural landscape is dominant. Pastures are generally improved on the valley floor but become rougher on the valley sides. Fields are of medium to large size enclosed by dry stone dykes which reinforce the upland character. The topography of the lower slope moraines is undulating but long views are frequently possible in this open and rather exposed landscape. Narrow riparian woodlands are features of the tributary channels on the valley sides, as are policy woodlands and more recent forestry. This forestry is mostly large scale, with less geometric boundaries than earlier estate forests. Heather clad upland slopes are particularly distinctive when in flower. Management of this through muirburn helps to retain nature conservation interest and creates an interesting patchwork in the landscape.

Settlement

The *Upper Dale – Dumfries & Galloway* areas contain settlements, dispersed houses and farmsteads on their valley floors, with isolated farmsteads a characteristic of upper slopes and side valleys. Carsphairn is more remote in the Upper Glenkens, and the villages of Upper Nithsdale are notably lively and well-populated. The legacy of coal mining is evident in the buildings of settlements and in the remains of mining activity, forming part of the cultural heritage of this landscape. Hydro schemes, power lines and communication routes are also a feature of this landscape. Large scale windfarms are characteristic features of the upland fringes and backdrop skylines of the upland dale. They are prominent in areas of Upper Nithdale where the influence of wind energy development has an imposing effect.

There are numerous archaeological sites of outstanding significance and distinctiveness, some of which are promoted for public benefit. There is also the largest designed landscape in Dumfries and Galloway, as well as three Archaeologically Sensitive Areas.

Perception

The upland nature of this landscape and the legacy of discontinued industrial development have created quite a rough and abandoned character in places, contrasting with and at times in close juxtaposition with productive and well cared-for farmland and estates (e.g. Drumlanrig) and with the settlements of Kirkconnel, Sanquhar, Carsphairn and St John's Town of Dalry.

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 Dumfries and Galloway LCA (Land Use Consultants), published 1998.