



Location and Context

The *Rocky Coastland - Lochaber* Landscape Character Type borders the sea along the northern half of Lochaber. It forms a rugged indented coastline of low rocky hills which are interspersed with bright green pastures of crofts, deeply incised by bays and narrow beaches backed by a rolling or flat hinterland of farmland.

Key Characteristics

- Low, rounded rocky peninsulas covered with heather and grazed by sheep and deer.
- An incised coastal edge with offshore rocky outcrops; contrasting white sandy beaches fringing areas of more gentle relief which are occupied by crofts.
- Bays and inlets with a sheltered and intimate character; promontories and peninsulas that are exposed and windswept.
- Native oak and birch woodlands on sheltered rocky slopes.
- Small pockets of fertile machair.
- Scattered settlements and crofts with pastures along the Road to the Isles incorporating more recent tourist related developments.
- Simple vernacular architecture consisting of white washed cottages with pitched slate roofs that are found individually at the bottom of slopes or clustered in bays.
- Estates with large houses, policy woodlands and stone dykes.
- Views of the sea are ever-present; tranquility derives from a 'millpond' surface in calm weather; drama and power from wave, wind and spray during storms.
- Views of the Small Isles, each with its characteristic profile.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Rocky Coastland - Lochaber* Landscape Character Type of Lochaber forms the coastal edge between the sea and the *Rugged Coastal Hills - Lochaber* that rise from it and overlook it. It is characterised by a rugged indented coastline of low rocky hills, deeply incised bays and narrow beaches backed by a rolling or flat hinterland of farmland. There are views to the

sea, across the bays and to the Hebrides which are a very important aspect of the landscape character of this coastline.

Its Moinian geology of schists and granulites is similar to that of the *Rugged Coastal Hills - Lochaber* and the numerous rocky headlands, peninsulas and islands are miniature versions of the latter's more prominent relief. There are also numerous wide bays harbouring fertile soils which have been enriched over decades by kelping. Here there is a more subdued landform subject to intense settlement pressures and other human activity. The coastal edge therefore comprises both rocky coves that drop steeply into the sea, and which are reflected by small offshore outcrops, and flatter or gently sloping bays fringed by white sand beaches and fields on the machair.

Landcover

Thick woods of knarled oaks, interspersed with holly, hazel and birch, and in several areas rhododendron often cloak the steeper, sheltered slopes and separate the *Rocky Coastland - Lochaber* both physically and visually from the *Rugged Coastal Hills - Lochaber* (for example around Loch nan Ceall at Arisaig). This boundary is sometimes less distinct and the two landscape types may appear to merge, the former distinguished from the latter only by its indented coast and lower relief.

Settlement

The flat coastal hinterland is divided into fertile, mostly active crofts. Within crofting communities dwellings are regularly and evenly spaced. Pasture and meadow is often encroached by rough grassland, and by bracken and heather on rockier slopes. The characteristic settlement pattern is of nucleated settlements. Development within bays is sheltered by landform and vegetation. A number of prehistoric duns and forts occupy strategically important points along the coast. Other remnants of the prehistoric landscape are visible in the form of cup marked stones and Mesolithic flint scatters that occur infrequently amidst later agricultural and settlement remains.

The principal communication route - the 'Road to the Isles' passes along the coastal strip between Arisaig and Mallaig (both with their harbours). The A830 and the A861 together almost cover the length of this Landscape Character Type along the coast. Travellers experience open views to the sea and across the bays which alternate with some sections of deep cuttings, enclosed by rocks and woodland. Numerous small caravan sites and other recreational facilities are associated with it.

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 Lochaber LCA (Environmental Resources Management), published 1998.