



Location and Context

The *Rocky Moorland – Outer Hebrides* Landscape Character Type forms extensive inland areas in central Lewis and South Uist and smaller areas along the east coast of Harris, North Uist, Benbecula and Barra.

Key Characteristics

- Rocky, stepped landscape with irregular topography.
- Rocky knolls interlocked with peaty moorland vegetation and small lochans.
- Considerable diversity of form and texture.
- Occasional areas of forestry, small woodlands and shelter planting
- Medium scale.
- Predominantly uninhabited and sense of remoteness.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The Rocky Moorland Landscape Character Type is characterised by smooth dip slopes which combine with rocky convexities to create a rocky and stepped landscape. Inland rocky moor tends to merge with *Boggy Moorland – Outer Hebrides*, *Prominent Hills and Mountains* or *Rocky Rounded Hills – Outer Hebrides* where it extends to the shoreline, forming a coastline of convex landforms dipping into deep water. The irregular topography of rocky knolls is interlocked with peaty moorland vegetation and occasional small lochans in the hollows.

Landcover

Landcover is predominantly open heather moorland and damp, rough grassland which extends around, and occasionally over the rocky knolls. The muted tones of this heather moorland vegetation are subtle mixtures of greens, greys and browns. There are occasional areas of forestry, small woodlands and shelter planting found throughout the Rocky Moorlands type. At the broadest scale there are a few medium scale coniferous plantations. The most notable of a small number of mixed woodlands are the policy woodlands of the designed landscape at Lews Castle and Lady Lever Park, and the woodland at Northbay Barra. These woodlands tend to have a high degree of diversity of cover, texture and form

which tend to reflect the diversity of form, colour and texture of the adjacent *Rocky Moorland – Outer Hebrides*. In contrast, the strong linear vertical edged small scale and strong uniform green colour of the small coniferous woodlands contrast strongly with the scale and diversity of the *Rocky Moorland – Outer Hebrides* landscape.

Settlement

The *Rocky Moorland – Outer Hebrides* landscapes are now predominantly uninhabited with occasional isolated croft houses occurring in coastal locations, sheltered within the landform with small wind-clipped mixed woodlands, and frequently associated with a small natural harbour. The main arterial road through the islands passes through extensive areas of Rocky Moorland, whilst other roads within this Landscape Character Type tend to be narrow and undulating, closely following the grain of the landform, creating relatively little modification to the existing landscape and therefore minimising the perception of human interference. More recent improvements to the arterial roads network throughout the islands have been carried out in order to sustain a viable population and economy for the islands. These improvements have been carried out in conjunction with a number of new causeways and bridges to improve a spinal travel route through the Hebridean islands. Some erosion to the landscape characteristics of this type such as cuttings, embankments, and barriers have occurred as a result.

Cultural elements of diversity often fringe the edges of the rocky moorlands. Here, drier knolls sometimes exhibit evidence of earlier occupation, in the form of ruined walls, buildings and prehistoric sites, particularly brochs and duns overlooking natural routes between the shore and upland, and crannogs in lochs. The site of Neolithic burial cairns and standing stones, on slopes overlooking lower arable land, frequently have evidence of reuse for the construction of medieval and later shielings. Between rugged knolls, the upward sweep of some even slopes is emphasised by abandoned valley-bed and slope cultivations, marked by lazy beds, and the lower, flatter slopes between knolls are often criss-crossed with the geometry of actively worked peat banks, particularly near roads. Where there is peat, there is also potential for concealed prehistoric landscapes. Traditional routes and paths often cross these areas, using set stones as markers which are a feature of this landscape.

Perception

The irregular topography, vegetation, and occasional small lochans in the hollows create a landscape with considerable diversity of form and texture. Both vertical and horizontal scales are medium. Long views are obtained from high points and internal views are short, creating an overall medium scale landscape.

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 Western Isles LCA (John Richards), published 1998.