



Location and Context

The *Rugged Mountain Massif – Ross & Cromarty* Landscape Character Type comprises a broad band of high mountains along the west coast and central inland area. The steep vertical sides and bare rock of the mountains reflects the nature of the underlying geology, shaped by the effects of glaciation. Unlike the rugged mountains to the south of Ross and Cromarty in Inverness District, which form long east-west ranges, *Rugged Mountain Massif – Ross and Cromarty* occurs in discrete blocks which are separated by deep, linear clefts formed along fault lines and by glaciation, containing fjords, large inland lochs, rocky glens and u-shaped valleys.

Key Characteristics

- High rugged mountains on a broad, bulky base, forming discrete groups separated by deep linear glens and fjords.
- Angular skyline of rocky peaks and ridges, stony summits, steep mountain sides, and scree slopes.
- Glacial landforms including corries, narrow mountain lochs, deep u-shaped valleys, basin-shaped lochans and deep gorges.
- Horizontal terraces and craggy slopes on Torridonian sandstone.
- High proportion of bare rock on summits.
- Patches and bands of remnant native pinewoods and broadleaf woodland at the base of mountains.
- Little settlement, few roads or other structures, and little evidence of historic or current land use.
- Mountain scale and height emphasised by the contrast with surrounding low moorlands and sea, and by reference to the few man-made features present.
- Wild character derived from the natural, rugged and remote landscape.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

This Landscape Character Type is characterised by its mountains with steep sides and an angular, rugged skyline sitting on a broad, bulky base of individual mountain masses reaching between 600 and 1000 metres elevation. These high mountains contrast markedly with the surrounding relatively low lying moorlands and sea. The steep sides of *Rugged*

Mountain Massif – Ross & Cromarty often rise sharply from the sea and freshwater lochs, where the rock appears deeply sunk into the water creating a distinct edge. Glacial processes have acted on hard metamorphic bedrock to produce rugged summits, sharp and rounded rocky peaks, steep ridges, vertical mountain sides, scree slopes, corries, deep valleys, narrow mountain lochs and basin shaped lochans. In several places the horizontal or inclined layering of Torridonian sandstones has eroded to form tiered and craggy slopes and summits. A number of deep gorges, which wind their way down through the mountain spurs, have been created by downcutting of glacial meltwater along existing rivers.

Landcover

Summits and upper slopes comprise mainly exposed bedrock, surface boulders and scree. Lower down, the thin gritty soils and peat deposits support a mosaic of heather, acid grassland and bog, which are extensively grazed by deer and sheep. Within the sheltered microclimate of gorges, where soils often accumulate and grazing is limited by the terrain, native broadleaf woodland often occur as ribbons descending the slope. Remnant stands of broadleaf trees and native pines also occur in patches and bands at the foot of mountains in a few sheltered, inland locations, notably along Glen Sheildaig, Glen Torridon and the shores of Loch Maree.

Settlement

These landscapes are now largely uninhabited, with settlement limited to the few minor roads and coastal fringes. The interior of *Rugged Mountain Massif – Ross & Cromarty* is accessed by a few tracks and paths, often associated with hillwalking or deer stalking. These often follow routes between mountains tops, while low level routes provide access up strath intersections, along ridges and often zigzag up slopes. On more popular walking routes, the presence of paths is highlighted by increased erosion which exposes the underlying substrate. Minor public roads cross higher mountain passes and lower level glens in three locations, climbing to over 600 metres above sea level between Loch Kishorn and Applecross. Evidence of historic land use is sparse, given the mountainous character occurring on the coastal fringes in a few areas, and in the valleys that have provided outlying and seasonal pasture. The medieval and later settlement in Strath na Sealga provides an exception, but evidence elsewhere is limited to a small number of sheiling sites. Modern features include the ironworks near Loch Maree and the designed landscape at Corriehalloch.

Perception

The dramatic landform produces a dynamic visual composition. The eye groups peaks together, and within in a range individual points of focus are picked out. The mountain peaks are often adopted as landmarks due to their distinctive and recognisable outlines, aiding orientation when travelling through the landscape. The interplay of light within this landscape changes the sense of shape, form, size and texture of the mountains. They are generally experienced by views directed up slopes and are therefore constantly changing due to the backdrop of different weather conditions. The views can be limited by landform within the massif and the mountains often appear to be higher and more widely distributed than they are. Views from low levels are focused on the foot slopes of the mountain and are then drawn up to the intricate craggy tops. Bands of native woodland at the base of these mountains form a contrasting texture, and appear to anchor the mountains to the surrounding lowlands and lochs.

The contrast between the great height of these mountains and the surrounding glens and straths means a series of alternating views, from enclosure to exposure, is gained when travelling through this landscape. A sense of the great scale of these mountains is provided by their proximity to low moorlands, the sea, and the few man-made features which have a recognisable size, for example, roads, occasional buildings and lamp posts. The highly

rugged, natural and remote character and the lack of evidence of human activity impart wildness characteristics, particularly in the interior.



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 Ross & Cromarty LCA (Ferguson McIlveen) published 1999; and by Ross & Cromarty LCA Review (Deb Munro), published 2015.