



Location and Context

The *Inland Strath* Landscape Character Type occurs in three locations in Ross and Cromarty – Strath Conon, Strath Rusdale and Glen Achall, plus a small area near Contin by Strath Conon. The landscape forms a linear or curved channel through surrounding uplands. These enclosed landscapes are sparsely settled and support low intensity farming. They are landlocked and usually located at higher elevations than *Straths – Ross and Cromarty*. *Inland Straths* have more of an upland character, and the contrast with surrounding moorlands is often less pronounced than in *Strath – Ross and Cromarty* Landscape Character Type.

Key Characteristics

- Landlocked, sinuous or curved channels through upland hills and moorlands.
- Strath floors rise up to a strath head and peter out into upland moorlands.
- Lower ends of straths weakly enclosed and may pass through rocky moorlands into the adjoining farmed landscapes.
- Natural, meandering, central river often flowing through long, narrow lochs which are confined by landform.
- Relatively sheltered with green pastures divided into fields, often low intensity, and mixed with patches of native woodlands, riparian woodlands, trees and rough grassland.
- Small conifer forests which merge with larger scale forests in surrounding moorlands.
- Character varies along the length of straths, from high exposed rough pasture to lower, more sheltered and improved pastures.
- Central minor road or track runs along strath sides and terminates at upper end of strath.
- Estate houses and associated buildings, walls, enclosures and policy woodlands give an historic character.
- Contrast with surrounding exposed, uninhabited, upland moorland and hills, and the more intensely farmed or settled areas beyond the lower end of the strath.
- Confined views which direct attention towards the foreground details on the surrounding slopes and enclosing skyline.
- Landlocked, enclosed upland setting, and low use, cul-de-sac minor roads and tracks, which give a sense of isolation.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Inland Strath* Landscape Character Type comprises landlocked, sinuous or curved channels directed by the surrounding topography, following a curved route around the base

of the adjacent hills. Channels vary from broad, curved strath floors with relatively gently slopes, to deep, v-shaped channels with flat, narrow floors. The definition between the strath sides and floor is often less well defined than in the *Straths* character type. The strath floor tapers out at the upper end to form a strath head and the contrast of land use between the strath and surrounding landscape is reduced. The lower ends of straths are weakly enclosed and descend into adjoining farmed landscapes, sometimes passing through rocky moorlands.

Landcover

This landscape tends to accommodate agricultural land use mainly for low-intensity grazing of sheep and cattle. In some areas, this results in a managed landscape with mature hedgerow trees and a patchwork of large fields giving a sense of richness and contrast with surrounding moorland and woodland. A central river meanders along the strath floor and is emphasised by riparian woodland or scrub. Larger rivers have wide meanders and braids and flow through long, narrow lochs. In one strath – Glen Achall – there are large stands of remnant Caledonian Pine Forest. Small pockets of mature mixed woodland occur on the slopes, and the upper reaches of straths tend to have increasingly rougher grazing, which often appears to merge with adjoining moorland vegetation. Wetter areas on the strath floor include some areas of poorly drained or abandoned rough grassland. Some straths contains small conifer forests on the floor or strath sides, and these continue up to surrounding moorland slopes, which are sometimes extensively forested.

Settlement

The remains of Neolithic cairns testify to the early settlement of these inland straths and a continued presence into the later prehistoric period is indicated by hut circles, brochs and duns. There are numerous shielings, some of which are medieval, and later individual buildings and abandoned townships dotted about the landscape. These prehistoric remains have a minimal physical and visual influence on the landscape.

Because of the linear character of the geography, modern settlement tends to be found adjacent to the small roads or tracks which pass through the valleys, or their associated side roads following the traditional routes through estates. These routes generally run along the base of the slope until the strath narrows then cut into the slope, accentuating the sinuous form of the strath line. Roads terminate at the upper end of the strath, becoming rough tracks which continue into the interior uplands. Buildings range from castles, towerhouses, churches and power stations, to small cottages. Settlements themselves tend to consist of small dwellings and buildings associated with traditional estates. The estate house forms a focal point within the strath, as it is generally large and surrounded by smaller agricultural buildings, all possessing a historic character derived from the distinctive architecture, and features such as mature woodland, old walled enclosures, hedgerow trees and iron railings. Where the remains of later 19th and early 20th Century abandoned settlements and enclosures are visible this gives a sense of history.

Perception

The character varies subtly along the length of straths, from high, exposed rough pastures of the upper reaches, to more sheltered and improved pastures at lower reaches. The flat or sloping valley floor divides the landscape with its smooth regular fields, and contrasts with the dark forests and irregular moorland textures on the surrounding slopes and hills. The sheltered, enclosed, farmed and settled character of these straths, and the presence of human activity, results in a landscape which is distinct from the surrounding uninhabited uplands. This contrast is less well defined than in many parts of the *Strath – Ross & Cromarty* Landscape Character Type due to the often lower intensity of land use, and presence of rough grasslands which merges with surrounding moorlands.

The landlocked character of these straths and their upland setting gives a strong sense of enclosure and isolation. This is enhanced by the low use, minor roads and tracks, and absence of through-roads. Distant views are restricted by the strath sides which interlock along the curving route of the strath, directing attention towards the foreground details on the surrounding slopes and enclosing skyline. Where the strath accommodates a large loch, the more open views are accentuated by reflections of light and surroundings on the loch surface.

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.