



Location and Context

The *Cnocan - Skye & Lochalsh* Landscape Character Type forms the northern part of the island of Raasay and the entire landscape of the island of Rona. It is typical of the exposed patches of Lewisian Gneiss found across the west coasts of Wester Ross and Sutherland. These rocks are found to the west of the Moine Thrust, a geological boundary between interior mountain ranges and the generally lower, rocky, undulating moorlands of the west coast.

Key Characteristics

- Very low, rocky moorland.
- Bumpy profile of small scale, deep undulations of highpoints (cnocs) and hollows in equal balance.
- Dominance of bare, light grey-pink rock rounded and ‘plucked’ by glaciers and covered in lichens, which gives uniform texture and colour in distant views
- Complex mosaic of land cover evident in close views, consisting of bare rounded and loose rocks, interspersed with occasional patches of broad leaved trees, shrubby vegetation, grasses, dark, peaty lochans and bogs.
- Largely unsettled, with a few coastal crofts, small jetties and tracks fitting into the sheltered hollows and inlets.
- Few structures and buildings, which are separated by undulations and have little cumulative visual presence.
- Overall exposed, rugged, seemingly natural landscape is isolated and imparts a sense of remoteness and wild character.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

Cnocan – Skye & Lochalsh landscapes are characteristic of exposed outcrops of Lewisian Gneiss, a very old, hard rock. Their profile is shaped by glacial erosion, plucking and smoothing of the rock surface to form convoluted surfaces, with little subsequent deposition of glacial till leaving a dominance of bare rock. The landform is deeply undulating with a fairly equal balance of high points, or cnocs, and low points within peaty hollows and lochans. This balance gives a uniform bumpy texture in distant views.

Landcover

At close quarters, the complexity of land cover becomes apparent. There is a general dominance of exposed, light, grey-pink rock, covered in lichens, with rock seams emphasised by narrow lines of thin gritty or peaty soils and mosses. Poorly drained, peaty dips and basins support a variety of vegetation, dominated by heathers, grasses, mosses,

stunted shrub willows and flag iris and small areas of smooth moorland. Occasional small, broad leaved woodlands are found in lower, deeper basins and around the margins. Lochans support sedges, rushes and water lilies. The combination of landform, dark or reflective water, light, bare rock and dark or seasonally colourful vegetation forms a fine-grained, intricate mosaic of colours and textures.

The random patterns of land cover and landform create ever changing views and make orientation difficult, particularly in dips. Basins form enclosed, sheltered spaces, occasionally reinforced with fragments of broad leaved woodland. In contrast, the cnoc are open with extensive views over the undulating terrain, and beyond the landscape type.

Settlement

The topography of the landscape creates small areas of potential occupation, around the shores of freshwater lochs and small bays. Typically these sites show evidence of use and reuse over thousands of years, often with prehistoric remains incorporated into later walls and structures. Neolithic cairns, often quite small, survive only as megalithic chambers, with their stones reused to build adjacent field walls, and small standing stones can be found within Cleared townships, as at Arnish and Torran, on Raasay. Tidal fish traps, and small, individual piers and jetties, are typical of shorelines in these landscapes.

Perception

The predominance of exposed rock and thin, poor and waterlogged soils have left these areas largely unsettled and generally free from roads. Occasional minor roads, tracks, scattered crofts, small jetties, pockets of improved grassland, and very small conifer plantations are found in lower, sheltered locations usually close to the coast. These uses tend to be fitted into the landform, and rarely have a prominent or cumulative visual presence. The overwhelming raw, apparently natural, exposed nature of these landscapes and island locations impart a strong sense of remoteness and wild character.

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 Skye & Lochalsh LCA (Caroline Stanton), published 1996; and Skye & Lochalsh LCA review (Deb Munro), produced 2014.