



Location and Context

The *Rugged Massif – Skye & Lochalsh* Landscape Character Type occurs to the east of the area, covering a large proportion of the mainland and parts of south-east Skye. The mainland area is part of a great expanse of rugged mountain ranges formed from metamorphic bedrock, which extends eastwards towards Inverness.

Key Characteristics

- Massive form of hills and mountains, usually forming ranges.
- Broad rugged summit areas, occasionally with clearly defined peaks.
- Broad bases and gentle, convex foot slopes.
- Extensive ranges divided by u-shaped valleys with moraines, screes and exposed rock.
- Slopes with shoulders divided by corries and u-shaped valleys with burns and waterfalls.
- Occasional features of undulating rocky plateaux, and areas of smooth moorland and peat hags.
- Margins include large scale plantations.
- Limited evidence of human activity in the interior, typically tracks for deer stalking, and reservoirs.
- Extensive high level views of the vast mountainous interior.
- Wild character due to sparse habitation, natural landform and water courses, and sense of remoteness.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

Rugged Massif – Skye & Lochalsh consists of high hills and mountains, usually forming extensive ranges from 500 - 1000 metres in elevation. Individual mountains can appear complicated in profile, reflecting the complex, folded and eroded geology. The dominant characteristics are the massive high mountain form, with broad bases which are wider than their height, and gentle, often convex slopes. Peaks tend to be less well defined than in other mountain types, being rugged and bulky, often with high level shoulders interconnecting with adjacent summits. Ranges within this Landscape Character Type are typically divided by deep, u-shaped valleys. *Rugged Massif – Skye & Lochalsh* often possesses 'limbs' of high ground radiating from the central mass, separated by corries and u-shaped valleys, featuring burns, rivers and waterfalls. In places, occasional high level,

undulating rocky plateaux occur, which contain numerous lochans. In broader depressions between mountains, the deeper drift and peat deposits form smooth moorland and large areas of peat hags. At the coast, this type descends steeply to narrow, deep fjords, which emphasise the massive mountain scale.

Landcover

The varied ground conditions within this landscape tend to result in a mottled texture at lower elevations, linked to the undulating landform and pockets of wet ground, deep peat, grass and heather moorland. This mottling is reinforced by there being no clear hierarchy of textural elements, such as rock outcrops, vegetation, drainage channels. On the low, more sheltered fringes there are fragments of broadleaf woodlands, and at higher levels there is an abundance of exposed rock and scree, with montane habitats.

Settlement

The gentle slopes and massive scale of these hills means that aspect tends to be less of a limitation on land use than within other mountain character types. The type is sparsely settled and other human influences are mainly limited to tracks, and a few reservoirs with associated seasonal shorelines revealed from draw-down. The high mountains attract hillwalkers. On the periphery, the main land use is sheep grazing and large scale conifer plantations, concentrated around a number of small settlements and along access routes. Contrasting areas of intensive land use sometimes occur within the glen floors and along the narrow coastal edge adjacent to this Landscape Character Type. The interior is uninhabited and the main active land use is extensive deer grazing. These vast, exposed areas are remote, and the mountains and glens lack obvious signs of human use. In combination with the dominance of natural landforms and water courses, this imparts wild character.

Prehistoric settlement is attested by occasional hut-circles, most often found in similar situations to the later settlements, and the occasional dun (Dun Grugaig in Gleann Beag being the best-known). Two historic routes are to be found running through these landscapes, both with considerable visual impact. The first is the military road climbing from the foot of Glen Shiel, over the Mam Ratagan and down to Bernera Barracks in Glenelg. Although upgraded several times, there are several historic bridges along its route. The other route is the old drovers' road from Kinloch to Kylerhea on Skye, on record from the mid-18th Century, parts of which have in recent decades been consolidated and upgraded for walkers.

Perception

The combination of landform and lack of human artefacts makes scale difficult to perceive. The form and size of these mountains are easier to discern from a distance, the visibility of their summits and upper slopes tends to be obscured by the foothills in closer views. Some areas of *Rugged Massif – Skye & Lochalsh* have interlocking, stacked flanks when viewed along lochs, fjords and glens, but lack the distinctive peaks of *Interlocking Sweeping Peaks – Skye & Lochalsh*. High level views allow for orientation, and reveal the vast size of the mountainous interior extending far to the north, east and south. From here the large scale pattern of alternating summits and glens can be appreciated.



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.