



### Location and Context

The *Summits and Plateaux - Tayside* Landscape Character Type comprises the highest and most remote upland parts of western and northern Perth and Kinross and Angus Council areas. In places they border the Cairngorms, and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, National Parks. This is an extensive Landscape Character Type present in 13 different areas.

The West Highlands can be described as a series of comparatively discrete hills or ranges as follows:

- Forest of Glenartney, south of Loch Earn;
- Ben Chonzie/Sron Mhor/Meall nam Fuaran between Strathearn and Loch Tay/Strath Tay;
- Ben Lawers and Beinn Heasgarnich range south of Glen Lyon;
- Cairn Gorm/Schiehallion range between Glen Lyon and Loch Rannoch;
- Mean Tairneachan Group between Strath Tay and Loch Tummel;
- Talla Bheith and Craiganour Forest between Lochs Rannoch and Tummel and Glen Garry.

A series of spurs between the principal Angus Glens, extending southwards towards Strathmore and which form part of the more continuous upland area of Mounth Highlands which extend into the Cairngorms National Park, comprise the other areas of this Landscape Character Type.

### Key Characteristics

- Areas of upland incised by and separating the principal Tayside glens.
- Western areas comprising distinct summits and ranges, separated by fault line lochs; the hills are sharply defined and often craggy.
- Areas of the Mounth Highlands in the east comprising the southern extents of a more extensive area of upland with spurs extending southwards; the hills are more rounded than those to the west and rock outcrops are fewer.
- Large scale vegetation patterns closely reflecting altitude and exposure and including heather, grassland, blanket bog and arctic alpine plant communities; variations

reflecting the underlying geology.

- Most of the area managed as open moorland, with characteristic muirburn patterns.
- Little or no settlement, with minor tracks used for sporting, forestry and some recreation access, as well as newer more visible tracks for access to wind farms, pylon construction and forestry.
- A few patches of semi-natural broadleaf woodland on slopes up to about 600 metres.
- Remote and wild character.
- Important scenic and dramatic backdrop to lower glens and straths.
- Panoramic views both into and out of adjacent mountainous areas, such as the Cairngorm Massif, and lower lying areas like Strathmore.

## **Landscape Character Description**

### *Landform*

The *Summits and Plateaux- Tayside* Landscape Character Type comprises areas of upland separating the principal glens in Tayside, to the north of the Highland Boundary Fault. A broad distinction can be drawn between the West Highlands to the west, and the Mounth Highlands to the east. While the hills generally reach similar heights, those in the west tend to be craggier and those in the east more rounded. This reflects the higher rates of erosion in the west due to the more rapid accumulation of snow and ice during period of glaciation, as well as the pre-glacial landform. The West Highlands are more heavily dissected than the Mounth. Furthermore, east-west fault lines have determined the orientation of western glens while north-south valleys in the Mounth reflect the inclination of the massif. In Angus, the Landscape Character Type comprises the upland areas surrounding the main Angus glens.

The geology of the *Summits and Plateaux - Tayside* is dominated by Dalradian and Moinian grits, forming broad bands running south-west to north-east, parallel to the Highland Boundary Fault. These rocks were once the sediments of limestones, sandstones and shales, metamorphosed by heat and pressure to form huge schist mountains which over millions of years, were reduced to the mountains we see today. The area also has significant intrusions of other rock forming parallel bands. These rocks include granites, limestones, quartzites and intrusive diorite. These differing rock types can have an important influence on local landform. Harder rocks result in outcrops, softer rocks result in eroded basins. They also influence vegetation patterns. The rare mineral barytes has been quarried in parts of this area.

### *Landcover*

Vegetation on the schists varies with altitude and exposure. On the moorland slopes below 600 metres, the landcover tends to be dominated by heather, mixed with sedge, rush, bog asphodel, cotton grass, and purple moor grass. On some of the shallower plateau slopes (for example on the Atholl upper moors) blanket bog has developed, with peat lying a metre or more deep. Heather is particularly extensive on drier moorland slopes, such as those in Glen Clova, turning the hillsides purple and pink in late August and September. Grass tends to dominate in the western part of the Highlands. At between 600 and 900 metres there is a pronounced transition from heather and grass moorland to the arctic alpine zone with many screes, rock outcrops and, where topography and soil accumulation allows, a low growth of blaeberry and crowberry, and sometimes a mat of prostrate heather. Otherwise it is lichens which predominate in this exposed, often inhospitable environment. Periglacial features

produced by freeze-thaw processes are also evident in the higher areas.

Vegetation patterns vary with the underlying rock, however. The most common of these variations occurs where calcareous schists and limestone rocks occur. Particular plant communities associated with these rocks are found on Ben Lawers, Carn Gorm, and Schiehallion among others. A number of these summits are protected as SSSIs, while Ben Lawers, regarded by some as one of the finest examples of arctic a pine flora, is designated as a National Nature Reserve.

Most of the vegetation is managed for grouse, deer and sheep. Tree and scrub growth is prevented by burning, grazing and tree-cutting. The upland landscape that we see today is highly managed and closely allied to the historic pattern of estate management and economy. Although there are a few patches of semi-natural woodland on slopes up to about 600 metres, the tree roots and stumps that are sometimes visible in areas of bog point to the former extent of woodland on these moors. In other countries, where similar sub-arctic conditions occur, land uses have allowed the growth of vegetation such as dwarf birch and willow, forming a transition from lower habitats to the ground vegetation of the arctic alpine zone.

The Highland areas support a variety of habitats. Notable species of birds found in the area include ptarmigan, dotterel, dunlin and golden plover on the higher ground and peregrine falcon, red and black grouse, snipe, Curlew, hen harrier, siskin, lesser redpoll and capercaillie on the lower moors and in the remaining areas of woodland. Red squirrel, mountain hare and wild cat are not uncommon, while much of the area is inhabited by both red deer and roe deer.

#### *Settlement*

For the most part the *Summits and Plateaux - Tayside* are inaccessible and currently largely unsettled. Human activity is specialised in the upland areas. Long managed by the large estates for hunting and shooting (hence the term 'forest' which is used extensively throughout the area), the upland areas also once provided areas of summer grazing when transhumance (the seasonal movement of sheep and cattle between the lowland and upland pastures) was a common practice. The remains of the old shielings, often sited in the most sheltered parts of the upland, can still be found today, for example on the southern and eastern slopes of Ben Lawers above Loch Tay. Here, the well-preserved remains of groups of stone and turf huts and peat-stores, together with associated tracks, cluster in the shelter of small valleys. They form important evidence for farming practice and social and economic conditions in the 17th and 18th Centuries within these otherwise exposed uplands.

Historically, there would also have been many tracks and paths through the uplands, providing links with areas to the north or west. Many of these were important droving routes, used when moving stock to and from market. Some of the best examples of these old routes are found at the head of the cul-de-sac glens of the Mounth. Few modern roads follow these old routes. While these historic tracks, together with more recent stalkers' paths and footpaths, are an important recreational resource, there are comparatively few highland passes, and they are generally minor in their impact on the upland landscape.

In some areas, the lower contours of this landscape bear witness to past settlement and agriculture, with relict farming landscapes of various periods occurring on the hill slopes above river and burn valleys. On the rough grazing grounds and moorlands on the lower slopes of the West Highlands, these landscapes are also associated with a concentration of abandoned settlements of a post-medieval date. Other signs of human activity are generally limited to the patterns created by heather burning, and upland conifer forests. Large coniferous woodlands on the upland plateaux are less intrusive than within the glens or where the scale of the landscape is less expansive. In part this is because of the high ratio of open moorland to forest. Here they appear as a thin layer which does not upset the scale or drama of the highlands.

Pylons serving hydroelectric schemes are present, particularly in the west. Depending upon the angle of view, the season and the light these pylons can appear as light grey structures against an otherwise sombre landscape of browns and greens. There is also a cluster of wind farm development in this Landscape Character Type, south of Aberfeldy (existing scheme at Calliachar and the approved one at north Calliachar). Access tracks for mining activity, spoil heaps and water-filled pits are evident particularly around Faragon Hill and Meall Tairneachan hill group between Strath Tay and Loch Tummel.

With exception of hunting and shooting, recreation pressures are relatively few on this remote landscape. The principal exceptions are the more popular peaks such as Ben Lawers, and Schiehallion where substantial numbers of walkers and climbers can cause local problems of erosion.

#### *Perception*

Despite active management which favours heather moorland over other forms of sub-arctic vegetation, the *Summits and Plateaux - Tayside* comprise landscapes with strong wild character, despite their relative proximity to centres of population. Dramatic mountains, sweeping moorlands, extensive views throughout southern Scotland and constant exposure to changing, often extreme weather conditions, all shape perceptions of the landscape. Hidden from view are the more sheltered, fertile and settled glens. Remoteness is another important factor. With just a few roads climbing out of the glens onto the high moorland, these are relatively inaccessible areas requiring commitment on the part of those visiting them.

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 Tayside LCA (Land Use Consultants), published 1999.