



Location and Context

Along the Highland Boundary Fault, at the foot of the Mounth Highlands, a series of foothills mark the transition to the lowland of Strathmore. Dissected by the rivers that flow out of the Highland glens, the *Foothills - Tayside* Landscape Character Type forms a series of units running eastwards from Dunkeld to Edzell.

Key Characteristics

- Narrow series of foothills at the base of the Highland Boundary Fault.
- Small to medium scale landscapes.
- Complex geological structure typically reflected in an elongated linear alignment of rounded hills and ridges ranging in elevation between 100 and 400 metres, orientated south-west to north-east.
- Hills are defined by and act as a transition, between the much more extensive and large scale summits and plateau which extend into the Cairngorm massif to the north, and the relatively abrupt change in elevation to low valley to the south.
- Steep whale-backed hills and south-west to north-east valleys.
- Winding, gorge-like main river valleys flowing off the highlands along major fault lines.
- Predominantly agricultural land use of fertile grasslands and arable fields on flatter areas.
- Limited woodland cover, with broadleaf woodland on steeper slopes of the valleys and dens which cut through the hills and a small number of conifer forests on the hills themselves.
- Gateway to the Angus Glens with a rich historic heritage.
- Rich heritage of archaeological sites and relict landscapes of various periods, with hill forts including the Brown and White Caterthuns and Roman camps.
- Limited modern settlement comprising scattered farmsteads and hamlets, and some large houses.
- Building materials reflecting geological transition, with both grey schists and granites,

and lowland red sandstone.

- Complex, sometimes disorientating landscape with glimpses of highland and lowland areas.
- Varied views, from the expansive lowland views across Strathmore to the panoramic views north to the highland massif, and as a series of overlapping horizons viewed east and west along the foothills.
- Very important backdrop and setting to low lying settled landscapes to the south.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The geology of the *Foothills - Tayside* Landscape Character Type at the base of the Highland Boundary Fault is mixed, comprising areas of schist to the north-west and Old Red Sandstone to the south-east, separated in places by a variety of resistant conglomerates, intrusive and extrusive rocks including slates, lavas and tuffs. Superimposed upon this structure is a mass of glacial moraine, deposited as the ice sheets retreated into the glens. The complexity of the geology is reflected in a landscape of steep, whale-backed hills and intervening valleys, generally orientated on an east-west axis. Many of the Highland Boundary rocks are harder than those to the north and south, and rivers flowing off the highlands have been forced to find the least resistant route. Each turns north-eastwards before turning to the south once again. The hills are most distinct in the east. In the west, the hills between Dunkeld and Blairgowrie are less well-defined, though there are many signs of glacial deposition.

Landcover

Much of the *Foothills - Tayside* Landscape Character Type is under intensive agricultural use, comprising a mixture of fertile grasslands and, on the more level better drained land, arable fields. The transitional nature of the *Foothills - Tayside* is reflected in the pattern of agriculture. Many farms straddle the transition, combining sheep and cattle rearing on the uplands with arable cultivation on the lowlands. The foothills have a limited amount of woodland, in some places hidden within the complex of hills, in others crowning the hills overlooking the lowland straths. Large areas containing the remains of past plantation enclosures occur within the foothills, indicating the longevity of woodland creation and management over many generations. A small number of coniferous forests are found on the foothills, while broadleaf woodland is concentrated on steeper slopes, particularly along the narrow river valleys, or dens, that cut through the hills. While much of this woodland is commercial in nature, some has been planted to provide shelter for game, stock and crops. Many of the valleys are ecologically important, supporting ancient woodland and the cool damp conditions favouring ferns and mosses. Many of the valleys are designated as SSSIs.

Settlement

The *Foothills - Tayside* have a rich heritage of archaeological sites and relict landscapes from prehistory to the recent past. This is explained in part by their proximity to fertile farmland and grazing; natural routes between highland and lowland glens; and also historic factors including the northern limits of Roman occupation and the presence of medieval royal forest. There are concentrations of prehistoric settlement, soutterains and funerary and ritual monuments in some areas, most notably in the higher ground between Strathtay and the Lunan Burn. A number of early medieval castle sites are also located here, with Castle Hill at

Clunie forming an important example. Sculptured stones and crosses and later medieval castles also occur. Particularly significant examples of substantial late prehistoric hill forts are also found further east at Brown Caterthun and White Caterthun.

Though relatively close to the string of small towns and villages located at the mouth of the Angus Glens, development within the *Foothills - Tayside* is very limited, generally comprising little more than a scatter of farmsteads and a few small hamlets. Modern settlement echoes the past importance of the glens, most towns and villages of any size being sited close to one of the valleys emanating from the foothills. Building materials reflect the geological transition, comprising a mixture of grey schists and granites and the more colourful lowland red sandstones. Many farms in the *Foothills - Tayside* have constructed modern agricultural buildings such as sheds and barns. They are generally of a smaller scale than those found in the lowland straths. Furthermore, the more complex landform provides a much greater degree of screening. There is a high voltage electricity transmission line which climbs through the foothills near Airlie before running north-eastwards through the hills. Given the comparatively small scale of the foothills and the intervening valleys, this line of pylons is a substantial feature in the landscape, conflicting with the area's otherwise rural character. This effect is particularly significant where the pylons run across hilltops or along ridgelines, or where they run along narrow glens such as that of the Paphrie Burn. There are several medium scale single wind turbines whose white colour shows up clearly against the backdrop of the Highland Boundary Fault.

The *Foothills-Tayside* contain a network of minor roads, often bordered by hedgerows (sometimes comprising gorse) or contained within steep banks, with small scale, rural character. The circuitous nature of many of these roads emphasises the complicated nature of the landform. Access to the highland glens, the proliferation of castles and other historic sites, and the particular nature conservation interest of areas such as the Lunan Valley, means that the *Highland Foothills* are popular for recreation and tourism. A number of caravan parks are found within or immediately adjoining the foothills.

Perception

In contrast to the apparent simplicity of lowland Strathmore and the clear structure of the Mounth Highlands and glens, this is a confusing, disorientating landscape. The hills and their intervening valleys mean that it is relatively well contained, with only occasional glimpses to the heath moorland above, or open lowland below. Valleys appear to run in all directions, twisting up into the Highlands, running along the fault line and leading down to Strathmore.

The *Foothills – Tayside* are most pronounced, but also narrowest in the east. Here the whale-backed hills are sharpest in relief, enclosing a narrow valley running parallel to the Highland Boundary Fault to the north. Further west, the foothills are less pronounced, and their width increases to over 5 kilometres. There is a gradual transition in character and the area of foothills between Rattray and Dunkeld, which includes a series of small kettle hole lochs along the course of the Lunan Burn, is quite different in appearance from those areas near Edzell. The waterbodies are of considerable nature conservation importance, adding further interest to this landscape.



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.

