



Location and Context

To the south and east of the Tayside Old Red Sandstone lies a band of hard volcanic rocks forming the *Lowland Hill Ranges* Landscape Character Type. More resistant than the surrounding beds, these rocks survive as the Ochil Hills which run from the boundary with Fife as far as Perth and the Sidlaw Hills which run from Perth north-east towards Forfar. The Ochils and Sidlaws represent two parts of the same geological structure. Once, a broad arch of volcanic rocks would have extended over the area occupied by the lower part of Strathearn and the Firth of Tay. Weakened by compression, the crest of this arch was eroded away, revealing the softer rocks beneath. The resulting landforms comprise a pair of scarp slopes (in the Ochils facing north, in the Sidlaws, south) and a pair of dipslopes (in the Ochils facing south, in the Sidlaws, north).

Key Characteristics

- The Sidlaw and Ochil Hills comprise hard volcanic rocks which appear as relatively uniform ridgelines orientated southwest to northeast, contributing to the much wider strategic grain of landscape character defined by the Highland Boundary Fault geology.
- Recognisable shapes, peaks and slopes, and ridge profiles, the presence of which is emphasised by their location set within low lying agricultural landscape to the north and south.
- Short burns and rivers flowing from dramatic, short steep glens.
- Several large glens through the hills.
- Often distinctive and conspicuous scarp and dipslopes.
- Generally open medium scale landscapes of almost conical summits dominated by grass moorland and upland pasture.
- Sweeping patchwork of regular but not geometric patterns on the dipslopes.
- Some areas of extensive forestry.
- Occasional vertical features such as navigational and telecom masts, follies, and wind turbines which appear prominent in these elevated locations.
- Popular use for informal recreation by nearby large centres of population.
- A sense of relative tranquillity.

- Importance as a backdrop to many settlements in the surrounding low lying agricultural landscapes.
- Views within, across and up to this character type.

General

The two areas of Lowland Hill Ranges Landscape Character Type share the following similarities. Much of the Ochils and Sidlaws are given over to pastoral uses, and in places the land is so poor it supports little more than rough grazing. This pattern of agricultural land use sits comfortably with the Igneous Hills' upland, exposed character and contrasts effectively with more fertile areas of lowland to the north and south. In a few areas better soils and a degree of shelter allow arable cultivation to take place, often at some altitude.

The Ochils and Sidlaws are crossed by a number of minor roads, often bordered by dry-stone dykes. The alignment of many of these roads reflects the gradient of the landform and the presence of glens and passes through the hills. They have a small scale, rural landscape character, contrasting with the generally medium scale of the landscape. There are also a number of main roads, which also have a rural character. The eastern part of the Tayside Ochils is cut by the M90 motorway. Despite its scale and nature, the road alignment is relatively sympathetic to the landscape, following a sinuous glen through the hills. However, the movement, noise and pollution associated with moving traffic, together with the presence of over-bridges, cuttings and other structures determine that the motorway has a considerable impact on the local landscape.

The elevation and exposure of the Ochils and Sidlaws, and the presence of nearby lowland settlements means that the Igneous Hills are very sparsely settled. The principal exception to this is the gentler southern slopes of the Sidlaws near Dundee. Here there has been a limited amount of building in the open countryside, creating a few lines of south facing suburban houses extending from farmsteads or existing hamlets. This has a suburbanising influence on the Sidlaws' landscape.

The hard volcanic rocks of the Ochils and Sidlaws are valued for road construction among other uses. However, there are very few operational quarries and only a handful of small-scale disused quarries. Existing quarries are generally well concealed and do not have a significant impact on the wider landscape. Collace Quarry in the Sidlaws is comparatively well-hidden in the wider landscape, though it has a more local effect on the setting on the hill-fort of Dunsinane.

Woodland makes an important contribution to the landscape of the Ochils and Sidlaws, clothing many of the steepest slopes and lining some of the more sheltered valleys and glens. However, a number of commercial woodlands, planted in the first half of the 20th Century, have had a significant adverse effect on the landscape. Extensive ranks of Sitka spruce and Douglas fir cover large areas of the Ochils in particular in an even aged monoculture of conifers. Such plantations have created a uniform, enclosing landscape where before there would have been an open and varied landscape of pastures, burns and small glens. As the existing plantations reach maturity, felling and replanting is allowing a more varied and natural woodland form to be created, with a much more varied species and age mix, and a higher proportion of open space.

The proximity of the Ochils and Sidlaws to a number of centres of population means that

there is an opportunity to facilitate countryside and informal recreation, thereby taking the pressure off other more sensitive areas to the north. Formal recreation provision within the area is comparatively limited. However, within Glen Devon a number of commercial developments have been established, announcing their presence with large signs. This contrasts with other less-developed parts of the Ochils.

Landscape Character Description - The Ochils

Landform

The Ochils are the larger of the two *Lowland Hill Ranges*, rising to over 500 metres and extending up to 12 kilometres in width in places, forming a long and almost continuous land mass with a distinctive skyline. They consist of weathered and glaciated rocks mainly of Carboniferous origin which were more resistant than the sedimentary Old Red Sandstone of the adjacent lower lying Straths and Loch Leven Basin. They comprise igneous extrusive andesite. The hills are drained by a large number of short burns and small rivers, flowing northwards into Strathearn and Strathallan and southwards into the Loch Leven Basin. Most glens are short and steep, some forming river gorges. The principal exception to this is the pass formed by Glen Eagles to the north and Glen Devon to the south. This corridor was enlarged during the Ice Age when ice sheets in Strathearn pushed into Glen Eagles, lowering the watershed between the two glens by over 200 metres. Ice sheets also had the effect of truncating the Ochils' northern spurs, thereby increasing the drama of the scarp along the southern side of Strathearn and Strathallan. The most important linear features of the dipslopes are their tops, where the landform cuts back sharply to the uplands, like a cliff top. These form the skyline and visual horizons from extensive parts of the low hills and basin from which the tops of the uplands are not always visible.

Landcover

Soils on the tops of the Ochils are thin, peat podzols with brown forest soils with gleying derived from the Old Red Sandstone. Though there are areas of improved pasture and even some cultivation within the more sheltered glens, the land is generally of low fertility and the bulk of the agricultural land takes the form of unimproved rough grazing. The Ochils also have a considerable amount of coniferous forestry. Along the lower slopes in Strathallan, this generally takes the form of geometric plantations and shelterbelts, forming strong linear features, which are prominent in this open, large scale landscape. Further west, in Strathearn, the woodland is less formal. However, the most extensive woodlands are located in the heart of the eastern Ochils, particularly on Innerdowny Hill where a large expanse of Sitka spruce covers a series of upper catchments. The effect is to transform the sparse, open landscape of the Ochil summits, and to create a sense of enclosure which is absent elsewhere on the hills. Newer planting is more sensitive, incorporating broadleaf fringes and better reflecting the natural flow of the landform. Nevertheless, this has resulted in a significant change in the upland landscape. The Ochil slopes, being less steep, are a patchwork of semi-natural vegetation with occasional outcrops, hill pasture, semi-improved and improved grassland and occasional arable fields.

Settlement

There are many later prehistoric hill forts, concentrated particularly along the northern escarpment of the Ochils overlooking Strathearn and along key routes through. Later castles occupy positions lower down the slopes and in the glens themselves. Several of the glens

show signs of pre-improvement agriculture in areas that are not intensively farmed today. In Glen Devon the abandoned field boundaries are visible as a series of low grassy banks. At Blaeberry Hill, high above the Dunning Burn, are the upstanding remains of deserted buildings including a longhouse; the settlement is mentioned in a late medieval charter. More recent settlement is limited to a scatter of farmsteads, concentrated in the less steep eastern part of the Ochils and often located high on the slopes. Where gradients ease still further, to the east, small hamlets and groups of buildings occur. The hills are popular for informal recreation, but otherwise land use is limited to agriculture and forestry, with limited access. Glen Devon now accommodates a range of tourism and recreation facilities while some of the more prominent hilltops are crowned with telecommunications masts.

There are also wind farms located on the tops of the Ochils at regular spacings along the hills, creating modern focal points, as well as a high voltage pylon line on the eastern extremity below the Tillyrie and Golloch Hills, and the increased height Beaully Denny pylon line near Stirling which diminishes the apparent height of the hills.

Point features on the Ochil slopes are inevitably highly conspicuous. The slopes themselves are very prominent right across the adjacent straths and the Loch Leven basin, and features can be significantly visible over great distances.

Perception

The Ochils tops are open, exposed and climatically rigorous. Away from forestry the experience is of large-scale, rather uniform or simple landscapes of rough texture, predominantly green or brown, with vertical or sloping form and curving or sinuous lines. It is generally a still (wind dependent), balanced, quiet landscape which is tended and irregular in pattern being responsive to natural topography. It is a quiet and peaceful, safe landscape except in poor weather conditions when it can become disturbed, isolated and hostile.

The hills can evoke strong spiritual feelings ranging from awesome respect to tranquil appreciation. These and other experiential characteristics and qualities are heightened by the extent and scale of views, often across one upland range to others on the distant skyline. The slopes provide a backdrop to views from surrounding lowland because of their prominence. They are of a large scale, exposed, simple, rough, rugged, robust, vertical and curving landscape background dominated by semi-natural or upland landscapes readily experienced from the lowlands. They are balanced, harmonious, colourful, many-featured landscapes, which have a powerful influence on the landscape experiences of surrounding landscapes.

Landscape Character Description - The Sidlaws

Landform

The Sidlaws are lower and less extensive than the Ochils. They are most distinct at their southern end where the south-east facing scarp (the Braes of the Carse) rises almost vertically to tower over the Carse of Gowrie, and where the shallower, north-facing dip slope meets the Strath Tay near Scone. Even here the hills are barely 5 kilometres wide. Further north the hills subside, particularly along their south-eastern side, gradually merging into the farmland plateau. From the north, however, the hills continue to present a distinctive profile of smooth rounded hills which contain the views within Strathmore.

Landcover

The lower elevation of the Sidlaws is reflected in more productive agricultural land. While grass and some heather moorland predominate on the upper parts of the hills, it is not uncommon to find arable and improved grassland fields, enclosed by stone dykes, in the more sheltered open basins that occur in the Sidlaws. Such a concentration is round around Milton or Ogilvie, to the south of Glamis. Broad-leaf woodland is limited to steep slopes (such as the southern scarp face) and river valleys.

Settlement

Though elevated and often exposed the landscape of the Sidlaws shows evidence of four millennia of human activity. Many Bronze Age burial mounds occupy key locations on prominent ridges overlooking the lowland. There are also many late Bronze Age or Iron Age hillforts and enclosures, often sited on the most prominent hilltops. Several medieval castles and mottes are located to defend routes through the hills. An example is Pitcur Castle, sited at the mouth of Glen Cott, south of Coupar Angus. There are several follies, notably the series of towers built along the top of the south facing cliffs overlooking the Carse of Gowrie and apparently designed to recreate the landscape of the Rhine Valley in Germany. Some of these lie within Kinfauns Castle designed landscape, and other designed landscapes at Glendoick and Fingask Castle also make use of the steep slopes overlooking the carse. Another example is the tower on Kinpurney Hill which was built as an observatory and sits within a hill fort. More recent development has taken the form of coniferous forests which are less extensive than in the Ochils, telecommunication masts which have been built at the summit of a number of hills and large single wind turbines and small wind farms. A number of existing and disused quarries are found in the Sidlaws, reflecting the value of the hard volcanic rocks that occur there.

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.