

Original description of the NSA from the publication *Scotland's Scenic Heritage* published by the Countryside Commission for Scotland in 1978, and available on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at <http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B464646.pdf> (6.52mb)

BEN NEVIS AND GLEN COE NATIONAL SCENIC AREA *Highland, with parts in Argyll & Bute and Perth & Kinross*

Description from *Scotland's Scenic Heritage* 1978

There is a great variety of landform and scenery within this area, attributable in the main to the intricacy of its geological structure. Granite outcrops form the dominant features around Ben Nevis, Glen Etive and Rannoch Moor, while Glencoe is of volcanic origin. The variety of scenery throughout the area is witnessed in hills that may be smooth or jagged, rounded or precipitous, grass or heather covered. The glens may contain moorland, meadow, arable or forest, and swift streams or calm lochs. The sea shore may be wooded and bayed as in outer Loch Leven, or fjord-like as in the inner loch and Loch Etive.

Many people would consider that Glen Nevis ranks with Glen Affric and Glen Lyon as one of the most beautiful glens in Scotland. No other part of the country has greater relative relief. But it is not scale alone which makes Glen Nevis memorable. The lower reaches are pastoral, with an alder threaded river and woodlands clothing the glen sides. The middle section exhibits a 'Himalayan' character, while the upper glen is a place of peaceful meadows, Alpine in feeling, enhanced by the presence of the graceful Steall waterfall. On the north side of Ben Nevis is Coire Leis, 'the most splendid of all Scottish corries' (Murray).

South of the Mamore Forest lies the fjord-like trench of Loch Leven. The soaring mountain walls rising from the deciduous wooded shores of the deep and narrow waters of the inner loch give it a character not replicated elsewhere in Scotland. Its beauty is further enhanced by the islands at the mouth of Glen Coe, and by the swift tidal race which flows through the narrows at Ballachulish below the sharp cones of Beinn a'Bheithir.

Glen Coe itself '.... must rank high among the most spectacular scenic experiences in Scotland' (Whittow). Lying between the 6 mile-long notched ridge of Aonach Eagach and the truncated spurs of Bidean nam Bian, the highest mountain in Argyll (1141m), the glen is an ice worn valley mantled with screes and debris from the mountains. The place called The Study offers impressive vistas of the Three Sisters. Here the River Coe flows westwards over foaming cascades and through clear pools to the calm waters of Loch Achtriochtan. The peaty flats of the lower glen are in sharp contrast to the towering precipices and waterfalls around them.

Glen Etive is not of the same awe-inspiring grandeur, but nevertheless it is a deep cleft through towering peaks, notably the portal peaks of the Buachailles and the great slabs of Ben Starav. The River Etive with its numerous waterfalls is an important feature of the glen. To the east lies Rannoch Moor, probably the best known moor in Scotland. Its sometimes endless-seeming wastes have a beauty derived from the inter-relationship of water and islands with the moor, and the relationship of the moor to its surrounding mountains.