

The Special Qualities of the Ben Nevis and Glencoe National Scenic Area

- A land of mountain grandeur
- A land of classic highland vistas
- Human settlement dwarfed by mountain and moorland
- The expansive Moor of Rannoch
- The spectacular drama of Glen Coe
- The wooded strath of lower Glen Coe
- The narrow and enclosed Loch Leven
- The impressive massif of Ben Nevis
- The wild Mamores and secretive Glen Nevis
- The fjord-like upper Loch Leven
- Long and green Glen Etive
- The dark heritage

Special Quality	Further Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A land of mountain grandeur</i> 	
<p>This is a landscape of massive proportions, breathtaking grandeur and great variety. It offers the highest altitude and greatest vertical relief in Britain.</p>	<p>Ben Nevis at 1343 metres (4406 feet) is the highest mountain in the British Isles, and the neighbouring Aonach Mor and Aonach Beag are both over 1200 metres. Numerous other Munros are present, particularly in the massifs of the Grey Corries, the Mamores and Glencoe.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A land of classic highland vistas</i> 	
<p>With each crossing of a glen or watershed, the scenery dramatically changes, from open moor to mountain pass, from smooth hillside to towering crags, from enclosed glen to long sea loch.</p> <p>The journey by road northwards across the open Moor of Rannoch Moor, past the sentinel of Buachaille Etive, and down through spectacular Glen Coe to the sea at Loch Leven, is a journey of great contrasts – one of the classic Highland journeys.</p> <p>The mountains, moors and glens are visited by many of those in search of the outstanding scenic experience, or outdoor exhilaration and challenge. It is not remote by distance or time from major settlement, particularly Fort</p>	<p>It is the inter-relationships as well as the individual qualities of the mountains, moors, glens and lochs that elevate the landscape scenery of Ben Nevis and (particularly) Glen Coe, to iconic status.</p> <p>Much of the core mountain area lies within SNH Wild Land Search Areas.</p>

<p>William, and a sense of true remoteness must be searched for, with human contact in the upper glens and moors to be expected.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">• <i>Human settlement dwarfed by the mountain and moorland</i></p>	
<p>Although in places humans have left a marked impression on the landscape, particularly around Loch Leven, overall this is a landscape where human endeavour and activity is dwarfed by the mountain grandeur.</p> <p>Where houses and settlements are present, they appear small amongst the large scale surrounds of mountain, moor, glen and sea loch. Scenic quality and drama prevail.</p>	<p>Human settlement is sparse, highly concentrated around the shores of Loch Leven, with only occasional houses elsewhere. Around the loch, human impact can itself be a dominant feature of the landscape, for example the old Ballachulish slate quarries; Ballachulish itself and its bridge; Glencoe Village; Kinlochleven with its previous aluminium works (now only a hydro-electric power station); and the surrounding forestry plantations. The coast of Loch Leven is characterised by aquaculture, inshore fishing and pleasure-craft activities.</p> <p>In some places the road and ski infrastructure penetrate deeply into the mountains and moorlands. In most other inland areas human influence comes across as minimal. However, populations have come and gone, with evidence of former occupation in many locations.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Location-specific qualities</i></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">• <i>The expansive Moor of Rannoch</i></p>	
<p>Rannoch Moor is a wide open expanse of barren, wet peat moorland and peaty lochans which seems primeval in its character.</p> <p>The framing of the moor by the highland peaks which funnel towards Glen Coe is striking. The Black Mount range rises ominously to the south, gradually encroaching upon the moor until the entrance of the glen presents a striking contrast to the openness of Rannoch Moor.</p>	<p>The most striking landscape drama, contrast and juxtaposition of moor, mountain and seascape is experienced as the visitor crosses from south-east to north-west across the NSA along the A82. The route from Bridge of Orchy rises gradually from the Tulla basin to the lip of Rannoch Moor.</p> <p>The road bisects the moor on a true and straight line; there is a sense that departure from its line would lead to isolation and exposure in an inaccessible, intricate mosaic of high, but gently profiled, wet moorland and shallow peaty lochans.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">• <i>The spectacular drama of Glen Coe</i></p>	
<p>The soaring, dramatic splendour of Glen Coe alters the traveller's experience and a sense of deep enclosure prevails, whilst the scenery increases yet in splendour and drama as the glen is descended.</p> <p>The pyramidal profile of the mountain of Buachaille is striking as it stands sentry to the glen's entrance, but is challenged by numerous other distinctive peaked summits along the glen's twin ridges,</p>	<p>Access to the foot of the mountain slopes is straightforward, but their high, vast, sheer slopes require skill, energy and determination to scale.</p> <p>The usually broad glen floor of grassland and heather falls gradually to the north-west and the river Coe masks its seasonal powers as it cascades through gorges and across stony washlands, fed by many waterfalls and lively mountain burns which spill almost vertically into the glen from their lofty source. The view across Loch Achtriochtan to the cottage of Achnambeithach, dwarfed by the mountain above, is another iconic Scottish view.</p> <p>In the lower reaches of the glen the river plays only a minor</p>

<p>one of which is the ten kilometres long, notched ridge of Aonach Eagach.</p> <p>From here the steep and high sided rocky, rugged mountains soar from the generously proportioned, flat valley floor, adorned with burns, waterfalls, scree fans, vertical outcrops and hanging valleys. This gives rise to one of the most iconic views in Scotland – the dramatic buttresses of the Three Sisters.</p>	<p>role in the summer-time scenery, but its broad and braided gravel beds and boulder debris tell of a thundering power in spate.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">• <i>The wooded strath of lower Glen Coe</i></p>	
<p>Glen Coe's splendour is not diminished as it falls to sea level and meets Loch Leven, albeit some way from the open sea. The meeting of the glen and the loch is enhanced by the suddenness of the transition between high mountain pass and the lightly wooded strath which separates the two dominant landscape elements. Population and human influence on the landscape begins to increase markedly.</p>	<p>The twisting line of the glen afforded by the western sentinels of Meall Mor and Sgorr nam Fiannaidh emphasises the suddenness of the transition and from the north serves to obscure the entrance to the mighty breach through the mountains.</p> <p>The deep enclosure of the glen is relieved by the narrow, lightly wooded strath with meadows and plantations, aside the loch which prevails as the dominant element in the coastal scene.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">• <i>The narrow and enclosed Loch Leven</i></p>	
<p>Loch Leven is a fjord-like sea loch which strikes deep into the upland of the NSA's core.</p> <p>The wooded slopes of the north shore, the peak of the Pap of Glencoe and the forested southern valley sides provide a sense of enclosure, which the bridge contributes to by affording a visual barrier to the openness of the outer loch. The abandoned slate quarries above are an impressive reminder of human endeavour.</p> <p>The expanse of calm waters affords a far brighter light to pervade than across the moor or within the Glen, and this glistening reflection, particularly in early or evening hours adds a magical air to the place. The hills of Ardgour with their distinctive, irregular profile often stand out across the water.</p>	<p>The A82 meets the loch close to its opening out to the sea beyond the distinctive bridge and narrows, and enters a concentration of settlement: Glencoe and Ballachulish villages, with old slate quarries above.</p> <p>Here the islands of the middle loch add to the detail of the waterscape and provide natural refuge and shelter for mooring pleasure craft and fishing boats.</p>

• ***The impressive massif of Ben Nevis***

The huge Ben Nevis range dominates the setting of Fort William. The brooding mountain, with its massive rolling shoulders and dramatic eastern cliffs, attracts a wide variety of walkers and climbers. Some are drawn to the challenging rocky precipices and snow-filled gullies of Coire Leis Dearg, while others are simply wanting to reach the highest point in Britain.

The eastern ridge of Ben Nevis links to the grand, high-level hill walking country of Aonach Mòr and the Grey Corries.

Ben Nevis is a rolling rounded massif when viewed from the west. Vegetation is simple, grass and heather moorland flowing over convex slopes. Boulder fields and outcrops proliferate with increasing altitude, but this remains a simple, exposed, open massive mountain landscape. The prospect from the east is very different, with the precipices and gullies of Coire Leis Dearg.

The massif of Ben Nevis continues eastwards with a range of high hills, generally scree-covered with narrow ridges. From the north the hills named collectively 'The Grey Corries' appear as a series of high corries.

About 100,000 people a year ascend Ben Nevis.

• ***The wild Mamores and secretive Glen Nevis***

The Mamore Forest consists of open rolling moorland and rounded, rocky mountains exhibiting an unspoilt character and a wild integrity.

Penetrating between the Ben Nevis range and Mamores, Glen Nevis offers a striking transition from the pastoral and wooded lower valley, through a boulder-strewn gorge of Himalayan proportions, into a secretive upper glen bounded by steep rocky slopes and waterfalls.

In the pastoral lower valley where the river Nevis meanders into Fort William, lined with alder woodlands and stands of mature oak, flanked by gentle meadow, but bounded by the mass of the Ben's foothills. Tenuous groups of willow and birch cling to burn sides in vertical green fingers.

Travelling eastwards into the mid glen the valley floor narrows and the steepness and the broken character of the glen sides gradually increases, the hillside profiles become more rugged, with rocky outcrops prevailing. Here the lightly forested glen sides are complemented by remnants of ancient, gnarled Scots pine woods, clinging precariously between boulder and outcrop, and dominating the less dramatic willow, birch and alder woodlands. Here the river energetically tumbles through an increasingly rocky, boulder-strewn and secretive gorge, affording, in the words of *Scotland's Scenic Heritage*, a Himalayan character to the scene. The previous use of the woods in this area for charcoal production highlights the relationship between the natural and cultural aspects of the landscape.

The upper glen is secretive inviting exploration of its extremely flat alpine meadow, bounded by steep upper slopes of the Ben and the Mamores. The drama of the Steall waterfalls is complemented by the peacefulness of the enclosure and detail of the cotton grass and broad, gravelly river beds.

• ***The fjord-like upper Loch Leven***

Loch Leven, a long, linear, narrow, fjord-like sea loch penetrates deep into the mountain setting.

Vistas from sea level, or from its upper slopes, are stunning, with the distinct conical peaks betraying its point as transition between the more rounded northern ranges and the pinnacles and

Its sides are often concave and banded from the water's edge through thick broadleaved and coniferous woodland, to the open moors of the Mamores and northern Glen Coe ridge. Woods in this area were once used for charcoal production.

Before the arrival of the aluminium smelter in 1907, Kinlochleven consisted of two small hamlets – Kinlochmore and Kinlochbeag. The smelter closed in 2000, with the associated large Blackwater Reservoir and its power-plant in Kinlochleven now feeding hydro-electricity into the

<p>drama of the Glen Coe range.</p> <p>At its head lies the isolated settlement of Kinlochleven, a small town built on the aluminium industry. The settlement has a particular charm enhanced by its long access route and its enclosed setting amongst wooded slopes.</p>	<p>national grid.</p>
<p>• Long and green Glen Etive</p>	
<p>Glen Etive, a long and dramatic glen with a fast-flowing rocky river, is generally green and grassy, affording tranquillity and peacefulness. Surrounded by high mountains, its narrow, sinuous single track road extends to the shores of Loch Etive, where it abruptly ends at the disused pier.</p> <p>From here the narrow, elegant Loch Etive stretches seawards, free of obvious human infrastructure, settlement or intrusion.</p> <p>The upper reaches of the River Etive offer interesting and sharply contrasting detail to the overall simplicity of the landscape. Its shallow, gorged profile within the sweeping, smooth grassland draws attention, emphasised by the crystal pools and waterfalls over a complex geological bedrock.</p> <p>Settlement in this glen is limited to the occasional cottage and a single hunting lodge, but it is influential with the policies of the lodge dominating the lower reaches.</p>	<p>This glen runs south from the upper reaches of Glen Coe flanked by the towering peaks of the Buachailles and the great slabs of Ben Starav. It is a generally smooth-sided and extremely long, cleft valley, gradually sloping to the head of Loch Etive, a remote, relatively inaccessible sea loch.</p> <p>There is a harmonious transition from the broad lower valley floor of the braided river Etive to the open water of the sea loch.</p> <p>The simple profile of the glen is nevertheless dramatic, with smooth, high, U-shaped valleys meeting the main glen. The upper slopes give way from grass to rocky conical summits, and their sides characterised by steep streambeds opening out to rocky fans of scree.</p> <p>The glen's vegetation is predominantly of smooth grassland, with trees in small, sporadic stands or plantations, particularly in its lower reaches; there are extensive conifer plantations immediately north of the loch end. In places rhododendron colonises the western glen sides detracting from the semi-natural vegetation but adding striking colour in the early summer months.</p>
<p>• The dark heritage</p>	
<p>The grandeur and drama of the NSA is undeniable and irresistible, and modern development seems not to have diluted this grand scenery. However the village of Glencoe at the foot of the glen witnessed an historical betrayal and massacre which is still an integral part of the area's character and ambience.</p> <p>Whilst infamous for the massacre the glen also carries with it legend of cattle</p>	<p>The murder of 38 of the Clan Macdonald in 1692 by order of the Crown, and the subsequent loss of life of women and children from exposure after the King's soldiers had lodged within the village for several nights, engenders feelings of sorrow and disquiet.</p> <p>In later years, the village of Glencoe was populated by workers from the nearby slate quarries, and, later still, the Kinlochleven aluminium works.</p>

rustling and banditry between clans and government, secret refuges in hidden valleys and tales of incredible hardship. All weave together with the scenery of the area to present a dramatic and fascinating experience to the visitor.	
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Selected Bibliography

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