

The Special Qualities of the Knapdale National Scenic Area

- Distinctive ridges and loch-filled trenches
- A landscape of skylines
- A clothing of oak woodland over the ridges and hollows
- A profoundly evocative, ancient place
- Ever-changing patterns of colour, sound and smell
- In the north, dramatic juxtaposition of ridges and volcanic plugs arising from the flat expanse of Mòine Mhòr bog
- A centre of parallel ridges and secret lochans
- Long, slow journeys to the sea
- Dramatic sea views in the south
- The Crinan Canal

Special Quality	Further Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Distinctive ridges and loch-filled trenches</i> 	
<p>This is a landscape of long, linear, narrow, steep-sided ridges which sweep down to the coast and plunge beneath the sea, reappearing as chains of rocky islands off-shore.</p> <p>The lochs in middle and lower, coastal Knapdale penetrate finger-like, deeply into the land, to create the distinctive peninsulas, each subtly different to the others.</p> <p>The combination of the distinctive ridged landform and the loch-filled trenches of the deeply folded rocks epitomises the Knapdale landscape.</p>	<p>The landform has a strong south-west to north-east direction formed by the tightly folded metamorphic Dalradian rocks.</p> <p>The lochs form gateways and corridors to the sea. The tidal edge adds interest and diversity as well as a cyclical change to the shorelines. The surface of the lochs is continuously moving with ripples or waves, usually quiet and calm, owing to the deep shelter of the incised glens of which they form the floor.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A landscape of skylines</i> 	
<p>It is an area dominated by skylines. In upper, forested Knapdale the skyline is of blunt or jagged lines of conifers at the top of parallel ridges; in middle, moorland Knapdale the ridges are often bare rock or grassy moorland where the variety of skylines are revealed as rounded, undulating, sweeping, crenulated or toothed moorland. In lower coastal Knapdale the ridges fall to the sea</p>	<p>The skylines provide strong linear features within the landscape, framing and enclosing views, particularly from the sea lochs and within the ridge-framed basin of the Mòine Mhòr moss.</p> <p>The shorelines provide as strong horizontal lines as those of the ridged skylines.</p>

<p>forming a steep, rugged coast interspersed with sandy coves, and seaweed-strewn rocky shores.</p>	
<p>• <i>A clothing of oak woodland over the ridges and hollows</i></p>	
<p>The Atlantic oak woodland is characteristic and adds a wild and natural dimension to many views throughout middle and lower, coastal Knapdale; it rolls around the hills, clings to the cliffs and scarps, flows into the gullies and dips of the burns, billows and wraps around the ridges and occasionally clothes the skyline.</p> <p>It provides a rich haven for wildlife and peaceful, seclusion for people, offering a welcoming, safe and natural invitation. The woods lend harmony to the scene, and are a contrast to the plantations in upper Knapdale, which never quite seem to fit the ridges in the same natural way.</p>	<p>Modern conifer plantations are nowadays more common in the NSA than oakwoods, particularly in the central part of the NSA.</p> <p>The coniferous-covered ridges have different flora and fauna, they can be silent or still and can feel dominating and disorientating, an awareness increased by their height and imposing stature, exaggerated by the height of the trees.</p> <p>The modern plantations have destroyed or masked many of the archaeological field patterns and other evidence of previous human settlement, and an understanding of this can add a tinge of sadness to one's perception of the forest.</p>
<p>• <i>A profoundly evocative, ancient place</i></p>	
<p>The sense of place and history is profound, stretching from prehistory through the centuries to the ancient kingdom of Dalradia.</p> <p>The prominent hill of Dunadd was a key stronghold of the kings of Dalriada and holds an iconic place in the early history of Scotland. Its summit offers a breathtaking 360° panorama, more spectacular than its modest height might portray.</p> <p>Here and across the northern part of the NSA, in the Glens of Kilmichael and Kilmartin are found some of the finest examples in Scotland of standing stones, stone circles, burial mounds, cup and ring marked slabs and other prehistoric landscape features.</p> <p>This is a profoundly evocative, ancient place where everyone will draw some inspiration, sense of place or history; a landscape of great historical continuity.</p>	<p>The carvings on the summit of Dunadd (a boar, footprints and an ogham inscription) suggest that it was an important location and may have been associated with the inauguration of kings.</p> <p>Pottery discovered at Dunadd during excavation suggests that there was widespread trading here at a time when the river was navigable to the sea.</p> <p>Although the most evocative remains relate to the distant past, many later elements of the landscape testify to the history of the area, for example castles, pre-improvement settlements, agricultural field patterns and designed landscapes.</p>

• ***Ever-changing patterns of colour, sound and smell***

The hills and woods adopt an ever-changing, dynamic of patterns created by sunlight or cloud, rain or mist, sometimes casting light and brightness on the foreground contrasting with the darker ridges, alternately hidden and revealed as the mists or cloud lift and fall.

Along the coast is the contrast of the bright greens of pastures and iris beds with a backdrop of dark green or grey moorland.

Birdsongs and calls from woodland, moorland and bog are complemented by the cries of seabirds and waves gently lapping in the bays and coves.

Inland, the water moves slowly along sinuous rivers, marked by riparian tree belts, or lies still in the drains of the bog, or rests mirror like in the canal until the lock gates are released.

Smells add considerably to the landscape, especially the smells of the sea, the shore, the dank coniferous woodlands, damp oakwoods, bog myrtle and iris beds on and near the moss, and the freshness of the moors.

The colours and striking flora of the iris beds, saltmarsh, rush pasture, wet cotton grass and short turf of grazed rocky outcrops adds to the sense of place and naturalness of the scenery.

• ***Long, slow journeys to the sea***

Journeys to the sea are slow, along narrow winding roads through the trenches of Knapdale, with views ever-changing and unfolding. Often the view is restricted by trees or slopes to the immediate surrounds, but sometimes the landform or woodland suddenly open to present surprise vistas across the hills and sea.

The reward at the end of the journey is views of the sea and remoteness, isolation and seclusion, a place to stay and contemplate. The peninsula feeling is as strong as that of disembarking onto an island after a sea journey. The sea views are exhilarating, mysterious, sometimes dramatic yet enjoyed without

The visitor is compelled to explore the narrow roads right to the end of the seemingly endless peninsulas, just to see what is there.

In the past the sea was the main means of communication and trade, and areas now seeming remote would have appeared more central. At one time the River Add was navigable to the sea from Dunadd.

effort, risk or exposure.	
<i>Location-specific qualities</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In the north, dramatic juxtaposition of ridges and volcanic plugs arising from the flat expanse of Mòine Mhòr bog</i> 	
<p>The distinctive ridges have a strong identity and, together with Dunadd, are dramatically juxtaposed to the flat expanse of the Mòine Mhòr bog, crossed by the sinuous line of the River Add slowly flowing to the equally unusual morphology of the double bay at Crinan.</p>	<p>The northern part of the NSA is a distinctive flat moss, with Dunadd and oak-wooded, lower, outlying ridges protruding out of the bog. To the west is the coastal bay at Crinan with its extensive intertidal mud and sand flats, an inner and outer bay each with its own character and a variety of coastal grassland and wetland habitats merging into the toe of the bog.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A centre of parallel ridges and secret lochans</i> 	
<p>The upper, northern parts of the parallel ridges are almost entirely blanketed with coniferous plantations obscuring the landform and hiding the secret lochans within the afforested trenches of the deeply folded ridge. The lochans form rich oases for wildlife and portray a rather magical, slightly unsettling but calm, secluded, intimate tranquillity.</p> <p>Further south, in middle Knapdale, the forest subsides and is replaced by the billowing crowns of Atlantic oakwoods or open grassy or bracken covered moorlands with a variety of textures and colours.</p> <p>Here the shape of the ridgelines is revealed providing a dynamic, sweeping strongly horizontal skyline enclosing the loch-filled trenches.</p>	<p>South of the Mòine Mhòr, the NSA is comprised of the parallel ridges evocative of this part of Argyll.</p> <p>The small lochs appear almost as if they are large wildlife ponds, or a secret garden reminiscent of 'Alice in Wonderland' with a disorientation of scale.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dramatic sea views in the south</i> 	
<p>Lower, southern and coastal Knapdale is dominated by the presence of the sea and dramatic sea views from the comfort and safety of sheltered bays, inlets and sea lochs, looking across to sparkling or misty offshore islands and the massive, looming, bulk of Jura, with Islay in the distance.</p> <p>The coast is interesting, often quite active with the movement of people, boats and vehicles, but always peaceful</p>	

<p>and relaxing with a seaside holiday ambience heightened by children playing and people camping.</p>	
<p>• <i>The Crinan Canal</i></p>	
<p>At the foot of the steep edge of the ridges and at the edge of the bog, wends the historic and fully restored sometimes quite busy, basin of the Crinan Canal. This adds to the specialness and distinctiveness of Knapdale, as nowhere else is there this juxtaposition of ridge-land, canal and flat moss close to coastal bays.</p>	<p>The Crinan Canal links Loch Fyne and the Sound of Jura, obviating the need for smaller vessels to go round the Mull of Kintyre. It is nine miles long, has 15 locks and was opened in 1801.</p> <p>This area has always had wide networking and communication links, and the canal is a particular manifestation of the area's importance.</p>

Selected Bibliography

Environmental Resources Management 1996. Landscape Character Assessment of Argyll and the Firth of Clyde. *Scottish Natural Heritage Review, No. 78.*