The Special Qualities of the Kyle of Tongue National Scenic Area

- An ever-present backdrop of mountains
- The Kyle – a link from an inhabited coast to a wild, moorland
- Scale, from domestic to monumental
- The constantly changing character of the Kyle
- Rich variety of coastal scenery
- Distinct pattern of settlement

Special Quality	Further information
• ***An ever-present backdrop of mountains***	
Ben Hope and Ben Loyal, standing isolated above the open moorland, are well known as two of the finest mountains in the north. Both hills rise above their eponymous lochs and each has its own distinct profile. Ben Hope appears as a large asymmetric cone whereas Ben Loyal, 'The Queen of Scottish Mountains', forms a stately succession of granite peaks. They have a timeless and lofty presence, forming an ever-present backdrop and acting as landmarks over a wide area. They provide the whole locality with a sense of place and symbolise the boundary between the populated coast and the wild and generally uninhabited interior.	Ben Loyal (764m) forms a compelling skyline at the head of the Kyle of Tongue, while Ben Hope (927m) dominates the northern seaboard. These isolated mountains are distinctive and their individual shapes make them easily recognisable. Ben Loyal is known as the 'Queen of Scottish Mountains' for its aesthetically pleasing profile. Its vegetated summit ridge has four prominent, granitic tors, and there are impressive corries on its northwest side. Ben Hope (Hill of the Bay), the most northerly Munro, is asymmetric in shape and generally less complex. Its western slopes form a very steep, forbidding foil to the head of Loch Hope and Strath More. This edge is formed by two tiers of crags, the highest one forming the edge of the main north-south ridge. The east side of the mountain has three fine, remote corries. Although there is a wide variety of landform within the NSA, the mountains are a link that contributes to the coherence of this NSA, even though at times they are shrouded in cloud, or wreathed in mist.
• ***The Kyle – a link from an inhabited coast to a wild, moorland***	
Lying between the sea to the north, the mountains to the south, and expansive moorlands to the east and west, the Kyle of Tongue appears as a green, inhabited oasis on the exposed north coast of Scotland. It brings sea and settlement well inland, into the heart of the interior. Human presence, both ancient and modern, is centred on or near the coast, with an outlier at the head of the Kyle. In	Settlement lies almost exclusively within the coastal zone, along the kyle shores as far south as the A836 Causeway; with occasional habitation south to Kinloch Lodge at the head of the kyle. Inbye land lies within the coastal zone or in pockets of less steep moorland. The interior shows the least human activity, which is largely restricted to sporting and hill-walking interests. The southern half of the NSA includes part of an SNH Wild Land Search Area.

contrast, the sweeping moorland and mountain is a wild and remote land of heather, bog, loch, river and burn; of rock, crag and high mountain corrie.	
• ***Scale, from domestic to monumental***	
The small domestic scale of crofting and other activity around the coastal shores contrasts markedly with the monumental outer landscape presented by the mountains to the south and the open ocean to the north.	It can be difficult to appreciate the mountains' height and scale when there are few scale indicators such as trees or buildings.
• ***The ever-changing changing character of the Kyle***	
The Kyle itself exhibits an ever-changing character of light and texture: the ebb and flow of the tide over sands or mudflats; the pattern of wind and waves; or reflections of the sun and scudding clouds. Diversity is enhanced by the woods and crofts around the shores, and this endless variety provides a dynamic foreground to spectacular views of the surrounding moors and mountains.	Variety comes from the extensive intertidal mudflats in the inner kyle, with their variation in pattern and colour; and the extensive intertidal sandbanks in the outer kyle, also with variation in pattern and colour.
• ***Rich variety of coastal scenery***	
From the sheltered Kyle to islands exposed to the full force of the ocean, the area exhibits a rich variety of coastal scenery. This includes both soft landscapes of sand and mud and harder landscapes of rock and cliff. One of the highlights of the north coast is the long, sandy Torrisdale Bay.	Along its length the Kyle displays a combination of what can be considered as 'east coast' and 'west coast' characteristics. This is due to the intermix of rocky, coastal sections and flatter, sand flats and estuarine deposits. The northern coastline has high cliffs, shelving shores and sandy sheltered bays. This variety increases at the broad mouth of the kyle where a scatter of islands mirror the landform of the rocky coastal promontories, and mark the transition from the open sea to the sheltered kyle. In the east, the NSA includes coastal crofting areas, the headland between the Rivers Naver and Borgie, and the raised beach of Invernaver.
• ***Distinct pattern of settlement***	
In this open landscape, the pattern of settlement and land use, both modern and historic, is often clearly visible. Each crofting township possesses its own distinct character, some linear and some	Crofting patterns are distinctive. They vary according to the topography and access to local resources, so that the location of croft houses and boundaries create distinct township characters. For example, the Melness townships have a linear crofting pattern compared to the clustered pattern at Strathan Skerray.

clustered. Inland, shooting lodges and sheep farms provide a contrasting land use, as does the designed landscape surrounding Tongue House. The presence of chambered cairns and brochs illustrates that people have occupied this land for many centuries.	Traditional rig boundaries are landscape features which can often be picked out from a distance, although many are now falling into disrepair. 18th century improvement landscapes add to the diversity of woodland and significant boundaries. Tongue House is included in the Inventory of Gardens & Designed Landscapes. The western garden wall of Tongue House is especially significant from the western shore of the Kyle of Tongue and the coast road on the eastern shore. The rectangular enclosures of Melness House are prominent from the A836 at Rhitongue and from the approach into Midtown on the western shores. The presence of major sporting estates has had an impact on the landscape, with shooting lodges and other infrastructure notable at Strathmore, Loch Loyal and Kinloch, as well as Tongue House. The large sheep farms at Ribigill, Tongue Mains and Melness also provide a link to the area's history.

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