

The Special Qualities of the River Earn (Comrie to St Fillans) National Scenic Area

- A harmonious combination of highland and lowland
- An enclosed and unified strath
- The sinuous river at the heart of the NSA
- Rocky hillocks rising out of the level floodplain
- Diverse tree cover of woods and forests
- A managed, ordered landscape
- The spectacular De'il's Cauldron and Dunmore Hill
- The viewpoint of Dundurn, St Fillans Hill

Special Quality	Further information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A harmonious combination of highland and lowland</i> 	
<p>Entering this NSA gives a feeling of transition, of leaving the rugged highlands behind and entering the fertile lowlands (or <i>vice versa</i>). The highland aspects of rocky hills, enclosing glen, fast flowing rivers, waterfalls and gorges are all present, but so are fertile lowland fields and ordered designed landscapes of hedges, policy woodlands and big houses.</p> <p>These lowland features soften the harsher highland elements, resulting in a harmonious and aesthetically pleasing landscape of great charm.</p>	<p>The NSA represents the boundary or interface between highland and lowland landscapes, and comprises three principle elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highland landscapes of distinctively shaped, steep-sided, hills of bare rock (not high in relative terms); and moorland of bracken and heather. • Gentler hilly slopes which mark the transition from highland to lowland, and which consist of rough grazing, grassland pasture. • A lowland landscape along the flat valley bottom in the middle of the NSA; this is intensively grazed and consists of improved, rectilinear, fields of grass. <p>The east end of the NSA is close to the Highland Boundary Fault.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>An enclosed and unified strath</i> 	
<p>With its bare, rocky open hills descending through slopes of wood and bracken to the fields on the flat valley floor, this area of Strathearn exhibits a unity and coherence. There is a feeling of enclosed and encircled space at the centre, which reinforces its compact and unified nature.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The sinuous river at the heart of the NSA</i> 	
<p>The River Earn, running through the heart of the NSA, meanders across its level flood plain. With its pools, riffles and</p>	<p>A particular feature is the presence of bankside trees along much of its length. The River Earn is noted for the good quality fishing it provides, particularly salmon, sea trout and</p>

<p>rapids, it is both swift and leisurely, providing constant variety and change. Sometimes it is visible hard against the main road, at other times it takes its own course through the fields and woods.</p>	<p>grayling.</p>
<p>• <i>Rocky hillocks rising out of the level floodplain</i></p>	
<p>The flat floor of the strath is punctuated by rounded hillocks, often rocky and planted with trees. Contrasting with the surrounding open fields, these create a picturesque and balanced landscape of open ground and woodland cover.</p>	<p>There is a distinctive flood plain where lies most of the farmland. The craggy outcrops have been planted as features of a designed landscape or to provide commercial woodland. Both the main road and the river wander through these hillocks.</p>
<p>• <i>Diverse tree cover of woods and forests</i></p>	
<p>As well as the wooded hillocks, there is a great variety of other woodland, so that no one type dominates. Policy woodlands surround the big houses, hedgerow and isolated trees stand out in the fields, alders follow the river, native woodland of birch and oak occurs on the hill slopes, and there are many stands of commercial conifer plantation.</p> <p>The varied cover of trees, woods and forests provides constant interest throughout the year – in colour, form, species, type, canopy spread and coverage.</p>	<p>Much of the woodland in the eastern half is part of the Dunira and Aberuchill Castle designed landscapes, including an old pinetum at the former, with some of the tall old conifers visible from the road.</p>
<p>• <i>A managed, ordered landscape</i></p>	
<p>Two extensive designed landscapes cover much of the eastern half of the NSA. The clipped hedges, ordered fields, parklands and policy woodland associated with these and the other farmland give the appearance of a managed and ordered land. Buildings are generally traditional in appearance and well integrated into the landscape.</p>	<p>Well-kept boundaries of clipped beech hedges, fences and drystone walls are features of this landscape.</p> <p>Dunira is a late 18th century designed landscape of 350 ha with formal garden terraces by William Burn and gardens by Thomas Mawson added in the early 20th century. The Glen Boltachan burn cuts steeply down over waterfalls through the hills to the northwest of the parkland and flows through the west park to join the River Earn.</p> <p>Aberuchill Castle is a 19th century designed landscape of 315 ha with historical connections to the Scottish plant hunters. The parkland and woodland makes a major contribution to the surrounding scenery and provides the setting for a category A listed building.</p> <p>The area has a long history of settlement and land use, as shown, for example, by the presence of prehistoric burial cairns and medieval tower-houses.</p>

<i>Location-specific qualities</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The spectacular De'ils Cauldron and Dunmore Hill</i> 	
<p>At the eastern extremity of the NSA the River Lednock leaves its glen and descends to Comrie in a spectacular narrow gorge, the De'ils Cauldron, surrounded by beautiful native woodland of oak and birch.</p> <p>In contrast to this enclosed and highly focussed experience, a short walk away can be found the Melville Monument on the summit of Dunmore Hill. Here a magnificent panorama of the NSA to the west unfolds, with Loch Earn beyond. Views to the south extend to the Ochils, and northwards can be seen Glen Lednock, with its Munro of Ben Chonzie towering above.</p>	<p>The impressive Melville Monument was built in 1811, commemorating the first Lord Melville, Henry Dundas, who was the Chief Minister in Scotland under William Pitt the Younger and who was regarded as the uncrowned King of Scotland.</p> <p>The monument also provides a focal feature in views eastwards from within the NSA.</p> <p>The route to the De'ils Cauldron and the Melville Monument is a popular circular walk from Comrie.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The viewpoint of Dundurn, St Fillans Hill</i> 	
<p>At the western end of the NSA lies the early historic fort of Dundurn atop St Fillans Hill, indicating its past strategic importance. Nowadays this isolated, rocky hill offers grand views of the ordered landscape of Strathearn.</p>	<p>Although there are few physical remains of this fort dating from the seventh century or earlier, it is particularly significant in the development of Scotland in the early historic period.</p> <p>West of the hill are remains of St Fillan's chapel and burial ground. The present chapel is 16th century, and is on the site of an earlier chapel said to have been erected by St Fillan (7th century) and of which nothing remains except a round stone basin. The village of St Fillans adjacent to the NSA is named after this saint.</p>

Selected Bibliography

Land Use Consultants 1999. Tayside Landscape Character Assessment. *Scottish Natural Heritage Review, No. 122.*

www.strathearn.com (accessed January 2008)