



Location and Context

The *Rocky Moorland Plateau - Inverness* Landscape Character Type consists of two areas of high rocky plateau which covers much of the central part of the district, gradually merging to the *Rugged Massif - Inverness* in the west and bordering the Great Glen to the east. The plateaux form a simple moorland backdrop to the adjacent lower straths and glens. Extensive conifer forests occur in the north-east of this Landscape Character Type. *Rocky Moorland Plateau* often acts as a buffer between areas of greater land use intensity.

Key Characteristics

- Open, gently rolling moorland plateaux with distinct edges descending to adjoining straths and glens or rising to merge with Rugged Massif.
- Plateau with a patchy texture of small rocky outcrop hills, bogs and lochans in no clear hierarchy or discernible pattern.
- Hilltops and upper slopes dominated by rocky heather moorland, except in the north east where extensive, contrasting conifer forests dominate.
- Regenerating trees and scrub in glens with rivers and sheltered lower hillsides.
- Strong contrast in landcover and settlement between the plateau and adjoining straths and glens.
- Sparsely inhabited and little evidence of active landuse.
- A few historic sites indicating past settlement and land use.
- Orientation is difficult due to the lack of hierarchy, pattern and foci in the landform and landcover.
- Within the plateau distance and scale are generally difficult to perceive due to the lack of elements of known size.
- Distinct edges isolate the plateau from adjacent areas and give the sense of a vast, remote, upland moor.
- At the plateau edges, expansive views over inhabited straths and glens create surprise.
- Eastern areas have a semi-exposed character with occasional views of distant

hills framed by the distinct edges of conifer forests.

- Perception of remoteness on the open plateau, from the rugged patchy texture and absence of obvious human artefacts.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

This landscape is characterised by an open, gently rolling and undulating moorland plateaux, ranging from 350 to 550 metres above sea level, with distinct edges. From the plateau, small hills formed by rocky outcrops rise to around 650 metres, with no clear hierarchy. The plateau contains low areas of varying scale which tend to be semi-enclosed, poorly drained and often occupied by a lochan. The landform was generated from the weathering and glacial erosion of Moine schists and Old Red Sandstones, and is divided by glens following the easterly direction of ice flows, and later rivers. Drainage is dominated by these rivers, which are fed by numerous small, high-level lochans and small burns which wind slowly at first before descending rapidly down the plateau sides.

Landcover

Rocky heather moorland dominates the hilltops and upper slopes, and many small lochans and areas of bog occupy depressions mainly on the extensive surface peat deposits in the south west, giving a variable landform of no clear pattern. Regenerating pine, birch and gorse concentrate along glens with rivers and form sporadic patches on hillsides. Surface water drainage and soils increasingly improve to the north and east, such that the far north-east part (south of the Beaully Firth) is mainly covered with extensive conifer forests on gentle slopes, interspersed with rough pastures. Here, rocky hilltops are occasionally revealed as open summits or features of clearings.

The majority of this landscape does not possess any active land use, other than extensive sheep or deer grazing and forestry in the east. Some areas of this landscape type are being increasingly fenced to exclude deer to facilitate regeneration of natural habitats.

Settlement

Much of this Landscape Character Type is sparsely inhabited, with any settlements tending to be located along the edges or in adjacent Landscape Character Types. In this way, the major plateau areas often act as a buffer between areas of greater landuse intensity. In some areas, mainly on the periphery, roads and power lines cross the landscape, winding and twisting over the undulating landform and linking the landscape to adjacent areas. In the east there are a few isolated small farms and crofts within open forest clearings, accessed by a number of minor roads and tracks.

There are few archaeological sites on the main plateau, although the circular stone foundations of prehistoric hut circles and prehistoric burial sites occur in some places, together with some abandoned 19th Century settlements and a few rural industrial sites. There are also some areas of historic peat cutting. More sites occur in the north-east part, particularly prehistoric hut circle remains with evidence of arable fields and pastures.

Perception

There is an overall feeling of openness and exposure within most of this landscape,

although there is a contrast of experience between the small hills and plateau, and the forested areas in the east of the Landscape Character Type. The hills and high points offer extensive views of the surrounding landform. The plateaux possess distinct edges which separate them from adjacent lower areas which are generally not visible from their interior, creating an impression of being within a vast, remote, upland moor. However, as one approaches the plateau edges, there is an element of surprise as expansive views over inhabited straths and glens are revealed below. In contrast to the open plateau, the eastern areas have a semi-exposed character with occasional views of distant hills framed by the distinct edges of conifer forests.

The pattern and ground texture of the majority of this landscape tends to appear random although it is in fact closely tied to the landform and ground conditions. The lack of hierarchy in the rocky hills and lack of discernible pattern in the bogs and lochans of the lower areas, creates a landscape with no dominant visual movement or clear focal points, making orientation difficult. There is a strong contrast between this simplicity and the organised fields and settled nature of surrounding straths and glens.

In the east, the colour, texture and geometric shape of the conifer forests generally contrasts strongly with their moorland surroundings. Some lower fringes of the forests have a more broken pattern, fringed by small broadleaf woodland which interlock with the farms and settlements of adjacent landscape types.

The mix of rocks, bogs and lochs and scrubby woodlands gives most of the area a patchy texture and an unrefined, rugged image. In most areas there is also an absence of obvious human artefacts, creating a strong perception of remoteness. Due to the lack of elements of known size it is also difficult to perceive both scale and distance within the landscape.

This is one of 390 Landscape Character Types identified at a scale of 1:50 000 as part of a national programme of Landscape Character Assessment republished in 2019.

The area covered by this Landscape Character Type was originally included in the Inverness LCA (Richards, J), published 1999.