



Location and Context

The *High Rocky Moorland and Plateau – Ross & Cromarty* Landscape Character Type consists of mainly steep-sided rocky moorland rising to high, extensive plateaux. It occurs in five large patches towards the centre and west of Ross and Cromarty, forming a raised ‘plinth’ from which *Rugged Mountain Massif – Ross & Cromarty* rises. It tends to form a bridge between mountain groups, or a transition to lower moorland types or the sea.

Key Characteristics

- High level, undulating, level or slightly inclined plateaux, forming a raised plinth from which adjoining type *Rugged Mountain Massif – Ross & Cromarty* rises.
- Mainly rough, patchy texture on the plateaux from numerous strewn boulders, lochans and peat bogs giving a random, raw and unmanaged appearance.
- Moorland margins with smooth, grazed, rough grassland, rock and scree, cut by many burns and usually falling steeply to adjacent coastlines and straths.
- Mainly low moorland vegetation, with a few remnants of broadleaf woodlands and Caledonian pine forests and small coniferous forests at lower margins.
- Modern settlements are absent, man-made structures are relatively scarce, but there is evidence for past land-use, from prehistory onwards.
- Plateaux are mainly visible from higher ground.
- Views are expansive and open within the plateaux and from the edges.
- The plateaux form a visual and physical buffer between rugged mountains and adjoining more settled landscapes.
- Rugged, remote and natural giving a sense of wild landscape character.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

This landscape consists of extensive upland moorland plateaux found at an elevation of around 300 to 450 metres above sea level. The level or slightly inclined and poorly drained plateaux surface is usually undulating, with a rough texture. Occasionally, level or slightly inclined smooth moorlands occur where deep peat blankets the underlying rock, with occasional lochans and peat channels. In a few places isolated rocky moorland summits rise from the outer edges of the plateau, some rising to around 550 metres above sea level. Where this type adjoins the coast, lower moorlands and straths, there is usually a distinct, steeply sloping edge, cut by many small burns. In places a gentler, inclined or terraced moorland edge is formed over Torridonian sandstones. At the boundary with *Rugged Mountain Massif – Ross & Cromarty*, slopes rise from the plateau, becoming steeper and

more rugged, gradually merging with the lower slopes of the mountains.

Landcover

The apparently random patterns of landcover on the plateaux reflect the underlying geology and drainage. Here, the landcover is mainly exposed rock and scattered boulders, with lochans, peat bogs and peat hags on the many poorly drained areas, interspersed with low moorland grassland, often with no one element dominating overall. This gives a rough, patchy texture which appears raw and unmanaged. The better drained slopes at the edges of this type often have short, extensively grazed, pale-green rough grasses with occasional boulders, screes and rock outcrops. Exposure, poor soils and drainage prevent tree growth on the plateaux, and trees rarely grow on the grazed plateaux sides, apart from very small coniferous forests or remnant patches of broad leaved woodlands and Caledonian pine woods at the lower margins.

Settlement

The area is uninhabited today. However, there is evidence of previous land use. Prehistoric activity is shown by later prehistoric hut circles as high as 300 metres above sea level on the eastern slopes of Strath more, with a small group surviving near Dundonnell House. Elsewhere, medieval and post-medieval settlement has been limited to coastal fringes, with associated shieling sites and peat cutting found on higher ground and in inland valleys. Less common features include lime kilns above Ullapool.

A few small scale reservoirs and hydroelectric stations have been created from lochans on more accessible margins. Occasional rough tracks and paths cross this landscape, with one in the south west having developed into a single track road descending from Meall Gorm to Applecross.

Perception

The plateaux are not accessible or visible from adjoining valley roads, the views being blocked by the steep sides. Views from mountain tops or from high level roads in adjoining landscapes reveal the scale of the plateaux. There are few comparative scale indicators to make judgments of vertical or horizontal height. There is a lack of dominant vertical points of interest and the eye scans along the irregular outline, being drawn to features in the foreground, or occasionally to a particular more distant point, such as an outcrop of boulders, a rocky summit, or beyond the sudden plateau edge to adjacent mountains or the sea. In good light the surface appears encrusted with reflections from lochans, which contrast with the grey rock and dark peat, and the muted browns of smoother areas of moorland. Panoramic views over the plateaux combined with the overall exposure create a sense of solitude. The sudden drop at the edge of steep-sided plateaux provides airy views of adjoining straths, settlements and seascapes.

This type often forms a visual and physical buffer between adjacent mountainous types and the inhabited landscapes of lower areas. Within many plateaux, the lack of evidence of human activity, combined with the highly natural and rugged landscape, impart a sense of wild character which continues into adjacent mountain Landscape Character Types.

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 Ross & Cromarty LCA (Ferguson McIlveen), published 1999; and by Ross & Cromarty LCA Review (Deb Munro), published 2015.