



Location and Context

The *Rocky Moorland and Rugged Hills* Landscape Character Type is a mainly moderate to high elevation landscape which occurs in several tracts in the north and west of Ross and Cromarty, around and between *Rugged Mountain Massif – Ross & Cromarty*. Like *High Rocky Moorland Plateau*, this type acts as a transition to lower-lying coastal moorlands and rocky glens. However, it differs by often forming sloping spurs and shoulders to rugged mountains, lacks extensive high-level plateau, and contains large rugged foothills. It adjoins *Rocky Moorland - Skye & Lochalsh*, which is of similar height but lacks the rugged hills.

Key Characteristics

- Irregular, rocky moorland which descends in spurs and shoulders from adjoining higher mountains down to lower moorlands.
- Hills and slopes merge with *Rugged Mountain Massif – Ross & Cromarty*.
- High proportion of exposed rocky crags, outcrops and boulders interspersed with moorland vegetation.
- In places, relatively high rugged hills with corries and lochans and craggy, not angular, summits, rise from the rocky moorland.
- Caledonian pine wood stands in some sheltered locations, enhancing the rugged landscape.
- Exposed, rocky and relatively steep terrain which is now uninhabited and has very few roads or other built structures, with only a small number of prehistoric and later archaeological finds.
- Occasional paths and tracks within passes and fault lines providing access routes to adjoining mountains.
- Apparent scale of the hills varies depending on the viewing point, aspect and surroundings, as there are few structures against which to measure scale.
- Provides a visual setting and physical buffer between adjacent mountainous types and settlement and roads of lower areas.
- Wild character over large areas, derived from ruggedness, naturalness and lack of structures, which often continue into adjacent mountain types.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

This Landscape Character Type consists of irregular, rocky moorland which usually occurs between 100 and 400 metres above sea level, and includes a few relatively high rugged hills. Although landform varies in this transitional type, overall the mainly free-draining terrain descends from the higher mountain sides to lower moorlands of adjoining types,

occasionally directly to the sea. Irregular, rocky and rugged hills rise from the rocky moorland to between 500 and 600 metres above sea level in places, but these are dwarfed by the adjoining *Rugged Mountain Massif – Ross & Cromarty* and become increasingly lower and smaller scale towards the coast. These hills are often separated by high-level u-shaped valleys and the highest hill summits contain corries and lochans. Some of these hills have craggy areas around their summits and reach the height of lower *Rugged Mountain Massif – Ross & Cromarty* summits, but do not form large scale ranges and lack rugged, angular tops. The boundary between *Rugged Mountain Massif – Ross & Cromarty* and *Rocky Moorland and Rugged Hills* is indistinct where the slopes merge, however the junction is well defined where the types are divided by high level u-shaped valleys or fault lines.

Landcover

The variety of rocky surfaces, outcrops and occasional ridges reflect the varying underlying geology of metamorphic rocks. Amongst this, low moorland vegetation of rough grassland and heathers on peaty soils bring uniformity to the landscape. There is an abundance of scattered rocks, boulders and rock outcrops that create a rough landcover which contrasts with the smoother surfaces of other moorland character types. The mixed landcover has a greater proportion of vegetation to exposed rock than in adjoining rugged mountains. In several locations on sheltered lower ground, there are stands of Caledonian pine woods. Lochans and bogs occur in a few of the more level areas and high level glens.

Settlement

This Landscape Character Type is now uninhabited and largely inaccessible due to the terrain, exposure and lack of suitable soils and level ground. Rough tracks, paths and occasional single track roads cross this landscape, utilizing the relatively level terrain of passes and fault lines. Many tracks are used by hill walkers to access the adjacent mountains. Major roads rarely occur, crossing this landscape through the lower level glens where there is no alternative route. Much of the land is extensively grazed by deer or sheep. A scatter of burnt mounds, cairnfields and field systems near Achiltibuie indicate that the lower ground was used in later prehistory, particularly when it borders better agricultural ground. Elsewhere, small farmsteads and shielings sites near rough pasture are few, reflecting the high and rough character of the ground.

Perception

The rough textured surface and the lack of distinctive features within this Landscape Character Type mean that there are few particular focal points within the expanses of rocky moorland, other than gentle summits and craggy detail of the hills. Views from this landscape are often dominated by rugged mountains and the expanse of the sea, and the eye is often drawn up the connecting slope to more dramatic adjoining peaks. Occasional small scale features within the type, such as communication masts and summit cairns, are visible on the skyline from nearby hills and roads. The dark colour and statuesque form of isolated remnants of native pines adds contrast, texture and variety and enhances the rugged naturalness of this type.

The scale of the rugged hills in this Landscape Character Type is often difficult to judge. In near views and from some aspects, the hills appear almost as high as many parts of *Rugged Mountain Massif – Ross & Cromarty*, but from other aspects the same hills seem subordinate. This Landscape Character Type often forms a visual setting and physical buffer between adjacent mountainous types and the habitation and roads of lower areas. The lack of habitation, built structures and human activity away from roads, in combination with ruggedness, exposure and expansive views, imparts wild character which often continues into adjacent mountain 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.