

## The Special Qualities of the Kintail National Scenic Area

- Drama epitomising the West Highland scene
- Renowned mountain ranges composed of identifiable, well-known peaks
- Human settlement and activity circumscribed and dwarfed by towering hills
- A remote and wild interior
- The rich heritage of historic sites
- An inland coast
- A natural, theatrical stage

Special Quality	Further information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Drama epitomising the West Highland scene</i></b></li> </ul>	
<p>The dramatic Kintail landscape encapsulates the West Highlands. Magnificent mountain scenery is composed of stately peaks sweeping up steeply from lochs and glens. Waterfalls descend from high corries and mountain ridges, adding a background sound of thunderous, roaring water and movement to the monumentally steep and still mountains.</p> <p>Glens, glacially formed and deeply U-shaped, cut through the mountains and contain burns or rivers that rush and tumble over rapids and falls into pools girt with alder. Loch Duich, a deep and narrow sea loch, leads far inland, the steep hills and mountains appearing to rise almost directly from the water.</p> <p>Human settlement is sparse and dispersed, appearing incidental within a landscape sculpted by nature.</p>	<p><i>'In Kintail nothing lacks; all things culminate. It is the epitome of the West Highland scene.'</i> W H Murray (1962)</p> <p><i>'Emotive wild landscape of magnificent West Highland scenery.'</i> NTS Property Statement (2006)</p> <p>The Falls of Glomach, one of the highest waterfalls in Britain, lies in a remote area of the NSA, accessible only on foot; numerous other waterfalls are found throughout the area.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Renowned mountain ranges composed of identifiable, well-known peaks</i></b></li> </ul>	
<p>In Kintail the highest, most distinctive peaks combine with the narrowness and most distinctive of the glens to form identifiable and memorable scenic images. Those readily identifiable and widely renowned as landmarks are:</p>	<p>Three long mountain ranges terminate around the head of Loch Duich: the Five Sisters of Kintail, the Cluanie Forest which culminates in the Saddle, and Beinn Fhada.</p> <p>The Five Sisters of Kintail, when viewed from Mam Ratagan, Letterfearn or Carr Brae, are supremely elegant peaks, forming a graceful and imposing background at the head of Loch Duich. Legend relates that two Irish Princes washed ashore during a storm, fell in love with two of the seven daughters of the King of Kintail. Having promised to</p>

<p>The Five Sisters of Kintail – a group of supremely elegant, conical peaks standing north of Glen Shiel and best appreciated from the slopes of hills around Loch Duich.</p> <p>The spear-like cone of Faochag and the pinnacles of The Saddle that dominate the southern slopes of Glen Shiel.</p> <p>The serrated ridge of massive Beinn Fhada (Beinn Attow) that towers over Glen Lichd and Glen Chòinneachain.</p>	<p>send their five brothers for the remaining sisters, the Princes married the two youngest Princesses and returned to Ireland. The five sisters waited in vain, and eventually asked the Grey Magician of Coire Dhunnaid to extend their vigil beyond life itself, whereupon he turned them into mountains.</p> <p>These landmarks are the subject of illustrations, drawings, landscape paintings and photographs. They have long been portrayed, from the 'discovery of the Highlands' in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present day.</p>
<p>• <b><i>Human settlement and activity circumscribed and dwarfed by towering hills</i></b></p>	
<p>The scale of human activity appears dwarfed by these ever-present mountains. Steep and precipitous slopes strongly circumscribe the possibility of human settlement, which is limited to the fertile coastal fringe and the lower glens in the west. The pattern is of small-scale crofting, with forestry on many of the lower slopes and fish-farming on the loch.</p> <p>Narrow glens penetrate the mountain core, through which once-important drove roads gave access to the markets and towns of the east.</p>	<p>The area suffered from the Highland Clearances, with the cleared areas planted with trees or converted to sheep grazing. The township of Letterfearn, on the south shores of Loch Duich, is the survivor of an early 19<sup>th</sup> century clearance event, and stands out for that reason.</p> <p>Before the rise of motor transport the glens provided a web of communication for passage on foot and by packhorse. Many were drove roads like Glen Lichd which was used, in the 18th and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, to drive cattle from the Isle of Skye to the rail routes at Beaully and Muir of Ord. Glen Shiel, a major route through to Inverness and Spean Bridge, became the modern trunk road (A87).</p>
<p>• <b><i>A remote and wild interior</i></b></p>	
<p>Moving inland from Loch Duich, the landscape and its atmosphere gradually shifts from being active and populated to being remote and wild. As the mountain fastnesses are penetrated, buildings and settlement are left behind and a sense of wildness comes to the fore.</p> <p>A feeling of seclusion is engendered by narrow and winding glens that constrain the view and hide both the nearby summits and the distant settlements.</p> <p>Access is often only possible on foot, following the well-maintained paths through the glens and upward to the summits. However the wildness and drama of the mountain core can also be</p>	<p>The best way of experiencing the interior of the NSA is on foot, particularly following the footpath up Glen Lichd and on to Glen Affric, or round to the Falls of Glomach. And the best way of experiencing how Loch Duich breaks through mountain ranges to reach far inland, is by boat.</p> <p>The Kintail ranges attract large numbers of mountaineers and hill walkers. The eastern half of the NSA and the extreme southwest are included within an SNH Wild Land Search Areas.</p>

<p>experienced by motorists as they travel the main road through narrow Glen Shiel.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>• The rich heritage of historic sites</b></p>	
<p>In the days when the main highway was the sea, the area had significant strategic importance. This is shown by the presence of Eilean Donan Castle, standing lone sentinel on its rocky islet at the meeting point of three sea lochs – Lochs Long, Duich and Alsh. It is a fortress of solid stone and formidable defences, despite its dreamlike, island setting amidst silent, tree-clad hills and a rugged mountain backdrop. With its arched bridge, it is the classic, romantic picture of a Scottish castle.</p> <p>Further inland can be found the site of the Battle Glen Shiel which dates from the 1719 Jacobite uprising. This is a rare survival of a site still containing visible remains of defensive constructions.</p> <p>The nearby Prince’s Stone marks where Prince Charles Stuart and his companions sheltered after the Battle of Culloden, which signalled the end of the Jacobite uprisings.</p> <p>Considerable evidence of settlement over some five millennia can be observed on the lower ground of this largely open landscape, with abandoned cultural remains becoming more common near the coast. Remains include turf buildings and summer shielings, attesting to pre-clearance, transhumance.</p>	<p>Eilean Donan castle is located at what was once a strategically important location. It originated as a vitrified fort of the early historic period, and the island is said to be the place where St Donan lived (died 618AD). It was restored from a ruin in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.</p> <p>The Battle of Glen Shiel took place on 10 June 1719 between the Hanoverian army and the Jacobites. Its course and outcome were strongly related to the inhospitable terrain, and saw the Jacobites defeated. The action of Spanish troops, amounting to some 300 men in support of the Jacobite cause, are commemorated in the following place-names:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coire nan Spainteach – Corrie of the Spaniards, where two hundred Jacobites were captured.</li> <li>• Sgurr nan Spainteach.</li> <li>• Bealach nan Spainteach.</li> </ul> <p>Tilleman’s painting of the battle depicts it from the government position. Based on eye-witness accounts and contemporary battle plans, it shows an accurate representation of the Glen Shiel landscape.</p> <p>On 27<sup>th</sup> July 1746, after Culloden Bonnie Prince Charlie and his companions passed through Kintail, eluding the Redcoats. They rested for a day in Glen Shiel, on the north side of the river, in the shelter of a great rock boulder one mile north of Achnangart.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>• An inland coast</b></p>	
<p>Views are of an inland sea, the open ocean being far distant and unseen. However, Loch Duich, with its surrounding ring of houses and crofts, reaches far inland, bringing the sea into the heart of the hills: the movement of water within tidal currents, the sound of breaking waves, stony beaches and mudflats, sea birds and mammals, the orange of seaweed on the shore, and the</p>	<p><i>‘Although there are a few isolated areas within the Lochalsh interior which have a predominantly inland character, the penetration of the sea into much of this district results in the dominance of coastal landscape characteristics...’ Stanton (1996)</i></p> <p>A distinctive feature of the shoreline at the extreme east end at low tide is the orange seaweed that sits unattached on the shore. It is a variant of the common knotted wrack (<i>Ascophyllum nodosum</i> ecad <i>mackaii</i>).</p>

dampness and smell of the salty sea air.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>A natural, theatrical stage</i></b></li> </ul>	
<p>Above all, Kintail's scenery is dynamic. It experiences a barrage of westerly Atlantic weather systems, bringing plentiful wind, rain and cloud. Weather can be highly changeable and extremely localised, the bottom of a glen, for example, being calm and sheltered, while there is a raging gale on the summits; or the coast can be dry and sunny, with the mountains inland obscured by cloud and rain.</p> <p>This changeability brings continual drama. A shaft of sunlight can suddenly break through after a morning of greyness and rain. A hidden summit can be revealed briefly as the clouds scud past. The sea can be a mirror calm one minute, and then whipped up as a squall passes. The mountains can gain an alpenglow of gold as the sun sets following a cloudless winter's day.</p>	<p>The area possesses a maritime climate, with the mountains causing significant orographic precipitation. Calm, sunny conditions are the exception rather than the norm.</p> <p>In low cloud, visual emphasis rests on the foreground and smaller-scale features; but there is an awareness of a higher land, creating a sense of anticipation and mystery. In the past, geological surveyors referred to the 'Kintail Curtain', a curtain of rain often present over the watershed but not elsewhere.</p> <p>In clear conditions, this higher land is revealed. It is only when human-scale elements can be seen in relation to the peaks that their full vertical scale can be registered, with their height and steep slopes dwarfing human activity and settlement.</p>

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