

Appendix 12.1: Sloy Pumped Hydro Storage Scheme: National Landscape Character Types

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1. National Landscape Character Types

1.1. Introduction

This Appendix comprises extracts of descriptions for 2019 Landscape Character Types (LCTs) within the study area, identified by NatureScot as part of the Landscape Character Assessment of Scotland (SNH, 2019 [online])¹

¹ NatureScot: (2019): Scottish Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions [ONLINE] <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions> [accessed April 2024].



Location and Context

The *Highland Summits* Landscape Character Type comprises high mountains with a rugged and complex form and a massive scale. These mountains lie north of the Highland Boundary Fault in the Highlands and include the well-known ‘Munro’ peaks of Ben Lomond, Ben Lui, Beinn Ime, Ben More, Ben Arthur (“The Cobbler”), Ben Narnain, and Ben Vorlich within the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, as well as the high, but not Munro-height mountains of Beinn an Lochain and Ben Donich.

Key Characteristics

- High mountains generally lying above 800 metres, but lower and intensely craggy in the core of the Trossachs where geology is particularly complex.
- Steep slopes often covered in scree.
- Narrow rocky ridges, deeply scooped corries and rocky gullies on many of these mountains.
- Narrow glens deeply cut into the mountains, often contain fast-flowing burns and waterfalls.
- Strongly patterned landscape with exposed rock, crags, small lochs and myriad water courses significantly increasing complexity.
- Simple vegetation cover is, largely comprising semi-natural grassland with patchy heather and ground-hugging alpine species on upper slopes and summits. Bracken and bog occurs on lower slopes and within glen floors. Coniferous forestry present on some lower slopes, extending up into glens.
- Broadleaf woodlands rare, confined to steeper slopes with fragments of oak and birch tracing burns and gullies.
- Very sparsely populated with roads and dispersed settlement occurring only on its fringes.
- Impounded lochs, coniferous forestry and hydroelectric infrastructure and transmission lines close to the mountains northwest of Loch Lomond.
- Highly visible massive peaks and ridges of the mountains forming a scenic rugged backdrop to the lower settled loch shores, glens and straths.
- Instantly recognisable mountain forms such as the Cobbler and Ben Lomond. Ben Ledi, Ben Vorlich and Ben Lomond are important landmark features, marking the Highland edge seen widely from the Central Lowlands of Scotland.

- Popular mountains with walkers because of their highly natural and rugged character, and the presence of ‘Munro’ and ‘Corbett’ peaks. The higher summits offer extensive views.
- Distinct sense of wild character of the summits due to their rugged and natural qualities, especially away from hydro-electric infrastructure and poorly integrated forestry.
- Where snow is held on the high summits and the corries of Ben Lui and Ben Oss long in the year, this accentuates the exposure and wild character.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The mountains of the *Highland Summits* Landscape Character Type within the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park form distinct summits and ranges separated by fault line lochs. These high mountains show much variation, from the rugged and complex Arrochar Alps to the massive and smoother mountains of Breadalbane.

The *Highland Summits* form pronounced and recognisable peaks. They tend to be craggier, marked by many rocky outcrops, in the core of the Trossachs and to the north-west of Loch Lomond and west of Loch Long, although less so in Breadalbane. Elsewhere in the National Park, the mountains tend to be more solitary, forming distinctive individual and often conical peaks.

Landcover

The upper slopes of these mountains are covered with grass and heather, with areas of bog and dense bracken occurring in dips and valleys, while summits are often rocky and sparsely vegetated. Conifer forests occur on lower slopes, extending up into the narrow valleys which cut between these mountains, although it is not extensive in relation to the amount of open ground. Small wisps of broadleaf woodland are confined to steep gullies and steeper slopes.

Settlement

This landscape is largely uninhabited with settlement restricted to loch fringes and narrow glens.

The Breadalbane mountains have traditionally been seen as forming the cultural boundary between the Gaelic highlands and Scottish lowlands. Physical remains of shielings can be found along the longer glens such as Gleann nan Caorann, Fionn Ghleann and Gleann a’Chlachain. They are also in broader pockets of sheltered land in the upper reaches of the hills. Concentrations are notable north of Finglas reservoir and to the north of Glen Dochart. Small area of historic farming and settlement are evident at Blairvockie and the lower slopes of Ben Lomond. Extensive historic mining is evident across the hillslopes south of Tyndrum, with a smaller mine found at Glen Leacann Sheileach.

Perception

Many of the higher mountains, and particularly those lying close to the Highland Boundary Fault, form key landmark features extensively visible outside the boundaries of the National Park. Dramatic views of individual mountains are channelled through glens and along lochs where they enrich the scenic composition of the diverse landscapes of the Park. Although these mountains generally lie close to roads and are popular with walkers, a sense of wildness can be experienced because of the naturalness of the open summits and ridges and their rugged character.

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 Loch Lomond and the Trossachs LCA (Environmental Resources Management), published 2005; updated in 2009 (SNH); and the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs Landscape Character Review (Carol Anderson Landscape Associates), published 2015.



Location and Context

The *Upland Glens – Loch Lomond & the Trossachs* Landscape Character Type within the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park includes the larger glens which cut into the *Highland Summits* and *Steep Ridges and Hills* Landscape Character Types.

Key Characteristics

- Often narrow with little flat glen floor, strongly enclosed by steep hill slopes of the adjacent *Steep Ridges and Hills* and *Highland Summits*.
- Steep glen sides often patterned with rocky outcrops, boulders and screes but also extensively forested, particularly on lower slopes.
- Tributary burns and rivers cut deep gullies into slopes and many feature waterfalls and cascades, pools and rocky outcrops.
- Walled pastures sometimes occasionally occurring on lower (usually south-facing) slopes. Heather covers better drained areas and bright green flushes appear at spring lines on hill slopes.
- Some glens covered with extensive coniferous forestry.
- Notable ancient and semi-ancient woodlands of oak and birch in some glens, Natural regeneration of scrub woodland where grazing has declined as in the Luss Glens.
- Relict wood pasture and Caledonian pine woodlands evident in some areas,
- Scattered trees and native woodland trace the edges of burns.
- Sparsely settled but with some isolated farms in lower reaches of glens, these often south-facing. The
- Significant cultural features in more open glens, including shielings and abandoned field systems.
- Areas of crofting evident on some lower slopes.
- Some important historic strategic routes for communications and accommodate key road and rail links today for example.
- Classic views channelled up and down the Glens, with steep side slopes framing landscapes that lie beyond them.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Upland Glens – Loch Lomond & the Trossachs* Landscape Character Type within Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park typically forms narrow valleys, strongly enclosed by steep hill slopes; the glen floor is rarely flat. Many of the Upland Glens form the more constricted upper sections, or tributary valleys, of the broader loch-filled straths.

Landcover and Settlement

The steep slopes containing the glens are predominantly covered with coniferous forestry in the Cowal and Balquhudder area (such as Glen Croe, Glen Ample and Monachyle Glen). Some of the Upland Glens are however notable for their native woodlands of oak, birch and pine such as in Glen Finglas and Falloch, where this is being revitalized by more recent natural regeneration and planting. Remnant Caledonian pine woodlands are found in Glen Falloch and Glen Cononish. These glens are very sparsely settled with only small pockets of farmland, these usually occurring at the junction with smaller side glens where slopes ease or in the lower glen at the transition with broader straths or lochs. Small walled pastures are often encroached by rushes and bracken and in some areas, scrubby woodland. Relict wood pasture is also evident in some glens, such as in Glen Falloch. Where crofting is evident, such as on the lower slopes of Balquhudder, Glen Ogle and around Lochearnhead, the distinct strip pattern noticeable even where enclosures are in disrepair and scrub and woodland has encroached where in decline. Traditional single-storey thatch and tin roofed buildings now largely abandoned or used as outbuildings in these crofting areas.

More open *Upland Glens – Loch Lomond & the Trossachs* have a wealth of cultural features such as shielings and abandoned field systems. These relict field systems are distinguished by areas of more vivid green grass sward. Most of glens contain distinctive farmsteads and religious buildings dating to when these areas were more densely occupied.

The *Upland Glens – Loch Lomond & the Trossachs* commonly form important and historic passes through the mountains and now accommodate main roads and railway, such as through Glen Ogle, Glen Falloch and the “rest and be Thankful” in Glen Croe. Hydro-electric infrastructure and the impounded Loch Sloy are dominant features in Glen Sloy.

Perception

Classic views are channelled up and down the historic passes in these glens, their steep side-slopes framing the landscapes that lie beyond. Glen Ogle, for example, provides spectacular views over steep glen sides and floor littered with boulders and rock falls to the south of Ben Vorlich, as well as from the A84 north to the Tarmachan ridge above Killin. In contrast the narrow pass of Glen Falloch creates a more intimate and introspective experience as steep and dark rocky and wooded slopes confine views.

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Location and Context

The *Straths and Glens with Lochs* Landscape Character Type occurs in six locations within the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national Park, contained by steep hill slopes. Lochs are generally long and narrow, such as Loch Voil and Loch Eck, although others are more indented and irregular, such as Loch Katrine.

Key Characteristics

- Strongly enclosed by steep and often rugged hill slopes with lochs filling much of the space between, leaving only a narrow flatter margin against the loch shore.
- Lochs generally long and narrow.
- Narrow passes occur between some lochs. Subtle promontories and narrow beaches feature on loch shorelines, – these particularly appreciated in long views down the length of the lochs. Modification of natural lochs and water catchments in the Park, giving rise to a variety of structures including dams and aquaducts – many of these comprise distinctive 19th Century structures.
- Settlements often located at the head of lochs and major through roads are aligned through some of these glens and straths.
- Scattered traditional dwellings or clusters of buildings usually located close to alluvial pastures at the intersection with side glens and water courses on some loch shores.
- Tourism and recreation facilities along loch shores.
- Highland-type designed landscapes, grand houses, hunting lodges and associated features, policies and parklands occupy prime loch shore positions. Pier and timber boat houses are a common feature in association with houses and estates particularly on Loch Ard.
- Lochs are highly visible, with roads and cycle/walking routes aligned close to their shores.
- Long views are possible across open water to the *Highland Summits* and the combination of craggy towering hills and smooth water is an essential component of the scenic richness of the National Park.

Landscape Character Description

Landform and Landcover

Smaller lochs are particularly common in the Trossachs area of the National Park, and slightly less so in Breadalbane, formed as glaciers scoured deep hollows out of narrow Highland valleys then melted. The *Straths and Glens with Lochs* Landscape Character Type is strongly contained by steep hill slopes. Lochs are generally long and narrow with some like Loch Voil and Loch Eck having an even straight form while others, such as Loch Katrine and Loch Lubnaig, are more indented and irregular, indented by the steep rocky slopes of the *Highland Summits*. The lochs tend to fill much of the glen or strath although settlement and farming occurs infrequently where lower side slopes are more gently sloping and wider loch margins or drier promontories are present. Some lochs are fringed by diverse natural grassland and wetlands, with these usually more extensive around the mouths of rivers at their outflows at the ends of lochs or between water bodies. The wetlands merge gradually with floodplain pastures on higher areas. Small rocky and wooded islands occur at the head of Loch Katrine where they interlock with the rocky promontories to create strong enclosure, influencing the intimate scale experienced in this area.

Strings of lochs occur within single valleys in the Trossachs, the most spectacular of these being Lochs Venachar, Achray and Katrine which are separated by narrow passes, with an intricate small scale pattern of floodplain wetlands, scrubby rolling pastures and complex wooded knolls and rocky outcrops enriched by a cover of native oak woodland. Connecting rivers tumble in a series of pools and falls.

The steep side slopes of the glens and straths are usually densely wooded with coniferous forest. Broadleaf woodlands are however particularly notable in the core of the Trossachs around Loch Achray and within upper Loch Lomond and narrow loch shores throughout the National Park often feature mature oak, birch and some exotic plantings associated with the many estates associated with this landscape character type.

Settlement

The lochs have formed natural route ways for centuries and most have crannogs and castles built at either end to dominate the lochs and control movement. Examples include Loch Ard and Loch Earn, which also has Edinample towerhouse dominating one end. These buildings are often complemented by chapels, such as that on the crannog below Edinample, or that to the south of Loch Lubnaig.

Settlement of scattered traditional dwellings and clusters of buildings is usually associated with alluvial fans and promontories where tributary water courses join the loch and accommodate small pastures. Larger settlements with large inns or hotels tend to occupy larger areas of flatter ground at the head of the loch where it joins the *Straths and Glens* Landscape Character Type. Many of the estate houses and hotels share a distinctive rusticated Victorian-gothic woodland style. Highland-type designed landscapes and associated grand houses, lodges and associated built features, with policies and parkland are located in prominent lochside positions. Major roads pass through the straths and glens. A variety of structures, including dams and aqueducts, are present as a result of modification of the natural lochs and catchments, for example on Lochs Venachar and Katrine. These often highly scenic landscapes are a key focus for recreation and tourism, with campsites, picnic areas and cycling routes and walks located along loch shores. Larger scale tourist facilities and leisure developments, including hotels and chalet and caravan parks, are a common feature.



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