



Cairngorms National Park
Landscape Character Assessment

Prepared for the Cairngorms National Park Authority
in partnership with British Geological Survey
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I INTRODUCTION AND METHOD STATEMENT

I.1 Purpose of LCA

This landscape character assessment was commissioned by the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), in partnership with the British Geological Survey, in June 2009. It was undertaken over a period of six months. The aims of this study, as expressed in the brief, were:

- To produce an accurate and detailed description of the landscape types (LCTs) and areas (LCAs) within the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) that encompasses the many formative influences upon that landscape
- To make the description clear and understandable to a wide range of users
- To be able to utilise the Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) as a fundamental building block for all policy and activity of the CNPA and its partners in delivering the 4 aims of the National Park

The brief also had three other requirements which informed the method and outputs:

- The LCA would be required to underpin the Park's proposed Landscape Framework, which was envisaged as a tool for both engaging the public and identifying landscape management priorities as required;
- The Park was keen to see how geological information, provided by the British Geological Survey (BGS), could be incorporated usefully within the LCA; and
- The LCA was also required to take into account, and if possible integrate, the Historic Land Use Assessment for the Park, which was available from the Royal Commission for Historic and Ancient Monuments in Scotland (RCHAMS)

I.2 Benefits of this LCA

A landscape character assessment (LCA) for the Cairngorms area was prepared in 1996¹. This LCA preceded designation of the National Park. While it covered the area which was later designated, other LCAs² also assessed landscapes which were later incorporated into the Park. As a result, in some parts of the Park, two LCAs – the Cairngorms LCA and another, regional

¹ Turnbull Jeffrey Partnership, 1996. Cairngorms landscape assessment. [Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 75](#)

² Areas which were included within the National Park boundary when it was designated have also been assessed within other commissioned LCAs. In particular, the Angus Glens were included in the Tayside LCA, "Land Use Consultants, 1999. Tayside landscape assessment. [Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 122](#)"

based LCA – have already been undertaken, but have used different methods of assessment, and have been commissioned by different authorities before the Park was established.

Against this background, commissioning a new, Park-wide LCA has offered the opportunity to:

- Provide an assessment that has as its main purpose the needs of the Park, its policies and management priorities
- Apply a single assessment methodology consistently Park-wide, including the proposed south west extension to the Park
- Undertake a more detailed study than the earlier LCAs commissioned in the 1990s
- Incorporate additional information, such as the HLA, which had not been available at the time of earlier studies, into a new LCA; and
- Take advantage of new technology, most notably the advances in GIS

1.3 Approach to assessment

The assessment method has evolved specifically to meet the needs of the Park.

1.3.1 Landscape character areas

It was decided early on that the most appropriate way to do this was to focus on undertaking a ‘landscape character area’ based approach. This approach aims to divide the landscape up into distinct and recognisable ‘places’, which are named, as far as possible, according to local place names.

These landscape character areas are all different, but within each one there is a consistency of character formed by the topography, land use, history, settlement and development pattern and the way the landscape is experienced. They are mapped and their differences are drawn out using field work supported by desk-based review.

A description of the landscape characteristics and the landscape experience of each area is provided in written text, along with a succinct summary of what makes the character area distinctive from elsewhere in the Park. The character descriptions of the landscape areas are set out as bullet points, and broadly follow a description of topography and geomorphology, followed by comments on vegetation pattern and current land use, settlement pattern, relevant historic land use and infrastructure.

1.3.2 A spatial framework for delivery of the Park’s objectives

At the heart of defining these character areas is the need to provide a robust spatial framework for advice which the Park might be required to give on future land management.

The character areas were therefore selected with two main objectives in mind.

Firstly, they should, as far as possible, be areas that most people would recognise and understand. This required the method to identify, as far as possible, areas that people would be able to relate to, and give these areas names that would, as far as possible, be familiar to people. This latter was not always possible, as sometimes there was no clear single place name associated with an area.

Secondly, the character areas needed to be able to provide a spatial framework for the delivery of the Park's own responsibilities, duties and policy priorities. Each landscape character area therefore has a consistent and identifiable character. This should allow any future landscape management advice to relate to the character area as a whole, as far as possible.

1.3.3 *Boundaries*

Boundaries were identified where the character of the landscape, and potential future landscape management priorities, were likely to change. However, as with most assessments of this type, it should be noted that there is always an area of 'character transition' around the boundary. Around the boundary, the landscape often adopts characteristics from the character areas either side of the boundary, and so it should be interpreted as a 'permeable' line.

1.3.4 *Settlements*

The character of individual settlements and their immediate setting were not analysed as part of this study. Landscape 'capacity' studies for the towns and villages in the Park have already been carried out relatively recently. These studies included landscape character assessments of the setting and surroundings of the towns, as well as an analysis of townscape and architectural style at a more detailed level than could be accommodated in this LCA. It was therefore decided to exclude these areas from this study.

1.4 Presentation

Two separate 'sets' of character areas have been defined. These have been mapped on separate GIS layers. They are:

- Lowland areas. These are the most inhabited straths and glens of the Park. Seventy eight landscape character areas were identified.
- Upland areas. These are the hills and mountains, and interior glens. Twelve landscape character areas were identified.

1.4.1 *Lowland areas*

These are areas where most people live. They are the places where there is most 'human activity', infrastructure and pressure for built development. These areas are where the Park's advice will be required on housing, industry, infrastructure, agriculture, woodland diversity and water and wetland management, all of which are likely to change the landscape. In short, these are the areas where the largest potential variety of pressures for landscape change are most likely to occur.

1.4.2 Upland areas

The upland areas are the least inhabited areas of the Park – although there are occasional remote settlements and farms in addition to some estate houses which may be inhabited for at least part of the year.

In these areas, land management is more likely to influence landscape character than built development. In upland areas, it is usually also the case that a small number of management issues are likely to influence landscape change over a wide area. As a result, the upland character areas tend to be larger than the lowland character areas.

1.4.3 Areas of overlap between lowland and upland

Finally, the maps for each of these assessments – one for lowlands, and one for uplands – illustrate that there is an area of the landscape which contributes to both. This ‘transitional’ area of landscape, generally the hill slopes, provides the visual containment, the open grazing land, the visual backdrop, and sometimes even the extent of the water catchment, for the lowland areas. But it is also the ‘periphery’ of the upland areas, and it acts as both ‘threshold’ and ‘buffer zone’ for the more remote hinterlands.

This area of overlap contributes to both the uplands and the lowlands, and decisions about its future management will affect both the upland, mountain areas and the lowland straths and glens. It therefore seems appropriate for it to be included, as an area of overlap, on the maps for both the upland and lowland character areas, and in its dual role subsequently explained in the text which accompanies the character area descriptions.

1.5 Using the Historic Landuse Assessment (HLA)

The brief for this study noted that *‘the historical development of the landscape is a key consideration...of landscape character’*. The consultants were required to use the HLA provided by RCHAMS, who also provided support in its interpretation.

The data provided by the HLA is extensive, with 59 historic ‘land use types’ recorded on a GIS database. Every part of the Park has an historic land use type allocated to it.

Some historic land use types have more influence on the landscape character of the CNP than others. These are most obviously historic land use types which even today influence the settlement or field pattern, road alignment, the woodland distribution and species choice, for example. But there were also areas of abundant remains, such as extensive areas of townships, pre-improvement field systems, shielings and prehistoric sites, which were relatively easy to encounter within the landscape. Even without particular archaeological knowledge, the extent

and integrity of these areas, some of which were surprisingly large, had a strong influence on the experience of the landscape.

For the purposes of this study, it was necessary to identify the historic land use types which were most influential on the landscape character of the CNP.

The consultants carried out an assessment of all 59 historic land use types in the HLA and, through a process of selection and amalgamation, identified a list of 12 historic land use types which were considered most influential in terms of landscape character. These were then mapped on a single GIS base layer by the RCHAMS, and used in field work and assessment when defining the character areas and describing the characteristics of the landscape.

A more detailed description of how the HLA was interpreted and incorporated into the LCA can be found in a separate report 'Cairngorms Landscape Character Assessment – Using and Interpreting the Historic Landuse Assessment' which is also an output from this study.

1.6 Using information provided by BGS

The brief also required the consultants to work with BGS to analyse and explain how geology and geomorphology influenced the landscape character of the Park. It is recognised that the 'raw resource' of geography underpins many of the historic and present day decisions on land use, settlement pattern and development.

The BGS provided a summary of the influence of bedrock on the major features of the Park. This was provided in map form with accompanying text.

In addition, a list of simplified drift, or superficial deposit, features which have particular influence on the character of the landscape and how it has been used by people, was identified. These features were then mapped on a 'digital terrain model' base. The resulting map and accompanying text, provided by BGS, combines the simplified superficial deposit with the topographical detail of the Park.

All this information was used in field work and assessment when defining the character areas and describing the characteristics of the landscape.

A more detailed description of how the BGS sourced material was interpreted and incorporated into the LCA can be found in a separate report 'Cairngorms Landscape Character Assessment – Using and Interpreting information on the Geology and Geomorphology of the Park' which is also an output from this study.

I.7 Integrating the data provided by RCHAMS and BGS

The aspects of geography and historic land use which are considered most relevant to the landscape character and its future management have been integrated into the text for each individual landscape character area. Sometimes this information has taken the form of explanation and information, but more often it has only been used where it is a defining characteristic, or a key feature within the character area.

I.8 Executive summary

This landscape character assessment (LCA) has been carried out specifically to meet the needs of the Cairngorms National Park. It has been the intention to provide a document which is engaging and inspiring as well as accessible and informative. The LCA is detailed, combining information sourced from the Historic Land Use assessment, geological material provided by the British Geological Survey, extensive fieldwork and the knowledge of experienced consultants to provide a comprehensive character assessment. The LCA subdivides the landscape into character areas which aim to both reflect 'place' and provide a robust spatial framework for the proposed Landscape Framework.

Disclaimer

The content of this report reflects the views of the contractor, Alison Grant, and associate consultants, Carol Anderson, landscape architect, Jill Harden, consultant archaeologist, and Dr Adrian Hall, geomorphologist. The content does not necessarily reflect the views of the CNPA. Alison Grant, the lead consultant, is responsible for any errors in final drafting.

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Nicholas Shepherd, Forestry Commission (Scotland)

Stewart Roberts, Angus District Council

Peter Fraser, Aberdeenshire Council

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT:

LOWLAND AREAS

These lowland character areas are the most inhabited straths and glens of the Park. Seventy eight landscape character areas were identified and these have been grouped into nine 'regions'. Many of the character areas have been named with a prefix which relates to the character area used in the original Cairngorms LCA (1996), which allows for cross-reference to this original document. The character areas are illustrated on the following map, and have been numbered as follows:

Spey Headwaters, Ardverikie and Upper Spey Farmlands

- 1 Arverikie: Glen Shirra
- 2 Ardverikie: Pattack Glen/Strath Mashie
- 3 Spey Headwaters: Upper Glen of the Spey
- 4 Spey Headwaters: Spey Dam
- 5 Upper Spey farmlands: Coul Farm pinch point
- 6 Upper Spey Farmlands: Laggan Strath
- 7 Upper Spey Farmland: Loch Uvie pinch point

Badenoch and Strathspey

- 8 Badenoch: Upper Strath
- 9 Badenoch: Upper Glen Banchor
- 10 Badenoch: Lower Glen Banchor
- 11 Badenoch: Newtonmore to Kingussie
- 12 Badenoch: Insh Marshes
- 13 Badenoch: Inshriach Forest
- 14 Badenoch: Kinraig to Loch Alvie
- 15 Badenoch: Loch Alvie to Inverdrue
- 16 Rothiemurchus Forest
- 17 Glen More
- 18 Strathspey: Inverdrue to Pityoulish
- 19 Strathspey: Pityoulish to Boat of Garten
- 20 Strathspey: Boat of Garten to Craggan
- 21 Strathspey: Craggan to Grantown on Spey

- 22 Abernethy Forest
- 23 Strathspey: Dulnain Strath
- 24 The Slochd

Lower Spey and Cromdale

- 25 Lower Strathspey: Glen Beg to Dava Moor
- 26 Lower Strathspey: Glen of the Allt an Fhithich
- 27 Lower Strathspey: Castle Grant and Tomvaich
- 28 Lower Strathspey: Auchnagallin and Blar Mòr
- 29 Lower Strathspey: Strathspey
- 30 Lower Strathspey: Burn of Dalvey Glen
- 31 Lower Strathspey: Haughs of Cromdale
- 32 Lower Strathspey: Tomintoul Road

Strath Avon and Glen Livet

- 33 Strath Avon: Mid Strath Avon
- 34 Strath Avon: Lower Strath Avon
- 35 Glen Livet
- 36 Glen Livet: Braes of Glen Livet
- 37 Glen Livet: Inchnacape
- 38 Glen Livet: Delnabo
- 39 Glen Livet: Conglass Water

The Lecht and Strathdon

- 40 The Lecht
- 41 Strathdon: Corgarff and Cockbridge
- 42 Strathdon: Upper Strathdon
- 43 Strathdon: Mid Strathdon
- 44 Strathdon: Glen Nocty
- 45 Strathdon: Glen Buchat
- 46 Strathdon: Waters of Deskry, Carvie and Conrie

Deeside, Muir of Dinnet and Cromar

- 47 Upper Deeside: Linn of Dee
- 48 Upper Deeside: Mar Lodge Policies
- 49 Upper Deeside: Allanaquoich Haughland
- 50 Upper Deeside: Invercauld
- 51 Upper Deeside: Invercauld Bridge to Inver
- 52 Upper Deeside: Inver to Cambus o' May
- 53 Upper Deeside: Glen Gairn

- 54 Upper Deeside: Lower Glen Muick
- 55 The White Mounth: Upper Glen Muick
- 56 Upper Deeside: Glen Tanar
- 57 Muir of Dinnet
- 58 Cromar Farmlands

Angus Glens

- 59 Angus Glens: Upper Glen Esk
- 60 Angus Glens: Glen Doll
- 61 Angus Glens: Upper Glen Clova
- 62 Angus Glens: Mid Glen Clova
- 63 Angus Glens: Upper Glen Prosen
- 64 Angus Glens: Upper Glen Isla

Glen Shee, Glen Beag and Glen Clunie

- 65 Glen Shee: Upper Glen
- 66 Glen Shee: Head of Glen Shee
- 67 Glen Beag: Lower Glen
- 68 Glen Beag: High Pass at Cairnwell
- 69 Glen Clunie: Upper Glen
- 70 Glen Clunie: Lower Glen

Atholl, Glen Garry, Cathàr Mòr and Glen Truim

- 71 Glen Fender
- 72 Glen Garry: Lower Glen and Blair Atholl
- 73 Glen Garry: Mid Glen
- 74 Glen Garry: Upper Glen
- 75 Drumochter Pass
- 76 Glen Truim: Upper Glen and Dalwhinnie
- 77 Cathàr Mòr
- 78 Glen Truim



