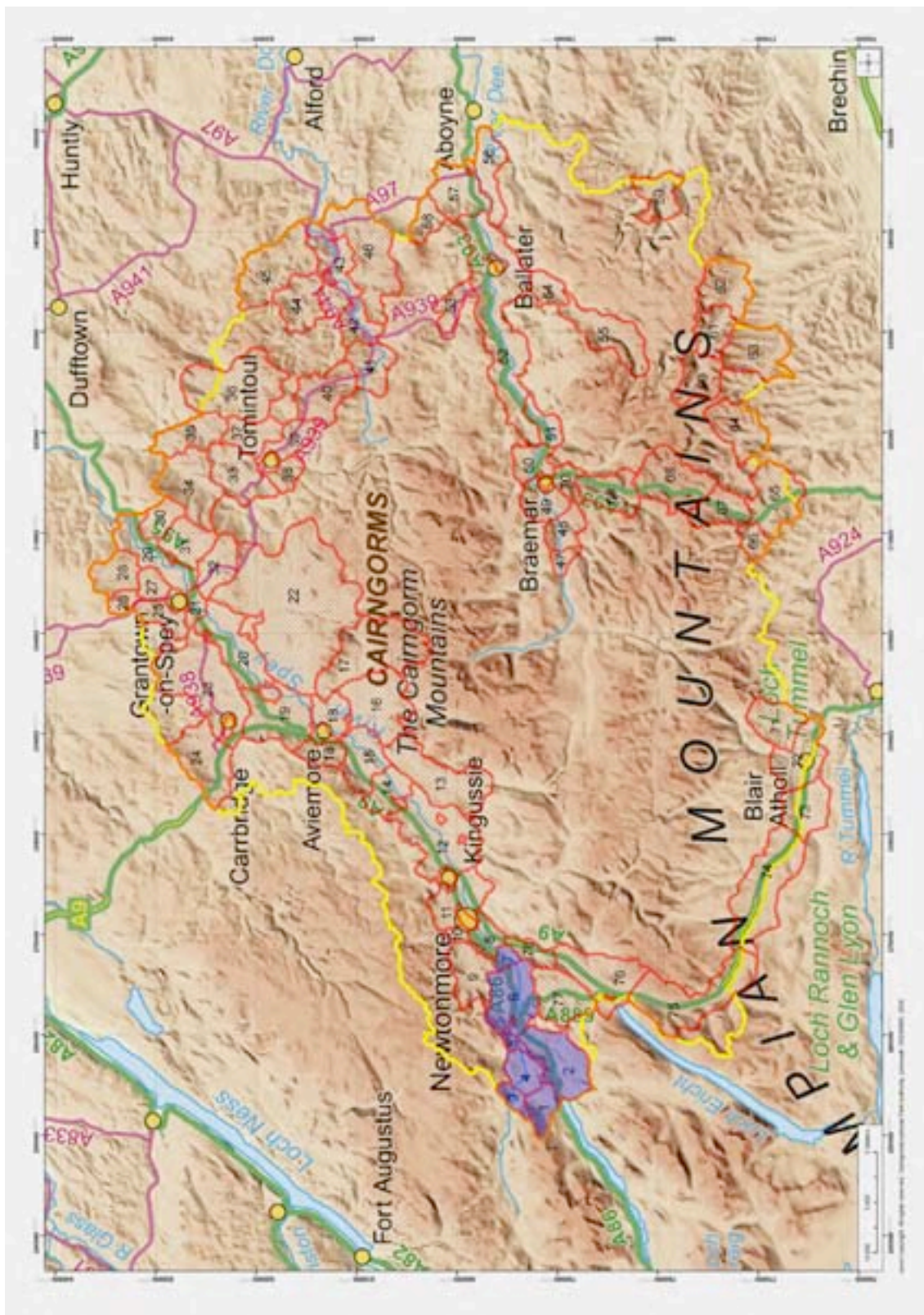


## **2 SPEY HEADWATERS, ARDVERIKIE AND UPPER SPEY FARMLANDS**

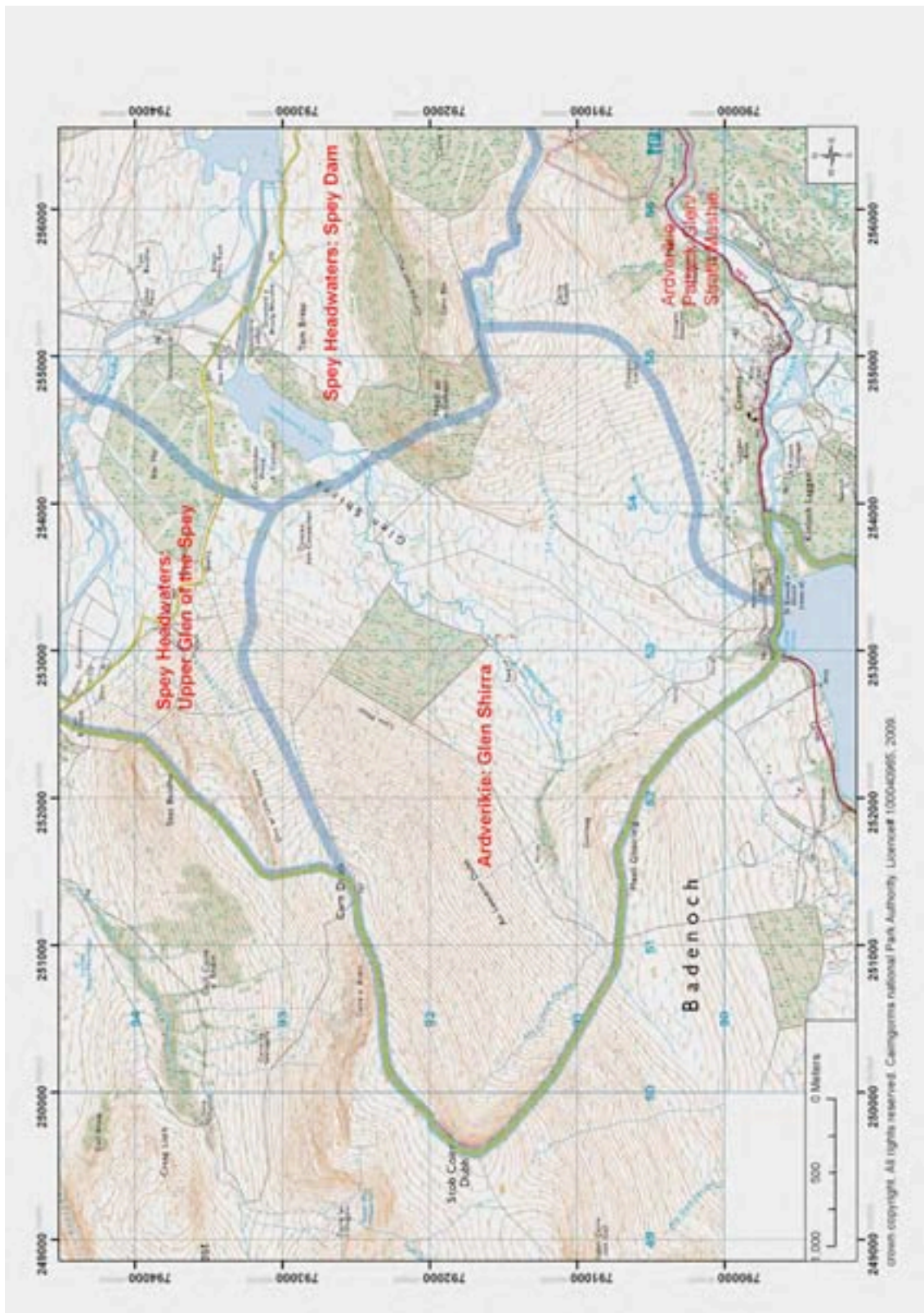
This section of the LCA includes the straths and glens which lie at the western most edge of the Park. This character assessment is presented, working from west to east, as follows:

1. Ardverikie: **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 Farmlands: **Loch Uvie pinch point**

The numbers relate to the character areas identified on the following map.



2.1 Ardverikie: **Glen Shirra**



### 2.1.1 *Landscape Character*

- This wide glen, straddled between steeper slopes, is orientated broadly southwest to northeast
- The landform is dramatically sweeping, with even side slopes extending up to slightly craggy hill tops
- The valley floor is wet and drained by several small burns to Loch Crunachdan in the north and Loch Laggan to the south
- The vegetation is sparse and visually simple, dominated by wet pasture and wet heath, and with no distinct boundary between the valley floor and its sides
- Remnant birch woodland is associated with a steep-sided burn and less accessible crags
- There is one area of geometrically shaped conifer woodland, located on a gently rising, south east facing side slope
- There is evidence of pre-improvement farming along the middle stretch of the Crunachdan burn around Camas Cilean on Loch Laggan and on the slopes above this bay, although the remains are slight bumps in the ground and more obvious in winter
- Access is by tracks only, both of which are elevated above the wet glen floor

### 2.1.2 *Landscape experience*

- The area is relatively secluded, due to the lack of development, low key access and the perceived naturalness of vegetation, as well as its quiet, tranquil context.

2.1.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is relatively self contained, but views north to the Upper Spey Valley, and extensive views south west across to Ardverikie estate and the Mamores enhance scenic quality and provide a contrast to the simplicity of this glen.

2.1.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

This area is dominated by the sense of seclusion and the simplicity of the landform, which is reinforced by the apparent limited number of elements and visually simple vegetation pattern.



*Views south to Loch Laggan, illustrating the visually simple vegetation pattern of wet grassland, and more dramatic terrain to the west*



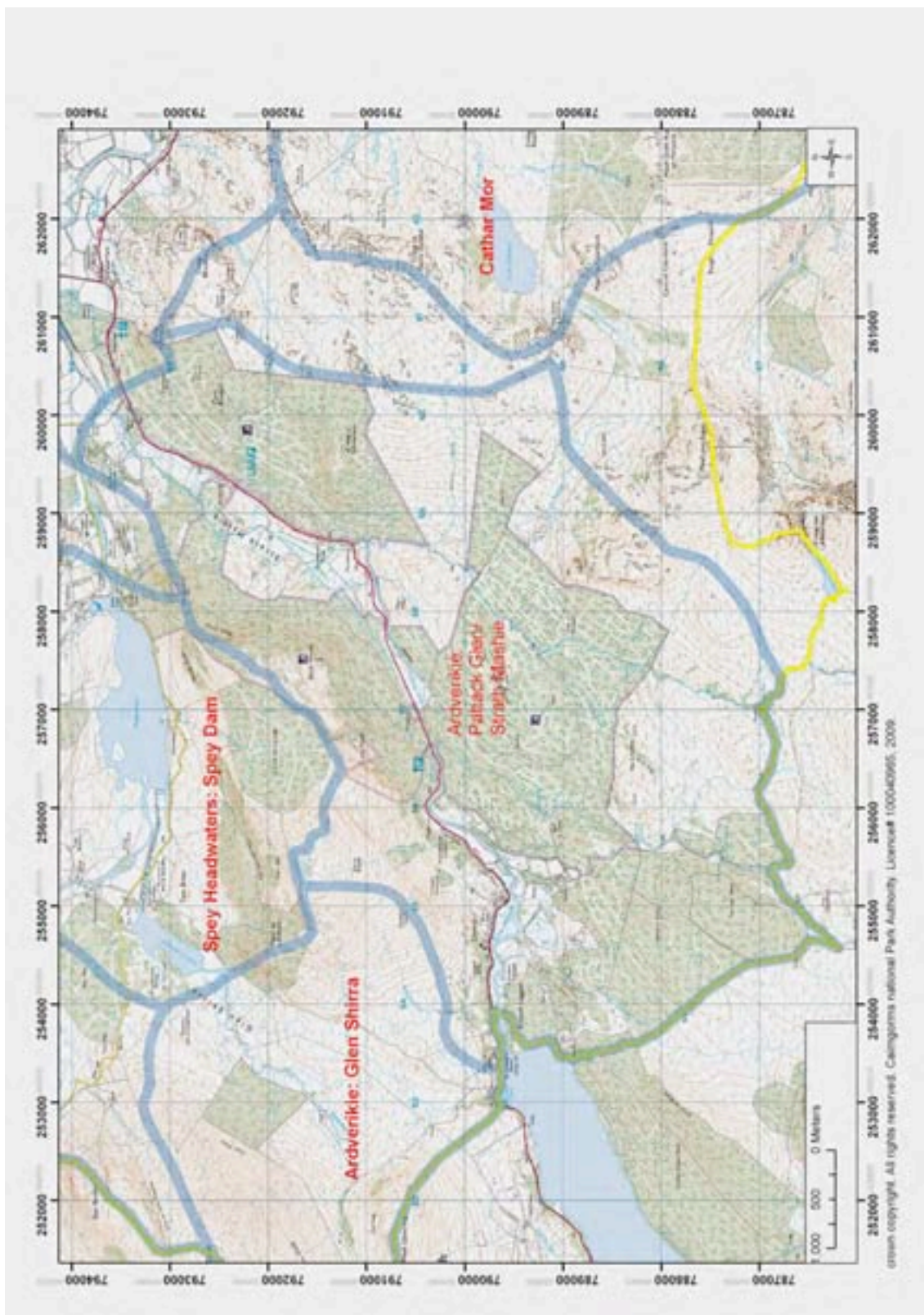
*Views across the sweeping glen northwards*



*The openness of the landscape when viewed from the north*



2.2 Ardverikie: **Pattack Glen/Strath Mashie**



### 2.2.1 *Landscape Character*

- Long, gentle slopes and rocky ridges to the south and hills to the north which have been steepened and roughened by glacial erosion contain this glen occupied by the meandering Rivers Pattack and Mashie
- The glen is generally orientated west/east, but then curves north eastwards to meet the Spey
- Bands and prominent outcrops of relatively erosion resistant rock, often partially covered by deposit, extend across the strath floor
- Glacial-fluvial deposits form ridges at the sides of the strath
- In places, the rivers meander across the glen floor, but the rivers are also in part canalised, and the glen floor has been partially drained
- This floor is grazed, permanent pasture, interspersed with wetter grassland and fenced, 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields, the latter particularly associated with settlement
- To the north the small hills support mixed conifer woodland which extends close to the summits
- Very extensive conifer woodland also dominates the broad, sweeping southern slopes, and in places also extends onto the floor of the strath
- Small groups of mature mixed broadleaved trees and pine occupy the well defined hummocks
- There is riparian woodland along the River Pattack
- Settlement, often sheltered by small woods, is limited to scattered estate-style housing, associated with road or along the woodland edge at the break in slope
- The gorge at Kinloch Laggan creates a dramatic pinch-point and acts as a portal to the sudden view of Loch Laggan when travelling west

### 2.2.2 *Landscape experience*

- The narrow road sits along slightly higher land, tucked hard against the break in slope, so that travelling on it reinforces the experience of the land form and the sense of 'winding' through the glen
- The sequence of spaces experienced from the road, created by moving between alternating open grazed pastures and enclosed woodland, reinforce the intimate scale of the glen
- 'Pinch points' created by narrow passes at Kinloch Laggan and at Feagour are key thresholds within the glen, emphasised by tall trees and the sense of enclosure created by topography
- Together these 'pinch points' also contribute to a sense of arrival to the National Park from the west, and the 'gateway' to Loch Laggan when travelling from the east.



2.2.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is largely self-contained, although there is occasional inter-visibility with higher hills to the south and glimpses of the Monadhliath to the north.

2.2.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

On the road, the experience of this area is dominated by travelling through an alternating sequence of open grazed land and enclosing woodland. As an important gateway to the Park, the way the A889 winds through the enclosure created by rock cliffs at the western end reinforces the 'threshold' experience. The erosion resistant rock underpins many of the striking smaller scale features along the floor of the strath.



*Extensive conifer woodland on the hill slopes, with hummocky terrain along the sides of Strath Mashie*



*Groups of trees on rocky outcrops overlain with deposit*



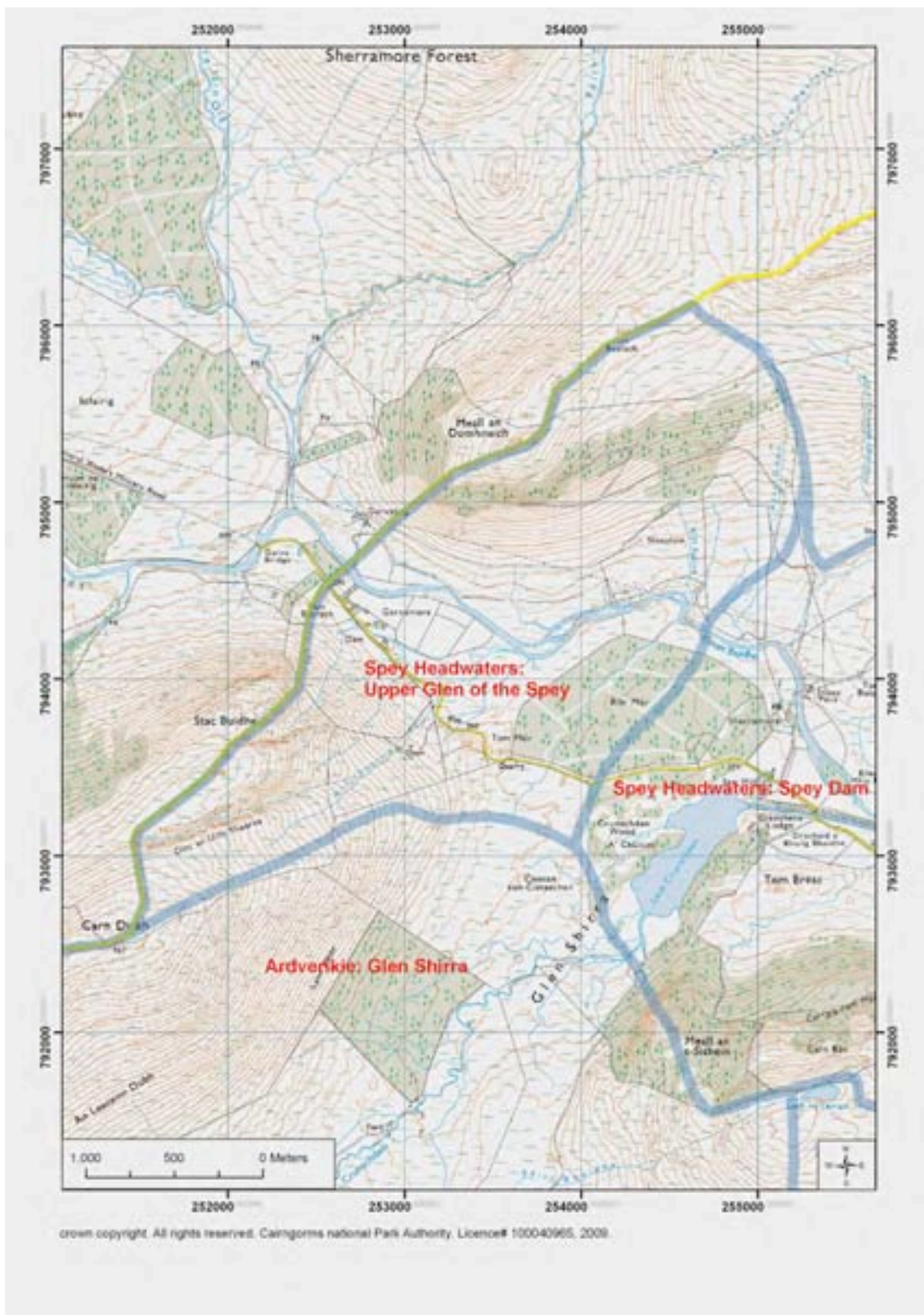
*Road and housing sits on a terrace above the flood plain*



*Open spaces, where the floodplain widens and there are areas of grazing, alternate with the enclosure of the woodland*



### 2.3 Spey Headwaters: **Upper Glen of the Spey**



### 2.3.1 *Landscape Character*

- Steep slopes rise to medium-scaled hills which rise either side of a flat bottomed glen, which is orientated west/east
- The sense of enclosure is limited by the conjunction of glens and side valleys which breach the side slopes and allow views to spill out to the west and north west.
- Rocky and boulder strewn hilltops and slopes of shattered debris, as well as glacial deposits, reflect past glacial activity, while long terraces demonstrate the further re-working of deposits by the River Spey
- Several tributaries feed into the meandering river, which is characterised by reaches of both slabby bedrock and braided, gravelly deposits
- There are substantial conifer shelter woods which extend beyond the western edge of the Park, into relatively inaccessible hinterland
- There is scattered conifer woodland, perhaps remnants of a larger wood, along the upper, south facing hill slopes
- The valley floor is pasture, with some wetter grassland
- Broadly rectilinear, fenced 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields at the farm at Garvamore create a contrasting nucleus of more intensive management on the glen floor
- The narrow road is part of the Wade Military road through the Corrieyarrick Pass, linking Fort Augustus with Ruthven Barracks and Dalwhinnie. This stretch links Garva Bridge, a historic 'Wade' bridge built in 1731 and the recently repaired Kingshouse at the farm at Garvamore, originally built around 1740 for military and civilian travellers and later used by drovers

### 2.3.2 *Landscape experience*

- The experience of arrival at the Park is reinforced by the narrowing of the glen at Garvamore to create a tentative 'threshold'
- There is a real sense of being at the edge the Park, as the topography takes on the character of individual mountains and rugged skylines, especially to the west, more normally associated with the west of Scotland

### 2.3.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is partially inter-visible with the Glen Shirra character area, but is mostly orientated towards the rugged mountains beyond the Park to the west. A large block of conifer woodland straddles the boundary between this area and the neighbouring Spey Dam character area,

### 2.3.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

This area is dominated by the conjunctions of several glens and side valleys, radiating north and west from Garva Bridge as well as the merging of Glen Shirra with the Upper Glen of the Spey – these reinforce the sense of a ‘pass’, which is further emphasised by the historic Wade Road and associated infrastructure and history.



Wide, grazed glen floor



Garvamore, sitting within improved fields and sheltered by woodland



Conifer woodland on the hill tops to the north of this area, above a well defined river terrace occupied by housing



Large hummocks of free draining glacial deposit along the edge of the strath



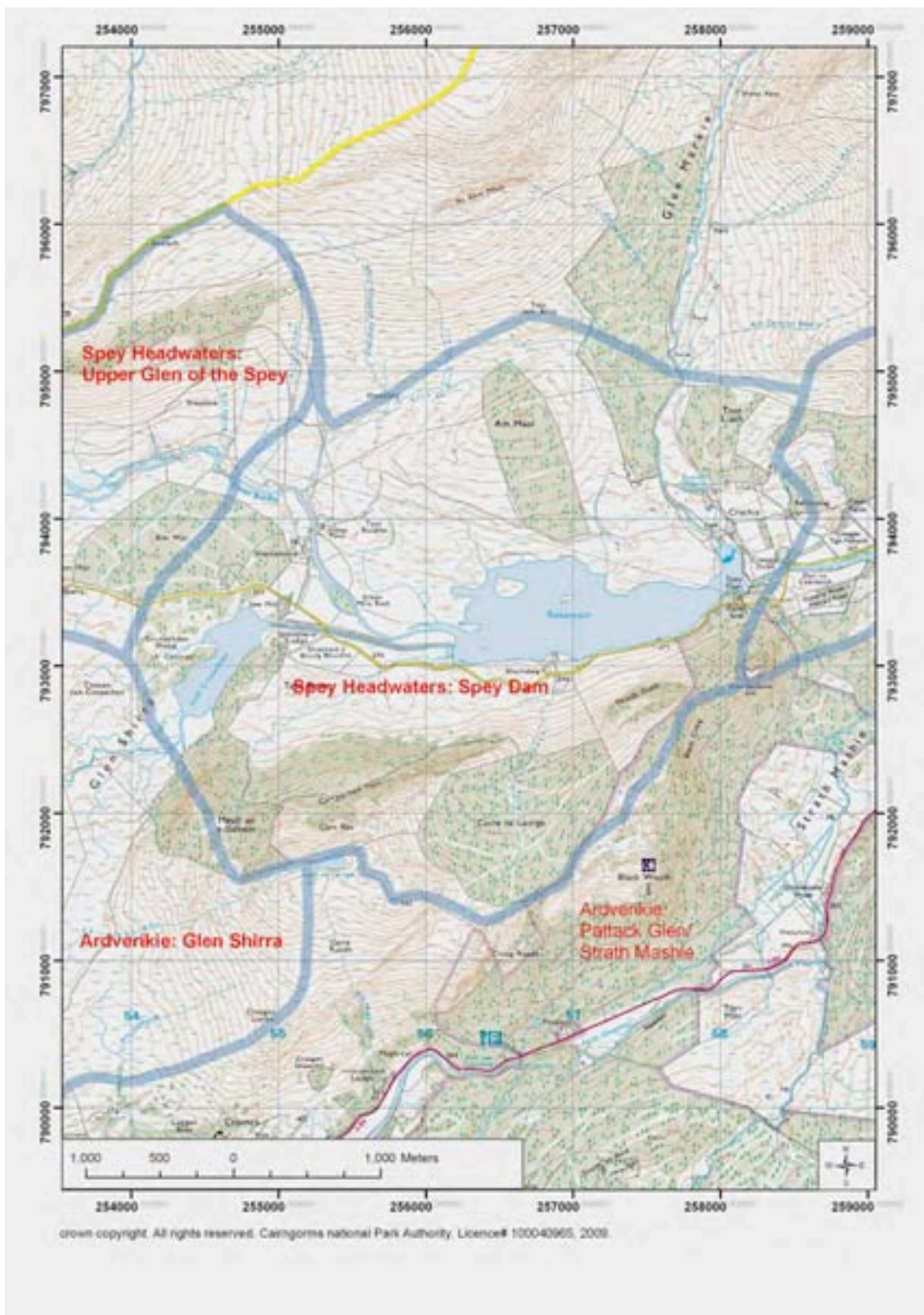
Conifer woodland straddles the boundary between this area and the Spey Dam



Small conifer shelter woods, here on well-drained terraces which extend outwith the Park



## 2.4 Spey Headwaters: **Spey Dam**



#### 2.4.1 Landscape Character

- This relatively contained glen, orientated west/east, is enclosed by sharply rising slopes to the south and a low hill to the north, behind which rises the Monadhliath
- There are shattered rock faces high up on the north facing slopes steepened and roughened by glacial erosion
- There are numerous glacial-fluvial deposits, some of which form substantial, rounded hummocks
- Loch Crunachdan lies at the conjunction of the Spey glen with Glen Shirra, framed by the 'parabolic-shaped' side slopes
- The shallow, dammed 'Spey' reservoir extends along much of the floor of the main glen
- There is extensive evidence of previous settlement, with small townships and traces of medieval and post-medieval land use associated with the tributaries and well drained gravelly deposits, especially along the gentle, south facing slopes
- There are several large conifer shelter woods, and an area of more extensive woodland across steep, north-facing upper slopes, which merges with semi-natural birch woodland
- The limited area of valley floor is pasture, generally extensively grazed, although each cluster of present-day settlement is surrounded by late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields, now enclosed with fences, and occasionally punctuated by single specimen trees or small groups of mature broadleaved trees
- Grassland extends onto the well-drained lower hill slopes with no distinct change in vegetation
- Estate buildings at the western end of the reservoir are prominently located on hummocks overlooking Loch Crunachdan and are surrounded by shelter woods and groups of trees
- The infrastructure associated with the dam – canalised river, concrete bridges, the dam wall, levees and embankments – reinforce that this is a man made waterbody.
- The narrow 'Wade Military' road is slightly elevated above the glen floor following the break in slope as it winds around hummocks, apart from where it sits on top of straight embankments at the western end of the reservoir
- The eastern end of the reservoir is overlooked by the dramatic ridgeline of Black Craig on top of which is Dun-da-lamh fort



#### 2.4.2 *Landscape experience*

- This part of the glen can appear cluttered, and the location and design of more recent infrastructure and woodland pays little regard to either topography or the extensive historic land use
- The extensive evidence of past land use and settlement is clearly visible, although it can be more evident in low side light and under winter vegetation
- The elevated road allows views down to and across the reservoir

#### 2.4.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is relatively self-contained, but there are views into the hinterland of the Monadhliath to the north, and there are framed views to Glen Shirra, with Loch Crunachdan in the foreground, a focal point of views from the lodges at Glenshero or Sherramor.

#### 2.4.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

When travelling along the road, the dam and its associated infrastructure dominate, however on closer inspection, the evidence of extensive past settlement is very apparent.



*Loch Crunachdan and the steep sided, wooded, southern hills of this part of the Spey*



*Infrastructure associated with the dam*



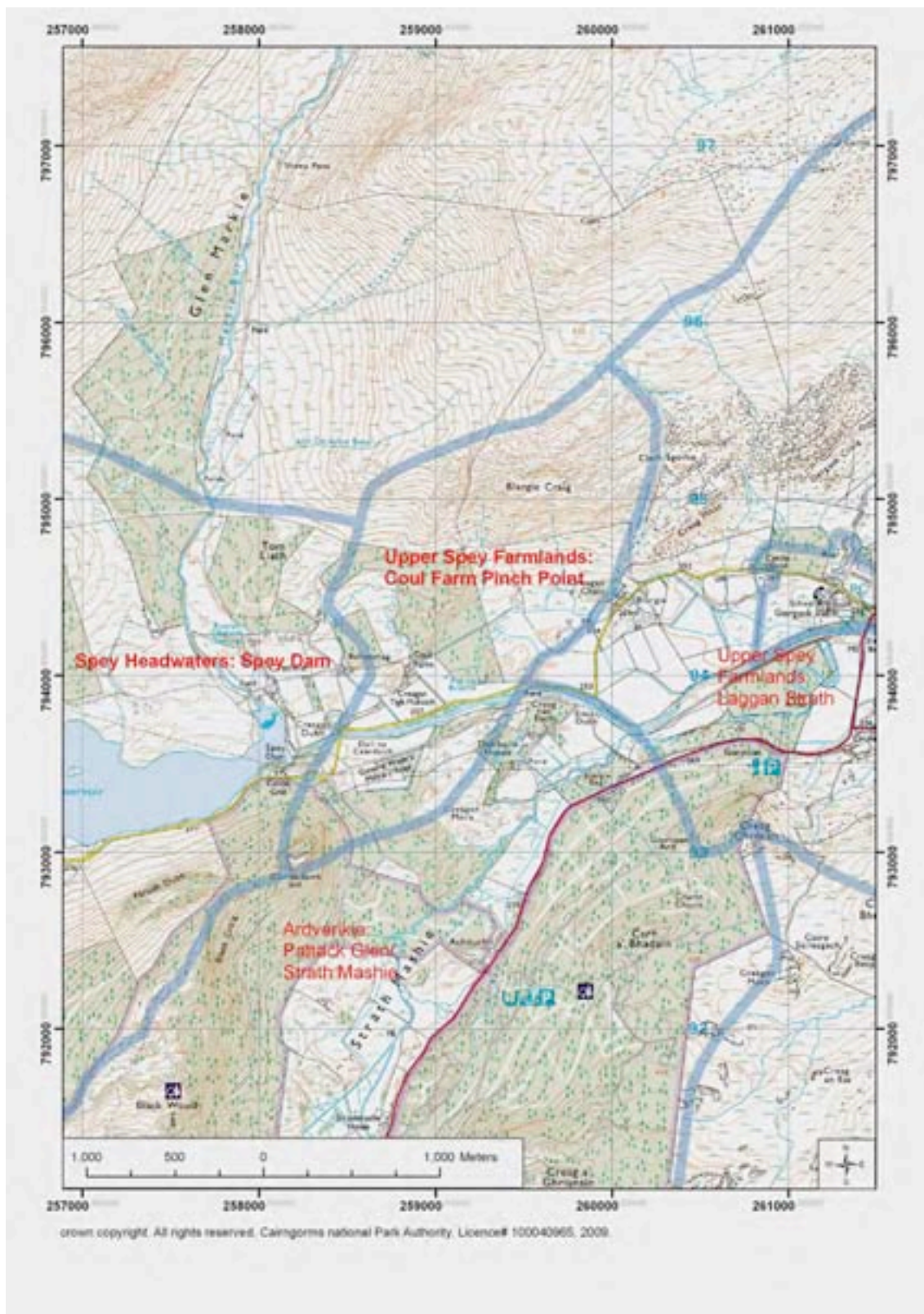
*Settlement and associated woodland on hummocks*



*Evidence of past land use*



## 2.5 Upper Spey Farmlands: **Coul Farm pinch point**



### 2.5.1 *Landscape Character*

- This small area is strongly influenced by a bed of rock which has been relatively resistant to erosion and weathering and now forms the precipitous slopes of Black Craig to the south and the rocky outcrops at the edge of the Monadhliath to the north
- The narrowness of the strath at this point forms a gateway to the upper reaches of the Spey
- The tapering form and narrow summit of Black Craig forms a dramatic focal point in the landscape, and is also the location of the Dun-da-lamh Iron-age or Pictish fort which overlooks the junction of Strath Mashie, the glen of the upper Spey and Laggan strath
- Where it extends as a band across the floor, the resistant rock has been dramatically scoured by glaciers to form low, rounded 'roches moutonnées' which reinforces the sense of enclosure when travelling along the road
- Conifer shelter blocks and more extensive woodland around Black Craig further reinforce containment
- The River Spey, which is relatively straight at this point, is bordered by riparian woodland, and there is also an avenue of broadleaved trees along the approach to Coul Farm and a line of poplar trees, which form a additional features
- Pasture, with some fodder crops, occupies small, level, straight-edged 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields along the valley floor which fit snugly around the rocky outcrops
- The road follows the banks on the north side of the river, while the 'Wade Military' road stays south of the River
- Settlement, both at present and in the past, is set well back from the road, clustered along the edges of knolls, away from the fields

### 2.5.2 *Landscape experience*

- The dramatic sense of 'threshold' between the flat strath floor to the east, and the more upland character of the Spey Headwaters to the west, is pronounced and reinforced by the 'gateway' of dramatic topography created by the resistant rock forms and further reinforced by woodland

### 2.5.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is small and is very much a 'threshold' between three different character areas which meet at this point.

#### 2.5.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The relatively erosion-resistant rock formations of this landscape dominate the topography, including the drama of the towering, narrow ridge of Black Craig to the south and the crags of Blargie Craig to the north, along with the exposed rocky outcrops across the valley floor. The small scale settlement is consistently placed at the edges of these rounded, rocky outcrops.



*Black Craig, topped by Dun-da-lamh fort, overlooks this area*



*Rocky outcrops – roches moutonnées – frame the flat fields*



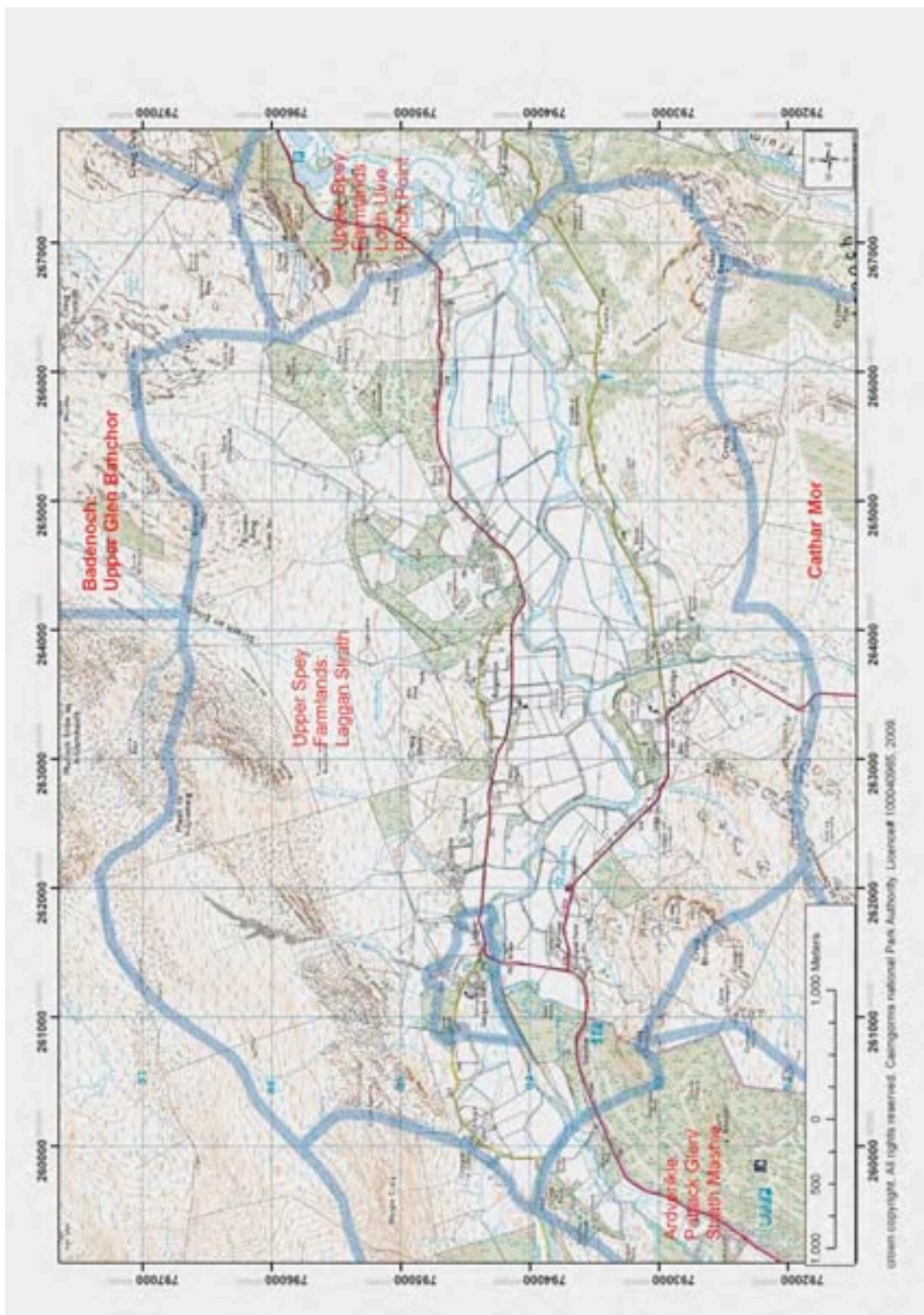
*Settlement tucked back against the rocky outcrops*



*The River Spey – with riparian woodland at either side*



**2.6** Upper Spey Farmlands: **Laggan strath**



### 2.6.1 Landscape Character

- The River Spey has worked the glacial-fluvial deposits to create a nearly-flat strath floor, edged with well drained gravelly terraces and hummocks, and further constrained by low, craggy hills. This is an inner valley set within an older, broader strath.
- The steep rock slopes that define the inner valley and which also form the break in slope that leads up to the high tops have been steepened and roughened by glacial erosion, with the formation of crags that face to the east.
- The strath is orientated east-west
- The hill summits consistently display exposed cliffs below which lie the accumulated loose rocks from rockfall and frost-shattering
- The River Spey, contained by pronounced embankments to discourage flooding, meanders across the strath floor, which is criss-crossed with drainage ditches dug in the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- The lines of the main drains have been fenced, creating straight-edged late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields, some of which have reverted to wetland where drainage has been abandoned. Fields above the flood plain, generally on its north side, also reflect 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improvement but tend to be slightly less rectilinear
- Grassland and fodder crops dominate those fields which are still cultivated, some of which extend up onto the well drained gravelly deposits along the sides of the strath
- Planted conifers become more dominant at the western end of the strath where there is also one single larger block of conifer on the strath floor
- Otherwise, woodland is varied, with small woodlands associated with individual farms, occasional policy features, more extensive mixed woodland, particularly at Cluny Castle, and semi-natural woodland, especially on north-facing slopes, creating a diverse mix
- On the south side of the floodplain, between and within these woodlands, the north-facing slopes retain traces – humps and bumps on the ground – of pre-improvement century farming
- Laggan is a focal settlement, located near a bridge crossing and road junction, and Catlodge is a cluster of buildings next to a road junction
- More scattered individual farms and houses are largely strung along the roadside – or follow the line of an earlier road – strongly linked to lower slopes but still elevated land, back against the break in slope
- Balgowan has a settlement pattern formed by a close sequence of individual farms and linear fields extending down across the strath



Buildings are kept off the better land but close to the road, reinforcing the edge between free draining cultivatable land and rough grazing

- The public roads are elevated above the strath floor, often located at a break in slope between high terraces along the lower edge of the hills
- The occasional hill summit is occupied by a cairn, monument or trees

#### 2.6.2 *Landscape experience*

- The roads, often located hard against the break in slope and elevated above the floodplain, wind around spurs and rocky outcrops, so that the effect when travelling is of a direct experience of the 'lie of the land'
- The small scale of the landscape is reinforced by the surrounding low rocky hills, the hummocks of glacial-fluvial deposit and the varied pattern of fields and woodland

#### 2.6.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

There is consistent visual interaction with the surrounding character areas, particularly the Monadhliath to the north and the Ardverikie Hills and Cathar Mor to the south, all of which provide a backdrop to the immediate strath. Much of the strath is overlooked by the dramatic summit of Black Craig and the fort at Dun-da-Lamh.

2.6.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The pronounced contrast between the low, rocky, rugged, irregular hill tops and the level plain dominates. This juxtaposition is emphasised by the smooth texture of the cultivated fields across the floor of the strath which contrast with the rougher textures of the vegetation on the hill slopes. Settlement, the road and other infrastructure generally occupies a very particular location, sitting on the hummocky terrain between the two.



*The level strath floor framed by extensive glacial-fluvial deposits*



*Long terraces provide a backdrop for settlement*



*Black Craig and the fort of Dun da Lamh overlook the western end of the strath*



*Drainage ditches in the foreground and woodland on the lower hill slopes*

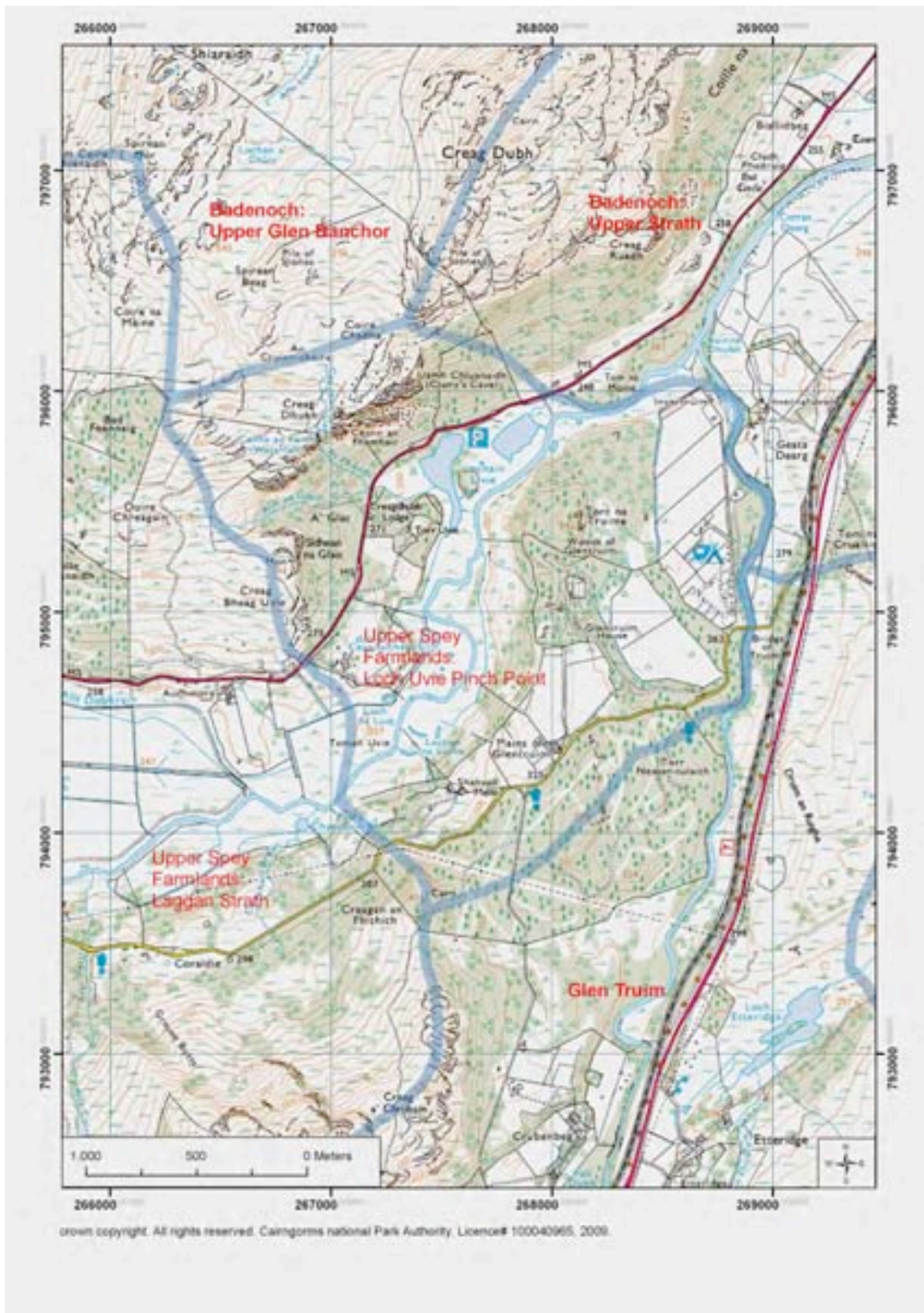


*Monuments top some of the hill tops*



*Policy woodland around Cluny Castle*

2.7 Upper Spey Farmlands: **Loch Uvie** pinchpoint



### 2.7.1 *Landscape Character*

- This narrow, contained 'pinchpoint' between two sections of wider strath is located close to the confluence of the River Spey with the River Truim
- Dramatic, exposed steep cliffs, shattered rock faces and block slopes, especially to the north, were quarried by a huge glacier which exited northwards from the much wider Laggan strath
- To the south, there is a high terrace, backed by further rocky slopes
- The strath floor is narrow, occupied by the meandering Spey and a sequence of sheltered lochans lying within kettle holes and contained by gravelly deposits, many appearing as sinuous ridges
- Swathes of semi-natural mixed broadleaved woodland extend across the steeper slopes and terraces, and the upper slopes around Glentruim are occupied by fine stands of well thinned Scots pine
- Mature policy woodland and parkland are associated with two large houses and their designed landscapes – at Glentruim House and Torr Uvie
- There is a relatively seamless transition between the semi-natural woodland, the policy woodland and the managed Scots pine which is achieved by 'merging' one into the other
- The remaining land is grazed pasture across the parkland, subdivided into straight-edged 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields on the flat, elevated terraces around Glentruim House, Mains of Glentruim and Invertruim
- Settlement is strictly associated with the estates, with the main houses occupying well defined topographical features
- The roads generally follow the break in slope, hugging the base of steeper slopes
- There is a caravan and campsite at Glentruim

### 2.7.2 *Landscape experience*

- The dramatic sense of 'pinchpoint' is emphasised by the towering rock features especially as experienced from the A86. The vertical scale is further reinforced by travelling between the tall, narrow conifer trees adjacent to the road at Torr Uvie, which reinforces the sense of arrival both into and from the neighbouring Laggan strath.
- The drama of the topography and setting contributes to high scenic quality and the lochans, dramatic cliffs, well-thinned woodland and policies combining to create a unified, well-composed landscape.

2.7.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is small and is very much a 'threshold' between different character areas, being at the juxtaposition between three other character areas.

2.7.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The sense of a 'pinchpoint' is overwhelming, with tall trees reinforcing the enclosure created by the topography. Every element has a clear link with the landform or topography – fields on level land, lochans contained by sinuous terraces, woodland located on steeper slopes, settlement sited on elevated hillocks – all of which create a unified landscape character.



The 'pinch point' seen from Laggan strath – the floor of the strath becomes more hummocky as it extends east towards the pinchpoint



Kettle holes filled with lochans



Rocky hills and crags create dramatic enclosure



Parkland at Truim house

