

3 **BADENOCH AND STRATHSPEY**

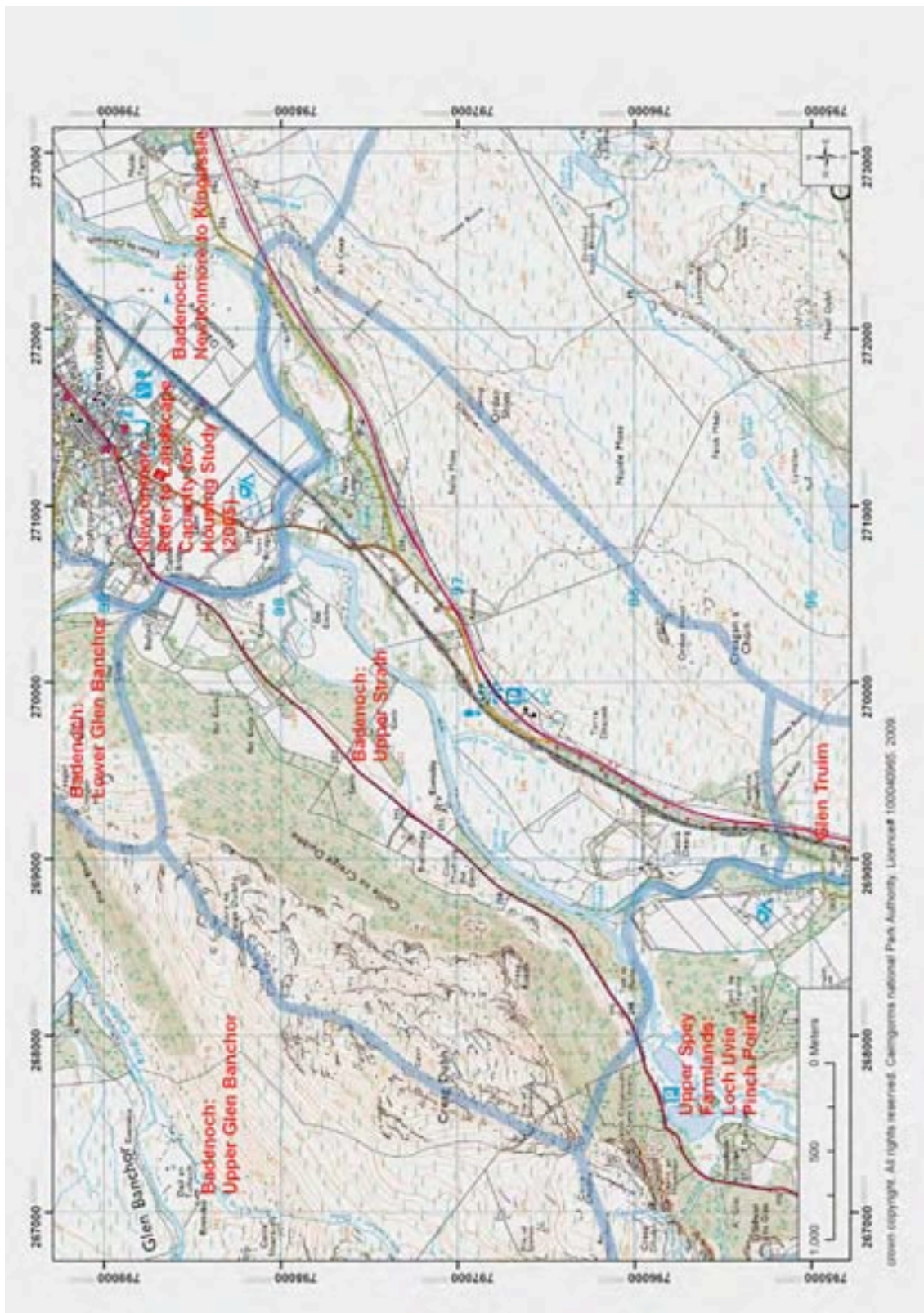
This section of the LCA includes the strath of the River Spey from Glentruim north to Kincaig, which we have called 'Badenoch' and then from Kincaig north to Grantown on Spey, which we have called 'Strathspey'. This character assessment is presented, working from south to north, as follows:

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: **Kincaig 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: **Dalnain Strath**
24. **The Slochd**

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



3.1 Badenoch: Upper Strath



3.1.1 Landscape Character

- This fertile strath of extensive well drained fluvial deposits, worked relatively level by the River Spey, is contained by well drained glacial-fluvial terraces and hummocks which extend along the edges of the strath floor
- Beyond this to the south east, the strath is only loosely contained by undulating moor and striking streamlined rock ridges with crags at their northern ends which are evidence of a glacier exiting north eastwards through the strath
- Behind these features lies the very distinct trough of the Erich-Laidon fault and steep slopes which form the edge to extensive low, rounded hills, the foreground to views to the high Cairngorm mountains
- To the north west, the steep, rocky summit and ridgeline of Creag Dubh, rising above rock falls, forms a well-defined enclosure to the strath
- The River Spey forms subtle bends across the strath, its line sometimes reinforced by riparian woodland
- The floor of the strath is grazed, with some straight sided, late 18th/19th century improved fields, and extensive areas of rough grazing punctuated by scattered semi-natural broadleaved woodland and possibly wood pasture
- The fenced, improved fields extend northwards onto the numerous hummocks and gentle slopes below Creag Dubh
- Very extensive native broadleaved woodland clothes the steeper slopes of Creag Dubh, regenerating across less accessible slopes and screes
- Planted conifer shelter woods are located along the floor of the strath
- There is extensive and readily visible evidence of pre-improvement settlement and agriculture, some with extant remains of earlier, medieval and/or prehistoric farms, associated with gravelly river terraces
- Contemporary buildings are limited to the farm at Baillidbeg and scattered buildings associated with the old A9, which are tucked into woodland on the hummocky terrain and terraces along the south eastern edge of the strath
- The A9, railway line and pylon line extend along the southern side of the strath, which is a major communication corridor, on slightly elevated ground, often hidden within hummocky terrain and visually screened by extensive semi-natural, birch dominated woodland

3.1.2 *Landscape experience*

- The area is experienced as relatively open from the A86, despite the woodland, because of the extensive, unobstructed views south and east across a variety of topography to the Cairngorm mountains
- In contrast, the A9 is relatively enclosed and views out are limited
- There is a sense of arrival associated with leaving either Glen Truim or the Laggan area from the south and arriving at this more open, less defined strath of the River Spey

3.1.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

There are views to the much more extensive, and relatively distant, mountain areas to the south and east.

3.1.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

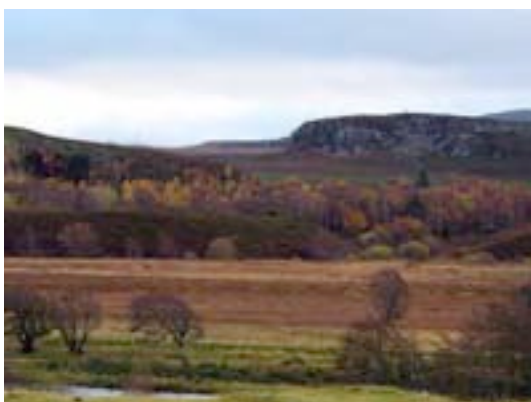
Although well contained by steep, craggy slopes to the north-west, the sense of openness dominates across the strath despite extensive woodland around the A9. This is because low relief to the south east of the strath allows long views to the massive bulk of the Cairngorm mountains. In addition, there are extensive areas of historic settlement and land use, which are evident as lumps, bumps and shallow depressions in the now improved field system.



Steep craggy slopes with woodland regenerating onto scree above hummocky terrain, occupied by the road and farm



Gently undulating strath floor, largely grazed but with woodland hiding the A9 in the distance

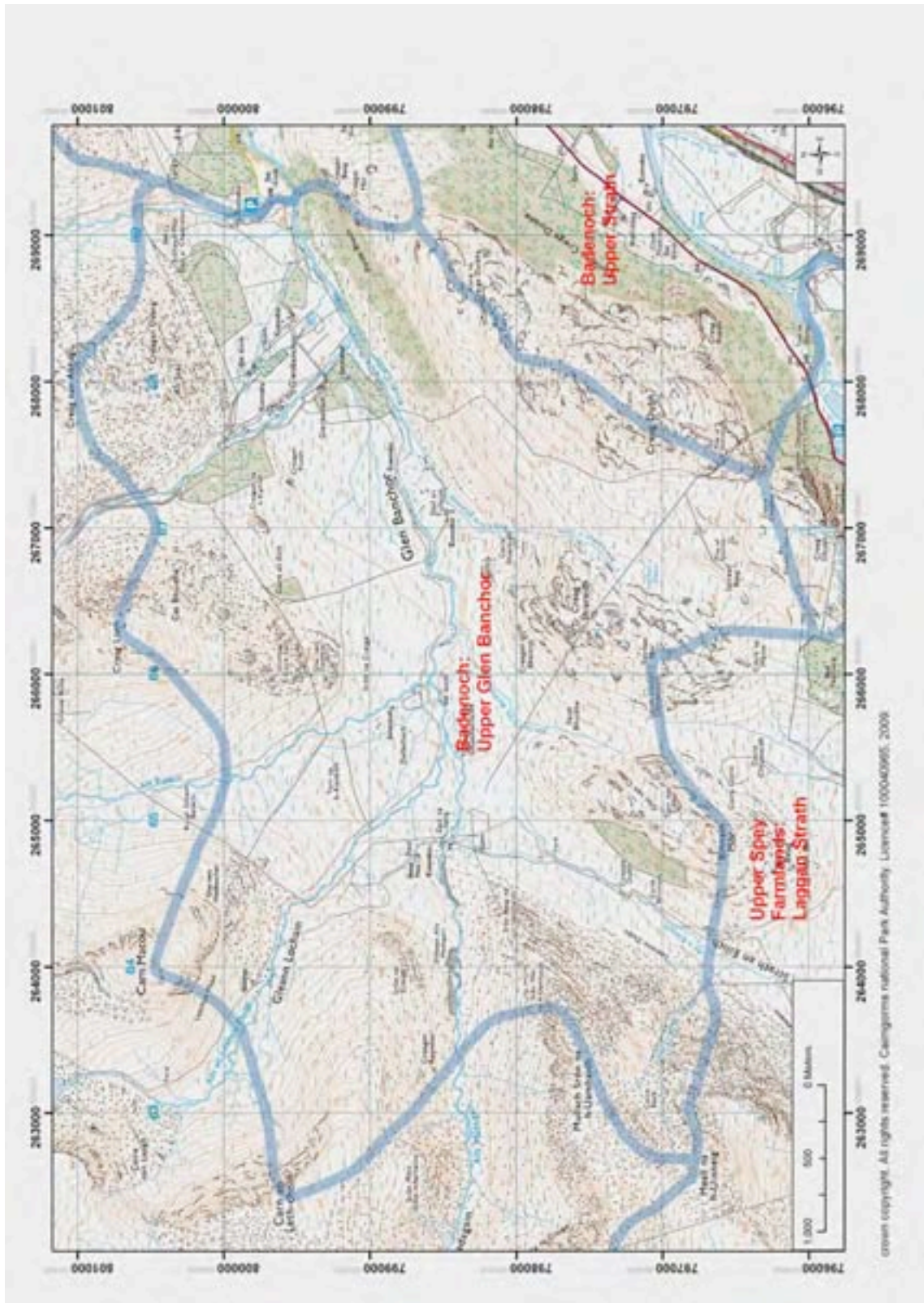


Streamlined rock ridge with crags at its northern end



Evidence of pre-improvement agriculture is very visible

3.2 Badenoch: Upper Glen Banchor



3.2.1 *Landscape Character*

- This surprisingly broad glen has a relatively level floor contained by steep hillsides
- The hillsides are strewn with shattered rocks and boulders left behind when glaciers melted and the support for the rockfaces was undermined
- The slopes rise to rugged, rocky summits of individual hills
- Several large well-drained glacial-fluvial terraces are located at the mouth of well defined side valleys, deeply cut between the hills
- A series of tributaries feed into the braided boulder bed of the River Calder which extends along the south side of the glen floor
- Most of the lowlying land is unimproved pasture on blanket peat, although a few fields of more improved grassland are located on the extensive alluvial fans and areas of well-drained gravelly, fluvial deposit
- There are a number of geometrically shaped conifer shelter woods around the fields and along the side slopes at the eastern end of the glen
- The north facing slopes are clothed with semi-natural broadleaved woodland which is regenerating across the hillside
- There is extensive evidence of past settlement, including prehistoric hut circles with associated field systems as well as pre-improvement townships, farmsteads, turf walled enclosures, a fort and, in side glens, associated seasonal shielings (with origins in medieval or earlier times), all closely related to the free-draining gravel and alluvial outwash of the tributaries of the River Calder
- The remaining settlement is sparse, with a few individual houses located where there was once more extensive settlement at Glenballoch and Glenbanchor
- The bulk of the glen is not accessible on public roads, although there is a network of tracks and footpaths
- The area is popular for local recreation, being relatively accessible from Newtonmore

3.2.2 *Landscape experience*

- The area is secluded and very self-contained, partly due to its 'hidden' location and the visual restriction created by the enclosing hills
- There is clear evidence of extensive past settlement which influences the perception of the landscape

3.2.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

The area is very self contained, although most likely to be accessed from the east through lower Glen Banchor, which forms a transition area between this 'hidden' glen and Strathspey.

3.2.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

This glen has a strong sense of seclusion, although there is clear evidence of extensive early settlement and land use on well-drained, gravelly land over a long timescale. The dramatic contrast between the level strath floor and the craggy surrounding hillsides also contributes to a distinctive sense of place.



The unusually broad, almost level, floor of this side valley, encircled by steeper slopes with conifer shelter woods in the foreground



Rivers cut into the flat valley floor

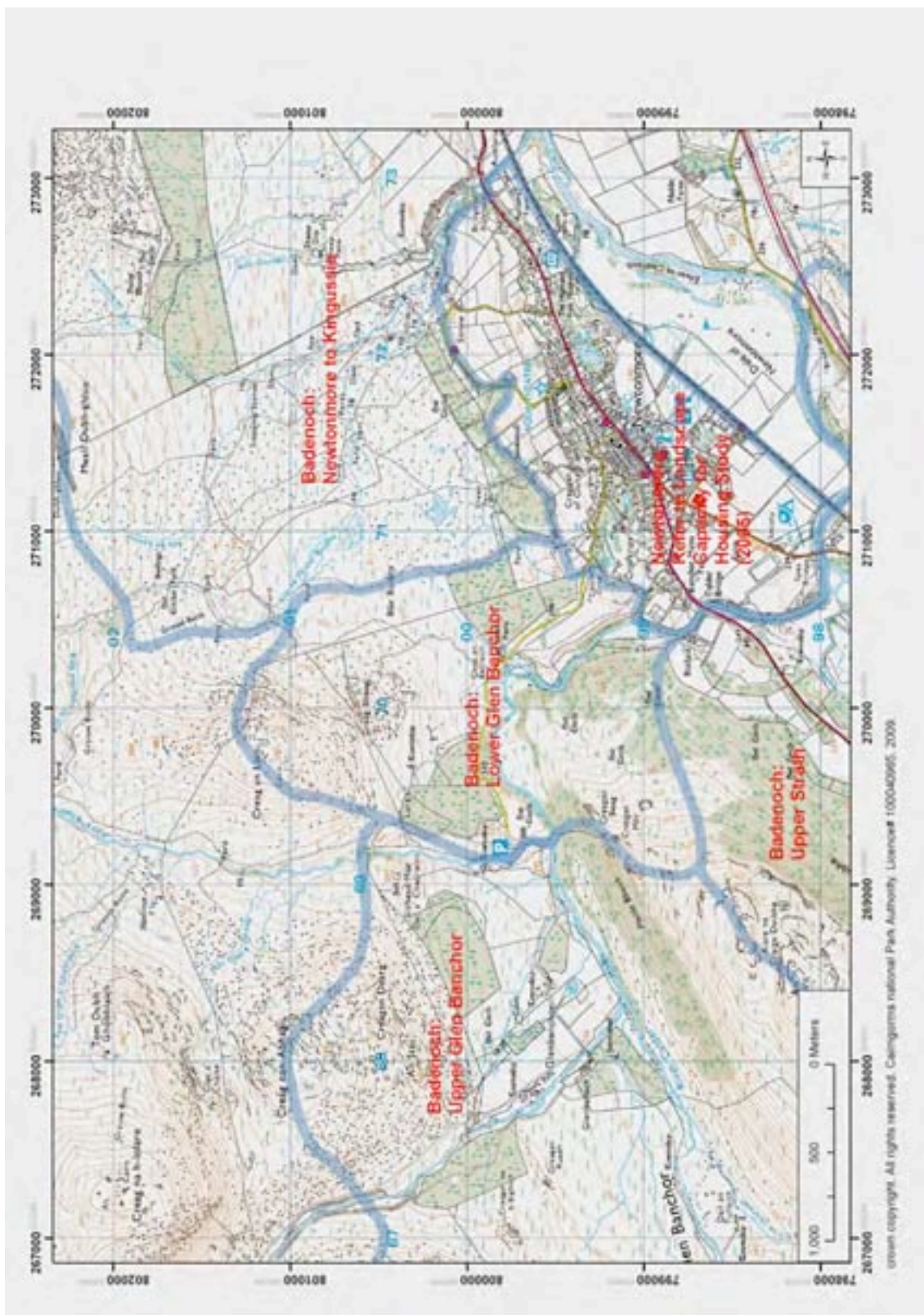


Extensive birch woodland across the north west facing slopes of Creag Dubh



Traces of past settlement and land use on the alluvial fan of one of the tributaries to the River Calder

3.3 Badenoch: Lower Glen Banchor



3.3.1 *Landscape Character*

- This area forms the ‘transition’ between Newtonmore and Strathspey and the more hidden glen of upper Glen Banchor
- Although comparatively low-lying, it is still significantly elevated above Strathspey
- The fast moving River Calder has cut through terraced, gravelly fluvial deposits to create a well defined and dramatic deep, steeply sided gorge, with several waterfalls
- The hillside of Creag an Loin is strewn with shattered rocks and boulders left behind when glaciers melted, but it rises from more hummocky terrain of gravelly deposits and moraine ridges which lies north-east of the gorge
- Two large areas of straight-edged conifer woodland are established on the lower slopes
- Birch dominated woodland along the River Calder is supplemented by recent planting along the steep slopes of the river valley
- More extensive birch woodland occupies the east facing slopes of Creag Dubh which reinforce the containment of the gorge of the River Calder
- The lower glen, although still elevated, is a relatively level terrace above the gorge
- Most of these lower slopes and level land is extensive but partially improved grassland, with some wood pasture, including occasional, prominent clumps of substantial birch trees
- There is extensive and visible evidence of past settlement across this grassland, including pre-improvement townships, numerous turf walls, enclosures and clearance cairns on the open, free draining ground
- There is no contemporary settlement
- The area is very popular for local recreation, being easily accessible from Newtonmore, and there are several benches placed along the glen to take advantage of views to the river

3.3.2 *Landscape experience*

- The area provides a pronounced transition or ‘threshold’ to the upper reaches of Glen Banchor
- The sound of the river pervades the space, especially when in spate
- There is clear evidence of extensive past settlement which influences the perception of the landscape

3.3.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

The area forms a transition area between the 'hidden' glen of Upper Glen Banchor and Strathspey. In addition, there are fine views across Strathspey to the Cairngorm massif from much of this area.

3.3.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The drama of the river, cutting its way through a steep sided small glen within this area and framed by semi-natural woodland, is a focal point and a scenic feature. The scattered woodland and wood pasture is a particular characteristic of this landscape, as are the numerous and easily visible remains of pre-improvement farms and associated enclosures.



The slopes of Creag and Loin rise up from hummocky, well drained glacial-fluvial deposits which support grassland



Woodland along the steep sided gorge of the River Calder which has cut through the gravelly deposit

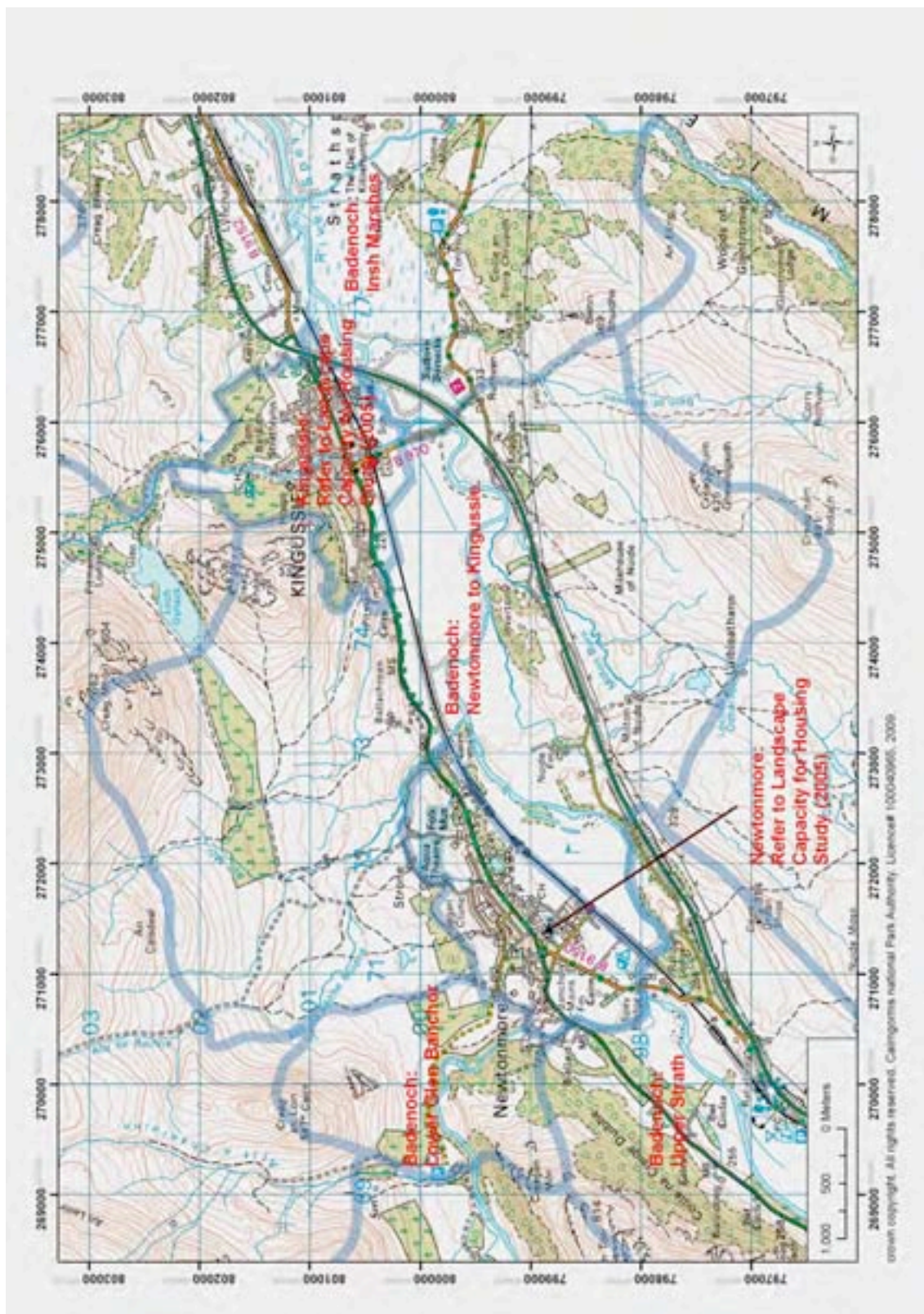


Clumps of mature birch trees – 'wood pasture' on the grassland



The remains of a circular enclosure – one of many traces of extensive past settlement and land use

3.4 Badenoch: Newtonmore to Kingussie



3.4.1 Landscape Character

- This wide strath, where the River Spey has worked the gravelly glacial-fluvial deposits into a relatively flat floodplain, is enclosed by gently graded side slopes leading to low hills which can be identified as individual rocky summits
- To the north, the flat plain is contained by well drained terraces which form a well-defined steep edge to the strath floor
- Along the southern edge of the strath there is an extensive area of complex, interlocking hummocks, terraces and ridges of glacial-fluvial deposit are interspersed with lochans and small flats of farmed land
- Shallow basins and gentle gradients along the upper side slopes and subtle side glens, such as the valley of the Milton Burn, which follows the line of the Ericht-Laidon fault, reinforce the sense of expansiveness
- The strath floor is partially drained and cultivated, with regularly shaped late 18th/19th century improved fields, and now used for improved grassland, fodder and arable crops
- There is a golf course south of Newtonmore, which occupies part of the floodplain
- There is some woodland on the side slopes, including a large area of conifer woodland near Loch Gynack, but scattered trees across the strath and along the river flats, and birch woodland on the more hummocky terrain are a more pronounced characteristic
- There are additional trees associated with field boundaries and riparian woodland, and occasional narrow conifer shelter woods cross the extensive hummocky terrain along the southern edge of the strath
- Settlement avoids the floodplain, and the two larger towns – Newtonmore and Kingussie – are clearly linked to the alluvial fans of large tributaries of the Spey
- Individual houses and farms are set on elevated terraces and tucked in between hummocks of gravelly deposit, especially on the southern side of the strath, with the ruins of pre-improvement farmsteads and field systems in evidence across elevated, south facing slopes
- The A9 strikes through, and is often hidden by, the hummocks and terraces of deposit on the south eastern side of the strath
- To the north of the River, the old road hugs the sinuous line of the break in slope, its slight elevation offering extensive views, while the railway sits on top of an embankment above the flood plain

3.4.2 *Landscape experience*

- The broad scale and expansiveness of this wide stretch of strath is reinforced by the relative openness maintained by the cultivated fields of the floodplain and the low surrounding topography
- The complex, intricate terrain of interlocking hummocks and terraces enclosing small areas of wetland, pools and farmed flats along the south eastern edge of the strath creates a small scale landscape which contrasts with the more expansive main valley floor. It is easily experienced from the A9.

3.4.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

The openness of the strath allows frequent views of the adjacent character areas, particularly the more mountainous hinterland of the Monadhliath and the Cairngorms.

3.4.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The small scale, complex terrain of hummocks, terraces, wetland and cultivated flats and its juxtaposition with the simple level floodplain of the River Spey is a key feature of the area.



The expanse of the grazed strath – the railway is elevated on and embankment



Hummocky terrain and terraces of glacial-fluvial deposit on the southern side of the strath

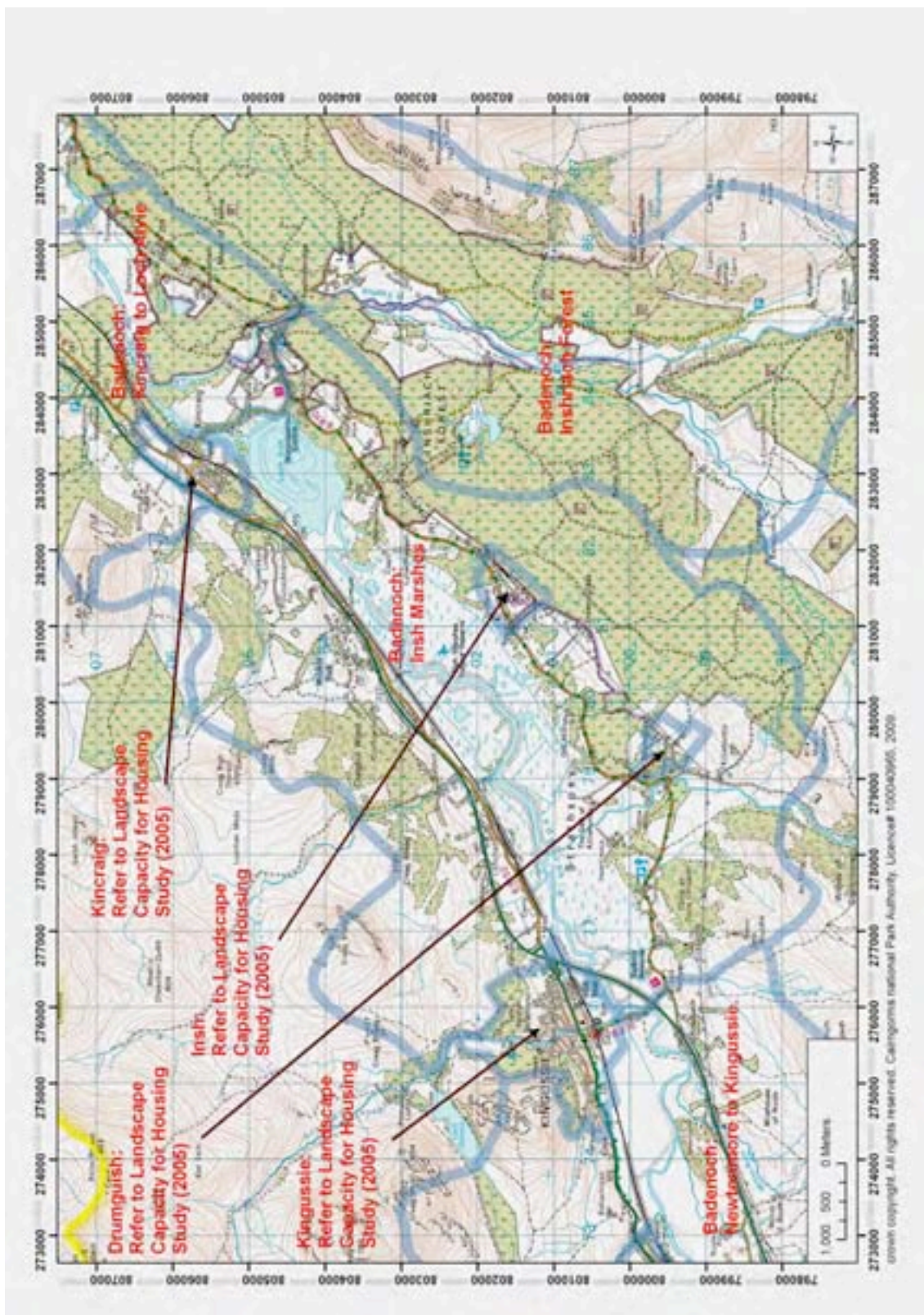


The A9 cuts through the hummocky terrain



The road between Kingussie and Newtonmore hugs the bottom of a well defined terrace

3.5 Badenoch: Insh Marshes



3.5.1 Landscape Character

- Extensive wetland, marsh and occasional pools reach across most of the floor of this wide stretch of strath, interrupted by occasional hummocks of gravelly deposit
- The floodplain is framed on both sides by wide terraces and elevated, sometimes complex and undulating slopes of well-drained glacial-fluvial deposits
- The north western side of the strath is then contained by low, rocky hills along the edge of the Monadhliath, while along the south eastern edge, the vast conifer woodland of Inshriach forest extends across low, undulating terrain
- More extensive, well drained deposits are supplemented by an extensive fan of gravelly outwash from the River Tromie at the mouth of Glen Tromie
- The River Spey meanders in generous loops across the strath floor, pools indicating the line of past meanders, to join with the calm expanse of Loch Insh to the north. The river seasonally floods to transform the strath into a vast shallow, temporary loch
- The floodplain is largely rough textured reeds and wetland vegetation, with occasional scrub
- There are large, better drained meadows on the gravelly outwash from the river Tromie at the Dell of Killiehuntly and Invertromie, within broadly straight edged, late 18th/19th century improved fields
- Extensive woodland, much of it semi-natural, occupies the immediate edges of the wetland, rising up onto the low terraces which enclose the strath floor and over the low rocky hills to the north and at the mouth of Glen Tromie
- Geometrically shaped, improved fields sit on top of the well drained terraces and frequently appear surrounded by broadleaved woodland
- Smaller fields, indicating a period of pre-improvement enclosure, cluster around the settlements of Balnеспick, Inveruglass and Drumguish to the south of the strath
- There are small holdings at Insh, although the former linear field pattern has largely disappeared
- Large lodges, at Balavil and Dunachton, and more prominent farms occupy the south facing slopes above the A9, where conifer shelter woods, occasional policies, roundels and specimen trees add to the diversity of the vegetation pattern
- Ruthven Barracks is a prominent landmark feature sitting on the remnants of a kame terrace at the south-western end of the marshes,

while Insh church, a small white kirk, possibly on the site of an earlier Christian chapel, is a focus on the shores of Loch Insh

- The roads clearly occupy land which is elevated above the flood-prone strath, and are often enclosed in woodland, while the railway sits, at least in large part, on top of an embankment across the floodplain
- The Insh marshes are a visitor attraction, as is the Highland Wildlife Park, which is largely hidden in woodland, and Ruthven Barracks

3.5.2 *Landscape experience*

- The extensive wetland, rushes, willow scrub and numerous pools create a large area of semi-natural appearance, emphasised during periods of flooding
- The dominance of natural forces is further reinforced by the flood prone river which introduces an unpredictable and dynamic element
- The experience of travelling along the roads, through a sequence of enclosed woodland and open farmland is particularly striking on the south side of the Spey
- Views of the marshes are surprisingly infrequent as they are surrounded by trees, through which there are only glimpse views. However, they are very visible from the train, which is elevated on embankments.

3.5.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

The marshes are an extensive semi-natural contrast to the managed strath floor elsewhere along the Spey.

3.5.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The naturalistic and dynamic, unpredictable character of the flood-prone marshes is a striking feature, which is reinforced by the extensive areas of semi-natural woodland.



Level, marshy land, subject to dramatic flooding but punctuated with occasional hummocks of well drained gravelly deposit



Extensive woodland, much of it semi-natural, along the hummocky terrain which frames the marshes



The meandering River Spey leads into Loch Insh, largely contained by trees



The Insh marshes in flood



Specimen trees and roundels on designed landscape at Balavil



Farmland on well drained, elevated land at the mouth of Glen Tromie

3.6 Badenoch: Inshriach Forest/Mouth of Glen Feshie



3.6.1 Landscape Character

- This elevated platform of land extends either side of the mouth of the River Feshie, forming the threshold to the inner Glen Feshie
- The undulating landform of this area rises to a low summit at Creag Dhubh and is strongly contained to the east by the sheer, scree slopes of Carn Ban Beag and Creag Mhigeachaidh. The hills to the west of the River Feshie are less high with gentler slopes gradually merging with lower moorland and forest
- There are well-drained glacial-fluvial deposits supplemented by extensive outwash from the River Feshie which forms large fans of gravelly deposit
- The River Feshie is renowned for its dynamism, evident in its braided form and banks of deposited gravel with no pioneer vegetation.
- This is an extensively forested area with largely commercially managed conifers
- There are mature pine on the steep western hill slopes of Carn Ban Beag and Creag Mhigeachaidh, with extensive natural regeneration of young native pine and broadleaves across the steep scree slopes
- Heather moorland extends beyond this area and across small low-lying flats adjacent to the River Feshie
- A sequence of spaces, with small fields of pasture contained by the forest, sits on terraces either side of the River Feshie and its tributary the Allt Fhearnasdail
- Small farms, on sites of earlier settlement, are associated with these pastures
- Uath Lochan, an interlocking cluster of peat-black pools surrounded by mixed pine, birch and tall Douglas Fir, forms a focus within Inshriach Forest. The shattered cliff face of Creag Far-Leitire, colonised by contorted Scots pine, birch and rowan, provides a backdrop to these pools and contributes to the rich diversity of this area
- A loose cluster of low dwellings and an outdoor education centre are situated at the northern end of the open land at the township of Lagganalia and Blackmill and are partially screened by the forest
- A larger area of grassland is used by a gliding school at Lagganlia
- Public roads extend either side of the Feshie, both ending at small settlements and, on the western side of the valley, the private road of the Feshie Estate continues up the glen
- The area is popular for walkers and cyclists with parking at Uath Lochan, which is a focus for recreation, and on the eastern side of the River Feshie, where access to a number of Munro peaks is possible

- The Spey Way traverses the area via Uath Lochan and the western bank of the Feshie

3.6.2 *Landscape experience*

- The constant rushing sound of the River Feshie, which increases when it is in spate, can extend well beyond its immediate setting
- The dynamic nature of this flood-prone river, which can often change its course, creates a sense of naturalness and unpredictability
- The sheer slopes of Carn Ban Beag and Creag Mhigeachaidh, patterned with scree and extensive native pine and broadleaves, are orientated to capture the evening light and are also highly visible from the A9 and Kingussie
- A strong sequence of spaces is experienced when travelling through the lower glen as open pasture around small farm buildings alternates with enclosed forest

3.6.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

While this character area is visible from and forms a forested backdrop to character areas along Strathspey, the gently undulating platform that the forest occupies is foreshortened in these views and its scale is not appreciated from afar. This area forms the threshold between Strathspey and the remote inner Glen Feshie and the Cairngorm mountains.

3.6.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The extensive woodland cover provides localised containment, although the sequence of spaces created by open farmland in the forest are valuable as a contrast to enclosed forested areas and allow views of the River Feshie. The River Feshie forms a focus due to its dynamic, unpredictable and powerful nature.



Scree slopes of Carn Ban Beag and Creag Mhigeachaidh, with an esker in foreground



Regenerating pine over moorland



Pasture, often associated with small farms, here a granite stone building, provides open spaces within this largely wooded area



Uath Lochan, a kettle hole lake which is a focal point within the forest

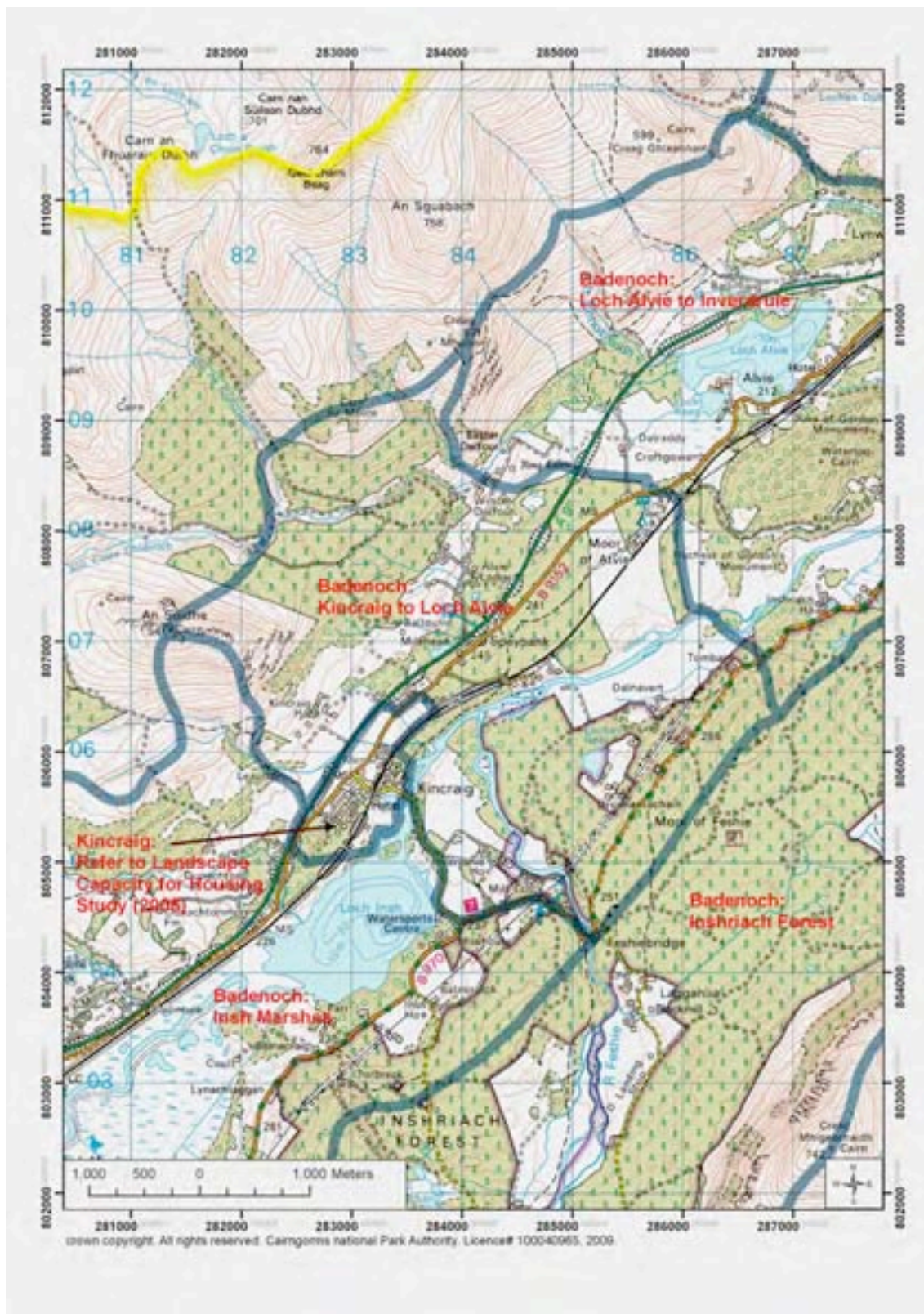


Open space along the River Feshie



Braided reaches of the River Feshie – riverbank vegetation is sparse as it is washed away by seasonal spates

3.7 Badenoch: Kinraig to Loch Alvie



3.7.1 *Landscape Character*

- This area is contained to the north west by hill slopes which have been steepened by the flow of ice along the strath to form the edge of the Monadhliath
- Containment to the south east is dominated by the densely wooded slopes of Inshriach Forest, which sit below the ice roughened crags of Creag Mhigeachaidh.
- Gravelly glacial-fluvial deposits underpin a series of well-drained ridges and terraces stepping up from the floodplain of the Spey.
- Extensive commercially managed pine forest planted either side of the river conceals the hummocky landform of dips and knolls.
- Farmland occupies a long, level terrace at the foot of the Monadhliath and on open land south of the Spey. The rectilinear, late 18/19th century improved fields are enclosed by fences, although dykes are a particular feature across farmland around Kinncraig House.
- Wetter un-grazed fields and areas of scrub fringe the meandering River Spey in places
- Roundel plantings and richly diverse woodlands of the Allt an Fhearna are evidence of a formerly more extensive designed landscape associated with Alvie Lodge, with further designed landscape at Invereshie House.
- A fragmented pattern of development is a feature of this character area. Gravel extraction, estate sawmill and fish farming activities are well-screened by terraces in a dip at the foot of the Monadhliath while a chalet park and quarry are located within the forested areas but more visible from elevated areas and transport routes.
- Estate farms and cottages are located at intervals possibly associated with former settlement and elevated above the farmland along the foot of the Monadhliath, buildings often set on localised hummocky terrain
- Two small linear settlements of mainly newer bungalows are located on terraces either side of the Spey floodplain at Speybank and Dalnavert.
- Communications are relatively close together within this character area. The A9, B9152 and railway pass through dense woodland on the north side of the Spey while the B970 takes a more circuitous route on the edge of Inshriach Forest.

3.7.2 *Landscape experience*

- Transport routes, and much of the development, are frequently enclosed by dense woodland and hummocky landform, which also limits views of the River Spey and floodplain farmed areas.

- The A9 emerges into open, grazed land at Kincaig, which contrasts with the generally enclosed experience from the road
- The Alvie Estate and the deeply cut valleys and craggy hill slopes of the foothills to the Monadhliath is more secluded.

3.7.3 Relationship to adjacent character areas

Extensive forestry restricts the visibility of adjacent character areas from low level viewpoints although views over Strathspey, Inshriach Forest and the western edge of the Cairngorms massif are possible from the slopes of the Monadhliath.

3.7.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

Dispersed development, including industrial and chalet development and several transport routes, can give this area a slightly cluttered character in some places, although it is not always highly visible. The presence of extensive commercial woodland extending onto the floor of Strathspey is an unusual feature. This hides the subtle undulations of the landform and inhibits views of the River Spey and its more open floodplain.



Elevated view from above Alvie Lodge illustrates the dense expanse of woodland in this area, and farms tucked along the better drained land at the foot of the Monadhliath



Development is often hidden by land form and trees

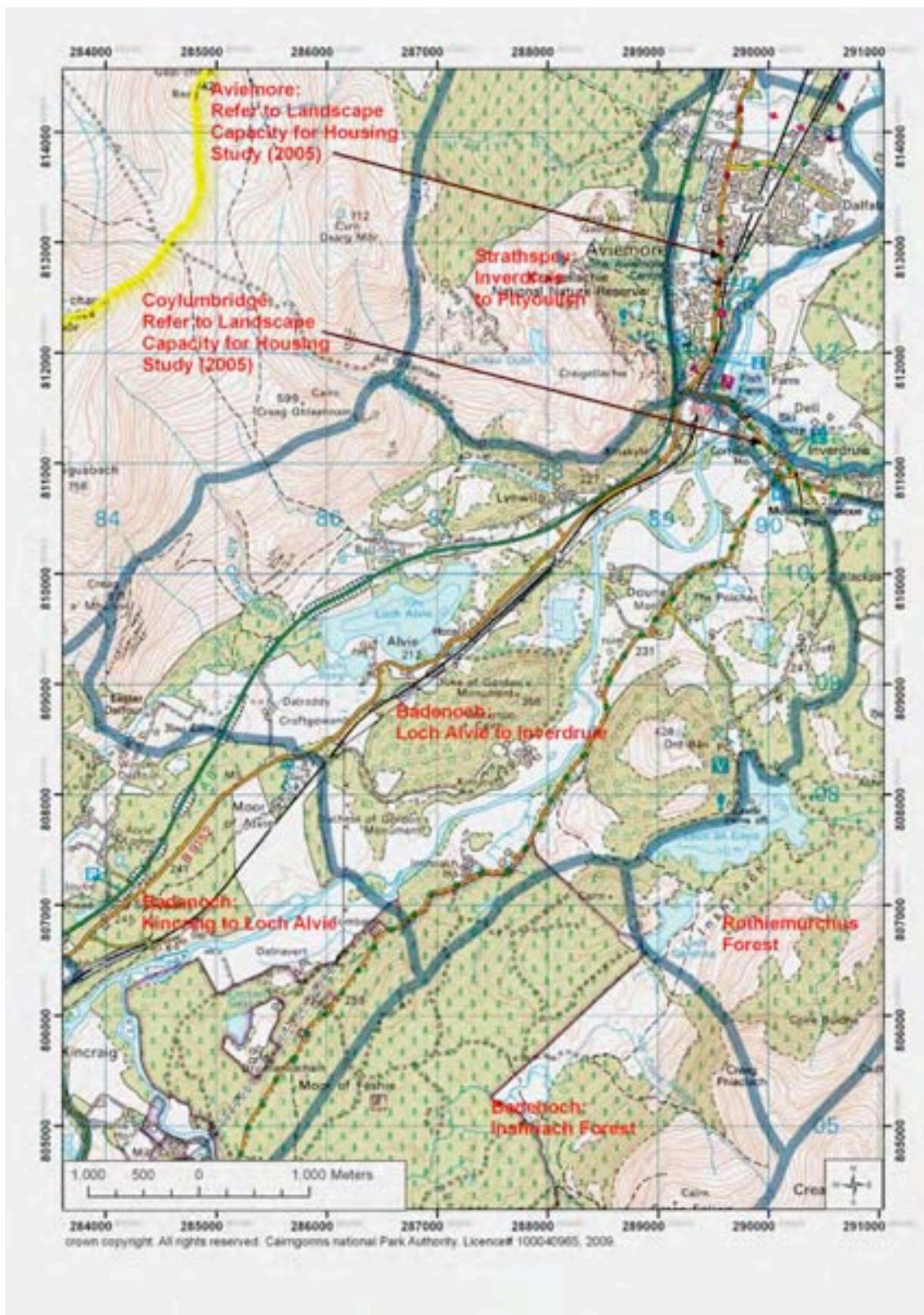


Farm located on hummocky terrain, surrounded by fields enclosed with walls on slopes near Kincaig house



The A9 emerges from woodland near Kincaig, but is largely enclosed in cuttings. Hummocky terrain is revealed across grazing land around Kincaig

3.8 Badenoch: Loch Alvie to Inverdrue



3.8.1 Landscape Character

- A series of steep sided, densely wooded, prominent outcrop hills which are large “roches moutonnées” of erosion resistant rock, including Ord Ban and Torr Alvie rise abruptly from the level strath of the River Spey, constricting the floodplain.
- Steep sided, irregularly shaped hills contain the area to the north-west, while to the south east, the undulating terrain of Inshriach and Rothiemurchus extend either side of the prominent Ord Ban
- There are several smaller lochans in addition to the larger Loch Alvie, set in rough, scrubby wetlands, probably lying above deep rock basins
- This character area has a richly diverse vegetation cover comprising naturalistic wetlands and extensive policy woods as well as juniper and birch scrub and extensive broadleaved and native pine woodland
- Straight edged, late 18th/19th century improved fields, surrounded by woodland, are sited on well-drained hummocky terrain at the edge of the strath floor
- Generous policy influenced planting is associated with the designed landscapes of Doune of Rothiemurchus, Kinrara and Inshriach. Beech woods cling to steep, curving banks above the flood plain of the Spey. Avenue trees of lime, oak and beech line the B970 and estate roads and ornamental conifers punctuate broadleaved woodlands at the foot of Torr Alvie.
- An area of parkland surrounds the late 16th – 19th century mansion house of Doune, an old clan chief centre, and its adjacent medieval motte which are located on a flat floodplain contained within a loop of the Spey.
- The designed landscape of Doune includes centuries of historic land use focussed round this ancient, fortified site and extends to the indented western shore of Loch an Eilean, where plantings of beech and chestnut mingle with extensive native pine.
- Mansion houses and estate buildings, gate lodges, Alvie church and other built features such as hill-top monuments and stone walls have a strong architectural integrity and add significantly to the visual diversity and cultural interest of this area
- Small settlements, of a handful of houses or a cluster of farm buildings, are located predominantly on the north side of the strath
- Where the deciduous woodland cover is patchy south of the Polchar the slight humps and bumps of small areas of prehistoric farmed landscapes can be seen, a feature that must have been common before agricultural improvements and afforestation

- The B970 is elevated on the south-eastern edge of the strath, edged by a low stone wall and skirting the sinuous floodplain of the Spey.
- The A9 is frequently in cuttings through this character area, and both it and the railway are often hidden in woodland
- Loch an Eilean is a focus for recreation and the Spey Way passes through this area. Tracks and paths are overgrown on Torr Alvie and access may be restricted around the designed landscapes of Doune of Rothiemurchus and Kinrara.

3.8.2 *Landscape experience*

- The steep-sided, densely wooded hills of Ord Ban and Torr Alvie create a very pronounced sense of enclosure within Strathspey which is accentuated by the dense woodland cover of this character area
- The occasional openness of the grazed land and fields offers a contrast to the dominant enclosure created by woodland throughout this area
- A strong sense of seclusion can be experienced within the core parts of this character area, particularly within the Spey floodplain which is not readily visible from public roads
- The wetlands tucked at the foot of the outcrop hills and fringing the Spey and the extensive mixed woodlands covering Torr Alvie and Ord Ban have a natural appearance, contrasting with the more formal designed elements of the landscape
- While open views from the B970 are rare, glimpses of the meandering Spey and the intricate pattern of wetlands and pastures on the floodplain backed by the wooded Torr Alvie are highly scenic in their contrast of form, texture and colour
- The B9152 offers more open views of Torr Alvie and Loch Alvie than the A9 which is frequently in cutting. Views of the pronounced hills rising suddenly above the farmed strath are quite dramatic when they are suddenly revealed on the rare, open stretches of road.
- There is much visual and cultural interest in the rich policy woodlands, designed landscapes and historic buildings

3.8.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is largely self-contained, although this intimate, enclosed landscape contrasts with the huge scale and rugged mountainous core of the Park, and the relative openness of wide floodplains elsewhere along the Spey.

3.8.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The abrupt steepness of Ord Ban and Torr Alvie, rising from the floor of the strath is a striking feature. The pattern of these small hills, the meandering River Spey and the indented Loch Alvie contribute to the intimate scale of the area. The broadleaved woodlands, wetlands, parkland and avenues as well as the built estate features further contribute to the rich scenic diversity.



The outcrop hill of Torr Alvie to the right, with the Duke of Gordon's monument on top



There are wetlands, as well as small lochans, across the strath floor



Characteristic occasional glimpse views of the strath floor



Loch Alvie, a feature and a focal point for dispersed settlement

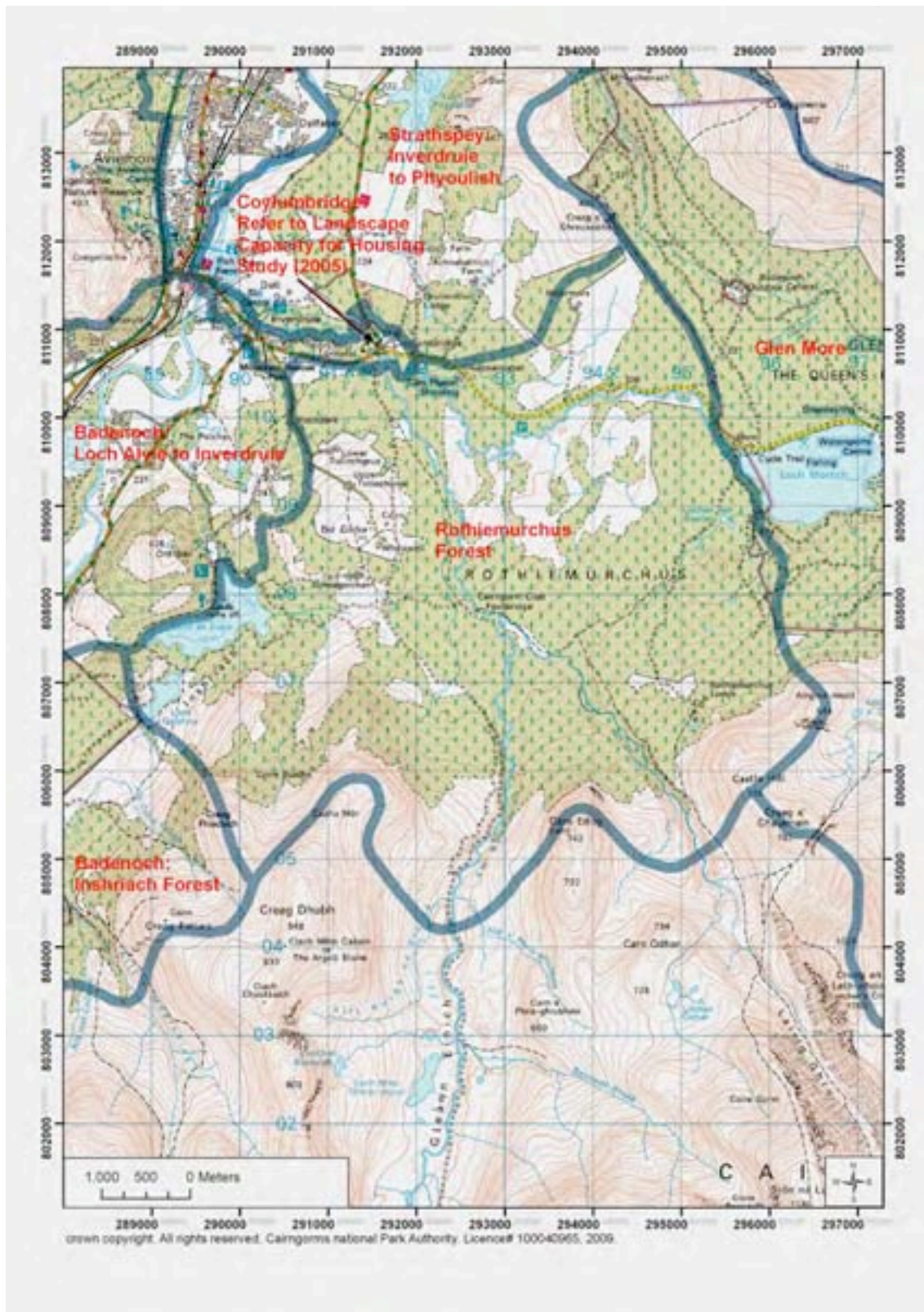


Open, grazed fields permit views to the outcrop hills



The A9 is frequently in cutting, limiting views out

3.9 Rothiemurchus Forest



3.9.1 *Landscape character*

- This landscape is raised above Strathspey, lying in the lower part of a bowl-shaped landform which continues east with the Glen More character area, at the foot of the Cairngorm massif, contained by granite-rich hills to the south
- The floor of the basin shows a lot of landform detail. The last ice movement was from South West and North East, leaving behind a series of long, sinuous esker ridges of deposit, interspersed with winding melt water channels
- Large areas of planted and regenerating native Scots pine, of varied age and density, extend over this area, colonising up the steep slopes of the surrounding hills, and into adjacent glens along the southern edge
- Heather moorland, often speckled with young regenerating birch and pine, occupies the numerous more open spaces within the woodland
- Loch an Eilean, with its 15th to 17th century island castle, forms a picturesque focus on the western edge of this character area, its deeply indented shoreline fringed by diverse native pine woodland with an under-storey of birch, rowan, heather and juniper
- There are occasional stands or individual 'specimen' trees of mature pine
- An open area of pasture is located on the low, rounded hill of Tullochgrue within the heart of the Forest. Straight edged, late 18th/19th century improved fields, and dispersed clusters of farm buildings occupy this land which also has evidence of prehistoric farming, suggesting continuity of land-use across at least three millenia.
- Hidden in the forest by the Allt Druidh is a pre-improvement summer shieling area, indicative perhaps, of more unrecorded shielings along watercourses elsewhere in the forest
- The area is well used by walkers and cyclists. A network of tracks and paths through Rothiemurchus Forest link to the dramatic passes of Gleann Einich and the Lairig Ghru which penetrate deep into the Cairngorm massif
- The 'ski road' undulates across the ridges of glacial-fluvial deposit

3.9.2 *Landscape experience*

- The western expanse of the Rothiemurchus Forest has a pronounced natural character emanating from its extensive and diverse native woodland of varying ages and density as well as the moorland
- The eastern part of the forest has a more commercial forest character, in part due to stands of more even-aged woodland
- The Cairngorms massif, and its associated deeply cut passes and glens, is striking in its huge scale and bold form and can be appreciated from the many open areas within the Forest, for example on the road to Whitewell
- The area is very popular for recreation and while this reduces the sense of seclusion experienced, the forest and the varied terrain has the ability to absorb the many people who visit
- A feeling of timelessness can be experienced within the long-settled parts of the forest, for example in the Tullochgrue area. This is complemented by the long history of forest management.
- The mature native pinewood-fringed Loch an Eilean is highly picturesque and displays a typical 'Highland' scene to the many visitors who walk in this easily accessible area. It has a 'romantic' character enhanced by the ruined castle set on an island and the mountainous backdrop to views.

3.9.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

The enclosure of woodland cover generally limits visibility to adjacent character areas, but when views of Strathspey, the Glen More area and the mountains are revealed from the open elevated areas, these can be dramatic as well as defining wider containment.

3.9.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The diverse mosaic of naturalistic native pine woodland interspersed with open heather moorland, juniper scrub and pockets of long-established farmland are the key distinctive features of this landscape, especially to the west. Where the forest is open, there are striking views of the dramatic northern face of the Cairngorms and the Lairig Ghru.



The long, sinuous esker ridges can be seen under the woodland across the floor of the bowl



From clearings within the forest, there are views of the Cairngorms massif and the major glens



Small fields of pasture at Tullochgrue, and views across Strathspey



Pine woodland and heather understorey

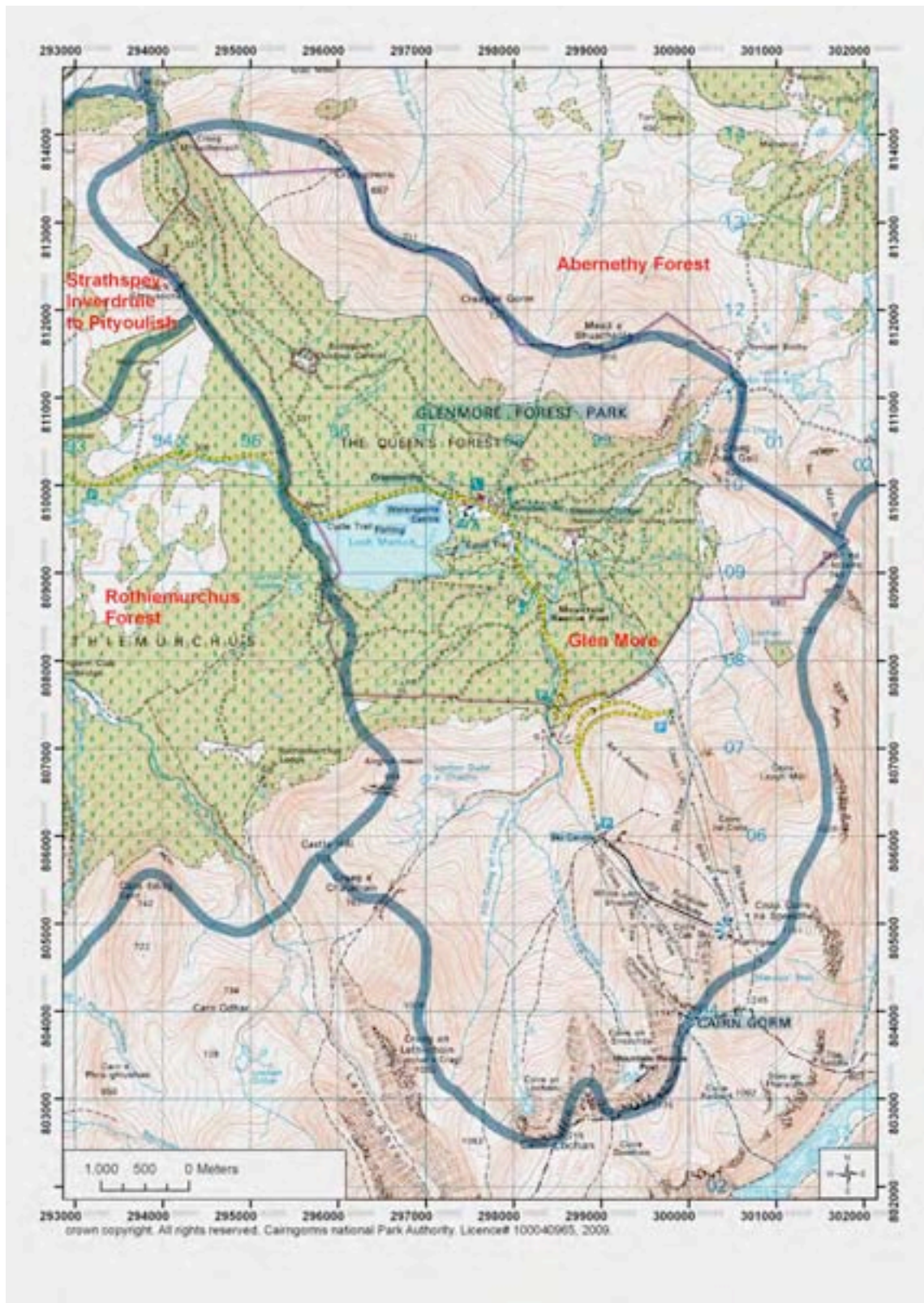


View to the deeply cut valley form of Lairig Ghru



Buildings at Tullochgrue

3.10 Glen More



3.10.1 *Landscape character*

- This is the upper part of a bowl-shaped landform, extending east from the Rothiemurchus character area, contained by the arc of the high granite “pluton” of the Cairngorms massif to the south and the Kincardine Hills to the north-east.
- On the slopes that rise around Glenmore there are some very large moraines and melt water channels, which are often hidden in the woodland, but where they appear above the forest, for example at Ryvoan, they appear as dramatic, large steps on the hillside.
- When exposed by rivers or manmade excavations, the gravelly deposits are revealed.
- The huge scale and bold form of amphitheatre-like corries, deeply cut valleys and ridges of the bulk Cairngorms create a dramatic skyline
- Glenmore Forest covers much of the gently dished lower ground of this character area. It is predominantly composed of pine and is largely commercially managed.
- Larger ‘specimen’ native pine fringe Loch Morlich and young native pine regeneration is evident on the upper slopes of the Kincardine Hills, increasingly creating a more naturalistic, fragmented upper margin to the forest.
- Occasional mature ‘granny’ pine can be found as small stands or individual trees within the forest
- Loch Morlich forms a focus within the forest, its simple, rounded form, sandy beach and light-reflective surface standing out amidst the extensive dark green coniferous cover.
- This character area is sparsely settled, with a single focus of settlement at Glenmore, where development is often related to recreational use of the forest and surrounding mountains
- Summer shielings can be found on the east slopes of Airgiod-meall ridge. There are likely to be others hidden in the forest, along the main rivers and burns
- Loch Morlich is a focus for recreation with a large camp site and water sports facility abutting the sandy beach on its eastern shore. Glenmore Forest accommodates a network of well-used tracks and footpaths popular with cyclists and walkers. A plethora of signs marks a range of other recreational and commercial facilities accessed from the public road to the Cairn Gorm ski centre, which passes through the forest.
- The ‘ski road’ climbs upwards from Loch Morlich on the steep lower slopes of Cairn Gorm in a series of looping, switch-back bends which

offer glimpse views of gravel banks where the river is eroding old glacial deposits

- A large car park is sited at the foot of the funicular railway and the ski slopes which are marked by snow fences, metal gantries and ski lifts. It offers expansive views across the basin of Glenmore Forest and Strathspey.

3.10.2 *Landscape experience*

- Glenmore Forest, Loch Morlich and the Cairngorm mountains are a focus for recreation and as such it is difficult to experience a strong sense of seclusion within this character area, particularly in the more popular areas, and with skiing infrastructure extending onto the mountain slopes
- While the presence of the ski road, which provides access high up onto the slopes of the northern Cairngorm Massif, reduces the degree of remoteness experienced it does allow spectacular views into the deep valleys and corries of the mountains and enables an accessible appreciation of their huge scale and dramatic form
- The northern corries offer an accessible but alpine experience of corrie, lochan and crag, dominated by the dramatic vertical scale of the corrie faces
- Adverse weather conditions at any time of the year can emphasise the scale and elemental qualities of the mountains, even from the exposed car park at the head of the ski road
- The Cairngorm massif, its skyline, corries and major glens, forms a dramatic backdrop seen from Loch Morlich and from footpaths within the Kincardine Hills

3.10.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This landscape is strongly contained by woodland and views of adjacent character areas are only possible from the open upper slopes of the Cairngorms and the Kincardine Hills. This landscape forms a transition between the more managed and settled Aviemore/Strathspey area and the mountainous core of the National Park.

3.10.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

There is a strong sense of being surrounded by the massive bulk of the Cairngorm mountains in this area, and the sense of enclosure is reinforced by the woodland. While the dramatic landform of the north face of the Cairngorms looms dramatically into views, often quite suddenly, Loch Morlich also forms a visual focus within the dense cover of darker woodland.



The 'bowl' of the Glen More area, as seen from the ski lift car park



Loch Morlich and the Cairngorm massif, with high summits and rounded profile of glens and corries



Recent felling of woodland creates a fragmented upper edge above which are the stepped moraines of Ryvoan



Signage along the road to the ski lifts at Glenmore

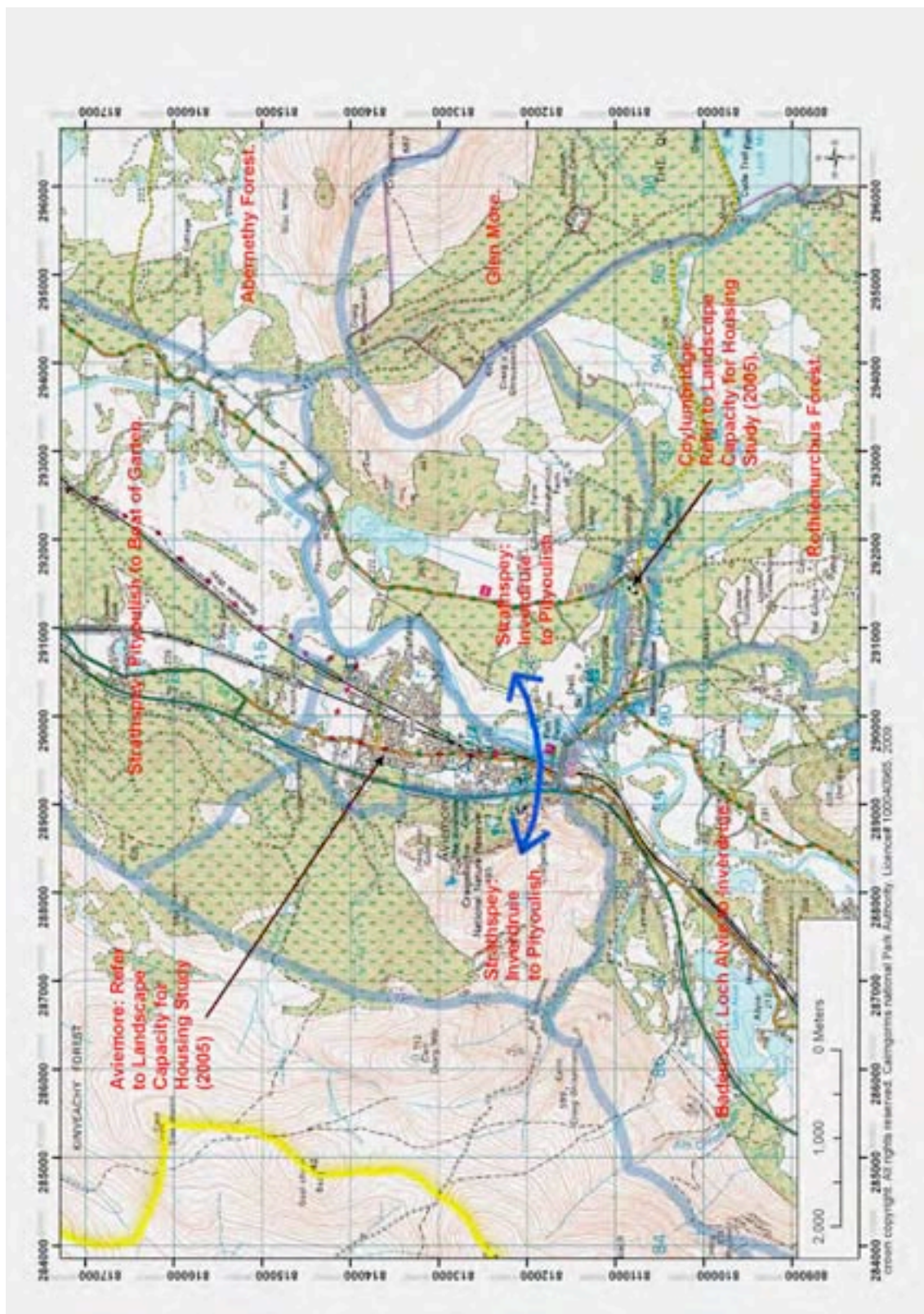


Woodland across corrugated landform of long ridges, moraines and melt water channels



Upper forest margin of regenerated pine in the foreground, with planted upper margin in the background

3.11 Strathspey: Inverdrue to Pityoulish



3.11.1 Landscape character

- This character extends across Strathspey and includes the setting of Aviemore. It is contained by the steep, craggy wooded slopes of Craigellachie, an ice-roughened schist ridge, to the west and Pityoulish Hill to the east, both of which have proved resistant to erosion
- The Spey forms wide meanders across the slightly undulating floor of the strath. Well-drained, glacial-fluvial terraces extend along either side of the strath floor
- Extensive low and fertile flats, associated with the Spey at the Dell, and extending south from Loch Pityoulish, are contained by steep-sided river terraces and hummocky terrain of glacial-fluvial deposit
- Between these, there is a raised, undulating gravelly terrace occupied by moorland and pine woodland at An Camus Mor
- Regularly shaped, straight edged, late 18th/19th century improved fields are located on the flat splay of alluvial deposit at the confluence of the Spey and the Druie, along the elevated terrain below Pityoulish and on the terraces and slopes east of the B970
- Conifer woodland extends over much of the undulating floor of the strath and the hill slopes north of Craigellachie, partially fragmented by heather moorland
- Hummocky deposits north of Aviemore, some close to the edge of the settlement, are covered with birch woodland which contrasts with more open level grazing land
- Loch Pityoulish nestles at the foot of steep slopes, its deeply indented form fringed by policy woodland and wetlands. Purple beech and oak woodlands together with occasional groupings of ornamental conifers occur around the well-screened estate buildings. The pronounced knoll of Callart Hill further contains the Loch.
- Aviemore is located on a terrace west of the Spey, and has been extended to the north and onto low terraces near to the river
- More recent development has extended under the A9 onto the lower slopes of Craigellachie
- Clusters of linear settlement and commercial development, set within woodland, sit along much of the length of the B970 between Aviemore and Coylumbridge.
- The elevated A9 is largely hidden within cuttings and woodland, and uses a slot-like glacial valley to pass through the ridge of Craigellachie
- The narrow B970, east of the Spey, travels through a sequence of enclosed woodland and open space of moor and farmland.

- Although few formal footpaths and recreational facilities are evident in the eastern part of this area, Craigellachie National Nature Reserve and the River Spey are important recreational resources easily accessible from Aviemore.

3.11.2 *Landscape experience*

- The eastern part of this character area appears 'tucked away' and relatively quiet, contrasting with the bustle of nearby Aviemore which is largely screened from the B970 by the raised landform of An Camus Mor and woodland, and is separated by the river.
- A 'pinch point', where the River Spey comes close to Pityoulish Hill, is further reinforced by Loch Pityoulish and policy woodland which marks the threshold into this landscape in the north at Pityoulish estate
- The twisting, narrow B970 accentuates the intimate scale and scenic qualities experienced in this area
- The B970 offers striking long views towards the Cairngorms massif
- There are limited views of the mountains from the A9 in this area, but Craigellachie looms into view when travelling south
- On arrival to Aviemore from the north, there is a fine view of the massif which is partially obscured by trees and recent development

3.11.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This character area is fairly contained with only brief glimpses of the northern face of the Cairngorm massif.

3.11.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

This landscape combines the bustle, activity and infrastructure of Aviemore and satellite settlements on the ‘ski road’, with a quiet and less developed landscape to the east of the Spey. The mix of extensive woodlands, moorland, policy features and farmland, set against the dramatic local features of Craigellachie, Callart Hill, Loch Pityoulish and the Spey and combined with occasional views of the Cairngorms massif, form a fine setting to these developments.



The raised, slightly undulating terrace with woodland of diverse age structure at An Camus Mor hides Aviemore in views from the B970



Steep sided Callart Hill on the left, with a low lying, level plain of farmland framed by river terrace in the foreground, leading to Loch Pityoulish



A low lying fertile flat of farmed land, with hummocky terrain in the background



Loch Pityoulish framed by trees and hills

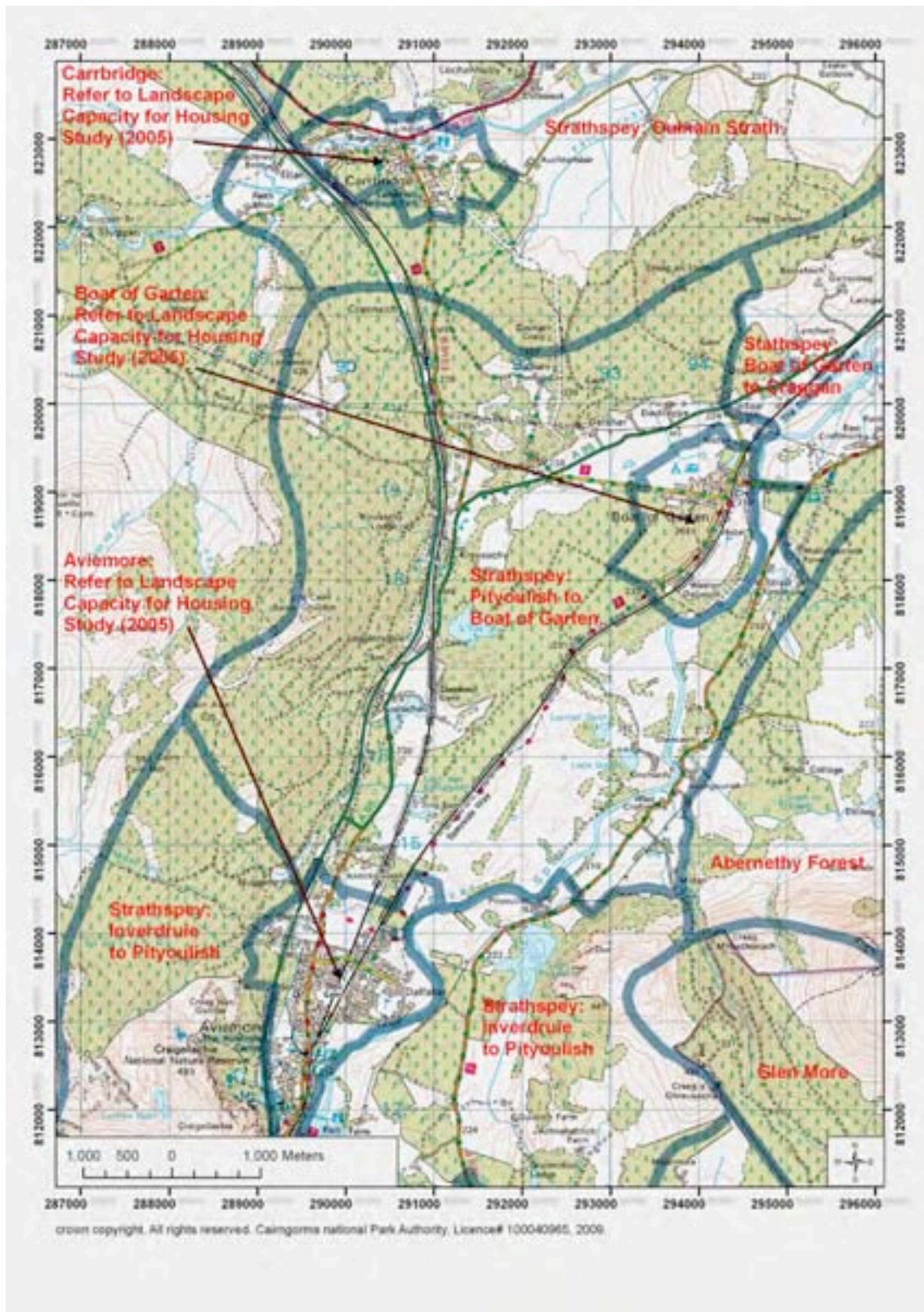


The A9, within cuttings and further enclosed with woodland, and Craigellachie looming into view



Northern edge of Aviemore, with birch on hummocky deposits

3.12 Strathspey: Pityoulish to Boat of Garten



3.12.1 *Landscape character*

- This area of undulating terrain is contained by steep wooded slopes to the west and north and gentle slopes adjacent to the basin-like landform of Abernethy Forest to the east
- The Spey meanders through a fairly narrow floodplain between expansive areas of hummocky, undulating terrain of glacial terraces, moraine ridges and kettle holes which extend over the wide strath floor where Strathspey converges with the shallow glen which heads towards The Slochd
- An extensive area of commercially managed pine woodland occupies much of the strath floor between two railway lines
- Low lying, raised moorland lies on similarly undulating terrain to the west of the Spey. Although this is largely covered with heather, regeneration of young pine and birch is evident.
- Occasional lochs and smaller lochans can be found within the woodland and this moorland, as well as in the more open farmland
- Birch colonises ground sloping down to the Spey around the edge of the moorland and extends onto the golf course south of Boat of Garten
- Extensive conifer woodland, often fringed with birch, covers the upper terraces and hill slopes containing this area to the west and north, hiding a series of burial cairns on what is likely to have been the northern skyline
- Straight edged, 18th/19th century improved fields, most of which are grazed, are located on the narrow floodplain of the river or on well-drained elevated terraces along the B970, where farms probably reflect a pre-improvement settlement pattern
- The farmed land on the western side of the strath combines later prehistoric and pre-improvement field systems with later improved, but small, fields
- There is a line of farmsteads set back against the break in slope immediately north of the A95, while an evenly dispersed pattern of small farms and houses set in woodland is strung along the B970
- Other buildings are often clustered in small groups and are generally sited on elevated ground, for example around Avie Lochan or at Street of Kincardine. Settlements are frequently in very wooded settings, merging with the adjacent woodlands

- The junction of Strathspey and the road north to the Slochd is overlooked by a prehistoric fort (Tor Beag) near Avielochan to the west, which is now hidden in forestry
- This junction means that this section of the strath is a focal point for transport links and in addition to the A9, the A95, minor roads and two railway lines extend through the length of this area
- The A9 is frequently hidden in cuttings and woodland
- The southern part of the Speyside Way crosses the low-lying, undulating moorland west of the river and the openness allows panoramic views of the dramatic northern face of the Cairngorm massif
- This area is popular with walkers and cyclists and the seasonal operation of the steam train provides a further recreation focus

3.12.2 *Landscape experience*

- When travelling on the B970 and the A9, the dense enclosed woodland alternates with areas of open farmed land
- The slightly raised, undulating moorland and birch woodland at the core of this area has a semi-natural character
- The heather moorland at the core of this area, close to the Spey, and the woodland across the strath floor, is an unusual feature, contrasting with the predominantly farmed land close to the river
- The open character of the undulating moorland allows striking views to the Cairngorms massif
- The settlements and fields within this extensively wooded area often have a feeling of being carved out of the forest

3.12.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

While views of the Cairngorms massif are possible from the open moorland at the core of this character area, the dense woodland restricts visibility of other character areas.

3.12.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The extensive woodland stretches into the floor of the strath, but the openness of the adjacent heather moorland allows people crossing the moor to view the Cairngorm massif. The distinct patterns of settlement, including regularly spaced farms and buildings and villages set within woodland are a particular feature, as is the strong sequential pattern of travelling through enclosed woodland alternating with open grazed fields.



A gravel terrace, with open moorland of heather in the valley floor offering fine views to the surrounding hills



Pastures located on well drained undulating terrain at the edges of the strath, with extensive woodland across the strath behind. There is a wet floored kettle hole in the foreground



Settlement at Avielochan (the loch is hidden behind the trees), tucked into hummocky deposits overlooking the loch



Other settlement is often located within a wooded setting

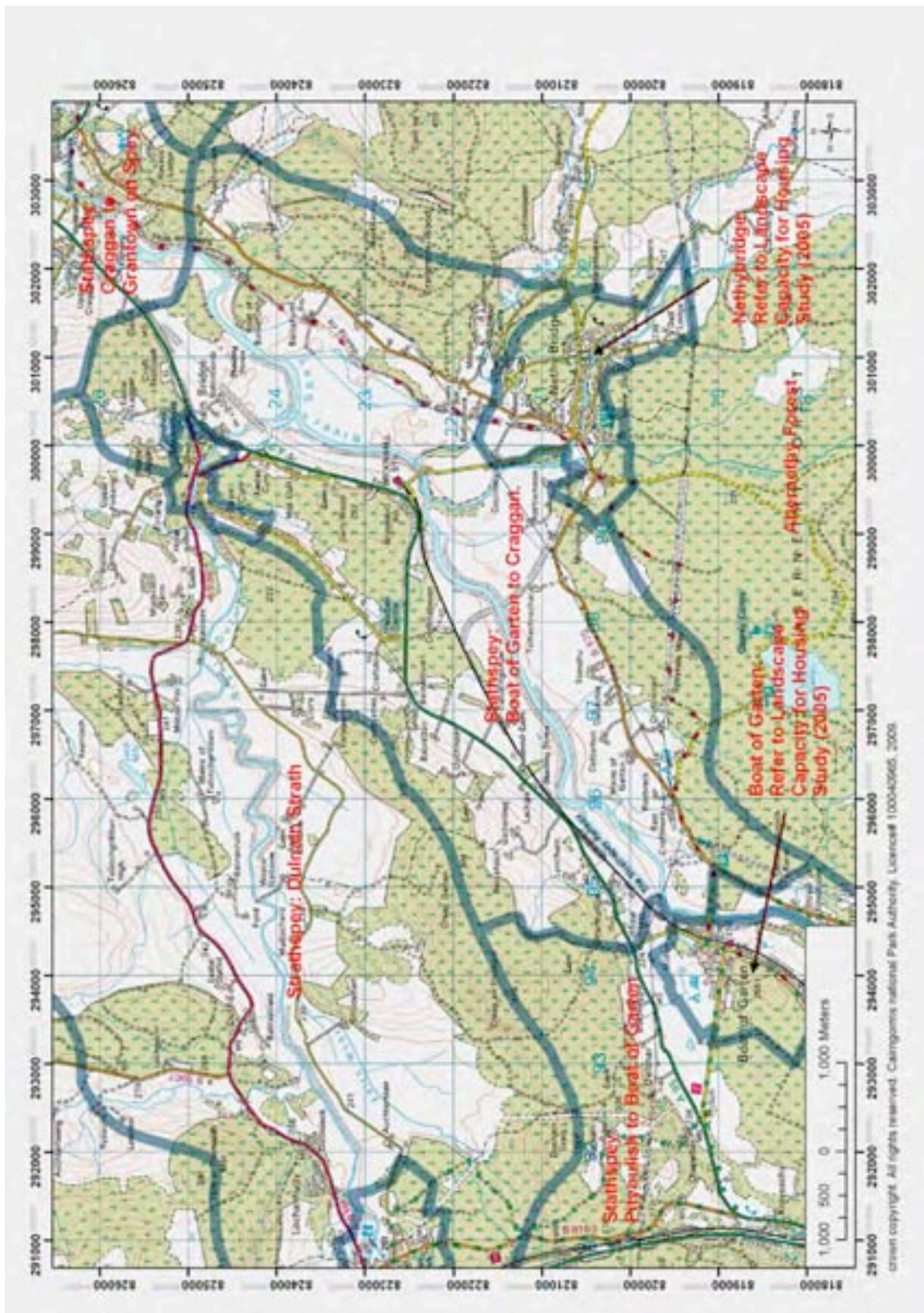


The narrow B970 winds through the woodland



B970 crossing open farm land alternating with woodland

3.13 Strathspey: **Boat of Garten to Craggan**



3.13.1 *Landscape character*

- This broad, open strath with its extensive floodplain, low terraces and shallow sloped sides is loosely contained by low wooded ridges to the north and south
- Terraced and occasionally rolling landform of glacial-fluvial deposit is evident on the edge of the floodplain, and distinct outcrops of gravelly deposit stand above the floodplain. These are occasionally quarried
- The wide River Spey forms a key focus within the open, farmed strath floor, its gently meandering alignment accentuated by flood embankments along much of its route
- Commercially managed pine woodlands cover the gently rounded hills containing this area to the north-west while the extensive Abernethy Forest lies to the south-east in a less visible gently sloping basin.
- Occasional small conifer shelter woods and ribbons of broadleaves are located on the strath floor
- Some riparian woodland fringes the Spey, especially at the south-western end of this area, where it coalesces to give the appearance of a well-wooded landscape in places
- Large, regularly shaped late 18th/19th century improved fields of drained and fenced pasture and some arable land, as well as areas of haugh and wetland, occupy the floodplain and low terraces.
- The field size tends to decrease on the more elevated side slopes and well drained terraces at the edge of the strath
- Grazing land extends up onto the lower north-western hill slopes, above the A95, where fields are occasionally enclosed by stone dykes
- Although there are a number of prehistoric standing stones and burial cairns on the floodplain, settlement consistently avoids this area
- Dispersed individual farms and dwellings are sited on knolls and terraces, clearly set above the floodplain at the very edge of the strath
- North of the A95, individual farms and houses are dispersed, located on subtle individual hummocks and ridges across the elevated slopes
- Smallholdings at Skye of Curr, partially in-filled with housing to create a linear settlement, lie along the length of the minor road south from Dulnain Bridge, the fields contained by conifer woodland
- The A95 is elevated above the strath, its long straights alternating with sweeping curves through forest and overlooking the strath floor
- In contrast, the B970 winds its way along the very edge of the strath floor, raised on the terraces and linking access roads to the many houses and farms located on this free draining terrain

- An electricity transmission line and associated sub-station are located on the south-eastern edge of the strath. The Cairngorms Steam Railway line is located above the Spey, often on embankments.

3.13.2 *Landscape experience*

- The farmed landscape and occasional wetland maintains openness across the floodplain, which allows views across this landscape and to the dramatic backdrop of the Cairngorms massif.
- Side light along the strath picks out the clusters of hummocky deposits
- Panoramic views are a particular experience from the elevated A95

3.13.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is largely self-contained although the Cairngorm massif forms a backdrop to views from the A95. The extensive farmland and open views across the floodplain of the strath contrast with some of the more enclosed landscape character areas experienced within the wider Strathspey area.

3.13.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The extent of fields and enclosures form a regular pattern across the whole breadth of the floodplain. This pattern is further emphasised by the lack of settlement or major infrastructure across the floodplain. The dimpled hummocks of gravelly deposit are a particular feature, visible across the open strath.



The wide expanse of farmed strath. With long, low wooded ridges providing some containment



Distinct dimpled hummocks of gravelly deposit above the floodplain

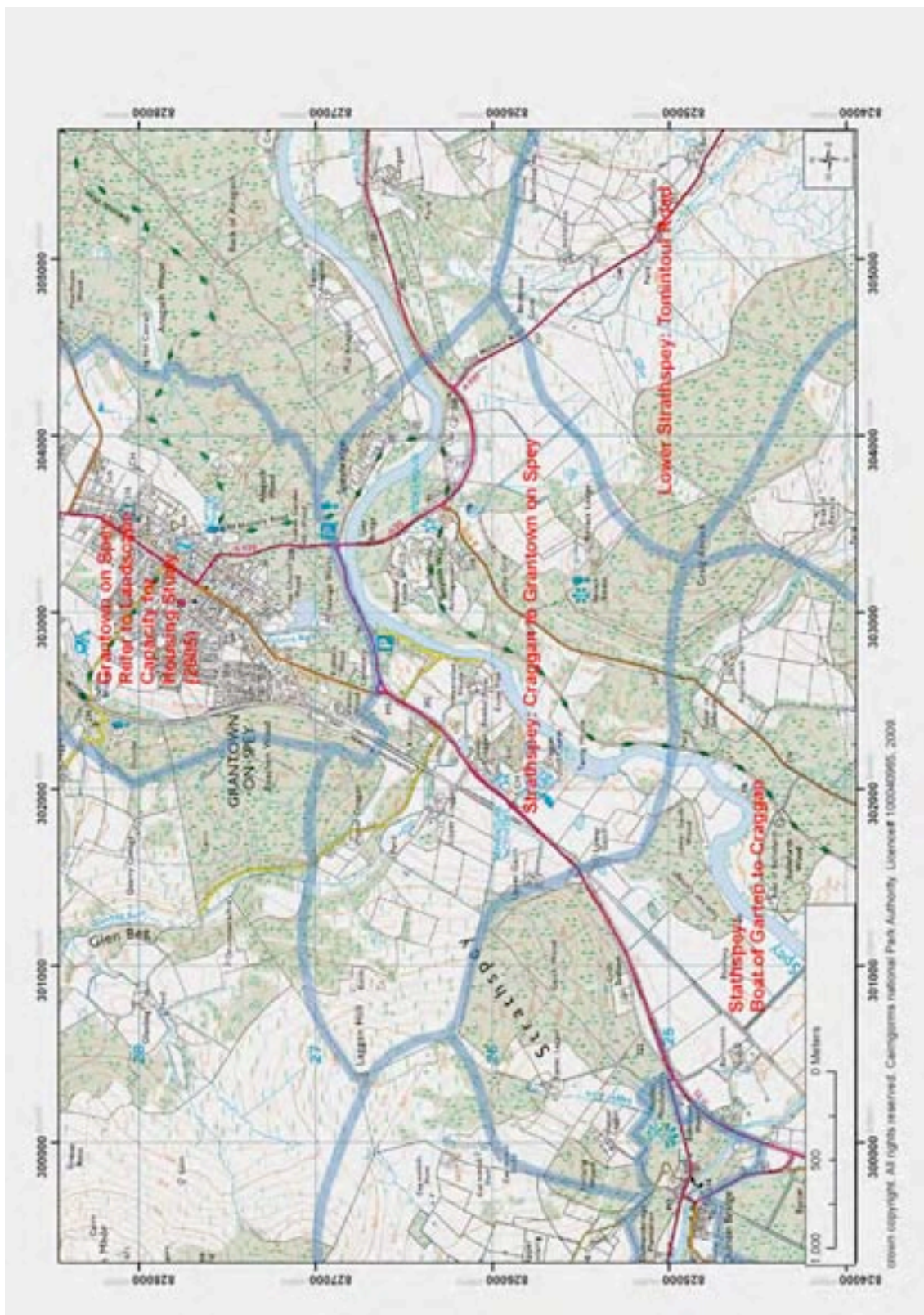


Settlement, perched along the well drained terraces and hummocks along the edges of the strath floor



The wide river Spey, and associated riparian woodland, is occasionally visible from the road – more so when in flood

3.14 Strathspey: Craggan to Grantown on Spey



3.14.1 *Landscape character*

- The River Spey swings in a wide curve just south of Grantown on Spey, contained by a narrowing of the flat floor of the strath between Craig Revack and the mouth of Glen Beg
- Extensive glacial-fluvial deposits create irregular terrain, including eskers, hummocks and terraces on the lower slopes above the narrow floodplain
- The hills are low but well defined summits, framing this focal point in the strath, where several side glens meet with Strathspey and major roads converge near to the crossing point of the River Spey
- There is extensive conifer woodland, especially across upper slopes and hill summits, although pine wood is a particular feature on the free-draining and gravelly, hummocky glacial-fluvial deposits on the outskirts of Grantown on Spey
- Large areas of broadleaved woodland extend along lower slopes and up the valley sides of Glen Beg
- There is almost continuous riparian woodland along the River Spey
- Mature pine are a specific feature often associated with hummocks and eskers along the strath floor
- The open land is largely divided into straight sided, late 18th/19th century improved fields, currently growing improved grassland and fodder crops
- There are a number of key archaeological features in this area – including a prehistoric fort – which although not key characteristics, perhaps indicate the importance of this area as a junction point in the strath
- Settlement is scattered, following no particular pattern except that it avoids the floodplain and is largely associated with the fields, with small farms located on the upper slopes around the mouth of Glen Beg
- There are several major developments in this character area, perhaps because of its proximity to road junctions and Grantown on Spey, including recreational development at Craggan and Revack, the industrial estate at Achnagonalin and Station Road, and the Spey Valley Smokehouse
- The A9 is partially elevated and relatively open, but other roads are largely hidden in woodland
- The Speyside Way passes through this area on a disused railway line

3.14.2 *Landscape experience*

- This area is experienced as a junction point, with glens converging on the main valley from several directions, and roads converging on both the former and current crossing points of the Spey
- The area is heavily wooded, with both broadleaved woodland and pine forming a unifying element in what can be quite a confusing pattern of development and infrastructure
- There are views along the River Spey from the bridge and walking routes

3.14.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area forms a gateway between the lower Spey and the main Spey valley, and so sits at the conjunction of several other character types.

3.14.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The area is dominated by the scale and diversity of the woodland, which provides a setting for the numerous and diverse developments which have taken advantage of the conjunction of glens and roads at this point on Strathspey.



Extensive areas of birch woodland extend along the lower slopes of the strath and up Glen Beag, around improved grassland fields



There is a fort hidden in woodland on this hummock, adjacent to the golf course at the outdoor centre at Craggan

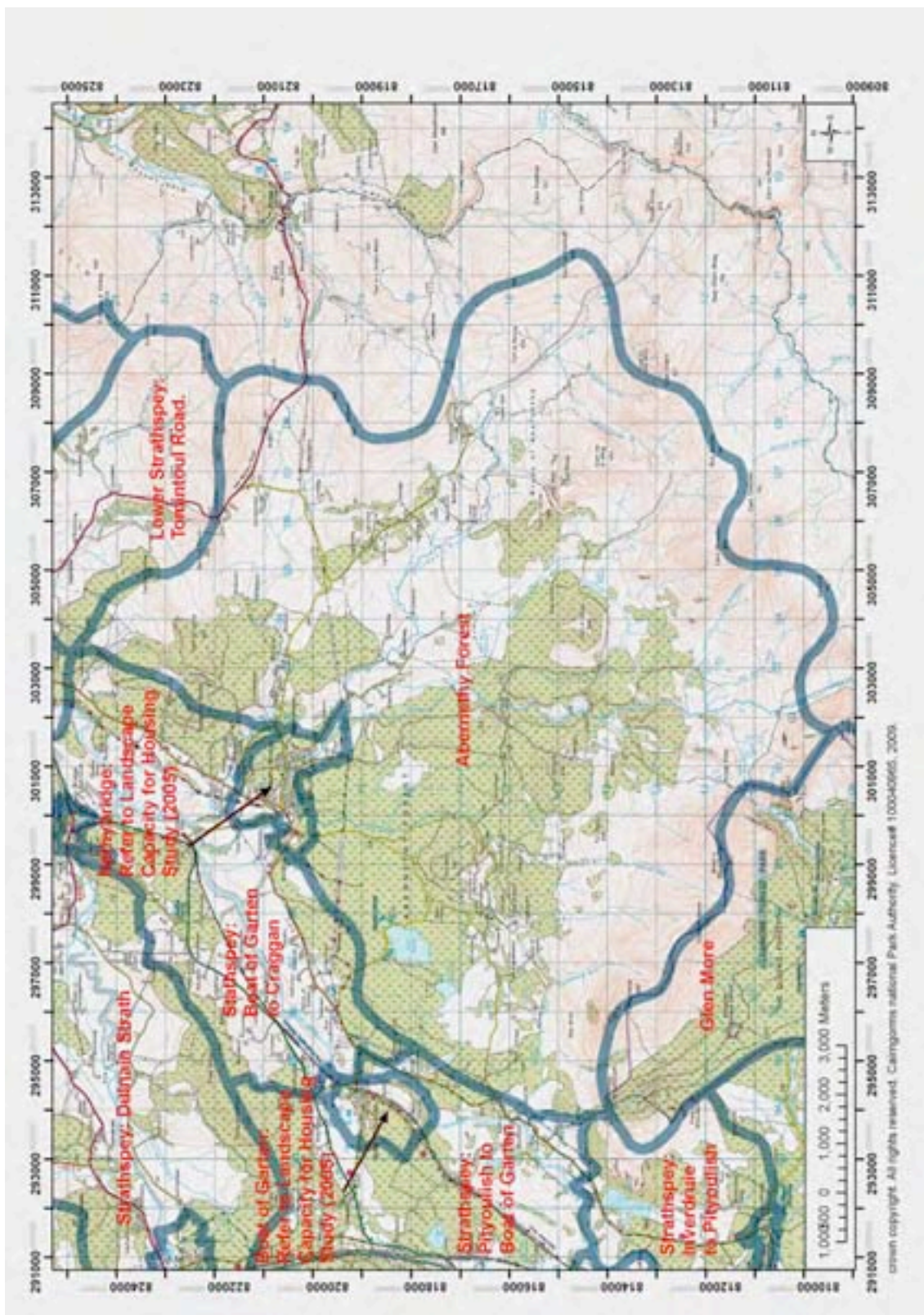


The River Spey and associated riparian woodland



Mature pine associated with well drained gravelly deposits

3.15 Abernethy Forest



3.15.1 Landscape Character

- This character area lies above the Spey valley and comprises a north-west facing basin contained by an arc of hills which rise to the high Cairngorms Massif.
- Watercourses radiate from glens within the steep slopes of the encircling hills, converging south of Nethy Bridge before draining to the Spey. The River Nethy is the most significant of these, issuing through the deeply incised gorge of Strath Nethy from the Cairngorms Massif before tightly meandering across the undulating basin of Abernethy
- The rivers have broad floodplains, and their dynamic systems have braided reaches and little vegetation as it is often washed away
- The detail of the terrain is complex, reflecting the varied underlying lithology as well as glacial and fluvial activity. Extensive areas of well-drained glacial and fluvial deposit and river worked gravels alternate with peat.
- Overall, however, while there are prominent, low, rock hills, the basin floor is remarkably flat, appearing vast from elevated viewpoints
- The steep slopes of the Kincardine Hills and Braes of Abernethy which immediately contain this area are eclipsed by the huge scale of the Cairngorms massif.
- The area is extensively forested, predominantly with native pine. It has a strongly naturalistic appearance with trees of varied ages and a diverse ground flora of heather, juniper and blaeberry. Areas of wetland occurring within the forest are marked by stunted pine and bog vegetation
- There are occasional shelter woods in farmed areas, often associated with settlement
- Heather moorland dominates the hill slopes and extensive regeneration of pine is evident on the upper slopes of the Kincardine Hills
- Drained, broadly straight edged, late 18th/19th century improved fields along the shallow valley of the Dorback Burn stand out as bright green patches against the muted colours of flatter wetlands and moorland
- Small pastures associated with scattered farms and settlement are found in clearings within and on the more fragmented southern fringes of the forest.
- Farms and shelterbelts within the more extensive farmed areas to the east are dispersed, located on well-drained fluvial deposits and drier ridges above the Dorback burn with some less regular, pre-improvement fields and ruined buildings on the slightly higher slopes

- Settlement sited within or on the fringes of Abernethy Forest to the south tends to be more clustered, forming groups of up to 5 small dwellings and individual small farmsteads. These small clusters are tucked in around the low hills and are often hidden by the forest; an array of name-posts the only evidence of their existence from public roads.
- Minor roads fan out from Nethy Bridge and follow the river valleys with dispersed farms along their length. Some of these roads continue as estate tracks through the upland area linking to Glen More and the eastern fringes of the Cairngorm plateau.
- An electricity transmission line crosses through the forest and the open moorland before running parallel to the A939 to the east.
- Loch Garten is a visual and recreational focus within the forest, its indented shore edged by overhanging mature pine and birch.

3.15.2 *Landscape experience*

- The fringing hills and high mountains ring this low lying basin of land and provide a striking panoramic backdrop to views from the open farmland and moorland of the Dorback Burn area
- The drama of the vast scale of the basin is only fully appreciated from more elevated viewpoints, such as from the A939, from where the open expanse of moorland reinforces the sense of distance
- The high mass of the mountains is also appreciated from the open farmland and moorland, accentuated by the juxtaposition between the vast horizontal expanse of the basin and the huge vertical scale of the massif
- The diverse composition of Abernethy Forest feels very natural. The forest can also feel secluded in many areas, despite the presence of popular recreational facilities and dispersed settlement
- The pattern of tree cover and occasional farmland clearings within Abernethy Forest provide a diverse experience of light and shade, enclosure and openness when travelling in the area

3.15.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

The extensive forest cover characteristic of this area limits inter-visibility with adjacent character areas. The vast extent of this character area is not readily appreciated from the adjacent Spey valley due to the gentle landform which leads to a foreshortening effect. The more open farmland and moorland and elevated roads offer panoramic views to the Cairngorm massif.

3.15.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

Lying within an arc of dramatic, high mountains, the vast scale of the basin and its openness and sense of space is best appreciated from more elevated and open spaces within and around the woodland. This expanse contrasts with the small scale detail of the diversity and naturalness of Abernethy Forest, and the pattern of farmed open spaces which extend along the river valleys and in a band around the fringes of the forest.



Extensive areas of native pine woodland



Open moor and small upland farms create open space within the forest, allowing views over this vast basin to the Cairngorms

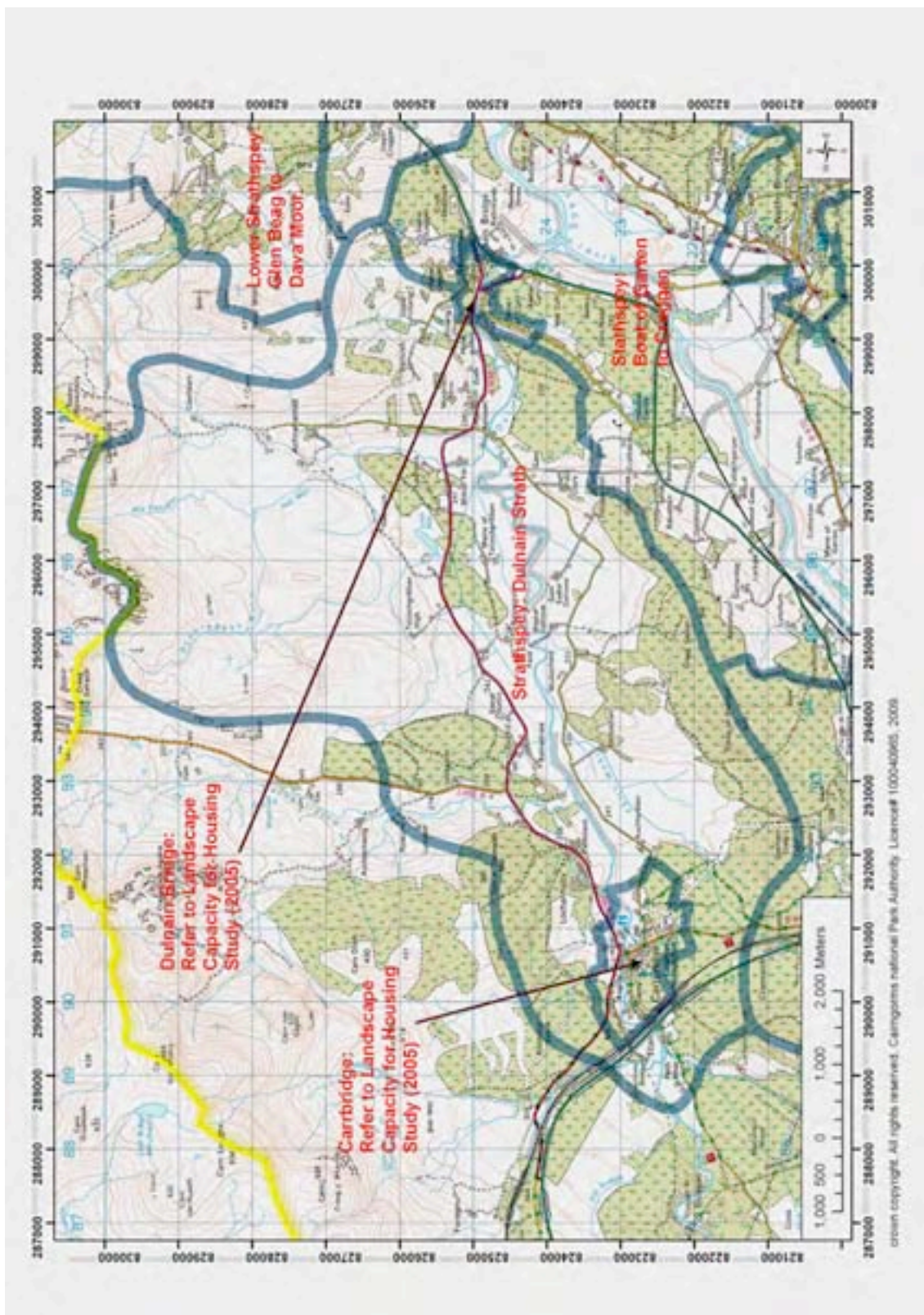


Loch Garten



Small rock hills within the forest, along the southern edge, stand proud of the more level basin floor

3.16 Strathspey: Dulnain Strath



3.16.1 *Landscape character*

- This area, orientated east/west is contained by the steep slopes of the rugged Strathdearn Hills to the north and the low ridgeline of rounded hills associated with Creag an Fhithich to the south.
- The River Dulnain winds through a broad flat floodplain. This floodplain has an irregular form, curving round the outlying hill above Shillochan and narrowing where the A9 crosses the river at Ellan
- Flood embankments are conspicuous along the length of the river and emphasise its notably sinuous course to the east.
- Occasional hummocks of glacial-fluvial deposit, as well as small melt channels create a slightly undulating relief to the east and around Feith Mhor tributary
- The river valley is constricted by hills relatively resistant to erosion at Dulnain Bridge, which also separate the strath from Strathspey
- Commercial conifer woodland extends along the whole length of the hill ridge to the south and managed pine woodland extends down the lower hill slopes to the north, alternating with heather moor
- This conifer woodland extends onto the low lying land right across the strath at Carrbridge
- Riparian woodland is largely confined to the western end of the strath, where birch woodland also extends around the fields and is scattered around the settlements
- An extensive area of birch woodland is situated on the small hill near Shillochan which rises abruptly from the strath floor.
- The pattern of regularly shaped late 18th/19th century improved fields across the strath floor and the sloping terraces at either side of the strath. The different crop colours, including arable, emphasise the regular field pattern.
- Pasture dominates the elevated and undulating floor of the expansive and surprisingly green south-facing Alt Mor valley, where dispersed farms at Achnahannet are located on low hummocks
- There is wetland, and sometimes scrub, in less well drained locations along lower lying parts of the strath
- Prehistoric burial cairns create somewhat unexpected focal points along the southern side of the floodplain
- Carrbridge is set within extensive conifer woodland at a crossing point on the River Dulnain
- Relatively large farms are located on raised ground across the strath floor, sometimes apparently surrounded by floodplain.

- Clustered settlements at Duthil and Dalbuiack are located in woodland along the A95, favouring the south-facing slopes and terraces above the strath.
- The estate lodge of Finlarig and Muckrach Castle, a recently restored 16th – 18th century castle, are located on the south-facing slopes above Dulnain Bridge. The small church at Duthil is a landmark feature widely visible across the open strath.
- Policy woodlands surround Finlarig and former parkland and avenue trees are a feature around Clury, on the minor road along the south side of the strath
- Development from Carrbridge spills west along the strath, under the railway and the A9 which are elevated to cross the river

3.16.2 *Landscape experience*

- The extensive farmland on the strath floor, along with areas of wetland, maintain the openness of the strath
- The backdrop of wooded slopes and hills and the rugged, heathery hill tops to the north provide strong containment to the area and contrast with the smooth texture and regular field pattern of farmland on the strath floor
- The River Dulnain is a key feature visible from public roads and settlement in this largely open landscape
- Muckrach Castle is a landmark feature as the strath narrows towards its confluence with the Spey
- Elevated views to Carrbridge and the western side of the strath are a particular feature from the A9 and the railway, revealed suddenly when they exit the woodland onto elevated crossings of the River Dulnain

3.16.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is largely self-contained with views of adjacent character areas being limited by intervening hills, although the Monadhliath hills provide a setting to the strath to the west.

3.16.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The openness of the consistent and widespread pattern of regular field shapes of the farmland on the broad strath floor contrasts with the enclosure of the forest on the surrounding hills and the wooded settings of the settlements.



The edge of the strath is contained by low wooded hills, with riparian woodland along the river Dulnain



A wide strath – from elevated roads, the cultivated farmland and the Dulnain River are easily visible

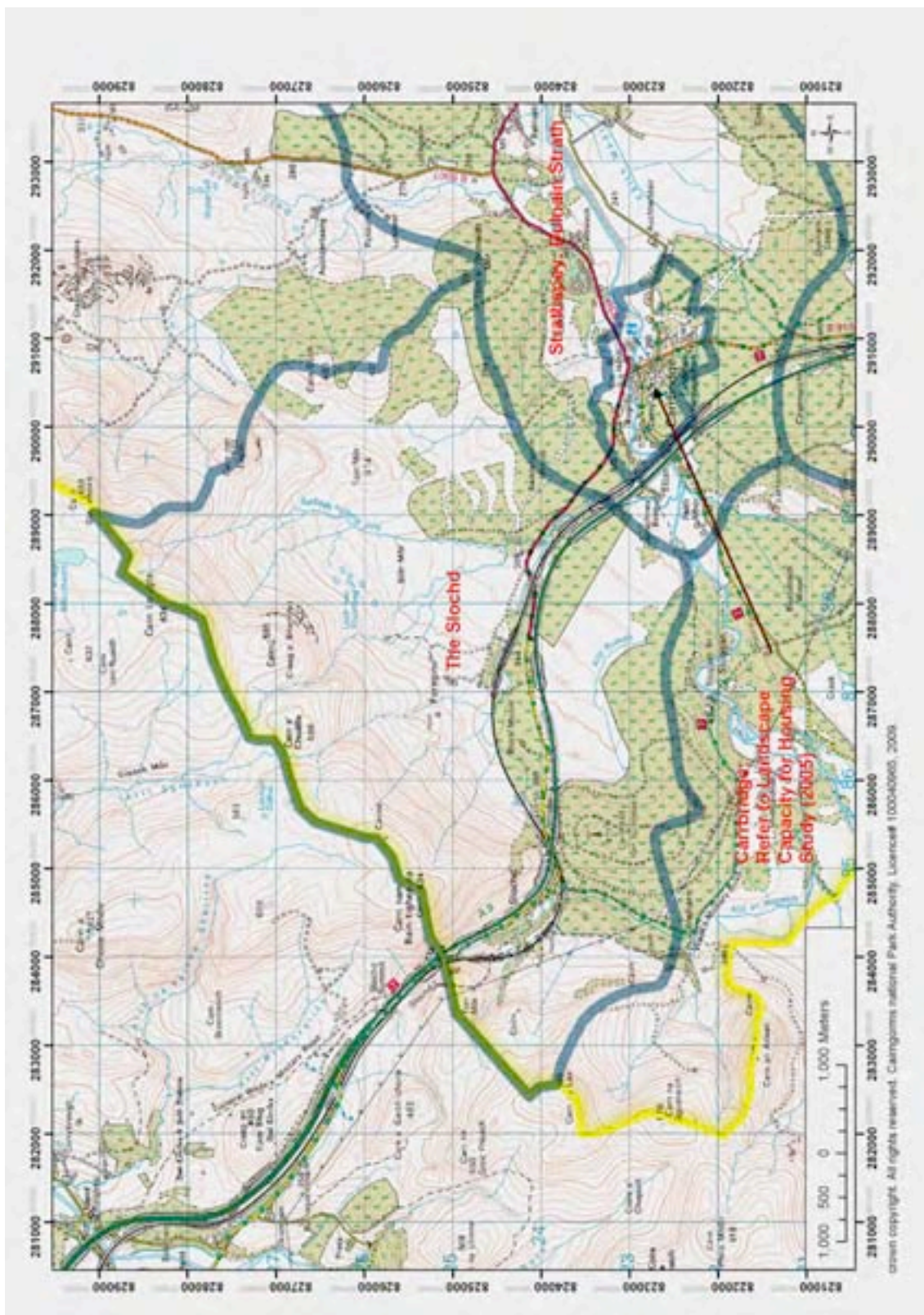


Near Dalbuiack, fields appear 'carved' out of woodland



Views west along the strath from the elevated A9, which crosses the River Dulnain at a 'pinchpoint'

3.17 The Slochd



3.17.1 *Landscape character*

- This wide, elevated basin of deep glacial-fluvial deposit, contained to the west, north and more tentatively to the east by surrounding low hills, slopes southwards to the steep sided valley of the Dulnain River
- The northern edge of the basin is formed by a pronounced escarpment, that rises to the undulating plateau which marks the edge of the Park. This plateau represents a northern extension of the great Monadhliath tableland.
- A deep, steep sided gorge where a large melt water channel has cut through this escarpment creates a dramatic pass which has been widened to accommodate the A9, as well as earlier roads and the railway
- The rounded western hills are covered with conifer woodland, but the the northern hill slopes are covered with heather moorland
- The basin floor is largely gently undulating heather moor, partly on peat, but conifer woodland extends across this moorland, and is regenerating across ungrazed heather
- Birch woodland extends up watercourses, regenerating along less accessible reaches
- Pockets of more regularly shaped, late 18th/19th century improved fields sit on flatter land on the lower hill slopes, associated with abandoned farmsteads
- A small number of properties at the pass at Slochd sit overlooking the gorge and tucked below the A9
- The older road hugs the edge of the gorge, while the railway sweeps in wide arcs, crossing the river on a high arched bridge. The A9 is elevated above them all, sitting in cuttings above the gorge before curving across the floor of the basin
- Two telecommunications masts are prominent on the skyline on arrival to the Park along the A9 from the north

3.17.2 *Landscape experience*

- The drama of travelling from the north through the narrow Pass and then emerging through the trees onto the expanse of open moor, with panoramic views to the south, creates a fine sense of arrival to the Park
- The drama is reinforced by the contrast between the enclosure of the gorge and associated woodland and the openness of the basin
- The gorge acts as a threshold when travelling in either direction
- The elevation of the basin offers panoramic views south

- When travelling along the old road, the narrowness and depth of the gorge is easily experienced, emphasised by the sound of the fast moving river far below

3.17.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area offers widespread views to the Monadhliath and more distant Cairngorm mountain areas, across the northern reaches of Strathspey.

3.17.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The contrast between the narrow enclosure in the Pass and the open expanse of the basin creates a dramatic entrance or exit to the Park.



The A9 curves through the Pass above the narrow gorge, its enclosure reinforced by woodland



The elevated basin and open moorland offer the opportunity for a dramatic panorama



Woodland over the western hills, and some regenerating pine



The high arches of the railway bridge over the gorge



Heather hills to the north and east, with a band of grazing land on the lower slopes



Broadleaved trees regenerating up the water courses