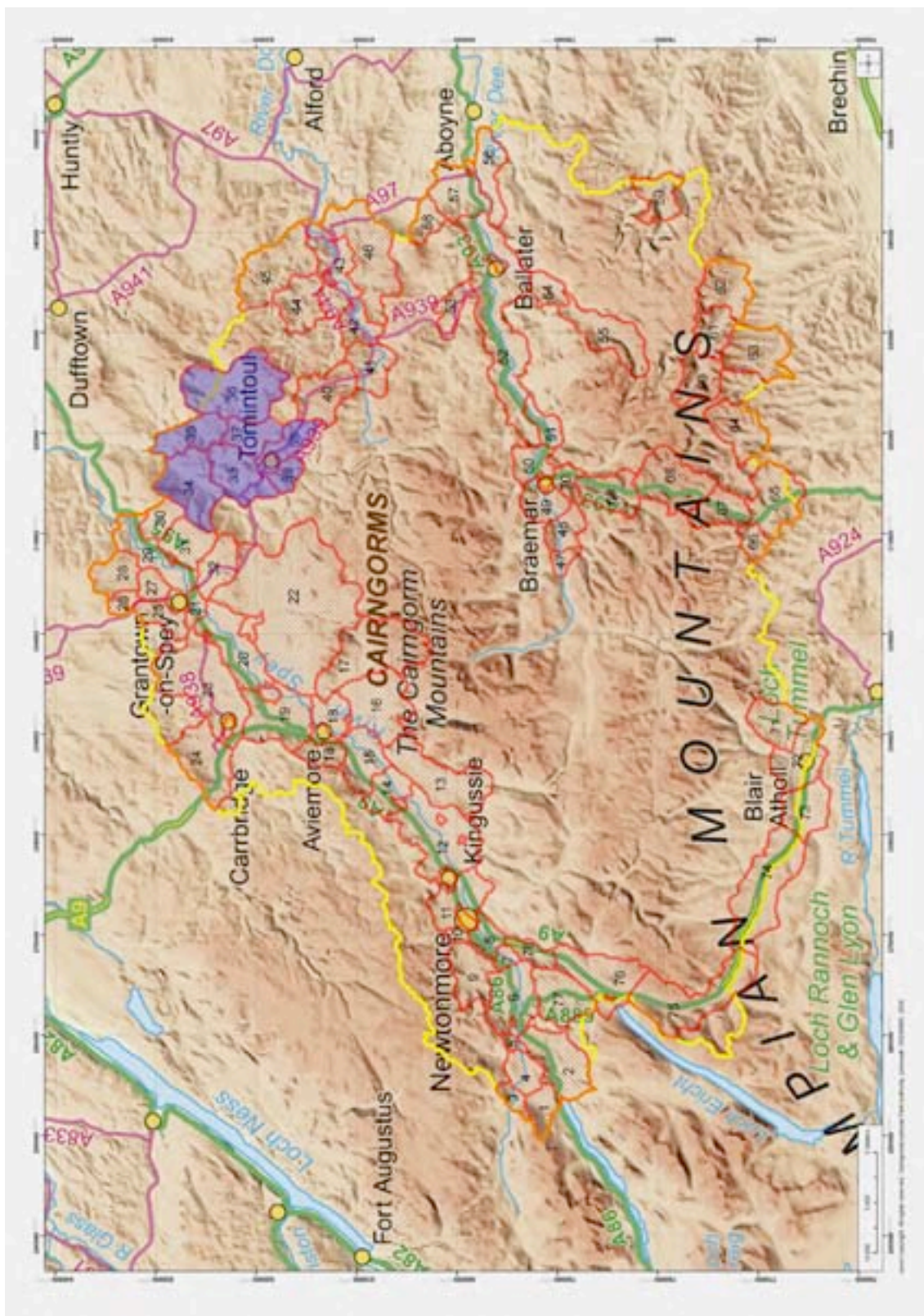


## 5 STRATH AVON AND GLEN LIVET

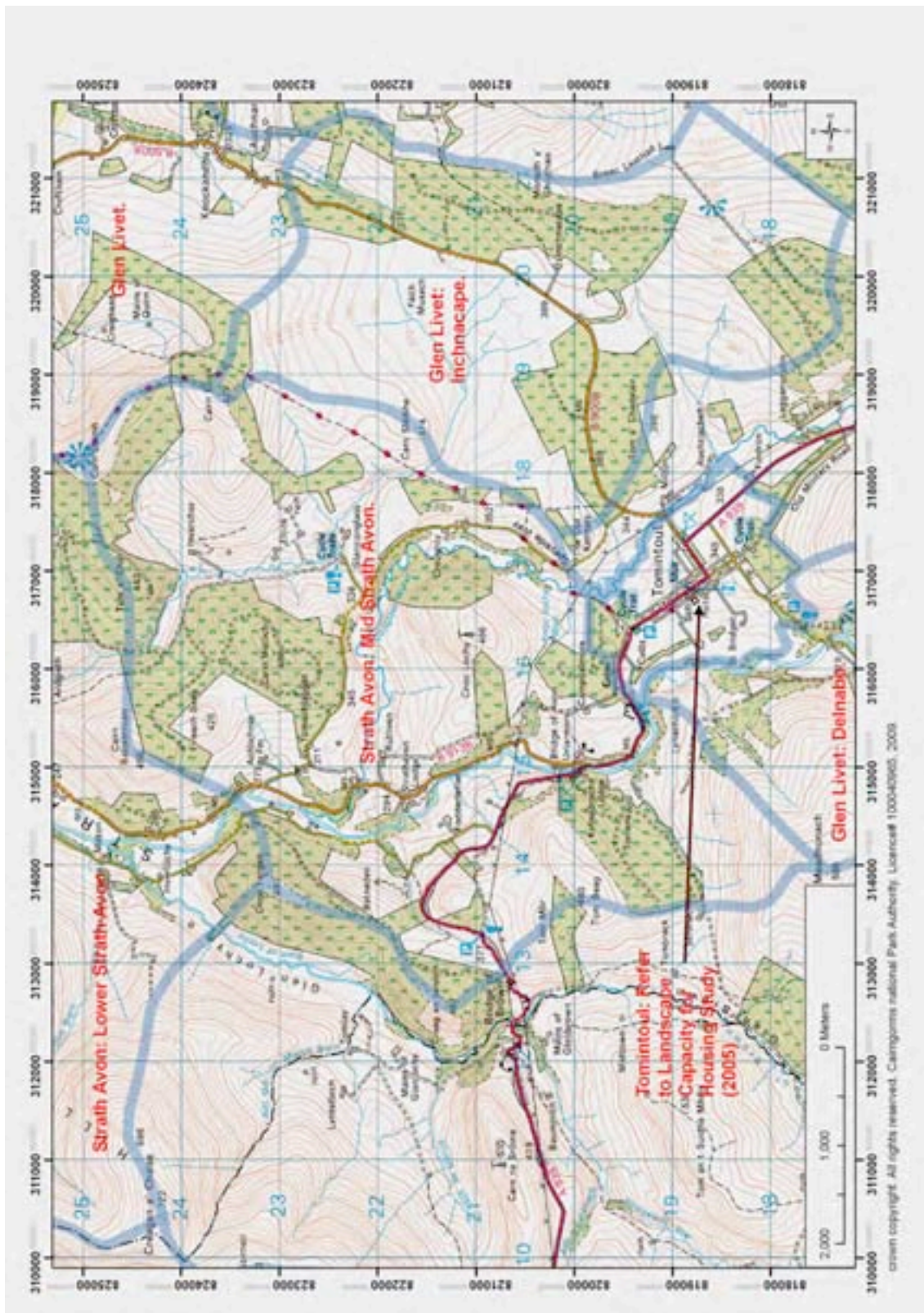
This section of the LCA includes Strath Avon and Glen Livet as well as the glens south of Tomintoul. This character assessment is presented, working from north to south, as follows:

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

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



5.1 Strath Avon: **Mid Strath Avon**



### 5.1.1 *Landscape Character*

- The quartzite bedrock locally forms smooth, rounded upper slopes and low hills within this complex topography
- The upper slopes rise above narrow, deep glens where fluvial deposits have been partially worked to create narrow floodplains
- Sandy soils, locally covered by deposits and in places underpinned by limestone and black schist, create a more fertile soil than that which lies across surrounding metamorphic rocks, allowing fields to extend quite far up the side slopes
- Conifer woodland on the upper slopes extends over the hill summits on former heather moorland
- Broadleaved woodland is established on steep sided slopes, including banks of possible former river terraces, and along the narrow glens of the watercourses
- Fenced, late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields of arable and improved grassland occupy well-drained lower slopes, but also extend up onto elevated, gently graded slopes, shallow bowls and terraces. These higher fields are in places reverting to unimproved grassland.
- The side glen of the Conglass Water is an exception to the more generally farmed landscape, as the river meanders across a level floodplain of wetland and rush
- Farms are generally located on level terraces or natural breaks in slope on the upper slopes, surrounded by fields
- There is a widespread network of narrow, winding roads which follow the glen floors or traverse the upper slopes along an elevated contour line

### 5.1.2 *Landscape experience*

- The topographical complexity of this area creates small scale enclosure along the glen floors
- This complexity is easily experienced from the narrow roads and farm access routes along the valley floor which wind around hummocks and along terraces
- There are contrasting panoramic views from the upper slopes, including from elevated roads

### 5.1.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This complex topography of this area contrasts with the relative simplicity of the linear lower reaches of Glen Avon to the north. The intensity and extent of the improved fields, farmed

land and conifer woodland also contrasts with the more simple, moorland dominated landscapes to the east.

#### 5.1.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

This area is strongly influenced by the complex topography which creates a landscape of intimate scale. This complexity is complemented by the diverse pattern of strongly rectilinear fields of varied crops combined with different types of woodland, which includes very naturalistic as well as strongly managed elements.



*The complex topography, with the narrow river valley hidden in broadleaved woodland, and fields extending over upper slopes.*



*Conifer woodland over the summits of rounded hills and smooth slopes improved pasture fields*



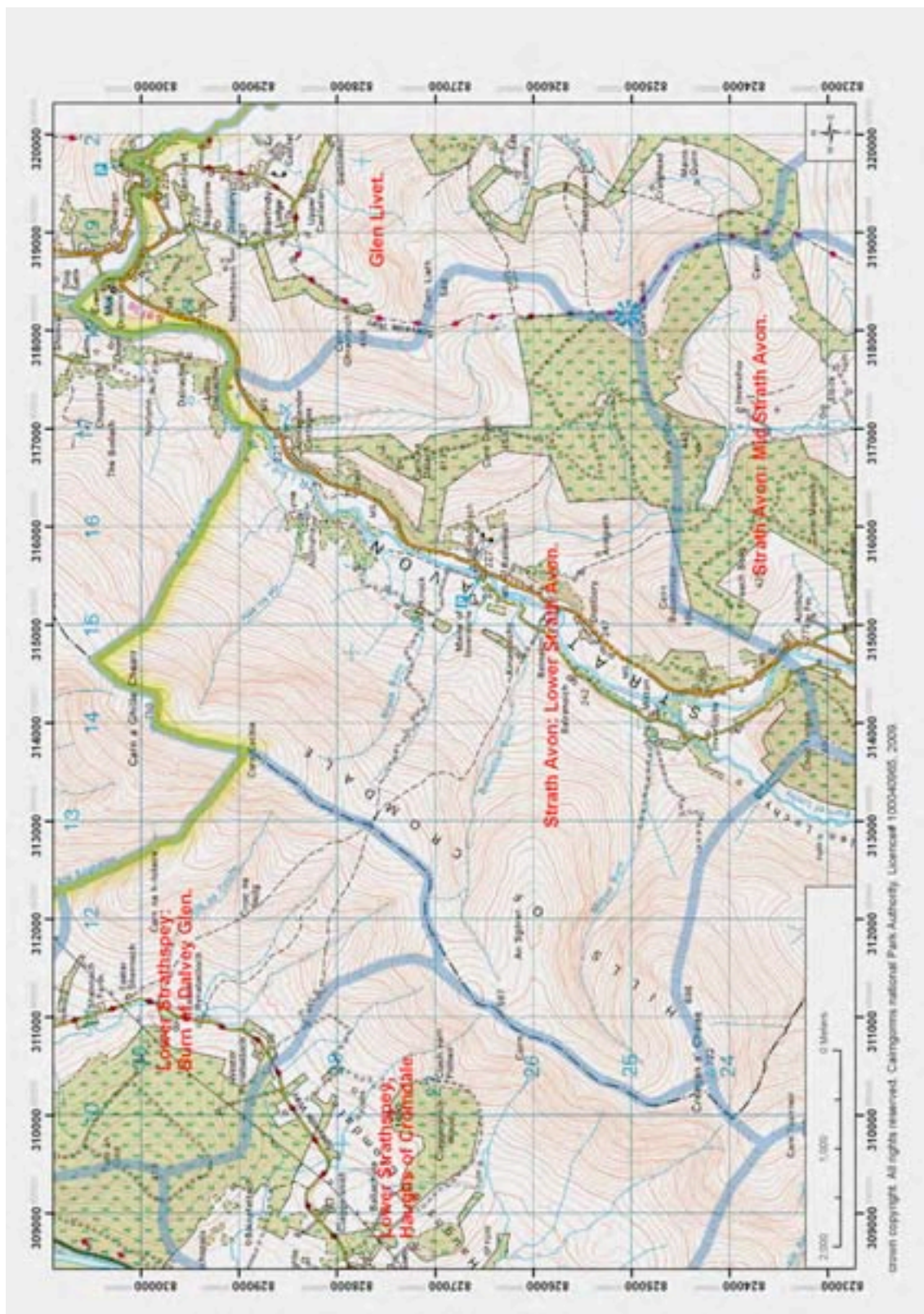
*Along the valley of the Conglass Water, the meandering river has worked deposits into a level floodplain of wetland and rushy pasture*



*Extensive fields system, enclosed in the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> centuries with farms often located on the upper slopes surrounded by fields*



## 5.2 Strath Avon: Lower Strath Avon



### 5.2.1 Landscape Character

- A narrow, linear strath, orientated north-north east/south-south west, contained by smooth, relatively evenly graded slopes which extend down from rounded ridges and summits
- The high Hills of Cromdale to the west are subtly subdivided by watercourses, but nevertheless form a formidable flank of hillside which stops abruptly at the edge of the narrow strath floor
- To the east, lower hills are subdivided by a series of parallel side valleys
- The River Avon meanders across the valley floor, carving out long river terraces and working deposits into a flat floodplain
- Heather moor across the Hills of Cromdale has been managed as grouse moorland, with extensive patches and broad bands of burnt heather moor
- Birch woodland occupies the lower slopes of the broadly west facing valley side, with some additional conifer woods planted for shelter, and extending along the upper slopes on former heather moorland
- Riparian woodland, dominated by dark coloured alder extends along the River Avon, but groups of mature, large alder are also located on the terraces
- Straight-edged, late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields, often formerly walled but now fenced and enclosing grassland, extend along the floor of the strath
- Where these fields extend up onto the lower slopes they have often reverted to rougher grassland on the east facing slopes, but are still improved on the west facing slopes
- The relatively even spaced farms of similar vernacular style are located along the edge of the strath floor, or on elevated terraces above the floodplain
- While on close inspection there is evidence of earlier land use and settlement, for example prehistoric settlement, including traces of round houses and field systems on the upper west facing slopes, it is not widely visible
- The Tomintoul distillery, large buildings sited on a river terrace, is a landmark feature, as is the church of St Michaels located close to where Glen Lochy joins Strath Avon
- The roads are aligned parallel with the strath and are slightly elevated on terraces above the strath floor
- There are several car parks along the strath, providing access to way marked walks



5.2.2 *Landscape experience*

- The linear shape of the strath, and its relative narrowness, encourage views along its length
- The strath feels very enclosed, because the level floor and flat topped terraces create visual foreshortening, which makes the vertical sides of the valley appear closer together than they are

5.2.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This character area is relatively self-contained.

5.2.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The linear form of this strath is reinforced by the abrupt boundary between the hillsides and the relatively level valley floor. Long river terraces, riparian woodland which is emphasised by the presence of dark coloured alder, and the improved fields which extend along the length of the valley floor, all emphasise the linearity of this glen.



Approaching lower Strath Avon from the north, these interlocking spurs and woodland form a 'gateway' to this part of the glen



The wide river terraces along the strath floor are subdivided into late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century fields, with large areas of broadleaved woodland along the west facing slopes



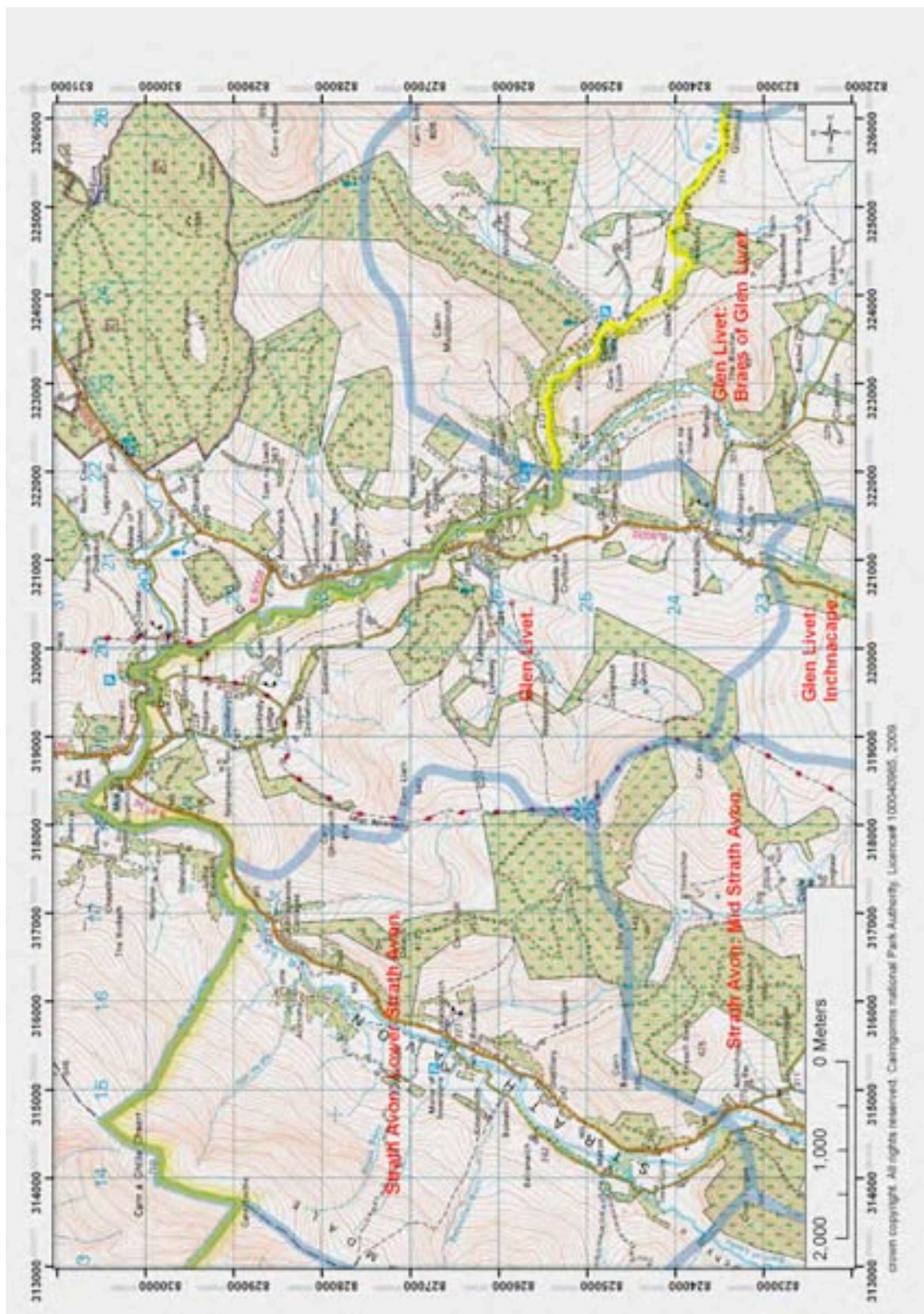
Long river terraces carved into the deposits, behind which is moorland across the lower slopes of the Hills of Cromdale



Alder trees, some of which are very large, are a particular feature of this strath



### 5.3 Glen Livet



### 5.3.1 Landscape Character

- This wide, deep river valley, which includes the valley of the Cattach Burn and the middle reaches of the River Livet, is oriented south/north, enclosed by the relatively gentle, sometimes convex shaped flanks of dome-shaped hills
- The Cattach Burn tumbles down a narrow, steep sided upper valley to join the River Livet where three valleys converge within complex, rolling land form of glacial-fluvial deposits
- The River Livet meanders across a floodplain within the trough of the river valley
- There is extensive birch woodland in these river valleys, which sometimes extends up the lower flanks of the hills and along burn-sides well up the valley sides
- There is some conifer woodland on steeper slopes, as well as many linear conifer shelter woods, some of which are strung horizontally round the hill slopes
- Many lines of broadleaved trees and hedges of hawthorn and beech, some of which are overgrown, reinforce the pattern of the fields and linear form of the watercourses. The line of the River Livet is also picked out by alder to the north
- Whin and juniper also extend along the river valleys or on disturbed ground – juniper most obvious in the less grazed side valleys
- Late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields, their large regular shapes enclosed by fencing and hedges, contain grassland and arable crops, and extend far up the hillsides on the gentle gradients – particularly across the west facing slopes, which are outwith the Park but easily visible from it
- In the more elevated side valleys, the improved land is in part reverting to more open grazing
- Farms are dispersed across the slopes, but are often located on small, natural terraces, on a tiny ridge or at a subtle change of gradient across the relatively even slopes. Within the elevated side valleys, there are some abandoned farmsteads
- There are two clustered settlements linked to the distilleries at Glenlivet and Tomnavoulin
- There is a cluster of historic sites overlooking the confluence of the Livet with the Tervie and the Avon, where there is also a convergence of long-established routes through accessible passes

- These include the ruins of Drumin Castle, overlooking the dramatic confluence of the Avon and the Livet and the remains of Blairfindy castle, as well as older sites, such as the Doune of Dalmore
- The B9008 is tucked against the break in slope above the steeper valley sides or on a terrace above the floodplain, while the narrower side road adheres strictly to a break in slope, elevated above the glen, at the point where the fields stop and more open grazing land starts
- There is an extensive network of waymarked footpaths

#### 5.3.2 *Landscape experience*

- The complexity of the landform where the Livet is joined by tributaries adds considerable to the diversity of this glen, as the form and intimate scale of the interlocking folds contrasts with the more straight form of the valley overall
- The upper side glens are relatively secluded

#### 5.3.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is relatively self contained.

#### 5.3.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The lines of trees, narrow woodlands and in particular, hedges, reinforce the pattern of the fields and the watercourses within this landscape. The complexity of the topography where the glens converge creates areas of land form diversity which are complemented by the small scale pattern of lines of trees, hedges, woodland and scattered settlement tucked in and around the land form.



*The lines of hedges and trees, associated with the field boundaries and the watercourses, extend across smooth, rounded, sometimes convex slopes*



*Complex landform where three valleys converge near the Cattach Burn*



*In elevated side valleys, the pattern of fields is less distinct as the land has in part reverted to unimproved grazing around some abandoned farmsteads*



*A hedge – no longer in leaf – in the foreground, with improved grassland adjacent to moorland*

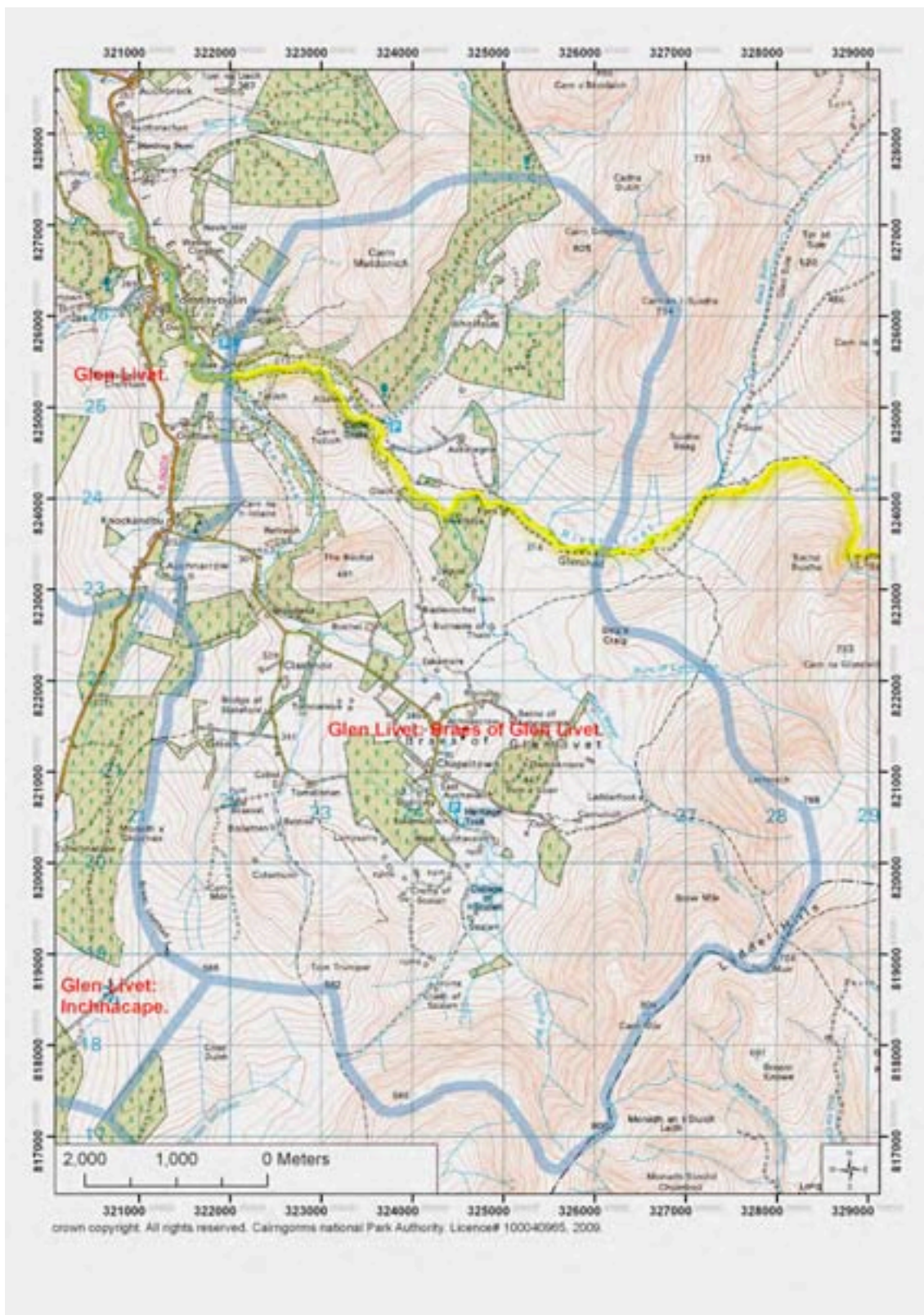


*The linear network of trees and hedges associated with field boundaries and watercourses, with farms set on natural ledges within the rounded land forms*



*The distillery and settlement at Tomnavoulin, tucked into the valley floor in a wooded setting*

5.4 Glen Livet: **Braes of Glen Livet**



#### 5.4.1 Landscape Character

- This expansive howe or basin is developed in granite set amid metamorphic rocks, although a band of metamorphosed limestone forms Glen Suie to the north east
- The basin floor retains a deep layer of poorly sorted fluvial-glacial deposit resting on glacial till. This creates elevated and gently graded terrain of smooth low ridges and low hills almost completely encircled by steeper, higher hills, including the Ladder Hills
- The entrance to the Braes is marked by a narrower pass along the Crombie Water, which winds between steep sided hills forming a strong sense of 'threshold' between the Braes and Glen Livet
- Many burns wind tightly on narrow floodplains and through wetland along the base of the subtle shallow valleys to converge with the River Livet
- There are several areas of conifer woodland, on drier hills or on areas of peat within the basin, as well as smaller shelter woods
- Conifer woodland has also been planted along the burn-sides, and there are clumps of trees, sometimes pine, associated with each individual farmstead
- The steep hills form a relatively abrupt edge to the valley floor, and are clad in heather, the marks of management by burning clearly visible on the slopes
- Extensive areas of late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields, fenced and rectilinear in shape, and small or medium sized, are draped over the gently sloping land form
- While most of the ground is used for grazing, there are also some arable and winter fodder crops
- There is also extensive, still apparent, evidence of field systems which pre-date amalgamation of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century – where field shapes are narrow, long and smaller than later fields
- There are many small, late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century farmsteads, relatively evenly dispersed across the slopes, sometimes perched on the subtle ridges
- Older farmsteads, including former crofts, possibly created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are scattered across the farmed land, but are most apparent at the peripheral edge of present-day cultivation, where buildings have been abandoned and their former fields have reverted to hill land
- There is a cluster of buildings at the Chapelton distillery, located at the head of one of the shallow glens and surrounded by woodland



- The College of Scalán – a seminary for Catholic priests during the 18<sup>th</sup> century – is located at the very end of a winding narrow road, tucked into the folds of the land form to keep its location discrete
- Narrow, winding roads extends up the shallow glens and links to a network of smaller farm tracks which criss-cross the whole basin

#### 5.4.2 *Landscape experience*

- The narrow entrance to the Braes, along the Crombie Water reinforces the sense of seclusion experienced in this self-contained area, which appears very 'cut off' from Glen Livet.
- There is a sense of 'surprise' at the wide extent of the Braes, which only becomes evident after travelling through the narrow winding glen of the Crombie water
- This sense of secrecy is reinforced by the knowledge that the area supported the Catholic faith when it was oppressed during the 18<sup>th</sup> century
- The extent of the basin is very evident, with the low hills and ridges forming only subtle containment within the backdrop of steep hillsides

#### 5.4.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is very self-contained, with little inter-visibility with surrounding areas beyond the immediate Ladder Hills

#### 5.4.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The sense of seclusion is very pronounced, reinforced by the 'gateway' created by the narrow glen of the Crombie Water and the sudden revelation of the expanse of relatively fertile, gently graded terrain. The field systems today reflect a complex post-17<sup>th</sup> century history including, in the furthest reaches, abandoned small holdings. Much of the settlement and field pattern today follows patterns and forms laid down in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



*The approach to the Braes of Glen Livet is through a narrow glen*



*The Braes are a series of gentle undulating ridges, encircled by higher hills. Farmsteads tend to be small and elevated.*



*Grass fields, established during the late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improvement period, across gentle gradients. Conifer woodland predominates, even planted along the sides of the watercourses*



*The distillery and settlement of Chapelton, set in woodland*

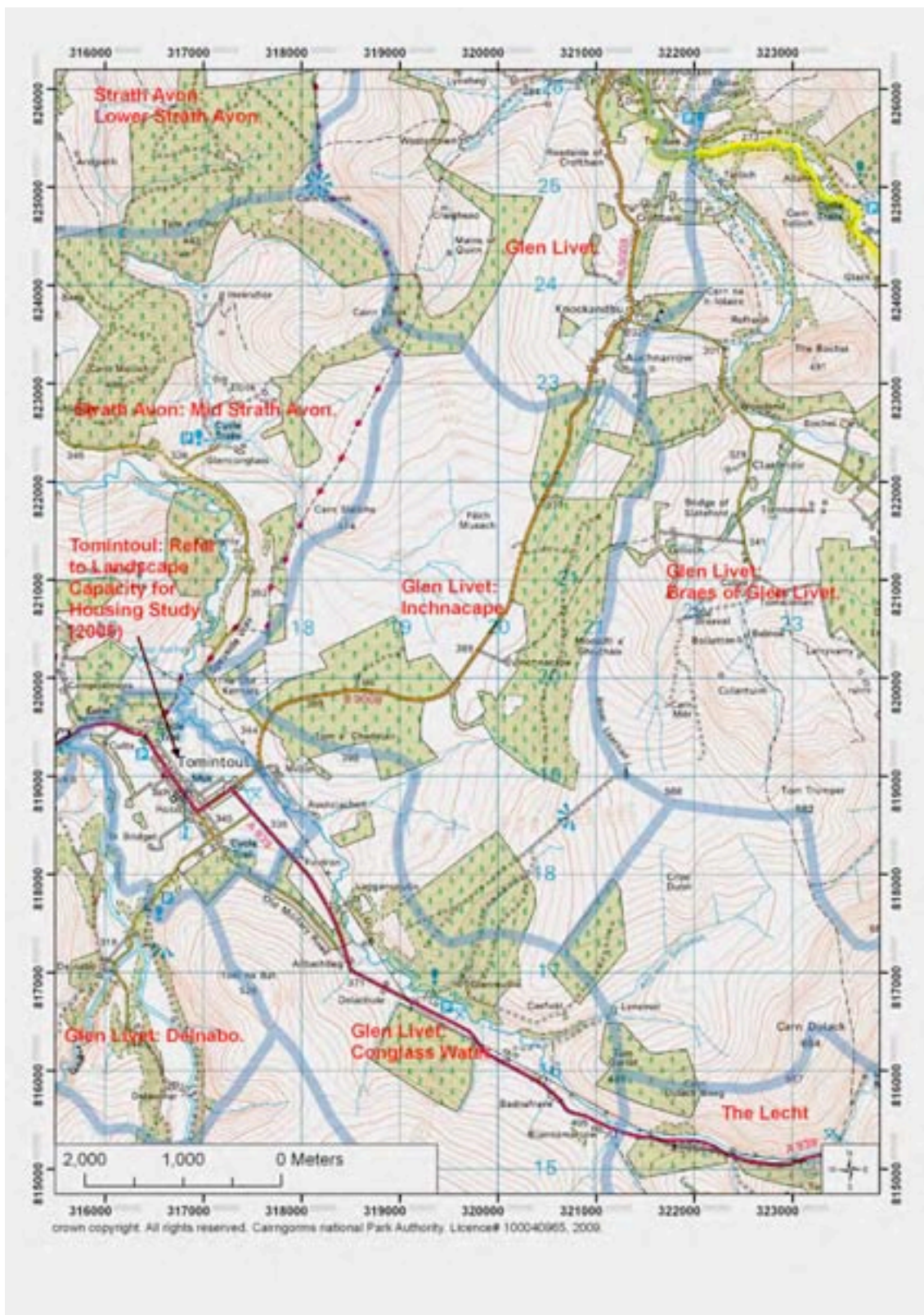


*Former crofts, now abandoned with the land reverting to rush pasture*



*The well hidden seminary of Scalan*

### 5.5 Glen Livet: **Inchnacape**



### 5.5.1 *Landscape Character*

- This elevated expanse of blanket peat covers a broad, shallow valley, aligned south west/north east, straddled between higher hills with elongated, gently sloping flanks and domed summits
- The area is largely wetland, with upland grass and patches of heather moor across the east facing hillsides
- Extensive areas of conifer woodland, mostly spruce with some pine, extends over the steeper west facing hill slopes and where the land falls away towards Glen Livet in the north and Tomintoul in the south
- Regenerating pine on the moorland to the north, along with scattered birch and juniper, create a more natural character
- A couple of mature pines are all that remains of old roundels, or small shelter woods on the tiny area of farmed fields
- A line of rectangular, presumably 19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields, now reseeded and fenced, sits on slopes sheltered by woodland adjacent to the B9008 overlooked by the small farm of Inchnacape
- Peat extraction on the moss reveals the dark brown worked layer of peat. The machinery and stockpiles of excavated peat are highly visible in the open landscape
- The B9008 is a series of long straights linked by sweeping bends

### 5.5.2 *Landscape experience*

- The openness and expanse of this landscape is fully revealed when emerging from the forest onto the elevated moss
- The landscape is relatively simple in structure, although the peat works and conifer woodland in particular break up the uniform expanse of the moor
- The sense of elevation is reinforced by views of the tops of surrounding hills, appearing over the edge of the moor

### 5.5.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area provides a contrast to the much more complex and diverse landscape of Glen Livet to the north. Its elevation encourages views to the surrounding mountain areas.

5.5.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The contrast between the enclosure of the woodland at the edges of the moor and the openness of the highest section of the moor reinforces the sense of elevation. The relative simplicity, and extent, of the mosaic of moorland vegetation reinforces the upland character.



*Conifer woodland on the lower slopes on the approach to the upper moorland of this area*



*The open moor, with excavated peat in the middle distance*



*The farm of Inchnacape, set above a line of improved fields and back against woodland*



*Machinery and stockpiles of excavated peat*



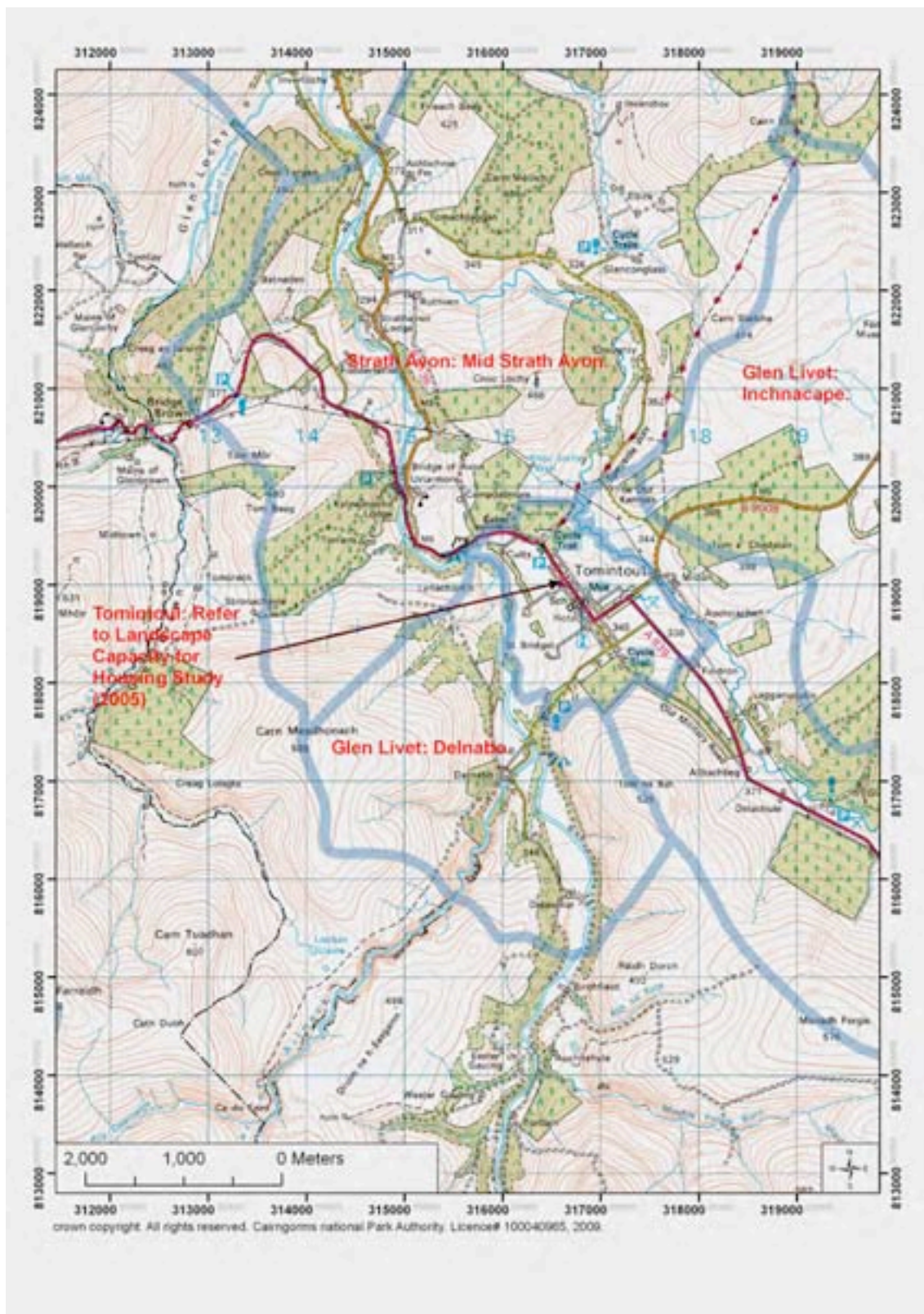
*Regenerating pine and birch across the moorland to the north*



*Views of the tops of high mountains appearing over the edge of this elevated valley*



### 5.6 Glen Livet: Delnabo



### 5.6.1 *Landscape Character*

- These are the upper reaches of Strath Avon, where the river has carved its way through a narrow valley northwards to eventually form a wide strath with a level floodplain just west of Tomintoul
- The floodplain is well defined by long, flat topped terraces and steep slopes which rise abruptly from the level floor of the strath
- To the south west lies the mouth of the steep sided Ailnack gorge, deeply cut into Devonian sediments
- Extensive birch-dominated broadleaved woodland, and some conifer woodland, occupy the steeper side slopes of the glen, reinforcing enclosure of the floodplain
- Policy woodland, associated with Delnabo Lodge, adds to the woodland diversity
- The strath is subdivided into large, often bright green and fertile looking, regularly shaped late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields, which enclose grassland and some arable crops.
- These occasionally, although rarely, extend up onto the slopes above the floodplain, where there are better drained hummocky deposits
- There are traces of the curved field boundaries and early enclosures of pre-improvement and prehistoric field systems as well as later farmsteads on well-drained hummocky deposits and sheltered upper slopes within the inner glen
- A dispersed pattern of farms, lodges, and other buildings occupy the terraces above the floodplain, generally sitting at the very edge of a terrace adjacent to a tributary overlooking the strath, sheltered by surrounding woodland
- The narrow public road hugs the undulating landform and generally follows a break in slope
- The public road extends only a short distance up this glen, but there is a car park at Queens Cairn, overlooking the river, where a bridge crosses the river and there is a cluster of built estate-style features is associated with Delnabo
- Remaining access is on estate roads and tracks, which link the many dispersed hill side farmsteads and provide some access onto the flanks of the higher hills

### 5.6.2 *Landscape experience*

- There is a strong sense of enclosure within the inner glen, created by the pronounced containment of the valley sides which is often reinforced by woodland



- This secluded glen is quiet and ‘tucked away’
- The access to the dramatic Ailnack Gorge, perhaps the most spectacular canyon in the eastern Grampians, is concealed behind Delnabo Lodge, reinforcing the sense of discovery when it is encountered
- The narrow road is elevated as it leaves Tomintoul, offering fine views of the wide floodplain at the north end of this strath

### 5.6.3 Relationship to adjacent character areas

This sheltered glen and fertile floodplain is a marked contrast to the more exposed moors and open landscapes around much of the rest of Tomintoul.

### 5.6.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The presence of the river and the abrupt transition from the flat flood plain to the steep enclosure of the valley sides are a particularly dramatic feature of this glen. This is further emphasised by the difference in vegetation pattern, with bright green fields on the flat floodplain, extensive semi-natural broadleaved woodland on the enclosing side slopes and farmsteads perched on the edges of the glen.



*The wide mouth of this floodplain just west of Tomintoul*



*The floodplain narrows as the glen extends south into the hills, with the improved fields on the floor of the valley*



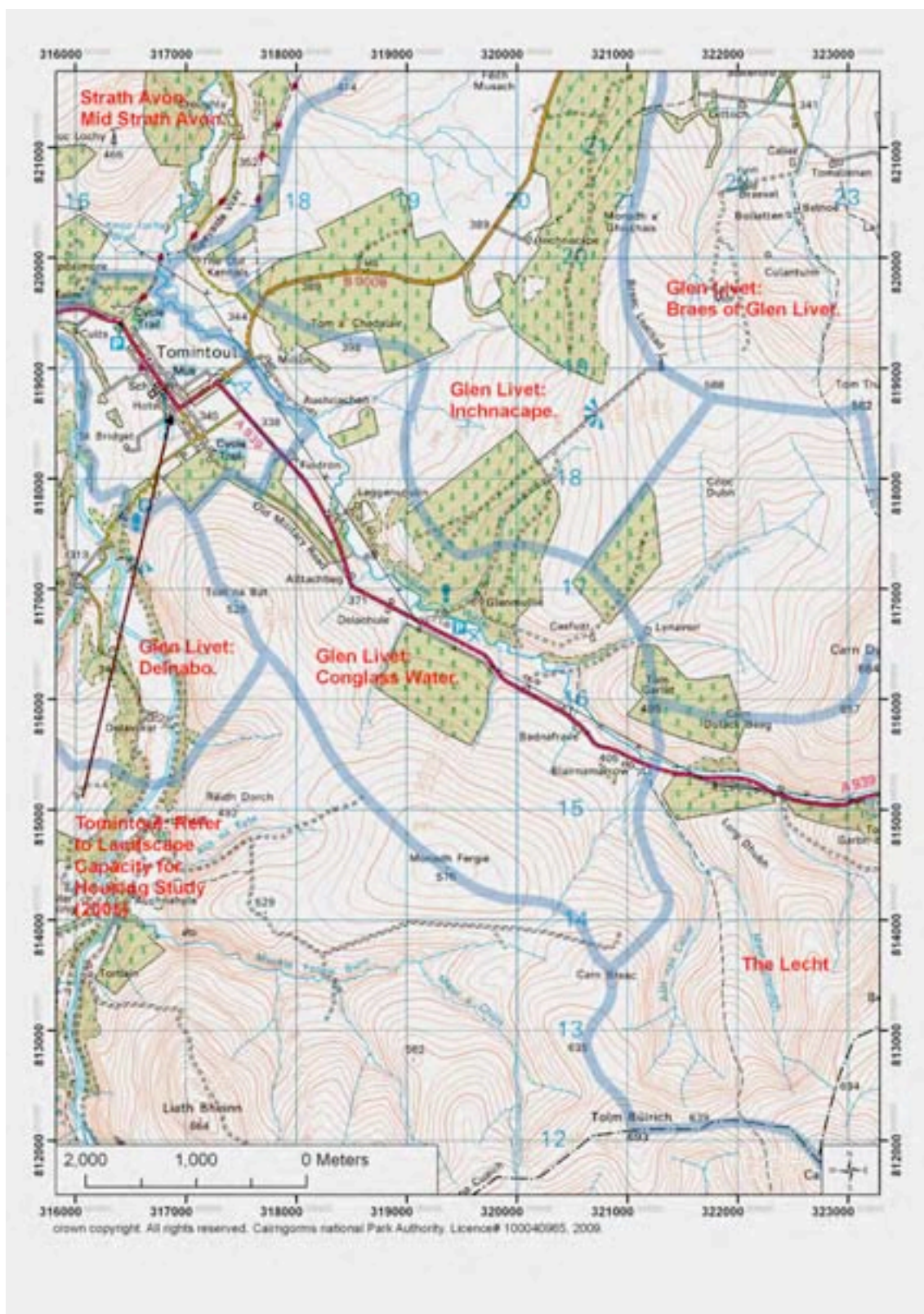
*Occasionally, the improved fields extend up onto better drained rolling terrain. There is extensive birch woodland along steeper side slopes*



*An avenue at Delnabo, and built features associated with the estate*



### 5.7 Glen Livet: **Conglass Water**



### 5.7.1 *Landscape Character*

- This elevated, broad, flat bottomed glen, orientated north west/south east sits framed by well defined valley sides carved out of deep deposit by the Conglass Water. The valley narrows, and the sides become steeper, as it extends south east into the hills
- Although the domed hills with gently graded side slopes provide very little containment, several deep side valleys, with much steeper slopes, have been formed by tributaries to the main river
- The Conglass Water meanders across the floodplain, although to the north it sits firmly to the north east side of the valley, leaving a wide stretch of level valley floor available for cultivation
- There are several blocks of conifer woodland, not clearly associated with any particular land form feature, and some broadleaved, semi-natural woodland along the river valleys and steep valley sides
- The remaining hill sides are heather moor with some upland grassland
- The valley floor has been subdivided into 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields, now fenced, around each of the farms, alternating with stretches of unimproved grazing and wetland
- The former pattern of long, narrow, linear fields around the planned village of Tomintoul is now barely visible as the fields are reverting to unimproved pasture, or being managed more extensively
- More extensive, linear fields on the flat river terrace behind Milton take advantage of well drained deposits
- Farms are clearly located at the mouths of the individual side valleys, above small alluvial fans, and fields sometimes extend up onto higher hillsides close to the farmsteads
- There is a tiny linear settlement, perched on the top of the river terrace, at Milton, set in sheltering woodland
- The A939 is relatively straight, generally following the line of the old military road, usually located at the break in slope, elevated above the lower valley and floodplain

### 5.7.2 *Landscape experience*

- There is a sense of openness in this relatively expansive landscape, which feels exposed despite the conifer woodland and the well-defined river terrace providing some containment
- Despite the cultivated fields, there is a perception of being in an upland area, with marginal farmland, at the edge of cultivation

5.7.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This landscape forms a transition between Strath Avon/Glen Livet and the high pass at the Lecht, and reflects this transition, with cultivation and fields extending into an elevated river valley which narrows to become a pass.

5.7.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The elevated glen floor, with its profile of a level floodplain contained by steep sided river terraces forms the context for marginal farmland which creates a sense of being at the transition between sheltered lowlands and exposed uplands.



*The relatively level, broad valley floor of the Conglass Water*



*The settlement of Milton, set on a river terrace above the floodplain, with fields on the elevated terrace behind the settlement*

