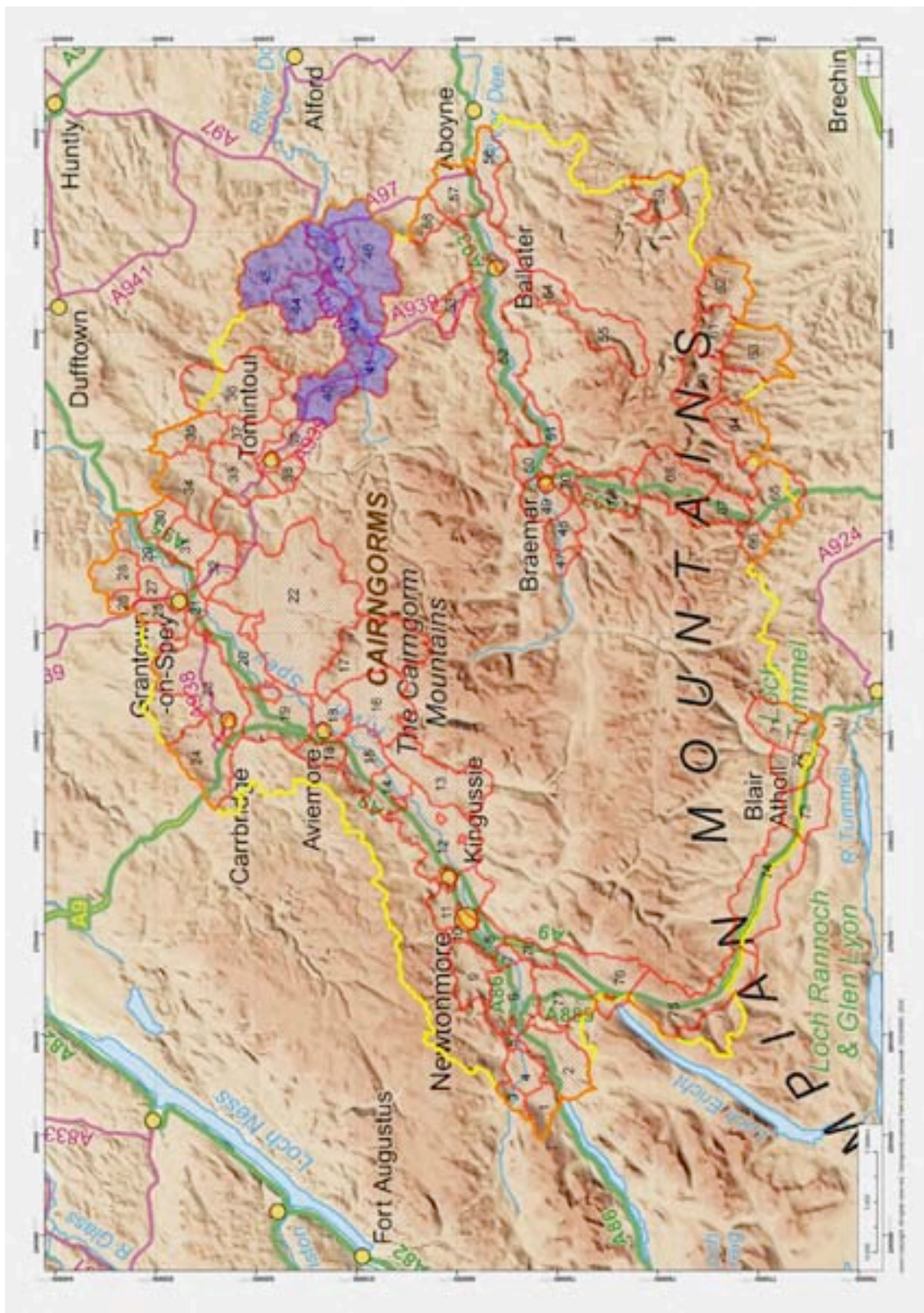


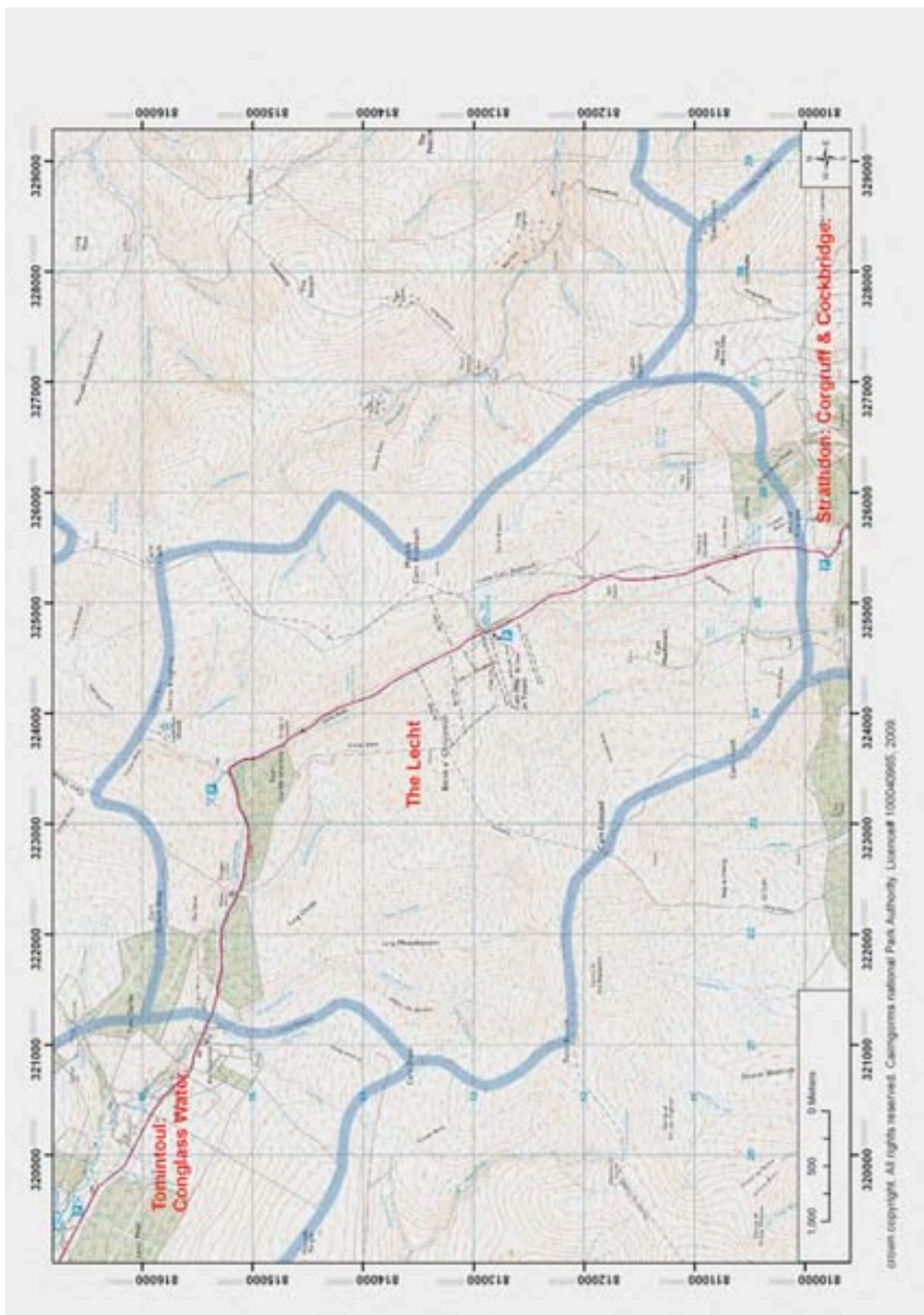
6 THE LECHT AND STRATHDON

This section of the LCA includes the Lecht and Strathdon. This character assessment is presented, working from west to east, as follows:

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



6.1 The Lecht



6.1.1 *Landscape Character*

- This high pass is formed by a deep, steep sided river valley which cuts through the bulky but rounded hill summits and long, smooth ridges of the Ladder Hills
- The summits and upper slopes are a mosaic of heather, patches of burnt heather moor and swathes of pale upland grassland
- To the north, the pass is further contained by conifer woodland as it narrows
- The road, following the route of an old military way, climbs on a long even gradient along the upper edge of the deep river valley, elevated well above the valley, at times even perched on a ridgeline
- The ski centre at the Lecht is close to the highest point on the road, and some of the lifts and other infrastructure are seen on the skylines of the long ridges
- The cluster of buildings and carparks associated with the ski centre sit either side of the road, although they are focussed on a single stretch of road
- The only other feature is the 'Well of the Lecht' and the old mines, which are accessible on foot from an associated carpark at the northern end of the pass

6.1.2 *Landscape experience*

- There is a sense of openness in this expansive and elevated landscape
- The high road offers panoramic views and easy, vehicular access to a landscape of mountain and upland character
- The landscape is still in essence simple and sparse, despite the woodland and ski centre as well as other infrastructure such as the overhead line
- The upland hill forms are bold and formidable, creating a sense of solidity and 'bulk' in the landscape which dominates over the human interventions

6.1.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This upland, relatively sparse landscape is in marked contrast to the diverse valley landscapes in the glens and straths on either side.

6.1.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The sense of openness, the semi-natural vegetation, the elevation, and the strong 'presence' of the formidable heft of the landform still dominates this upland landscape despite the infrastructure, ski centre buildings and the forestry.



Rounded hills, clad in moor mottled with burnt heather, enclose the deep river valley



The road sits on the edge of the valley, sometimes on an exposed ridge



Infrastructure associated with the ski centre, as well as the pylon line, clustered at a high point on the road

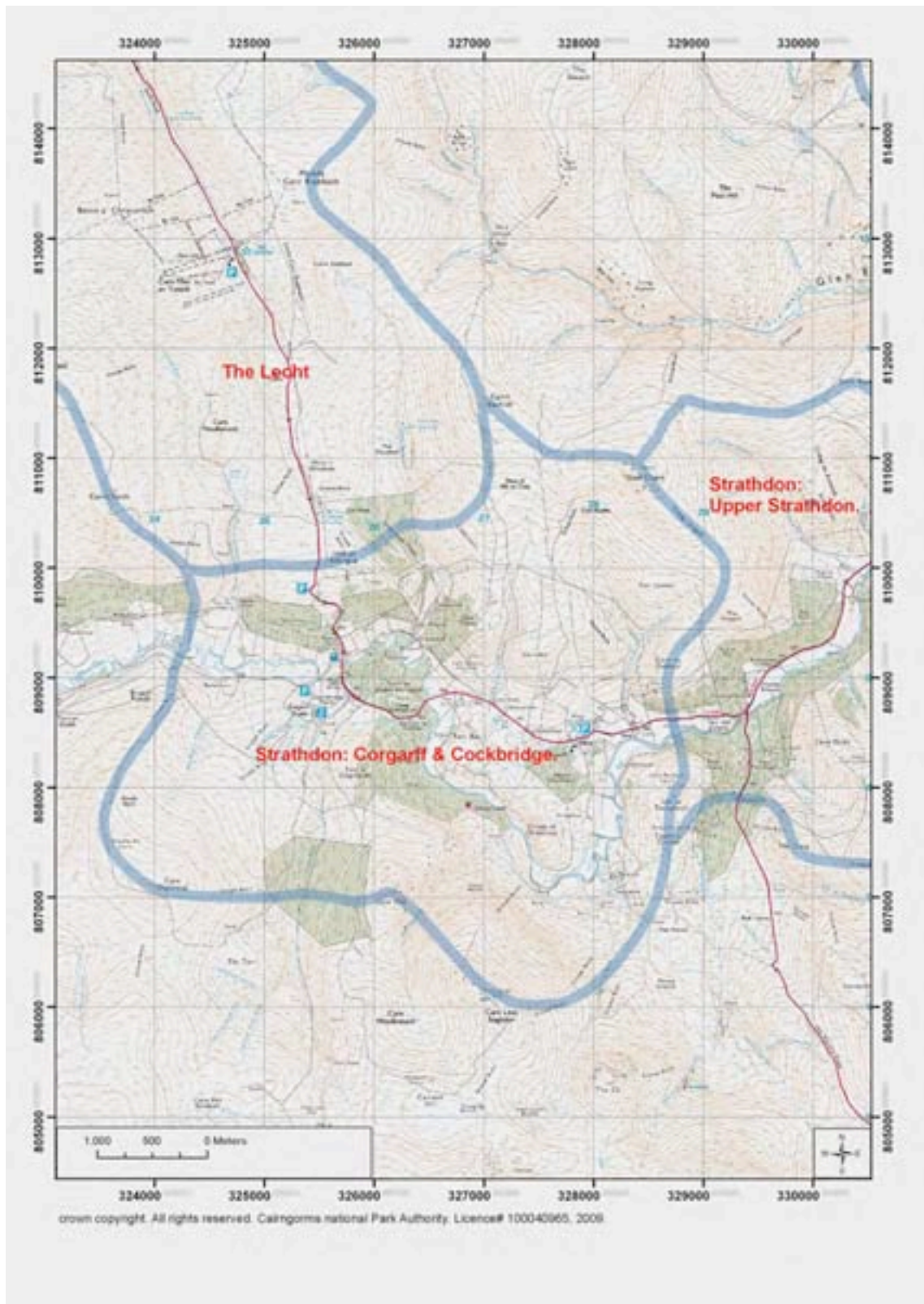


The Well of the Lecht, and the former mid-nineteenth century mine which was the largest manganese mine in Scotland



Conifer woodland at the northern end of the pass

6.2 Strathdon: **Corgarff and Cockbridge**



6.2.1 *Landscape Character*

- This wide, shallow, elevated glen is contained by steep hills with rounded summits and narrow side valleys
- The very meandering River Don winds across a narrow, flat floodplain, but this sits within a wider valley floor of extensive undulating glacial-fluvial deposit which has been eroded to form smooth ridges
- The landscape is relatively open, but there are some large areas of conifer woodland at the western end of the character area, particularly on steeper side slopes which frame the lower valley
- Heather moorland, with patches of burnt heather, and upland grassland extend over the unplanted hillsides, with rough grazing even on lower slopes and along the floor of the glen
- Small groups of trees are associated with the farms and other buildings, and there is the occasional conifer shelter wood
- Late 18th/19th century improved fields, fenced and grazed, are interspersed with rough grazing and fields which are reverting to wetland and unimproved grassland. These tend to be on the south facing slopes in places well above the river
- Farms and individual houses are dispersed across the farmed land, on the terraces or higher ground above the floodplain
- The white painted Corgarff castle is a landmark building at the conjunction of Strath Don and the pass to the Lecht. It sits on an alluvial fan, surrounded by bright green improved fields
- From the east, the A939 sweeps through this landscape in long curves undulating with the gentle curvature of the landform before striking uphill in a series of switch back bends to the high pass at the Lecht
- The A939 in part strikes well away from the winding river, deviating from the route of the old military road

6.2.2 *Landscape experience*

- This landscape feels marginal in terms of agriculture, as many of the fields are interspersed with rough grazing, and former improved land is not being intensively farmed
- The striking colour contrast between the white painted Corgarff castle and its setting of bright green fields reinforces its 'pivotal' location within the valleys and its role as a landmark feature
- There are dramatic views of the strath from the elevated A939 where it begins to climb up to the pass towards the Lecht

6.2.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area forms a 'transition' between the more diverse and fertile lower reaches of Strath Don and the upland areas and high pass at the Lecht, and therefore has characteristics which reflect both these neighbouring character areas.

6.2.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The mixture of enclosed fields and rough grazing alternating across the floor of parts of the strath reflects its location as a transition between upland and lowland areas. The strategic placement of Corgarff castle at the conjunction of the strath and the pass to the Lecht within its setting of green fields, combine to create a striking landmark feature.



Fields on more gentle slopes, with heather moorland on the upper slopes



There is more woodland to the west of this character area

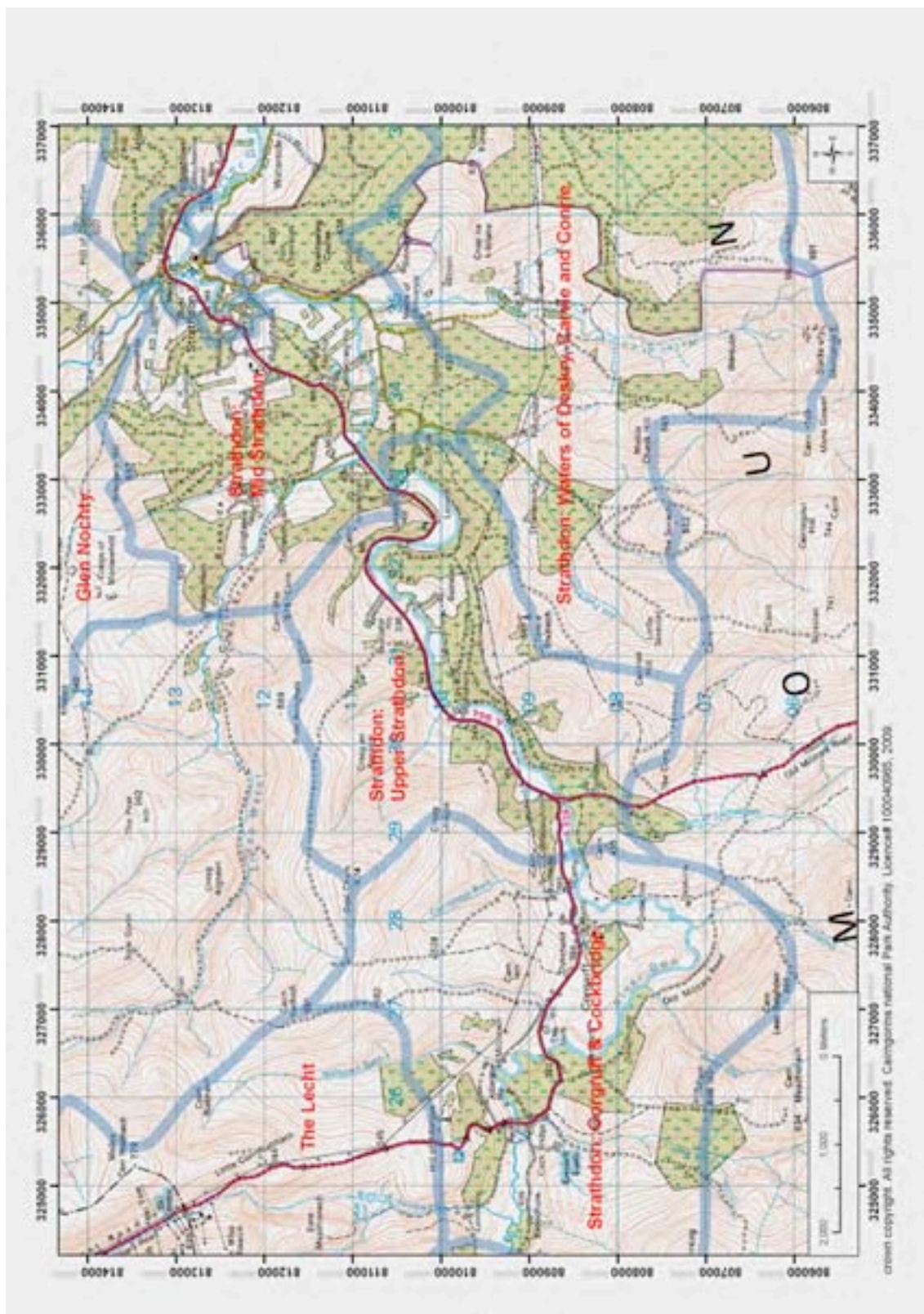


Corgarff castle surrounded by green fields



The road sweeps through the undulating land form. The farms are often sheltered by small groups of trees

6.3 Strathdon: **Upper Strathdon**



6.3.1 *Landscape Character*

- This narrow section of valley, a 'pass' carved by the River Don, winds broadly west/east between steep sided hills with rounded, often domed summits
- Bands of scree on some of the slopes have been created by glacial erosion exposing bands of bedrock which have subsequently been subject to frost weathering, resulting in rockfalls
- The steep valley sides stop abruptly at the edge of a narrow, very flat flood plain, although they also alternate with arcs of more gentle gradients along the length of the valley, creating a complex topography which reflects the underlying diverse lithology
- At Lonach Hill the River Don carves a fine, incised meander where the floodplain is contained within the higher amplitude bends of the valley
- The north facing slopes of this valley are covered with conifer forest, which often reaches down to the edge of the floodplain
- On the south facing slopes, the conifer woodland focuses around the narrowest sections of the 'pass', where the side slopes are steepest, and where again woodland comes down to the edge of the floodplain
- Occasional policy woodland features – such as the avenue at Skellater House – add some diversity to this landscape
- Late 18th/19th century improved fields, often enclosed by walls, occupy the more gentle gradients of the side slopes, regardless of aspect
- These small fields of grassland and some arable alternate with the woodland on the steeper slopes
- Most of the very level floodplain is also subdivided into small, fenced 18th/19th century improved fields, but these alternate with areas of wetland which are subject to frequent flooding
- Remarkably, there are a couple of farms located on the edge of the narrow floodplain, but otherwise, farms are sited on the gentle, farmed upper slopes, overlooking the strath. This part of the valley of the River Don is not heavily settled.
- At the narrowest sections of valley floor, the A944 hugs the very edge of the steeper slopes, right on the edge of the floodplain, where it has a stone retaining wall along the upside of the roadway

6.3.2 *Landscape experience*

- The sense of winding through a narrow pass is reinforced by the dense conifer woodland

- There is a sequence of open farmed land associated with more gentle gradients alternating with woodland on steeper side slopes which is experienced when travelling through the valley
- The flat floodplain, and its abrupt juxtaposition with steep side slopes 'channels' views along the valley, although they are never far-reaching

6.3.3 Relationship to adjacent character areas

This area is very self contained, although it provides a sense of a 'pass' between the settled, diverse lower strath and the upper reaches of the River Don west of Corgarff.

6.3.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The drama of the flat floodplain framed by the steep valley sides is reinforced by the alternating sequence of woodland and farmland, a pattern which is closely allied to slope gradient. A similar alternating sequence of farmed land and wetland along the floodplain creates a further rhythmic pattern to this landscape.



Conifer woodland on the steeper slopes enclose the narrow, level floodplain



There are fields, framed by woodland, across the more gentle slopes, alternating with woodland on the steeper slopes

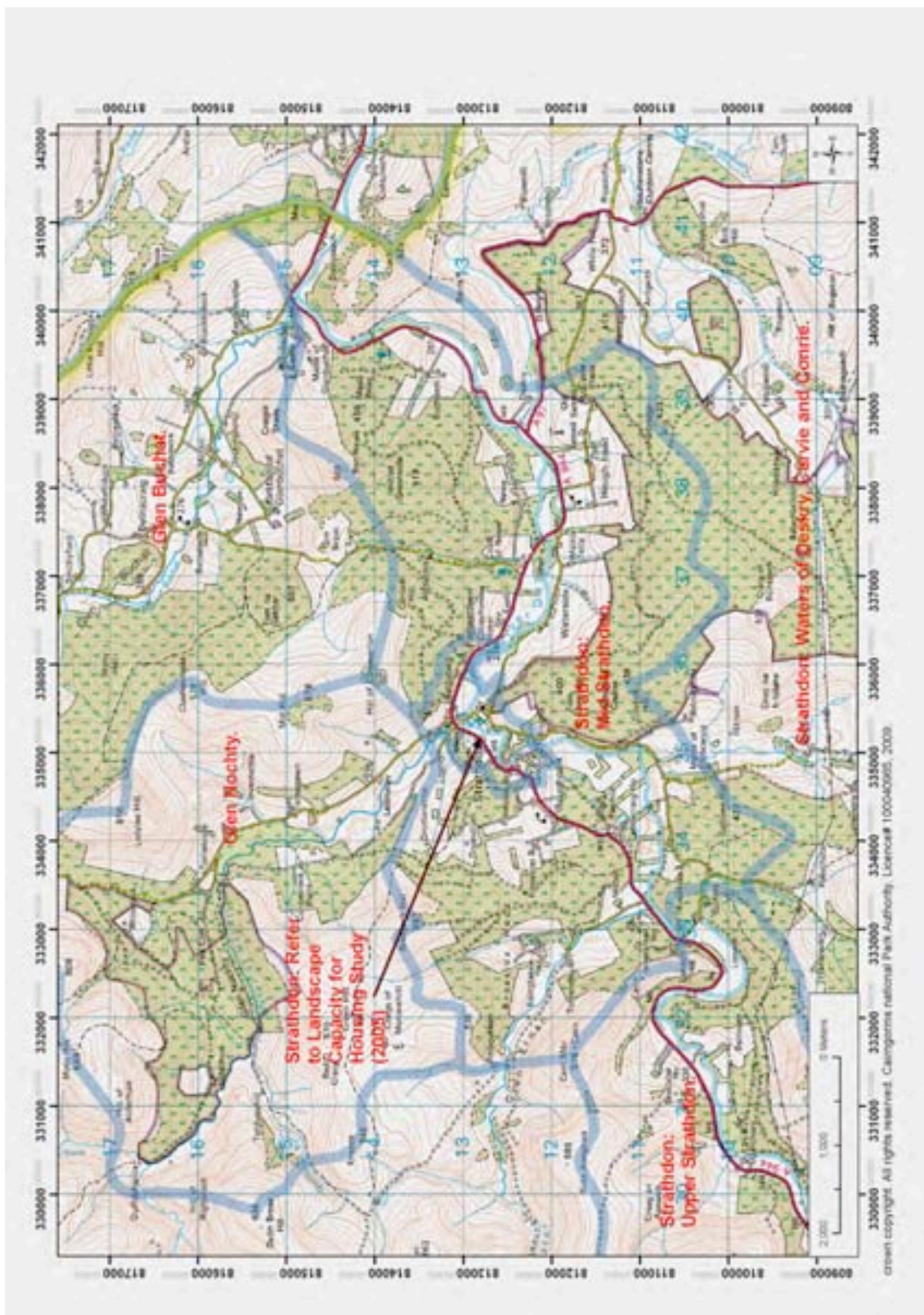


Scree created by frost weathering on bands of bedrock which have been exposed by glacial erosion



An avenue of mature broadleaves at Skellater

6.4 Strathdon: **Mid Strathdon**



6.4.1 Landscape Character

- This winding valley is relatively narrow, contained by gently sloping and rounded lower slopes beneath steeper, enclosing upper slopes
- Rounded hill summits and long ridges form the pronounced containment of the valley, with only the narrow-mouthed side glens occasionally breaching the valley sides
- The winding River Don meanders in long loops from side to side across the floodplain. This varies in width, lying between undulating slopes of glacial-fluvial deposit
- Extensive mixed conifer woodland covers most of the upper, steeper slopes, occasionally linked seamlessly to narrow shelter belts which reach down to the floor of the strath
- Several designed landscapes of policy woodland and planted features, including beech and lime in the species mix, avenues, occasional clumps of parkland trees on the floodplain and specimen trees, add to diversity
- These wooded designed landscapes associated with a number of estate mansions create a pattern of woodland on steep slopes alternating with farmland on gentle slopes along the sides of the strath
- Gaps in the woodland means that in places farmland extends well up the hill sides, with relatively small, late 18th/19th century improved fields on well drained and gently graded slopes, regardless of aspect. These are sometimes contained by walls
- The lower fields, some of which are quite large, enclose arable crops as well as grassland, but occasionally on the very highest slopes there is some reversion to more poorly drained, unimproved grassland
- The area is well settled. Four or five small linear settlements are located along the valley sides
- Loose clusters of estate and farm buildings are sited at intervals, often associated with the sites of now ruined castles. The architectural style of individual estates adds to the diversity of built structures
- Strathdon and Bellabeg are associated with the conjunction of glens combined with an ancient crossing point of the River, which is further marked by the striking pre-historic motte and more recent church. This pattern is repeated at the mouth of the Buchat
- Dispersed farms are often located on the upper slopes
- The A944 winds along this strath, following the sinuous river valley.
- All the roads are very tightly located against clearly defined 'breaks in slope', slightly elevated above the floodplain. Several have stone retaining walls along the upside of the roadway

6.4.2 *Landscape experience*

- The sinuous form of this strath creates a sense of ‘intrigue’, as when travelling along the length of the valley, the landscape is revealed only in small stages, and it is impossible to see the valley as a whole
- The roads wind through a sequence of woodland alternating with patches of open farmland which increases the sense of anticipation as the landscape is revealed and views change at each bend in the road and at every new open space
- The strath is very diverse, in large part due to the influence of the individual estates, some of which occupy very old sites, and have well established designed landscapes and many individual features

6.4.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This character area is very self contained, with only occasional views into other character areas along side glens.

6.4.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

Small fields extend high up the smooth, undulating side slopes of the strath, reinforcing the sequence of open farmland alternating with enclosed woodland, some of which is associated with designed landscapes along the strath. Roads are firmly tucked into the winding 'break in slope', so that travelling through this strath reveals its sinuous form.



Rolling land form and gentle slopes support fields of grassland and arable land up the side slopes of the strath



Fields extend up higher slopes, although some are reverting to upland grassland and whin



Woodland, including shelterbelts and, on the level floodplain, 'roundels' of pine



A linear settlement – one of several – adjacent to the River Don, which is hidden within riparian woodland

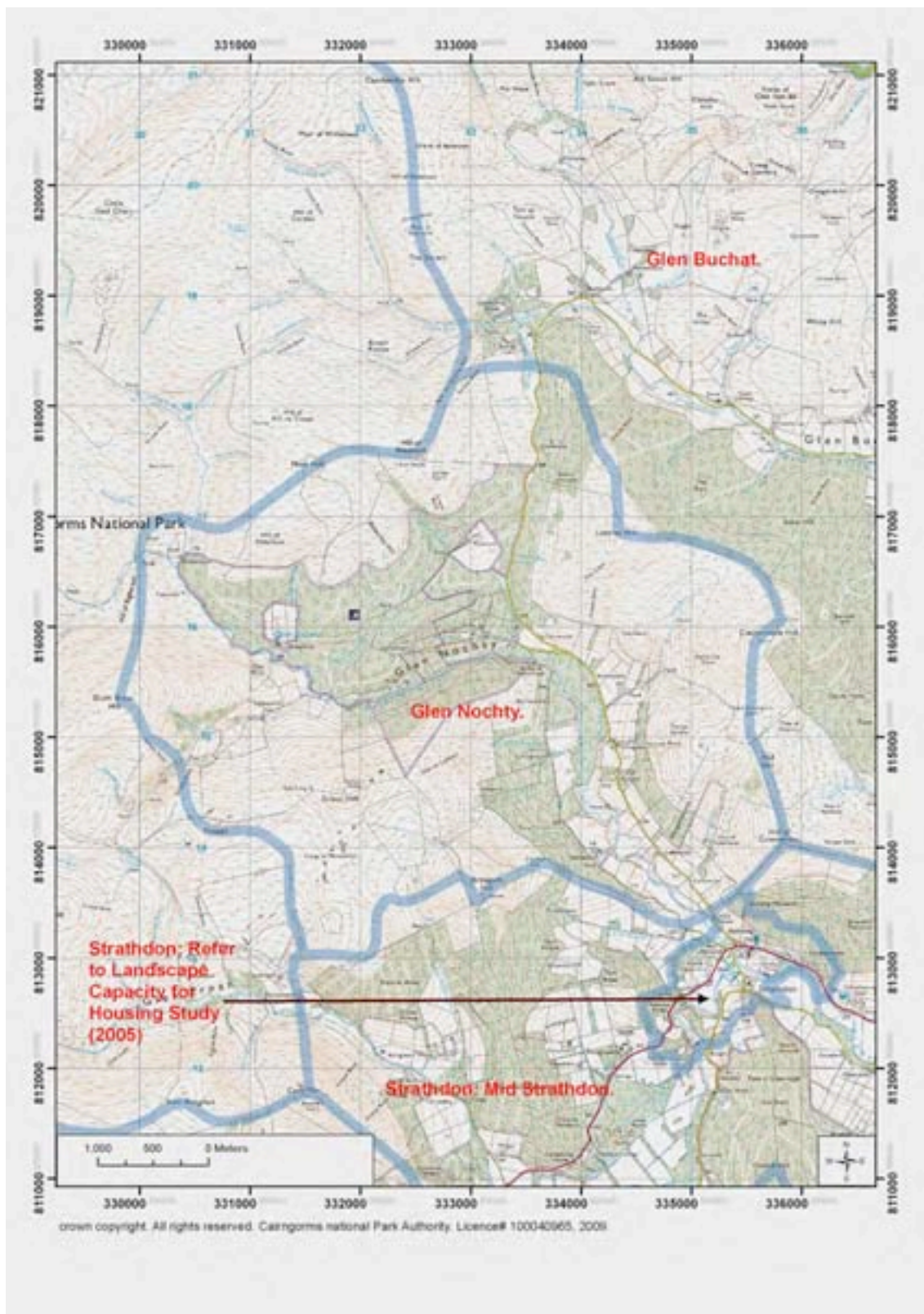


The sequence of woodland and farmland along the glen



Walls around these fields, and some mature policy woodland

6.5 Strathdon: **Glen Nocht**



6.5.1 *Landscape Character*

- This steep sided glen is contained by low rounded hills and relatively even slopes divided by a series of small, quite deeply incised side valleys which are suspended above the main glen
- The steep side slopes frame dramatic river terraces along the floor of the main glen, and the narrow, V-shaped valley of the Water of Nocht where it branches west into the Ladder Hills
- The meandering Water of Nocht has carved river terraces into the deep deposit which fills this valley and which still fall away into the river after heavy rain
- The glen is heavily wooded, with conifer woodland over many of the side slopes, occasionally reaching down to the valley floor or stopping at the upper edge of the fields. It also extends over and closes around former fields in the narrow upper glens
- Small, fenced, late 18th/19th century improved fields, mostly under grass, lie across the more gentle gradients, particularly on the west facing slopes, and sit on top of the flat, well drained river terraces
- The floodplain of the river is narrow, framed by the terraces and occupied by wetland as well as grassland
- Dispersed farms are located prominently on the top of river terraces, or sit along the upper slopes, overlooking the mouths of the small, elevated side glens
- The roads are narrow, and are largely perched on the valley sides, elevated well above the river, except at the most northerly reaches, where it winds along the valley floor, hugging the slightly sinuous landform
- The 'motte' at Strathdon is a striking land mark feature at the foot of this glen

6.5.2 *Landscape experience*

- The narrowness and containment of the glen is reinforced by the enclosure created by the extensive conifer woodland
- The river terraces are dramatic, and, with erosion still taking place, dynamic features along the valley floor
- The elevated roads offer fine views along the length of the glen and down to these features, as well as an elevated view of the dramatic 'motte'
- The farmed land offers some relief to the extent of woodland enclosure along this glen

6.5.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is relatively self contained and visually there is little relationship with any other character area.

6.5.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The elevated open views of the dramatic river terraces and the 'motte' are a striking contrast to the more densely wooded stretches of this glen. The consistent location of farms on either river terraces or at the mouths of side glens is a recognisable pattern.



Fields on the west facing slopes, with a farm located on the edge of a side valley



Woodland extends down to the upper edge of the fields, with a farm perched on the river terrace

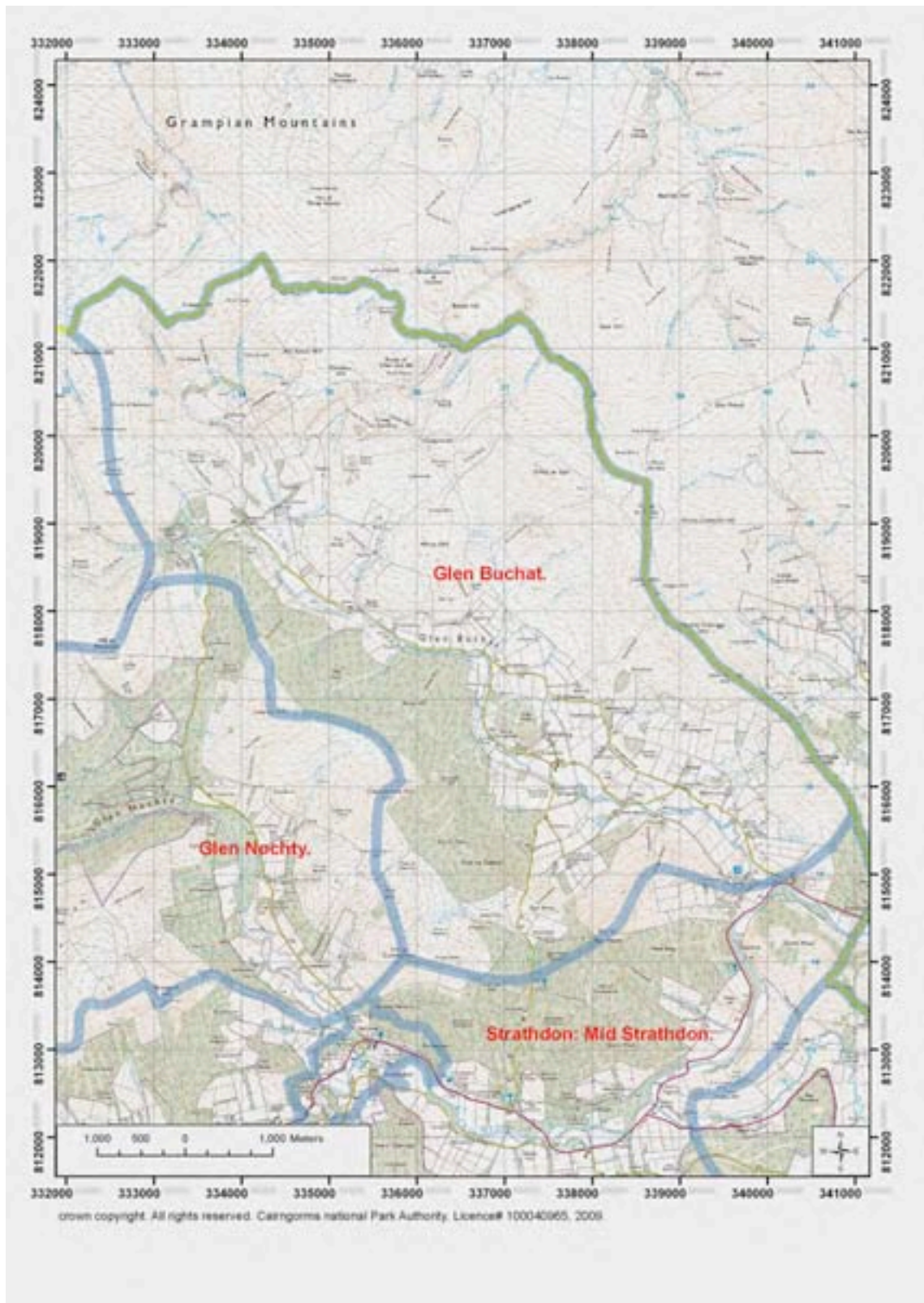


There is extensive conifer woodland in this glen



The Water of Nocht meanders through a narrow floodplain contained by dramatic river bluffs. The valley floor has been in filled by glacial deposits and then re-excavated.

6.6 Strathdon: **Glen Buchat**



6.6.1 *Landscape Character*

- The complex landform of this southeast/north west orientated glen is underpinned by a diverse lithology which shows very few signs of glacial erosion
- The wide glen is contained by low, smooth, rounded hill forms and undulating side slopes, and punctuated by small isolated hills
- The glen narrows part way up, to create a slightly steeper 'pass' linking the two wider sections of the glen. Here the river is contained by sloping ledges of bedrock covered by a thin layer of deposit between rounded hillsides
- There is extensive conifer woodland over the western hills, which occasionally extends down to the edge of the glen floor
- In addition, there are smaller conifer shelter woods across the floor of the strath, often associated with the small, individual hills, and sometimes along the sides of the Water of Buchat
- The eastern slopes are open, clad in heather moor with some upland grassland
- Numerous, straight-edged, small 18th/19th century improved fields, enclosed with walls or fences, extend across the whole width of the glen floor and up onto the gently graded side slopes and small hills
- Rich soils over basic igneous rocks underpin the southern part of the valley, and here the fields contain arable crops as well as grassland,
- The upper glen, on less rich bedrock, is more dominated by grassland and occasional rough grazing on lower slopes
- The many late 19th century farmsteads are dispersed across the glen, often located on higher slopes, with additional clusters of small settlement associated with river crossing points
- Areas of pre-improvement farming, with slight remains of buildings and shielings can be found on the open, unwooded south west facing slopes
- The northern head of the glen is marked by Glenbuchat Lodge, which is set in extensive conifer woodland, while the ruined Glenbuchat castle overlooks the mouth of the glen to the south
- There is a network of narrow public roads which criss-cross the wider parts of the glen, and link to an extensive network of estate and forestry tracks across the low hills on both sides of the glen

6.6.2 *Landscape experience*

- The complex landform of undulations, low hills and smooth interlocking ridges creates a small scale landscape

- The expanse of small fields, especially in the lower part of the glen, creates a colourful patchwork of diverse crops intermixed with small scale woodlands which complements the small scale land form features
- The contrast between the dark green conifer woodland on the north east facing slopes and the open, south west facing hill sides is pronounced
- The narrow, winding roads, which wriggle their way around the undulating topography, sometimes cross higher ridges, offering elevated views of the glen floor
- Although well settled, the area is slightly 'tucked away', and becomes more secluded especially towards the northern end of the glen

6.6.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is largely self-contained, with very little inter-visibility with adjacent character areas.

6.6.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The small scale of this landscape, created by the landform of a wide, undulating glen floor punctuated by individual hills, is further reinforced by the small size of the fields, the narrow winding network of roads and the small farms.



Low rounded hills across the wide floor of this lower part of the glen, with farmland and small shelter woods



Small fields contained by sloping ledges of bedrock, which are underneath a relatively thin layer of deposit, in the narrower part of the glen

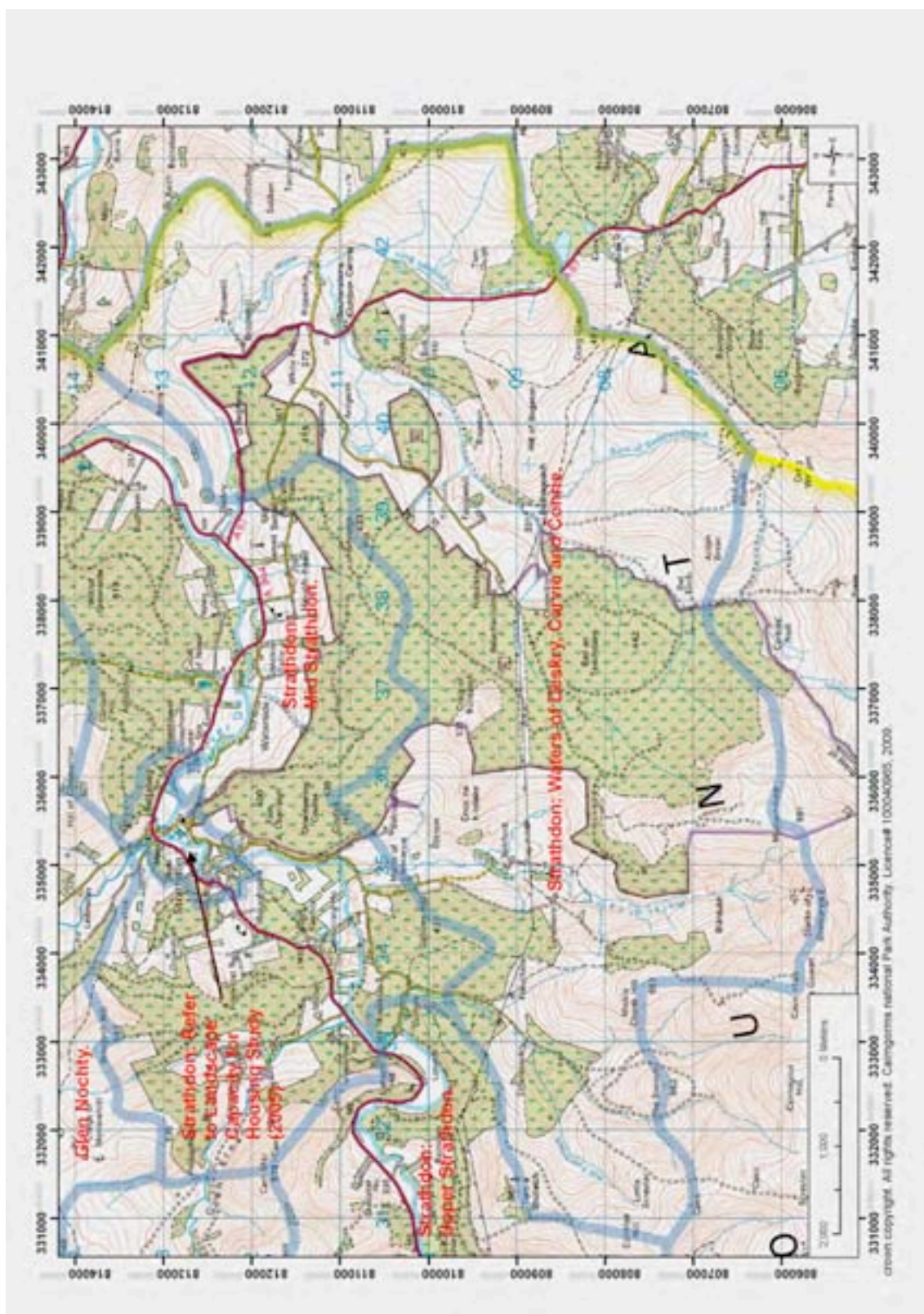


Some fields are enclosed with walls, and many are relatively small



Farms tucked in and around the small scale landform

6.7 Strathdon: Waters of Deskry, Glen Carvie and Glen Conrie



6.7.1 *Landscape Character*

- These three shallow valleys are elevated above the main valley of the Don, extending broadly south/south west from the main glen, contained by gently rounded hills and long ridges. This is a pre-glacial landscape, with little evidence of glacial erosion
- The watercourses meander tightly through narrow floodplains of wetland, although the lower courses are more incised as they drop down to the main valley. Occasional small pools and lochans can be found on the glen floors.
- There is extensive conifer forest on the side slopes and many of the hill tops, and smaller conifer woodlands and shelter woods in the glens
- There are small patches of pine woodland, often encountered as mature stands on hill tops, supplemented by more extensive regenerating pine across the moorland and grassland on the remaining unforested upper slopes
- There is extensive farmed land on the wide valley floors and gently graded lower slopes of these shallow glens
- Small, straight edged, late 18th/19th century improved fields, some of which are enclosed with walls and some of which are now fenced, enclose grazing land with very occasional arable crops
- Frequent small, generally vernacular 19th century farmsteads, arranged in no particular pattern, but often sited to avoid the best land, are linked to the public road by short farm tracks
- There are several abandoned farmsteads within these glens, and some of the former improved fields are reverting to unimproved pasture
- The narrow, winding public roads are 'dead ends', petering out to become forest roads and estate tracks. Several have stone retaining walls along the upside of the roadway
- Although each glen is self contained, they are linked by a series of tracks and footpaths

6.7.2 *Landscape experience*

- The shallow landform generally limits enclosure, so that this landscape feels open, although the woodland creates some sense of containment, perhaps most obviously in Glen Conrie
- The small scale of the fields and frequency of the farmsteads creates an impression of a landscape of some historic integrity, in places less affected by later field improvements

- The glens feel secluded, although they are close to the Strath of the River Don, in part because of the narrow, dead end road which limits traffic

6.7.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

These glens are very self contained, with limited inter-visibility with other surrounding character areas, and a degree of detachment from Strathdon

6.7.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The secluded and marginal, upland character, and the apparent historic integrity of the small fields and pattern of dispersed but frequent late 18th/19th century farmsteads sets this area apart from the Strath of the River Don.



Wide, shallow valleys of farmed land



Watercourses in narrow, wet floodplains, and scattered pine regenerating on the upper slopes across moorland



Dispersed farmsteads, including abandoned buildings are scattered across the gentle slopes – hummocky deposit is revealed by the grassland in the foreground



Stone retaining walls along the 'upside' of the narrow roads

