

9 **GLEN SHEE, GLEN BEAG AND GLEN CLUNIE**

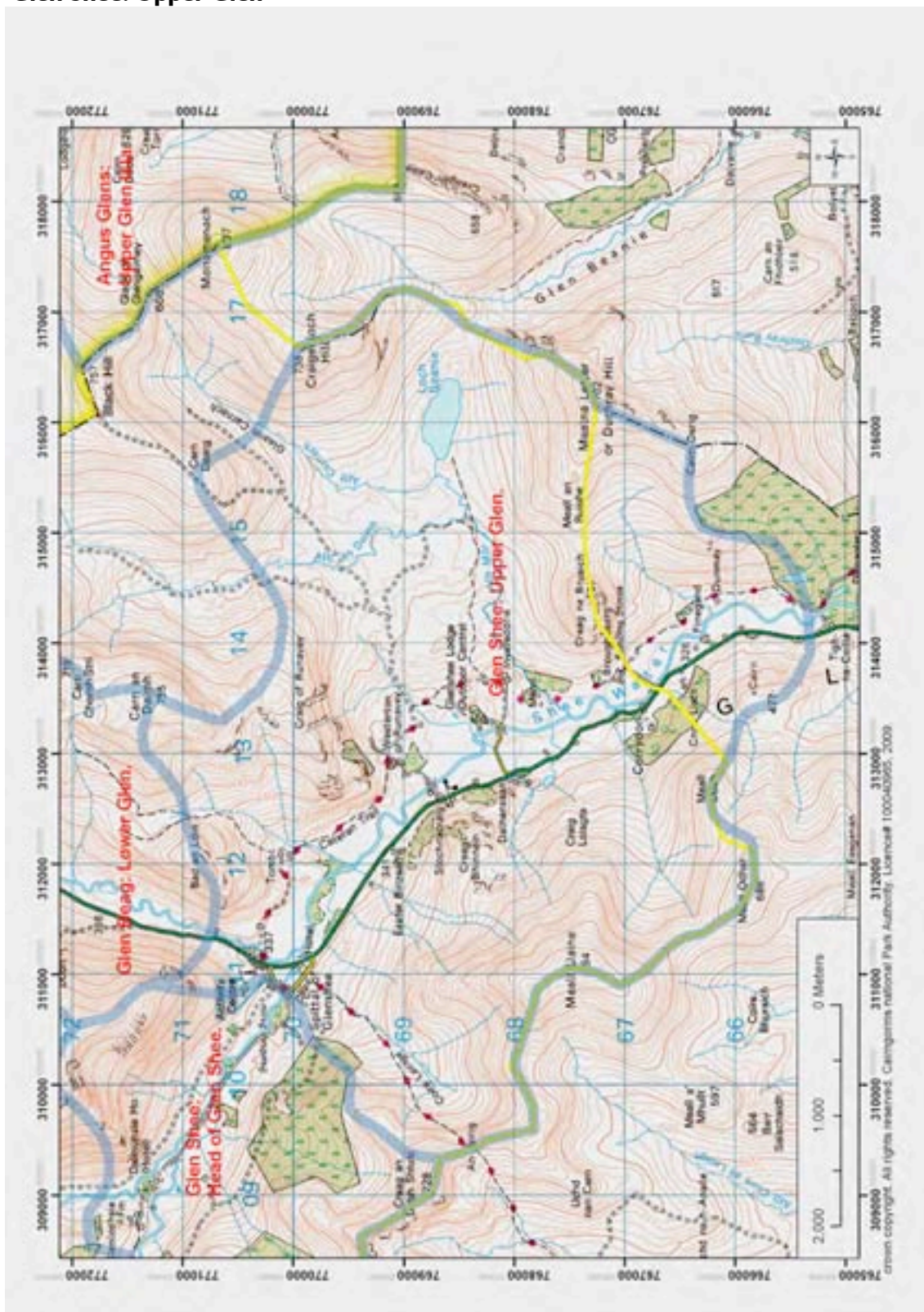
This section of the LCA includes the northern part of Glen Shee, which lies within the proposed new Park boundary up to the Glen Shee ski resort at Cairnwell (Glen Beag), and then northwards up to Braemar (Glen Clunie). This character assessment is presented, working from south to north, as follows:

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

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



9.1 Glen Shee: Upper Glen



9.1.1 Landscape Character

- Steep sided upper slopes, often with rocky outcrops with forms that reflect the changing lithology and structure of the bedrock, rise to distinct summits
- Lower slopes are typified by more complex terrain of varied gradients, terraces, hummocks and subtle ridges where glacial deposits often mask the bedrock
- Level stretches of floodplain alternate with well drained gravelly hummocks, ridges and terraces in glacial-fluvial deposits which extend along the edges of the wide glen floor
- The Shee Water meanders in wide loops across the width of the glen floor, sometimes through extensive areas of rushy wetland
- The upper slopes are covered with actively burned heather moor
- 18th/19th century improved fields, now containing improved grassland, are shaped to fit around the steep-sided hummocks where unimproved grassland and occasional mature birch woodland provide a textural contrast
- The glen is diversely wooded, including riparian woodland, 'wood pasture' on hummocks, birch along the lower side slopes and occasional conifer woodland associated with individual settlements or established as shelter woods
- The fields, some of which are walled, extend onto more accessible, gentle gradients up the sides of the glen, to a 'head dyke' which largely follows the boundary between glacial deposit and revealed bedrock
- There is evidence that this area has been continuously settled for millennia and there are extensive remains of former, pre-improvement buildings and fields particularly along the lower slopes above the improved glen floor, although they are not widely visible
- Evenly and frequently distributed 18th/19th century farmsteads, located on the drier ground at the very edge of the glen floor, appear to be located on the sites of long-established settlements
- The Spittal of Glenshee is a focal settlement, located at the conjunction of three glens, with diverse architectural styles in part reflecting its role as a seasonal skiing base
- The road sits on higher ground, hugging the break in slope and following the dips and crests of the terrain along the western edge of the glen
- While there are several tracks – possibly used largely for sporting access – into the hills, the main public access is the CATERAN TRAIL, a long distance walk which extends along the length of the glen

9.1.2 *Landscape experience*

- The glen appears to be well wooded, as from many viewpoints the individual areas of woods and mature trees visually merge to create a continuous mass of trees
- The wide glen floor, subdivided by small scale hummocks, woodland and fields, contrasts with the larger scale of the hills
- From the elevated road, there are good views across the glen floor, and the side slopes frame views to the prominent summit of Ben Gulabin when travelling north

9.1.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

The glen is largely self-contained, with little inter-relationship with other areas, although the Spittal forms a threshold settlement to the Head of Glen Shee and Glen Beag.

9.1.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The complex topography, varied woodland and small fields on the glen floor contrasts with the rugged, heather clad mountain slopes and summits. The settlement pattern appears to be little changed from the early 19th century farmstead distribution and architecture.



Small 19th century farms against the edges of the glen floor



A ridge of glacial-fluvial deposit with associated 'wood pasture' type grazing

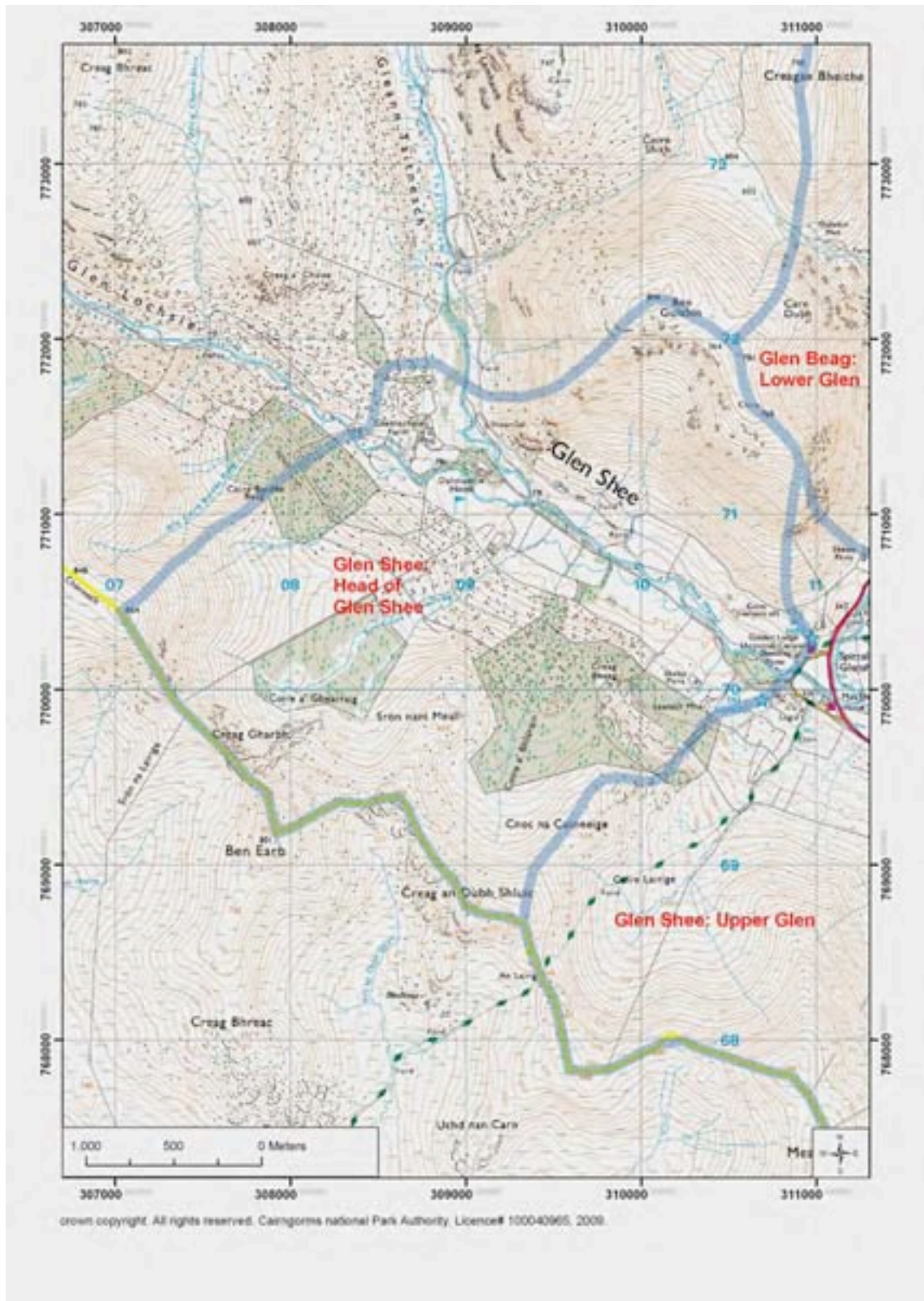


Riparian woodland, and the faint outline of turf dykes



A variety of woodland – from open stands of birch to commercial conifer woodland

9.2 Glen Shee: **Head of Glen Shee**



9.2.1 *Landscape Character*

- Extending north west from the main glen, this glen is accessed by passing through the Spittal of Glenshee, its entrance on the road indicated by a formal estate gateway
- The relatively narrow glen floor is framed by steep sided, concave slopes, with a more complex topography of rocky spurs and shallow corries facing north east
- The glen floor is hummocky, with glacial-fluvial deposits which extend along the lower slopes of the hills
- The Shee Water is gravel-bedded, with occasional braided reaches, but is relatively straight, constrained by the hummocky terrain
- 18/19th century improved fields, containing improved grassland and fodder crops, are located on the well-drained, hummocky glen floor
- There are several large areas of conifer woodland, including recent planting in a high corrie, and riparian woodland which blends with smaller shelter woods along the glen floor
- A prominent head dyke separates the fields from the actively burnt heather moorland and grazing on the steeper slopes
- Although past settlement, including numerous post-medieval farmsteads, has been widespread, evidence of this has largely disappeared
- Dalmunzie Hotel, a former shooting lodge, and associated buildings of similar architectural style at Glenlochsie Farm cluster on higher hillocks at the junction of Glen Shee and the side glens of Glen Lochsie and Glen Taitneach
- These buildings are also the focus of mature mixed woodland
- A nine hole golf course occupies terraced, well drained land immediately adjacent to the hotel, and there is a dismantled railway, once used for transporting goods and people to an upper Lodge in Glen Lochsie, which is a quirky feature
- The road to the hotel is single lane, and tracks, used for estate management as well as being signposted for public access, lead into the mountainous interior along the side glens

9.2.2 *Landscape experience*

- The glen is secluded but not remote, although it forms a threshold to more remote country within the upper glens and mountainous hinterland

9.2.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This character area is relatively self contained, although it provides a 'gateway' to the more mountainous interior of the higher hills and more remote glens.

9.2.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The settlement and field pattern demonstrates the establishment of an 'improvement period' sporting estate which has superseded 18th/19th century farmsteads, overlaid on the distinctive, hummocky topography of the lower slopes and glen floor.



The winding, braided, gravelly Shee Water



Glenlochsie Farm, perched on hummocky terrain, probably a moraine, at the very head of the glen

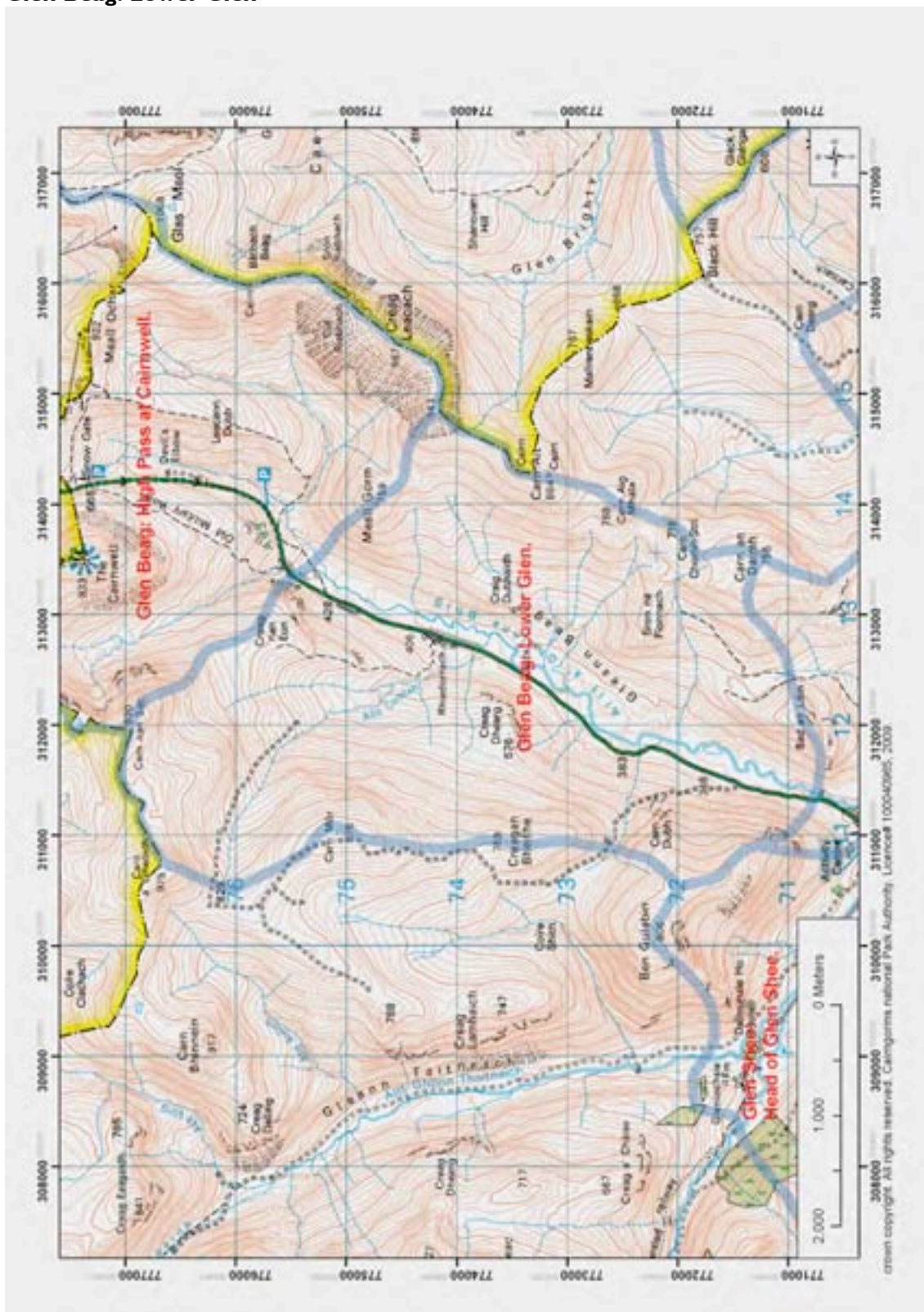


The prominent head dyke, with improved fields below, and conifer shelter woods.



Naturally regenerating vegetation along the riversides

9.3 Glen Beag: Lower Glen



9.3.1 *Landscape Character*

- The narrow southern ‘gateway’ to this upper glen, framed by the steep side slopes of Bad an Loin and Ben Gulabin, opens out into a wider glen floor before climbing to the high pass of the Cairnwell
- Orientated NNE/SSW, the glen is contained by a complex topography of shallow side glens, intervening rocky ridges and terraced terrain created by a glacial valley sitting within a much older, broader valley – the cliffs are spurs of the older valley truncated by glacial action
- The upper slopes are topped by distinct summits of individual hills, some of which have extensive areas of quartzite scree, while the eastern ridge is knobbly
- The well drained glacial-fluvial deposits on the lower slopes have in part been worked into terraces and a level floodplain by the meandering river
- Unimproved grassland extends along much of the glen floor, with the ruins of small pre-improvement farmsteads and field systems evident, particularly where grass is low and if there is strong side light
- The lower southern hill slopes of the glen are extensive unimproved grassland, while the upper, northern part of the glen is clothed with heather, which is managed as grouse moorland
- There is a prominent head dyke which marks the break in slope but which has been supplemented by a fence further up slope
- The evidence of past settlement is all the more striking because there is now no settlement in this part of the glen, apart from a single house and barn at Rhiedorrach, an elevated well drained terrace near to the road
- The road largely hugs the profile of the topography

9.3.2 *Landscape experience*

- The glen is perceived as a strongly ‘upland’ character, in part due to the very pronounced contrast with the farmed Glen Shee to the south, and in part due to the elevation and simple vegetation pattern
- The ‘threshold’ to and from the glen from the south has a very pronounced sense of ‘gateway’ created by the narrow pass and the curve in the road, which reinforces the sense of ‘surprise’ on arriving at Glen Beag

9.3.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

The glen is relatively self-contained, but as its character contrasts strongly with Upper Glen Shee, the sequence of travelling between the two creates a sense of drama.

9.3.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

This glen has a pronounced 'upland' character. Sparsely and simply vegetated, it is dominated by the grazed, unimproved grassland and lack of contemporary settlement. The grazing and lack of trees helps to reveal the evidence of extensive past settlement and land use, as well as emphasising the profile and form of the topography.



This is the narrow pass between Glen Beag and upper Glen Shee, the light catching on a distinct terrace



The wide, but wet and uncultivated glen floor, edged with better drained glacial-fluvial and slope deposits

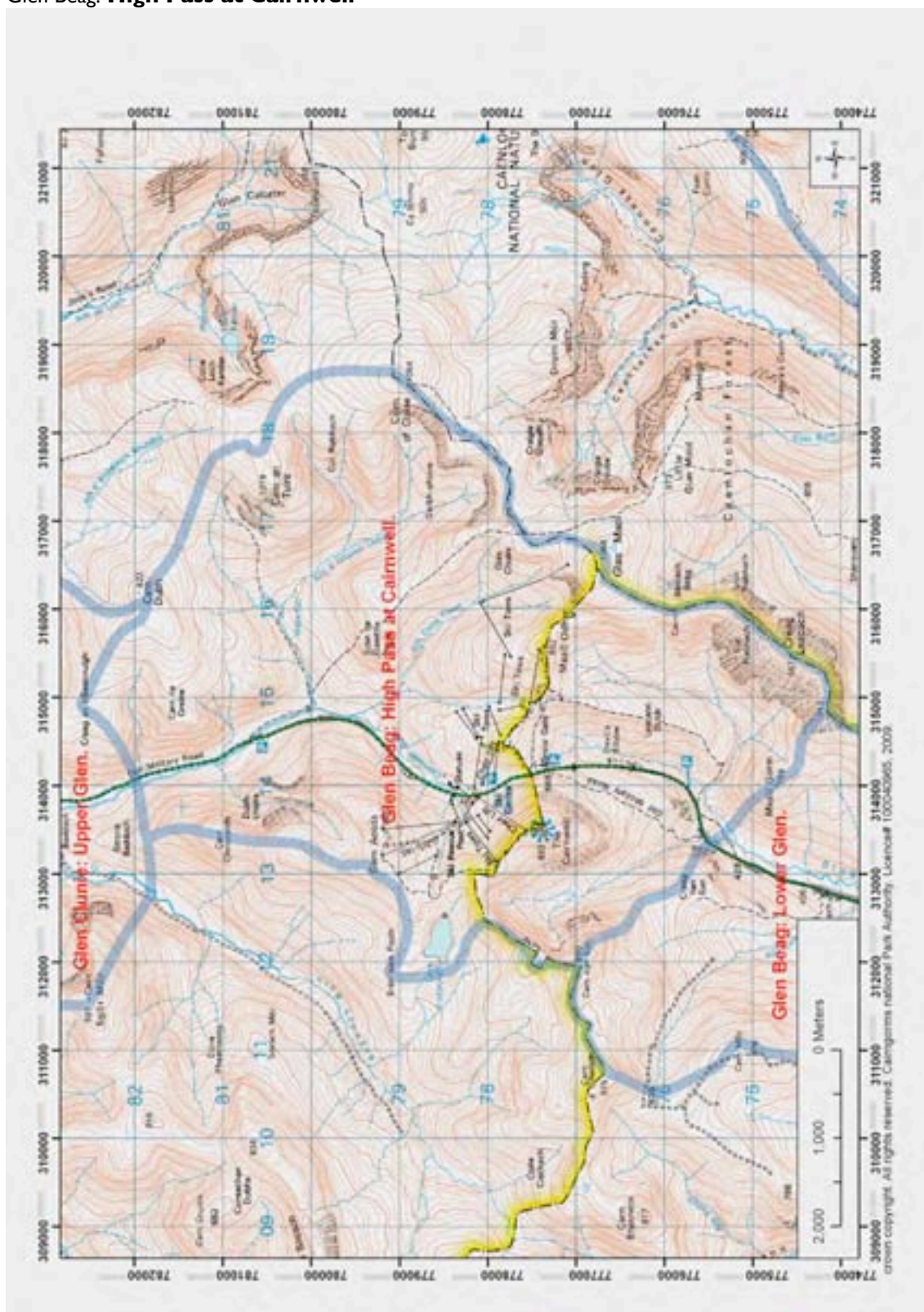


The road hugs the landform, following its ridges and dips, here the verge defined by a metal fence



Medieval and post-medieval settlement and field systems can be seen on these better drained areas

9.4 Glen Beag: High Pass at Cairnwell



9.4.1 *Landscape Character*

- This high pass curves around the massive bulk of the Cairnwell and is contained by broad flanks of rugged ridges and individually defined 'munro' summits
- Corries and cliffs sit along the south eastern edge of this character area, and Glas Choire is a fine 'snowbowl'
- The irregular topography of ridges and shallow glens reflects complex bedrock lithology and the extensive scree slopes have been created by post-glacial weathering of frost-susceptible quartz
- The crest of the pass is the focus of development associated with the seasonal ski resort of Glenshee, which includes several buildings and car parks, as well as an extensive tow system which reaches up onto the high tops and ridges
- The vegetation is heather moorland, possibly on glacial till overlying an acidic bedrock, fragmented by scree, some of which is managed by burning to create grouse moor
- Distinct and sometimes large, green patches around many burn sides, generally on the east side of the glen, indicate the location of pre-19th century shielings/shelters associated with summer grazings across the heather moorland
- There is some peat erosion associated with the ski runs
- There are occasional access tracks, some of which have been created informally through the use of ATVs
- Very occasional small fenced enclosures appear to be part of a research experiment in grazing impacts
- The road is relatively wide and very steep, marked out by numerous snow poles and signs, while its edges are reinforced on the southern side of the pass by concrete kerbing.

9.4.2 *Landscape experience*

- The steep sided hills and the sense of the surrounding 'mass' create a very pronounced sense of enclosure
- There is a very strong sense of 'upland pass' – it is clear that the road and the pass are higher than many other roads in Scotland, partly because of the long steep climb, and partly due to the sparse vegetation and lack of permanent settlement
- There is a sense of anticipation which builds up as a traveller approaches the crest of the pass
- The ski resort is a seasonal destination point in its own right, so there is also a sense of arrival experienced when reaching the 'high point'.

9.4.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is experienced very much as part of the transition of landscape character travelling between Glen Shee and Braemar, and therefore has strong sequential links with Glen Beag and Glen Clunie.

9.4.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The sense of elevation, and of crossing a pass, is very pronounced, a perception reinforced by the transition in vegetation and settlement pattern when travelling up from the glen floors at Deeside and Glen Shee, which then culminates in the crest of the pass. The ski resort, although tidy and well maintained, is a prominent and memorable feature. The green of the shieling sites, which can be found along the burnsides, can be a surprising encounter.



The road going up over the pass, with vegetation of moor and rough grazing emphasising the elevation



Approaching the Cairnwell from the north, the pass cuts behind a steep spur

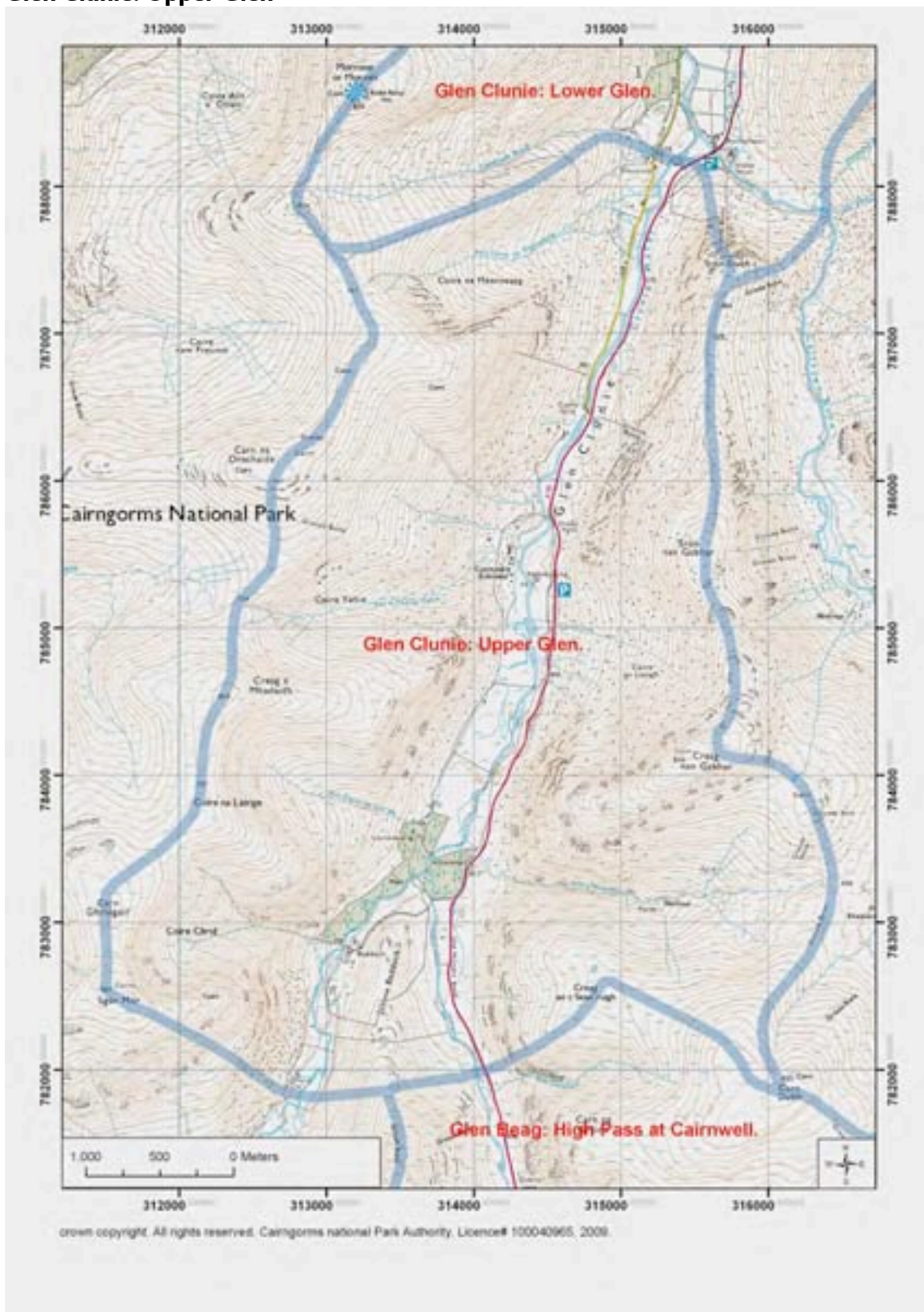


The ski resort and snow fences extend up the hillsides to screes across the silvery quartzite summits and ridges



Road side signs, concrete edges and barriers reflecting the high winter use of the road, combine to create visual clutter

9.5 Glen Clunie: Upper Glen



9.5.1 *Landscape Character*

- The north/south aligned Glen Clunie links the high pass of the Cairnwell and the wooded glens of Deeside
- The upper glen is framed by sweeping, concave-shaped hillsides interspersed with rocky ledges created by a glacial valley sitting within a much older, broader valley – the cliffs are spurs of the older valley truncated by glacial action
- The upper slopes of occasional screes of weathered quartzite sit below rugged summits
- The glen floor is generally a well defined, level floodplain, with intermittent deposits of well drained glacial-fluvial deposits largely limited to the northern end of the glen
- This upper glen is divided from the lower glen by the ‘threshold’ of a narrower section of glen just downstream from Newbigging
- The floodplain is subdivided into improved fields, although these have largely reverted to unimproved grazing and some wetland, with only occasional, drier fields on well drained deposit, being still actively managed at Newbigging and Auchallater
- The upper slopes are heathery, with actively managed grouse moor punctuated by shooting butts
- Woodland occupies the prominent conjunction between Glen Clunie and Glen Baddoch, which is also the location of several remnant 18th/19th century farmsteads, and evidence of both buildings and field systems is still readily visible
- The road hugs the base in slope, often sitting very close to the glen floor, and it is only elevated when passing Newbigging
- The bridge taking the old military road across the Clunie Water is a landmark feature, as well as offering a short but popular walking route which takes people past several ruined buildings

9.5.2 *Landscape experience*

- From the road, framed views north and south along the length of the glen reinforce the height and vertical drama of the hillsides
- The slight evidence of past settlement, especially when juxtaposed with the lack of present day development, suggests abandonment

9.5.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is experienced very much as part of the transition of landscape character travelling between Glen Shee and Braemar.

9.5.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The sparse vegetation pattern and lack of present day settlement in this upper part of Glen Clunie are key characteristics, while the simplicity of the vegetation particularly reinforces the profile of the topography, which stands out in views framed by the sweeping concave side slopes in views along the length of the glen.



Woodland straddles the conjunction of two glens at the southern end of Glen Clunie, where several improved fields are located on the glen floor



The glen is steep sided, but has a narrow level floor. The profile of the slightly concave side slopes formed by truncated spurs is easy to pick out



Remains of 18/19th century farms on the better drained, glacial/fluvial deposits

9.6.1 *Landscape Character*

- The north/south aligned Glen Clunie links the high pass of the Cairnwell and the wooded glens of Deeside
- The glen is framed by sweeping, concave-shaped hillsides rising to upper slopes of rugged rocky summits, with occasional screes reflecting post-glacial weathering
- The glen floor is a well defined floodplain worked flat by the Clunie Water and edged with hummocks and terraces of well drained glacial-fluvial deposits
- The floodplain is subdivided into regularly shaped, 18th/19th century improved fields which are fenced and grazed and, closer to Braemar, it is occupied by a golf course
- The upper slopes are heather moor, and there is one conifer woodland associated with more accessible lower slopes above the floodplain
- Occasional mature trees and sparse riparian woodland ensures that the glen appears open
- There is some conifer shelter wood on the lower side slopes, which changes to more extensive birch woodland approaching Braemar
- Settlement is limited to occasional late-18/19th century farmsteads, which appear to be on the sites of older settlements, located on the higher, free-draining hummocks of deposit at the edge of the glen
- The main public road, on the eastern side of the glen, is elevated, sitting on top of deposits at the edge of the glen
- The older military road on the western side of the glen, is a popular walking route and sits at the break in slope

9.6.2 *Landscape experience*

- The elevated main road affords panoramic views up and down the length of the glen
- The glen is relatively open, and its profile – a flat level floor contained by sharply defined, slightly concave flanks – is very simple and easy to read

9.6.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is experienced very much as part of the transition of landscape character travelling between Glen Shee and Braemar. It contrasts dramatically with the narrow, uncultivated upper glen of Glen Clunie, as it is wide and cultivated.

9.6.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The openness of the glen floor allows the pattern of small, but regularly shaped, 19th century improved green fields to dominate, particularly from elevated viewpoints, including the road. Further evidence of past settlement becomes quickly obvious on closer inspection, and appears to inform the location of the 19th century farmsteads, set on elevated hummocks at the edge of the strath.



The wide level floor is subdivided into 19th century improved fields, with only occasional mature trees remaining



Towards Braemar, a golf course occupies the glen floor, and semi-natural woodland extends across the lower glen sides



Settlement, largely associated with 18/19th century farmsteads, is located on the hummocky terrain at the edges of the glen floor

