

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT:

UPLAND AREAS

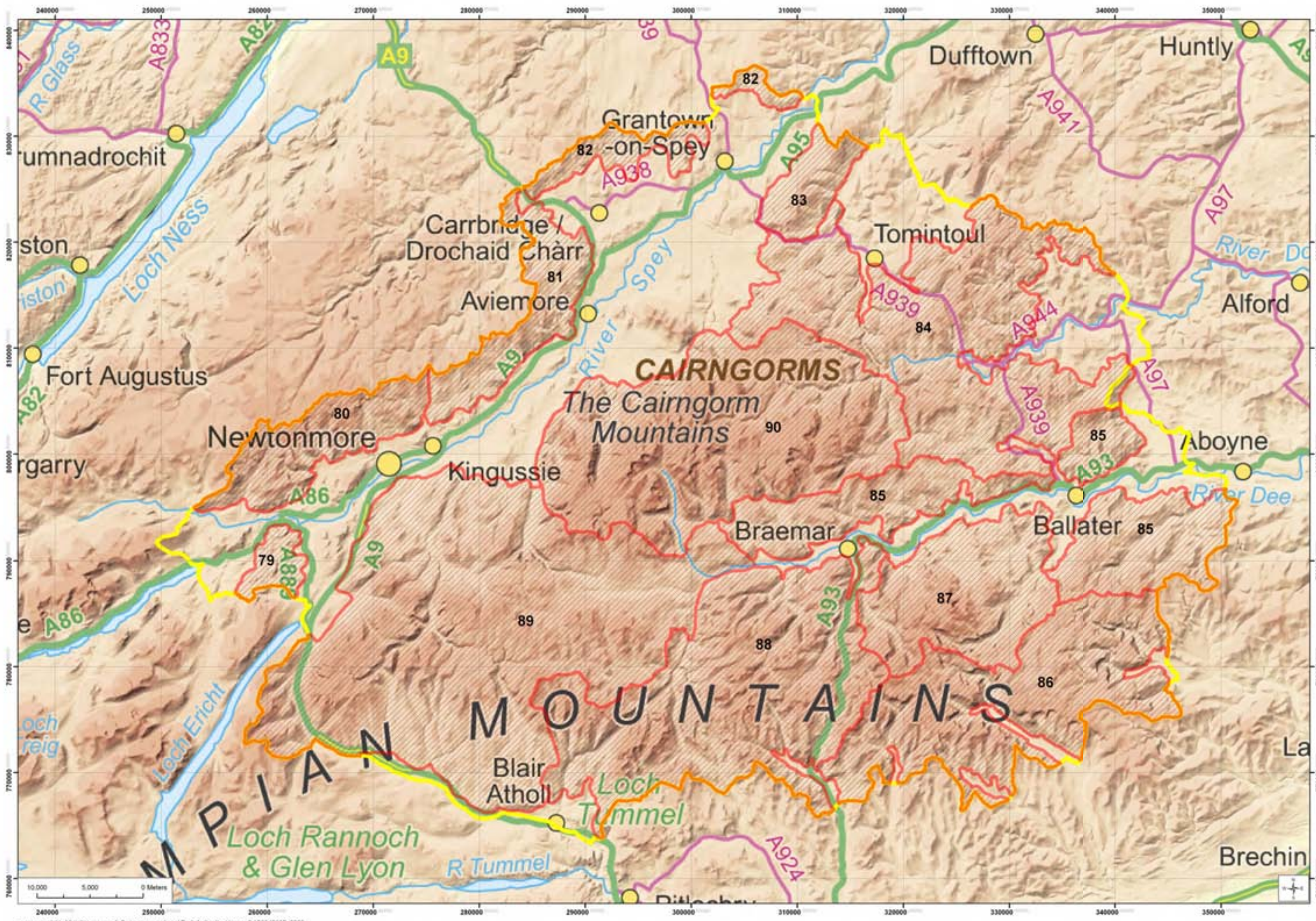
These upland areas are the least inhabited areas of the Park – although there are occasional remote settlements and farms in addition to some estate houses which may be inhabited for at least part of the year. For the purposes of this landscape character assessment, these areas were assessed at a more strategic scale. This broader scale of assessment reflects the relatively limited number of potential land management and land use issues which are likely to be encountered in these areas.

II UPLAND AREAS

Twelve upland landscape character areas were identified. Many of the character areas have been named to correspond with the upland character area used in the original Cairngorms LCA (1996), which allows for cross-reference to this original document. The character areas are illustrated on the following map, and have been numbered as follows:

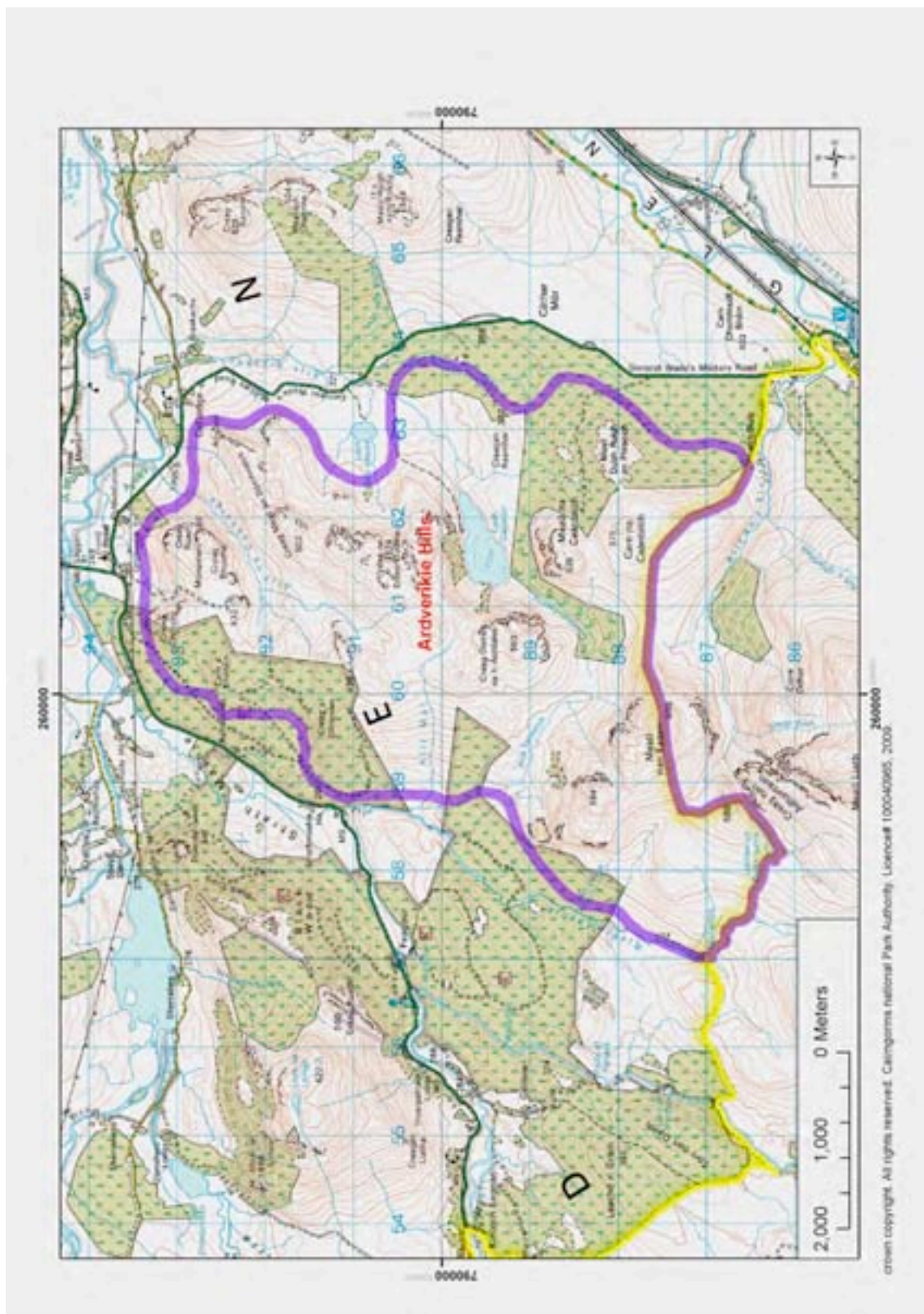
- 79. The Ardverikie Hills**
- 80. The Monadhliath: South Monadhliath**
- 81. The Monadhliath: North Monadhliath**
- 82. The Strathdearn Hills**
- 83. The Hills of Cromdale**
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- 88. The Southern Hills: South Eastern Glens**
- 89. The Southern Hills: South Western Glens**
- 90. Cairngorms Central Massif**

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





11.1 Ardverikie Hills



11.1.1 *Landscape Character*

- These small, knobbly, erosion-resistant hills are developed on intensely folded and fractured Moine schists, and have been steepened and roughened by glaciation, with crags most evident on the east-facing sides of the hill summits
- The hills contain a series of linked, steep sided and narrow valleys generally orientated south west/north east, creating a relatively complex landscape
- The hills are low – rising up to about 650m – but are elevated above the already raised Càthar Mor corridor to the east
- Lochs – including Loch Caoldair, set within rocky crags at the heart of this area – and relatively level areas of wetland are enclosed by steep hillsides
- The soils are generally immature rankers, which tend to be shallow, poorly developed and acidic, supporting heather and some blaeberry heath
- Conifer woodland extends up onto the lower slopes from the low lying bowl of Càthar Mor to the east and the shallow slopes of Strath Mashie to the north west
- Semi-natural broadleaved woodland extends into the core of this area along the narrow valleys
- There is no historic or pre-historic settlement evident in this area, and apart from a couple of access tracks, one of which is way-marked from the woodland at Càthar Mor, there is no other infrastructure

11.1.2 *Landscape experience*

- Although a small area of relatively low hills, the crags and rock outcrops create a rugged character
- The small scale, almost intimate character of this area reflects its intricate detailed topography
- The rugged, vertical hills contrast with the horizontal expanse of Càthar Mor to the east
- This area is secluded, hidden away behind forest on most sides, and rarely visited
- The hills are often obscured by woodland, which grows along the lower slopes and screens the hills from surrounding roads

11.1.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This hill group is at the western edge of the Park, and are part of the transition between landscapes of the east and west sides of Scotland. The Hills form the westerly containment to

the expansive bowl of Càthar Mor as well as the south easterly edge to Strath Mashie and Glen Pattack.

11.1.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

These small but rugged hills of craggy, exposed rock, form an irregular skyline which is easily recognisable when visible, but the area is secluded and rarely visited, largely tucked away behind surrounding woodland.

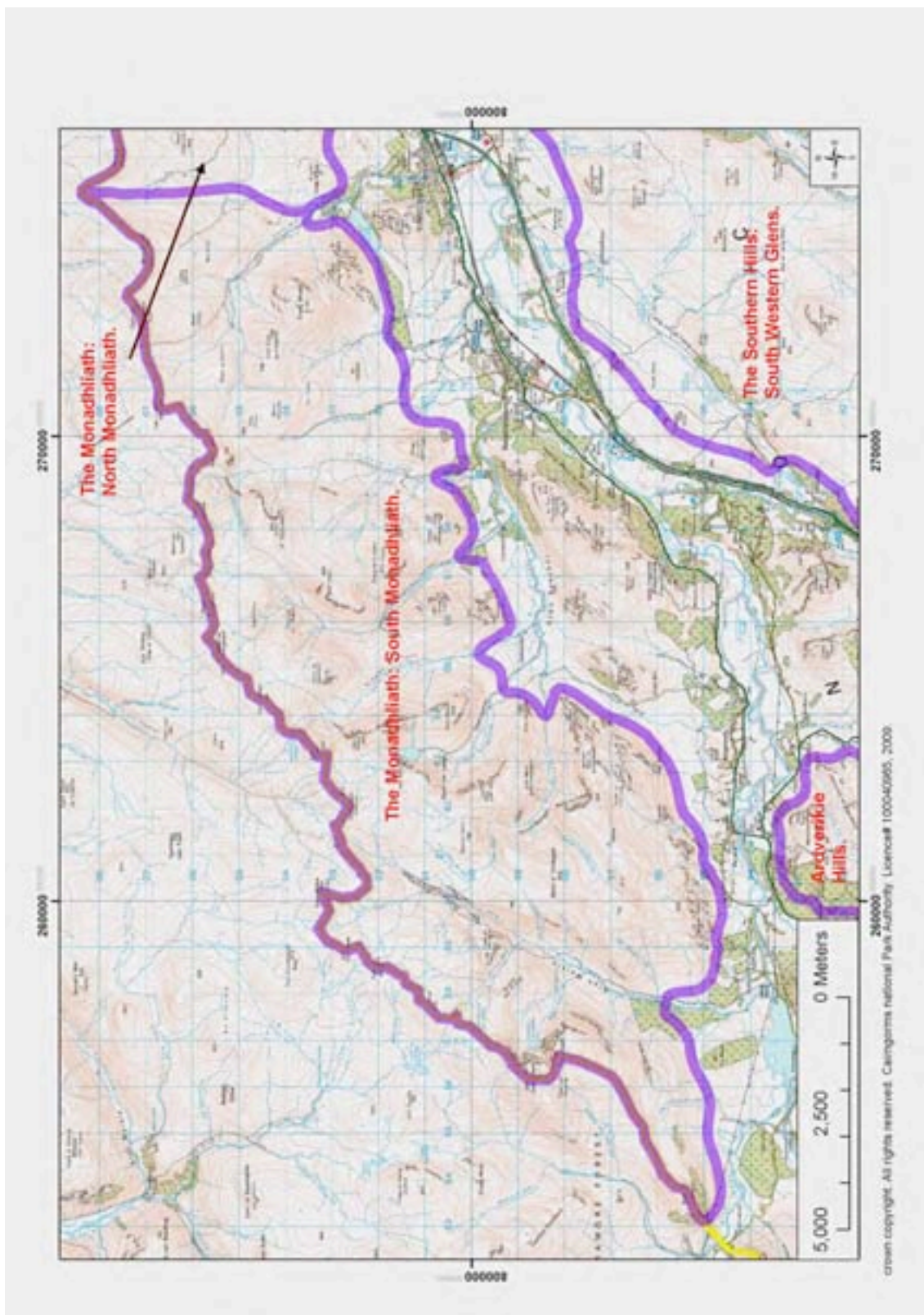


The craggy, exposed rock of these hills, with forestry in the foreground



Woodland along the lower slopes, with the Ardverikie hills in the mist

11.2 The Monadhliath: South Monadhliath



11.2.1 *Landscape Character*

- The southerly and south easterly orientated glens and slopes of the rounded hills and long ridges of the Monadhliath form the north western boundary to the Park
- While within the wider extent of the Monadhliath, long glens and ridges extend north-east/south west, here side valleys and shallow bowls of land drain south-eastwards to the Spey and its tributaries
- Peaks and separate summits in the south Monadhliath can reach 800m, and the high tops have been steepened a by glacial erosion of corries
- On lower hills, other glacial activity has formed crags and rocky outcrops along the upper flanks of the side glens, often on the east/south east facing hills directly overlooking Strathspey
- Glacial erosion has also created rocky outcrops and rockfalls along the south east faces of slopes above Strathspey
- The side glens tend to be elevated, with many tributaries feeding into burns which cut into glacial-fluvial deposits
- There is very occasional riparian woodland along these watercourses
- Heather and upland grassland dominates the upper slopes, and this vegetation can extend down to the glen floors, although areas of grassland and rush, with occasional lochans are located on poorly drained areas dominated by peat
- There is extensive evidence of past land use on the lower, south facing slopes above the rivers Spey and Banchor, with numerous prehistoric sites amongst the pre-improvement townships, a feature of this character area
- Many former shielings, often recognised by their bright green sites, cluster around most of the watercourses flowing south from the high hills
- Tracks for off road vehicles are largely confined to the floors of the glens, with footpaths and smaller tracks then branching off to access ridges and summits

11.2.2 *Landscape experience*

- This area includes some of the most remote hills and glens in the Park, an experience which is reinforced by the height of the hills, the roughness of the terrain and the difficulty of accessing this area from the north
- The mountains are formidable, forming a robust edge to the Park and from the tops they are experienced as the outer edge of the much larger, remote and relatively inaccessible Monadhliath range

11.2.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

The southern Monadhliath form the visual backdrop and the more remote hinterland to the landscape character areas within Upper Spey and Badenoch. These mountains are also highly visible from southern hill ranges and the Cairngorm massif.

11.2.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

This area of high peaks and craggy upper slopes combines relative remoteness with numerous sites of historic and even prehistoric, settlement and land use, many of which are found across the lower slopes, while summer shielings are found higher up, along the numerous minor glens in this area.



The side glens are elevated above the main trunk glens, with craggy upper slopes formed by glacial erosion – the bright green areas are often likely to be shieling sites



Tracks, often located along the glen floors, leading into the interior hills – here leading through the grass-covered slopes of Glen Markie

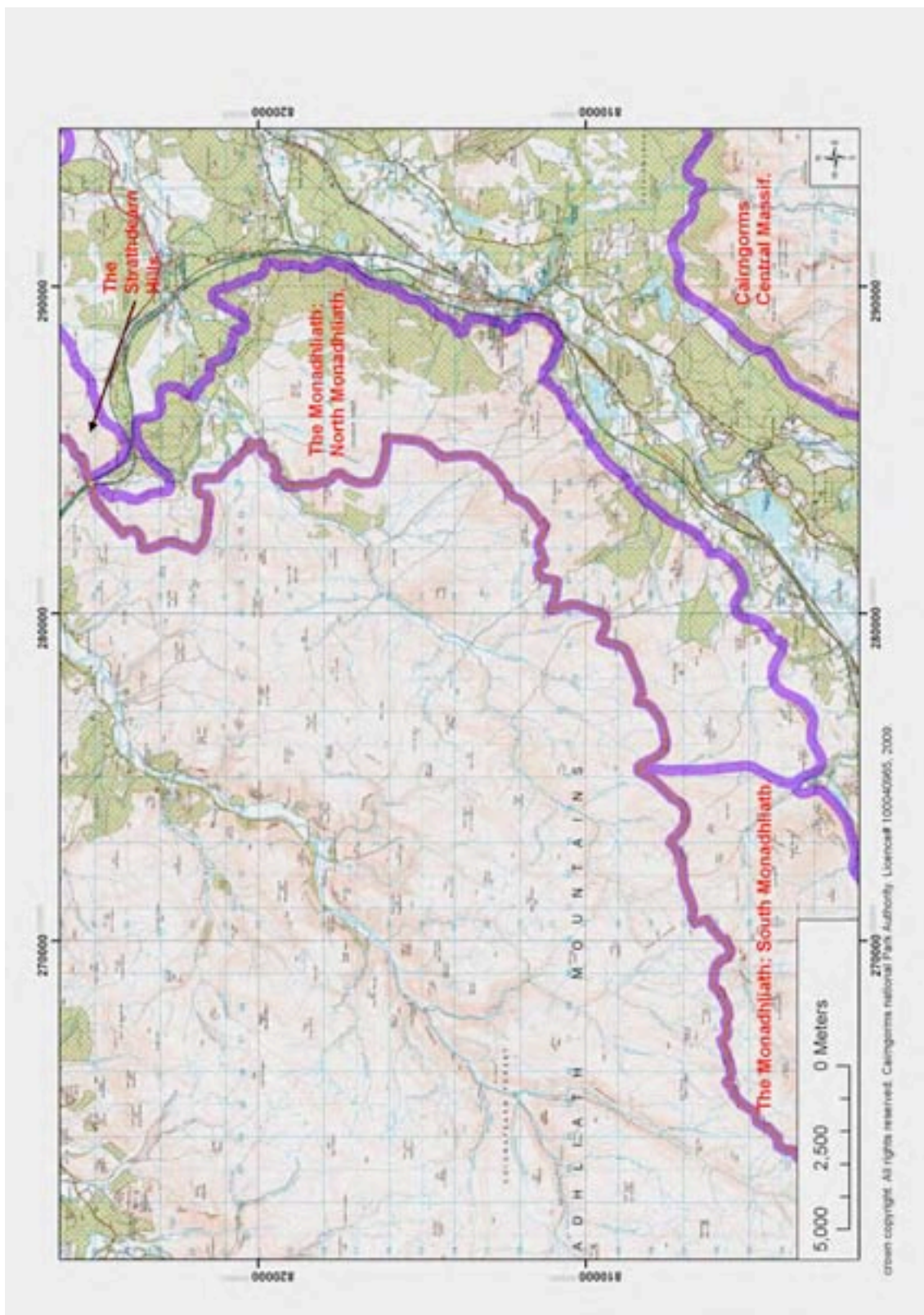


Long ridges, and extensive views to the south west, out with the Park



Hills slopes steepened and roughened by glaciation

11.3 The Monadhliath: North Monadhliath



11.3.1 *Landscape Character*

- These south easterly orientated glens and slopes of the rounded hills and long ridges of the Monadhliath form the north western boundary to the Park
- The high plateau shows few signs of significant glacial erosion in this northern section of the Monadhliath. Its relative monotony is partly a reflection of the uniformity of the underlying Moine schists, but it is also an old erosion surface which has tilted towards the north east
- While within the wider extent of the Monadhliath, long glens and ridges extend north-east/south west, here wide side valleys and generally shallow bowls of land drain south-eastwards to the Spey and its tributaries
- This part of the Monadhliath is generally more subdued than the more rugged southern Monadhliath, and has lower and more rounded terrain especially on the south east flanks overlooking Strathspey, because the lower terrain offered fewer opportunities for mountain glaciers to form during the latest period of repeated glaciation
- The lower hills limit the sense of enclosure and the north/south elongated ridges form large scale, undulating terrain
- Occasional steep sided glens and rocky upper slopes can be found in this area, especially on hillsides facing Strathspey
- Burns traverse the gentle gradients in wide sweeps, often through wetter land, but with few identifiable tributaries
- While there is extensive heather moor and upland grassland across this area, there are also large areas of geometrically shaped conifer woodland, often on gently sloping ground, which extends well into the interior of the glens
- There is little recorded evidence of past land use or settlement beyond the immediate side slopes of Strathspey
- Tracks, suitable for off road vehicles, extend along the lower glen floors, leading to more minor access routes on higher ridges

11.3.2 *Landscape experience*

- The simple topography of low relief and smooth slopes creates a relatively open, expansive landscape on the upper slopes, although forestry can be a contrasting enclosing element
- This area is secluded but not especially remote, with the forest and associated activities limiting the sense of remoteness

11.3.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

The part of the Monadhliath forms a visual backdrop and a more secluded hinterland to the landscape character areas within Strathspey. These hills are also visible from the Rothiemurchus, Inshriach and the Cairngorm massif.

11.3.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The smooth, subdued land form strongly reflects glacial erosion, and underpins the low relief which creates a relatively open landscape. It differs from the Southern Monadhliath in terms of the presence of the forestry and lack of recorded historic settlement, as well as being perceived as less remote.

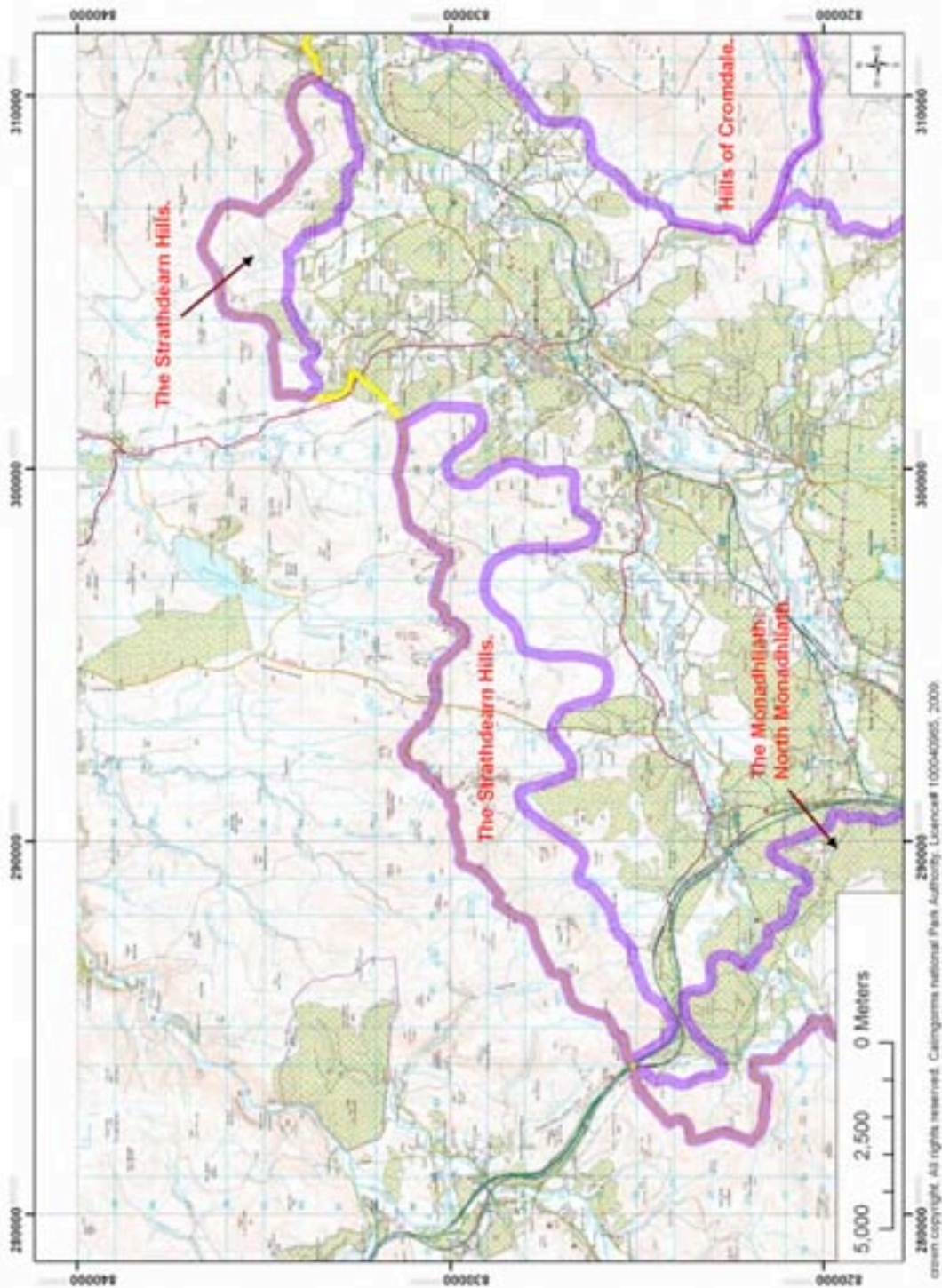


Low relief and shallow glens of the subdued terrain of the North Monadhliath, with woodland in the foreground



Long slopes, with roughened by glacial erosion as they extend down towards the Spey, contain shallow bowls and wide side valleys

11.4 The Strathdearn Hills



11.4.1 Landscape Character

- The south facing slopes of the Strathdearn Hills form a pronounced line of hills that rises to an undulating plateau which represents a northern extension of the great Monadhliath 'tableland'
- The hills rise to around 600m and as the last ice sheet streamed northwards the tops were roughened to create knobbly, rocky summits by glacial erosion
- A number of ridges, elongated north/south and heavily eroded by glacier activity, contain a series of wide, elevated, basin-like glens which are orientated southwards
- Many tributaries, and often extensive areas of wetland with small pools, drain into south flowing burns which in turn feed into the Dulnain River and the Spey
- Heather moorland, generally managed as grouse moor, with linear shaped patches of burning, extends over the highest summits
- Settlement is sparse, limited to dispersed elevated late 18th and 19th century farms which occupy the more accessible glens at the very lower margins of these hills, or are tucked against rising ground on the plateau north of the Park
- These farmsteads are on marginal land, which is nevertheless bright green in contrast to the surrounding heather moor
- Occasionally abandoned farmsteads sit within remnants of small pre-improvement field, turf dykes and walled enclosures which have sometimes been subsumed by larger, fenced late 18th/19th century improved fields, but, unlike certain other character areas, are not common-place
- Where fields are still in use, the drained and improved grassland is enclosed by fences which replace walls and there are occasional clumps of scattered birch woodland, sometimes associated with watercourses
- Shielings are regular features of the upper stretches of watercourses across the higher slopes of this area
- North/south aligned public roads (in addition to the A9 at the Slochd) and estate tracks cut between the pronounced knolly summits of the low hills
- There are also several accessible farm roads and tracks which link the remaining working farms, and vehicle tracks which extend onto the grouse moors

11.4.2 *Landscape experience*

- The wide bowls and shallow ridges create a topography which is relatively open, often barely contained by the low relief
- Views from these elevated glens and ridges, and from the through roads which cross over the hills, are often channelled southwards to the open aspect and panoramic views of the northern face of the Cairngorms Massif
- Conifer woodland along the lower slopes often hides these hills from low lying viewpoints
- View north extend across the undulating plateau and the open expanse of Dava Moor
- Within the Park, the less well known glens are relatively secluded, especially away from the through roads, but the plateau becomes more remote outwith the Park to the north

11.4.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is the visual backdrop to Dulnain Strath and the character areas which lie north of Grantown, although its low relief limits the sense of enclosure. The elevated public roads offer the opportunity for extensive panoramic views south across the Park when approaching from the north.

11.4.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The steep, well defined edge of the escarpment which forms the Park boundary is a dramatic, sudden transition between the generally cultivated south facing slopes of shallow glens and the plateau of undulating moorland to the north.

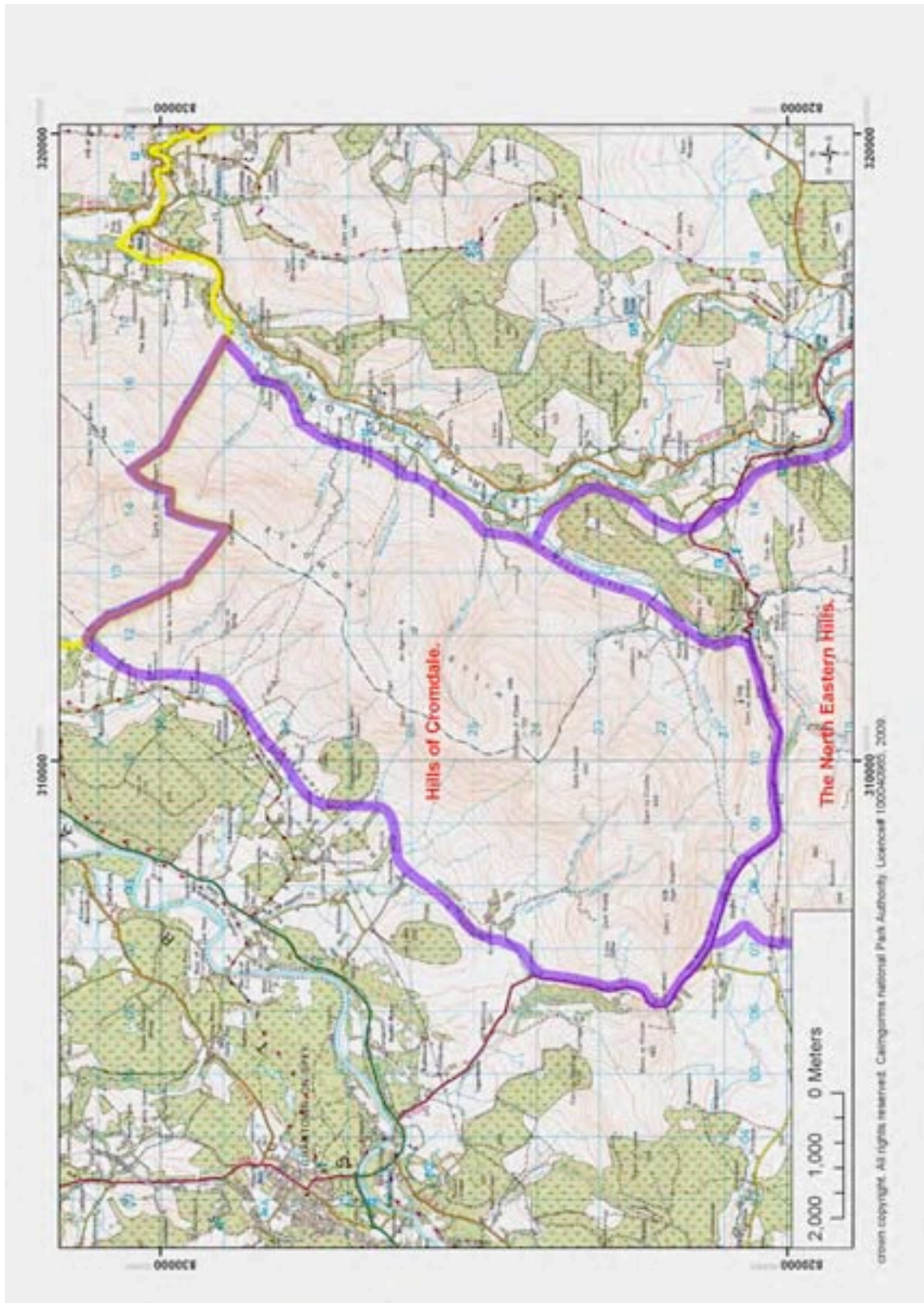


Conifer woodland long the lower slopes, behind which lie the heather-clad hills with their pronounced summits



Occasional patches of bright green, where land has been improved for grazing, can be found in this area

11.5 The Hills of Cromdale



11.5.1 Landscape Character

- The high Hills of Cromdale, developed in sandy Moine schists, form a south-west to north-east orientated spine of rounded summits draped in peat.
- The smooth, concave shaped spurs extend down from the central spine south east towards Strath Avon and north west to the Haughs of Cromdale. There is a 'step' on the hillside at around 500m on the north flank of the hills
- The hill sides form formidable flanks which rise abruptly from the edge of the surrounding low lying farmland, forming the enclosure and visual backdrop to adjacent Strath Avon, the Haughs of Cromdale and the Glen of Dalvey
- The relatively bulky flanks of the Hills of Cromdale are divided by a series of deep valleys cut by watercourses to form dry ridges
- The hills are almost entirely heather/blaeberry moorland, with some acidic upland grassland, although there is peat bog along the spine of summits
- The hills appear to be almost entirely managed as grouse moorland, and heather has been burnt in long, broadly rectilinear patches, which have sometimes been marked out by flailed heather boundaries
- Occasional conifer woodland and enclosed, partially drained and improved grassland sits along the lower edges of the north west facing slopes
- Farms, some of which have been abandoned, are all located to take advantage of tributaries and slight shelter from the valleys formed by the watercourses
- These farms consistently sit along the lower fringe of the hill slopes, just at the point where the gradient softens to form the valley floor or lower foothills and are often the focus of small, conifer shelter woods
- The heart of this narrow ridge of hills has no recorded shieling sites although occasional traces of prehistoric and pre-improvement settlements are evident around the lower slopes
- Several vehicle tracks start at the base of the deep valleys but often then veer out of the valleys onto the ridges, sometimes zig-zaging up the hillsides
- Occasional smaller access routes extend into the hills and cross over the hills, linking Strath Avon with Cromdale

11.5.2 Landscape experience

- The relatively narrow spine of hills offer the opportunity for an undulating ridge walk, which allows views down to the lowlying land on either side of these Hills
- Views south to the North Eastern Hills and the Cairngorm massif are panoramic

11.5.3 Relationship to adjacent character areas

This hill group is well defined and 'isolated', extending outwith the Park and forming the backdrop to several low lying, adjacent character areas while also being highly visible from character areas to the north and west of Grantown on Spey.

11.5.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

This spine of hills is easily recognisable, with uniformly rounded summits and formidable flanks incised by deep river valleys and a consistent coverage of managed heather-dominated grouse moor. The settlement pattern is also well defined, with a relatively consistent relationship with the mouths of the river valleys and change in gradient.



The broad spine of the hills, with the pattern of burning evident on the moorland



Farmland along the lower fringes of the hills

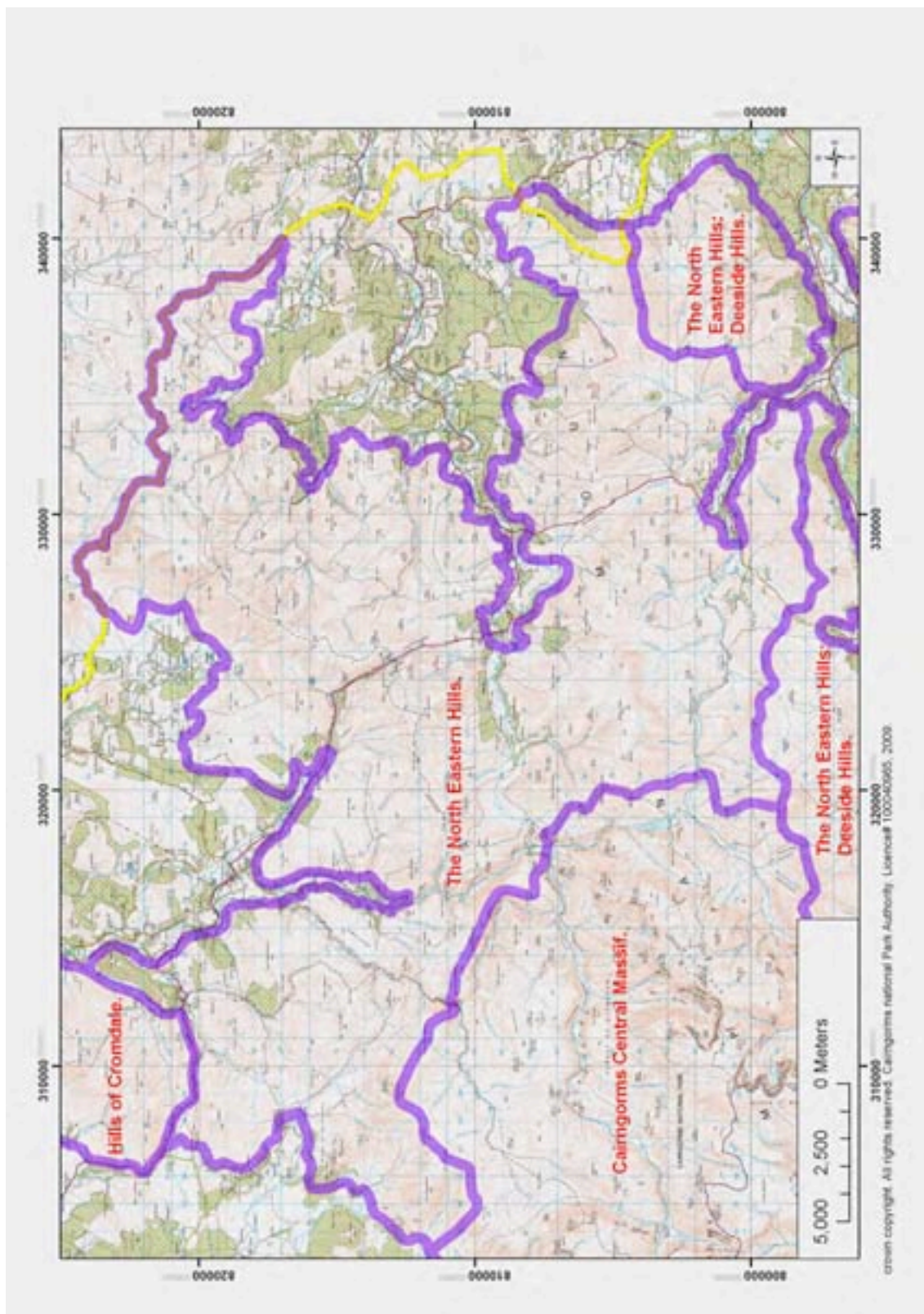


Views towards Grantown and the lower Spey from the summits



The flanks of these hills are divided by deep, narrow valleys cut by watercourses to form drier ridges

11.6 The North Eastern Hills



11.6.1 Landscape Character

- This large tract of land, curving round the main Cairngorms massif to the north and east, is characterised by rounded, smooth sided hills are generally around 600m to 700m in height
- This area includes an ancient valley system, probably formed 400 million years ago and the geology is perhaps the most varied in the whole of the National Park, with narrow bands of schists, including quartzites and limestones, intrusions of granite and basic igneous rocks, and old red sandstone in the Tomintoul basin
- Ridges, formed by erosion resistant rocks, alternate with valleys and basins on other, less resistant rock types which have been subject to chemical wearing and erosion over hundreds of millions of years
- The hill sides form formidable flanks which rise abruptly from the edge of the occasional low lying valleys which extend into this upland area
- These steep sided flanks are divided by deep valleys incised by watercourses, often with multiple tributaries, carved between smooth sided, drier ridges
- Occasionally, the river valleys have deepened to create long, narrow steep sided valleys which cut through the upland massif, forming a skeletal network of more accessible passes
- The Ailnack gorge, a spectacular canyon deeply cut into Devonian sediments in its lower part, is a particular geological feature
- The majority of these hills are overlain with blanket peat, which in places has been severely eroded
- The hills are frequently managed as grouse moorland, where heather has been burnt in long, broadly rectilinear patches, which have sometimes been marked out by flailed heather
- Occasional conifer woodland, both planted spruce and Scots Pine, extends up onto the lower flanks of the hills from the surrounding glens. Scattered Scots pine can sometimes be found near former grazing land
- Settlement is limited to a very few farms and estate buildings within the long glens which penetrate into this upland area, possibly where better drained and more fertile soils can be found
- Only in the south east facing glens of the Ladder Hills is there any evidence of historic landuse, in the form of pre-improvement shieling grounds
- In addition, occasional lodges and other estate buildings, can be found well into the interior of the narrow valleys, located adjacent to watercourses where tributaries feed into the main rivers

- Several roads cross over the high passes, often sitting along drier ridges, or tucked against the break in slope as they climb up and over the most accessible through routes
- Vehicle tracks wind along the narrow, steep sided river valleys, allowing access into the interior
- A more extensive network of access routes extends up the ridgelines of the drier spurs onto the upper hill slopes
- The ski centre at the Lecht is also located within this character area, and some of the lifts and other infrastructure are seen on the skylines of the long ridges

11.6.2 *Landscape experience*

- There is a tremendous sense of space and openness, linked to great distance, experienced from the upper slopes and ridges which contrasts with the enclosure of the narrow steep sided river valleys
- The upland hill forms are bold, rounded and formidable, creating a sense of solidity and 'bulk' in the landscape which dominates over the human interventions
- This area is diverse and complex, in terms of both geology and topography, but can be easily overshadowed by the dominance of the Cairngorm massif
- The roads which cross over this area offer readily accessible panoramic views and easy, vehicular access to a landscape of mountain and upland character
- Elsewhere, the interior of this character area is secluded and can be remote, particularly as the hill ranges and narrow valleys extend west and south towards the mountainous Cairngorm massif
- The heather turns purple in August, creating an accessible seasonal spectacle

11.6.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

In addition to having a strong identity in its own right, this hill group forms a 'transition area' to the higher and even more remote interior of the Cairngorms central massif, as well as providing some visual containment to the surrounding, lower lying character areas, such as Strathdon, Glen Livet and, to the west, Abernethy

11.6.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The varied relief creates a complex landscape which can be difficult to understand as a whole. The area is often overlooked in favour of higher mountain areas, yet the valleys and basins give a powerful sense of remoteness. The sense of vast expanse and the extent of the heather moor creates an open landscape where the rounded form of the hills is very apparent. The

moor is further emphasised by the pattern of muirburn and the spectacular flowering of the heather in August.



The smooth, rounded hills



Long ridges alternate with valleys and basins

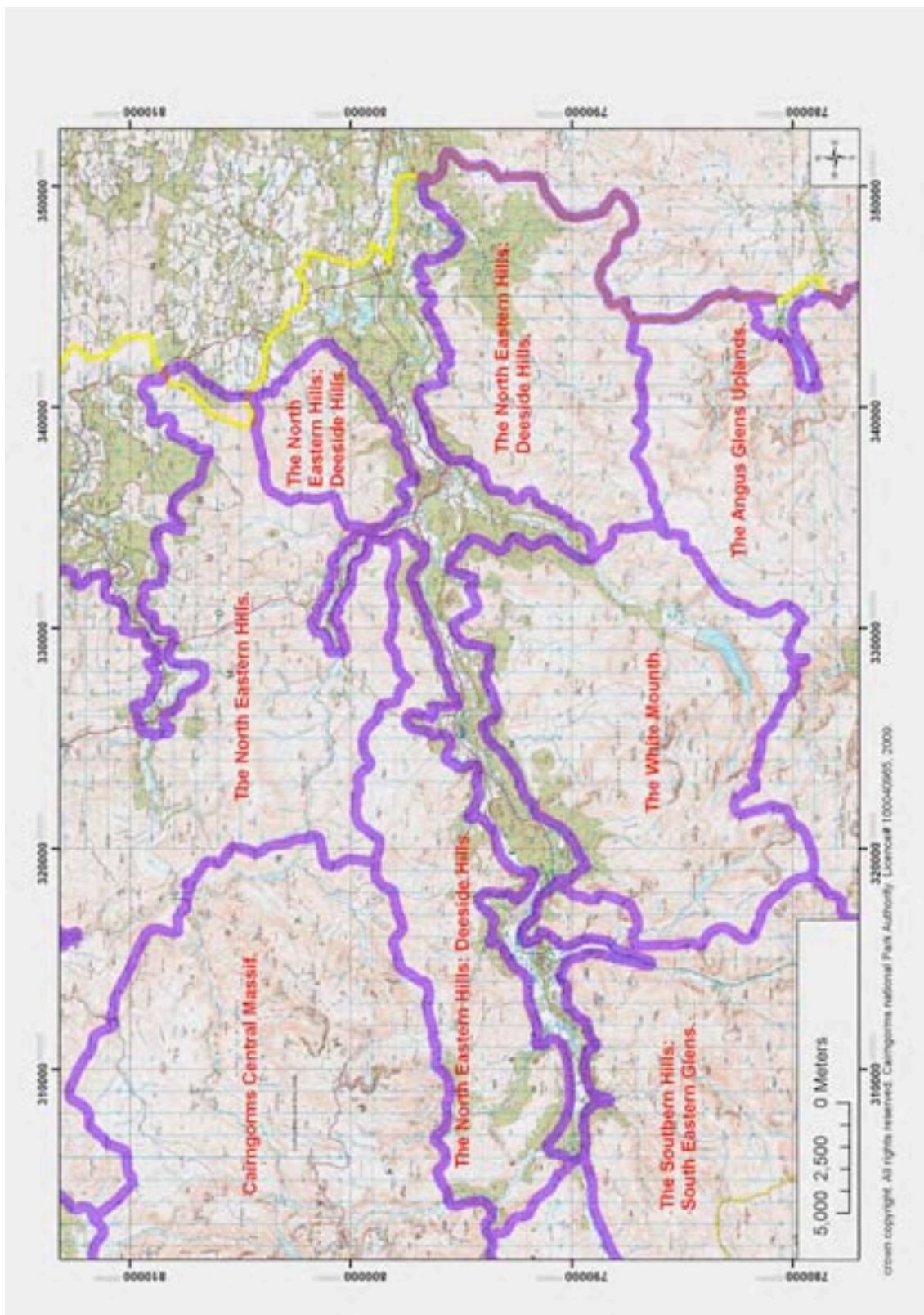


The pattern of muirburn stands out clearly on these hills, with scattered pine on the lower flank of the hill



Patches of brighter green possibly reflect a change in underlying bedrock, here the focus of a small farm, with a deeply cut valley in the background

11.7 The North Eastern Hills: **Deeside Hills**



11.7.1 *Landscape Character*

- A 'sub set' of the North Eastern Hills, these hills extend along the southern edge of the main Cairngorms massif forming the northern edge to Deeside and its southern edge east of Ballater
- These smooth sided hills are generally around 600m to 700m in height form generally flat-topped ridges which frame a series of valleys which drain into the Dee
- The steep hill sides are divided by deep glens incised by watercourses, often with multiple tributaries, carved between smooth sided, drier ridges.
- Some of the ridges have been truncated by ice moving along the valley in the last glaciation, which has also reshaped some of the hills into large, rounded, roches moutonnées, and in places, the ridge lines are cut through by meltwater channels, visible as notches on the skylines
- The hills are dominated by humus-iron podzols, and support heather and blaeberry dwarf shrub heath on the lower slopes rising to more montane habitat including sedge, rush and moss heath on the upper slopes and summits
- The hills are frequently managed as grouse moorland, where heather has been burnt in long, broadly rectilinear patches
- Conifer woodland, often extensive, extends up onto the lower flanks of the hills and frame the mouths of the glens along Deeside, often hiding evidence of earlier landuse
- Extensive areas of regenerating Scots Pine and semi-natural woodland are found in these glens, often extending well into the interior along the river valleys
- Beyond the wooded areas, settlement is very sparse, limited to occasional estate lodges and small, isolated farms with some traces of pre-improvement settlement towards the west end of the area, around Feardur burn and along the lower, south facing slopes of the Dee
- A few isolated shieling grounds are situated by watercourses that flow down the slopes along the north side of the Dee
- Vehicle tracks wind along the base of the main glens, allowing access into the massif to the north
- A more extensive network of access routes generally – although not always – follow the valleys of tributaries to these main glens

11.7.2 *Landscape experience*

- There is a sense of openness experienced from the upper slopes and ridges which contrasts with the enclosure of the glens and river valleys

- The upland hill forms are bold, rounded and formidable, creating a sense of solidity and 'bulk' in the landscape which dominates over the human interventions
- Views from these hills focus on Deeside or towards Lochnagar and the White Mounth to the south, and north into the interior of the Cairngorm massif
- Extensive planted and regenerating Scots pine reinforces enclosure, and where more semi-natural in habit, naturalness, at the mouths of the glens
- This character area is often secluded and can be relatively remote, particularly as the hill ranges and narrow valleys extend north towards the mountainous Cairngorm massif, or south to meet the head of the Angus Glens
- Remoteness is limited, however, by the popularity of some of the glens, which are very accessible, and the presence of hill tracks and planted woodland

11.7.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This hill group forms a 'transition area' between the higher and more remote interior of the Cairngorms central massif, the Angus Glens and the White Mounth and the managed woodlands, policies and farmland of Deeside. It also forms the visual backdrop and containment to the Deeside character areas.

11.7.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The presence of large areas of regenerating native woodland and Scots Pine, which continues to expand along the rivers and glens is a particular feature which contrasts with the broad, open sweep of the hills. Where the woodland is more open and semi-natural in character, it reinforces a sense of naturalness.



The Smooth sided hills clothed by conifer woodland where they join the main Deeside valley

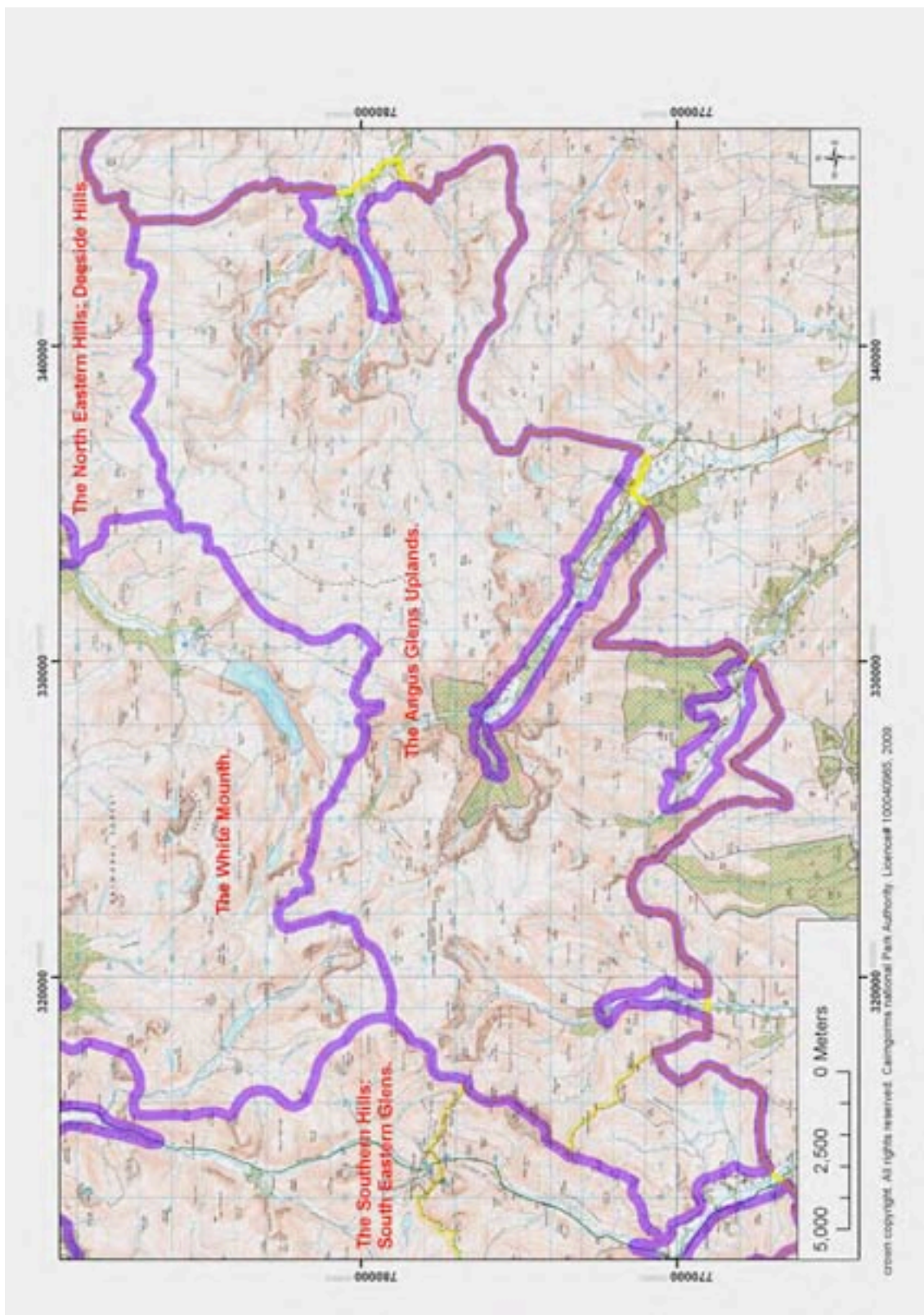


Heather/blaeberry heath in the foreground, with woodland extending along the valley floors, and the higher hills of the Cairngorms massif in the background



Looking south over the Deeside Hills towards Braemar, the pattern of heather burning clearly evident (photograph courtesy of Dr AM Hall)

11.8 The Angus Glens Uplands



11.8.1 Landscape Character

- The cliffs and corries of the heads of the Angus Glens bound steep-sided, narrow glacial troughs which penetrate into a rolling plateau with rounded hill summits, rising to over 900m and including a number of 'Munros'
- These glens are contained by slopes which have been steepened and roughened by glacial activity, which has left behind high cliffs, exposed rocky crags and huge corries which often enclose lochans
- The steep slopes below the crags are often mantled by thick scree or rockfall debris
- As the head of the glens extend into the hills they become narrower and more sinuous, and the rocky side slopes become ever more craggy and dramatic, with overhanging cliffs incised by steep-falling burns
- The plateau between these steep-sided glens is broad and sweeping with smooth, undulating summits and shallow river-valleys divided by an extensive network of watercourses
- The extensive upland blanket peat over this plateau has been severely eroded in places and is sometimes interspersed by peat hags and wetland
- This plateau is dominated by montane habitat including sedge, rush and moss heath on the upper slopes and summits
- Remnants of birch woodland extend across the more inaccessible, craggy upper slopes and screes around the heads of the glens
- Heather, often managed as grouse moor, dominates the side slopes, with some swathes of grassland and even occasional bracken associated with the side slopes of the lower glens
- Many tributaries drain into rivers which have worked the fluvial-glacial deposits to create narrow floodplains in each of the four main glens
- Small conifer shelter woods of pine, spruce or larch, are located along the glen floors and side slopes, often extending into the upper reaches of the glens
- The narrow floodplains are the focus of infrequent small, fenced and drained improved grassland fields – most of which have been largely abandoned – associated with very occasional remote farms and estate houses located next to watercourses
- Occasional tiny stone walled fields and rigs, often located on or near alluvial fans, are evidence of pre-improvement farming
- There are occasional ruined buildings well into the interior of glens, sometimes even where the edge of the plateau meets the head of the glen and often associated with high passes

- Private vehicle tracks are located along the base of the glens, leading to access routes into the hills which link one glen to another, as well as crossing to neighbouring mountain areas over a series of high passes, many of which are ancient access routes

11.8.2 *Landscape experience*

- The sense of 'expanse' experienced from the undulating plateau is reinforced by the openness of the rounded summits and the smoothness of the terrain
- This contrasts with the enclosure and narrowness of the heads of the Angus glens, which are contained within steep rocky side slopes
- The heads of the glens are very dramatic and rugged, with towering cliffs and huge corries contained by cliffs, often emphasised by waterfalls which plunge down the hill sides
- Views from these hill tops focus down the individual Angus Glens, or north/west to Lochnagar, as well as north to the distant, higher summits of the Cairngorm massif
- This character area is often secluded and can be relatively remote, particularly when traversing the extensive plateau or crossing over high passes where there are very few vehicular tracks or conifer shelter woods
- Remoteness is limited, however, by the popularity of some of the glens, the presence of planted conifer woodland and vehicle tracks associated with the individual glens

11.8.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This hill group forms a 'transition area' between the lower, farmed and settled Angus Glens and the high summits of the White Mounth. It has a particular role, however, in linking the individual Angus Glens through its series of high mountain passes.

11.8.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The contrast between the elevated undulating plateau and the deep, steep sided and rocky, sinuous glens is a particular feature of this landscape. The glens penetrate deep into the mountains, with ruins of former farmsteads and associated field systems often extending well into the interior, contrasting with their relatively remote location.



The heads of the Angus glens become narrower and more sinuous as the wind into the interior of the plateau



Relatively remote houses, usually former small farms, associated with the estates, are located next to watercourses and green fields on the nea by floodplain



Rock ribs and crags exposed by ice moving from the right to the left in this picture taken above Glen Isla (photograph courtesy of Dr AM Hall)



A steep-sided glacial trough, typical of the heads of the Angus glens, with exposed rocky crags above rockfall debris

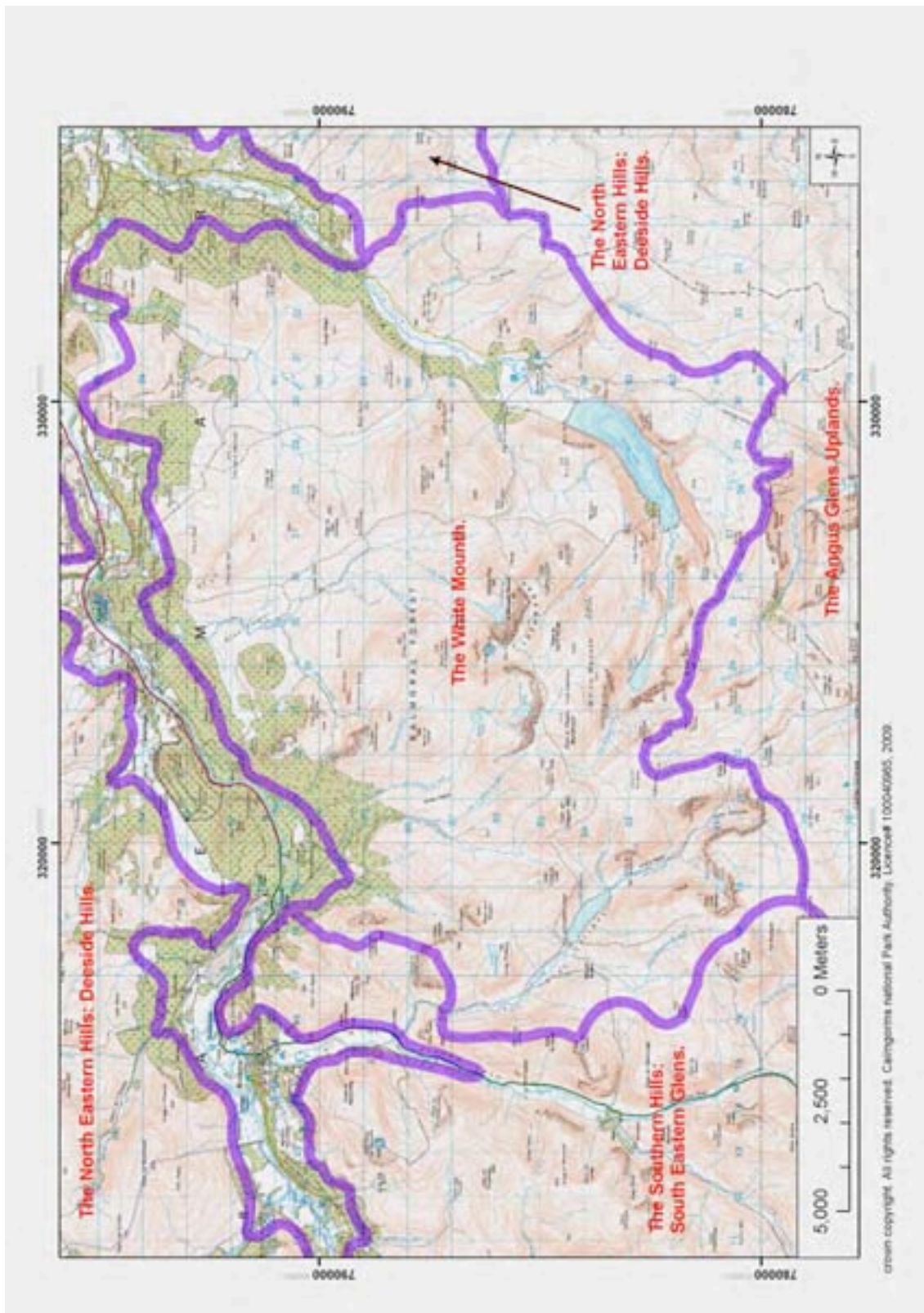


Conifer woodland and shelter woods within the glens



Trees – sometimes including larch and spruce – regenerate over less accessible slopes and scree

11.9 The White Mounth



11.9.1 Landscape Character

- Centred on an extensive, ring-like granite intrusion, this character area includes the high peaks and cliffs of Lochnagar, which rise to over 1100m, forming a relatively isolated group of high mountains surrounded by an expanse of lower hills
- The domed summits and tors are pre-glacial forms, developed in granite, while subsequent glacial activity has created cliffs, corries and deep troughs and post-glacial weathering and frost action has formed scree and boulder slopes
- Glacial activity was fed by the extensive ice fields of the White Mounth but was highly selective in its impact. Glacial erosion has left behind deep eroded valleys, like Glen Callater, cliffs, exposed rocky crags, scree and huge corries embracing elevated lochans
- Loch Muick fills a deep glacial trough, its curving alignment reflecting the 'ring' structure of the intrusion which surrounds the Lochnagar granite, while the north facing, massive corries below Cac Carn Mòr tower above long, boulder-strewn ridges which slope northwards down to Deeside
- Deep erosion has left tributary valleys hanging along the upper edges of the deeper glens, from where plunging waterfalls are a particular feature after heavy rain or following snow melt
- Alpine soils, which are shallow and fragile, take many years to accumulate on the frost shattered and weathered mountain tops and plateau, and often support distinctive and rare plant communities
- From Deeside, the vegetation grades from Scots pine-based conifer woodland in the lower glens to heather and blaeberry dominated dwarf shrub heath above the tree line, rising to extensive montane habitats of sedge, rush and moss heath across the upper slopes and summits
- The sparse settlement is limited to occasional farms and estate buildings located in sheltered and accessible Glen Muick, and on former shieling sites at the heads of small, shallow glens extending south from Deeside, into the heart of this area
- There are small areas of pre-improvement field systems with remnants of irregularly shaped, walled enclosures at each of these individual settlements, particularly along Glen Muick but also in the lower reaches of Glens Girnock and Gelder
- The narrow public access road to Glen Muick is often busy, and it is therefore a very visible feature in this relatively open landscape
- Private vehicle tracks extend south from Deeside into this area, linking to a path network which allows access to the Munros of Lochnagar and

Broad Cairn, as well as other summits and ridges and to high passes which extend southwards to the Angus Glens

- Glen Muick is a focus for recreation with a large car park and visitor centre located at the Spittal of Glenmuick, allowing ready access to mountain scenery and the Munros

11.9.2 *Landscape experience*

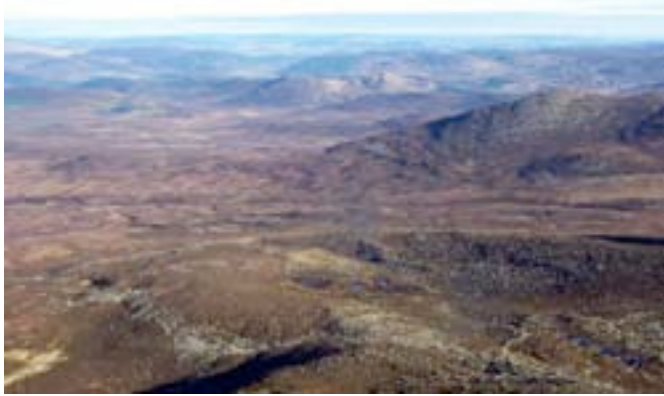
- Within the mountain interior, the height of the summits combined with the dramatic, towering cliffs, huge corries and deeply cut valleys create a spectacular landscape of complex topography
- Views from the very high peaks of Lochnagar and Broad Cairn range widely over the Park. There are also dramatic views along the lengths of the deep valleys from elevated passes
- The mountain interior of this character area is often secluded and can be relatively remote, particularly in the more inaccessible mountain in the western reaches of Lochnagar
- Remoteness is limited, however, by the popularity and accessibility of Glen Muick, which is accessed by a narrow public road and is a focus for recreation
- The transition from the more managed, sheltered and wooded landscapes of Deeside to the high, rugged mountainous interior can be relatively easily experienced travelling along the accessible Glen Muick

11.9.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

Lochnagar and other nearby summits are a recognisable, isolated group of high mountains which are highly visible from other mountain areas across the Park. This area also forms the wider setting to parts of Deeside.

11.9.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The dramatic topography of the White Mounth is relative accessible, although the more remote interior is rugged and challenging terrain. The extensive woodland around the outer fringes of this area forms a buffer along the southern edge of Deeside and reinforces the seclusion of the mountain areas.



Looking north from Lochnagar, the lower hills rising from an expanse of wet heather/blaeberry heath (photograph courtesy of Dr AM Hall)



A huge corrie below Cac Carn Mòr embraces an elevated corrie (Photograph courtesy of SNH)



The granite domes and paps of Lochnagar seen from the plateau edge south of Loch Muick. The steep sides of the glacial trough are locally scree covered with cliffs along the upper slopes. The stream is deeply incised into glacial deposits before it drops into the trough floor (photograph courtesy of Dr AM Hall)

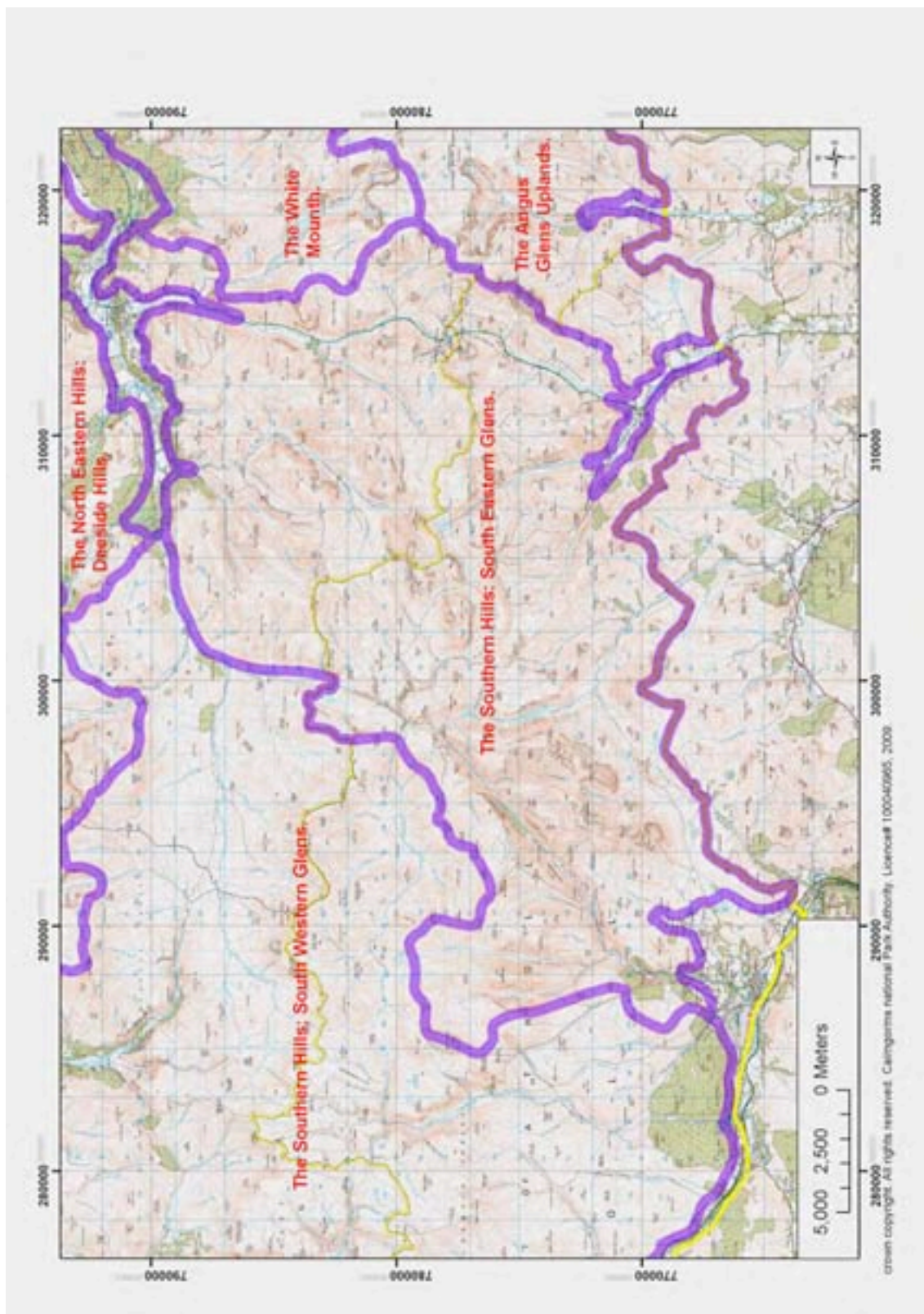


Viewed from Deeside, the shapely peaks of Lochnagar range rise above the woodland



Upper Glen Callater, a deep ice eroded valley, a lochan contained by the rocky cliffs of an impressive corrie

11.10 The Southern Hills: South Eastern Glens



11.10.1 Landscape Character

- The irregular topography of interlocking ridges, long glens and the complex terraced terrain reflects the effects of erosion acting on Dalradian schist bedrock of diverse lithology
- The long, often narrow, glens are contained by a complex topography of shallow side glens, intervening rocky ridges and truncated spurs created by a glacial activity deepening much older, broader valleys
- These long, enclosed glens, such as Glen Tilt, Glen Taitneach, Glen Ey and Glen Clunie, penetrate deep into the interior of the mountains, forming passes which link Deeside with the Perthshire lowlands. Glen Tilt sits on a faultline, and is very straight.
- The hill tops are sinuous ridges or individual summits, rising to over 1000m, and many of the highest peaks are very steep-sided with summits rising above extensive scree slopes, created by post-glacial weathering of frost-susceptible quartzite
- Subalpine soils on the upper slopes and summits, are shallow, with only a very thin layer of organic matter over the quartzite bedrock supporting sub alpine plant communities and montane habitats of sedge, rush and moss heath
- Heather and blaeberry over the upper glen slopes is often, although not always, managed as grouse moor, while extensive acid grassland with occasional bracken extends along lower slopes
- The narrow floodplains on the glen floors carry more fertile grasslands on calc and mica shists, often maintained by continued grazing
- Occasional conifer woodland extends into the most accessible glens, often established as shelter woods close to former farms or estate buildings
- Elsewhere, broadleaved woodland is located on more inaccessible slopes, with riparian woodland along many of the watercourses, particularly to the west of this character area
- Settlement is sparse, located along the glen floors, but estate buildings and the ruins of former farms can be found well into the interior of the mountain core along the accessible passes
- Traces of pre-improvement townships, including the ruins of buildings and the outlines of small field extend far up the glens, including the Tilt, Ey and Clunie, between and beyond occasional estate buildings
- Even further up these glens and into the heart of the hills, close to watercourses such as those around Ben Vurich or Carn Bhac, are numerous shieling grounds – bright green oases amongst the lesser greens of heather and acidic grasslands

- Private vehicle tracks extend far along the relatively flat glen floors, often linking to paths which continue through the narrow passes or branch out to track up through the side slopes of the side glens
- The A93 also passes through this area, and allows access to the ski centre at Glen Shee

11.10.2 *Landscape experience*

- The steep sided hills and the sense of the surrounding 'mass' create a very pronounced sense of enclosure when travelling through the narrow glens
- The steepness of the upper hill sides and the scree slopes create dramatic ridges, which can be experienced as relatively narrow, sinuous walking routes
- Views northwards to the Cairngorm massif and east to Lochnagar from the highest summits extend widely over the Park
- There are also dramatic, framed views along the lengths of the deep, steep sided glens, which are revealed in stages when travelling through the passes or long narrow glens
- The mountain interior of this character area is often secluded and can be remote, particularly in the more inaccessible mountain areas between Glen Tilt and Glen Shee
- Remoteness is limited, however, by the accessibility of Glen Tilt to the west and Glen Shee, the A93 and the ski centre to the east
- The presence of numerous shieling sites, abandoned pre-improvement townships and the ruins of later farmsteads are reminders of the relative accessibility of the glens, which were once much more widely inhabited and more readily used as access routes than they are today

11.10.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

The area is strongly characterised by the passes and long pathways and tracks which extend through the glens between Deeside and the southern boundary of the Park. It forms the backdrop to parts of Upper Deeside and the Glen Clunie and Glen Shee character areas, as well as Atholl to the west.

11.10.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The silvery quartzite scree on the upper mountain slopes often catches the light and is a striking feature both from a distance and when traversing the mountain ridges. The narrow, relatively grassy glens and passes allow access deep into the interior, reflected in the plentiful evidence of their long use and formerly extensive settlement, as well as continued grazing today.



Exposed rocky crags and weathered debris at Glen Shee



Grassy side slopes and more fertile floodplains in Glen Tilt

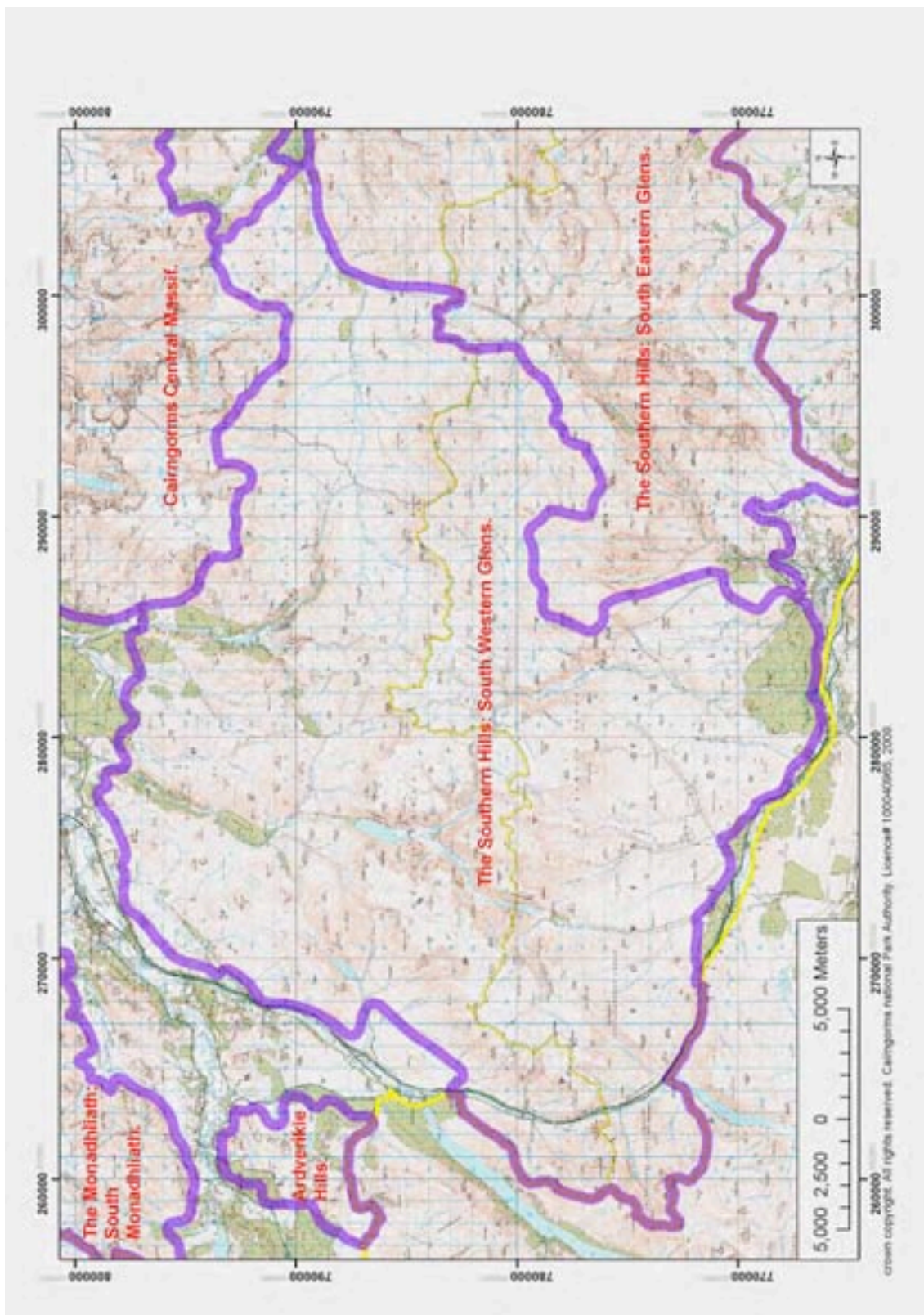


The ruins of former farms, here located close to the site of a former township, can be found well into the interior of these passes



Rigs, on an alluvial fan, sit above the river, where some riparian woodland still clings to less accessible river banks

11.11 The Southern Hills: South Western Glens



11.11.1 Landscape Character

- This extensive, very gently undulating plateau of the Gaick and the Forest of Dalnamein and Atholl is generally about 800m in elevation, with occasional isolated, steep sided mountain summits rising to over 1000m, often with scree slopes
- The plateau edge rises in an escarpment above the surrounding lower ground of the Atholl depression, Strathspey and the upper Geldie-Feshie strath
- The lack of significant lithological variability in the Moine psammite is reflected in the often subdued, at times almost level, terrain across the plateau
- Ancient west-east drainage systems, which have been little modified by glacial activity, form the main valleys, illustrated by the broad, shallow valley forms associated with the Upper Feshie and Geldie and Tarf
- Glacial activity has breached some watersheds to create several narrow, very steep-sided, through glens – lower Feshie, the Tromie/Gaick Pass and upper Glen Bruar for example – which penetrate through the interior of the plateau
- The tributary valleys that drop steeply to the floors of these glens are often deeply incised
- Hummocky glacial moraine subdivided by small melt water channels can be found along the lower slopes and valley floors, and solifluction, where previously frozen waterlogged sediment has slumped slowly down slope also creates small scale, rounded land forms along the lower slopes of the glens
- There are extensive debris slopes pockmarked with active run-off chutes and landslips along the steep escarpment edges of the plateau
- Long rivers, often with braided reaches or fragmenting into a network of smaller drainage channels and wetland as well as narrow lochs occupy the glen floors
- While there are areas of shallow, subalpine soils on the upper slopes and summits, there is also extensive blanket peat, including areas which have been significantly eroded, exposing the peat on the surface
- Montane habitats, of sedge, rush and moss heath can be found on the higher plateau and summits, but there is extensive open shrub heath of heather and blaeberry across the upper hill slopes while acid grassland occupies the lower slopes along the major glens
- Large areas of conifer woodland, often Scots pine, extend into the most accessible valleys from the mouths of the glens, located on the steep side slopes reinforcing the shelter and containment

- Broadleaved woodland is relatively sparse, limited to riparian woodland and occasional scattered birch across the valley floors
- Settlement is located along the more accessible glen floors and is nearly always associated with estates, with seasonally occupied lodges as well as the ruins of late 18th/19th century farmsteads west of Mar Lodge, as well as south of Glentromie Lodge and north of Glenfeshie Lodge
- The ruins of pre-improvement townships can be found along the mid-stretches of the Feshie, Chomraig, Tromie, Lui and Dee, located between the occasional estate buildings
- Further up these glens and others, into the heart of the hills, are occasional shieling grounds, but shielings are much more numerous and striking, bright green features beside the southerly flowing watercourses of Dalnamein Forest, the Bruar and the Edendon
- Private vehicle tracks extend far along the relatively flat glen floors, often linking to paths which continue through the narrow passes or branch out into the side glens
- The A9 also passes through this area, following the glacial breach at the elevated Pass of Drumochter

11.11.2 *Landscape experience*

- The steep sided glens and the escarpment at the edge of the plateau creates a very pronounced sense of enclosure when travelling through the narrow valleys
- This contrasts with the sense of expanse and openness experienced on the more level plateau
- The dynamic nature of the flood-prone rivers and the frequent landslips of loose material on the steep side slopes combine to create a sense that human intervention is easily overcome by natural forces at this elevation
- This sense of naturalness and unpredictability is reinforced where semi-native woodland, including Scots pine, has regenerated along the glens
- There are dramatic, framed views along the lengths of the deep, steep sided glens, which are revealed in stages when travelling through the passes or long narrow glens
- From the summits, there are extensive, often panoramic, views north and east to the Cairngorms massif and Lochnagar
- The mountain interior of this character area is relatively remote, particularly in the more inaccessible Gaick plateau between Drumochter and Glen Tilt

- Remoteness is limited, however, around the A9, and is in part reduced by the presence of vehicle tracks and the estate lodges, although these are largely located along the glen floors
- The presence of numerous shieling sites, abandoned pre-improvement townships and the ruins of later farmsteads are reminders of the relative accessibility of the glens, which were once much more widely inhabited

11.11.3 Relationship to adjacent character areas

This escarpment around the outer edge of this plateau creates the backdrop to character areas within the Spey valley, Drumochter and Glen Truim.

11.11.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The enclosed passes, with their long history of use and settlement, cut through the expanse of the open, exposed and often hostile plateau. Natural processes such as flooding, braided reaches of the rivers, active run off chutes and landslips creates a landscape where dynamic, natural processes are still very much in evidence.



Glacial moraine subdivided by small melt water channels along the valley floor at Drumochter



The glacial breach occupied by Loch an Dun in the eastern Drumochter Hills
(photograph courtesy of Dr AM Hall)

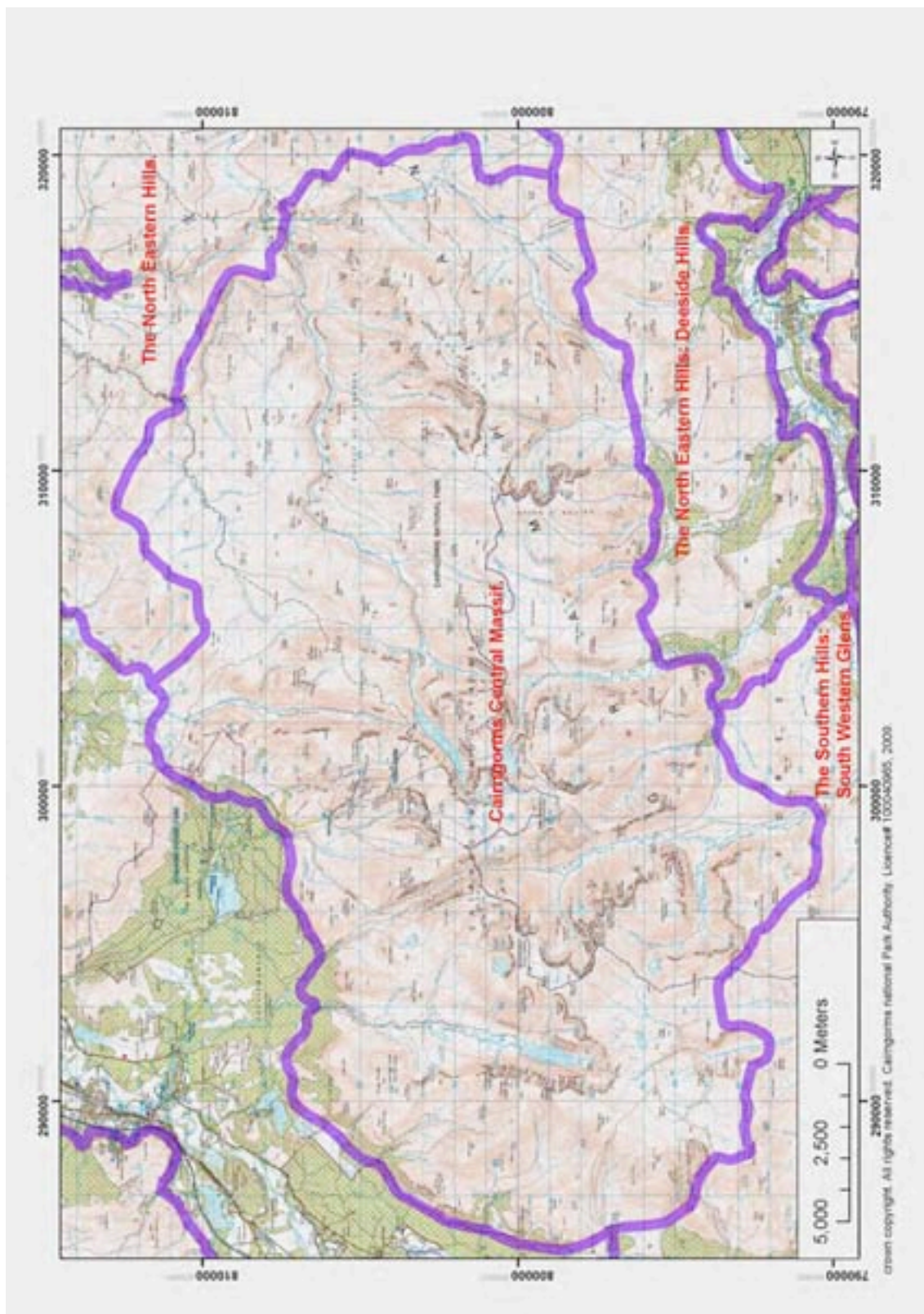


Extensive open shrubby heath of heather and blaeberry, with Scots pine on upper slopes and riparian woodland along Glen Tromie



The braided reaches of the Upper Feshie

11.12 The Cairngorms Massif



11.12.1 Landscape Character

- Centred on a massive granite intrusion, this area combines relict landforms which pre-date the last glaciation, such as the domed summits, vast, sweeping plateaux and dramatic tors, with enormous corries, cliffs and deepened troughs formed by glacial activity and smaller features including scree slopes and boulder-covered slopes created by post-glacial weathering
- The massive, bulky mountains rise to over 1300m, their open and exposed, often boulder strewn summits, rising above towering cliffs and corries which embrace elevated lochans
- Structures in the granite bedrock are expressed as straight and curved lineaments and slopes at scales ranging from huge domes to the rectangular building blocks of tors
- The arctic-alpine mountain environment often holds snow throughout the winter, with long-lasting snow patches a feature of shaded hollows
- The long, narrow, deepened glens are framed by the exposed granite of truncated spurs and weathered scree slopes. Some contain elongated lochs – the classic ribbon lakes of glacial scenery
- There are extensive debris slopes along these steep-sided glens, scored by active run-off chutes. Large landslips are found along the steep escarpment edges of the plateau
- Headwaters of the Spey, the Dee and the Don all rise in this massif
- Rivers are fed by burns issuing from elevated, shallow valleys on the plateau that plunge into the deeper glens from. Waterfalls are a particular feature after heavy rain or following snow melt
- At their lower reaches, the rivers meander, with frequent braided reaches and ‘wandering’ gravel banks
- Alpine soils and rankers, which are shallow, poorly developed and fragile, take many centuries to accumulate on the frost shattered and weathered mountain tops and plateau
- These shallow soils support fragmented montane habitats, of sedge, rush and moss heath as well as distinctive and rare plant communities
- Woodland is sparse, limited to riparian woodland and scattered Scots pine and birch along the sides of glens, particularly towards Deeside. Around Rothiemurchus, the natural treeline is being re-established, with stunted pines up to 800m.
- There is no permanent settlement in this area, although until recently, there were mountain bothies used by mountaineers
- Nor is there any upstanding evidence for historic or pre-historic settlement, other than at the extremities of this area, in the uppermost

reaches of the Derry and Gairn rivers, where there are ruins of shielings below Derry Cairngorm and Ben Avon

- The infrastructure of car parks, buildings, the funicular railway and the snow fences, metal gantries and ski lifts associated with the Cairngorm ski centre extend over the north facing slopes of Cairngorm and Cairn Lochan
- Access is largely limited to a path network which extends through the narrow glens and passes and links to footpaths heading into the mountains and up to the summits
- There are also occasional private vehicle routes which sometimes extend up the hillsides to allow access for stalking and a short section of public road access to the ski centre car parks

11.12.2 *Landscape experience*

- The combination of pre-glacial landforms and weathered surfaces, with impressive glacial forms such as the corries and troughs, with post-glacial weathering which has created scree and boulder slopes, creates a diverse and spectacular landscape that is recognised as being of international importance for its landforms
- The vast expanse of the plateau, the massive corries, deep troughs creates a landscape of great scale which is only truly experienced when within the mountain area
- The constant revelation of individual features – such as the tors, corries, lochans and boulder fields – creates a landscape of considerable natural diversity
- The exposed, unpredictable and often hostile environment, the long-lying snow, the dynamic nature of the flood-prone rivers and the frequent falls of loose material on the steep side slopes combine to create a sense that human intervention is easily overcome by natural forces
- From the summits and plateau, there are extensive, often panoramic, views across the massif, south east to Lochnagar and south west to the Gaick plateau. From the north western edges of the massif there are fine, elevated views of Glenmore, Strathspey and the Monadhliath
- There are dramatic, framed views along the lengths of the deep, steep sided glens, which are revealed in stages when travelling through the passes or long narrow glens
- The mountain interior of this character area is remote and relatively inaccessible, with rugged terrain and long travelling distances on foot, as well as the sheer ‘mass’ of the mountains further reinforcing a sense of isolation

- Remoteness is limited in the immediate surroundings of the Cairngorm ski centre, where the car parks allow easier access to the uplands and the ski lifts and railway reduce the sense of isolation experienced in the heart of the mountain area

11.12.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This escarpment around the north western edge of this plateau creates the backdrop to character areas within Speyside. This is the most remote part of the Park and it is 'buffered' to the north, east and south, by other mountain areas which reinforce this sense of remoteness.

11.12.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The drama and immense scale of the landforms, as well as the variety of individual features from pre- to post- glacial eras creates a landscape of considerable topographical diversity. The strong sense of remoteness is reinforced by the exposure and unpredictability of the climate, the relative inaccessibility and the dominance of natural processes. These combine to create a landscape where human intervention is minimal and readily overcome by natural forces.



Domed summits and vast plateaux which pre-date glacier activity, the dramatic rock face exposed by glaciation and post-glacial weathered rocks



The Lairig Ghru, a glacial trough



Looking north east across the Avon basin to the high Cairngorms (Photograph courtesy of Dr AM Hall)



Snow lasts well into the summer at this high altitude



Loch Avon – an elongated classic 'ribbon' lake

