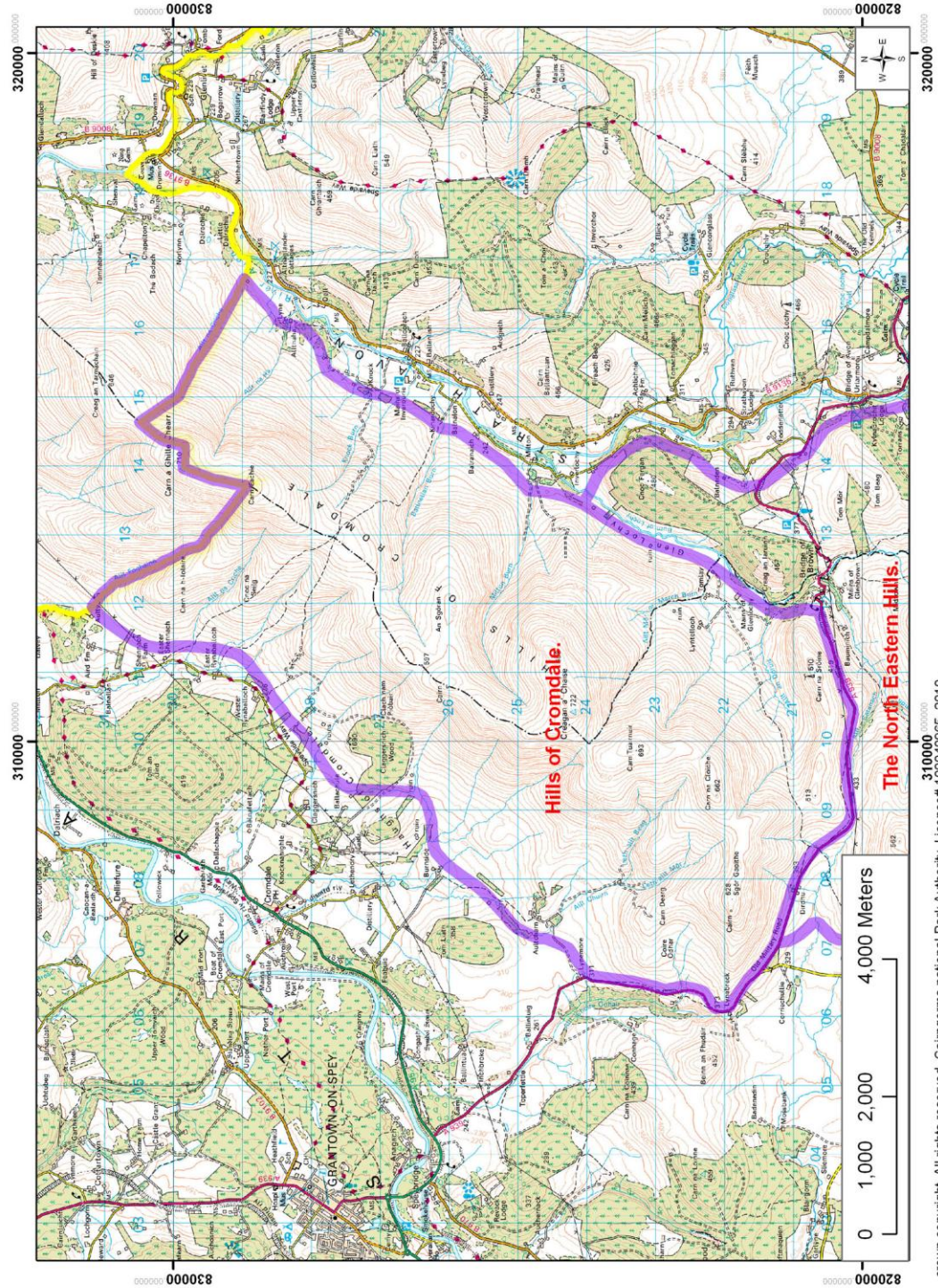


1.1 The Hills of Cromdale



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1.1.1 *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

1.1.2 *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

1.1.3 *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.

1.1.4 *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