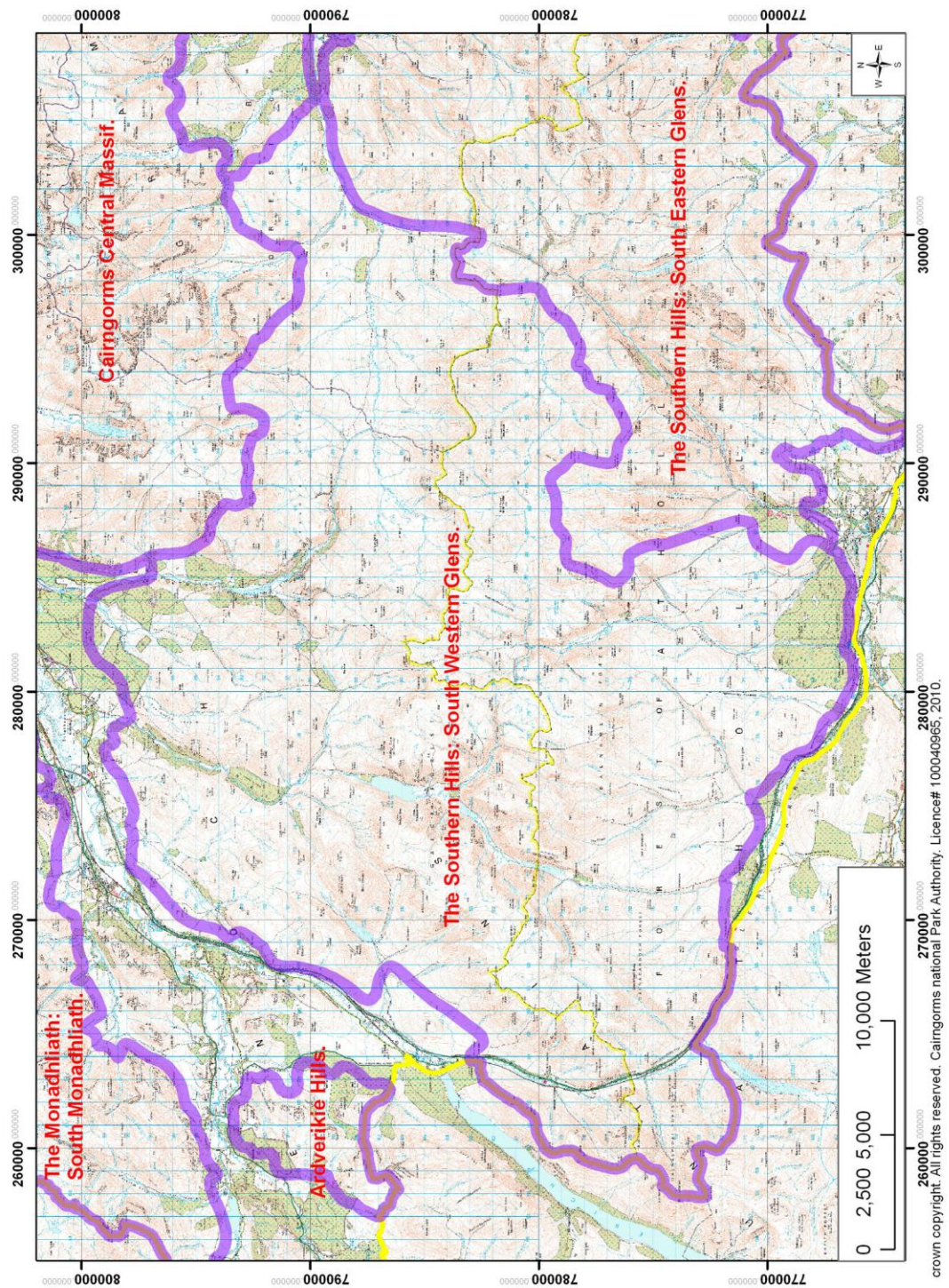


I.I The Southern Hills: **South Western Glens**



1.1.1 *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

1.1.2 *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

1.1.3 *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.

1.1.4 *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