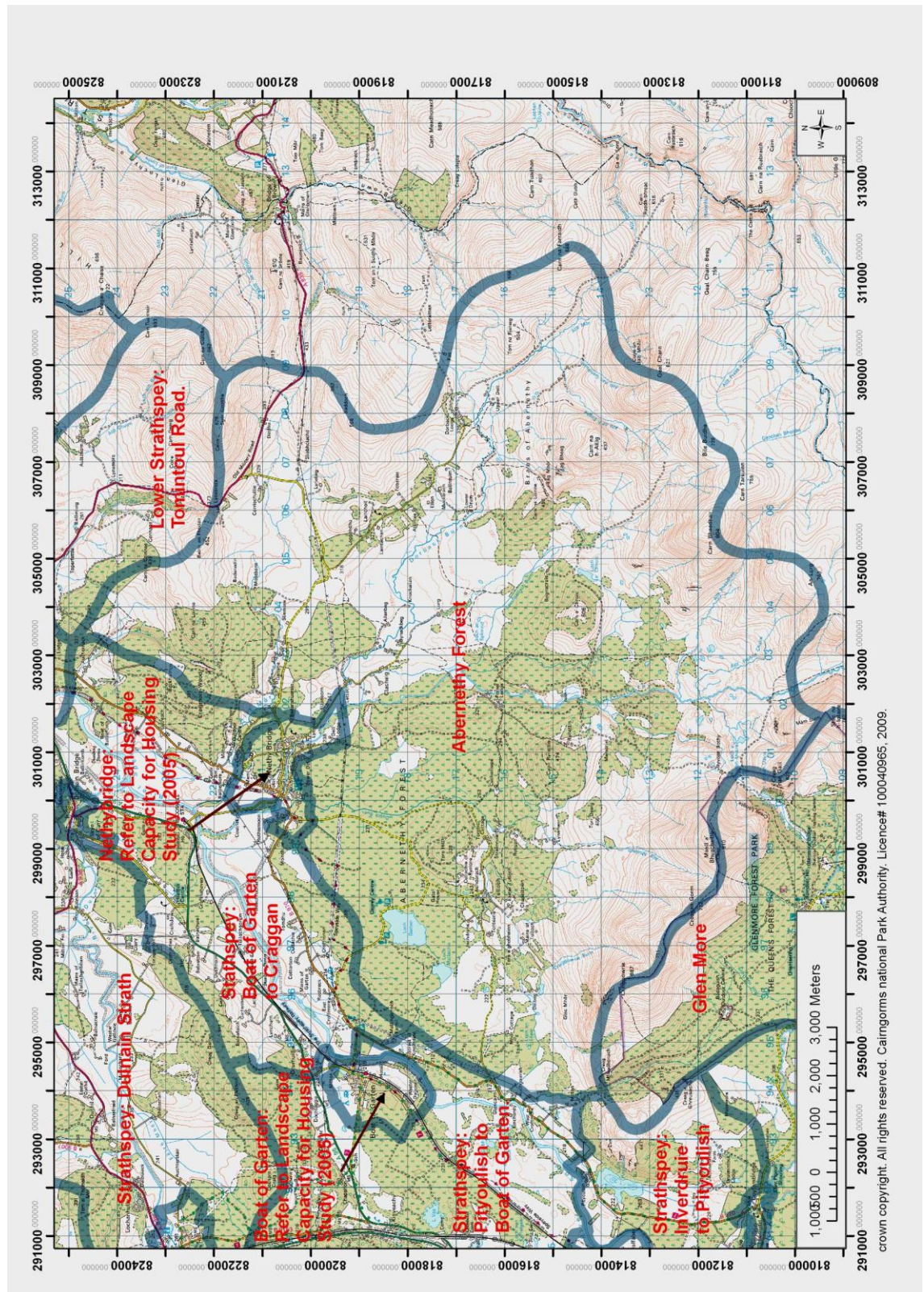


Abernethy Forest



1.1.1 *Landscape Character*

This character area lies above the Spey valley and comprises a north-west facing basin contained by an arc of hills which rise to the high Cairngorms Massif.

Watercourses radiate from glens within the steep slopes of the encircling hills, converging south of Nethy Bridge before draining to the Spey. The River Nethy is the most significant of these, issuing through the deeply incised gorge of Strath Nethy from the Cairngorms Massif before tightly meandering across the undulating basin of Abernethy

The rivers have broad floodplains, and their dynamic systems have braided reaches and little vegetation as it is often washed away

The detail of the terrain is complex, reflecting the varied underlying lithology as well as glacial and fluvial activity. Extensive areas of well-drained glacial and fluvial deposit and river worked gravels alternate with peat.

Overall, however, while there are prominent, low, rock hills, the basin floor is remarkably flat, appearing vast from elevated viewpoints

The steep slopes of the Kincardine Hills and Braes of Abernethy which immediately contain this area are eclipsed by the huge scale of the Cairngorms massif.

The area is extensively forested, predominantly with native pine. It has a strongly naturalistic appearance with trees of varied ages and a diverse ground flora of heather, juniper and blaeberry. Areas of wetland occurring within the forest are marked by stunted pine and bog vegetation

There are occasional shelter woods in farmed areas, often associated with settlement

Heather moorland dominates the hill slopes and extensive regeneration of pine is evident on the upper slopes of the Kincardine Hills

Drained, broadly straight edged, late 18th/19th century improved fields along the shallow valley of the Dorback Burn stand out as bright green patches against the muted colours of flatter wetlands and moorland

Small pastures associated with scattered farms and settlement are found in clearings within and on the more fragmented southern fringes of the forest.

Farms and shelterbelts within the more extensive farmed areas to the east are dispersed, located on well-drained fluvial deposits and drier ridges above the Dorback burn with some less regular, pre-improvement fields and ruined buildings on the slightly higher slopes

Settlement sited within or on the fringes of Abernethy Forest to the south tends to be more clustered, forming groups of up to 5 small dwellings and individual small farmsteads. These small clusters are tucked in around the low hills and are often hidden by the forest; an array of name-posts the only evidence of their existence from public roads.

Minor roads fan out from Nethy Bridge and follow the river valleys with dispersed farms along their length. Some of these roads continue as estate tracks through the upland area linking to Glen More and the eastern fringes of the Cairngorm plateau.

An electricity transmission line crosses through the forest and the open moorland before running parallel to the A939 to the east.

Loch Garten is a visual and recreational focus within the forest, its indented shore edged by overhanging mature pine and birch.

1.1.2 *Landscape experience*

The fringing hills and high mountains ring this low lying basin of land and provide a striking panoramic backdrop to views from the open farmland and moorland of the Dorback Burn area

The drama of the vast scale of the basin is only fully appreciated from more elevated viewpoints, such as from the A939, from where the open expanse of moorland reinforces the sense of distance

The high mass of the mountains is also appreciated from the open farmland and moorland, accentuated by the juxtaposition between the vast horizontal expanse of the basin and the huge vertical scale of the massif

The diverse composition of Abernethy Forest feels very natural. The forest can also feel secluded in many areas, despite the presence of popular recreational facilities and dispersed settlement

The pattern of tree cover and occasional farmland clearings within Abernethy Forest provide a diverse experience of light and shade, enclosure and openness when travelling in the area

1.1.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

The extensive forest cover characteristic of this area limits inter-visibility with adjacent character areas. The vast extent of this character area is not readily appreciated from the adjacent Spey valley due to the gentle landform which leads to a foreshortening effect. The more open farmland and moorland and elevated roads offer panoramic views to the Cairngorm massif.

1.1.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

Lying within an arc of dramatic, high mountains, the vast scale of the basin and its openness and sense of space is best appreciated from more elevated and open spaces within and around the woodland. This expanse contrasts with the small scale detail of the diversity

and naturalness of Abernethy Forest, and the pattern of farmed open spaces which extend along the river valleys and in a band around the fringes of the forest.



Extensive areas of native pine woodland



Open moor and small upland farms create open space within the forest, allowing views over this vast basin to the Cairngorms



Loch Garten



Small rock hills within the forest, along the southern edge, stand proud of the more level basin floor