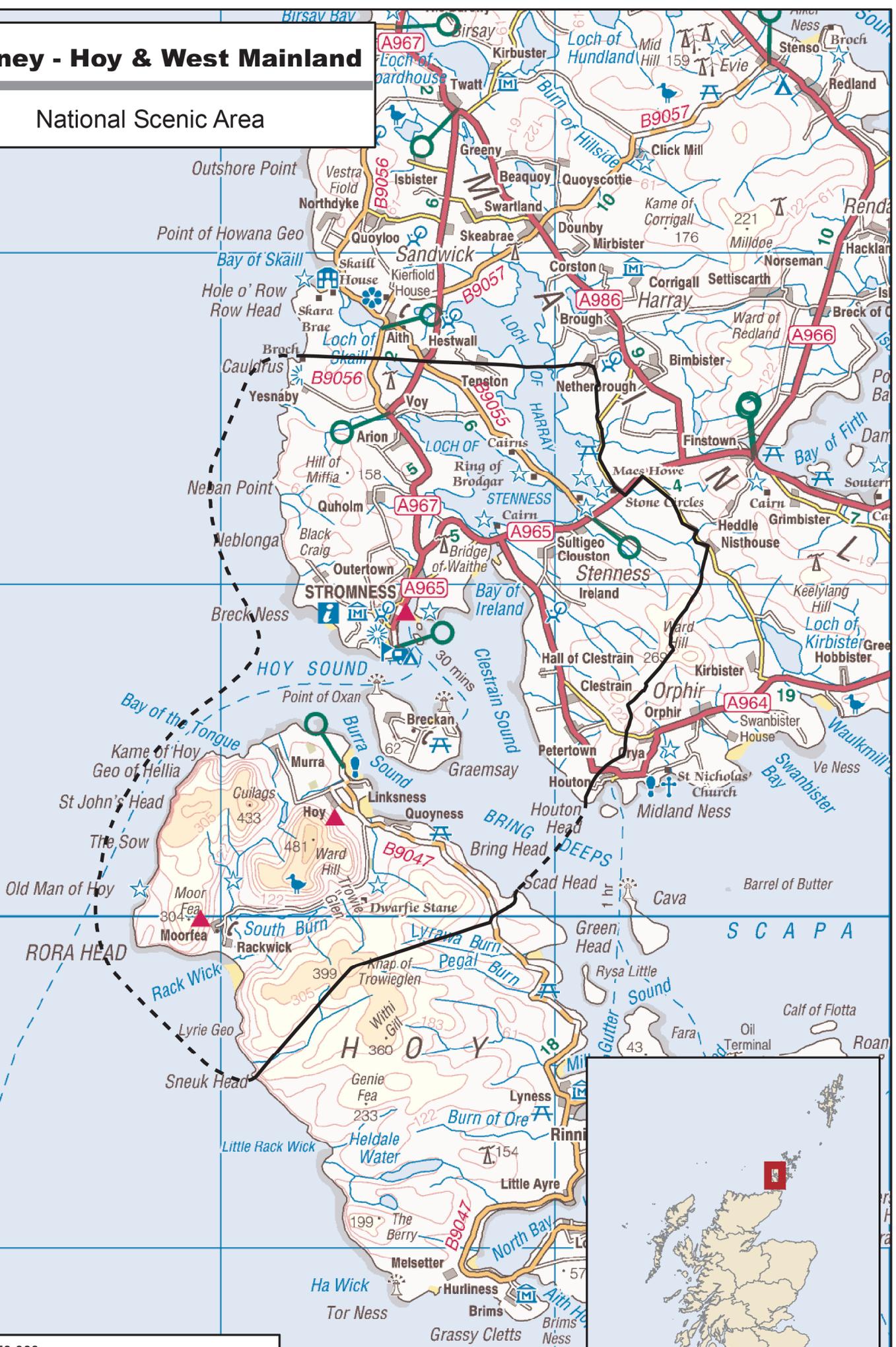


Appendix 15.3.2

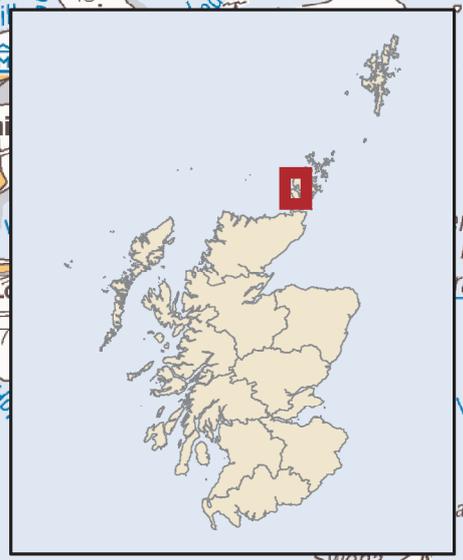
SLVIA Designation Citations

Orkney - Hoy & West Mainland

National Scenic Area



Scale 1:150,000
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HOY AND WEST MAINLAND NATIONAL SCENIC AREA
Orkney Isles

Description from *Scotland's Scenic Heritage 1978*

The great ice-rounded eminences of the hills of North Hoy dominate the Orkney scene with a power that is scarcely in tune with their modest height (479 metres). Their bold shape, fine grouping, soaring cliffs and headlands, including the famous stack of the Old Man of Hoy, are almost as important to the Caithness scene as they are in that of Orkney.

North Hoy has a particularly strong visual inter-relationship with the south-west mainland of Orkney, the pastoral character of which around the shores of the Loch of Stenness makes a good foil for the bold hills of Hoy. The basin of this loch is enclosed by low rolling hills of lush grassland, some arable land, scattered farm steadings and stone dykes with a noticeable lack of trees, giving a very open landscape, the character of which is enlivened by the abundant remains of ancient occupation.

This landscape culminates in the west in cliffed headlands like a rampart against the sea, which breaks through at Hoy Sound in a tidal race of impressive swiftness. The stone-built settlement of Stromness rising steeply out of its harbour further enhances the character of the area.

The Special Qualities of the Hoy and West Mainland National Scenic Area

- A palimpsest of geology, topography, archaeology and land use
- An archaeological landscape of World Heritage Status
- The spectacular coastal scenery
- Sandstone and flagstone as an essence of Orkney
- A long-settled and productive land and sea
- The contrast between the fertile farmland and the unimproved moorland
- A landscape of contrasting curves and lines
- Land and water in constantly changing combinations under the open sky
- The high hills of Hoy
- The townscape of Stromness, its setting and its link with the sea
- The traditional buildings and crofting patterns of Rackwick

| Special Quality | Further information |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A palimpsest of geology, topography, archaeology and land use</i> | |
| <p>This is a landscape composed of different layers that can be readily seen and understood:</p> <p>A base layer of Geology, with its horizontal strata of Devonian sandstones and flagstones, exemplified by the Old Man of Hoy and the cliffs of the western coastline.</p> <p>Overlain by undulating Topography, where a rocky coast rises through gentle lowlands to higher rounded summits.</p> <p>Overlain by Archaeology and Land Use, where a succession of different inhabitants have left their own distinctive patterns and monuments in the Orcadian landscape.</p> | <p>Orkney is a landscape of distinctive geology, topography, archaeology and land use which can be seen as layers within the landscape - a palimpsest. The NSA exemplifies this.</p> <p>The geology is horizontally bedded and relatively uniform. The topography consists of coasts both shallow and steep, extensive lowlands in the basins of the Lochs of Harray and Stenness, and the extensive uplands of Hoy. The surface layer contains archaeological sites, modern farmland and unimproved moorland.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>An archaeological landscape of world heritage status</i> | |
| <p>By their location, shape and vertical presence, the Neolithic monuments of the Ring of Brodgar, the Stones of Stenness and the grass-covered tomb of Maes Howe, are distinctive landmarks of international renown.</p> | <p>'The Orkney imagination is haunted by time.' George Mackay Brown</p> <p>The Neolithic monuments of central Orkney comprise the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site, and have become recognisable landmarks of West Mainland. Within the NSA they include:</p> |

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| <p>They lie within a landscape of low-lying farmland, which has been farmed for millennia. Wilder moors and hills rise to the east, and the Hills of Hoy form the backdrop to the south. Unusually for Orkney, there are few clear views of the open sea. The area feels enclosed, in the middle of a vast lowland amphitheatre of glistening loch and fertile pasture.</p> <p>The NSA is also rich in remains from other eras, from Norse and medieval to the Second World War.</p> <p>However, visible monuments represent only the clearest element of much more extensive and complex evidence of settlement and use of the landscape as revealed by archaeological excavations.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Stones of Stenness, the Ring of Brodgar and other standing stones composed of large flags of Devonian sandstone. • Maes Howe and Unstan (Onston) cairns, and other cairns and tumuli, which form distinctive, often grass covered low mounds in the landscape. <p>The solid carved boulder block of the Dwarfie Stane on Hoy lies within the NSA (although not in the World Heritage Site).</p> |
| <p>• <i>The spectacular coastal scenery</i></p> | |
| <p>With their towering red cliffs, the Atlantic coastline creates a spectacular scene, enhanced by the presence of the Old Man of Hoy, the highest sea stack in the British Isles.</p> <p>These vertical structures of red sandstone, home to numerous seabirds are both a landmark and an iconic image of the Orkney Islands, especially for those arriving by sea from across the Pentland Firth.</p> <p>In comparison, the sheltered waters and gentle topography of the western approaches to Scapa Flow contrast with the Atlantic-battered western seaboard.</p> | <p>The west coast of Mainland and Hoy contain high vertical cliffs, with St John's Head on Hoy, rising to 338m (the third highest sea cliff in Britain). They are composed of the Devonian Sandstone, with its distinctive bedding planes. The erosive force of the Atlantic storms and waves has exploited weaknesses in the strata to create cavities, skerries, ghoups, geos, caves, wave cut platforms and boulder-strewn beaches.</p> <p>The Old Man of Hoy towers 137m from its resistant, igneous rock foundation at sea level; it was not climbed until 1966.</p> <p>The cliffs provide home to numerous sea birds. The west coast of Hoy is part of the Hoy SSSI, SAC & SPA, and RSPB reserve, containing around 120,000 birds. These include nationally important populations of fulmar, great black-backed gull and guillemot.</p> |
| <p>• <i>Sandstone and flagstone as an essence of Orkney</i></p> | |
| <p>The presence of sandstones and flagstones, whether occurring as natural exposures or comprising human artefacts, is a characteristic of the NSA, indeed of Orkney as a whole.</p> <p>There are the towering cliffs and stacks of Hoy with their rusty reds and ochres, and also the lower rocky coasts with their</p> | <p>Hoy and West Mainland are composed predominantly of Devonian Old Red Sandstone, which includes Hoy Sandstone and Stromness Flags. The sandstone fractures along bedding planes, creating blocky stones and flag stones, which creates an excellent building material, including for standing stones. It is also prone to weathering, leading to changes in the colour and hue of the rock.</p> |

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| <p>wave-cut platforms and beaches of flagstones.</p> <p>There are the drystone dykes with their characteristic flattened stones, the traditional flagstone roofs as exemplified at Rackwick, and the golden or honey coloured stone of farm buildings and of old Stromness.</p> <p>There are ancient sandstone tombs, the solid carved boulder of the Dwarfie Stane, and the upstanding standing stones of the ancient circles.</p> | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">• A long-settled and productive land and sea</p> | |
| <p>The land has the appearance of a long and well-settled agricultural landscape, with solid farm buildings, fertile, green fields and numerous cattle.</p> <p>Likewise the ever-presence of the sea is a reminder that fishing and whaling have also been key to the prosperity of the islands.</p> | <p>The history of agriculture in Orkney goes back to Neolithic times. The mild climate, level ground and fertile soils have always made Orkney surprisingly fertile compared to Shetland, the Western Isles or mainland Scotland immediately to the south. This has been the key to the prosperity of the islands. Currently there are over 100,000 cattle in Orkney.</p> <p>It is a working landscape, and the current farms have had a long evolutionary history, including crofting townships and 19th century improvement farms. The steadings often preserve examples of kiln barns and other 19th century structures typical of crofting, such as the linear farmsteads. Examples of old townships include Clouston and Grimeston.</p> <p>The sea has always provided a source of food, as far back as the fish and shellfish remains found in the Neolithic middens. Additionally, Stromness was a centre of whaling and fishing industries, which brought prosperity to the islands.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">• The contrast between the fertile farmland and the unimproved moorland</p> | |
| <p>The fertile low ground with its farms and fields contrasts markedly with the open, uninhabited higher ground of moorland and hill. This is emphasised by the differing colours of the two areas – the bright greens of the farmland and the browns of the uplands.</p> | <p>Much of the low ground of the NSA, around the loch basin of Stenness and on the gentle, coastal slopes, is comprised of rich, fertile agricultural land. The fields consist of improved grassland.</p> <p>On the higher ground of Ward Hill (Stenness), and on the rugged, glaciated hills of Hoy there is open, unimproved, often heather-dominated, moorland and blanket peat. These areas have long been used for peat extraction, with old cuttings and extraction routes visible in many areas.</p> |

- ***A landscape of contrasting curves and lines***

The combination of curves and lines is a defining feature of this landscape. The pattern of the landform is smooth, with gentle curves, but the land itself often ends spectacularly in vertical cliffs and a horizontal horizon of sea. Rocks on the seashore and in the buildings and dykes tend to be flat and linear, and the field boundaries take straight lines across the curving landscape.

There are no trees to soften the regular outlines of the farm buildings that stand proud on the undulating pasture, and the ancient monuments can be a combination of the linear and the circular: upstanding stones within a circular surround.

The low-lying land rises gently from the sea, to rounded farmland and moorland; above are the more dramatic, steeper, but smoothly-curved hills of Hoy.

There are curves also in many of the ancient monuments: the distinctive curved forms of Maes Howe and other cairns in the landscape; and the circular forms of the ditches in the henge monuments of Brodgar and Stenness.

These curves contrast with the linear, angular forms, often derived from the underlying sandstone: the geological bedding planes, the joints and fractures in the rocky coastline, the vertical and angular cliffs and stacks, the blocky nature of the stones, the dykes with their flat stones. Additionally, the fields and buildings tend to be rectilinear.

- ***Land and water in constantly changing combinations under the open sky***

Under the wide horizons, endless combinations of water, land, sea and sky can be experienced, varying both with location and the weather. Movement is brought to the landscape by the almost ceaseless wind, whether the scudding of clouds, the shafts of sunlight moving across the fields and moors, the patterns on the water, or long grass blowing in the wind.

Sea or loch is never far distant: the lochs of Harray and Stenness, surrounded by smooth lowlands and hills; small voes and wicks such as Hamnavoe; the larger bay of Ireland, leading to sounds and deeps, and to the whale-shaped Graemsay; the enclosed Scapa Flow (bordering the NSA); the exposed Pentland Firth; and the open Atlantic Ocean.

Location-specific qualities

- ***The high hills of Hoy***

The high, rounded hills of Hoy form a spectacular backdrop to much of West Mainland. With their corries, deep U-shaped valleys and patterned ground, these rugged, moorland hills reflect their glacial history.

Within a sheltered gully in these hills lies the small Berriedale birchwood, the most northerly native wood in Britain.

Glaciated landforms on Hoy include distinctive U-shaped valleys, moraines, including a terminal moraine at Rackwick, and corries, the most northerly in Britain.

Post-glacial features include patterned ground on the summit of Ward Hill (Hoy) and raised beaches. In contrast to Hoy, Mainland is a drowned coast without raised beaches.

Berriedale Wood is composed of downy birch, with rowan, willow, aspen and hazel. There is an understorey of heather, roses, honeysuckle, ferns and blaeberry.

• **The townscape of Stromness, its setting and its link with the sea**

The stone-built settlement of Stromness, rising steeply out of its harbour, further enhances the character of the area.

The townscape is distinctive, comprised of sandstone houses around the bay and on the hill behind, its traditional settlement pattern little altered.

Particularly notable are its narrow, stone-flagged main street, with vennels leading down to the numerous private wharves; and narrow streets and paths leading up the hill behind.

The town has always been dependent on the sea, and maintains strong maritime links. There is constant movement of boats in the harbour and the surrounding seas, from fishing and diving boats, to the arrival and departure of the ferry from Caithness.

Stromness and Hamnavoe go back to Viking times, if not before, with the natural harbour and relative calm waters compared to the surrounding seaways of the Atlantic ocean and the North Sea.

Immediately north of mainland Britain, Orkney and its seaways have always been a strategic point for sea navigation. In times of war it has been an alternative route to the potentially dangerous English Channel.

The town has had a rich, maritime history, including being of key importance to the herring fishery. It has been an important strategic location in times of war, for example during the Napoleonic and First & Second World Wars. It has had strong links to the arctic, particularly through whaling and as base for the Hudson Bay Company.

• **The traditional buildings and crofting patterns of Rackwick**

Set at the end of a glacial valley, between towering sandstone cliffs and a rocky beach open to the Atlantic Ocean, the distinctive and attractive village of Rackwick contains stone buildings and crofts in a traditional layout and in a spectacular setting.

'Rackwick... the only example of a ... crofting township on estate land where most of the houses are still in place.'
Bailey (2007)

The distinctiveness of Rackwick is brought about by the prevalence of vernacular buildings. Modern buildings, where present, have broadly retained the vernacular style. There are also examples of old longhouses. Sandstone is the building material and some roofs consist of flagstones or turf.

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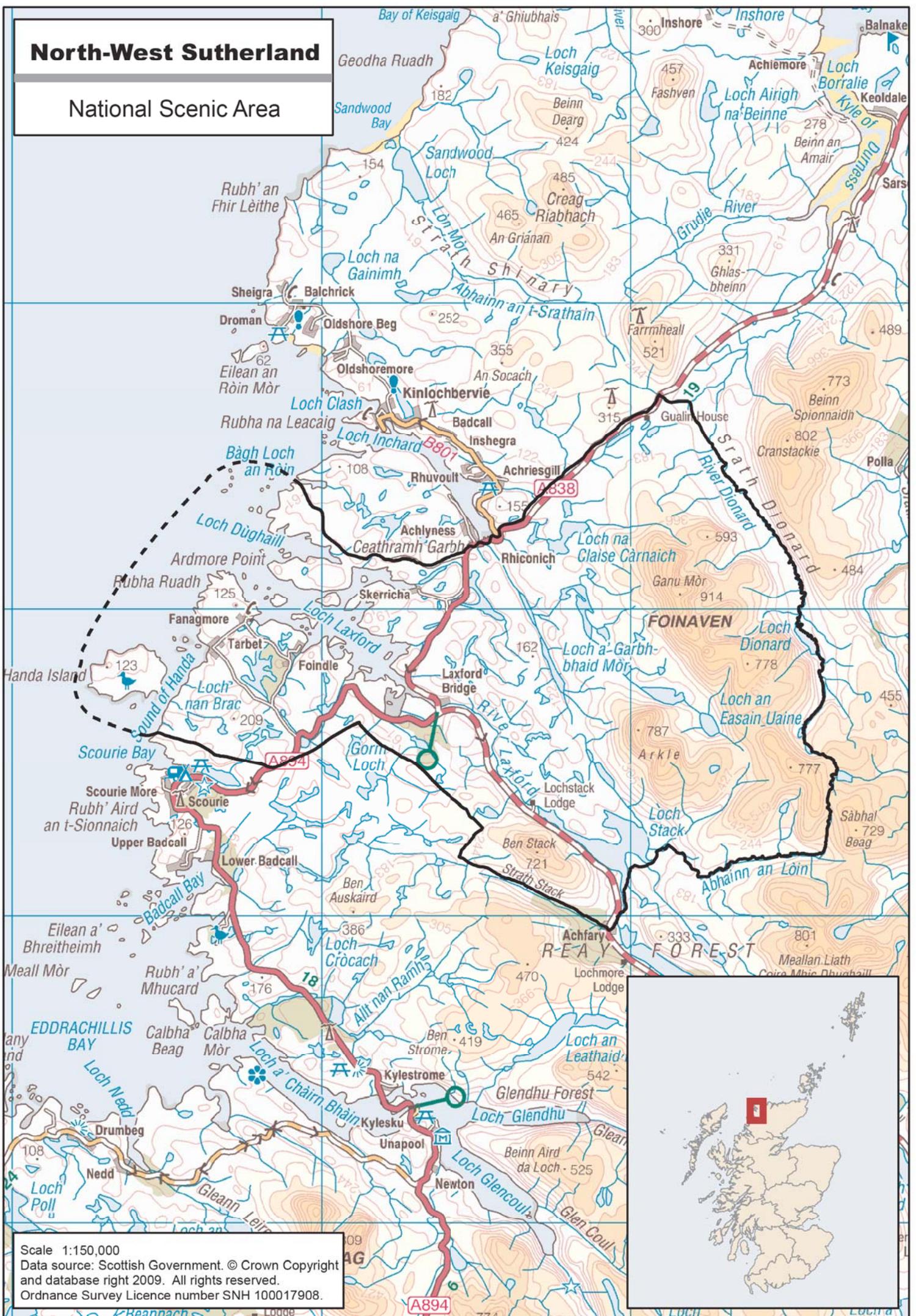
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North-West Sutherland

National Scenic Area



Scale 1:150,000
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NORTH-WEST SUTHERLAND NATIONAL SCENIC AREA
Highland

Description from *Scotland's Scenic Heritage 1978*

Foinaven, Arkle and Ben Stack are mountains of quartzite resting dramatically on Lewisian gneiss. Ben Stack (721m) is a shapely remnant cone, Arkle (787m) a whale-back, and Foinaven (909m) a long slab broken into separate summits. The summits and flanks of the latter two form a stark desert of white quartzite scree broken occasionally by lines of tiered crags. The knock and lochan topography of the gneiss landscape extending to the west forms a suitable foil for this varied trio, as hard and uncompromising as the mountains themselves.

Loch Laxford is made up of the same bare rocky topography and is clearly related to the mountain core of the area. Its indented coast does not have the wooded inlets and bays that are found further south, but there are some sheltered beaches from which Handa Island with its towering sandstone cliffs and bird colonies can be seen.

The Special Qualities of the Northwest Sutherland National Scenic Area

- A landscape of rock
- The backdrop of distinctive mountains
- A complex cnocan landscape of rock, water and sky
- Intimate mix of sea and land
- Contrast between extensive uninhabited land and localised human settlement
- Extensive tracts of wild land
- Handa's towering sea cliffs

| Special Quality | Further information |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A landscape of rock</i> | |
| <p>This is an uncompromising, open landscape of ancient, hard rock, sparsely clothed with vegetation. Grey and white scree-covered mountains rise steeply above a landscape of rocky cnocans interspersed with numerous lochs and lochans.</p> | <p>In many landscapes the geology provides the underlying template for the other landscape features. In this NSA it is the geology itself that stands out. The importance of the geology has been recognised through the accolade of GeoPark, the NSA being in the middle of a GeoPark that stretches beyond it both north and south.</p> <p>The Moine Thrust passes through the eastern side of the NSA. The mountains of Foinaven and Arkle are composed largely of brittle, white Cambrian quartzite, which readily erodes into scree. The land between the mountains and the sea consists of Lewisian gneiss which has eroded into a cnoc and lochan topography. The gneiss here, at over two billion years old, is amongst the oldest rocks in the world.</p> <p>The harshness of the environment is reflected in the Gaelic name <i>Ceathramh Garb</i>, the Rough Quarter.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The backdrop of distinctive mountains</i> | |
| <p>Three distinctive shaped peaks, all with a hard, steep and inaccessible appearance, stand sentinel over the landscape and dominate the views.</p> <p>The lone, cone-shaped peak of Ben Stack contrasts with the whaleback ridge of Arkle and the angular broken ridge of Foinaven. With their tiered crags, they come across as a forbidding fortress to Sutherland's interior.</p> | <p>Foinaven (911m), Arkle (787m) and Ben Stack (721m) rise dramatically from the lower-lying, cnoc and lochan topography.</p> <p>The distinctive peaks of Foinaven and Arkle are coarse, angular, irregular massifs of numerous small summits, dominated by light, grey cliffs, tiered crags, loose scree and gullies. Ben Stack, in contrast, is simpler in structure, appearing as a steep cone when viewed from the seaboard.</p> |

• ***A complex cnocan landscape of rock, water and sky***

Most of the NSA is a complex landscape of cnoc and lochan, composed of the fundamental elements of water and rock. The low height of the numerous cliffs and hillocks contrasts with the massive vertical scale of the mountains beyond. Ancient glacial erratics of rocks and boulders are common in places, still in place after being dropped by glaciers thousands of years ago.

Although this landscape can appear harsh and unforgiving, it also contains areas of intimacy – small crags, lochans, burns and hollows. Woods, however, are rare.

Abundant water, whether loch, lochan or burn, fills the hollows. Its ripples and reflections add light and movement to the static, ancient rock that is so prevalent. The waters of Loch Stack provide a reflective foreground to the dramatic slopes and cliffs of Arkle rising up behind.

Across this uneven and treeless topography no two horizons are the same, although the sky always a dominant feature. It is an unusual landscape of great fascination.

Although generally low-lying (below 150-200m), great variety can be observed in the cnocan landscape. However, this variety is based on a repeated pattern of generally rounded cnocs interspersed with lochs or lochans. On the other hand, the vegetation cover, where it exists, tends to be relatively uniform.

• ***Intimate mix of sea and land***

The cnocan topography descends slowly into the sea, resulting in a coastline of great complexity and interest – skerries, rocks, islands, cliffs, and bays. Many stretches are only accessible on foot which, combined with the highly indented shoreline, gives the coast a wild, secluded and secretive feel.

Loch Laxford, with its heather-clad shores, brings the sea into the heart of this landscape of rock. In places, only the ebb and flow of the tide, exposing the orange fringe of seaweed, is a reminder that it is saltwater at all. The open sea appears far away.

Compared to the Sutherland coast further south where small woods of birch and hazel often fringe the inland coast and soften the landscape, pockets of woodland are rare within this NSA.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contrast between extensive uninhabited land and localised human settlement | |
| <p>Most of the land is uninhabited and uncultivated and, where not bare rock, is clothed with natural vegetation. Settlement is rare and, apart from the occasional shooting lodge, is restricted to coastal areas. Human activity is both constrained and dwarfed by the surrounding mountains, rock and moorland.</p> | <p>The area is sparsely populated with habitation restricted mainly to isolated coastal, crofting settlements with limited inbye land; and with associated jetties, fish farms and mussel lines.</p> <p>Elsewhere there are occasional shooting lodges and access tracks, with much of the land comprising sporting estates.</p> <p>Roads and paths are sparse, with mostly single track roads following the uneven and undulating ground of the cnocan landscape.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive tracts of wild land | |
| <p>The super-abundance of rock and water makes passage into the interior difficult, and paths are few and far between. This is the domain of the serious hillwalker and sportsman, keen to enjoy a wild and remote landscape where natural forces predominate.</p> | <p>Although the land is used for grazing and shooting, overall the landscape exhibits a wild character, an impression of natural forces being in charge.</p> <p>The interior comprises part of an SNH Search Area for Wild Land.</p> |
| <p><i>Location-specific quality</i></p> | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handa's towering sea cliffs | |
| <p>The towering, sandstone cliffs and stacks of Handa Island contrast with the broken cnocan coastline found elsewhere.</p> <p>These vertical cliffs provide ideal nesting sites so that during the summer the crags and surrounding seas are teeming with seabirds.</p> | <p>Compared to the surrounding mainland which consists of Lewisian gneiss, Handa is composed of Torridonian sandstone. This rock is horizontally bedded and tends to result in vertical cliffs rather than the lower, more broken cliffs of the mainland.</p> |

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KYLE OF TONGUE NATIONAL SCENIC AREA *Highland*

Description from *Scotland's Scenic Heritage 1978*

Ben Hope (927m) and Ben Loyal (764m) are well known as two of the finest mountains in the north of Scotland. Their isolation in the landscape emphasises on the one hand the massive asymmetric cone of Ben Hope which dominates the northern seaboard, and on the other, the stately succession of granite peaks of Ben Loyal which form a compelling skyline at the head of the Kyle of Tongue.

The Kyle of Tongue itself exhibits a constantly changing character with the ebb and flow of the tide, and the varied woodlands and pattern of crofting settlements along its shores add landscape diversity to the scenic relationship it enjoys with the two bens. The coastline at the mouth of the Kyle, with its islands cliffs and indented bays with sandy beaches and crofting settlements, forms a visually related coastal extension to the inner part of the Kyle. This character extends in undiminished quality to the mouth of the Naver in Torrisdale Bay.

The Special Qualities of the Kyle of Tongue National Scenic Area

- An ever-present backdrop of mountains
- The Kyle – a link from an inhabited coast to a wild, moorland
- Scale, from domestic to monumental
- The constantly changing character of the Kyle
- Rich variety of coastal scenery
- Distinct pattern of settlement

| Special Quality | Further information |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>An ever-present backdrop of mountains</i> | |
| <p>Ben Hope and Ben Loyal, standing isolated above the open moorland, are well known as two of the finest mountains in the north.</p> <p>Both hills rise above their eponymous lochs and each has its own distinct profile. Ben Hope appears as a large asymmetric cone whereas Ben Loyal, 'The Queen of Scottish Mountains', forms a stately succession of granite peaks.</p> <p>They have a timeless and lofty presence, forming an ever-present backdrop and acting as landmarks over a wide area. They provide the whole locality with a sense of place and symbolise the boundary between the populated coast and the wild and generally uninhabited interior.</p> | <p>Ben Loyal (764m) forms a compelling skyline at the head of the Kyle of Tongue, while Ben Hope (927m) dominates the northern seaboard. These isolated mountains are distinctive and their individual shapes make them easily recognisable.</p> <p>Ben Loyal is known as the 'Queen of Scottish Mountains' for its aesthetically pleasing profile. Its vegetated summit ridge has four prominent, granitic tors, and there are impressive corries on its northwest side.</p> <p>Ben Hope (Hill of the Bay), the most northerly Munro, is asymmetric in shape and generally less complex. Its western slopes form a very steep, forbidding foil to the head of Loch Hope and Strath More. This edge is formed by two tiers of crags, the highest one forming the edge of the main north-south ridge. The east side of the mountain has three fine, remote corries.</p> <p>Although there is a wide variety of landform within the NSA, the mountains are a link that contributes to the coherence of this NSA, even though at times they are shrouded in cloud, or wreathed in mist.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Kyle – a link from an inhabited coast to a wild, moorland</i> | |
| <p>Lying between the sea to the north, the mountains to the south, and expansive moorlands to the east and west, the Kyle of Tongue appears as a green, inhabited oasis on the exposed north coast of Scotland. It brings sea and settlement well inland, into the heart of the interior.</p> | <p>Settlement lies almost exclusively within the coastal zone, along the kyle shores as far south as the A836 Causeway; with occasional habitation south to Kinloch Lodge at the head of the kyle. Inbye land lies within the coastal zone or in pockets of less steep moorland.</p> <p>The interior shows the least human activity, which is largely restricted to sporting and</p> |

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| <p>Human presence, both ancient and modern, is centred on or near the coast, with an outlier at the head of the Kyle. In contrast, the sweeping moorland and mountain is a wild and remote land of heather, bog, loch, river and burn; of rock, crag and high mountain corrie.</p> | <p>hill-walking interests.</p> <p>The southern half of the NSA includes part of an SNH Wild Land Search Area.</p> |
| <p>• Scale, from domestic to monumental</p> | |
| <p>The small domestic scale of crofting and other activity around the coastal shores contrasts markedly with the monumental outer landscape presented by the mountains to the south and the open ocean to the north.</p> | <p>It can be difficult to appreciate the mountains' height and scale when there are few scale indicators such as trees or buildings.</p> |
| <p>• The ever-changing changing character of the Kyle</p> | |
| <p>The Kyle itself exhibits an ever-changing character of light and texture: the ebb and flow of the tide over sands or mudflats; the pattern of wind and waves; or reflections of the sun and scudding clouds.</p> <p>Diversity is enhanced by the woods and crofts around the shores, and this endless variety provides a dynamic foreground to spectacular views of the surrounding moors and mountains.</p> | <p>Variety comes from the extensive intertidal mudflats in the inner kyle, with their variation in pattern and colour; and the extensive intertidal sandbanks in the outer kyle, also with variation in pattern and colour.</p> |
| <p>• Rich variety of coastal scenery</p> | |
| <p>From the sheltered Kyle to islands exposed to the full force of the ocean, the area exhibits a rich variety of coastal scenery. This includes both soft landscapes of sand and mud and harder landscapes of rock and cliff.</p> <p>One of the highlights of the north coast is the long, sandy Torrisdale Bay.</p> | <p>Along its length the Kyle displays a combination of what can be considered as 'east coast' and 'west coast' characteristics. This is due to the intermix of rocky, coastal sections and flatter, sand flats and estuarine deposits.</p> <p>The northern coastline has high cliffs, shelving shores and sandy sheltered bays. This variety increases at the broad mouth of the kyle where a scatter of islands mirror the landform of the rocky coastal promontories, and mark the transition from the open sea to the sheltered kyle.</p> <p>In the east, the NSA includes coastal crofting areas, the headland between the Rivers Naver and Borgie, and the raised beach of Invernaver.</p> |

- **Distinct pattern of settlement**

In this open landscape, the pattern of settlement and land use, both modern and historic, is often clearly visible. Each crofting township possesses its own distinct character, some linear and some clustered. Inland, shooting lodges and sheep farms provide a contrasting land use, as does the designed landscape surrounding Tongue House.

The presence of chambered cairns and brochs illustrates that people have occupied this land for many centuries.

Crofting patterns are distinctive. They vary according to the topography and access to local resources, so that the location of croft houses and boundaries create distinct township characters. For example, the Melness townships have a linear crofting pattern compared to the clustered pattern at Strathan Skerryay.

Traditional rig boundaries are landscape features which can often be picked out from a distance, although many are now falling into disrepair.

18th century improvement landscapes add to the diversity of woodland and significant boundaries. Tongue House is included in the Inventory of Gardens & Designed Landscapes. The western garden wall of Tongue House is especially significant from the western shore of the Kyle of Tongue and the coast road on the eastern shore. The rectangular enclosures of Melness House are prominent from the A836 at Rhitongue and from the approach into Midtown on the western shores.

The presence of major sporting estates has had an impact on the landscape, with shooting lodges and other infrastructure notable at Strathmore, Loch Loyal and Kinloch, as well as Tongue House.

The large sheep farms at Ribigill, Tongue Mains and Melness also provide a link to the area's history.

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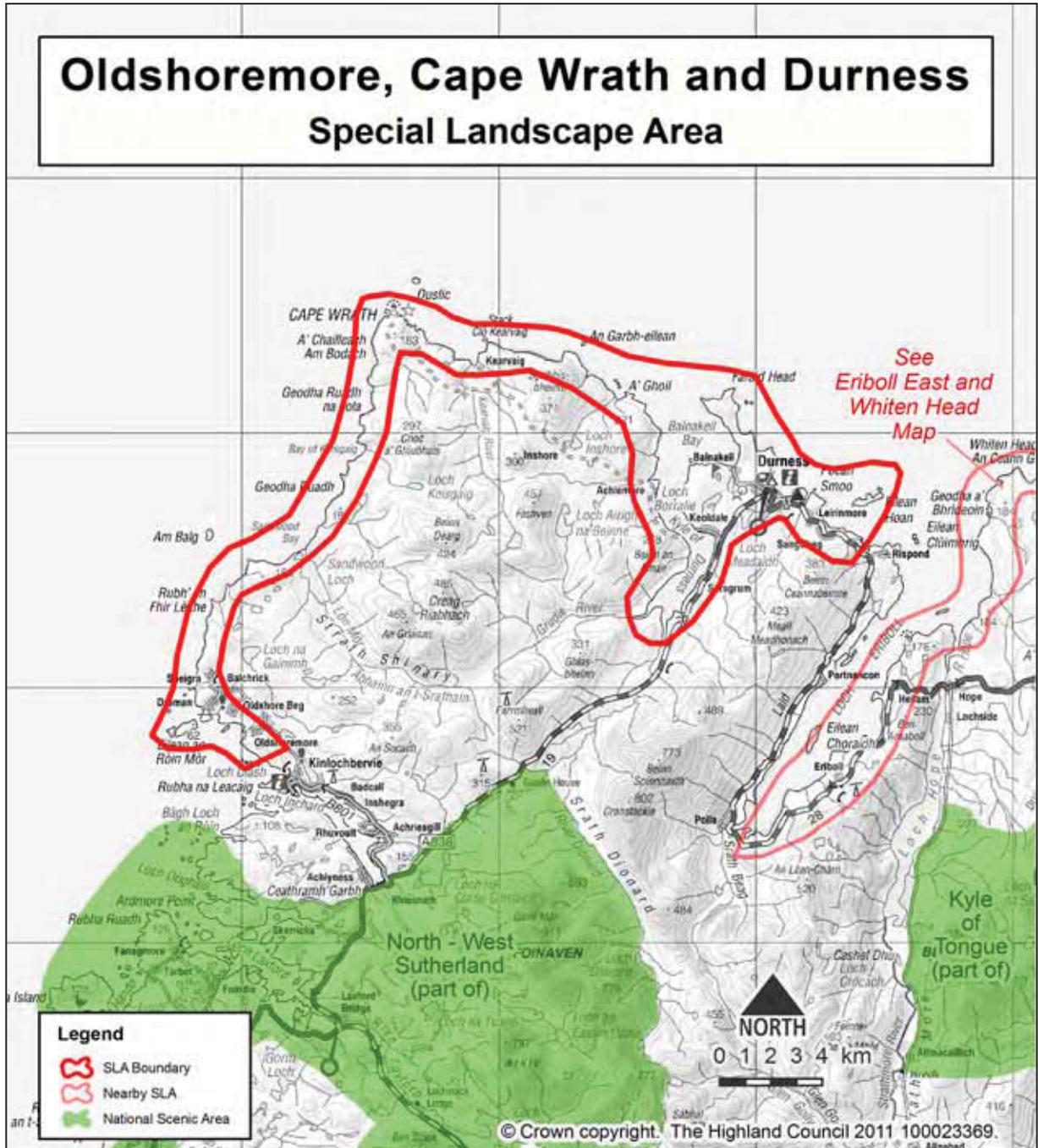
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Oldshoremore, Cape Wrath and Durness



Map 1



| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| SLA Ref. number/Name | 01. Oldshoremore, Cape Wrath and Durness |
| Location and Extent | REFER TO MAP 1. The area extends around the headland of Cape Wrath along the coastline from Oldshoremore in the west to Durness in the north east. |
| Area | 123km ² (12340ha). |
| Overview | This area of remote and varied coastline forms the north-west extremity of the Scottish mainland. The rugged coastline, carved from hard ancient rocks, is interspersed with some fine sandy bays and contrasts with a distinctive green landscape of crofts and pastures on softer limestones around Durness. Perhaps best known for the scenic grandeur of Sandwood Bay, this area also has other high-quality beaches at Oldshoremore and Sangobeg, rugged cliffs around Cape Wrath, dune systems at Faraid Head, and an extensive, sheltered inter-tidal area at the Kyle of Durness. Much of this area is distant from roads and is valued for its sense of remote isolation. |

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- Extensive, unbroken stretches of remote coastline dominated by high cliffs and related landform features including stacks, caves, and ravines.
- Contrasting lower-lying sheltered bays, sandy beaches, dunes, rocky promontories, skerries, and firths.
- Exceptionally diverse geology including important structural features, such as exposed outcrops of the Moine Thrust, and a large variety of rock types. Resistant rocks dominated by Torridonian sandstone and Lewisian gneiss form the majority of the coastline, contrasting with the softer Durness limestone which forms a distinctive tract of gentler landform in the east of the area.
- On the south-west margin the gneissic rocks form a tract of land characterised by rocky knolls and small lochans.
- Extreme difficulty of access to much of the area, with the only vehicular access being the long track to Cape Wrath from the Kyle of Durness Ferry and at Oldshoremore. The inland landscapes are virtually uninhabited while, on the coast settlement is limited to clusters on croft land on the southern and eastern margins.
- Cape Wrath lighthouse is an example of remote habitation accessible by boat and by some 12 miles of single track road across open moor, or by the long walk in from Oldshoremore.
- Flat to gently undulating moorland covers the cliff tops and extends inland providing a simple uniform visual contrast to the cliff face.
- A marked contrast in landform and sense of place is found around the Kyle of Durness where the Cambrian limestone fashions a less rugged landscape. Here, there are soft lines of sand along the shore of the estuary with shallow waters and extensive inter-tidal area.
- The fertile bright-green calcium-rich grasslands in and around Durness village contrast markedly with the otherwise dominant grays and browns of the surrounding exposed rock and moorland.
- Distinct limestone/marl lochs with turquoise waters.
- Seaward views vary along the coast with westward views to the Outer Hebrides and northwards views over the rough seas and strong currents of the Pentland Firth. This variety is heightened by shipping and boat activity.

Special Qualities

Remote Coastline

- Extensive uninhabited stretches of coastline accessible only by boat, on foot, or by ferry and track from the Kyle of Durness. The ferry crossing and the restrictions to public access to much of the area during military operations render the experience of this landscape as one dominated by the strong sense of remoteness.
- Superlative remote sandy beaches and dune system at Oldshoremore, accessible only on foot. Kearvaig Bay is very secluded with machair and a small dune system nestled into a break in the cliffs, while the dunes at Balnakeil are extensive, spectacular, active and exhibit a complete range of dune formations
- Distinct limestone/marl lochs, with distinctive turquoise waters, at Croispol, Borralie and Caladail.
- Eilean Hoan and associated islets form a cluster of point features in views from Sangobeg.

Geological and Landscape Diversity

- Steep cliffs formed by hard, ancient Lewisian and Torridonian rocks, for example at Clò Mòr, and eroded moorland plateaux, contrast with the softer limestone scenery around Durness where the shallow kyle penetrates far inland to create a sheltered haven remote from the rough seas of the Pentland Firth.
- Around Durness the Cambrian limestone forms small-scale but distinctive examples of a *karst* landscape, typified by the renowned Smoo Cave, and including features such as limestone pavements and sinkholes.

Singular geographic and landscape features

- Cape Wrath marks the extreme north-west corner of mainland Britain and this fact, combined with the absence of habitation and difficulty of access, heightens the experience of being in a highly remote and isolated area where the presence and power of the sea and the weather are dominating forces.
- Sandwood Bay is renowned as an outstanding scenic attraction enhanced by its remoteness.
- Erosion of the Durness limestone forms distinctive landforms including Smoo Cave.

Sensitivity to change

- Built development which could compromise the sense of wildness along the coast and in the interior.
- Additional metalled roads or access tracks could compromise the experience of remoteness experienced along the coast.
- Additional visual features on moorland slopes or within the setting of beaches and dune systems could compromise the simplicity of the scenic quality.
- Large scale buildings or structures or prominently sited built features could be incongruous in relation to existing small scale features and low lying elements concentrated at a few locations along the coast.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Restoration of vegetation/ repair erosion of pathways/tracks in sensitive areas (eg popular path to Sandwood Bay and over dune areas)
- Provision of 'low key' visitor provision eg parking areas and coastal footpath at key areas with SLA

Other designations/ interests

- The site lies at close proximity to the Eriboll East and Whiten Head SLA and views of each can be exchanged from certain locations enhancing each other's setting.
- Sheigra-Oldshoremore SSSI recognises the importance of the three small beaches backed by dune systems and separated by low cnocans.
- The Southern Parphe SSSI includes the dramatic Sandwood Bay, the impounded loch and sea stack. The dynamic dune system is a key feature of this site.
- Both the above sites are included in the Oldshoremore to Sandwood SAC for their coastal habitats.
- The Cape Wrath SSSI, SPA and SAC includes the huge Clò Mòr sea cliffs which provide seabird nest sites on the sandstone ledges.
- The Durness SSSI and SAC has a range of unique habitat features which are dependent on the underlying limestone including grassland, heathland, the marl lochs and the limestone pavement itself. A number of geological features are also designated as well as the unusual sediment transfer system. This involves the movement of sand overland by the wind from the Kyle of Durness, over Faraid head, to the sea on the east via a highly dynamic dune system.
- Eilean Hoan SSSI is notified for its breeding population of great black – backed gulls and wintering Greenland barnacle geese. Along with the nearby Eilean nan Ron it is also recognised as a SPA for the wintering geese.
- A Ministry of Defence bombing range is located over Parph Moor and along the coastline between Cape Wrath and the Kyle of Durness creating a further factor deterring access and landscape change. However the associated noise and visual intrusion detract from the wildness of the area.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

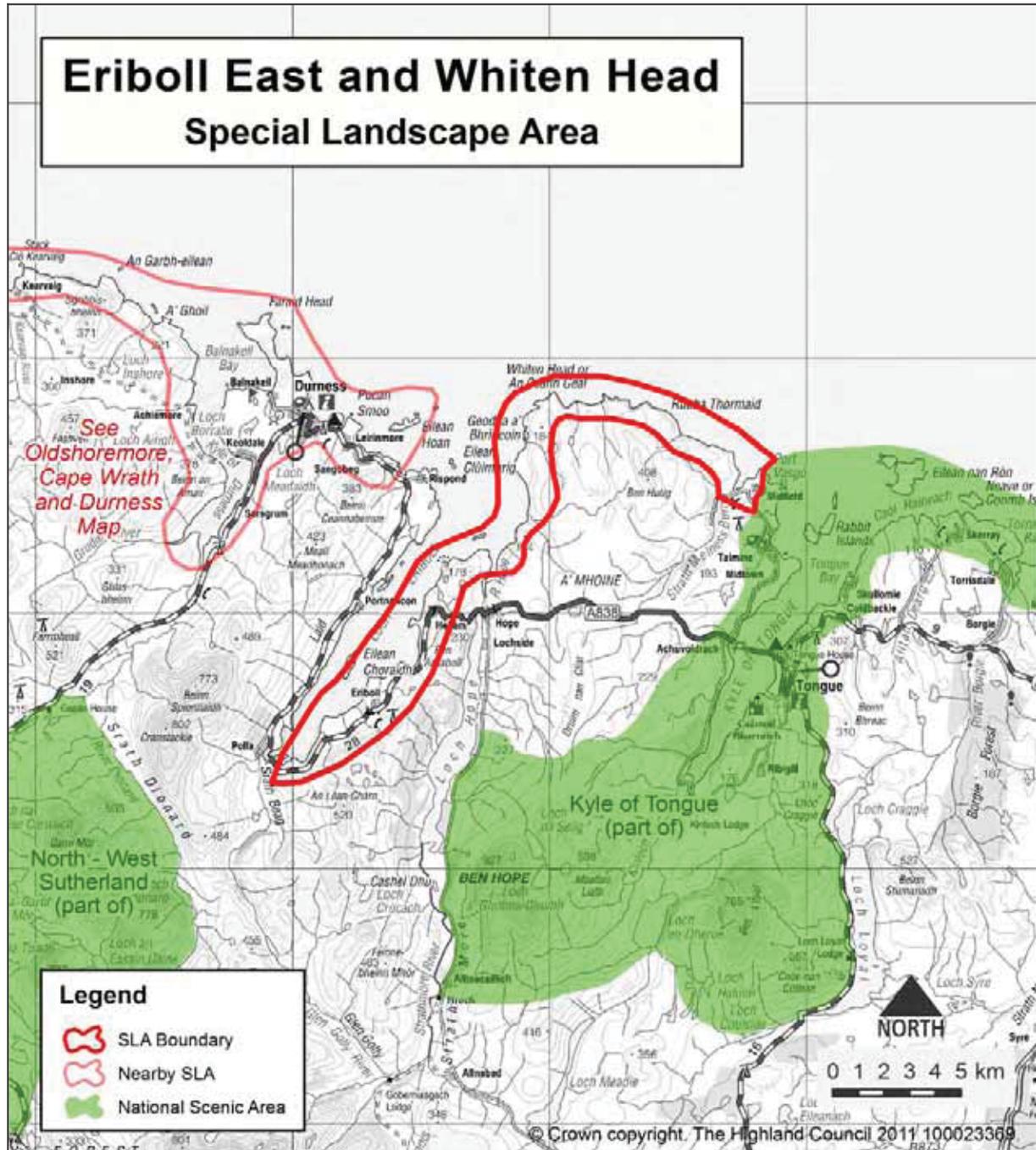
Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 103.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Eriboll East and Whiten Head



Map 2



| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| SLA Ref. number/Name | 02. Eriboll East and Whiten Head |
| Location and Extent | <p>REFER TO MAP 2.</p> <p>Located on the north coast of Sutherland near Durness, this area covers the whole eastern shore of Loch Eriboll, extending from the head of the Loch to Whiten Head and then eastwards along the steep coast of Rubha Thormaid to the bay at Strathan.</p> <p>Inland the area includes sections of the open moorland and the crofts of A' Mhoine.</p> |
| Area | 59km ² (5940ha) |
| Overview | <p>The area embraces dramatic cliffscapes, sheltered loch and open coastal waters, and exceptional framed views to neighbouring mountains. Ben Hope has a commanding presence and views pass to the striking outline of Ben Loyal. Loch Eriboll's eastern side has a distinctive and varied coastline and margins. The contrasts in scenery reveal a very clear relationship to the distinctive underlying geology, which includes an important structural boundary (the Moine Thrust). Inland there are few roads or tracks andcrofting settlement is rare, giving a predominantly remote character.</p> |

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- The distinctive contrasts in scenery reflect an important geological boundary at the edge of the Moine Thrust Belt (which takes its name from the A' Mhoine peninsula). The transition from older rocks within the thrust belt to younger rocks beyond is echoed by a change in topography. The more rugged landforms and moorland of the Moinian rocks on the north coast give way to the more gentle slopes and fields on the shores of the loch.
- Loch Eriboll is a glacial fjord occupying a strong linear north east to south west orientated inlet with steep side slopes and deep waters.
- The shoreline along Loch Eriboll presents a transition in character from low-lying wet heath and tidal flats and sand and shingle bays with rocky outcrops in the south to an increasingly dramatic rising cliffscape in the north.
- The distinctive "T"-shaped peninsula at Ard Neackie and the island of Eilean Choraidd (horse island) form key focal elements within the loch which contrast in scale with their surroundings.
- Dramatic framed views inland along the loch to the southwest towards the mountains (including Cranstackie, Foinaven, and Arkle), and north to the open Atlantic, come together to give a striking example of a mountain, sea and loch composition.
- The contrast between the sheltered nature of Loch Eriboll, the dramatic and challenging wildness of the mountains and rugged coastline, and the openness and exposure of the sea creates a distinctive the sense of place.
- Quartzite screes complementing adjoining shingle shorelines contrast to the dark heather tones of the hillsides. A striking example of this occurs on the slopes west of Ben Arnaboll (Am Breac-Leathad – the speckled slope).
- Isolated farmed areas, including at Eriboll, Hope and East Strathan, form abrupt changes in character from the dominant open moorland, comprising a distinct pattern of pasture, dwellings, stone walls and tree cover. However these isolated areas and other man-made features including the single-track roads with associated signs, walls, fences and telegraph poles, have little impact on the perception of overriding sense of naturalness in this landscape. The impression of this as

being an unspoiled landscape is reinforced by its peripheral location and feeling of remoteness.

- Marine aquaculture operations are present in the loch. Although these are generally small in size they are numerous and from some perspectives create a sense of clutter which can detract significantly from the inherent qualities of the landscape and seascape.

Special Qualities

Striking Geological and Landscape Contrasts

- The sharp transition from the rugged cliffs and craggy moorland hills of the A' Moine peninsula to Loch Eriboll's sheltered waters and gentler west and south facing shores marks one of Highland's most distinctive geological boundaries.
- Inland, there is a high moorland plateau with prominent rugged moorland hills, crags and ridges including Creag na Faolinn at the head of Loch Eriboll, Ben Arnaboll and Ben Heilam near the mouth of the River Hope.
- The striking light-coloured quartzite cliffs and exposed sea stacks and large sea caves of Whiten Head and the towering cliffs to the east form one of the most remarkable coastal landscapes in the North West. This is juxtaposed with the equally distinctive waters of Loch Eriboll.
- North of the mouth of the River Hope, the quartzite geology along the coast results in distinctive landforms (eg many square-cut sea caves) which are rare in a Highland context.

Striking Views

- The loch and its adjoining landforms create a series of framed views, both inland to the dramatic mountains of north Sutherland, and northwards to the open sea, which combine with foreground sheltered waters and rugged shorelines to form impressive visual compositions.

Sparse Settlement and Naturalness

- The sparsely settled nature of the area and absence of road access to much of the peninsula creates qualities of remoteness and wildness where the main focus is directed towards the sights and sounds of the land and sea.
- The size of the sea loch and the absence of a bridge or causeway requires a long diversion of the coast road along the sides of the Loch Eriboll. This not only highlights the presence of the loch, but focuses views upon this feature including boat activity.

Sensitivity to change

- Development could result in a dilution of the stark contrast in landcover at the geological boundary.
- The addition of further buildings and structures could interrupt views over moorland to the northern cliffs or to the loch shoreline.
- The addition of further marine structures could introduce visual foci which would compete with Eilean Choraidh or Ard Neackie and/or interrupt the linear flow of views along the length of the loch.
- Additional roads, tracks, buildings or other structures could impinge on the sense of remoteness and wildness or affect the balance of the distinctive mix of landscape elements within the existing small scale crofting communities.
- Fences associated could be conspicuous in views from the road down to the loch and along the length of the loch.
- Development of further onshore aquaculture infrastructure could appear to impinge upon coastal/loch views, including infrastructure elements associated with this development type.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Improve access to the loch shore for pedestrians and provide low key visitor facilities such as interpretation information.
- Reinstate dilapidated field boundaries.
- Encourage the regeneration of native woodland where ground conditions are favourable and where any fencing would be inconspicuous in views.

Other designations/ interests

- Close proximity to Oldshoremore, Cape Wrath and Durness SLA giving shared views from certain locations, enhancing the settings of each area.
- The Eriboll SSSI includes part of the Moine Thrust Belt along the eastern shore of Loch Eriboll, reinforcing its importance as a distinctive landscape. The outcropping limestone along the coast and on the island contribute to the unusual greenness which contrasts with the browns of the opposite (western) shore. The Ard Neackie peninsula is also part of the interest of this site.
- The wooded slopes of Creag Ruadh on the east of the mouth of the River Hope are designated for their woodland habitat and Moine geology. Uniquely the woodland here exhibits a natural treeline of windpruned birch just below the exposed crest.
- The coast of the Moine is also designated for its Moine geology as part of the Ben Hutig SSSI. This site is also designated for its upland habitats on the exposed but relatively low summit of Ben Hutig and for its blanket bog which is also part of the Peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland SAC and SPA.
- As a deep and extensive anchorage at the northernmost margins of the UK mainland, Loch Eriboll has important links to naval history, particularly in WW2. The loch still sees military exercises from time to time because of this anchorage capacity, it's proximity to the Cape Wrath firing range, and its sparse population.
- The Heilam Ferry once carried passengers across Loch Eriboll from Portnancon to Ard Neakie and a ferry house survives (Category B Listed) and is prominently located at the west end of the causeway that links Ard Neakie with the mainland. The associated pier (also Category B Listed) is located to the south.
- Ard Neakie is also home to mid 19th century industry. Two pairs of very well preserved, and very prominent, lime kilns (c.1870) are situated just behind the Heilam Ferry pier (located to ensure the lime could be easily transported by boat from the peninsula). An associated quarry from which the limestone was extracted is located to the rear of the kilns. The complex is Scheduled, and the kilns and pier are also listed (Category B).
- Prehistoric settlement on the gentler slopes overlooking Loch Eriboll are well documented and a number of roundhouses, a broch and a souterrain have been Scheduled in recognition of their exceptional state of preservation.
- Views to mountains in adjacent North West Sutherland and Kyle of Tongue National Scenic Areas.

**Landscape
Character**

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

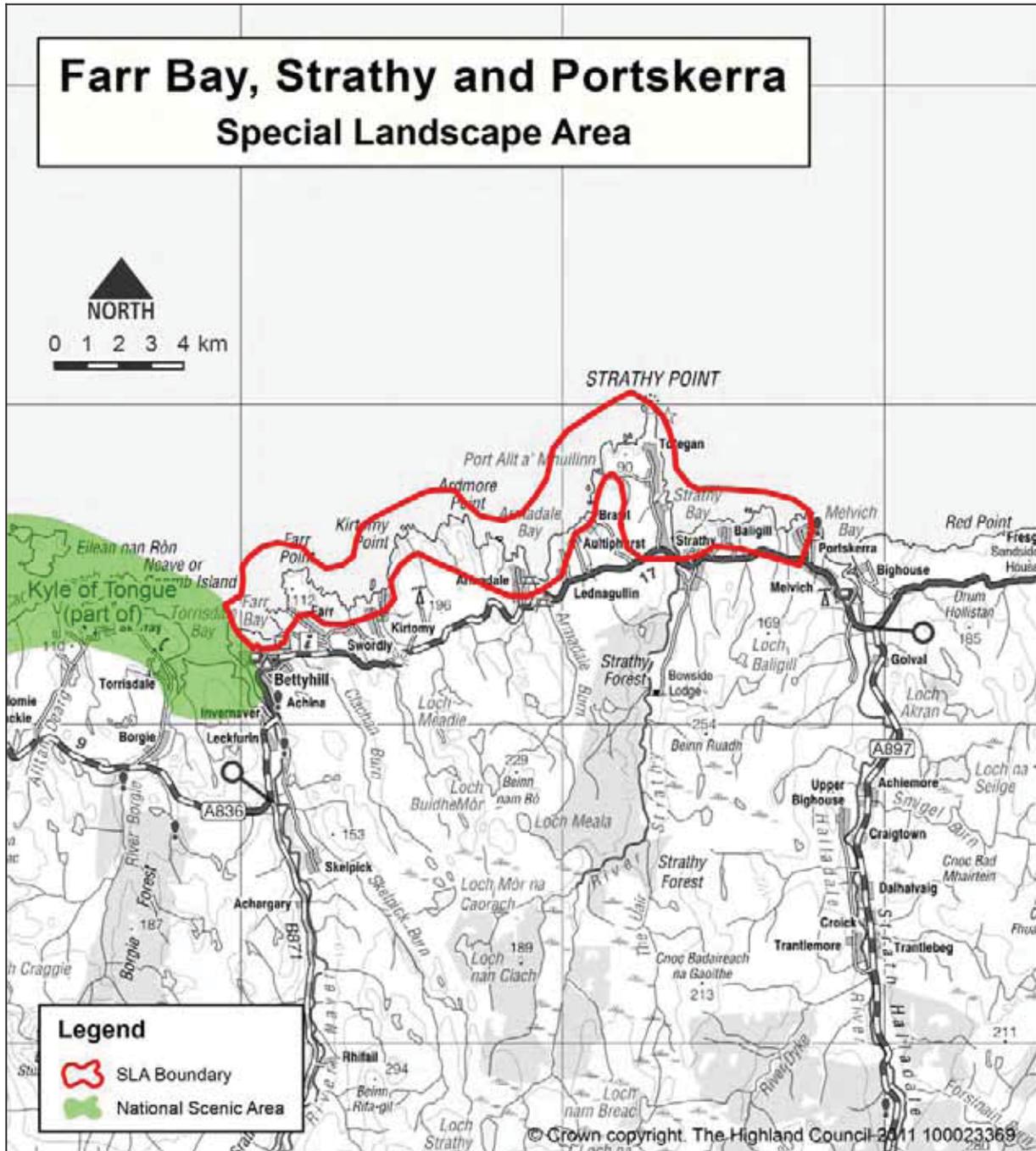
Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 103.

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Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra



Map 3



| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| SLA Ref. number/Name | 03. Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra |
| Location and Extent | REFER TO MAP 3. This area extends along the north coast of Sutherland from Bettyhill in the west to Melvich in the east and includes moorland and crofting areas. |
| Area | 47km ² (4680ha). |
| Overview | This area is characterised by its dramatic, deeply indented coastline of rocky headlands and sheltered bays, backed by a colourful and diverse mosaic of moorland and crofting landscapes. Big skies, combined with the ever-changing effects of the northern coastal light, create the impression of great space and dynamism. Fine weather allows impressive and extensive views, including northwards across the sea to Orkney and along the coast to Cape Wrath and Dunnet Head. |

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- Deeply-indented coastline characterised by a repetitive rhythm of alternating rocky headlands and sheltered bays, closely related to the underlying geological structure.¹
- Impressive assemblage of hard/rocky coastal landforms including cliffs, headlands, stacks, arches, caves and ravines.
- Fine sandy beaches in the largest and most sheltered bays which form foci that contrast in colour, form and texture to the rocky coastal cliffs.
- Elevated areas on the intervening high ground between the bays close to the sea provide expansive views both along the coast and out to sea, contrasting with a more enclosed, intimate visual character within the major bays. Views south to the inland mountains are a notable feature of this stretch of coast.
- The large scale of the landscape, combined with often rapidly changing weather and the distinctive coastal light, creates dynamic and dramatic visual effects.
- The immediate coastline is often not visible from the adjacent inland areas due to convex nature of slopes and the vertical cliffs which screen views. Consequently views tend to focus upon the waters of the Pentland Firth with its strong tides and currents which are clearly visible from many locations.
- Patterns of land cover and settlement within crofting areas form a complex mosaic with moorland areas, although occurring predominantly as linear strips or isolated patches, closely associated with physical conditions including soil type and topography. Crofting and farming is largely confined to the slopes around the bays and their subtle field patterns contrast with the simple vegetation backcloth of the inland hills.
- The moorland landscapes, with rolling slopes and hills and a characteristic combination of convex slopes and simple vegetation cover with rocky outcrops, become noticeably more open and sweeping in character moving eastwards towards Caithness.
- Abandoned and ruined buildings occur in places, partly a reflection of the harsh, uncompromising nature of the exposed coastal landscape. These form distinctive visual elements, together with the harbours and jetties which occur at regular intervals along the coast, and evoke a sense of history.
- Trees and scrub are rare, mainly restricted to crofts and settlements or in steeper glens.

¹ The broadly east-west line of the coast here cuts sharply across the regional “strike” of the Moinian complex giving a particularly fine example of a “discordant coastline”, where differential erosion of the narrow bands of harder and softer rocks corresponds very closely to the intricate physical features.

Special Qualities

Dramatically Intricate Coastline and Forceful Sea

- This is a distinctive stretch of rocky coastline which is typically viewed from the cliff tops and enclosed sandy beaches or from the sea by passing vessels. It is deeply eroded by the sea to form a complex assemblage of headlands, cliffs, promontories, stacks, arches, caves and ravines which combine to form unique features along the coastal edge.
- This coast can be an awe-inspiring, particularly during extreme weather or heavy oceanic swells. Access to the cliffs and coast line is readily available and allows opportunities to experience the sea's force and scale at close proximity.
- By contrast the sandy bays which alternate with the harsher cliffs and headlands provide a more focussed and tranquil setting due to their low lying location and the shelter afforded by flanking cliffs.
- The lighthouse at Strathy is a popular attraction to visitors and is approached via the minor road which serves the string of crofts and houses along the eastern side of the promontory.
- Traditional netting stations now largely abandoned elsewhere in Highland are still notable around Strathy Point whilst the sheltered harbour at Portskerra is still well-used by local fishermen.

Moorland and Crofting Mosaic

- Rolling landforms trending towards the coast and opening out over bays provide a distinctive contrast of sequential views and experience of the landscape - enclosed or exposed, framed or open, intimate or expansive.
- There is a rich tapestry of moorland and crofting settlements with the pattern of buildings and various land cover creating a diverse mix of colour, texture, and form.

Big Skies and Extensive Views

- There is a distinct perception and experience of immense space and dynamism, strongly influenced by the combination of big skies, and the distinctive coastal light, and the constantly changing influence of the weather. Fine conditions allow impressive and extensive views to Orkney and along the coast to Cape Wrath and Dunnet Head while in contrast poor weather restricts views and highlights the sense of remoteness of the landscape. The buildings and structures at Dounreay form prominent features in views from Strathy Point.

Historical Dimension

- The remains of Borge Castle situated on a natural promontory with a defensive bank built across the neck and with some ramparts and some masonry from the keep walls still visible, is one of the few surviving medieval (c.16th-17th century) defended promontory forts in this part of the north coast.

Sensitivity to change

- Development on or near the exposed cliff top landscape could interrupt the linear nature and open views or compromise the intricate nature of the coast.
- Infrastructure within and around existing settlements (e.g. street lighting, kerbs, signs, pavements) could individually erode their inherently rural character and collectively have a widespread impact on the area.
- Visitor facilities, other than very low-key elements, within sheltered bays could erode the existing tranquillity and sense of remoteness.

- Tall vertical structures or large-scale buildings could be visible in views along the coast and could be inappropriate in scale in relation to the domestic scale of existing buildings and settlements.
- Marine developments could affect existing views from the coastal cliffs to an uninterrupted expanse of sea below.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Underground overhead lines where these intrude on views from the road to the coast.
- Relocate incongruous structures and tracks (even those outwith the SLA) where these impinge on views along the coast.

Other designations/ interests

- The Highland Clearances of the 19th century had a great impact on this area. Many crofters were cleared from infamous Strathnaver including 20 who were sent to Strathy along with 18 others from elsewhere increasing the original crofting population of 4 to 42. The harsh way of life became too much for some and in desperation they set out for a new life overseas leaving the area sparsely populated as it remains today with ruins and abandoned buildings serving as poignant reminders.
- Many of the beaches provide good surfing locations where the power of the Atlantic rollers can be experienced.
- Important views to mountains within the Kyle of Tongue NSA to the south.
- The 30km+ Strathy Coast SSSI falls within this SLA and is designated for a range of features including the notable sandy beaches backed by dune systems and the intervening cliffs and headlands topped by extensive coastal heaths. A smaller section of coast centred on Strathy Point is also designated as SAC for its sea cliff vegetation.
- Distinctive ecological conditions associated with areas of sandy soils and extreme climatic conditions allow unusual assemblages of species, which include the rare Scottish primrose, also readily visible at Strathy Point.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

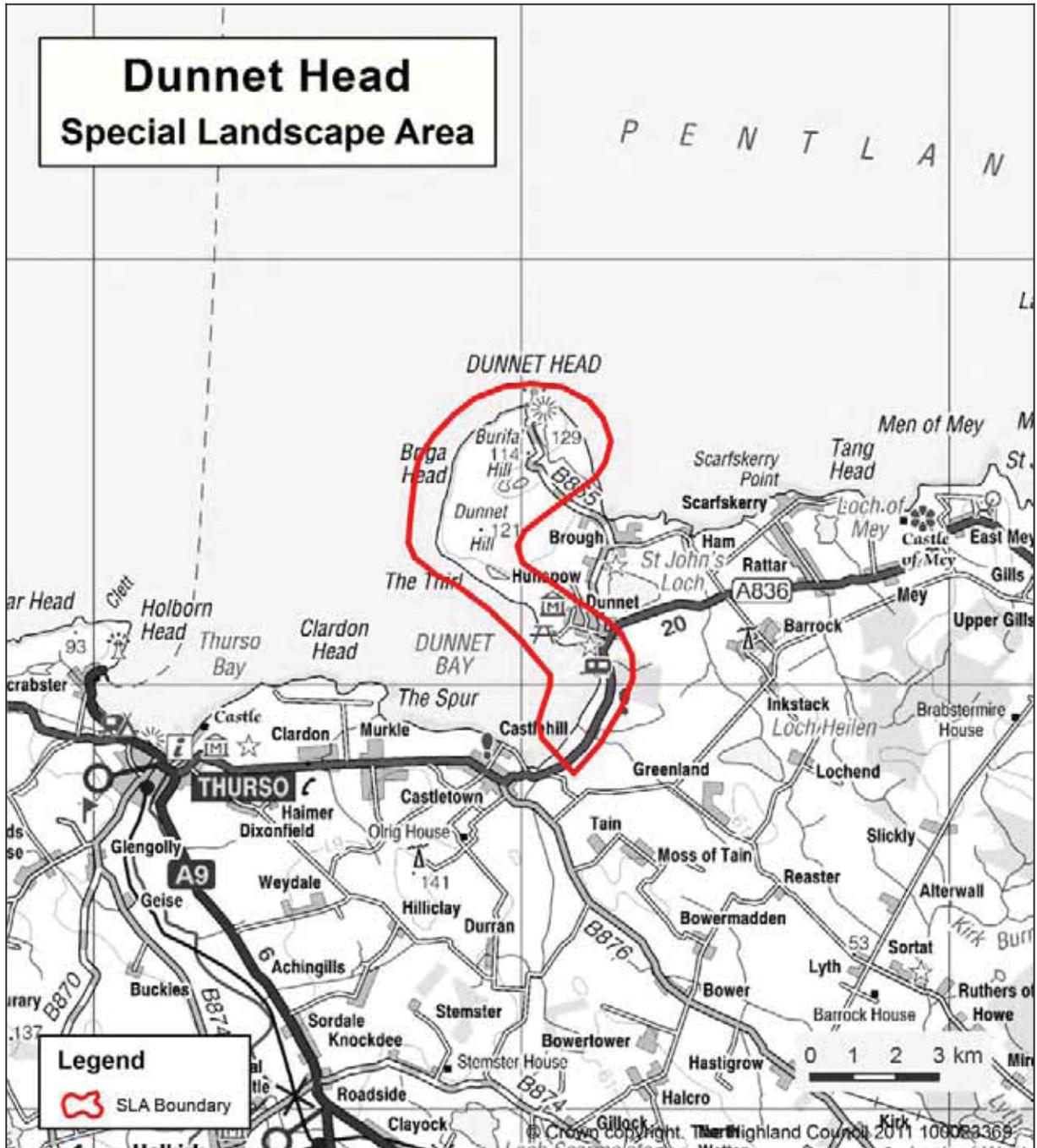
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Dunnet Head



Map 4



| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| SLA Ref. number/Name | 04. Dunnet Head |
| Location and Extent | REFER TO MAP 4. This area covers the Dunnet Head peninsula and the adjoining part of Dunnet Bay, including the settlements of Dunnet and West Dunnet. |
| Area | 23.5km ² (2350ha) |
| Overview | <p>This area includes the most northerly point on mainland Britain. The peninsula is characterised by its prominent headland, striking vertical cliffs and expanse of isolated moorland. Dunnet Head juts out into the Pentland Firth, so that experience at its northern tip is one of being more at sea than on land.</p> <p>To the south, settled farmland and a fine sandy beach and dune system provide a contrasting landscape experience. Clear weather allows impressive and extensive views over land and sea to Orkney, Strathy Point, Cape Wrath, Duncansby Head and the distinctive range of hills within the flow country, including the peaks of Morvern, Maiden Pap and Scaraben to the south.</p> |

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- A peninsula offering a spectacular panorama both seaward and inland to distant mountain peak.
- The headland which is massive in scale and formed from Old Red Sandstone. In detail, the cliffs form a complex cracked, fissured and eroded profile, with prominent and distinctive horizontal strata clearly visible.
- Reaching heights of up to 100m, the cliffs form an abrupt and sharply defined vertical edge to the coastline viewed against the open sea from distance. From distant viewpoints, these are seen to rise in stark contrast to the open sea while, from the cliff tops, the sense of exposure can be dramatic and, for some, intimidating.
- Low vegetation clings to the cliff tops, ledges, and eroded faces and parts of the rocky shoreline. The rich green hues of algae growing on damp areas of the cliff faces provide further striations of contrast against the red sandstone rock face.
- Sea birds including puffins frequent the cliff ledges and steep coastal grasslands. Together with the pounding spray and constant swell, the sounds and activity of these birds contribute to a dynamic experience.
- Sweeping moorland, punctuated by lochans, hilltops and the remains of WWII defensive structures, forms a contrasting open interior to the peninsula, where remote qualities can be experienced within a short distance from the busier settled areas.
- Elevated views from the peninsula reveal a pattern of pasture and arable fields to the south; these form a distinctive transition between the exposed headland and the settled agricultural lowlands to the south.

Special Qualities

Panoramic Views from Prominent Headland and Striking Cliffs

- The prominent headland forms a striking large landmark at the northernmost point of the British mainland. High numbers of visitors travel along the single-track road to the viewpoint and lighthouse which occupies a commanding position and is itself a prominent feature in views from land and sea.
- Views to the sheer cliffs of distinctive, horizontally layered Old Red Sandstone are enlivened by the changing light and weather conditions, the crashing waves of the Pentland Firth and the presence of many species of nesting sea birds.
- Distinctive landform features also include ravines such as Red and Chapel Geos, crags and promontories such as The Neback and Easter Head, and by areas of rocky coast where the cliff have slumped and eroded.
- In clear conditions expansive views are obtained, from the cliff tops and from elevated positions, extending across the sea to Orkney, Cape Wrath, Strathy Point, Duncansby Head, and inland to the peaks of Caithness including Morvern, Maiden Pap and Scaraben. These views looking across flat terrain or a low seaward horizon, are so expansive that they can prompt strong emotional responses, including evoking an “edge of world” feeling.

Isolated Moorland and Lochans

- Inland from the sea cliffs the headland consist of an outlying area of moorland with scattered lochans, isolated from the landward moors by a farmed and settled coastal strip that extends across the neck of the peninsula.
- The moorland seems extensive, even though it is actually quite small in extent, as its edges are typically not seen from its interior, and there is a lack of comparable size indicators.

Contrasting Bay and Cliff Landscapes

- The sweeping curve of fine sandy beach and sheltered agricultural landscape at Dunnet Bay seems to form a secluded haven in sharp contrast to the elevated and dramatic headland which projects beyond.

Sensitivity to change

- Development could impinge on either the views towards the headland from the east and west or the expansive panorama seen from Dunnet Head itself.
- Development could disrupt the gentle curve of Dunnet Bay and disturb its qualities of seclusion.
- Large-scale structures on or near to the headland could compromise its perceived large scale and the seeming extensive character of the interior moorland in addition to the peninsula’s distinctive landmark qualities.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Reinstate areas of traditional Caithness flagstone ‘fences’ highlighting landscape pattern.
- Improve the appearance of the existing visitor facilities including car parking, fences and interpretation.

**Other designations/
interests**

- Dunnet Head SSSI (a component of the Caithness cliffs SPA) fringes the majority of the Dunnet headland and approximately 70% of the length of the SLA, designated for breeding populations of guillemot, assemblages of other breeding seabirds, and vegetated sea cliffs.
- Dunnet Links SSSI is designated for its sand dunes and associated coastal geomorphology.
- The cliffs and coastal grassland are valued as an important habitat for sea birds and is managed by the RSPB.
- Dunnet Forest was planted as an experiment in the productivity of forestry on nutrient poor soils in the 1950s but is now managed by the community for recreation, biodiversity, environment education and as a wood fuel resource.
- Prehistoric settlement and burial remains, including roundhouses and burial cairns (two of which are scheduled) are located around Dunnet Bay, with a well preserved hut circle (roundhouse) surviving within Dunnet Forest.
- The lighthouse which stands on the cliff top of Easter Head was built in 1831 by Robert Stevenson, grandfather of Robert Louis Stevenson.
- Near the lighthouse are minor fortifications built during WWII to protect the naval base at Scapa Flow, including a Chain Home Low radar station and a bunker used by the Royal Observer Corps during the Cold War.
- Burifa Hill on Dunnet Head was the site of the master station and a monitoring station of the northern GEE chain of radio navigation stations during WWII.
- Dunnet Head was also the site of an artillery range during WWII.

**Landscape
Character**

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

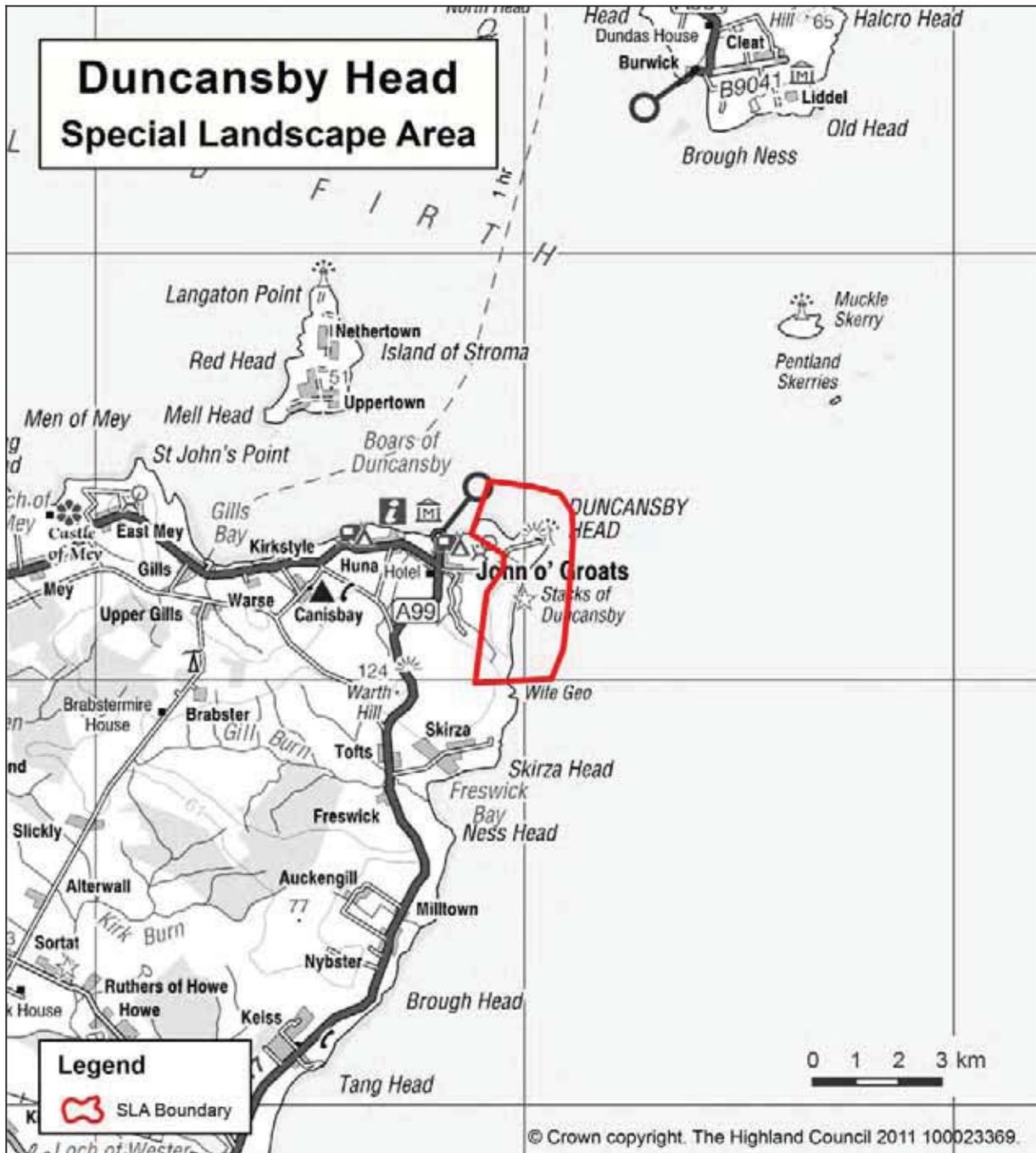
Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 103.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Duncansby Head



Map 5



| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| SLA Ref. number/Name | 05. Duncansby Head |
| Location and Extent | REFER TO MAP 5. This area is located at the extreme north east of the British mainland and lies to the east of John o'Groats. It includes both Duncansby Head and the Stacks of Duncansby. |
| Area | 9km ² (900ha) |
| Overview | Forming the most north-easterly point on mainland Britain, the headland is notable for its spectacular cliff scenery and its commanding views. Huge populations of seabirds use the cliffs as a breeding ground in spring providing a distinctive experience of bird noise and activity. |

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- The approach to the coastline is across gentle open grassland adding to the visual drama when the cliffs are suddenly encountered and the expansive views of the surrounding sea revealed. A distinctive and diverse sequence of views is available as the paths parallel to the coastline are followed.
- This area of spectacular coastal scenery is formed from horizontally bedded Old Red Sandstones with a complex mix of erosion landforms that include cliffs, stacks, geos, arches, caves and wave cut platforms.
- The cliffs are formed from less resistant sandstones than the neighbouring Dunnet Head and are characterised by a lower height (c.60m), and with more abundant vegetation cover on ledges and faces. Views are open and principally seaward with the landform largely screening glimpses of the shoreline far below. The high cliffs landscapes contrast with occasional sand and shingle beaches within sheltered bays.
- In clear conditions, the seaward views are very impressive, varying as you move along the coast.
- The cliffs and stacks form ideal nesting habitat for breeding sea birds. The constant noise and movement of these birds form a key feature of the landscape.
- Immediately inland of the Head open grassland and moorland are the predominant ground cover, although wood pole mounted overhead lines are prominent, and crofting settlement increases in density westwards towards John o' Groats.

Special Qualities

Commanding views and 'End of the Road' Experience

- The location of the headland at the extreme north-eastern point of the British mainland is a key attribute of the area and is the compelling attraction for the many of the people who visit.
- The headland is clearly separated from the neighbouring settlement of John o' Groats and the immediate approach to the cliff line is over a simple expanse of open grassland adding to the surprise and drama of the spectacular views when they are ultimately revealed.
- The lighthouse and adjoining car park form a focus for visitors and offer a safe haven from which to venture to appreciate the dynamic forces of the Pentland Firth with its visibly

powerful currents and turbulent waves which crash onto the shore far below.

- Tidal streams flowing through the Pentland Firth have earned the title 'Hell's Mouth' due to the Atlantic and North Sea ebbing in opposite directions forming a flurry of eddies, races and overfalls including the Duncansby Bore. These can be seen from Duncansby Head.
- In clear conditions, impressive seaward views extend to Dunnet Head and the Orkney Islands while closer to shore, the island of Stroma and the Pentland Skerries form focal features.

Striking and Diverse Coastal Landforms

- The striking arrangement of coastal features and landforms include sheer cliffs, rocky arches, jagged stacks, deep ravines, crashing waves and shingle bays concentrated within a relatively small area.
- The coastal edge is a very dynamic environment and in an exposed position such as this the sea cliffs are continually being moulded and transformed by the destructive power of wind and wave. They stand prominent and dark juxtaposed with a simple backdrops of grassland and open sea.
- In contrast to these land-based views which are dominated by the long, low horizons of the Caithness landscape and the Pentland Firth, views from the sea are dominated by the presence of the looming vertical rock faces. These can appear as vast, dark walls when in shadow or alternatively as a diverse patchwork of details when in the spotlight of sunlight.
- Nesting sea birds, perched precariously on narrow ledges, or swooping close to the cliffs create noise and movement and emphasise the sheer scale and inaccessible nature of the coastal edge.

Sensitivity to change

- Tall structures could diminish the perceived scale of the cliffs when seen from the sea.
- Any structures or buildings could impinge on views from the cliff tops.
- Change in land use could blur the distinction between the simple grassland and complex coastline.
- Structures or buildings could form dominant elements in the landscape or which could detract from the 'end of the road' experience and perceived remoteness.
- Introduction of buildings or structures could form new visual foci, drawing attention away from the sea views.
- Provide discreet interpretation for visitors.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- There may be potential to mitigate existing adverse impacts within this SLA by burying existing overhead lines to remove vertical structures and enhancing the simple open skyline and naturalness of the setting.
- There may be scope to restrict vehicular access to reduce the impact of cars while providing discrete, low-key, footpaths/cycleways from the busier, neighbouring settlement of John o' Groats to heighten the sense of remoteness.

**Other designations/
interests**

- Duncansby Head SSSI designated for breeding seabirds, vegetated cliff and geological interest. This SSSI is also a component of the North Caithness Cliffs SPA designated for breeding seabirds and peregrine falcon.
- A temporary fog signal / lighthouse was provided at Duncansby Head during the First World War and replaced afterwards with a permanent one which was gunned by a German bomber during the Second World War.
- In 1968 a racon (radar beacon) was installed as this area of coastline is inconspicuous on radar display.

**Landscape
Character**

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

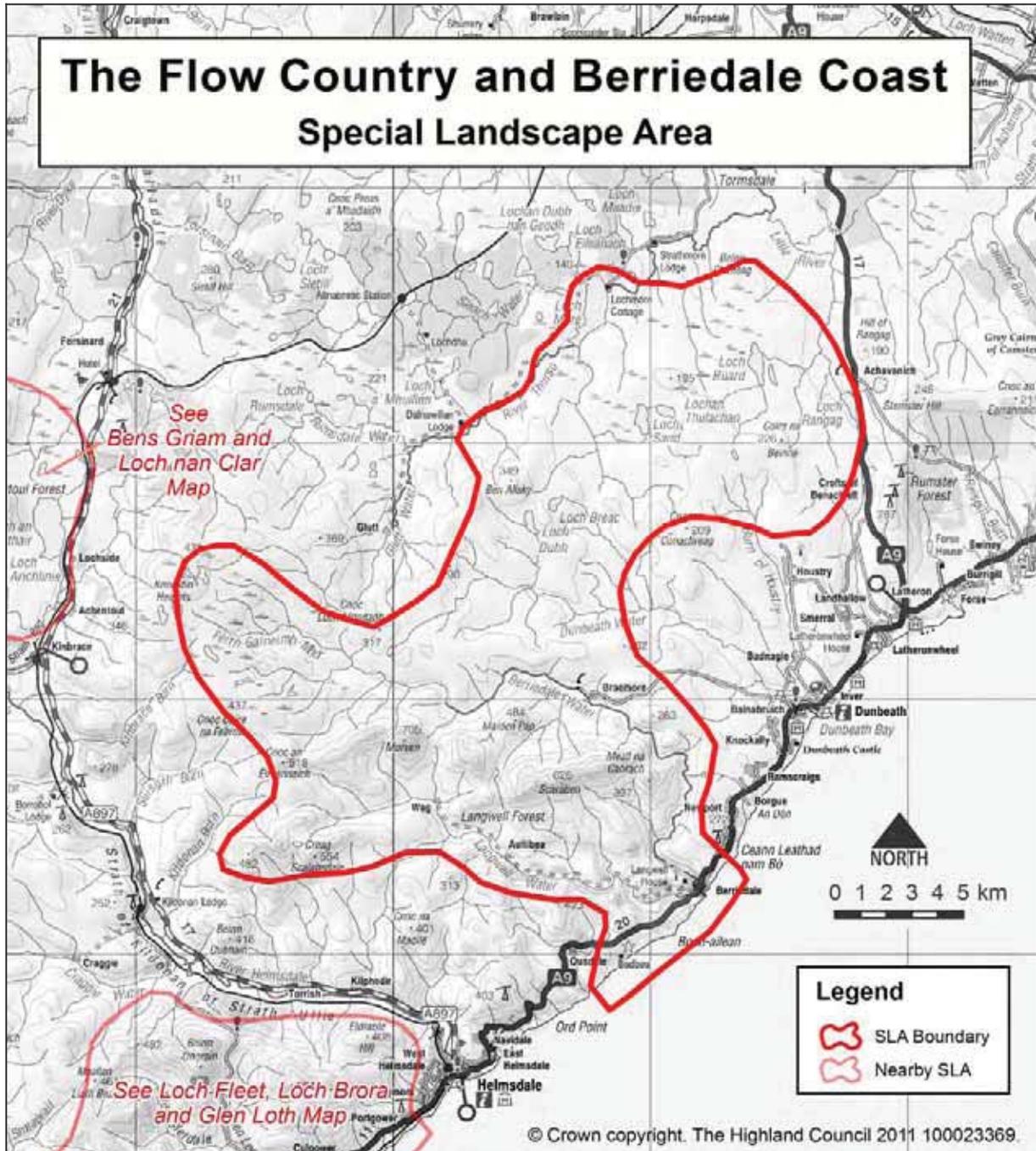
Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 103.

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The Flow Country and Berriedale Coast



Map 6



| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| SLA Ref. number/Name | 06. The Flow Country and Berriedale Coast |
| Location and Extent | <p>REFER TO MAP 6.</p> <p>This area extends from the coastal shelf and cliffs near Berriedale in the south, including Badbea, to Loch More in the north. It includes the wide expanse of interior peatland known as The Flow Country and extends westwards to include Knockfin Heights and the highly distinctive range of hills in the south that includes the peaks of Morven, Maiden Pap and Scaraben.</p> |
| Area | 363km ² (36300ha). |
| Overview | <p>This extensive area comprises a contrasting range of landscapes, from interior peatland to isolated mountains and a raised coastal shelf. It includes a large portion of the distinctive Flow Country of Caithness. The area is dominated by the overriding simplicity and horizontal emphasis to the landscape and the feeling of remoteness and wildness which is experienced directly from within its interior, and indirectly when looking in from the roads and tracks around its edge.</p> <p>The south western edge of the Flow country peatland is marked by a highly distinctive range of lone mountain peaks and moorland peaks that form a distinctive skyline which is visible from much of Caithness. These hills are largely bounded by the glens of the Berriedale and Langwell rivers and offer a series of fine vantage points from which to enjoy panoramic views over much of the Flow Country and out to the North Sea.</p> <p>The Berriedale and Langwell glens are steeply incised in their middle and lower reaches, and where they approach the sea they converge and cleave through the coastal cliffs. These glens offer welcome shelter and enclosure as well as a sense of human scale within the wider open space. The woodlands of Langwell and Berriedale together form the largest tract of semi-natural broadleaved woodland in Caithness.</p> |

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- A striking combination of mountains rising abruptly from surrounding extensive areas of peatland that is vast in scale, with a long low horizon and broadly very simple in character, although containing numerous lochs, lochans and pools. The peatland areas are very difficult to access or cross due to the lack of tracks and roads and because of the drainage conditions. As a consequence, these areas tend to possess a strong sense of wildness.
- The isolated mountains are typified by exposed rock, rocky outcrops and scree, and montane vegetation. They form distinctive and offer extensive views over the Flow Country and out to sea.
- The moorland foothills which flank the lone mountains typically comprise undulating and sloping broad convex hills, plateaux, rocky outcrops and crags, dense heather and grassland mosaics. The landform sweeps gently north from impressive elevations across vast open moorland to the flat peatland.
- Views of peatland are typically very simple in composition at a broad scale. However at a more detailed level, lochs, pools and patches of surface water, networks of watercourses and tussocky wetland grass and heather provide variation of detail including sounds, colours and textures.

- The peatland expanse is incised in places by deeply carved, meandering wooded glens. Parallel tracks and footpaths, penetrate some interior parts of these glens, also occupied by isolated lodges and bothies utilising the shelter and protection offered by these glen slopes. These build structures empathise and contrast the vast scale of the surrounding peatlands.
- Settlement only occurs at the south eastern part of this area, restricted to the sheltered glens and coastal areas. This leaves the area largely undeveloped and consequently possessing strong qualities of wildness.

Special Qualities

Distinctive Mountain and Moorland Skyline

- The distinctive combination of expansive peatland and isolated mountains is unique within the UK. The isolated and tall mountains emphasise the simplicity, flatness and low relief of the surrounding Flow Country peatland and vice versa.
- The conspicuous mountain profiles, from striking cones to rolling masses, are visible from most of Caithness and serve as distinctive landmarks. They are typically seen from a distance and it is difficult to perceive their size or distance due to the simplicity of the intervening peatland.
- Morven forms a prominent conical landmark feature which is visible from both the north coast and the Morayshire coast. It stands in strong contrast to its long-backed neighbour Scaraben but is echoed on a smaller scale by the rocky profile of the nearby Maiden Pap. The latter is an especially striking landscape feature and backdrop when viewed from the Braemore area.
- Ben Alisky is a remote, isolated peak north of the main range of mountains. Whilst not particularly high (349 metres), it forms a distinctive landmark feature for a wide area of Caithness.

Exposed Peaks, Vast Openness and Intimate Glens

- The mountain summits offer rare opportunity to view a panorama of wide ranging characteristics – extending over the Flow Country peatlands, out to sea and as far south as the Cairngorms in clear conditions.
- The vast open sweep of the peatlands with the long, low horizon evokes strong feelings of isolation and wildness. The mountains on its southern edge and the isolated peak of Ben Alisky are welcome orientation features in a landscape otherwise lacking in landmarks.
- Experience of the open peatlands area is strongly affected by big skies with rapidly changing light and weather conditions. Views from local roads are particularly important along the higher sections of the A9 around Achavanich and Berriedale and from the road into Braemore. Views from the railway which skirts the area's north western side, from the valley tracks, from the mountain peaks, or even from aircraft all give different perspectives. Views of the Flow Country from elevated viewpoints, including from air, best reveal the distinctive pattern of the pool systems.
- In further contrast to the elevation and exposure of the mountain summits and the wide expanse of the peatland, the deep wooded sections of the Berriedale and Langwell glens provide an intimacy of scale and shelter and are dotted with buildings and other welcoming signs of human habitation.
- Berriedale, at the wooded confluence of Langwell Water and Berriedale Water, is a dispersed settlement with buildings sandwiched between the Berriedale Water and the steep cliffs of the Berriedale Braes. Over these braes is a series of tortuous blind bends upon the A9 that are notoriously difficult to manoeuvre, particularly for long vehicles that occasionally get stuck on this section of the road.

- Within the glens, there is a concentration of architecturally and historically important buildings including a pair of Telford bridges, the Berriedale post office on west side of the A9, mills, smithys and a row of terrace estate workers houses on the south side of Berriedale Water, with the contrasting redundant salmon bothy, ice house and terraced fisherman cottages on the opposite side of the Water.

The Historic Landscape

- Recognising that the inland waterways were a vital method of transport and communication in prehistory monuments are predominantly located along Langwell and Berriedale Waters and their tributaries. The remains represent the full range of major prehistoric features and include chambered cairns, roundhouses, brochs, souterrains, burnt mounds etc; the density of monuments increases as one gets closer to the confluence of the two Waters and their eventual outlet at Berriedale

Sensitivity to change

- Development could compromise views of the exposed and striking skyline profile of the lone mountains and peatlands.
- The introduction of large scale structures could be prominent in views and would affect the perception of the scale of the mountains and the extent of the peatlands. This could occur cumulatively as well as individually.
- Drainage or other works could affect the hydrology of peatland habitats and associated landcover mosaic. Afforestation could reduce or fragment the large area of open peatland.
- More intensive grazing could reduce the perceived remoteness of the landscape and increase the diversity of vegetation cover.
- Large-scale provision for visitors could detract from the sense of remoteness and isolation or would require visually prominent ancillary structures such as new roads/tracks. Introduction of tracks or ATV routes could form linear elements in contrast to the simplicity and expansive character of the peatland..
- Development could compromise the qualities of wildness which are particularly sensitive to landscape change.
- There may be potential to improve visitor facilities within this landscape as long as it is kept 'low key' and discrete in character and within marginal locations, for example, parking areas for hill walkers. These facilities are likely to be located at the edge of the SLA; nevertheless, they may encourage greater numbers of people to 'get a taste' of the qualities of the area without the need to penetrate interior areas, thus protecting wildness qualities.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- There may be potential to increase areas of native broadleaf woodland in glens where appropriate growing conditions exist to reinforce and extend existing woodlands.
- There may be potential to remove or restructure remnants of commercial woodland plantation including associated infrastructure such as fences, drainage channels and tracks where these contrast to the character of the landscape.
- Potential may occur for mitigation of existing adverse landscape and visual impacts through restoration/removal of disturbed ground and vegetation, for example as caused by some existing access tracks and borrow pits.

**Other designations/
interests**

- This area has qualities of wild land which is recognised in part by the identification of a 'search area for wild land in SNH's Policy Statement on Wildness in Scotland's Countryside.
- The character of the Flow Country was adversely affected between 1979 and 1987 by the planting of non-native conifer forests and the cutting of thousands of miles of drains. This was encouraged by a system of grants and tax relief for wealthy investors which prioritised timber production over nature conservation and landscape considerations. In 1988 the system was changed. However, the effects of the old regime continue in many parts of the Flow Country to this day. Fortunately the Berriedale, Langwell and Knockfin Heights SLA largely escaped such afforestation.
- The SLA overlies (in part) a number of SSSIs designated for their blanket bog habitats (Blar nam Faoileag, Coirre na Beinne Mires and Knockfin Heights) and a number of SSSIs designated for their blanket bog habitats and populations of breeding waders (Strathmore Peatlands and Dunbeath Peatlands). All of the above are components of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SAC, SPA and Ramsar sites.
- Morvern and Scaraben SSSI also lies within the SLA which is designated for its alpine and sub alpine heath habitats. The SLA also overlies Berriedale Water SSSI and Langwell Water SSSI designated for their upland birch woodland habitat. Both these sites are components of the Berriedale and Langwell Waters SAC designated for its population of Atlantic salmon.
- On the coast, the above waters meet at Berriedale Cliffs SSSI designated for its populations of breeding seabirds and vegetated sea cliffs. This SSSI is also a component of the East Caithness Cliffs SAC (designated for its vegetated sea cliffs) and SPA (for populations of breeding seabirds and peregrine falcon).
- Langwell Lodge is an Inventory site Gardens and Designed Landscape and forms a key landscape feature within the landscape surrounding Berriedale Braes.
- Badbea village, on the coast southwest of Berriedale, marks a poignant point in Scottish history as one of the harsh locations to which crofters were evicted during the infamous Clearances throughout this area.
- The ruins of the 15th-century Berriedale Castle and nearby twin navigation towers dubbed the Duke's Candlesticks, form distinctive man-made features within a largely natural and featureless landscape.
- Former fishermen's cottages line the shore while the parish church and manse of Berriedale date from 1826 when they were built to a standard Parliamentary design by Thomas Telford (1757 - 1834).

**Landscape
Character**

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

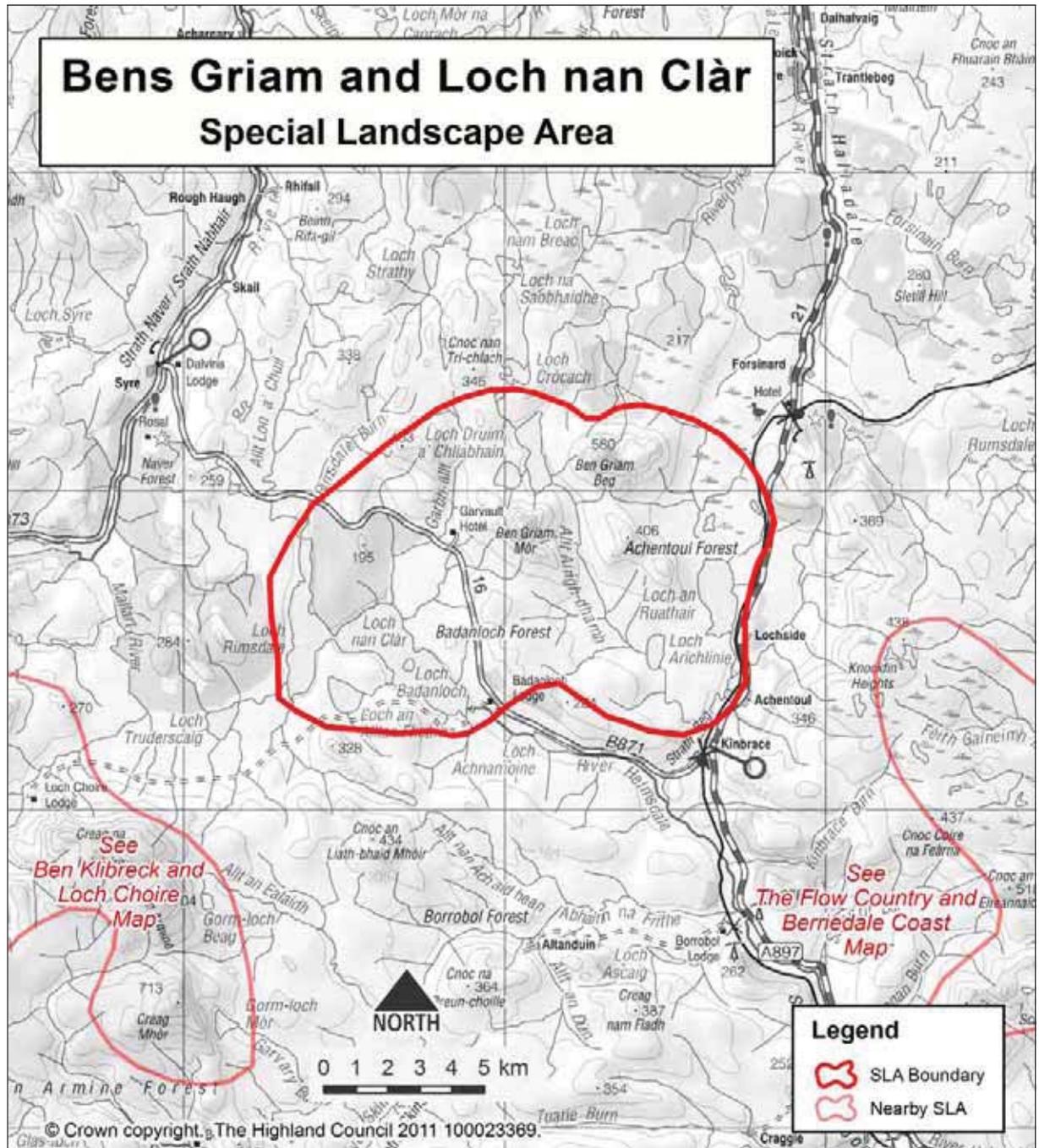
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Bens Griam and Loch nan Clar



Map 7



| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| SLA Ref. number/Name | 07. Bens Griam and Loch nan Clàr |
| Location and Extent | <p>REFER TO MAP 7.</p> <p>This area of remote hills and large lochs lies just west of the Kinbrace-Forsinard section of the A897 in east Sutherland. It extends from Loch Rimsdale in the west to Loch an Ruathair in the east. It's northern boundary takes in Loch Druim a' Chliabhain while the southern boundary includes Loch Badanloch. just south of Forsinard Station in the north east to Achentoul in the south east, including Loch an Ruathair, and stretching westwards to include the lochs and lochans to the north and west of Ben Griam Mòr.</p> |
| Area | 134km ² (13400ha). |
| Overview | <p>This area is focused around a trio of prominent, isolated hills - Ben Griam Mòr, Ben Griam Beg and Meall a' Bhùirich. These rise abruptly out of the surrounding sweeping moorland that includes a series of large lochs. One of these lochs includes an extensive body of water which feeds the River Helmsdale and carries three names on account of its intricate shape - Loch Rimsdale, Loch Nan Clar and Loch Badanloch. Other lochs feed into the River Halladale, the largest of which are Loch Druim a' Chliabhain and Loch an Ruathair.</p> <p>The landscape has a strong sense of remoteness, wildness and space. Although the area is traversed or bounded by two single-track public roads, these roads are used infrequently, and the area is almost completely uninhabited.</p> |

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- A conspicuous cluster of peaks pierce a wider lower-lying landscape of lochs, watercourses and sweeping moorland.
- The hills are covered by a Montane grassland scattered with rocky outcrops, areas of scree and incised with watercourses cutting into the slopes.
- The open moorland is vast in extent with a unifying mosaic of rough grassland and heathers. This forms a simple composition which changes with the seasons and light conditions, with the strong reds of deer grass prevailing in autumn.
- Coniferous plantations appear highly incongruous in this landscape as stark, angular, dark blocks which contrast with the muted colours, textures and sinuous patterns of the moorland vegetation.
- Flat boggy ground is criss-crossed by a series of larger burns and tributaries providing connections between the lochs and lochans and presenting barriers to access. Because of the predominant flatness of the peatland these are not always obvious from a distance.
- Pockets of sheep grazings, stone walls, post and wire fencing and telegraph poles mark the transition from isolated mountain and moorland to the road and rail corridor.
- Lightly peppered across the landscape are the remains of prehistoric settlement, cleared later medieval townships and shielings. Frequent archaeological features such as cairns and hut circles are commonly found within the shelter of landform, in proximity to open water, and atop Ben Griam Mòr.
- Views are expansive across the peatlands, with the interior hills forming the dominant visual foci and the lochs being of secondary prominence.
- The isolated nature of this mountain, moorland and loch landscape means that it is little disturbed and retains a sense of wildness which increases with distance from the main roads. Land use tends to be limited to fishing, deer stalking and forestry with some hill walkers.

Special Qualities

Accessible Solitude

- Ben Griam Mòr (*big dark hill*) and Ben Griam Beg (*small dark hill*) along with the less prominent Meall a' Bhùirich (*roaring hill*) form a conspicuous cluster of peaks fashioned from Old Red Sandstone. They lie within a wider lower lying landscape of lochs, watercourses and sweeping moorland.
- Several lochs including the Loch nan Clàr/ Badanloch/ Rimsdale system punctuate the open moorland marking distinctive moorland basins and providing horizontal reference which highlights the surrounding hills. In still conditions, these lochs have reflective water surfaces which contrast with the rich matt texture of the moor.
- The little-used single-track road through wild mountain and moorland with open and extensive views provides an experience of wildness and solitude for the road traveller.
- Well maintained access tracks provide access into remote parts of the interior of this landscape.
- Fishing on the remote hill lochs is enjoyed for the experience of isolation and tranquillity.

Flow Country Views

- The isolated and well-defined hill summits offer a rare vantage point to view the vast extent of the Caithness and Sutherland peatlands punctuated by other lone summits including Ben Alisky, Morven, Scaraben and the Maiden Pap.
- The A897, near the north east corner of this SLA, is one of few locations in Caithness and Sutherland to offer views from a public open road over a Flow Country pool system that are typically difficult to see because of the flatness of the peatlands.

- Sensitivity to change**
- The introduction of new structures could impinge on views of the exposed and striking nature of the distinct hills and /or compromise their perceived scale.
 - Development could introduce point or vertical features which would punctuate or disrupt the open and sweeping views over the moorland and lochs.
 - Changes in land use could destroy the perceived wildness of the area.
 - Any works which could alter the existing drainage system could have significant effects on the peatland character of the area.
 - This landscape is highly vulnerable to ground disturbance, due to the slow rates of soil and vegetation establishment and repair, for example as caused by establishment of new tracks.
 - Visitor interpretation at key locations alongside the A897 should be low key, discreetly located, and designed to avoid adverse impacts on the qualities of wildness within this landscape.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Restructure forestry plantations and restock to include native broadleaf species or remove altogether, including associated tracks and fences may mitigate existing adverse impacts within open peatland areas.
- There may be scope for restoration of disturbed ground and vegetation within this landscape to mitigate existing impacts, for example as caused by the route of access tracks, siting of borrow pits and river engineering works.

**Other designations/
interests**

- This area has qualities of wild land which are recognised in part by the proximity of two 'search areas for wild land' identified in the SNH Policy Statement on Wildness in Scotland's Countryside.
- Ben Griam Beg is crowned by the highest known hillfort in Scotland with a distinctive associated network of ruined walls being the remains of an external settlement.
- The site comprises areas of SSSI due to the internationally important range of montane and blanket bogland habitats. The Ben Griams SSSI is notified for its unusual combination of montane habitats which occurs on the summits of both hills in close proximity to surrounding peatland and the transition between the two well demonstrated here. This site and the nearby Badanloch Bogs SSSI are also within the Peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland SAC and SPA.
- One of the many ruins within this area includes the Greamarchy township which experienced the infamous Clearances.
- Garvault Hotel claims to be the most remote hotel in Scotland.
- Loch nan Clàr was dammed in the early 1900s (first of its kind in Scotland) in order to maintain the water level in the River Helmsdale.

**Landscape
Character**

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 103.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk

Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire



| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| SLA Ref. number/Name | 08. Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire |
| Location and Extent | REFER TO MAP 8. Centred on Loch Choire, to the southeast of Altnaharra in Sutherland, the area includes Ben Klibreck and part of the neighbouring massif of Ben Armine. |
| Area | 138km ² (13800ha) |
| Overview | One of several prominent lone mountains and mountain groups which rise dramatically from an open moorland in central Sutherland, Ben Klibreck is notable for its distinctive western profile. It rises like a great wave above Strath Vagastie and Loch Naver and is the dominant landscape feature in this part of Sutherland. It is separated from the neighbouring Ben Armine Forest by a secluded glen occupied by Loch Choire and Loch a' Bhealaich. The slopes rising from the southern shores of these lochs have fine remnants of native broad-leaved woodland. |

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- A very large-scale, open and exposed landscape in which a prominent, high isolated mountains rise conspicuously from the surrounding moorland with its very distinctive profile. The contrasting lower, hill massif is characterised by less distinctive landforms. Exceptional panoramic views are available from the high ridges and summits in clear conditions. Remote lochs occupy the trough between the mountains.
- At a broad level the landform is very simple. However at a more detailed level there is a diversity of upland habitats characterised by mosaics of heathland and grassland, with frequent rocky outcrops, screes and crags. Fragments of broadleaf woodland also occur on the lower ground that provides shelter.
- Pockets of gently sloping improved pasture fringe the shores of the two main lochs scattered with mature trees and stone sheepfolds. Occasional coniferous plantations appear particularly incongruous, contrasting in shape, colour and texture. This incongruity is particularly prominent when viewing from the isolated hill tops and distracts from the open panoramas seen from these areas.
- The isolated mountains, the lowland enclosed between them, the open moorland, and the extremely sparse settlement all contribute to a very strong sense of wildness within this area.

Special Qualities

Distinctive Mountains

- The prominent mountain ridge of Ben Klibreck is a popular Munro, fairly easy to climb from Altnaharra. However the absence of constructed tracks over the hill means the area retains a strong sense of wildness. A long crescent-shaped ridge forms the spine of Ben Klibreck with its steep western slopes descending to Strath Vagastie and Loch Naver. A conspicuous break of slope above the crags of A 'Chioch, topped by the summit cone of Meall nan Con, form the distinctive stepped profile seen in views from the south. Contrasting eastern slopes form large grassy corries which sweep more gently down to the shores of Loch Choire and Loch a' Bhealaich, dissected by parallel watercourses.
- The Ben Armine massif is less dramatic than Ben Klibreck but the steep bounding slopes on its eastern and northern sides provide a contrast with the relatively flat Flow Country beyond. This juxtaposition and vantage point is given added significance by the fact that Ben Armine is one of the most remote hill summits in Scotland.

Secluded Glen with Network of Tracks

- The glen of Loch a Choire possesses a strong sense of seclusion and wildness although punctuated by the estate lodge. Landscape and visual interest is enhanced by important native woodland remnants. The glen also contains no through-routes for non-vehicular traffic from Crask to Forsinard and numerous tracks south of the Loch.

Extensive Views from Peaks and Summits

- Exceptional panoramic views from high ridges and summits in clear conditions, extending to the northern coastline and beyond, taking in neighbouring peaks including Ben Hope and Ben Loyal and vast areas of surrounding moorland, the character of which is hard to discern from lower levels.

Historic Landscape

- This area contains the isolated remains of a cleared township and a number of shielings are located on the southern shore of Loch Choire. The flatter area to the east of Ben Klibreck represents the southern extent of an extensive prehistoric settlement that is predominantly south of Loch Naver. Accordingly, a number of roundhouses, a burnt mound and a field system are recorded, although the main area of settlement lies outwith the boundary to the north.

Sensitivity to change

- This area is very sensitive to development that could interrupt the relationship between the open moorland and the isolated mountains.
- Development or landuse change could impinge on the secluded character and wildness qualities of the central glen.
- Structures, such as access tracks and fences, are likely to contrast to the open character and undifferentiated pattern of vegetation within this landscape, creating prominent lines, new edges and fragmenting open space.
- This landscape is sensitive to construction operations, due to the sensitivity of the soil, drainage and vegetation conditions to disturbance and the difficulty of restoring or repairing impacts.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- Reinforce, link and extend areas of scattered native woodland, particularly in relation to the loch side and along associated watercourses and glens where it is possible to do so without associated deer fencing being prominent.
- There may be scope for restoration of disturbed ground and vegetation within this landscape to mitigate existing impacts, for example as caused by the route of access tracks, siting of borrow pits and river engineering works.

Other designations/interests

- The Ben Klibreck SSSI includes windswept montane grasslands and heaths, the spectacular birch woodlands on the southern shores and crags above Loch Choire, the pristine waters of Loch Choire and the surrounding blanket bog. Also included in this SLA is part of the extensive Skinsdale Peatlands SSSI which is part of the Peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland SAC and SPA.
- Wildness qualities are recognised within this area by the identification of a 'search area for wild land' in the SNH Policy Statement on Wildness in Scotland's Countryside.
- Scheduled Monument located on the E flank of Meall nan Con, the highest summit of the Ben Kilbreck Ridge. It is a campsite and survey station constructed by soldiers of the Ordnance Survey in the early 19th century whilst conducting the first triangulation of Scotland. There are several standing remains including the original survey cairn, several shelters and foundations, two triangulation pillars, a stone building, and tent platforms.
- Ben Klibreck is the second most northerly Munro (after Ben Hope).
- The area formed part of one of the first sheep farms on the Sutherland Estate following the infamous Clearances. It is now marked by numerous ruined sheepfolds.
- A memorial to crashed airmen can be found at the end of Meall Ailein (the eastern end of the main Ben Klibreck summit ridge).

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

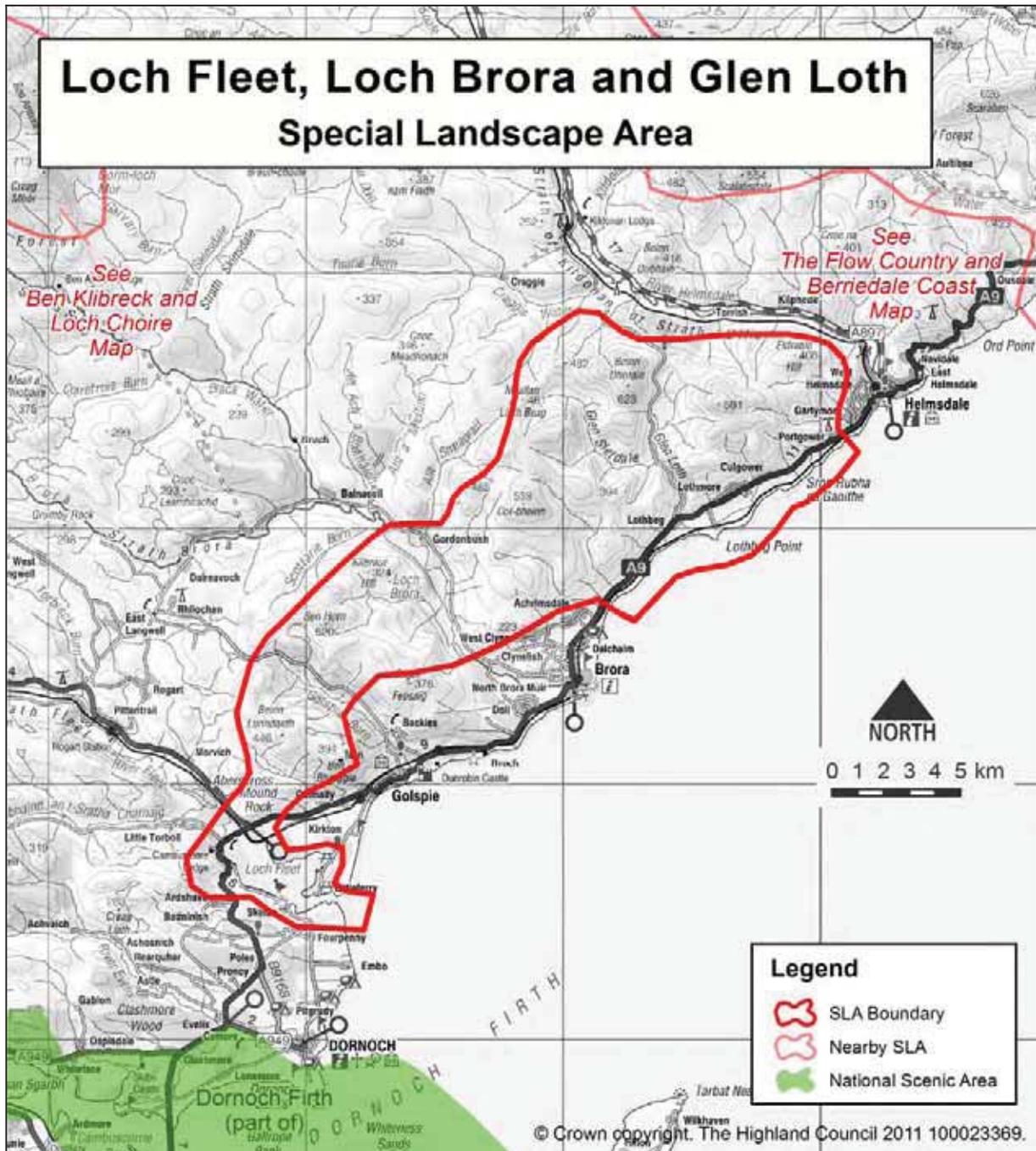
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Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth



Map 9



| | |
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| SLA Ref. number/Name | 09. Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth |
| Location and Extent | REFER TO MAP 9. Lying along the east coast of Sutherland, this area stretches from the southern slopes of Strath Ullie in the north to Loch Fleet in the south, including areas of coastal shelf and interior moorland and hills. |
| Area | 210.4km ² (21040ha) |
| Overview | This is an area of rolling moorland hills, punctuated by a series of southeast orientated glens, straths and lochs, and edged to a narrow strip of farmed coastal shelf running along the shoreline. The character of this area is distinguished by its composition of contrasting landscape features – the contrasting landform, landcover and landscape pattern that empathise the distinction of each other. |

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- A relatively simple uniform, rolling plateau of interior broad, interwoven rounded hills, clothed by an open mosaic of heather and grass moorland. As this composition is fairly simple, and extends throughout the area, there is a strong consistency of this backdrop to the coast.
- The hill area is breached by major straths and glens which have differing local character derived from the varying combination of native woodland, forest plantation, moorland and water bodies. They provide sheltered access routes through the hills and provide physical and visual connections between the interior and the coastal shelf and North Sea.
- To the east lies a narrow but relatively fertile coastal shelf contains the main road and rail routes in this area, and small farms and settlements at fairly regular intervals. A distinctive field pattern of pasture runs parallel to the coast, marked in places by windswept trees and stone walls.
- The linear coastal shelf, is defined on its interior side by the edge formed by the adjacent hill slopes, the elevation which provide expansive views both along the coastal edge and outwards across the open sea. Interior views are limited by the convex nature of the hill slopes.
- Loch Fleet is the most northerly inlet on the east coast. Where an inlet occurs, defined by its distinctive opposing spits of land, a sheltered, enclosed tidal basin is fringed with shingle shores and pine woods. At low tide, exposed mudflats create a distinctive feature whose character is enlivened by large flocks of wading birds.
- Views are obtained from some areas of wind turbines and overhead electricity lines whose large scale and man-made character can seem to diminish the scale of the interior hills and their wildness qualities.
- Along the coast and around the inlet, there are a number of historic built features that form prominent focal features and landmarks.

Special Qualities

Historic features

- Skelbo Castle is a dominant feature on the south-side of Loch Fleet, sitting atop a hill commanding excellent views of the loch.
- The Mound is a very prominent and clearly man-made causeway over which the main A9 coastal road passes. Engineered by Telford in 1814 -16 it spans the mouth of Loch Fleet with a bridge at its northern end and offers spectacular coastal views.
- The hills that separate Loch Brora from Glen Loth have a light scattering of mainly late medieval settlement and shielings. Apart from on the most inaccessible hills, head dykes and enclosures can be traced through the landscape with the occasional remains of a settlement located along a river valley in between.
- Glen Loth is rich in the remains of past settlement. Well preserved prehistoric remains proliferate from the flat coastal areas. Heading north the steepness of the glen sides soften the density of prehistoric settlement and later medieval township increases. Interspersed within the remaining prehistoric settlement, souterrains and standing stones still survive.
- Substantial remains of later medieval township occur, centred around Loth Burn in the lower slopes of Beinn Mhealach, and are still clearly visible and easily identifiable within the landscape.
- Centred around the banks of Loch Brora, monuments include well defined burial cairns, roundhouses and associated field systems, brochs and homesteads. Many of these early sites have been incorporated within the field systems and head dykes of later medieval townships which themselves survive along the Loch.
- Prehistoric settlement and burial cairns are located on the eastern slopes of Cnoc Odhar overlooking Loch Fleet and on the south-facing slopes of Creag an Amalaidh. On the north-side of Loch Fleet on the flat improved plains in between The Mound and Kirkton another extensive prehistoric settlement exists.

An Integrated Combination of Landforms

- The combination and juxtaposition of the rolling moorland hills, linear glens, the coastal shelf and tidal basin creates a diverse yet connected landscape composition which is experienced in sequence when travelling along the A9 and from the railway.
- Many small, often linear, settlements lie to the north west of the A9, strung along the foot-slopes of the interior hills, and these enjoy panoramic views out to sea. In contrast the larger settlements just outside the SLA boundary but visible from within it
- There is a strong contrast between the expansive open forms of the moorland hills, the narrow, enclosed and intimate forms of the glens and straths, the linear coastal fringe with its extensive sea views and the intimate wooded enclosure of the Loch Fleet tidal basin.
- The locally dominant ridgeline of Ben Bhraggie overlooking Loch Fleet and lower lying coastland is overlooked by the monument to the Duke of Sutherland which acts as a focal feature within the southern part of the SLA.

Accessible yet Secluded Glens and Lochs

- The interior is largely screened by the edge of the hill landform but occasional views are obtained where glens intersect with the coastal shelf. Readily accessible, these sheltered glens offer a sense of seclusion, tranquillity and intimacy from the busier coastal fringe.

Sensitivity to change

- Additional large scale features could, in combination with the existing wind turbines and overhead electricity line to the west of the SLA, could diminish the perceived scale of the hills and their qualities of wildness and tranquillity.
- Additional features within the moorland hills could appear to compromise the simplicity of the existing land cover and landform shape.
- Additional access tracks within the moorland hills could contrast to its simple cover, by introducing dominant lines and reduce its sense of remoteness.
- Widening of roads within the straths and glens could result in faster travel which could mean that historic features are noticed less. It could also result in a reduction in the sense of seclusion if it results in increased visitor numbers.
- Large-scale offshore development could introduce focal features that could impinge on panoramic sea views.
- Increased forest cover on the exposed and open moorland could mask and fragment its subtle landform pattern and reduce its consistency of character.

Potential for landscape enhancement

- There may be opportunity to promote natural regeneration of native woodlands along the sides of straths and glens.
- There may be potential to restore areas of moorland vegetation and soils which have been disturbed, for example by hill tracks and conifer plantations
- There may be scope to restructure existing coniferous plantations to include native species and to reduce existing impacts in existing areas where hard, straight edges conflict with the sinuous qualities of the moorland hills.

The impact of existing overhead electricity lines may be mitigated through rerouting or under grounding particularly where these appear incongruous and are dominant in views from the A9.

Other designations/ interests

- Loch Fleet National Nature Reserve. This Reserve includes the enclosed intertidal sand and mud flats of the Loch Fleet basin which host an array of over wintering waders and wildfowl whilst the pine wood plantations contain very rare native pinewood ground flora. This site is also a SPA for both the wintering birds and foraging osprey in spring and summer.
- Cambusavie was originally built as an Infectious Diseases Hospital in 1906 and comprised a number of green and white corrugated iron huts, each isolating a different illness. Little now remains but the surviving buildings are now used (in part) as a Bed and Breakfast establishment.
- Following the minor road to Embo on the south-side of Loch Fleet are the remains of the Dornoch Light Railway that linked Dornoch to the Highland Railway at The Mound junction; it opened in 1902 and closed in 1960. The track

(although not the railway) is still visible along with several of the original crossing-keepers cottages (to man the road/rail crossings), one where the Embo road meets the A9 at Cambusmore and a second on the north-side of the A9 at The Mound/Little Torroble road junction.

- Littleferry was the ferry crossing point across Loch Fleet prior to The Mound and grew up around this function. It includes a fine collection of early 19th century houses, stores, an ice house and boat sheds typical of a small rural settlement based on a limited fishing/ferry economy.
- Two aircraft crash sites are recorded, of which the remains of a Liberator (crashed in 1944) are still to be seen on the eastern slopes of Beinn Mhealaich.
- In Glen Loth a pair of prominent standing stones are located on a small hillock to the North of Carradh nan Clach, with the remains of a substantial broch located just to the south.
- A number of other aircraft are known to have crashed in amongst the hills that separate Glen Loth and Loch Brora, the remains of which can still be found. They include a Barracuda, a Wellington, a Sunderland (the location of the crash marked by a small cairn, constructed in part with some of the wreckage) and a Sea Hawk.
- Included are eight SSSIs. The most relevant to the landscape qualities being Loch Fleet as described above and the Mound Alderwoods (also a SAC) which is impounded by the A9 causeway and comprises alder and willow woodland growing on glacial sediment which has been washed down Strath Fleet. The other SSSIs represent a range of features including important geological outcrops along the rocky foreshore and remnant woodland in the coastal gorges along the coastal shelf and on other slopes and crags which are less accessible to grazing animals.
- Glen Sletdale is one location thought to be where the last wolf in Scotland was killed.
- Jurassic rocks of the coastal fringe produced a range of fossils.

Landscape Character

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in:

Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 103.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk