

1.1.1 *Landscape Character*

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

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

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

1.1.2 *Landscape experience*

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

the uplands and the ski uplifts and railway reduce the sense of isolation experienced in the heart of the mountain area

1.1.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

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

1.1.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

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



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



The Lairig Ghru, a glacial trough



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



Snow lasts well into the summer at this high altitude



Loch Avon – an elongated classic ‘ribbon’ lake