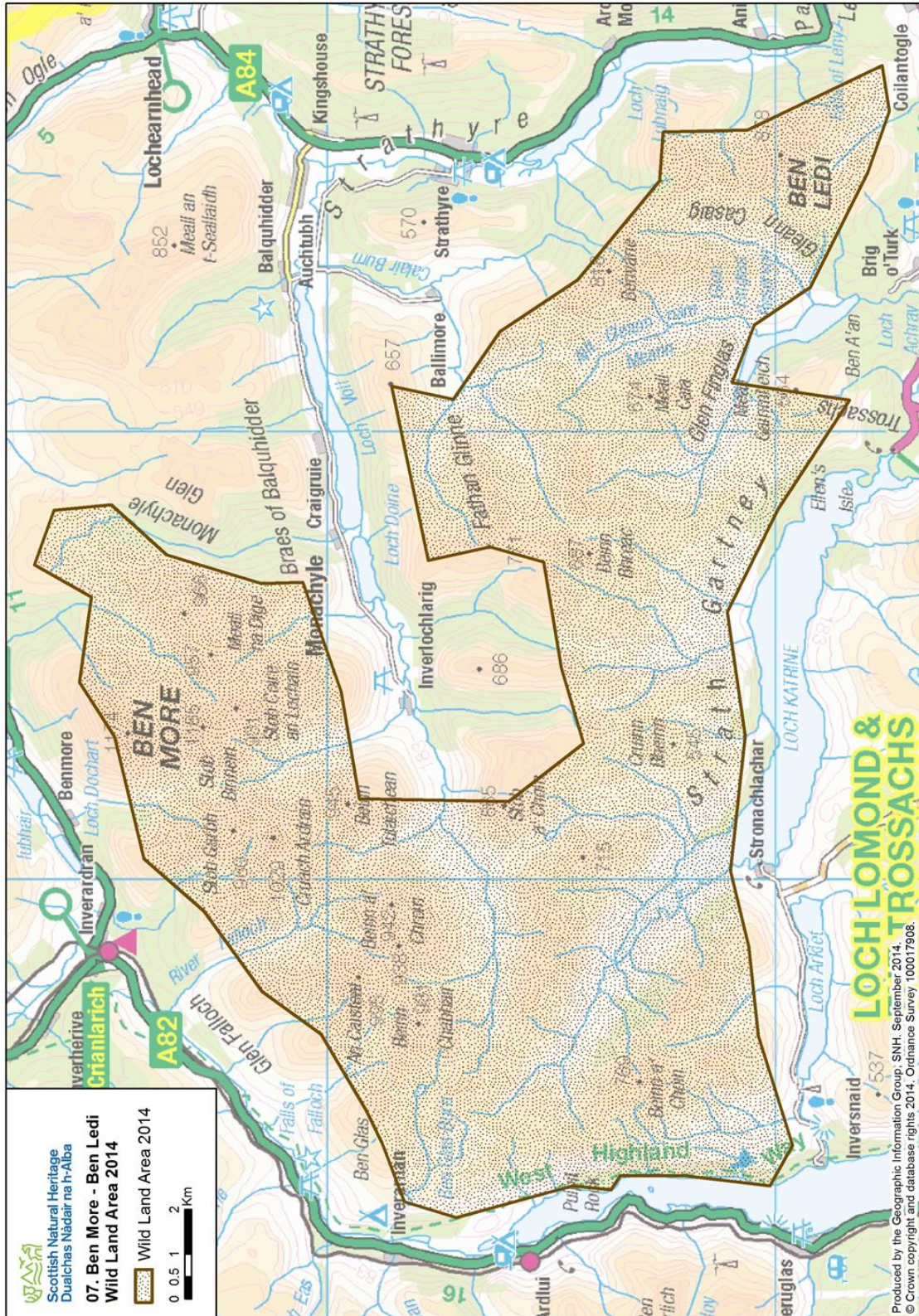


Ben More – Ben Ledi Wild Land Area



Context

This WLA lies in Stirling and wholly within Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. It has an area of 212 km² and takes the form of an elongated letter 'C', wrapping around lower Balquhidder Glen, which lies outside to the east. The southern part of the WLA extends further east, to include the southern slopes of Ben Ledi, lying over 27 km from the western extremity, near Inverarnan.

It consists of an interior of steep, high and sometimes craggy hills, mainly composed of quartz and mica-rich rocks, with pockets of limestone and slate. The interlocking summits, plateaux, corries and ridges are penetrated by dramatic, steep-sided glens and surrounded by grass and heather moorland slopes with blanket peat on poorly drained plateaux. The hills are generally higher north of Balquhidder Glen, with more exposed rock and crags.

No part of the WLA lies over 6.5 km from a public road. To the south, forest plantations and woodland allow few views of the WLA from surrounding roads, but there are prolonged views from those to the north, where the landscape is more open, allowing many visitors to appreciate the mountains at close range, often in combination with other WLAs. The West Highland Way follows the western boundary between Inversnaid and Inverarnan. It is used by over 30,000 walkers a year¹ but dense woodland and steep slopes allow few views into the WLA.

Loch Katrine lies to the south of the WLA, allowing open views of the craggy hills within the WLA above Strath Gartney to the north. It is a busy tourist destination and the popular steamship Sir Walter Scott sails between Trossachs Pier and Stronachlachar, where there are car parks and other tourist facilities adjacent to the WLA. It is also possible to walk or cycle between the two centres on the Great Trossachs Path, which follows the northern shore of the loch. This surfaced road is open to authorised vehicle use and an 8.6 km section west of Coilachra takes walkers and cyclists into the WLA. Crianlarich and Callander both lie close to the WLA and serve as important gateways for visitors to this part of the National Park.

The WLA is used mainly for grazing, deer stalking and recreation. It is largely uninhabited, apart from some dwellings around the north-western tip of Loch Katrine. Other built heritage features within the WLA include the Rob Roy burial ground and there are numerous signs of historic settlement and field systems around the edges and within the interior glens.

It is very accessible from the Central Belt and contains seven Munros and five Corbetts. The mountain landscape is therefore a major attraction and the popularity of hillwalking and winter mountaineering is evident from car parks adjacent to the WLA below Ben Ledi, Ben More and at Inverlochlarig, which provides access to all seven Munros lying to the north. At 1174 m, Ben More is the highest peak south of Loch Tay and its rugged profile dominates views from Strath Fillan, Glen Dochart and Balquhidder Glen. Ben More, Ben Ledi and Stob Binnein are widely visible from the south and central Highlands and, on clear days, from the Central Belt.

The WLA lies adjacent to Ben Lui (06) and Breadalbane – Schiehallion (10) WLAs and from some of its upper slopes and tops the wild land qualities appear to extend uninterrupted into these areas, especially where intervening settled glens or forests are screened from view.

Key attributes and qualities of the wild land area

- **The sense of remoteness found within the interior of the WLA contrasts strongly with the popularity of recreational hot spots around the margins**

There is a sharp contrast in terms of the *sense of remoteness, sanctuary and solitude* between much of the WLA and the numerous visitor facilities around its margins. Although none of the WLA lies over 5 km from a public road, many parts have a strong *sense of remoteness*. Long, single track, no-through roads lead to Inverlochlarig and Stronachlachar, emphasising the inaccessibility of these areas. Poorly defined drove roads become indistinct further into the interior, reinforcing the *sense of remoteness* although the actual distances from roads may not be all that great. The experience of the 'long walk in' from lower Balquhiddar Glen to the high summits is also particularly *awe-inspiring*.

Within the interior, there is a strong *sense of sanctuary*, especially where the enclosed glens or plateaux allow few views of any *human artefacts* or *contemporary land use*. Native woodlands add to the *sense of naturalness*, although tracks, signs of stock management, deer and stock fencing diminish the wild land attributes in other places.

Footpaths linking the Munros and popular peaks are generally evident from the erosion caused by walkers. Once away from the well-used routes there are large areas with no paths or tracks, where the *rugged*, hummocky, often boulder-strewn terrain can be disorientating and tussocky grass with heather and boggy sections can make the going arduous. Burn crossings add to the *physical challenge* required, increasing the length of time needed to reach the interior and the consequent *sense of remoteness and risk*.

Loch Katrine is a popular tourist destination, lying just outside the WLA to the south. The Great Trossachs Path follows the northern shore of the loch, is popular with both walkers and cyclists and is also open to authorised vehicle use. An 8.6 km section west of Coilachra lies within the WLA, where the surfaced road, signs, fencing and other *human artefacts*, the large number of recreational users and occasional vehicles diminish the *sense of solitude, sanctuary and remoteness*.

The West Highland Way follows the western boundary of the WLA. Although it is well used, the path and various facilities along the route are largely hidden from the interior by woodland and by the steepness of the landform. Effects on the wild land qualities are thus mainly restricted to the route itself, where the many path users diminish the *sense of solitude, sanctuary and remoteness*.



- **Rugged mountains, natural watercourses and striking broadleaved woodlands contribute to a strong sense of naturalness**

The many distinctive geological features of this WLA contribute to its strong *sense of naturalness*. This is evident from ice moulded craggy landforms, such as corries and exposed rock, cliffs, boulders and scree, but also from localised features such as the glacial moraines in Glen Finglas. Where rock is not exposed the mountains support natural arctic-alpine vegetation, with grass and heather-dominated moorland, bog vegetation in flatter areas and some bracken on lower slopes.



There are many natural watercourses, several with *arresting* waterfalls. Patches of native, riparian woodland often highlight the course of burns on valley sides, adding to the *sense of naturalness* and accentuating the *rugged* nature of the open moorland. Many of these burns are fast flowing and the sound of rushing water over bedrock enhances the *sense of naturalness*. Some of those flowing into Glen Falloch and Glen Dochart will be used for hydro power, once schemes currently under construction are completed, introducing obvious *human artefacts*.



Broadleaved woodlands along the fringes of Loch Lomond, large native woodlands within Glen Finglas and other areas south of Balquhidder Glen together form a relatively large and expanding area of woodland which adds to the *sense of naturalness*. These woods tend to be of an open character and reveal the underlying topography, forming a gradual transition to the open upper slopes and accentuating the *awe inspiring* qualities of the massive mountains above. Woods on the upper slopes are often stunted and more scattered, perched on the rock outcrops and gullies, accentuating the *rugged* qualities of the landform.

Some recent native woodland exclosures, such as those in the upper parts of Balquhidder Glen, are evident from the roughened appearance of the ground and fence lines that introduce obvious linear features that provide *evidence of contemporary land use*. Elsewhere large, carefully sited fenced exclosures have allowed native woodland restoration without the perception of extensive fencing, so providing a stronger *sense of naturalness*.



- **The rugged hills of Ben More, Stob Binnein and Ben Ledi are widely visible, providing an arresting backdrop when seen from both within and beyond the WLA**

The hills that form the interior of this WLA extend from Beinn Chabhair in the west to Ben Ledi in the east. Those to the north of Balquhidder Glen are higher and generally more *rugged*, but all are massive, exposed and *physically challenging* to climb or cross.

Seen from upper Balquhidder Glen, the seven Munros to the north-west are *awe-inspiring*, accentuated by the horizontal emphasis of the glen below, which is largely empty apart from a single constructed track, ruined shielings and some sheep enclosures.



Views of the rugged northern mountain massif are *arresting*, both from within and beyond the WLA, where they are seen by large numbers of people. Ben More is particularly *awe-inspiring*, its slopes relentlessly steep and *physically challenging*. Although not as high as adjacent hills, Stob a' Choin is one of the steepest and most *rugged* peaks in this part of the Highlands and its ascent is also very demanding. Other hills are equally *physically challenging* to climb; the bealachs and ridges are exposed and the steep, rocky slopes and crags hold snow late into the season, increasing the *sense of risk*.



When seen from below, the *rugged* corries, waterfalls, rock and scree faces are *arresting*, the raw glacial features providing a strong sense of *naturalness*, accentuated by the occasional trees perched on rock outcrops.



The massive scale and rocky slopes of this *rugged* backdrop contrast strongly with the scale, colour and form of some human elements within the WLA, such as the dwellings and estate woodland along the base of the hills when viewed across Loch Katrine.

- **Strong contrast between secluded glens and plateaux which have a high sense of sanctuary and the exposed peaks where there are views to adjacent WLAs that seem part of a continuous mountain landscape**

Within many of the glens that penetrate the WLA, as well as some plateaux and lower-lying parts of the interior, the surrounding mountains limit visibility, allowing a strong sense of *sanctuary and solitude* as well as *remoteness*, particularly where few *human artefacts* are evident.



From the peaks and upper slopes there are expansive views in all directions and the eye is drawn by the adjacent hill ranges that form an *awe-inspiring* succession of rugged mountain ridges. Ben Lui and Breadalbane-Schiehallion WLAs (06 and 10) appear continuous from the northern parts and there is also a strong connection with Lyon - Lochay and Ben Lawers WLAs (11 and 12).

Wild land qualities thus appear to extend well beyond this WLA, contributing to a perception that the area is larger than it is, especially where intervening settled glens and forest plantations that would otherwise demarcate its physical *extent* are hidden from view by the steep valley landform.



- **Apart from the rich archaeological heritage there are few human artefacts within the WLA, although human elements around the outside are widely visible from the upper slopes and mountain tops of the interior**

The WLA is rich in archaeological remains, including shielings and abandoned field systems, especially in sheltered areas along many of the burns. There are deserted farmsteads and townships, some now surrounded by woodland, evidence of iron working and charcoal burning and vestiges of upland pasture and prehistoric burnt mounds. Most of these remains are small in scale, some barely visible and they consequently have a localised effect on the *sense of sanctuary and remoteness*.



Other than the few dwellings around the north-west tip of Loch Katrine, there is no habitation within the WLA. The 18th century military road from the Garrison at Inversnaid to Kirkton Glen, which passes through Glen Gyle, is now used as a farm track. ATV tracks extend into the lower hills and some shielings have been adapted as stock shelters, introducing *evidence of contemporary land use*, although these are mostly localised in effect. Access tracks are often the main *human artefacts* visible within the interior glens, although stock and deer fences, land drains, fenced woodland enclosures and occasional signs diminish the *sense of sanctuary and remoteness* in places.



The majority of stone dykes and fences are restricted to lower ground but some extend higher up the mountain sides. These linear elements can be quite noticeable in open ground, contrasting with the *rugged* landform and indicating past or active management of grazing regimes that reduces the *sense of naturalness*.

A high voltage transmission line impacts upon the *sense of sanctuary* in the western part of the WLA, particularly within Glen Gyle to the west of Loch Katrine where pylons are experienced at close range within the narrow, enclosed glen. Constructed tracks run along both shores of Glen Finglas reservoir and diminish the *sense of remoteness* and *sanctuary* of this part of the WLA.



Views from the peaks and outward-facing slopes reveal some prominent *human artefacts* outside the WLA that affect the *sense of remoteness, sanctuary* and *solitude* from within, particularly from the north-western part of the WLA, where traffic noise is audible from the north and west-facing slopes above Glen Falloch and Glen Dochart.

Extensive forest plantations within the adjacent glens of Strathyre and Glen Dochart are highlighted by their colour, texture and form, which contrast with the surrounding open moorland. Several hydro developments on burns flowing into Glen Falloch, Glen Dochart and Glen Finglas are currently under construction. Although the schemes lie mostly outwith the WLA, they are visible from the open slopes within, affecting the *sense of remoteness, sanctuary* and *solitude*. Construction tracks are often the most obvious feature prior to restoration, due to the contrast in colour against the subdued tones of the moorland. Wind farms impinge little on the wild land qualities of much of the WLA, although the nearby Braes of Doune wind farm diminishes the *sense of sanctuary* when seen from Ben Ledi.



Where these human elements are sufficiently extensive, or where there are cumulative effects from, for example, tracks, hydro infrastructure and forest plantations, they can disrupt the visual connection with adjacent WLAs and reduce the perceived *extent* of the wider mountain landscape.

Endnotes and selected references

ⁱ Peter Scott Planning Services (2010). *Developing the Network of Longer Distance Routes*. SNH Commissioned Report No 380

Site assessment carried out May and June 2016