

10 ATHOLL, GLEN GARRY, CATHÀR MÒR AND GLEN TRUIM

This section of the LCA extends northwards from the edge of the Park near Blair Atholl, following Glen Garry through the Drumochter Pass, to Dalwhinnie and the Cathàr Mòr and then north to where Glen Truim joins Strathspey. This character assessment is presented, working from south to north, as follows:

71. **Glen Fender**
72. Glen Garry: **Lower Glen and Blair Atholl**
73. **Glen Garry: Mid Glen**
74. **Glen Garry: Upper Glen**
75. **Drumochter Pass**
76. Glen Truim: **Upper Glen and Dalwhinnie**
77. **Cathàr Mòr**
78. **Glen Truim**

The numbers relate to the character areas identified on the following map.



10.1.1 *Landscape Character*

- A wide, shallow upper bowl, with long undulating, gently graded slopes extending down to a narrow, steep sided river valley which is likely to pre-date the ice age
- This landscape has not been heavily worked by rivers, and in places retains a deep layer of glacial deposit
- The floor of the bowl is further diversified by alternating areas of rock ribs, mounded melt water deposits and drapes of glacial till
- The shallow side slopes are barely contained, often extending between the low surrounding hills onto expansive reaches of wet moorland which extend to the foot of the steep sided ridge of weathered scree at Carn Liath
- Orientated west/east, the long south facing slopes are farmed, despite elevations of between 350 and 400m, with 18th/19th century improved fields extending across the glacial till which is drained by a series of narrow tributaries to the main river
- The fields, now fenced, are used for grazing and fodder crops.
- Occasional conifer shelter woods are located around the farms or between fields, while the upper slopes of surrounding ridges are covered in moorland which has been burnt
- Broadleaves, birch dominated, occupy the steep sided river gulleys, and then extend in scattered groups across the unenclosed north facing slopes, where there are also more extensive areas of conifer woodland
- There is a head dyke of quarried stone and occasional individual specimen trees, reflecting the influence of the estate policies extending up from the lower land
- The farms, placed at regular intervals across the wider terraces on the north side of the river, still retain the form and scale of the original 18/19th century architecture, and seem to be largely still in use
- This pattern of 18th/19th century farmsteads is the most obvious contemporary evidence of a long history of past land use, but in the hinterland there are extensive areas of prehistoric hut circles and field systems, pre-improvement farmsteads and occasional abandoned 19th century farms

10.1.2 *Landscape experience*

- The sense of elevation – and a certain amount of surprise at seeing fields planned at such a high elevation within the Park – is reinforced by the extensive views north and across high plateaux to the mountain hinterland

- The survival of the well defined pattern of the 18th/19th century distribution of fields and farms creates a landscape of relative historic integrity
- The area is secluded, and feels 'set apart' from Blair Atholl below

10.1.3 Relationship to adjacent character areas

This shallow land form creates easy opportunities for 'borrowed' views into the mountainous interior north beyond Glen Tilt and westwards along Glen Garry. Most people would enter Glen Fender through Lower Glen Garry and Blair Atholl, reinforcing the sense of elevation.

10.1.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The elevated, improved field system and strong integrity of the 18/19th century pattern and form of the farm steadings are only the most recent manifestation of a long settled area, where people have taken advantage of the south facing, gentle slopes of deep, well drained deposits.



The gentle south facing slopes of deep glacial deposits have barely been eroded by rivers



North facing slopes are less enclosed, with rough grazing and scattered birch woodland

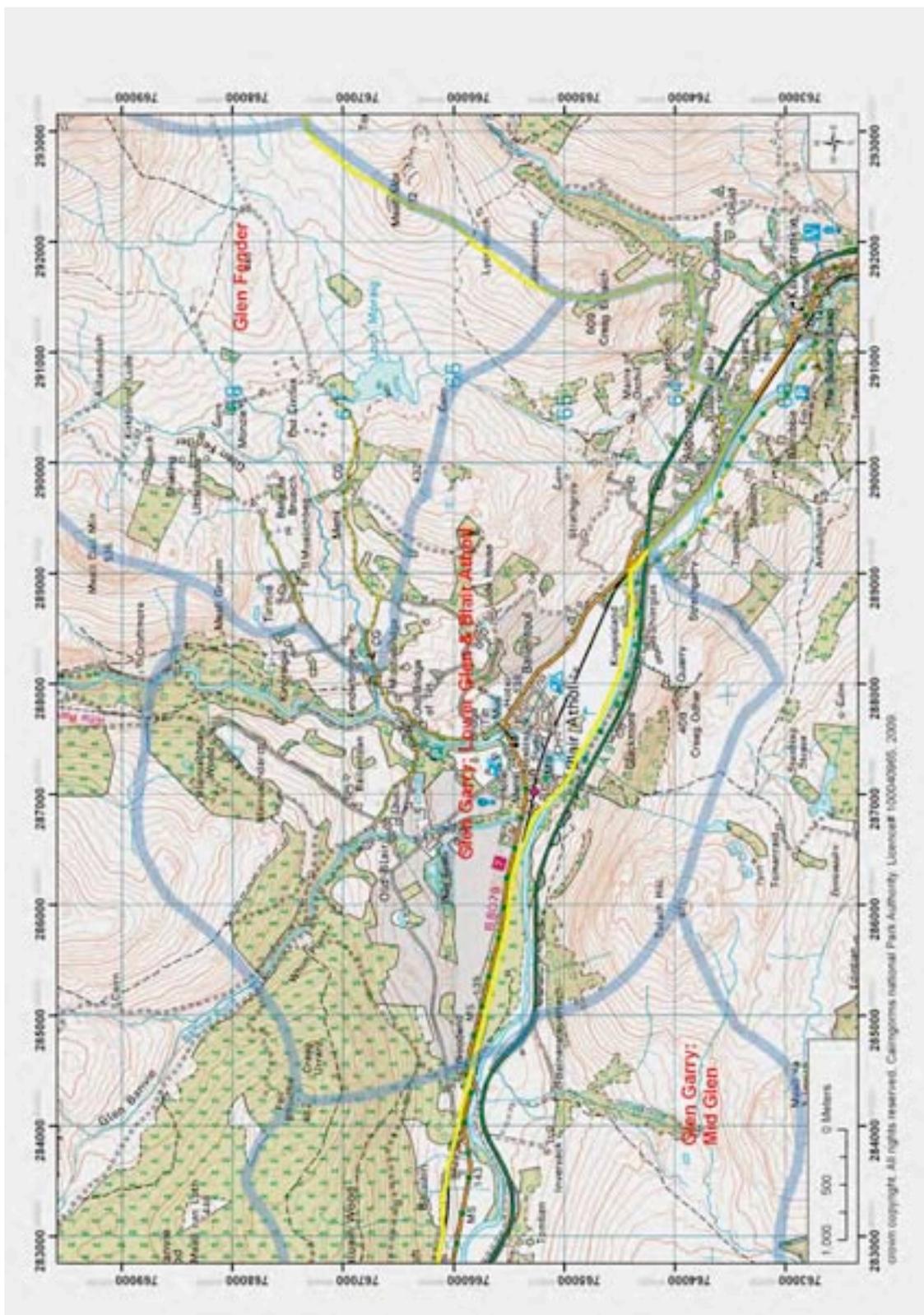


Moorland plateau and then the hills rise immediately from the elevated Glen Fender



Riparian woodland and a number of evenly dispersed 18th century farms across these elevated slopes

10.2 Glen Garry: Lower Glen and Blair Atholl



10.2.1 Landscape Character

- Surrounded by conical summits, the complex terrain of ridges, 'false' summits and undulations reflects the diverse composition of the metamorphic bedrock which has been subject to varied degrees of erosion
- The main valley has been deepened by glacial erosion, and the valley sides are rough and knobby where the bedrock is exposed
- Several rivers drop steeply from tributary valleys and converge to join the Garry at Blair Atholl
- This part of the glen combines gravelly glacial deposits with alluvial outlets from the tributary valleys forming terraces and mounds around an expansive basin of free-draining deposit which has been well-worked by the river systems along the floor of the glen
- The complex geomorphology is reflected in the diverse vegetation and land use, as well as a long history of settlement which has taken advantage of the south facing aspect, but it is also unified by the frequency and consistency of designed landscape features across a number of conjoined estates
- Policy woodland, specimen trees, parkland, field boundary trees, extensive commercial conifer woodlands on steeper slopes, semi-natural and riparian woodland are all present in this area
- The extensive designed landscapes form an easily recognisable element of wider 18th/19th century improvements, and regularly shaped fields occupy the undulating lower slopes and more level land
- These fields are often grazed, as is the extensive parkland, but there are also fields of arable crops adding further to visual diversity
- Small settlements are hidden within wooded settings, generally clustered around watercourses, while large houses, including Blair Castle, are located on more prominent sites
- The designed landscape of Blair Castle, an old clan chief base, includes centuries of historic land use focussed round this ancient, fortified site
- Built features associated with the designed landscapes are common – with walls and gateposts, bridges and walkways all combining to reinforce the extent of the individual estates
- The A9 occupies an elevated location along the southern side of the River Garry, and is partially screened by woodland
- North of the River there is a network of narrow roads on gravel terraces linking the tiny historic settlements and winding between small scale topographical features

- There are several waymarked access routes around Blair Atholl, as well as access to Blair Castle and visitor attractions in the villages.
- This character area is also the threshold to access into the heart of the southern Cairngorms, through Glen Tilt and lesser known passes, as well as south through the Pass of Killiecrankie

10.2.2 *Landscape experience*

- The influence of the designed landscapes is overwhelming, but travelling in and around the smaller roads and footpaths reveals the intimacy of the complex landform and the associated variety of features, both natural and historic, which reinforce the richness of this area
- The A9 gives fine views to the Beinn a' Ghlo massif to the east. Often this is where the first snow is seen on a winter journey north

10.2.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is relatively self contained, but does provide a 'threshold' to access routes into the hinterland of the Cairngorms massif, for example through Glen Tilt.

10.2.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The diversity of land form and land use, and the combination of prominent key focal points juxtaposed with features tucked away in more hidden, secluded settings, creates a rich landscape and experience. The designed landscapes created by individual estates underpin many of the distinctive features, and create a strong period setting.



Complex topography and diverse land use



This roundel of trees sits on a distinct gravel mound, while settlement is tucked into woodland

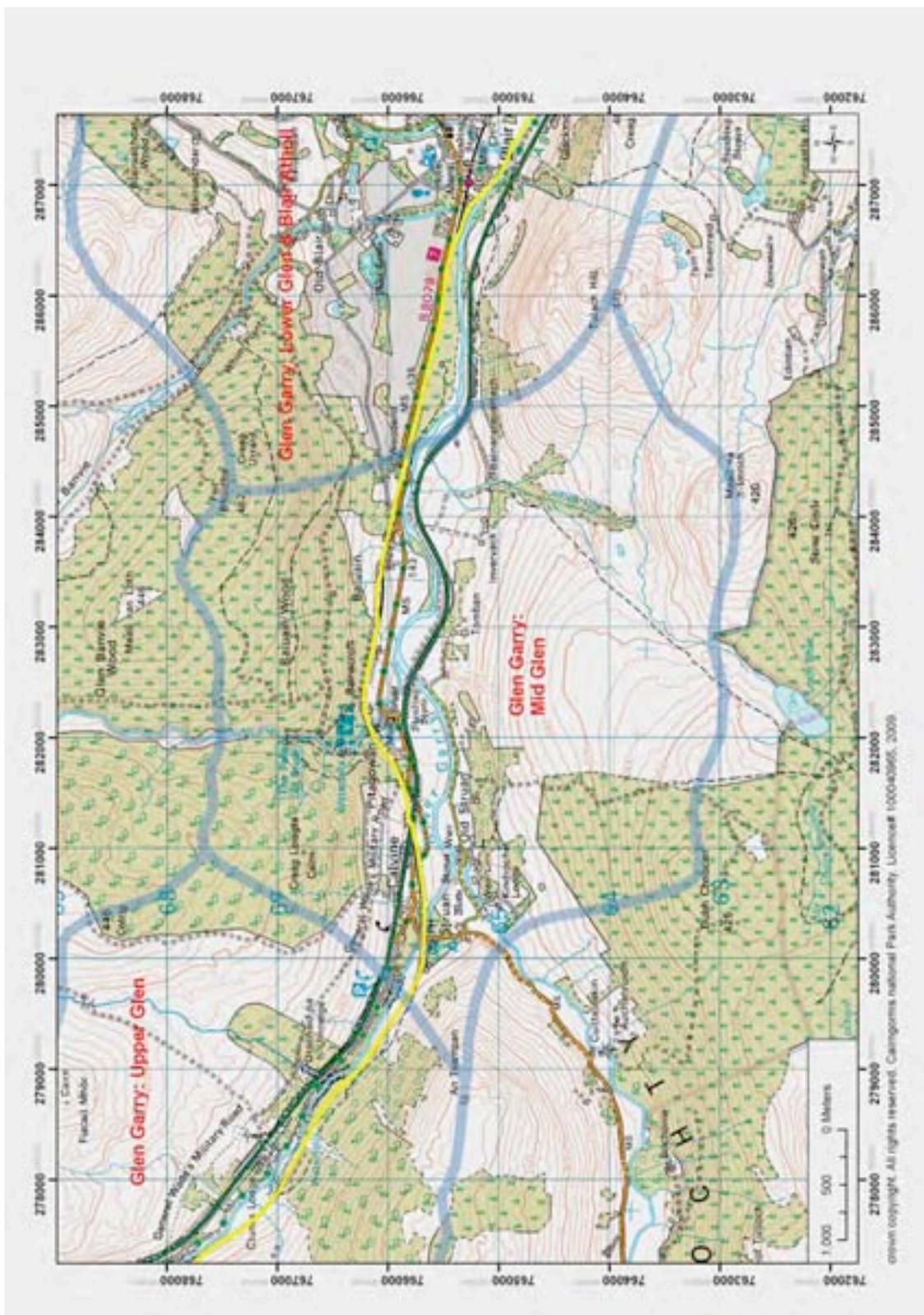


The River Tilt is one of several tributaries of the Garry



Blair Castle, elevated above the floodplain, and its policies

10.3 Glen Garry: Mid Glen



10.3.1 Landscape Character

- Two large glens – Glen Garry and Glen Errochty – merge to form a wide strath floor in this part of Glen Garry, aligned east/west, the confluence being marked by a striking medieval motte
- The side slopes of the glen are relatively evenly graded and simple slopes, extending down from ridges smoothed by glacier erosion which has also deepened the main valley
- Terraces and mounds of glacial-fluvial deposit sit along the edges of the strath floor
- The River Garry swings in wide meanders and has worked the gravelly deposits of the glen floor to form a relatively level floodplain
- Gravel builds up on the outer banks of the river, and the water flow is reduced by abstraction to reveal the gravelly riverbed
- Well established commercial conifer woodland extends along the south facing slopes of the glen, while the northern slopes are dominated by unimproved grassland and some heather, with naturally regenerating birch along the very lower slopes
- The level land along the strath floor, along with the most accessible gently graded lower slopes, are occupied by drained 18th/19th century improved fields
- These fields are fenced, with occasional sparse hedges or scant lines of trees reinforcing the regularity of the field pattern
- The line of the river and its tributaries stand out clearly as riparian woodland along the full extent of the glen
- Policy woodland around Kindrochat Lodge near Calvine and all the tiny settlements, as well as specimen trees of copper beech, ash, oak and sycamore reinforce the lowland character of this area
- Well settled, many of the regularly spaced farmsteads occupy sites likely to have been settled in an earlier periods, while the key villages – Calvine, Old Struan and Pitagowan/Bruar – are located at crossing points on the rivers which have been used for centuries
- The roads and railway converge at Calvine to crowd their way through a narrow part of the glen. Elevated on bridges and overpasses, these structures create some confusion and clutter, although this is partly absorbed by extensive woodland
- The visitor complex at Bruar offers an additional focal point for development, as well as provision for visitors to the Falls of Bruar, a spectacular gorge which has developed along a fault where the river drops steeply to the valley floor

- The glen is scattered with archaeological features, although they are only visible on close inspection

10.3.2 Landscape experience

- From the elevated A9, there are views across the strath to the north facing slopes, from where the regular spacing of the farmsteads is very easy to pick out
- The tangle of road and rail lines is most clearly experienced from more minor roads, from where the A9 seems out of scale with the detail of earlier settlement pattern and road network

10.3.3 Relationship to adjacent character areas

This area is largely self-contained, although it is partially inter-visible with the Lower Glen Garry character area, and provides a threshold to Upper Glen Garry when travelling north.

10.3.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The coherence of the 18th/19th century field pattern and associated regularly spaced farms, particularly on the north facing slopes, reinforces the historic character of this area. This is further emphasised by the clusters of small houses which are characteristic of the villages.



Terraces of gravelly deposit at the edges of the strath, and birch woodland on north facing slopes.



Extensive woodland on the south facing slopes overlooks the strath floor, worked level by the river

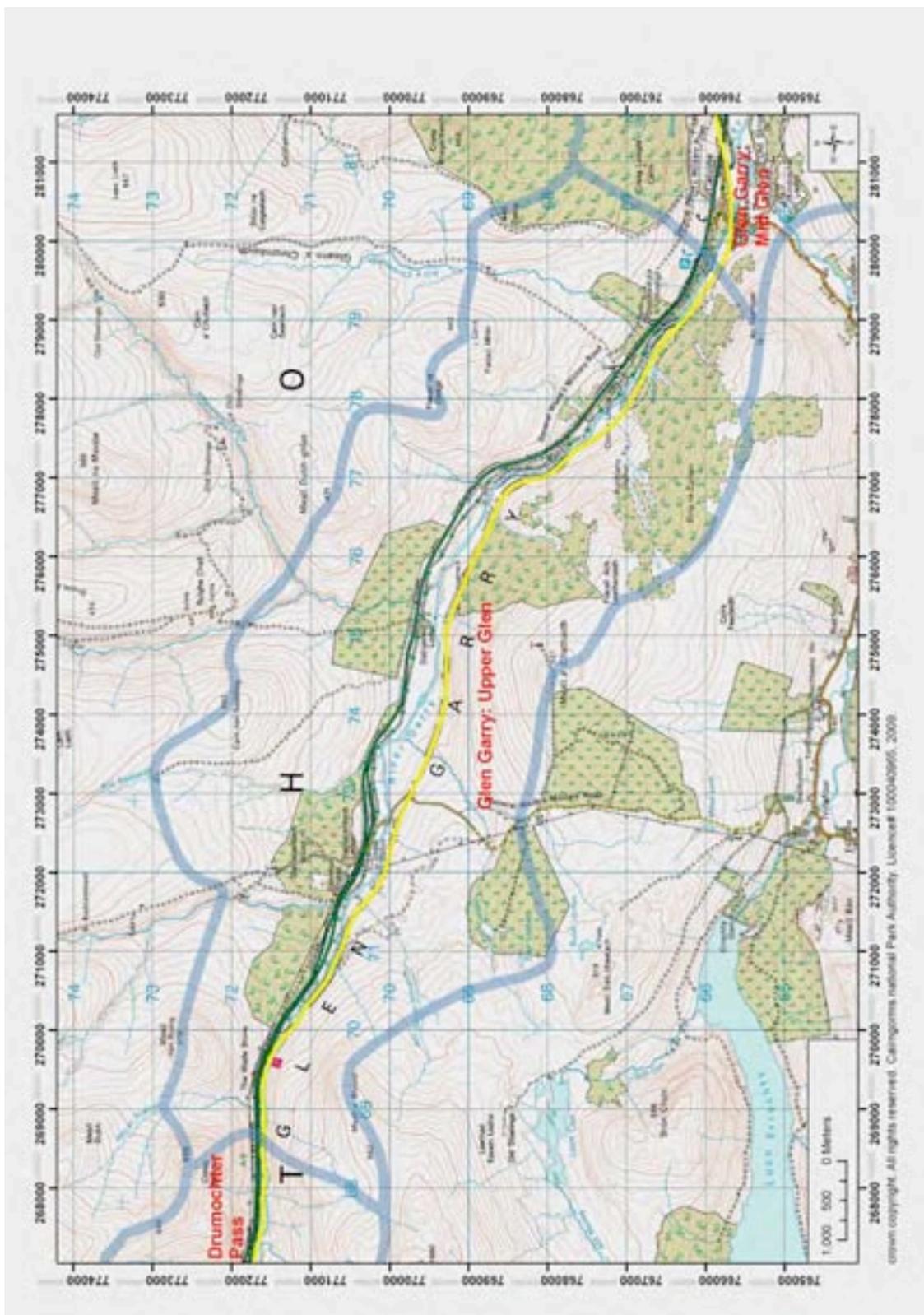


The River Garry, within riparian woodland, its gravel river bed revealed by the abstraction of some of its water



A 'motte' near the confluence of the rivers – one of a number of archaeological sites

10.4 Glen Garry: Upper Glen



10.4.1 *Landscape Character*

- The side slopes containing Glen Garry are gently graded, following the combined effects of glacial erosion and subsequent weathering of the bed rock into smooth, rounded, often elongated, forms
- These long smooth slopes and ridges frame a generally wide glen floor, although it narrows into a short section of more steeply sided and wooded pass around Clunes Lodge at its southern end
- The River Garry has worked glacial-fluvial deposits into a narrow floodplain, but abstraction has now reduced the water supply so that its gravelly riverbed is revealed
- Extensive woodland, including large areas of broadleaves and some of it relatively recently planted, extends across the side slopes
- This woodland is supplemented by small shelter woods associated with sparse settlement, naturally regenerating birch along the roadsides, distinctive clumps of remnant birch 'wood pasture' along the glen floor and riparian woodland
- There is evidence of past settlement along the valley floor, which extends back to medieval and post-medieval land use and settlement, but is most evident to day in the visible remains of 18th/19th century farmsteads, walled enclosures and the regular shapes of improved, grazed fields along the glen floor
- Settlement is now largely limited to a few large houses and buildings associated with managing shooting estates, with a series of lodges located on elevated land and set within woodland
- The A9 sits elevated and very close to the break in slope along the northern/eastern side of the glen, in part following the line of the Wade military road
- The railway is sited similarly hugging the bottom of steeper slopes along the western side of the glen

10.4.2 *Landscape experience*

- Travelling from the north, there is a marked sense of 'gateway' into Perthshire, as the narrow, enclosed Pass of Drumochter opens up into the wider Glen Garry
- Although they are visible from the A9, the remnant farmsteads and walled enclosures of the 18/19th century reward closer inspection and are an accessible reminder of more extensive historic land use

10.4.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This landscape area is relatively self contained, but its relative openness contrasts with the enclosed experience of the Drumochter Pass.

10.4.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The sense of openness, particularly when contrasted with the enclosure experienced in Drumochter Pass, contributes to the sequence of experience travelling along the A9, most significantly as a 'threshold' to the Perthshire side of the Cairngorms when travelling from the north. The remnants of historic settlement and land use – notably the ruins of farmsteads and the striking 'wood pasture' – are a feature of this glen.



The wide strath, low relief of the soil covered surrounding hills and shallow side valleys reinforce the sense of openness



Linear riparian woodland and wood pasture within unimproved grassland fields on gravelly terraces



Several lodge houses, surrounded by shelter woods, punctuate the glen



Woodland regenerating along the railway line, and planted on side slopes

10.5 Drumochter Pass



10.5.1 *Landscape Character*

- Steep, at times verging on sheer, side slopes contain this narrow, elevated pass which links Speyside to the Perthshire glens
- The drainage pattern that existed before glaciation is apparent in the V-shaped form of many of the tributary valleys that join this main trunk valley. Some of these valley heads acted as accumulation areas for snow during the ice age, and are now corries
- There are extensive debris slopes pockmarked with active run-off chutes and landslips while smaller water channels often simply drop down the hillsides in shallow gulleys
- The lower slopes and the edge of the glen floor are often covered in extensive mounded glacial-fluvial deposits which are very prominent if side-lit or after snowfall. This is classic, hummocky moraine, where individual ridges mark standstills in the retreat of a glacier
- The rivers, braided channels and their tributaries meander across the glen floor, sometimes fragmenting into a network of smaller drainage channels and wetland
- Heather moorland over the sides of the pass, and unimproved grassland along the glen floor, create a simple vegetation pattern, which in detail reflects the small scale topography – with heather on drier hummocks
- Conifer woodland is limited to small shelter woods associated with the very sparse settlement, and linear belts aligned parallel to the A9, to provide protection from snow
- Settlement is extremely sparse, with occasional buildings and infrastructure associated with managing shooting estates and the railway located on alluvial fans where tributaries join the main river system
- The A9, partially dualled, the railway and the overhead pylon line are packed into the narrow pass
- Infrastructure – such as road signs and the telecommunications mast at Drumochter – are very visible in this sparse landscape
- There are opportunities to walk into the interior, and access to munros and other summits from estate tracks is made more possible through car parks and laybys located at intervals through the pass

10.5.2 *Landscape experience*

- The sense of drama related to travelling through such a pronounced 'pass' is reinforced by the narrowness of the glen and the precipitous side slopes, as well as the shadows cast by the steep flanks of this pass

- Views from the elevated A9 into side valleys – such as where Loch Garry joins the Pass – create some relief from the sense of enclosure
- A change in weather is often experienced when crossing through Drumochter between southern and northern Scotland
- The infrastructure associated with the road and communications create visual clutter in this sparse landscape

10.5.3 Relationship to adjacent character areas

The pass is very self-contained, but as its character contrasts strongly with Perthshire to the south and Speyside to the north, the sequence of travelling between different characters heightens the sense of drama.

10.5.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

This pass has a pronounced ‘upland’ character. Sparsely and simply vegetated, wetland and low heath reveal the topography and the active scree slopes and land slips. Its simplicity has been compromised by the infrastructure, but the sense of travelling through an area where natural forces can dominate over human intervention prevails.



Hummocky terrain of glacial-fluvial deposits on the lower side slopes



The road and the railway on terraces above the glen floor, here above a stretch of wetland

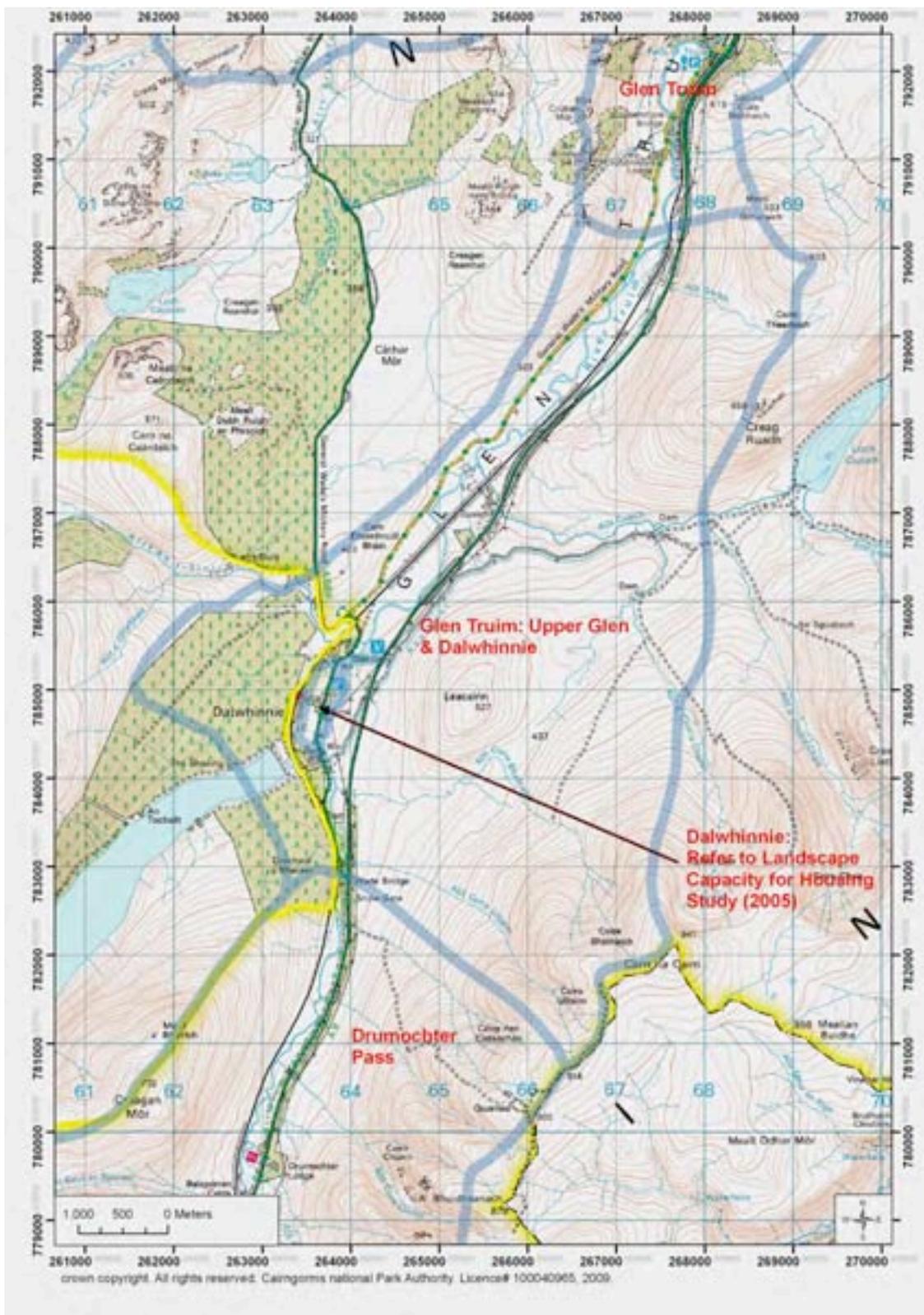


Loch Garry, visible in a relatively short glimpse view from the A9



The Pass closes in when travelling south from Dalwhinnie

10.6 Glen Truim: Upper Glen and Dalwhinnie



10.6.1 *Landscape Character*

- A wide floodplain contained by the shallow side slopes of Cathar Mor to the west and elongated rounded hills which sit in front of the steep escarpment which forms the edge of the Gaick plateau to the east
- The River Truim is fed by drains and tributaries as it meanders across the flat floor of this trench-like section of straight valley. It is prone to flooding and has braided reaches
- Occasional gravelly glacial-fluvial deposits and terraces at the edges of the glen floor stand out as features
- Sparsely vegetated, with little woodland – only scrubby willow and occasional broadleaves associated with the watercourses, as well as a single larger block of conifers – the glen floor is dominated by poorly drained grassland and wet heath, but is in part fenced into large fields
- The gently graded side slopes are dominated by heather moorland, but there are conifer woodland shelterbelts planted in horizontal strips east of the A9, to provide shelter from snow
- More extensive commercial conifer woodland extends over the east facing slopes to the south above Dalwhinnie and flanking either side of Loch Ericht, which is barely visible behind its dam face
- The A9, the railway, the minor road along the west of the glen, as well as the overhead pylon line, are all elevated above the strath floor, aligned lengthwise along the glen
- A series of rectangular settlement ponds, enclosed by embankments, are located towards the southern end of the glen and there are snow fences are aligned parallel to the A9
- There is very little existing settlement, or even evidence of pre mid/late 19th century land use until Dalwhinnie, where several distinct ‘clusters’ of development, including the prominent white painted distillery, are located on the A889

10.6.2 *Landscape experience*

- The glen feels elevated, expansive, exposed and open, an impression emphasised by the sparse vegetation and lack of cultivated land from any period, as well as the shallow gradients of the side slopes and low relief of surrounding hills, especially to the west
- The semi-natural vegetation pattern, the exposure and the powerful dynamism of the river all combine to create a sense that human intervention is easily overcome by natural forces at this elevation
- The snow fences and shelterbelts add visual clutter to the otherwise sparse and simple landscape

- Views to higher hills, including into the Cairngorms, are often framed by the mouths of side glens, or extend across the adjacent Cathar Moor
- The openness also ensures that traffic and infrastructure is clearly visible

10.6.3 Relationship to adjacent character areas

This character area is inter-visible with surrounding character areas, with 'borrowed' views of Glen Truim, as well as south towards the Drumochter Pass.

10.6.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The sense of elevation and openness, and the relative dominance of natural processes such as flooding, is pronounced, despite the presence of infrastructure and the settlement at Dalwhinnie. The simplicity of the topography is complemented by the lack of pattern in the vegetation cover.



From the A9, the expanse of the strath is clearly visible and the openness is easy to experience



Relatively simple, semi-natural vegetation, dominated by wet pasture within a trench-like valley

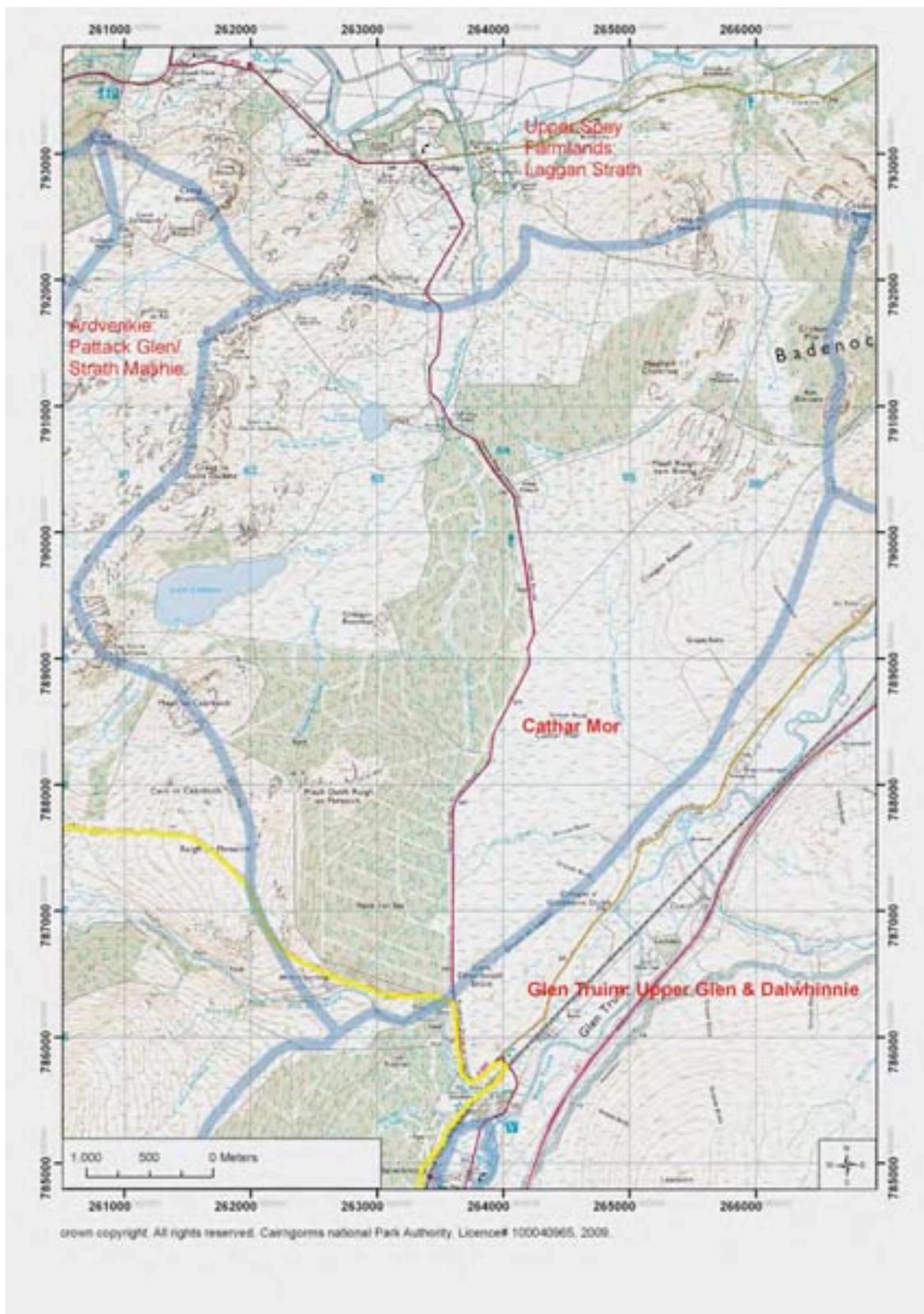


Dalwhinnie is located between the River Truim and afforested slopes



The River Truim, here in flood, is dynamic and can be unpredictable

10.7 Càthar Mòr



10.7.1 *Landscape Character*

- This expanse of undulating, raised moorland is an old valley floor which has largely escaped glacial erosion, because ice flow has tended towards adjacent valleys
- Flaggy Moine schist bedrock lies underneath a veneer of glacial deposits and peat bog, forming an irregular shaped bowl partially contained by craggy, irregular shaped hills, steepened and roughened by glacial erosion
- The ice-roughened hills to the east, around Cruben Beag, are particularly striking, with long slopes to the west and cliffs facing east
- Occasional hummocks of glacial deposits become more frequent to the north, where the terrain becomes more complex as it drops down to the Laggan Strath
- To the south west, a pronounced break in slope, up to 150m high, forms a well-defined edge to Glen Truim
- Long watercourses, with few tributaries drain to the Spey in the north and the Truim to the south
- Two lochs – Loch Caoldair and Loch Glas-Choire – are located west of the A889. The largest, Loch Caoldair is bounded by rocky crags
- Heather moorland, with occasional wet heath in shallow dips, extends over most of the moor, and is managed as grouse moor
- There is extensive conifer woodland across the moorland, in places reaching up to the rocky outcrops below the hill summits
- Settlement is limited to a single house next to the A889
- The A889 crosses the middle of moor on the line of one of Wade's military roads
- Several access routes and forest tracks lead into the hinterland especially to the west, including to Loch Caoldair

10.7.2 *Landscape experience*

- The moor feels open, expansive and often larger than it is in reality, despite the forestry, which is increasing the enclosure as it grows
- Travelling onto the moor along the A889, there is a strong sense of being elevated, which is reinforced by the steep slopes at either end, where the moor rises up above Glen Truim and Strathspey. This is most pronounced in winter, when snow drifts across the Cathàr Mòr corridor

- There are fine, panoramic views to the small enclosing hills and the more distant Cairngorms and the Monadhliath across the sweeping expanse of the moor
- Views down into the adjacent valleys are suddenly revealed when arriving at the crest of the elevated edges of the moor
- The simplicity of the vegetation and apparent lack of built structures means that occasional infrastructure, such as the telecommunications mast, is a visual feature
- The area around Loch Caoldair is relatively secluded, in part hidden from the road by woodland and well contained by hills

10.7.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This character area is very inter-visible with surrounding character areas, with 'borrowed' views of the surrounding mountains. In addition, it forms the southern boundary to the Laggan Strath, and partially contains Upper Glen Truim, and contrasts with these more settled, busier valleys

10.7.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

This landscape is dominated by the sense of elevation and expanse, the visual simplicity of the vegetation pattern, and the lack of settlement and infrastructure.



From the A889, the expanse of the moor is obvious, here with the knobby skyline of the eastern hills outlined beyond



Moorland, developed on hummocky glacial deposits along the edge to Glen Truim

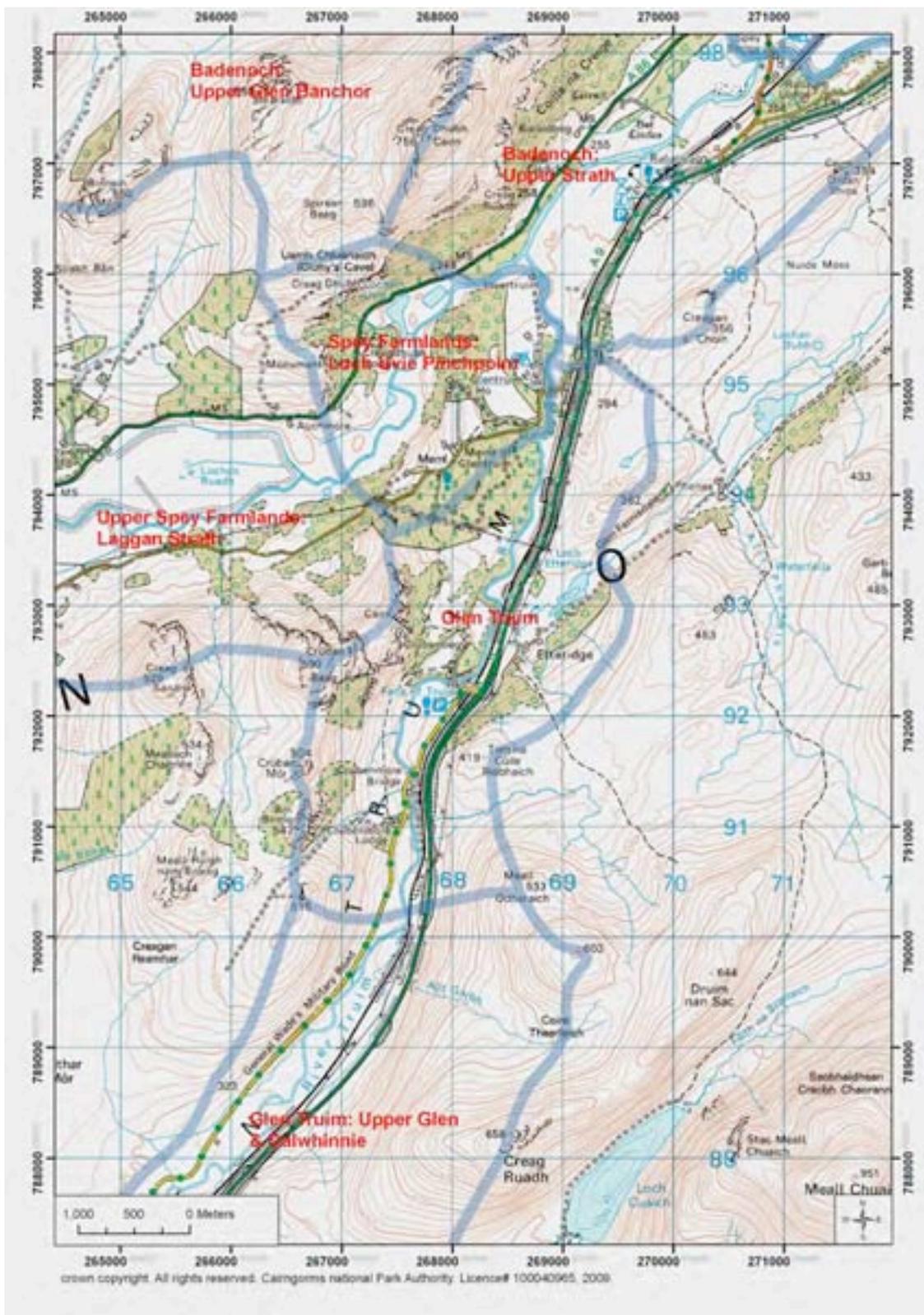


Autumn colour and young, planted forest where the terrain becomes more hummocky at the northern edge of the moor, before it drops down to Laggan strath



There is extensive woodland across the moor, partially obscuring views to the western hills at Ardverikie

10.8 Glen Truim



10.8.1 *Landscape Character*

- A sequence of low, rocky hill summits which have resisted erosion contain this slot like glacial valley to the west, while to the east, summits have been smoothed by glaciers into more rounded forms
- Glaciers retreated northwards through this narrow glen, leaving behind cliffs and over-steep slopes which resulted in post glacial rockfalls
- This glen sits just south of the confluence of the Spey and the Truim, and a small breach to the east joins with Glen Fernisdale, creating further physical complexity
- The River Truim winds across the narrow glen floor between gravelly terraces, dropping over a bench of rock relatively resistant to erosion at the Falls of Truim
- Planted woodland, including commercial conifer, occasional older belts of trees and recently established native woodland is supplemented by extensive regeneration of broadleaves and conifers along the steep slopes and the roadsides where grazing is limited
- Heather moorland extends over more open slopes
- Brighter green, 18th/19th improved fields, possibly overlying medieval and post-medieval agriculture, are still grazed on the flatter, better drained sections of gravelly fluvial-glacial deposits
- Three clusters of estate buildings – Etteridge, Crubenbeg and Crubenmore – are located on slightly raised, well-drained mounds, surrounded by these green fields and the abandoned fields of post-medieval farmsteads
- A Wade military road crosses this glen and goes through Glen Fernisdale, following the line of the Ericht-Laidon fault
- The A9 and the railway sit elevated, side by side, hugging the eastern edge of the glen floor
- Minor roads and access tracks extend access along the glens and there are routes up into the hills, possibly used largely for sporting access
- The Falls of Truim is a visitor attraction, from where there are way-marked walking routes to Laggan and around Glen Truim estate

10.8.2 *Landscape experience*

- Experienced from the A9, the glen appears to be well wooded, but from more minor roads and footpaths, the glen is experienced as an intimate scaled pattern of woodland and open ground which reflects the small scale diversity of the landform

- There is a sense of travelling through a 'pass', as this narrow glen links fertile, diverse 'Speyside' with the elevated and exposed character of Dalwhinnie and the Drumochter Pass to the south

10.8.3 Relationship to adjacent character areas

The glen is largely self-contained, with little inter-visibility with other areas, but it forms a distinct 'threshold' to the character areas of Speyside when travelling north, and up to the elevated, sparse landscape of upper Glen Truim and Drumochter to the south.

10.8.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

This landscape is diverse, with a range of different topographical features complemented by varied woodland and a pattern of fields, which pre-dates but is strongly associated with the individual clusters of the three estates. There is extensive regeneration, coupled with new planting, which reinforces the sense of an enclosed 'pass' when travelling through this glen.



The River Truim, with the rocky hill tops of this narrow glen in the background



Large houses sit on terraces, adjacent to grazed pasture. There a number of the small estate houses which cluster around this narrow glen



The narrow pass is framed by steep slopes and woodland



There is extensive planting and woodland regeneration

