

1.1.1 *Landscape character*

This area of undulating terrain is contained by steep wooded slopes to the west and north and gentle slopes adjacent to the basin-like landform of Abernethy Forest to the east

The Spey meanders through a fairly narrow floodplain between expansive areas of hummocky, undulating terrain of glacial terraces, moraine ridges and kettle holes which extend over the wide strath floor where Strathspey converges with the shallow glen which heads towards The Slochd

An extensive area of commercially managed pine woodland occupies much of the strath floor between two railway lines

Low lying, raised moorland lies on similarly undulating terrain to the west of the Spey. Although this is largely covered with heather, regeneration of young pine and birch is evident.

Occasional lochs and smaller lochans can be found within the woodland and this moorland, as well as in the more open farmland

Birch colonises ground sloping down to the Spey around the edge of the moorland and extends onto the golf course south of Boat of Garten

Extensive conifer woodland, often fringed with birch, covers the upper terraces and hill slopes containing this area to the west and north, hiding a series of burial cairns on what is likely to have been the northern skyline

Straight edged, 18th/19th century improved fields, most of which are grazed, are located on the narrow floodplain of the river or on well-drained elevated terraces along the B970, where farms probably reflect a pre-improvement settlement pattern

The farmed land on the western side of the strath combines later prehistoric and pre-improvement field systems with later improved, but small, fields

There is a line of farmsteads set back against the break in slope immediately north of the A95, while an evenly dispersed pattern of small farms and houses set in woodland is strung along the B970

Other buildings are often clustered in small groups and are generally sited on elevated ground, for example around Avie Lochan or at Street of Kincardine. Settlements are frequently in very wooded settings, merging with the adjacent woodlands

The junction of Strathspey and the road north to the Slochd is overlooked by a prehistoric fort (Tor Beag) near Avielochan to the west, which is now hidden in forestry

This junction means that this section of the strath is a focal point for transport links and in addition to the A9, the A95, minor roads and two railway lines extend through the length of this area

The A9 is frequently hidden in cuttings and woodland

The southern part of the Speyside Way crosses the low-lying, undulating moorland west of the river and the openness allows panoramic views of the dramatic northern face of the Cairngorm massif

This area is popular with walkers and cyclists and the seasonal operation of the steam train provides a further recreation focus

1.1.2 *Landscape experience*

When travelling on the B970 and the A9, the dense enclosed woodland alternates with areas of open farmed land

The slightly raised, undulating moorland and birch woodland at the core of this area has a semi-natural character

The heather moorland at the core of this area, close to the Spey, and the woodland across the strath floor, is an unusual feature, contrasting with the predominantly farmed land close to the river

The open character of the undulating moorland allows striking views to the Cairngorms massif

The settlements and fields within this extensively wooded area often have a feeling of being carved out of the forest

1.1.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

While views of the Cairngorms massif are possible from the open moorland at the core of this character area, the dense woodland restricts visibility of other character areas.

1.1.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The extensive woodland stretches into the floor of the strath, but the openness of the adjacent heather moorland allows people crossing the moor to view the Cairngorm massif. The distinct patterns of settlement, including regularly spaced farms and buildings and villages set within woodland are a particular feature, as is the strong sequential pattern of travelling through enclosed woodland alternating with open grazed fields.



A gravel terrace, with open moorland of heather in the valley floor offering fine views to the surrounding hills



Pastures located on well drained undulating terrain at the edges of the strath, with extensive woodland across the strath behind. There is a wet floored kettle hole in the foreground



Settlement at Avielochan (the loch is hidden behind the trees), tucked into hummocky deposits overlooking the loch



Other settlement is often located within a wooded setting



The narrow B970 winds through the woodland



B970 crossing open farm land alternating with woodland