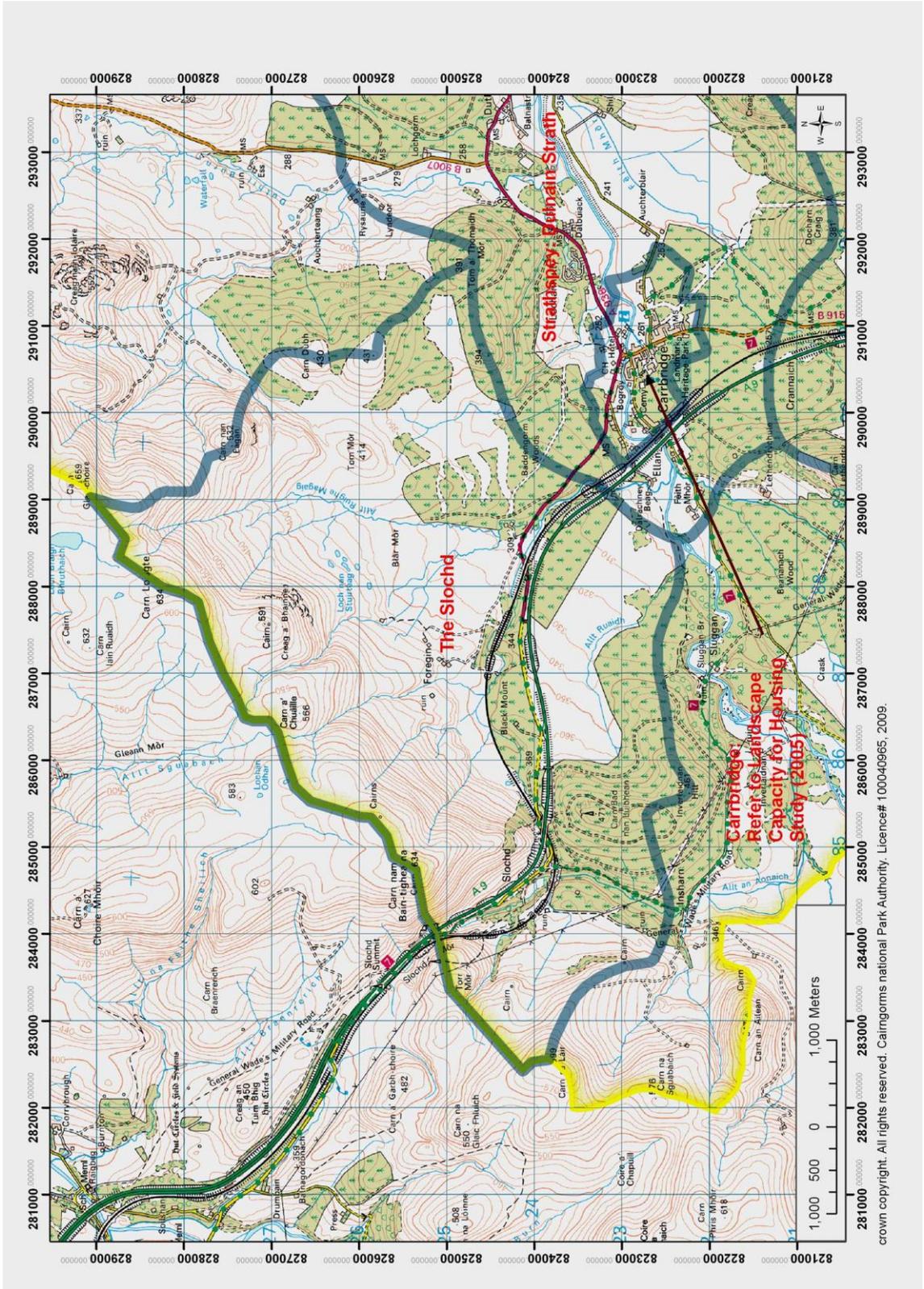


I.1 The Slochd



1.1.1 *Landscape character*

This wide, elevated basin of deep glacial-fluvial deposit, contained to the west, north and more tentatively to the east by surrounding low hills, slopes southwards to the steep sided valley of the Dulnain River

The northern edge of the basin is formed by a pronounced escarpment, that rises to the undulating plateau which marks the edge of the Park. This plateau represents a northern extension of the great Monadhliath tableland.

A deep, steep sided gorge where a large melt water channel has cut through this escarpment creates a dramatic pass which has been widened to accommodate the A9, as well as earlier roads and the railway

The rounded western hills are covered with conifer woodland, but the the northern hill slopes are covered with heather moorland

The basin floor is largely gently undulating heather moor, partly on peat, but conifer woodland extends across this moorland, and is regenerating across ungrazed heather

Birch woodland extends up watercourses, regenerating along less accessible reaches

Pockets of more regularly shaped, late 18th/19th century improved fields sit on flatter land on the lower hill slopes, associated with abandoned farmsteads

A small number of properties at the pass at Slochd sit overlooking the gorge and tucked below the A9

The older road hugs the edge of the gorge, while the railway sweeps in wide arcs, crossing the river on a high arched bridge. The A9 is elevated above them all, sitting in cuttings above the gorge before curving across the floor of the basin

Two telecommunications masts are prominent on the skyline on arrival to the Park along the A9 from the north

1.1.2 *Landscape experience*

The drama of travelling from the north through the narrow Pass and then emerging through the trees onto the expanse of open moor, with panoramic views to the south, creates a fine sense of arrival to the Park

The drama is reinforced by the contrast between the enclosure of the gorge and associated woodland and the openness of the basin

The gorge acts as a threshold when travelling in either direction

The elevation of the basin offers panoramic views south

When travelling along the old road, the narrowness and depth of the gorge is easily experienced, emphasised by the sound of the fast moving river far below

1.1.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area offers widespread views to the Monadhliath and more distant Cairngorm mountain areas, across the northern reaches of Strathspey.

1.1.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The contrast between the narrow enclosure in the Pass and the open expanse of the basin creates a dramatic entrance or exit to the Park.



The A9 curves through the Pass above the narrow gorge, its enclosure reinforced by woodland



The elevated basin and open moorland offer the opportunity for a dramatic panorama



Woodland over the western hills, and some regenerating pine



The high arches of the railway bridge over the gorge



Heather hills to the north and east, with a band of grazing land on the lower slopes



Broadleaved trees regenerating up the water courses

