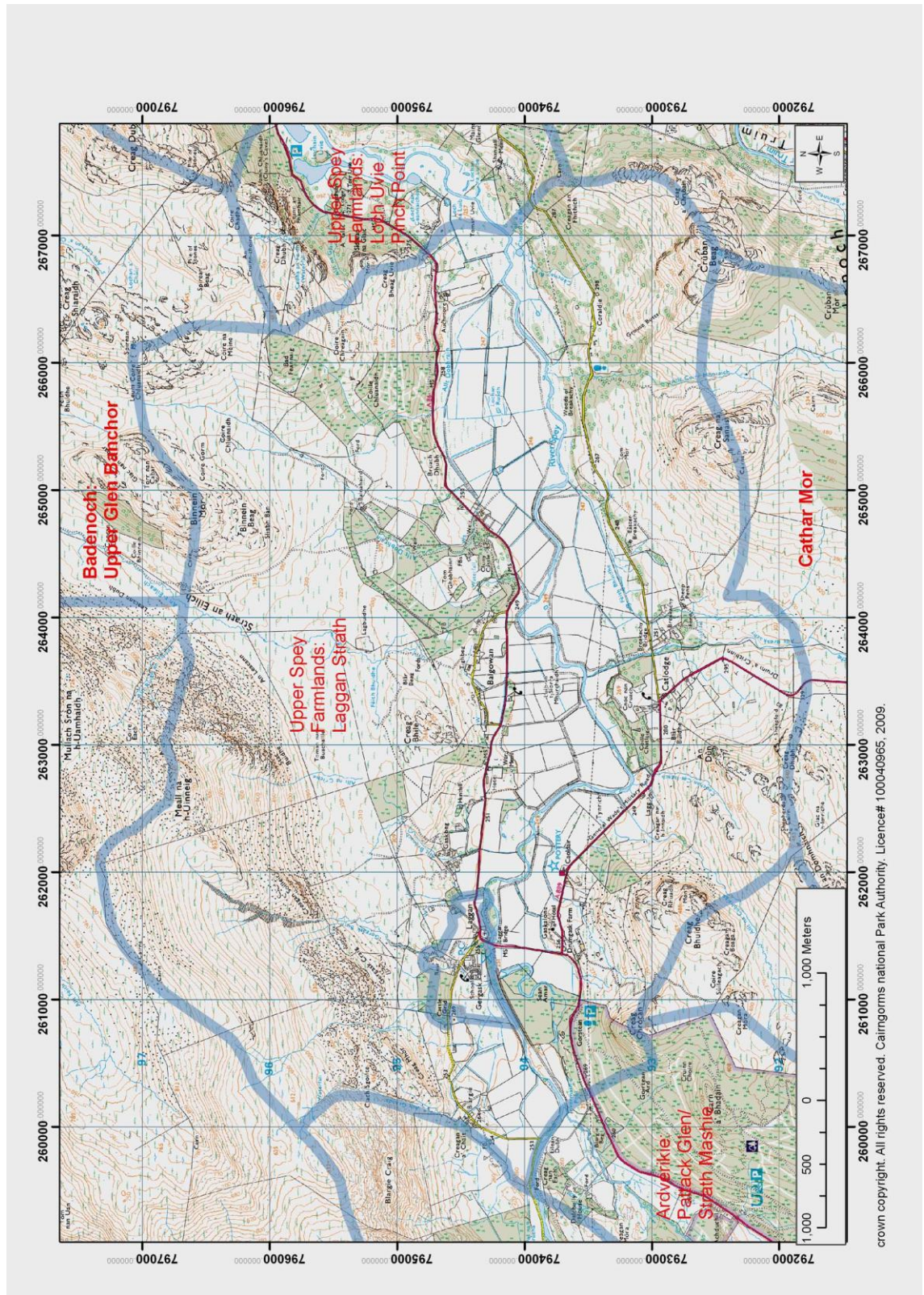


## Upper Spey Farmlands: **Laggan Strath**



### 1.1.1 *Landscape Character*

- The River Spey has worked the glacial-fluvial deposits to create a nearly-flat strath floor, edged with well drained gravelly terraces and hummocks, and further constrained by low, craggy hills. This is an inner valley set within an older, broader strath.
- The steep rock slopes that define the inner valley and which also form the break in slope that leads up to the high tops have been steepened and roughened by glacial erosion, with the formation of crags that face to the east.
- The strath is orientated east-west
- The hill summits consistently display exposed cliffs below which lie the accumulated loose rocks from rockfall and frost-shattering
- The River Spey, contained by pronounced embankments to discourage flooding, meanders across the strath floor, which is criss-crossed with drainage ditches dug in the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- The lines of the main drains have been fenced, creating straight-edged late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields, some of which have reverted to wetland where drainage has been abandoned. Fields above the flood plain, generally on its north side, also reflect 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improvement but tend to be slightly less rectilinear
- Grassland and fodder crops dominate those fields which are still cultivated, some of which extend up onto the well drained gravelly deposits along the sides of the strath
- Planted conifers become more dominant at the western end of the strath where there is also one single larger block of conifer on the strath floor
- Otherwise, woodland is varied, with small woodlands associated with individual farms, occasional policy features, more extensive mixed woodland, particularly at Cluny Castle, and semi-natural woodland, especially on north-facing slopes, creating a diverse mix
- On the south side of the floodplain, between and within these woodlands, the north-facing slopes retain traces – humps and bumps on the ground – of pre-improvement century farming
- Laggan is a focal settlement, located near a bridge crossing and road junction, and Catlodge is a cluster of buildings next to a road junction
- More scattered individual farms and houses are largely strung along the roadside – or follow the line of an earlier road – strongly linked to lower slopes but still elevated land, back against the break in slope
- Balgowan has a settlement pattern formed by a close sequence of individual farms and linear fields extending down across the strath

Buildings are kept off the better land but close to the road, reinforcing the edge between free draining cultivatable land and rough grazing

- The public roads are elevated above the strath floor, often located at a break in slope between high terraces along the lower edge of the hills
- The occasional hill summit is occupied by a cairn, monument or trees

#### 1.1.2 *Landscape experience*

- The roads, often located hard against the break in slope and elevated above the floodplain, wind around spurs and rocky outcrops, so that the effect when travelling is of a direct experience of the 'lie of the land'
- The small scale of the landscape is reinforced by the surrounding low rocky hills, the hummocks of glacial-fluvial deposit and the varied pattern of fields and woodland

#### 1.1.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

There is consistent visual interaction with the surrounding character areas, particularly the Monadhliath to the north and the Ardverikie Hills and Cathar Mor to the south, all of which provide a backdrop to the immediate strath. Much of the strath is overlooked by the dramatic summit of Black Craig and the fort at Dun-da-Lamh.



#### 1.1.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The pronounced contrast between the low, rocky, rugged, irregular hill tops and the level plain dominates. This juxtaposition is emphasised by the smooth texture of the cultivated fields across the floor of the strath which contrast with the rougher textures of the vegetation on the hill slopes. Settlement, the road and other infrastructure generally occupies a very particular location, sitting on the hummocky terrain between the two.



*The level strath floor framed by extensive glacial-fluvial deposits*



*Long terraces provide a backdrop for settlement*



*Black Craig and the fort of Dun da Lamh overlook the western end of the strath*



*Drainage ditches in the foreground and woodland on the lower hill slopes*



*Monuments top some of the hill tops*



*Policy woodland around Cluny Castle*