



## GUIDANCE FOR IDENTIFYING THE SPECIAL QUALITIES OF SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL SCENIC AREAS

Final version 29/1/08

*This guidance describes the method and resources required for identifying the special qualities of National Scenic Areas. It is aimed primarily at the landscape professionals who would lead on the work. For further information contact: James Fenton – [james.fenton@snh.gov.uk](mailto:james.fenton@snh.gov.uk)*

### Introduction

- a) To date, the only descriptions of most of Scotland's 40 National Scenic Areas are found in the original 1978 Countryside Commission for Scotland publication *Scotland's Scenic Heritage*. However, our understanding of landscape has developed significantly since then, and recent pilot NSA management strategy work has explored more systematic, transparent and robust approaches to defining the qualities that make each of these nationally important areas special.
- b) In 2006 SNH commissioned David Tyldesley and Associates (DTA) to review this special quality work and to produce a standardised methodology that could be used across the suite of NSAs. After producing such a methodology, DTA tested it across five representative NSAs.
- c) This guidance is based on the outcome of DTA's work, full details of which can be found in: David Tyldesley and Associates (2006). *Identifying the Special Qualities of Scotland's National Scenic Areas*. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No.255 (ROAME No. F05AC701). This report also includes a review of the methods that have been used to determine the special qualities of protected landscapes in the UK generally.
- d) The methodology described here is solely of a professional/expert nature, which does not involve public consultation nor seek to capture the views of the wider set stakeholders. The importance of these wider views is recognised, but it is intended that these will be captured through the inclusive process of preparing Management Strategies for individual NSAs. In effect this methodology produces provisional descriptions of the special qualities of NSAs from a national and professional perspective, which will be developed and endorsed with local input through the Management Strategy process.
- e) 'Special qualities' are here defined as the characteristics that individually, or when combined together, make an NSA special in terms of landscape and scenery. There may be other qualities that also make an area special (for example, cultural activities), but this guidance is restricted to determining the qualities related to landscape.

- f) Identifying these can never be a totally objective process because, at some stage, a judgement has to be made by the surveyors as to which particular qualities to include as 'special'. However, experience suggests that, for a given NSA, different teams of surveyors using this standardised, systematic approach will identify a common list of special qualities.

*Why determine special qualities?*

- g) Although NSAs have been in existence for over 25 years, they have a low profile amongst the people of Scotland as a whole. However it can be difficult to raise awareness of both individual NSAs and the suite as a whole without a clear statement of what is important about them. Hence identifying the qualities that make each one special will help communicate to both the public and the professional their importance.
- h) Management strategies are the tool for providing coordinated action to safeguard the landscape of NSAs for future generations. However, it is difficult to identify the management appropriate to a given NSA without a clear steer on the key features we are trying to safeguard. Hence the list of special qualities will form the core of any NSA management strategy.

*Approach to identifying special qualities*

- i) The approach here is a combination of desk study, where previously published work identified relevant to the landscape of the area is identified, and field work, where three standardised field sheets are used to aid identification of special qualities.
- j) It involves 10 steps which are described below and shown as a flowchart in Figure 1.

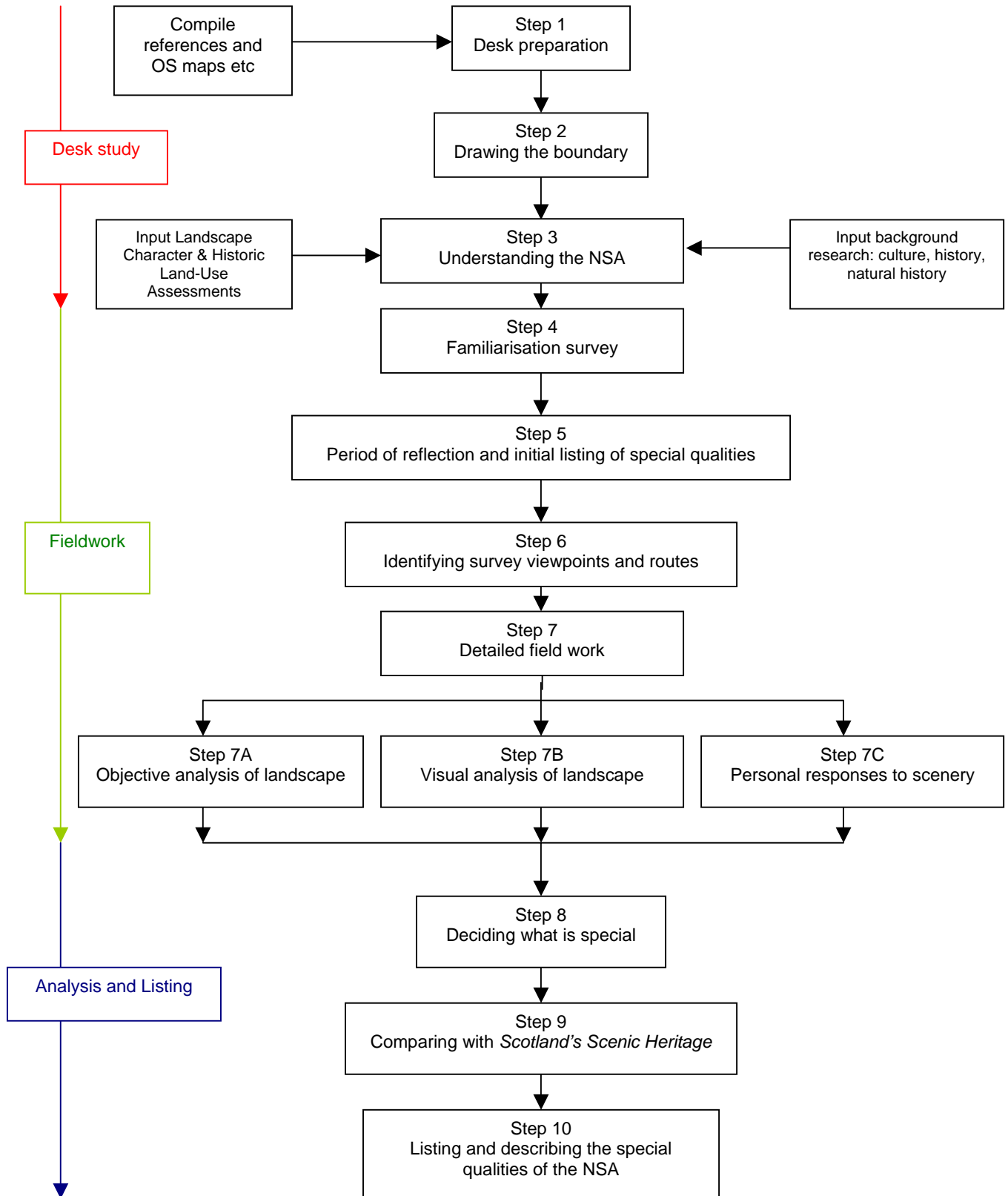
*Resources required*

- k) A team of at least two people is required for a given NSA because interaction with a colleague is a vital part of the process at all stages. The team should include a landscape architect and at least one other discipline such as an environmental planner, ecologist or recreation/land manager. Knowledge of the historic development of landscapes (time-depth) is also required by the team.
- l) The table below indicates the time needed to complete the whole process for a given NSA, based on a team who, although experienced, are not familiar with the NSA in advance. Although these figures are indicative, experience shows that there comes a time when further fieldwork results in no additional value.

**Guidance on Time Inputs**

Stage	Large NSA (person days)	Smaller NSA (person days)
Desk Study Steps 1-3	2-4	2-3
Fieldwork Steps 4-7	10-14	6-8
Analysis and Listing including writing-up Steps 8-10	3-4	2-3
Totals	15-21 person days = 1½-2 weeks for 2 people	10-15 person days = 1-1½ weeks for 2 people

Figure 1 – Process Flowchart



## 1 Step 1 – desk preparation

- 1.1 Examine the relevant entry in *Scotland's Scenic Heritage* to understand the reasons why the area was selected, and to see what the entry contains and (omits).
- 1.2 Obtain relevant boundary maps and regional Landscape Character Assessments (LCA) for the area (published in SNH's review series), and, where present, any earlier work that identifies the special qualities. Digitised versions of the maps can be obtained from SNH.

## 2 Step 2 – drawing the boundary

- 2.1 To appreciate the nature of the boundary and further improve understanding of the reasons for designation, the team should study and preferably draw the NSA boundary by hand onto Ordnance Survey maps. The boundaries of larger NSAs should be drawn at 1:50,000 scale, whilst smaller NSAs may be better represented at 1:25,000. Note that 1:25,000 maps will be necessary in the field for all NSAs.
- 2.2 This work may raise questions as to why some areas were included or excluded from the designated area, especially where the boundary is noticeably extended or indented to include or exclude specific areas. These queries should be noted in preparation for the fieldwork. Any differences between the boundary shown on the SNH GIS and either the map or written boundary descriptions in *Scotland's Scenic Heritage* should be identified on the maps.
- 2.3 **Output:** one or more Ordnance Survey maps at 1/25,000 or 1/50,000 scale, with the NSA boundary and any inconsistencies shown.

## 3 Step 3 – understanding the NSA

- 3.1 From the Landscape Character Assessment report(s) identify which Landscape Character Types (LCT) apply to the NSA. To aid understanding of the differences between the different parts of the NSA, and of the character of the area more generally, it may be helpful to draw the boundaries and names of the LCTs onto the OS Map used in step 2.
- 3.2 A summary sheet should be compiled for each LCT that falls wholly or partly within the NSA, based on the information collected. This provides a record of what should be there (which will be validated by field work), and paints an initial mental picture of the study area.
- 3.3 Box 1 provides an example of a LCT summary sheet for the Coastal Parallel Ridges LCT in Knapdale NSA. Note that this is not simply a listing of the characteristics set out in the LCA but a description reflecting the characteristics of the relevant units that occur in Knapdale NSA (ignoring the descriptions of features in Islay, Mull and Jura where the LCT also occurs).
- 3.4 Where LCTs appear to be quite similar in nature, consider merging them to reduce the number of units to be summarised to a manageable number. Some LCAs were undertaken in more detail than others and will identify subtle differences between two LCTs that share the same special qualities. When considering the merging of LCTs it will be important to focus on landform, land use and land cover.

- 3.5 An understanding of the historic environment and how the landscape has developed is essential because the NSA may contain an important time-depth that constitutes a special quality of the area.
- 3.6 Key landscape features could be evidence of agricultural practices related to important historic periods, such as abandoned crofting or improvement (enclosure) landscapes, or to industrial enterprises. Or they could relate to architectural styles and designed landscapes, which often portray strong visual evidence of cultural and historic design, taste and fashion, and which contribute to the scenic value of an area and influence its landscape and scenery.
- 3.7 A study of the Historic Scotland/RCAHMS Historic Land-use Assessment maps, where present, will provide useful background for assessing the importance of the historic environment in the NSA; as will reference to other relevant sources of information (for example, the inventories of Gardens and Designed Landscapes, and HS/RCAHMS Pastmap datasets). A summary of these key aspects could be included in Box 1 (if not already covered the Landscape Character Assessment).

**Box 1: Example of a Summary Sheet for a Landscape Character Type – Coastal Parallel Ridges, Knapdale. From the Argyll LCA.**

**Key Characteristics**

Distinctive, long, linear, narrow steep-sided rocky ridges with a strong SW – NE alignment formed by tightly folded metamorphic, Dalradian rocks

A flooded coastline, where gullies / glens between ridges are deeply scoured by glaciers, deepening the narrow gullies which are inundated by the sea

The ridges break down at the coast to form chains of rocky islands

Horse-shoe shaped sandy bays and extensive inter-tidal boulder strewn mudflats

Stunted oak-birch woodlands on the rocky ridges separating poorly drained narrow gullies / glens with marginal pastures, marshes or lochs

Small blocks of coniferous plantations

Stone dykes enclosing fields along narrow roads which tend to follow coast and run out as *culs de sac* at end of peninsulas

Small settlements concentrated in coastal coves

Small estates, derelict crofts and cottages

Rich variety of archaeological sites

Part of the transition from sea to upland parallel ridges LCT

- 3.8 Additionally, artistic, cultural, historic and scientific associations are frequently referred to in definitions of special qualities. For example Ruskin and Scott are associated with Lake Katrine in the Trossachs, and Queen Victoria and subsequent monarchs have influenced the scenery of Royal Deeside in Deeside and Lochnagar.

**Box 2: Example of summary notes on historical / cultural associations and other background information – The Trossachs NSA.**

'The Trossachs' comes from the Gaelic 'bristled country', referring to its vegetation. The original boundary of the area known as The Trossachs extended from Ben A'an in the north, Ben Venue in the south, Loch Katrine to the west and Loch Achray to the east. The NSA boundary extends this area further southeast to include much of Queen Elizabeth Forest Park and the ridge of the Menteith Hills. Today the area widely known as The Trossachs extends still further beyond the NSA boundary.

Others writing about the area have observed that the area's historical and cultural interest adds to the natural beauty, rural scenery and wildlife, animating and offering a romantic introduction to The Trossachs for many of today's visitors.

Countless writers, poets and artists have been drawn to its loch shores, including William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, James Hogg and John Ruskin. But it was the publishing of Sir Walter Scott's romantic poem 'Lady of the Lake' in 1810 and 'Rob Roy' in 1817 that the scenic charms of the area came to popularity and established The Trossachs as a major tourist attraction.

In his poem 'Lady of the Lake', which refers to Loch Katrine, Scott wrote:

*So wondrous wild, the whole might seem  
The scenery of a fairy dream*

And specifically about Loch Katrine he wrote:

*Where, gleaming with the setting sun,  
One burnished sheet of living gold,  
Loch Katrine lay beneath him roll'd  
In all her length far winding lay,  
With promontory, creek and bay,  
And islands that, empupled bright,  
Floated amid a livelier light,  
And mountains, that like giants stand,  
To sentinel enchanted land*

In his novel 'Rob Roy', Scott wrote of the tales of Rob Roy MacGregor and the 'children of the mist', referring to his followers the Clan MacGregor who lived amidst the wild hills. Rob Roy was born in Glen Gyle at the western end of Loch Katrine and is buried near by. The famous Duke's Pass is named after Rob Roy's arch rival, the Duke of Montrose.

Bordering the NSA to the north, Glen Finglas was possibly one of the most popular of the royal hunting forests, with many Kings and Scottish Earls hunting there between the early 1300's to the 1700's. Many veteran trees still remain.

Queen Victoria visited the area on many occasions, and loved it so much she had a holiday house built overlooking Loch Katrine. She is known to have stayed in what is now the Tigh Mor Trossachs hotel, a private, high quality hotel for members of the Holiday Property Bond, with its distinctive turrets and splendid location overlooking Loch Achray.

The very routes once followed by Rob Roy's cattle drovers and the horse-drawn carriages of 19<sup>th</sup> Century tourists, have become the main arteries, which now carry modern traffic over Duke's Pass. The Trossachs Trail is a signposted car tour that takes drivers north from Aberfoyle and over the Dukes Pass to take in the spectacular views of an area commonly regarded as 'the highlands in miniature'.

Since Sir Walter Scott's time, Loch Katrine has changed as a result of it being dammed in 1859 at its eastern end to provide a clean water supply to Glasgow. The loch's popularity now owes much to the presence of the last steam driven passenger vessel operating in the UK, fittingly named the Steam Ship SS Sir Walter Scott, which sails up and down Loch Katrine.

- 3.9 However, historical association is not in itself sufficient to merit consideration as a special quality in an NSA. To be relevant, an association needs to link to landscape or scenic value. Thus, an association with a writer *per se* is not in itself sufficient, but if the writer wrote about the landscape and scenery, and / or set the story in the scenery of the NSA, which was described in the written work, that association could be relevant to a NSA.
- 3.10 Similarly, association with a battle, visits by monarchs, or a birthplace would not in themselves qualify as special qualities for a NSA, whereas they may (and do) for a National Park with its cultural heritage dimension. However, where the battle story is embedded in the consciousness of those experiencing the landscape (e.g. Glen Coe), or where royal association has influenced the landscape itself (e.g. Deeside), it could be regarded as a special quality. See Box 2 for an example of such associations.
- 3.11 Use both written and web-based sources to identify any important associations with the landscape and scenery of the NSA. This work may be supplemented by visits to visitor and information centres and observations and discussions with local people at the time of fieldwork.
- 3.12 **Output:** a map (the one resulting from step 2) with the LCTs mapped and named; a summary sheet describing the key landscape characteristics of each LCT occurring in the NSA, drawn from the LCA and research into the historic environment (see Box 1); and a summary of the historical and cultural associations that may be influential on the appreciation of the special qualities of the NSA (see Box 2).

#### **4 Step 4 – familiarisation survey**

- 4.1 The survey team should undertake a comprehensive familiarisation survey of the NSA before detailed fieldwork begins. This overview will form the basis of a systematic series of descriptive observations that follow later. It is important that this element is afforded sufficient time – a minimum half day is required in the smallest NSAs rising to two or three days for the largest.
- 4.2 The familiarisation survey should cover as much of the accessible parts of the NSA as feasible, the team viewing and experiencing all the component LCTs, with frequent stops and short excursions to viewpoints. Digital photographs help to record the variation and character of the NSA, and are used again in later stages. Sketching, whilst useful, is time-consuming.
- 4.3 While it is not suggested here that each LCT be used as a survey unit, they do present a sound basis for ensuring that all representative landscape elements are understood and accounted for in subsequent stages of survey. Reference to the pre-prepared LCT summaries will be an important element in this familiarisation process.
- 4.4 **Output:** a series of annotated maps, notes, sketches and photographs; the likely number and location of viewpoints necessary to capture all of the special qualities; an assessment of whether 'routes' will also be necessary, and if so which routes (see paragraph 6.2).

#### **5 Step 5 – period of reflection and initial listing of special qualities**

- 5.1 A period of reflection by the team should be taken between the familiarisation survey and the fieldwork. Individual reflection and group discussion provides an opportunity to consolidate understanding and appreciation of the tangible and less tangible

characteristics of the NSA. This period could be overnight, with a discussion the following morning before immediately starting detailed fieldwork.

- 5.2 An initial listing of the NSA's special qualities should be recorded by the team at this stage (which will later be refined), based upon the desk study, the landscape character assessment, the familiarisation survey and the wider understanding of the NSA's historic and cultural associations. Revisiting *Scotland's Scenic Heritage* citation may also prove useful in the light of experiencing the NSA at first hand.
- 5.3 The spatial variation of the qualities that are emerging should be considered. For example, if it becomes apparent that distinct qualities are likely to be associated with a particular part or parts of the NSA, then these different areas could be identified and mapped. Much will depend on local circumstances, the size and homogeneity of the NSA and the nature and distribution of the landscape character types.
- 5.4 **Output:** a preliminary list of special qualities, an example of which is provided in Box 3.

## **6 Step 6 – identifying survey viewpoints and routes in the NSA**

- 6.1 The key to the detailed fieldwork is the identification of a series of representative viewpoints from where the NSA can be observed, described and analysed with respect to special qualities. Their selection will depend on the nature of the area. For example, some parts of an NSA may be assessed from elevated viewpoints, other areas from a series of viewpoints along a road or a path crossing the NSA. The selection should consider important viewpoints shown on the OS Landranger maps, together with other obvious viewpoints such as mountain summits, bridges or headlands.
- 6.2 As well as static viewpoints, routes can also be chosen to embrace the experience of moving through the scenery of the NSA, providing qualities additional to those experienced from viewpoints. Routes are not essential if viewpoints will capture all the special qualities of an area, but are useful where the experience of an NSA 'unfolds' as one travels through it, or where scenery changes noticeably in relatively short distances; or where a series of 'surprise' views open up along a road or path.
- 6.3 Sufficient viewpoints and routes to be representative of all parts of the NSA must be identified. If a particular LCT occurs extensively, or in more than one location, it may be sufficient, especially in the larger NSAs where access to all parts is not possible, to select sample viewpoints. To ensure that the variations of all parts of the NSA are covered it may be necessary to draw up spatial units as mentioned in paragraph 5.3 above, with each unit sampled appropriately.
- 6.4 Survey viewpoints and routes should be identified on the day following the completion of the familiarisation survey, irrespective of when the later field work may be undertaken.
- 6.5 **Output:** a list of the general or precise location of viewpoints, and the location of any routes which will be used as a basis for detailed fieldwork in step 7.

**Box 3: Example of an initial list of special qualities drawn up following familiarisation work – Assynt-Coigach NSA.**

Dramatic, rugged, exposed, isolated landscape.

The scale and extent – large unspoilt areas – of the landform.

Unique seascape with a combination of scattered islands close to the shore.

'Edge of world' experience on the rugged, exposed coast.

Sparsely populated, with few small settlements and dispersed crofting areas, yet accessible by determined tourists, walkers and anglers prepared to travel.

Larger settlements such as Ullapool (just outside the NSA) and Lochinver comprise sheltered harbours. Other settlements are on flatter land where enclosed grazing and cultivation is easier. Here the brighter greens of pastures contrast with the monotone more sombre heather moorland (colours dependent on season but contrast in colour would remain).

Narrow, long, winding roads follow the base of the mountains and loch shorelines, offering dramatic views of ever changing scenery.

Extensive areas are inaccessible except on foot, giving a sense of remoteness and quiet. Feeling at one with the natural landscape. A core of wildland.

Lack of trees. Coniferous forests are notable by their absence, names such as Inverpolly Forest, Drumrunie Forest and Inchnadamph Forest refer to open deer forests.

Steep-sided glens, with narrow bands of sheltered broadleaved woodland, hidden away in the landscape but when encountered they break up the wider, more exposed, prevailing landscape.

Strong Cnochan landscape of exposed, hummocky terrain with extensive lochs / lochans, over much of the central part of the NSA – mysterious, secretive, unsettling.

Internationally famous diverse geological character, being the birthplace of major geological thinking by Benjamin Peach and John Horne. Extensive areas of Lewisian Gneiss and Cambrian Limestone contrast with Sandstones, Quartzite and Syenite. Steep, dramatic, exposed sheer cliffs at Inchnadamph and Knockan are unique examples of the Moine Thrust, where overlying schists have been thrust westwards over much older rocks. Visitor attraction at Knockan Crag that tells the story of the unique geology.

Dramatic mountainous lone peaks with unique outlines and distinctive shapes which are easily recognisable and referred to by their individual names eg Ben Mor Coigach, Ben More Assynt, Suilven, Canisp and Stac Pollaidh. Provide recognisable land marks throughout the area

Unique combination of smooth moorland and peat bog running into rocky moorland / cnochan running up to irregular hill ranges and lone mountain peaks. Exposed, huge glacial erratics give a rugged and desolate beauty.

Unique? combination of mysterious, majestic peaks often with caps of white quartzite and light grey lichen, and often shrouded in mist and low cloud, contrasting with the deep, dark, horizontally flat lochs.

More managed areas of traditional crofting, where sheep grazing and muirburn dictate the changing appearance of the landscape, such as at Ben Mor Coigach.

Wildlife, such as in the Scottish Wildlife Trust's reserve at Ben Mor Coigach, where northern buckler-fern, trailing azalea and dwarf juniper are less common plants to be found. Ravens and ring ouzels nest in the hills, and red grouse, ptarmigan and twite feed amongst the heather. Stonechat, whinchat, redpoll and wheatear are found down on the crofts. Grey seals and otter frequent the shoreline and islets.

## Step 7 – detailed fieldwork

### *Introduction*

- 7.1 To identify special qualities it is necessary to consider three aspects: the objective analysis of the landscape; the visual analysis of the landscape; and personal responses to the landscape. Each of these is recorded in turn for each viewpoint or route on three field sheet proformas (see Appendix 1). For routes, the field sheets may be completed after traversing part of the NSA, without stopping but observing and mentally noting the features as you travel through the area.
- 7.2 The field sheets should be used simply as prompts and your own terminology should be used where the prompts do not fit well with what you see and experience. The nature of the view should also be recorded. The weather can have profound effects on scenery by changes in the intensity, direction, elevation and clarity of light, the sky can be a dominant or co-dominant element. Whilst you can only record the effects of weather that you see on the visit, from your own knowledge and experience you will be able to anticipate the range of effects and where the weather, light and sky are likely to be important characteristics of landscape.
- 7.3 The three field sheets for each viewpoint or route will later be summarised in a table, which will form the basis for selecting the special qualities. Appendix 2 gives examples of such summaries but also gives a flavour of what the field sheets should be trying to record.

### *Step 7A – Objective analysis of the landscape (field sheet 1)*

- 7.4 For each of the viewpoints or routes complete the description of key characteristics set out on field sheet 1 under the following headings: **landform, land cover / land use, settlement pattern, specific features** and **wildlife**. The object is an objective record of key characteristics, with an emphasis on the visible and physical characteristics. You are not at this stage trying to decide what is special or important, but what is typical or characteristic of the NSA; or rare / unusual / untypical. You will not be trying to record every variation and every detail. Where there is an obvious time-depth in the landscape, this can either be mentioned explicitly on the sheet or be implicit in the objective features listed.
- 7.5 **Landform** should be described in bold terms, ignoring minor variations but recording subtler changes to landform where these are distinctive and characteristic. Often the landform in NSAs exhibits important contrasts – steep slopes falling to a flat floodplain, steep cliffs at the edge of wide, flat plateaux – so the relationship between topographical features is important to record.
- 7.6 **Land cover / land use** determines the surface vegetation ranging from bare rock to dense woodland and from saltmarsh to moorland. Ignore minor land uses but look out for pockets of contrasting land cover as these can add to the variety and diversity of areas often cited in the NSA descriptions. Water may be in the form of the sea, sea lochs and freshwater lochs, rivers, burns etc and all their features including especially waterfalls, rapids, shores, intertidal features, etc. You should record not merely presence but characteristics of the water, speed of flow, sound, tidal movement, and the effects of light and any contrasts with the shape colour or texture of the land.
- 7.7 **Settlement pattern** includes all kinds of built development and infrastructure in the landscape, including towns, the pattern of steadings and individual houses and crofts,

and the occurrence of prominent buildings such as castles, kirks and monuments such as obelisks. Record the relationship of buildings and settlement to landscape features such as rivers, spring lines, shorelines, bridges and other crossing points, and the absence of settlement and evidence of previous settlement.

- 7.8 Some NSAs may have **specific features** that may be single points (lighthouse or tower) or linear (roads or former shorelines) that are characteristic of the area.
- 7.9 **Wildlife** should be recorded here where it has a strong influence on the character of the landscape, for example, the sea bird colonies of Shetland, and the colourful flower rich areas of the South Uist Machair.

*Step 7B – Visual analysis of the landscape (field sheet 2)*

- 7.10 Field sheet 2 is used to record the visual aspects of the landscape and is divided into **visual analysis** and **visual experience**.
- 7.11 **Visual analysis** identifies the relationships between the different landscape elements recorded on field sheet 1; for example, the location of settlement to topography, or juxtaposition of landform features. This step should identify all relationships, noting compositions, links, juxtapositions and contrasts in the landscape. Bear in mind that it is often the way in which characteristics combine or interact that make the commonplace special.
- 7.12 **Visual experience** involves the more subjective characteristics of an NSA but is usually at the heart of its selection for designation. To structure the description a series of prompts are suggested under the headings of scale, openness, diversity, colour and texture, form and line, movement, weather, other notable characteristics.

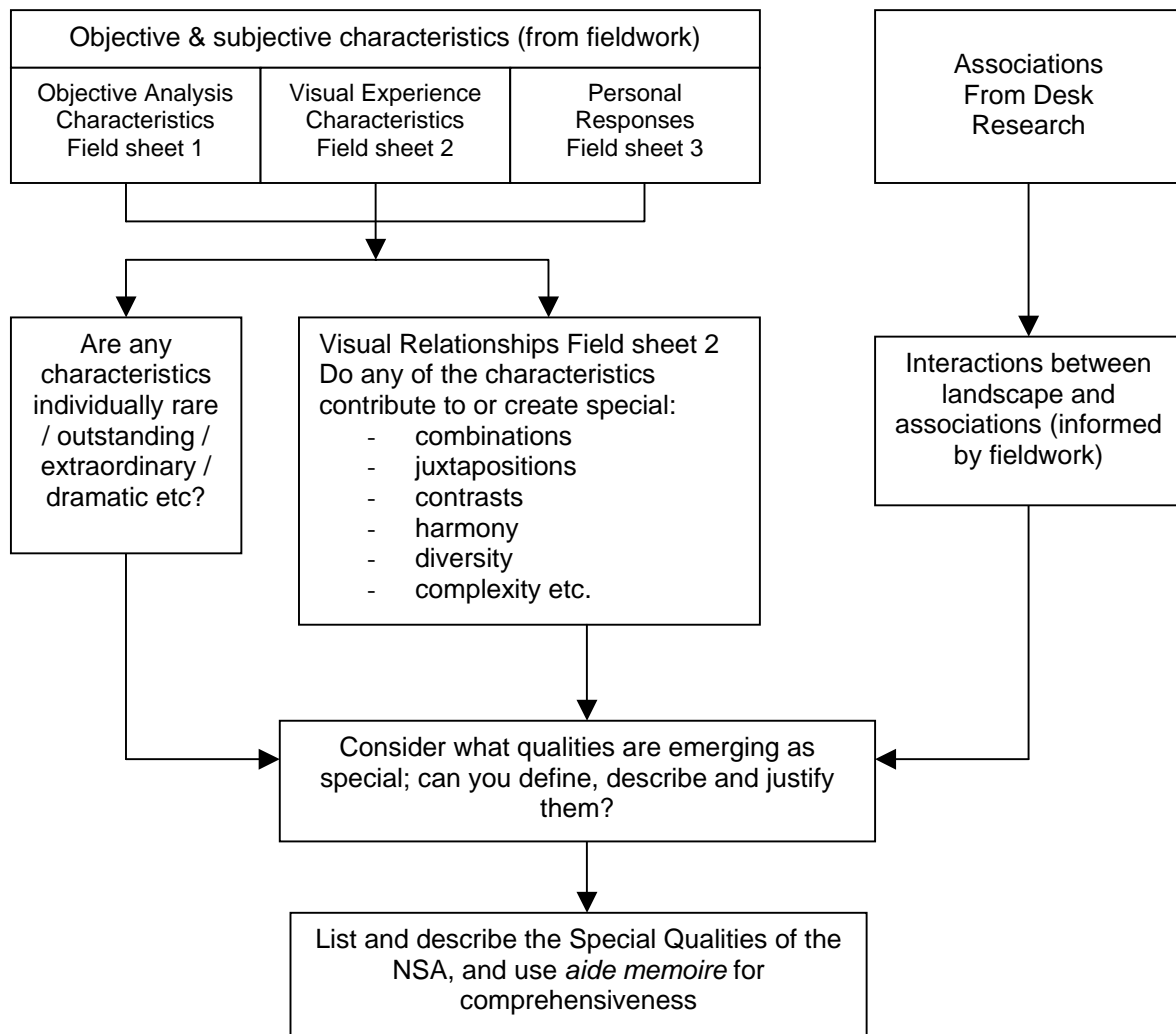
*Step 7C – Personal response to the scenery (field sheet 3)*

- 7.13 For each of the viewpoints and routes write down your personal response to the landscape, following the prompts set out on field sheet 3 (e.g. exhilarating, spectacular, remote, tranquil, harmonious, contrasting). This is the most subjective element of the work and is a record of your personal response and will make the identification and description of special qualities more meaningful, resonant and evocative. It goes well beyond the normal parameters of LCA by introducing evocative language and personal reactions that are deliberately excluded from LCA.
- 7.14 Inevitably, this will introduce more variation to descriptions as different people respond differently. It should be borne in mind that your descriptions will be considered later by a wide community of stakeholders. So excessive or generally inappropriate descriptions are likely to be challenged and modified. Consequently, it is important that you consider the descriptive words carefully, but that you are not inhibited by the prospect that others may not agree with your descriptions. Describe the scenery as you experience it, not as you think others might experience it; others will speak for themselves.
- 7.15 **Output:** Three completed field sheets for each viewpoint/route.

**Step 8 – deciding what is ‘special’**

- 8.1 The aim is to identify the characteristics that individually, or when combined together, make an NSA special in terms of landscape and scenery. To help determine the special qualities of the NSA, it is best to summarise the three field sheets for each viewpoint or route onto a summary table. Practical examples of this are given in Appendix 2.
- 8.2 The decision on what qualities to include as special will be the judgement of the surveyors. Identifying the special qualities is a challenging task, but the method used here enables a systematic, transparent and professional approach to explain its conclusions in a rational and consistent way. It is particularly important to undertake this step as a team, either together in discussion or by merging separate lists and descriptions generated by each team member separately. In most cases the special qualities will emerge in the minds of the surveyors as the work proceeds.
- 8.3 In deciding what is special it is useful to bear in mind that special places are not necessarily places where the rare or unusual occur, and can be places where the commonplace exhibit unusual extremes or come together in ways that invoke a response in people that is regarded as special – inspirational, romantic, wild, dramatic, spectacular, beautiful, tranquil or exhilarating.

**Figure 2 – Deciding what is special – a guide to the approach**



- 8.4 It is likely that many special qualities are relevant to all or several parts of the NSA, especially those that relate to the combinations, juxtapositions and contrasts between characteristic areas. Some special qualities will relate to parts of the NSA, for example, the uplands or valleys, which are different to other parts. Some special qualities may relate to a single point or location in the NSA, for example, a castle and its setting.
- 8.5 Figure 2 may help you to tease out the special qualities from the many characteristics and their relationships that you have identified. Characteristics that are individually rare, outstanding, extraordinary or dramatic would be likely to be special. It is important to look for combinations, juxtapositions, contrasts, harmonies and complexities because these are important aspects of identifying special qualities elsewhere. However, it should not be assumed that these considerations will always and invariably apply, nor should it be assumed that all special qualities will always fit into one or other of these characteristics. Figure 2 should be seen rather as a signpost to the process of thinking about and drawing out the special qualities, rather than a prescriptive process that contains all relevant criteria or considerations.
- 8.6 Refer back to the draft list of special qualities produced during stage 5, and also use the aide memoire below to check that the identified qualities capture the relevant range of potential qualities. It is possible that under some headings given below there is nothing special in a particular NSA:
- ✓ **landform** including geomorphology, natural processes and systems and water;
  - ✓ **land use and land cover**, especially their relationship with landform and settlement;
  - ✓ **settlement** including villages, steadings, crofts, houses, industrial and agricultural infrastructure, road and other transport structures;
  - ✓ **authenticity and integrity** expressed, for example, as areas of distinctiveness, sense of place, unspoilt character or historic environment;
  - ✓ **time depth**, especially where there is a strong palimpsest, with features from earlier periods being a key aspect, such as field patterns, designed landscapes, buildings, monuments, or archaeological sites;
  - ✓ **visual experience**, especially the combinations, contrasts, harmony, variety and complexity of the scene;
  - ✓ **emotional response** such as perceptions of remoteness, secrecy, wildness, exhilaration, safety, shelter, etc;
  - ✓ **wildlife**, where flora and fauna make a special contribution to the scenery without necessarily expressing them in habitat or species specific terms or scientific language; and
  - ✓ **cultural and historical associations**, where landscapes are associated with particular people or events.
- 8.7 **Output**: Initial list and description of the special qualities.

## Step 9 – comparing with Scotland's Scenic Heritage

- 9.1 Although *Scotland's Scenic Heritage* pre-dates the current, 2006 NSA legislation by many years, it is worth comparing the special qualities identified and described with those in this document, both as an *aide-memoire* and to note whether there have been changes to the landscape over the years. In particular, consider:
- which of the special qualities identified are cited (explicitly or implicitly) in *Scotland's Scenic Heritage*;
  - which of the special qualities that you have defined are not cited (explicitly or implicitly); and
  - whether there are any special qualities cited that you have not identified.

## Step 10 – describing what is 'special'

- 10.1 There are two basic approaches to describing what is special in a given NSA, both of which should be followed in the final report:
- short, staccato, bullet-point descriptions of the special qualities (such as those in Box 3), which can be helpful in identifying management objectives because they are focused and sharply defined; and
  - more evocative and poetic descriptions of the qualities, useful in promotion work because they are more inspirational and evoke interest and resonance in people.
- 10.2 Refine the list and description of the special qualities selected and provide any commentary or notes that you consider appropriate, with illustrations such as photographs to supplement the descriptions. Produce both a summary list of the qualities and a longer written description of them as outlined in 10.1 above.
- 10.3 It is worth noting that some special qualities, such as land cover and settlement pattern, will be capable of being modified by human activity, and hence are particularly relevant to future management strategies; others such as landform will be incapable of being changed. However, all should be recorded so that a full picture of the NSA is created.
- 10.4 Do not necessarily write up the descriptions and lists under the headings in paragraph 8.6 because this can produce a repetitive format. This will not allow evocative descriptions that come more readily from text that runs the topics together to emphasise their interrelationships, combinations, etc. The best way to highlight the contrasts and diversity of many of the NSAs will be to blend the descriptions of the more physical characteristics of landform, land cover and settlement with the more evocative descriptions of visual experience and emotional response. Consistency can be achieved by checking the evocative descriptions are inclusive, without reproducing the checklist.
- 10.5 While all the special qualities are important, some may be considered to be of particular significance. For example, whereas some qualities of Assynt-Coigach are special but found in many areas of Scotland, there are others which are rare or unique and draw people to the NSA, e.g. the association with geology and the highly distinctive 'lone peaks'. Hence some qualities may be unique to an NSA or defining of its distinctiveness, while others may be secondary – more widespread but nevertheless adding to the specialness of the area. Where there are clear

distinctions between these 'headline' qualities and 'detailed' qualities it may be appropriate to distinguish between them.

- 10.6 As indicated above, there may be important variations in the spatial distribution of special qualities: many will relate to all or several parts of the NSA, while others only to certain parts or even a single location. Where there is spatial variation of particular qualities, this should be mentioned in the descriptions.
- 10.7 The final report should also include notes on any obvious boundary anomalies that have been observed during the process (see para. 2.3 above). Ideally boundary amendments should be suggested that would ensure the boundary better encapsulated the special qualities identified.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### ***PRO FORMA* FIELD SHEETS**

<b>Special Qualities of the National Scenic Areas</b> <b>Field sheet 1 - Objective Analysis of the Landscape</b>	
Name of NSA	
Name of Viewpoint / Route	
Make an <b>objective</b> description of what you can see. Use the LCA summary and add to where appropriate. Describe form, cover, habitats, settlement, features, wildlife, etc objectively.	
Landform	(e.g. topographical features such as mountains, ridges, scarps, hills, drumlins, dunes, beaches, cliffs, gorges, valleys)
Land cover (including water)	(e.g. bare rock, alpine and montane areas, open sea, heather moorland, grass moorland, open water, running water, mosaics, patchworks, ponds and pools, estuaries, sandflats, mudflats, saltmarsh, burns, waterfalls, peatlands)
Land use	(e.g. arable farmland, pastoral farmland, open grazing, rectilinear and other field patterns, historic features, forestry plantations, Caledonian pinewood, semi-natural woodlands, broadleaved woodland, policy woodlands)
Settlement pattern	(e.g. uninhabited, sparsely populated, town, villages, scattered dwellings, crofts, steadings, castles, towers, kirks, vernacular buildings, distinctive building materials, building types and styles, settlement pattern especially related to natural features)
Specific features	(e.g. distinctive, characteristic or unusual point and linear features such as hedges, stone dykes, walls, shelterbelts, avenues, historic environment. Wildlife that makes a marked contribution to the scenery such as sea bird colonies, machair grassland flowers)
List any other distinctive physical characteristics of the landscape that you can see, noting important combinations / contrasts and any important time-depth.	
Continue overleaf if necessary	

**Special Qualities of the National Scenic Areas**  
**Field sheet 2 - Visual Analysis of the Landscape**

Name of NSA

Name of Viewpoint / Route

Undertake a **visual analysis** of the characteristics of the landscape, adding more detail and focusing on links / relationships / combinations / juxtapositions / contrasts e.g. between landform and settlement; landform and land use; landform and land cover. (e.g. steep sided mountains with distinctive spectacular profiles, rising from irregular hills and more uniform open moorland and loch).

Continue overleaf if necessary

**Visual Experience**

Describe the following characteristics of the landscape. Record whether different areas of or features in the scene have different characteristics e.g. hills may be large scale open, valleys small scale enclosed

Scale	(e.g. vast, large, medium, small, intimate)
Openness	(e.g. exposed, open, varied, sheltered, secluded, hidden)
Diversity	(e.g. complex, diverse, simple, homogenous)
Colour and Texture	(e.g. garish, colourful, muted, monochrome, dominant colour(s), rugged, rough, textured, smooth)
Form and line	(e.g. rivers, roads, vertical plantations, walls, slopes, angles)
Movement, weather and sound	(e.g. busy, noisy, constant/occasional movement/noise, calm, still, silent, quiet. How will changes in weather affect your visual experience?)
Other notable visual characteristics of the landscape	

**Special Qualities of the National Scenic Areas**  
**Field sheet 3 - Personal Response to the Landscape**

Name of NSA

Name of Viewpoint / Route

A subjective description of your personal response to, and feelings about the scene. Note any contrasting feelings relating to different parts of the scene, if applicable. (e.g. exhilarating, inspiring, exciting, awesome, challenging, surprising, spectacular, dramatic, turbulent, unsettling, uncomfortable, wild, remote, isolated, undiscovered, secret, mysterious, tranquil, peaceful, hidden, idyllic, contrasting, harmonious, unified, refreshing, reassuring, comforting; time-depth, sense of history). Imagine how the scene may change at different times of the year, or in different weather conditions.

NOTE PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN – Number / Direction / Stitched / Single etc

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **EXAMPLES OF COLLATED SUMMARIES OF THE THREE FIELD SHEETS**

### Knapdale NSA: Viewpoint 4 – Keillmore

Objective (field sheet 1)	Visual (field sheet 2)	Personal/Emotional (field sheet 3)
<p>The view is dominated by the coast and seascape.</p> <p>The main landform is linear steep sided coastal ridges on the adjacent peninsula, and offshore rounded islands and the coastal ridges on this peninsula that continue out and into the water.</p> <p>Land cover is rough grassland that merges into iris beds and then coastal saltmarsh before the rocky and kelp covered shore. The rough grassland is dotted with shorter sheep grazed turf where grasses are less coarse and therefore sweeter. Rocky outcrops provide the main concentrations of calcareous grassland species with typically tiny flowers, including wild thyme, fairy flax, eyebright and crosswort. English stonecrop creeps over the rock surface.</p> <p>Swathes of bracken and gorse are seen amongst the grazing land and there are occasional small conifer plantations.</p> <p>Land use is predominantly sheep grazing, with occasional walkers and local boating, although the small boats present are likely to belong to the few peninsula residents. There is the occasional croft and the small grey stone chapel close to the end of this peninsular open for visitors and has interpretation material.</p> <p>The key features of this area are the flora and birds, both shoreline waders and passerines (which will be seasonal), the linear ridges against the skyline, the offshore islands and drowned coast and secondary features such as the chapel and standing cross.</p> <p>This is iconic Scottish coastal landscape with ridges and shorelines.</p>	<p>Key visual features are the flat edges to the inlets which form the seas lochs, the strong linear striation of landform and drowned coast – the layers of ridges terminate in the sea which is punctuated by low drowned islands offshore. The transition of rough grazing, iris bed, saltmarsh to rocky kelp covered shore and the varying topography and height of ridges are further important visual features.</p> <p>The smooth greenness of the lower slopes is backed by steeper, rockier and grey green distant slopes of higher ridges.</p> <p>The scale is a medium enclosed view that is sheltered, secluded and hidden, complemented by a much wider expanse of open sea.</p> <p>The landscape is diverse, with a subtle mix of greens, browns and greys, and the eye is drawn to the detail of the colourful ground flora on the short cropped turfs.</p> <p>Significant bird song and the opportunity to see a variety of avian species adds to the peaceful, calm tranquillity. Situated at the end of a peninsula, this area will experience quite different views in bad weather, where the detail is likely to be lost, but the overall scene will be of considerable movement and drama.</p>	<p>Lochwards the scene evokes feelings of peace and relaxation. It is sheltered and calm, sleepy and quiet. The viewer feels safe and comfortable, but being at the end of a journey down the peninsula, there is some feeling of a hidden and unspoilt place. Not everyone will have seen this. It feels like a place that is at the end of a long cul-de-sac. All who visit this place are likely to stop, pause, and contemplate before travelling away again. It is definite end point.</p> <p>The semi-natural nature of the area is important, and the eye is caught by the tiny detail of small colourful wild flora that is in miniature to the dramatic and vast nature of the open sea and hint of distant islands seen only as grey outlines, including that of the large island of Jura. Outward views to the sea are large, exposed, wild and isolated.</p> <p>The evidence of human presence is low key but reassuring - boats, occasional crofts and grazing animals. Wildlife is very important within this scene; birds flit around the view and song posts are all around. The tiny delicate flowers of wild thyme and stonecrop are attractive and draw the eye in to appreciate their tiny beauty, which makes the wider landscape all the more inspiring and vast. Beyond the horizon is the open sea and distant lands.</p> <p>The large expanse of intertidal sand provides for the odd basking seal, again bringing nature in close proximity to the viewer.</p> <p>The chapel and an awareness of its history brings secondary or background emotions of the historic spiritual connections of the place, adding to feelings of long term continuity, although it is the many other features that remain the primary influences.</p>

## Knapdale NSA: Viewpoint 8 – Crinan Canal Corridor

### An assimilated field sheet based upon several journeys along the canal corridor

Objective	Visual	Personal/Emotional
<p>A linear canal following the hill foot of the upland and coastal parallel ridges on the south side of the moss basin.</p> <p>The canal is lined by rock bullions, with short amenity grassland along its sides. Numerous locks appear along the length of the canal, which are the focal points for settlement, with lock keepers cottages leading to further small white painted cottages at some lock points.</p> <p>The key features are the canal line itself, which despite being a manmade feature is sinuous like a river, fitting to the contours of the land. A second key feature is the black and white locks, which are well maintained and neatly painted, along with the associated dwellings and buildings that are similarly neatly painted white.</p>	<p>The view is usually small scale along the canal, but with linear views up and down the waterway. It is sheltered and calm, but with a range of features, colour and texture. The still water, rock bullions, neat canal sides with mown grass and small garden areas with bedding plants and pots of flowers, small white cottages and secluded mini marinas, are in contrast to a backdrop of the parallel ridges to one side and the flat expanse of the moss on the other. At many points along the canal, the moss is obscured from view by lines of small trees along the towpath, but frequently comes into view along the journey.</p> <p>The canal and its associated towpath are the most dominant linear features, whilst other lines and form are complicated and diverse with the range of features present.</p> <p>There is great interest and movement along the canal, with boats, yachts and barges travelling along it. There is a busy but relaxed atmosphere, as holiday boaters are constantly manoeuvring the locks, bringing boats in to moor or pushing boats off again.</p> <p>There is a strong human influence along the canal corridor, with the boating activity and the inns and guest houses reinforcing the feeling of a populated and active place.</p> <p>The canal corridor has a clear historical context, being a purpose built man made water way, that provided a link from inland to the sea.</p>	<p>The Crinan canal area is tranquil and hidden, peaceful and comforting. If travelling to the canal area from the moss the area is surprising, a real contrast to the wild expanse.</p> <p>The area is very relaxing and enjoyable, and there is a real feeling of being on holiday. One could spend several hours watching the boating activity, wandering along the towpath and picnicking at the colourful lock sides. There is always something to see, something of interest. There is active sound of movement, people and enjoyment.</p> <p>The strong identity and black and white colour of the canal side cottages and locks reminds the viewer of the history of the canal as a working waterway, and also further adds to the feeling of a holiday place.</p> <p>The background feeling is one of being on a journey. The viewer is constantly moving along the canal, albeit slowly and with pauses that could last for hours or a day. The journey unfolds along the canal corridor as it winds from inland to sea.</p>

## Knapdale NSA: Viewpoint 10 – Dun Add

### View taken from the top and is a description of the view in all directions

Objective	Visual	Personal/Emotional
<p>The land for is the flat moss area of Mòine Mhór, fringed by the steep parallel ridges. Occasional outcrops of volcanic plugs are seen across the moss, and the sinuous River Add winding its way across the moss is clearly seen.</p> <p>Land cover is the grass moorland of Mòine Mhór, with its patches of heather and clumps of broadleaved trees. Areas of the moss rise to semi-improved pasture land. The river meander is lined by riparian trees, and from the height of Dun Add the path of the old river, prior to an alteration in its course, can clearly be seen in the change in vegetation.</p> <p>The majority of the view is of the National Nature Reserve of Mòine Mhór, with additional land used in the plantation woodland on the ridges and scattering of small farmsteads across the moss.</p> <p>Prominent features are the sinuous line of the river and the clumps of woodland across the otherwise flat expanse of the moss. The parallel ridges rise up around the basin sides of the moss and push into the skyline.</p>	<p>The view is large scale and very open. It is homogenous other than the variety added by the woodland clumps and the line of the river.</p> <p>Colour is essentially a combination of greens and browns. Shades vary from the lighter moss area to the dark parallel ridges. The distance of the views and height given by Dun Add smoothes out what would be a more textured view when taken from the moss level where detail could be better appreciated.</p> <p>The edge of the moss against the ridges, and the moss surface is the dominating horizontal line, with the skyline at the tops of the ridges and the meander of the river being secondary forms that attract the eye.</p> <p>Sounds are audible a considerable distance from their source because of the height of the viewpoint. The experience is therefore influenced by a frequent traffic hum.</p> <p>The sheer volcanic plug of Dun Add is an iconic viewpoint from which the boundary of the northern section of the NSA may well have been defined. Two prominent peaks; Cnoc nah Eilde and Creagan Braed are important distant hills in the scene. The inclusion of the 'Bridgend Bump' within the NSA is also explained from this view, as its ridge backdrop completes the 360 degree view of the parallel ridge lined basin.</p>	<p>This is an inspiring and memorable view. It is impressive and refreshing. From this viewpoint the scene takes the eye across the flat moss and right out to the open sea. There is considerable drama in the immediate sheerness of Dun Add, the fanning out of space across the flat moss and the encapsulation of the ring of parallel ridges around the entire basin.</p> <p>There is significant exhilaration as a result of the impression of height at the top of Dun Add and there is a feeling of dizziness as a result of the combination of this height and the spacious 360 degree view.</p> <p>The historic relevance of this place, being the site where the Kings of Scotland were once crowned, is a powerful influence on the emotional response to the scene. It is inspiring and contemplating. The viewer cannot help but imagine this same view more than a thousand years past. For some it is likely to be spine tingling. For others it will be at least exhilarating.</p>

## Upper Tweeddale NSA: Viewpoint 1 – Black Meldon

Objective	Visual	Personal/Emotional
<p>The dominant landform is the rolling mountains with interlocking ridges with occasional peaks creating long sweeping skylines. Below is the shallow v-shaped, wooded valley of the River Tweed with sweeping, even slopes and some occasional concave slopes. The river itself however is generally inconspicuous.</p> <p>Land use comprises grass and heather moorland with frequent plantations and scree on the mountainsides. There is a regular geometric field pattern with occasional steadings and cottages invariably with tree clumps.</p> <p>The main features of the view are the strong linear pattern of shelterbelts and stone dykes. Meldon Burn is narrow and sinuous in a steep sided moorland valley. Sweeping, rolling hills and skyline, which continues into the distance.</p>	<p>There is a strong contrast with the wooded valleys and geometric patterns of the agricultural fields and shelterbelts with the open, wild moorland hills.</p> <p>The landscape scale is large on the hills with expansive 360o views and is open and exposed. However the scale within the valley is small and more intimate. There is great diversity within the landscape with the complex landscape in the valley and the simple rolling openness of the surrounding hills.</p> <p>The colour of the view is predominately green with the light green patchwork of the fields stitched with the dark green of shelterbelts in the valley and linking to the browns and greens of the moorland.</p> <p>The strongest visual lines are the geometric field patterns formed by the stone dykes and the line of the Meldon Burn.</p> <p>The general impression is still and quiet though there the hilltops are exposed and windy. There is the noise of sheep and other animals. Although the main road traverses the view it is not that evident except for occasional traffic noise.</p>	<p>The experience from the viewpoint is exhilarating and a place to enjoy spectacular panoramic views which include two thirds of the NSA. It provides a real “top of the world” feeling, looking down on a smaller landscape.</p> <p>Upper Tweeddale appears as a model farm landscape – a tranquil, settled and peaceful valley. It appears welcoming, inviting, sheltered and calm. The hilltops beckon to viewpoints contrasting with the intimacy of the valley. The encircling non-threatening hills are inviting and protective of the valley. Trees make the landscape more inviting and give it additional interest and variety.</p>

## Upper Tweeddale NSA: Viewpoint 5 – Broughton village, Biggar Water and Holms Water from Dreva Craig

Objective	Visual	Personal/Emotional
<p>This area consists of a flat-bottomed shallow v-shaped valley with even gentle slopes. High rounded hills terminate the view in the background at each end north and south. To the east and west the hills are more gentle and even with lower slopes.</p> <p>The pastoral river valley of the Biggar Water has occasional tree groups, shelterbelts and small woods on the valley floor with large regular blocks of conifer plantations from half way up the slopes. There is rough grass in the moorland and heather on the higher hills.</p> <p>The land use is pastoral farming and forestry.</p> <p>Broughton village has a linear pattern that follows the road and is surrounded by trees making it relatively inconspicuous in the landscape. The village is situated at the bridging point of the river at the confluence of the Broughton Burn and Biggar Water.</p> <p>There are strong patterns of woodland and regular geometric field patterns. There is an occasional large house in the wooded setting. The old railway line is a noticeable linear feature as are the drystone walls. The line of houses and traffic noise draws attention to the road but it is not easily visible. The red sandstone Kirk at Broughton is also a notable feature in the landscape.</p>	<p>There is a strong relationship between the broadleaved trees on the valley floor and the plantations on the upper slopes (upper two thirds) have the effect of emphasising the slope. The wooded slope of Rachan Hill makes it more prominent and emphasises its presence in the landform. The valley is closed off on both ends by steep sided rounded hills, which look bigger in contrast to the lowland valley though they are not actually as big as others in the area, this adds to the feeling of enclosure. The transition to intensive farming by Biggar Water contrasts with the semi-natural unimproved land which is receding to wet scrubland (rush) close to Dreva Muirburn.</p> <p>The valley is of medium scale though some of the fields are quite large. The area is relatively enclosed and sheltered with the open exposed hills at either end.</p> <p>This is a diverse relatively busy landscape with some traffic and movement and agricultural activity.</p> <p>There are a wide variety of greens from dark green to yellow. The high hills are brown and grey with noticeable cloud shadow.</p> <p>The geometric pattern of fields, the burns, fences and railway provides the form and line to the scene.</p> <p>The road, which cuts though the middle of the view, although not dominant, creates noise and movement to the area. However it is more peaceful and tranquil towards Holms water. In general the scene is calm and pastoral.</p>	<p>The feeling is peaceful, safe and pastoral though not as enclosed as in other areas. It is a pleasing rural landscape but the with the more intensive farming it is less attractive and has not got the intimacy of the main dale. It is interesting and varied though not remarkable.</p> <p>The viewpoint itself is an old fort and settlement that gives a feeling of antiquity to the scene. The valley gives the impression that, although rural and relatively remote, it has been occupied for a long time, which gives it added interest.</p> <p>The John Buchan museum is situated in Broughton village, a novelist who used the Upper Tweed as the setting for some of his novels.</p>