



Location and Context

The *Plateau Moorland - Lothians* occur in two places; the Lammermuir Plateau which defines the southern boundary of East Lothian, and the Moorfoot Plateau which is located at the southernmost extremity of Midlothian. They are characterised chiefly by their altitude, generally ranging from 350 metres to 650 metres, and their subdued plateau landscapes.

Key Characteristics

- Modest hills and moors forming broad plateaux with rounded.
- Smooth convex hill slopes dissected by a complex tracery of valley landforms which vary in scale and appearance, from minor burn narrow incised gullies to occasional wider flat-bottomed valleys of larger rivers.
- Medium to large scale landscape.
- Open upland character with sparse tree cover.
- Expanses of heather moorland, with rough grasses on upper slopes, with poor rough grassland and occasional improved pasture on lower slopes.
- Generally unenclosed, with some post and wire fences along roads and access tracks, and occasional stone sheep stells and walls around farmsteads.
- Sparsely inhabited, with scattered farmsteads in valleys.
- Reservoirs creating local focal points.
- Historic human influences evident in the many enclosures, cairns, hill forts and stone circles.
- Steep north-facing scarps with spectacular panoramic views overlooking the coastal plain of Lothian to the north with views across the Firth of Forth.
- Forms the skyline when viewed from the lower land to the north.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Plateau Moorland – Lothians* Landscape Character Type of the Lothians comprises two areas of hills, and moors forming broad plateaux with rounded summits between 350 metres to 650 metres in height. Blackhope Scar (651 metres) and Dundreich (622 metres) are distinct high points on the Moorfoot ridge when viewed from the north in Midlothian. The Lammermuirs rise gradually westwards from 348 metres to culminate in the summit of Lammer Law (527 metres). Both hill ranges extend southwards into the Borders. Despite

their relatively modest elevation the lateral extent of these hills is dominant in their lowland context.

Underlain by Devonian conglomerates and Silurian and Ordovician greywackes, the tightly interlocked hills and ridges interweave to form gently undulating upland plateaux. The smooth, convex hill slopes are dissected by a complex tracery of valley landforms which vary in scale and appearance from narrow incised gullies formed by minor burns, to the wider, flat-bottomed valleys of larger rivers such as the Whiteadder Water and the River South Esk. Within the plateaux there are man-made water bodies including Whiteadder, Stobshiel and Hopes Reservoirs. The margins of these reservoirs are occasionally interrupted by shingly bays and promontories, and in dry conditions extensive un-vegetated areas may be exposed in the drawdown area.

Landcover

Across the plateaux large expanses of dense, tussocky heather moorland and rough grasses form the predominant vegetation cover. Peatland communities on blanket bog include cotton grass, crowberry and cloudberry on the upper hill-slopes. Lower down, a mixed blanket of heather and rough moorland grasses gives way to enclosed pasture at valley fringes and along the Whiteadder Valley in the Lammermuirs. Fields of improved pasture are interspersed with small areas of marshy rush-dominated grassland at the edge of the moorland and in damp hollows, with occasional patches of scrub and bracken.

Low stone walls and sparse, clipped thorn hedgerows form infrequent field boundaries, post-and-wire fences being more common. On the upland plateaux, field boundary features are sparse, although post-and-wire fences often line roads and access tracks, and farmsteads are occasionally enclosed by low stone walls.

Tree cover is generally absent from the Upland Plateaux and Hills. A few large scale blocks of coniferous forestry occur within the open moorland along the Monynut Water in the Lammermuirs. The grassy hill-slopes are frequently banded with coniferous shelterbelts and small scale forests; less common are patches of mixed woodland and scrub along watercourses, with a few isolated clumps of gnarled mature Scots pine. Small areas of relict oak and birch scrub woodland define the steep cleughs which drain into the Esk Valley. Elsewhere, infrequent clumps of mature deciduous trees, and small coniferous and broadleaf shelterbelts, occur in association with farmsteads or reservoir margins. Occasional patchy scrub is found along stream valleys, together with scrub, bracken and areas of boggy, rush-infested ground.

Settlement

The area is sparsely populated, with the main settlement concentrated along the fringing farmland. Existing farmhouses and associated steadings date from the 17th Century onwards and generally retain their traditional appearance in the landscape, although more modern buildings and materials are also in evidence though not a common sight throughout the hills. These features can also be found scattered along the valleys of the main watercourses and reservoir edges. There is extensive evidence for late medieval upland land use in the form of shielings and farmsteads that were later abandoned due to 17th Century climate change.

Minor roads wind into and through the hills leading to the scattered farmsteads which dot lower slopes. The B7007 Middleton to Innerleithen road gently climbs the north-eastern escarpment of the Moorfoots before turning southward into the hill massif. Access tracks leading into the hills may be locally prominent, where track material is light coloured and bare soil has been exposed by grading earthworks. A pylon line crosses the Lammermuir plateau, and this area now hosts large-scale wind farms at Crystal Rig and Aikengall. Other wind farm developments are located just outwith the Lothians in the Borders Council area, at

Fallago Rig and Dun Law. Many of the wind farms are seen from within the *Plateau Moorland – Lothians* Landscape Character Type but also from the Lowlands where they are often seen in small areas, spaced at intervals on the extensive skyline formed by the hills, with the majority of the skyline retained as an unbroken element. They are less visible around the Moorfoot Hills in Midlothian. Crystal Rig is located within a bowl which decreases its visibility and prominence.

Many of the hill summits are marked by cairns, and the area is characterised by forts, enclosures and stone circles. Occasional circular stone sheep stells can be seen and are important features of these uplands, as is the 15th Century Penshiel Grange and 16th Century Gamelshiel Towerhouse.

Perception

Visually, the closely-knit hill landforms of the Lammermuirs generally coalesce to form an open, exposed plateau, the isolated character of which is emphasised by a lack of settlement or woodland. Internal views within the hill-groups may occasionally be constrained along valleys. Geometric coniferous woodlands contrast with the smooth swells of the landform. Towards the northern periphery of the areas of this Landscape Character Type the upland landform recedes, and panoramic views can be obtained across the landscapes to the north. From the Moorfoots there are views of the Pentland Hills, and across the whole of Edinburgh to Fife. From the Lammermuirs the views extend across the plains of Haddington and North Berwick, towards the Firth of Forth and Fife. The western edge of the Lammermuirs offers panoramic views east and south, particularly towards St Abbs. These views reveal a marked contrast between the remote, isolated upland plateau and the lowlands to the north. Despite these hills being of relatively modest elevation, they can appear high from adjacent settled lowlands, where they are often seen to form a distinct scarp. A high degree of wild land character is derived from the exposure, and relative lack of roads, settlements or urban features. However, this naturalness is detracted from in places by manmade elements, including the pylon line across the Lammermuirs, access tracks (which are generally not prominent) and wind turbines. Nonetheless within the valleys, particularly more centrally within the hill ranges, there can be a strong sense of isolation and remoteness.



This is one of 390 Landscape Character Types identified at a scale of 1:50 000 as part of a national programme of Landscape Character Assessment republished in 2019.

The area covered by this Landscape Character Type was originally included in the Lothians LCA (ASH Consulting Group), published 1998.