Introduction

Today, the ways of using the land are continually changing. Nevertheless, much of the landscape still holds evidence of past land uses. Indeed, there are very few parts of the country that have not been affected by human activity over the past 6,000 years. HLAmap shows where there is visible evidence for areas of previous land use surviving on the ground. Rather than dots on a map, HLA (historic land use assessment) throws light on the mosaic that is Scotland's landscape.

HLAmap is therefore an invaluable tool in preparing large scale development proposals. It provides information on land uses, including those that are likely to prove sensitive to developments, such as later prehistoric settlement and agriculture (round houses and field systems) or medieval/post-medieval summer shieling grounds. Land uses like these are relatively uncommon and yet their presence is readily visible using HLAmap, providing an immediate insight that is not so readily accessible elsewhere.

Using HLA data

This case study provides easy to follow guidance on how to use HLAmap for gathering information to inform the pre-application stages of the planning process, alongside site-based information held in historic environment records. It focuses on a wind-farm proposal but could just as easily be for a housing development, landfill site or industrial estate.

The applicability is clear:

- HLAmap gives an immediate view of the extent of areas of past land use.
- It provides spatial data that will be helpful to developing initial proposals.
- It can be overlain with datasets for designated archaeological and historic areas.

HLAmap is an impressive resource for those involved in land use change. Combined with the local authority Historic Environment Record it ensures that there is now extensive data available for pre-scoping and the EIA stage of the planning process.
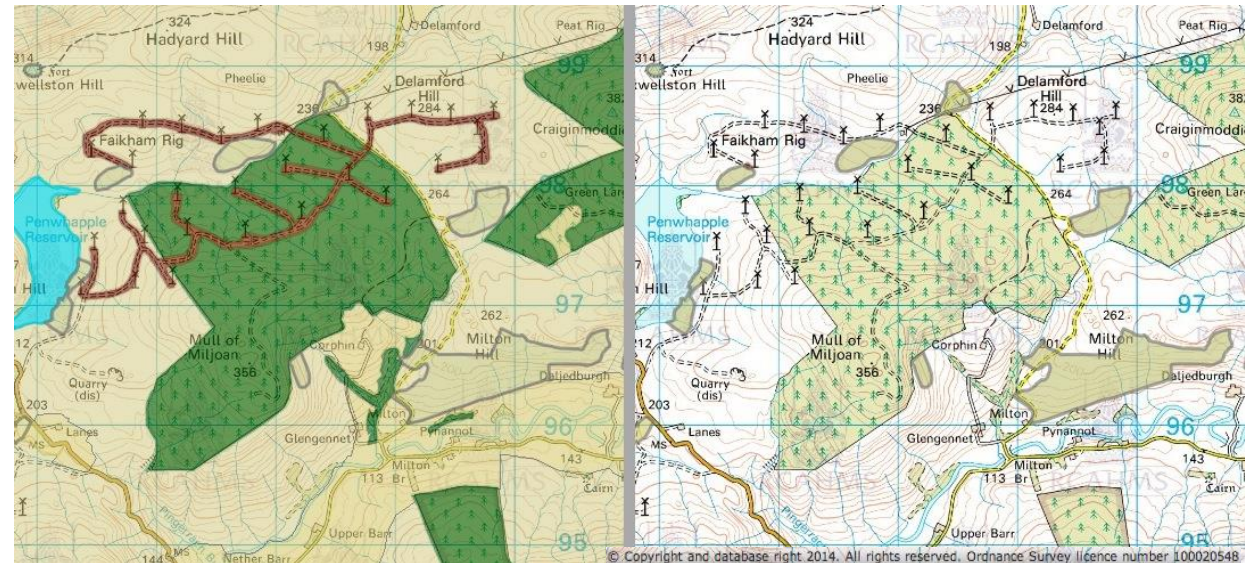

A view across the South Ayrshire hills. HLA records the elements that constitute this varied agricultural and afforested landscape and indicates their date of origin.
© RCAHMS DP106467

Using HLAmap

This website is specifically enabled for a development planning search. On the Home page choose 'The Map' on the menu bar and then find your area of interest by zooming into the map. The scale needs to be 1:27,000 (noted at the bottom right of the screen). It is at this scale that the website reveals HLA data. Then use the drop-down menu under Single View at the top right of the map screen to select 'Development and Planning'.

As shown opposite, two versions of the dataset are automatically revealed. The Primary View (left) gives a general picture of recent land uses, some of which may be of value historically. The right side shows those land uses that survive from the past, before the agricultural improvements of the 1800s or, in some areas, the 1700s.
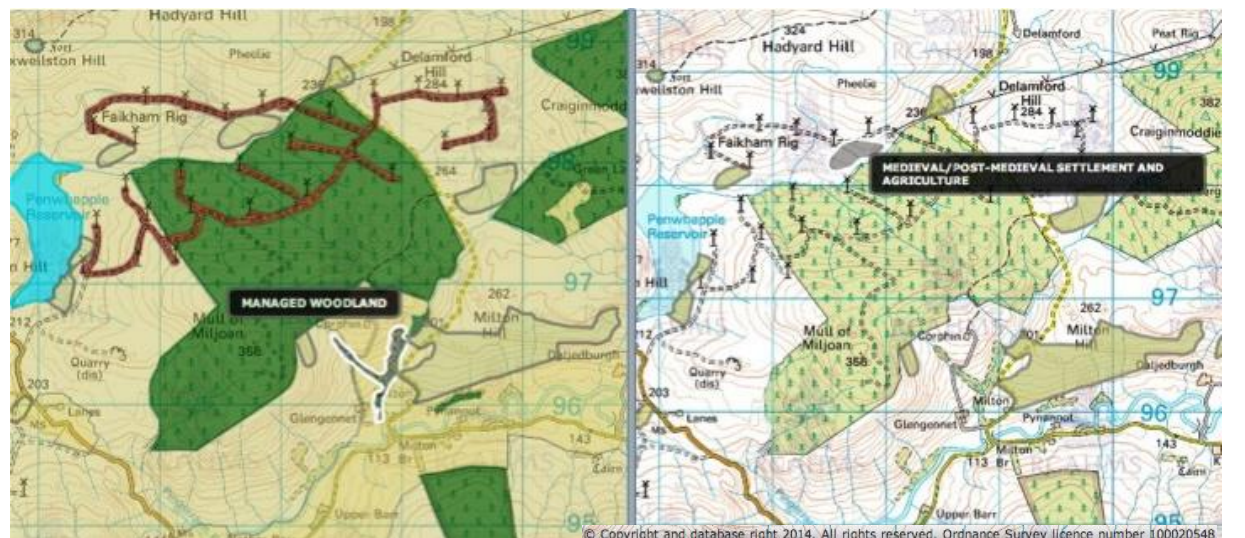
*'Modern' periods of land use on the left and   'Past' periods of land use on the right
are shown on this HLAmap extract for the area east of Girvan*

To see adjacent parts of the map hold down the mouse on the Primary View and move it (pan). The Secondary View map will move too.
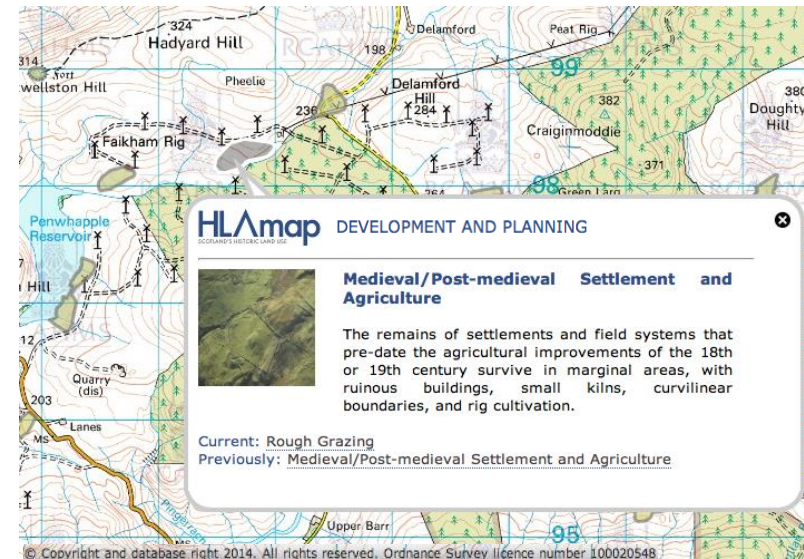
If you try to move the map on the right side nothing will happen. You can zoom in further to see a smaller area more clearly, but the data doesn't change.

- The different colours reflect the twelve categories of land use that have been applied to the whole country.

- Pop-up boxes appear as the mouse is moved over the map. Each box names the land use type that lies under the cursor. There are over 80 different types.
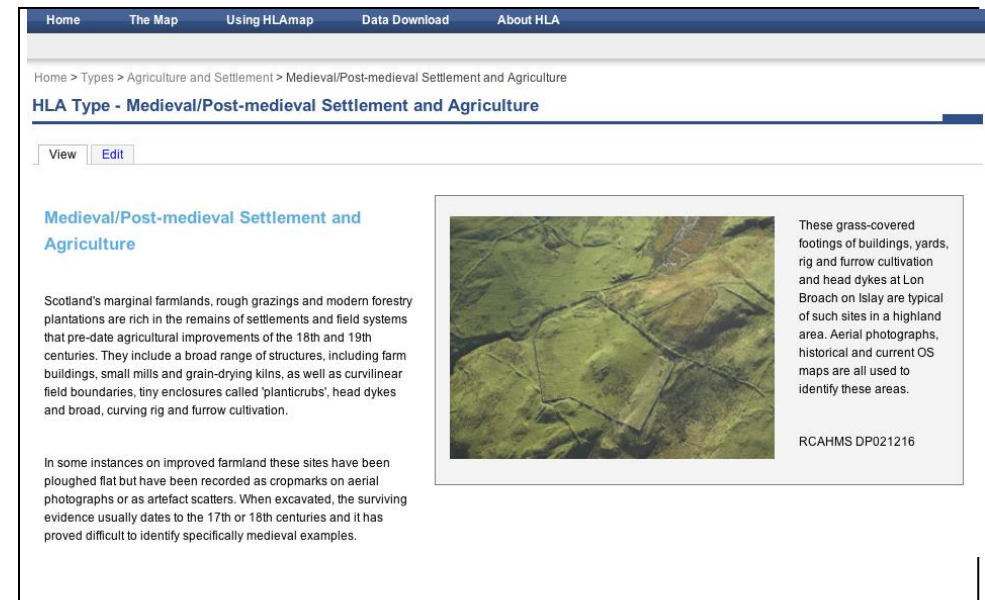
- Click on a highlighted type area and a brief description appears, or single click if the name pop-up box doesn't initially appear.

- The box describes the land use under the cursor.

- It also indicates whether any previous land uses survive within the bounded area. Some previous uses may be from the last 200 years, such as orchards now used as fields. Others may be past land uses, from 300 or even 3,000 years ago. They are all part of the rich pattern of Scotland's historic landscapes.

- Further details about the land uses can be found by clicking on the titles below the image in the description boxes. An example is shown in the extract below right.

- For those with GIS software, you can download HLA data and query it even further. In the 'Data Download' section of this website there is a specific study of how it can be applied.

Other options in HLAmap

You may wish to explore the data held in HLAmap in more detail. You can do this by changing the choices in the drop down menu in either the Primary or Secondary View. Alternatively, you can change the choices in both views. Or choose Single View and a larger area will be revealed. Again, a choice of layers is available, by 'land use' or by 'period of origin'.

Using HLAmap enables a quick assessment of archaeological and historic land uses that are over a hectare in area. It highlights where additional input may be needed when drawing together pre-scoping assessments and is therefore of great value.
But there are other sources that will need to be studied, as noted below.

Additional layers

The land use data of HLAmap is not the only data that can be called upon within the HLAmap website. Features less than a hectare in extent can't be recorded by HLA – they are just too small, but they can be added to the HLA data. Choose 'Single Map View' and click on the 'Additional Layers Menu' at the top right of the screen. Select Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments. This reveals the designated sites in your area of interest and provides direct links to legal documents and other information associated with them. You will also need to go to http://www.historic-scotland. gov.uk/index/heritage.htm to see if there are other sites that have been registered by Historic Scotland, such as designed landscapes or battlefields.

Canmore is also accessible from the 'Additional Layers Menu'. It shows sites recorded as points and gives an indication of the range of features that may exist in your area of interest. But, to comply with planning needs, other sources have to be consulted for site specific data.

Some Historic Scotland data is linked to the HLAmap website

Point data from Canmore gives an initial indication of the range of sites that will be highlighted in the local authority HER.

HLA and planning

The area-based data in HLA (grouped by 'land use' or 'period of origin') is of great value, providing an overview of potential heritage impact areas. There is no other similar single source of data.
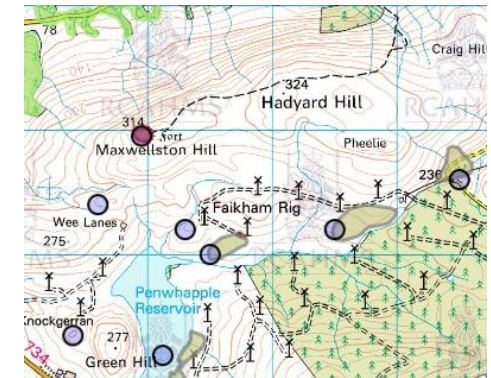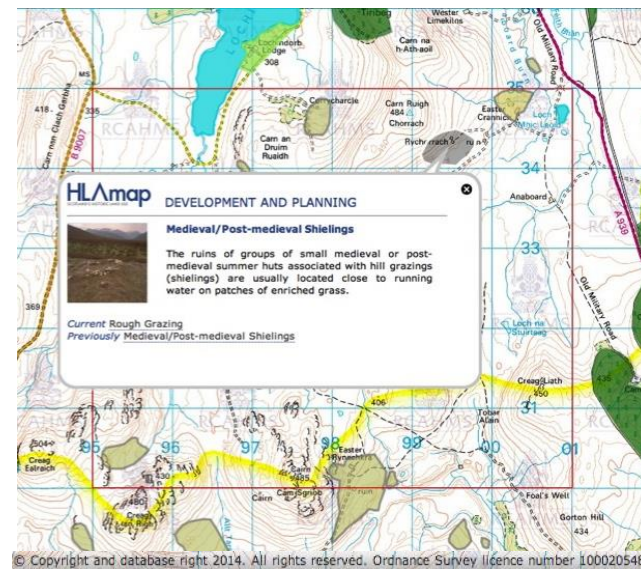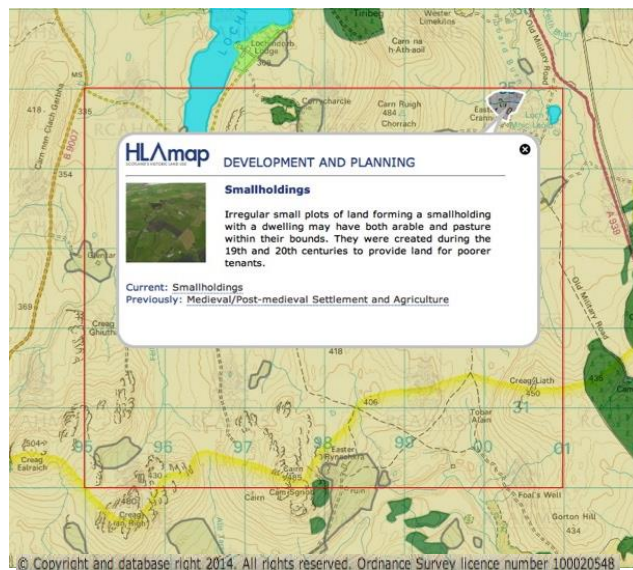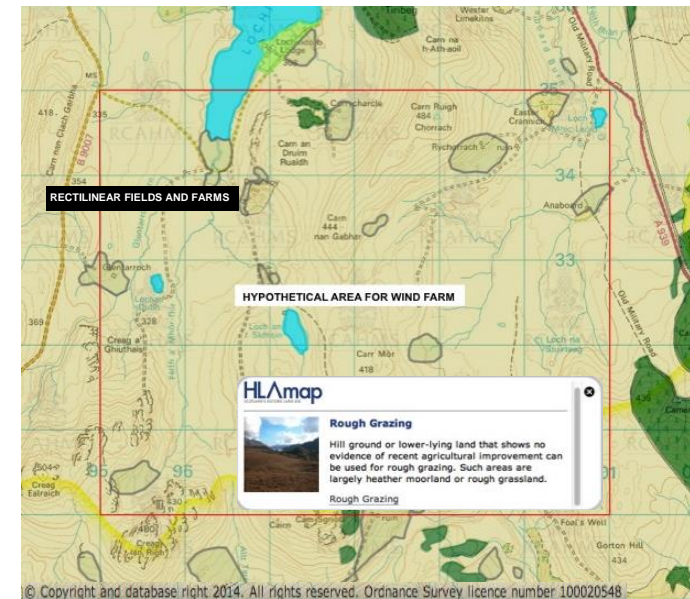
However, for pre-scoping development proposals it needs to be used in conjunction with Historic Scotland (HS) data and local authority Historic Environment Records (HERs). HLA data should be used alongside these records to enhance understanding of the historic environment at a landscape scale. For sites and areas that have been scheduled, listed or registered by HS see http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/heritage.htm. For local authority contact details see http://www.algao.org.uk/membership#scotland

Using HLAmap to help to inform development proposals
The next two pages reveal the information that can be gathered from HLAmap to help to inform preparatory thinking relating to development proposals, such as for a wind-farm.

A hypothetical wind farm

On the Home page click on 'The Map'. Zoom in to the area to be scoped – in this instance an area S of Nairn. Then choose 'Development and Planning' from the drop-down menu. Moving the cursor over the map HLA data reveals surviving evidence.
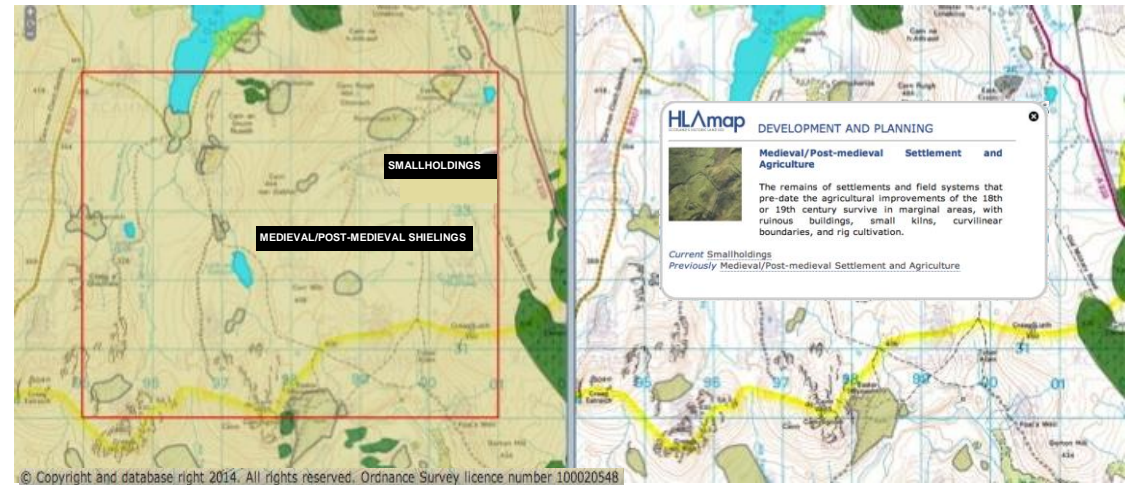
- Single click on the main colour of the primary view of the map and a brief description appears indicating that today rough grassland and/or heather moorland predominates.

  There is also a small area of a slightly different colour that reflects another land use category – rectilinear fields and farms of improvement agriculture from the later 18th century to the present day. Click and the brief description appears.

- Roll over other areas of the map and automatically areas are highlighted and pop-ups appear (both extracts below). Click and the description of that land use appears, as well as a reference to evidence for any previous land use.
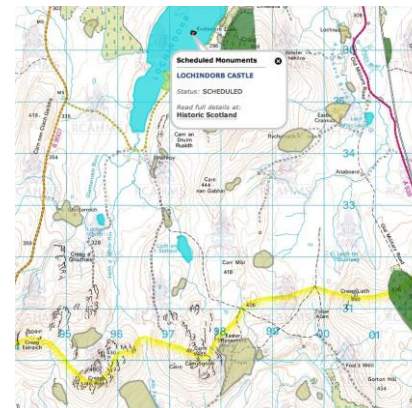
The results

Todays open moorland and rough grazing slopes northwards, down towards Lochindorb; an apparently featureless landscape. But a look at HLAmap shows just how well-used this environment once was. There are the ruins of a couple of smallholdings, reflecting 19th century attempts to farm this marginal ground. They are sited on previously farmed ground in medieval or post-medieval times. Contemporary features are the numerous summer shieling grounds along the watercourses. The shielings consisted of small huts and grazings that were used off-and-on for centuries.

HLAmap reveals the intensity of surviving land uses from the past , shown opposite. There is much to consider during the pre-scoping exercise.
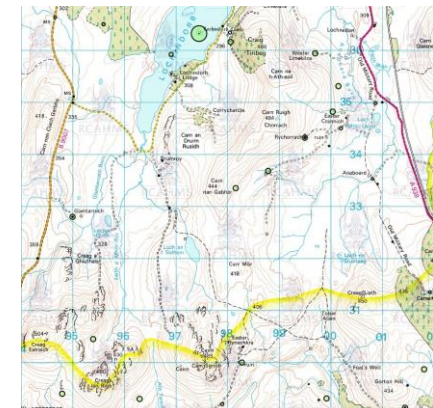
Bringing in additional layers from the other drop-down menu provides evidence of smaller features in the landscape. This data is indicative of potential that needs to be followed up by searches in the HS and HER datasets.

The potential for the discovery of new sites should also be borne in mind, especially as many areas of Scotland have not been subject to detailed fieldwork. In addition, the visual impacts of such a development on the wider landscape should be considered.

An extract from one of the HS datasets

An extract from the local authority's HER

Further advice

HLAmap provides a clear indication of the known areas of historic or archaeological interest within and in the vicinity of the main bounds of the development and associated infrastructure works, while HS and HER records will provide information about the presence of small, single or designated sites within the area. The potential for unrecorded features also needs to be remembered. Development works may impact on the evidence for historic land use directly or on the setting of particular features, while visual impacts on the wider landscape also need to be considered.

HLAmap gives a clear, initial indication of where there are likely to be major historic environment constraints on a development at an early stage. However, as noted above, detailed historic environment advice is needed before proposals are worked-up. The local authority archaeology service can provide advice on the implications of any proposed development, as well as the additional requirements of Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations.

The contribution of HLA

Using HLAmap enables aspects of the historic landscape to be easily assessed in the pre-planning process. In this example, it has been shown that sensitive areas can be rapidly identified. HLA data thus provides an extremely useful initial view of the historic environment in its broadest, mapped form.

This version was produced in October 2014