

Hence an inquiry into the origin of Highland scenery ought to trace the origin and history of the valleys before those of the hills. At the outset, it should be remarked that among the valleys of the Highlands, as in the rest of Scotland, certain prevalent types of form have been recognised in the popular names bestowed upon them. 'Straths' are broad expanses of low ground between bounding hills, usually traversed by one main stream and its tributaries, such as Strath Tay, Strath Spey, Strath Conon. The name, however, has also been applied to wide tracts of lowland which embrace portions of several valleys, but are defined by lines of heights on either side. The best example of this use of the word is afforded by Strathmore—the 'great strath'—between the southern margin of the Highlands and the line of the Ochil and Sidlaw Hills. This long and wide depression, though it looks like one great valley, strictly speaking includes portions of the valleys of the Tay, Isla, North Esk, and South Esk, all of which cross it. Elsewhere in central Scotland such a wide depression is known as a 'howe,' as in the Howe of Fife between the Ochil and Lomond Hills. 'Glen' is the usual Gaelic epithet for the ordinary type of Highland valley. A glen is usually a narrower and steeper-sided valley than a strath, though the names have not always been applied with discrimination. The hills rise rapidly on either side of a glen, sometimes in grassy slopes, sometimes in rocky bosses and precipitous cliffs, while the bottom is cumbered with mounds of debris and scattered boulders, or is levelled out into a flat platform of alluvium through which a stream meanders. Occasionally the bottom of the valley is occupied by a lake. Where a glen contracts and its river flows through a rocky gorge, there is very commonly either a lake, or a meadow marking the former site of a lake, above the gorge.