



Viewpoint

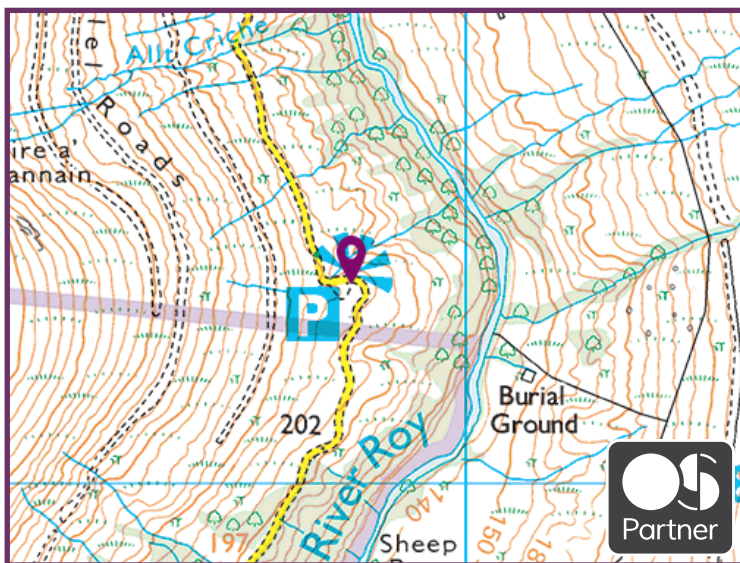
The lie of the lines



Time: 15 mins

Region: Scotland

Landscape: rural



Location:

Car park and viewing point just north of Bohuntine, off A86 Roy Bridge, Highland PH31 4AH

Grid reference:

NN 29096 83597

Cast your eye across the valley. Do you notice anything unusual here, particularly on the slopes to the left-hand side?

If you look carefully you should be able to see that there are three lines running in parallel, sometimes they fade into the mountainside but in other places they are quite distinct. They have become known as 'parallel roads'.

What has made these lines across the landscape?



According to local legends these lines were created by Fionn MacCumhail, or Fingal the Giant, a mythical Celtic warrior-king. The glen (mountain valley) used to be heavily wooded, so Fingal built a set of roads through the forest so he could hunt deer while riding on horseback. It is said the marks on the mountainside are the remains of these roads.

This explanation is not generally used today, but the real story behind these 'roads' is no less fascinating.

At the end of the last Ice Age, approximately 13,000 years, a glacier blocked the lower parts of three glens-Roy, Gloy and Spean. The ice acted like a dam, trapping water behind it and forming a large loch (or lake). The water filled the Glen to a height of 260 metres (**see Diagram 1**).

The water could not rise any higher than this as a low point between two hills allowed the water to escape. The waves of the loch, and continual freezing and thawing of the water at its edge, carved a beach into the sides of the mountains. We can see the remains of this beach today as the lowest 'road' at 260 metres high.

Rise and fall

But why are there three 'roads' here?

Between 100 and 200 years after the first beach was established the temperature dropped. More ice formed, and the glacier advanced up into Glen Roy, blocking off the overflow point between the two hills. As a result the loch became deeper. Its waves carved another beach into the mountain sides, this time at 325 metres. The water could not rise higher as there was a second overflow point at this height. Excess water drained into the neighbouring valley Glen Spean (**see Diagram 2**).

After another 100 or so years passed, the temperatures dropped again. This caused the glacier to advance further up Glen Roy and blocked off the second overflow point. Once again the depth of the loch increased and a third new beach was formed at a height of 350 metres (**see Diagram 3**).

When the climate eventually warmed up, the ice melted and the glacier retreated. The overflow points were unblocked in reverse order, so the loch drained away. The beaches cut into the mountainside are a ghostly reminder of the three stages of this long-vanished loch (**see Diagram 4**).



Viewpoint created by Helen Rawling
Photos: Glen Roy © Helen Rawling



Diagram 1

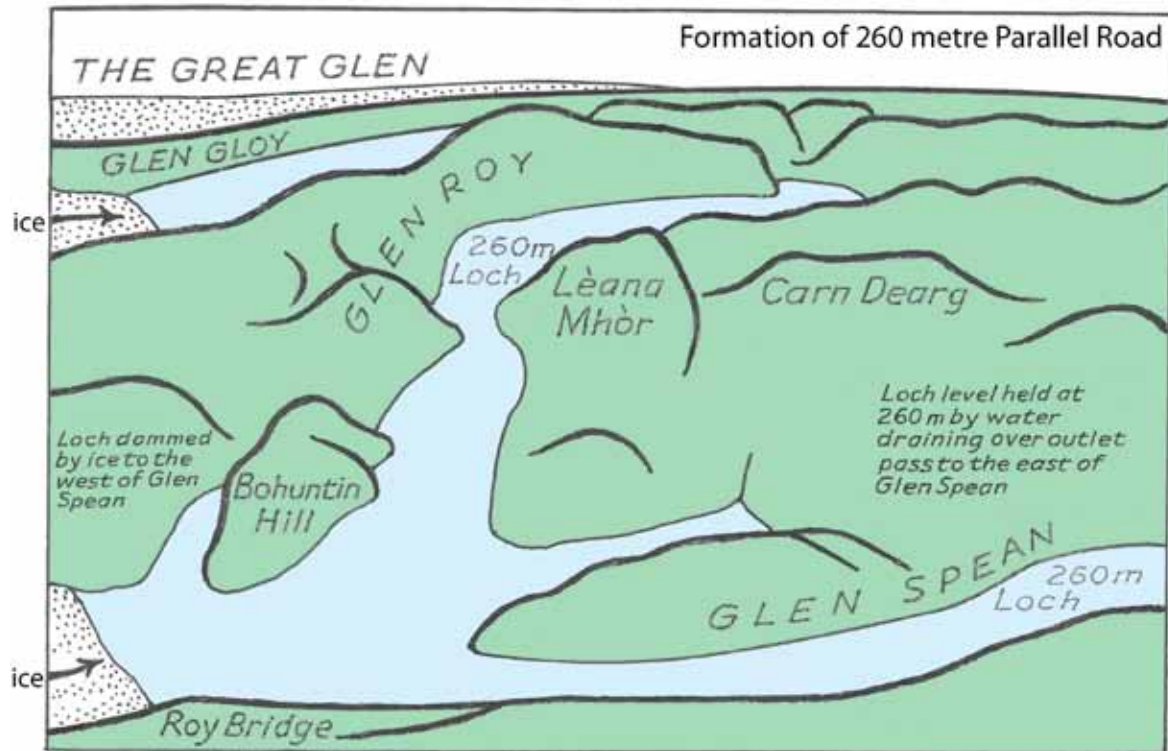


Diagram 2

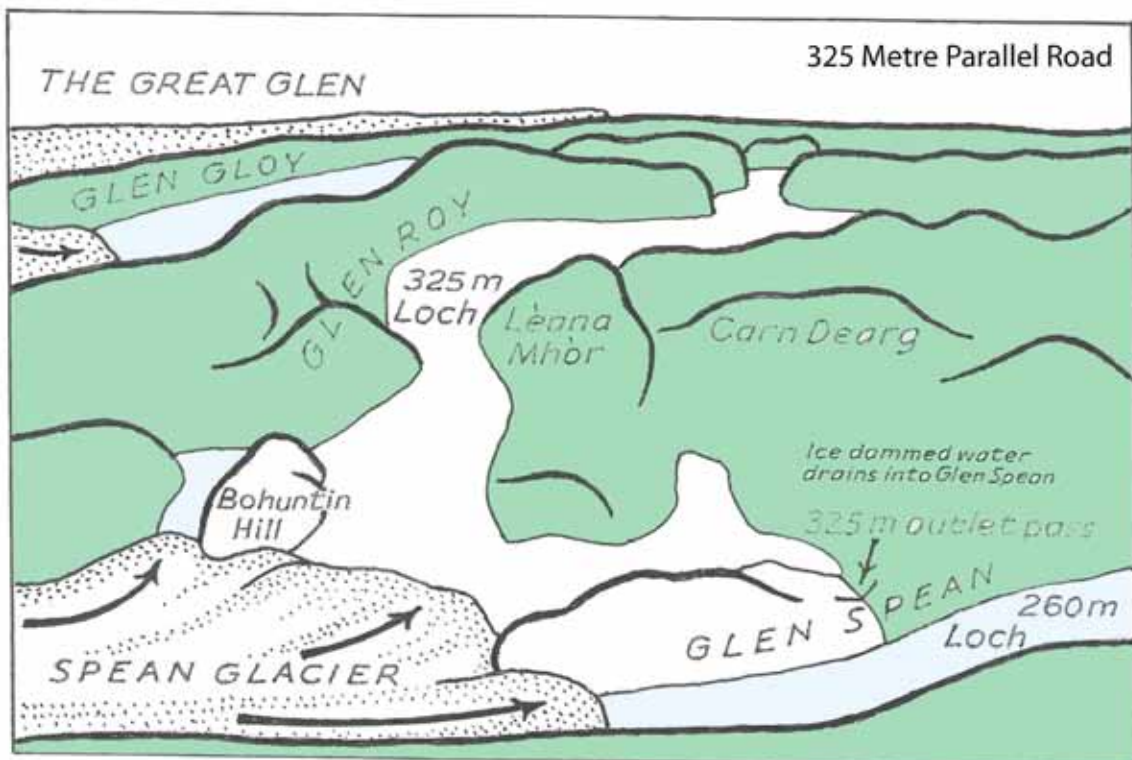




Diagram 3

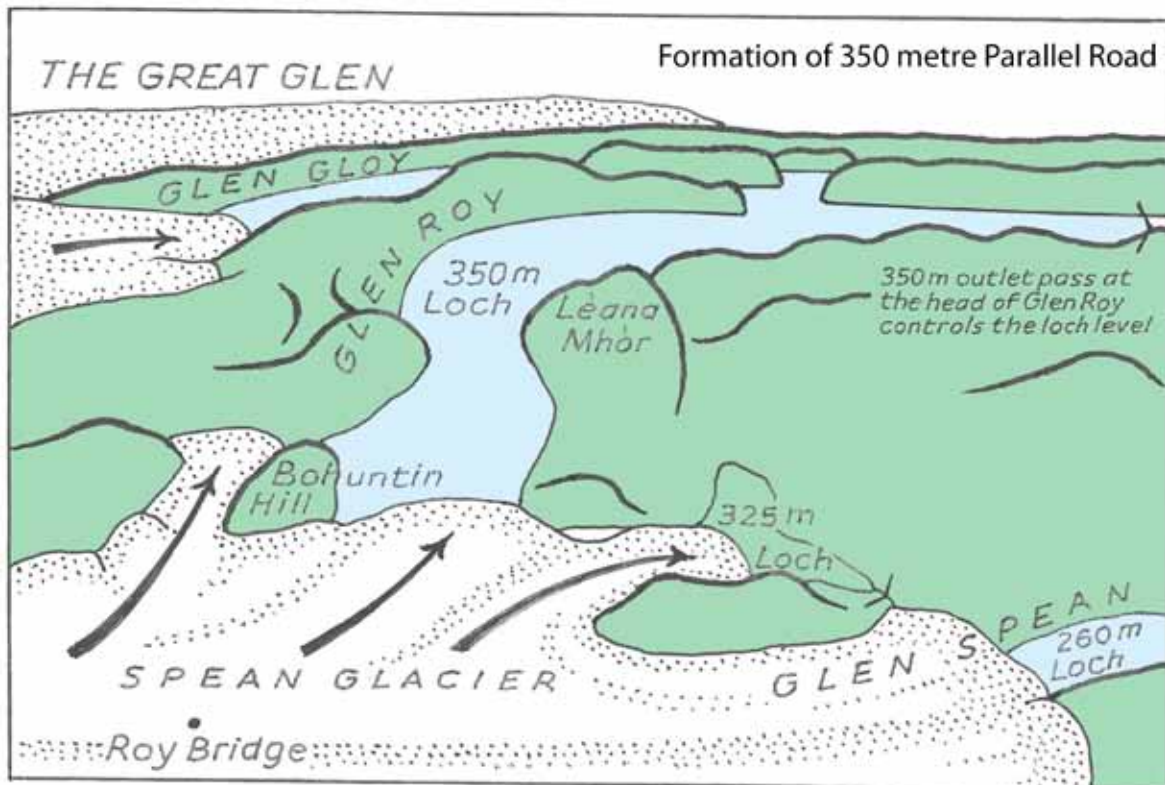


Diagram 4

