

Glaciers in the Glen

Eigh-shruthan sa Ghleann

Pronounced: Ayrooan sa Ghlann



Parallel lines on the hillside in Glen Roy formed by glacial beaches.

Thirteen thousand years ago the ice cap, which had been melting, started to grow again due to colder conditions.

In Glen Roy Gleann Ruaidh, Glen Gloy Gleann Glaidh and Glen Spean Gleann Spiothan, great dams of ice formed and stopped water escaping. The result was huge lochs whose levels rose higher and higher up the hillsides.

In these glens you can see horizontal lines along the hillsides. Known as "parallel roads" "ròidean co-shinte", these lines are actually narrow beaches which were worn away by the lake water. Each line shows the height of the water at a certain time.

Eventually, around 11,500 years ago, the climate became warmer. Large volumes of water collected under the glaciers eigh-shruthan, lifting the ice upwards. The water was then able to surge out of the glens in huge floods known as "glacier bursts".

In the biggest glacier burst of them all, five cubic kilometres (1.2 cubic miles) of water are believed to have flooded eastwards to Loch Ness and the sea, raising the level of Loch Ness by eight metres (25 feet).



Glaciers, such as this, created much of the landscape that you see along the Great Glen.

Did you know...?

Before geologists worked out what had created the "parallel roads", it was thought that they were the work of ancient giants seann fhamhairean or early Scottish kings!