

Run-of-River hydro-electric schemes in the Highlands

a photostudy of their impact on wild land and our enjoyment of the mountains

March 2019

this is Glen Quoich, one of the most intrusive schemes, formerly wild and secluded, yet conspicuous from the South Cluanie Ridge and the Quoich Munros, in off the Kinloch Hourn road

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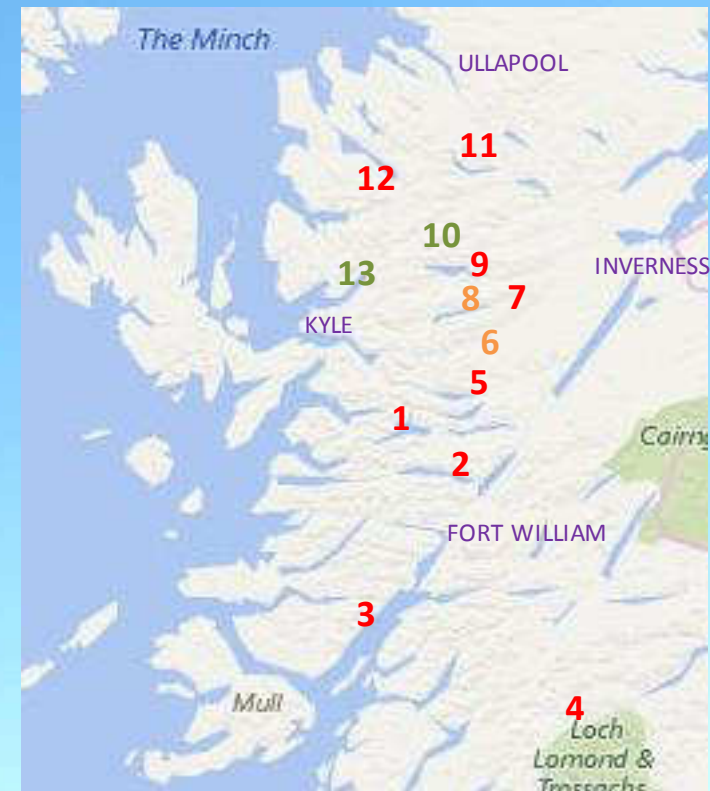
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Run-of-River hydro-electric schemes in the Highlands

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these schemes just happen to be ones we have come across while going about the Highlands in the last few years - there are many more, and this is not a 'sample survey'.

most of them we consider **very** or **disastrously** intrusive, but **a few show what can be done**, if we have to sacrifice any more of our wild Highlands.



Gleann nam Fiadh, Affric

Gleouraich 1034m

1 Glen Quoich

Loch Quoich

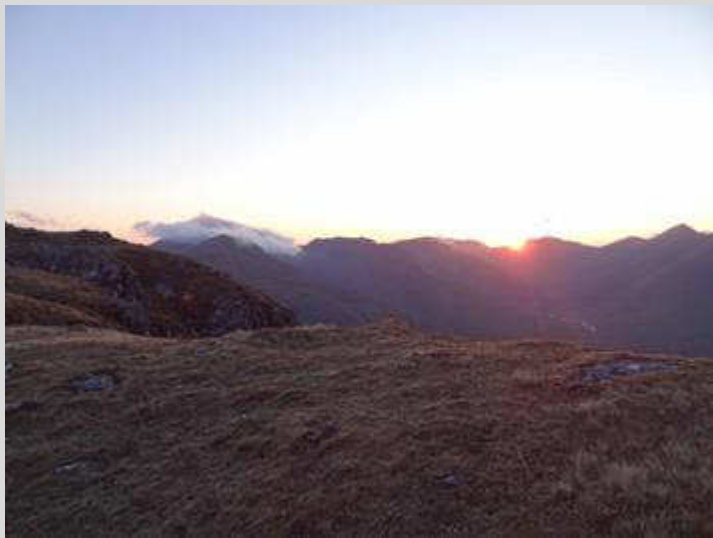
(c) J Michael Loughridge



(c) John Digney

this is **Gleouraich**, a popular Munro above **Loch Quoich**

and tucked in behind is Glen Quoich, seen in these old photos from the South Cluanie Ridge, and (inset) from the summit. modest estate tracks went up the two branches.



*and this is why people like to climb **Gleouraich***

*Hamish Brown calls the stalkers' path which winds up it
'the finest in the Highlands' - indeed.*



they even glimpse it from
the summit ridge



*but this is what people now
see, from the stalkers' path ...*

*... looking onto Glen Quoich,
once the most secluded of
backwaters between Glen Shiel
and Knoydart.*

*some shrug.
some are devastated.
like the land.*





*and this is what they now see
from the South Cluanie Ridge*

*- why carve a new track up the east
side, duplicating the one to the Lodge ?*

*- why tap every wee side burn, with
not much fall, and often quite low ?*

*the web of tracks ramifies to numerous weirs
in both Wester and Easter Glen Quoich*

Sgurr a' Mhaoraich 1027m

Sgurr an Doire Leathain 1010m

Am Bathach (arrow - next slide)



old estate track





the riverbank here once offered a delightful place to camp, at the foot of one of our most remarkable zigzag stalkers' paths; now crushed.

a year later - and one of the tracks has been extended right into a precious, steep-sided coire-glen





two big borrow pits, to build all these tracks - they will long remain conspicuous scars



at the very start of Hamish's 'finest stalkers' path', you see up this steep side valley to the summit of Gleouraich

- *very difficult to engineer a 'safe' access track up such confines without scars*
- *and a silenced burn, for what ?*



Gleouraich 1034m



new steep access track viewpoint

Loch Quoich

stalkers' path

Gleouraich means 'mountain of the yelling'.

we hear it.



2 *Gleann Cia-aig*

this side valley provides a main access to the Lochy Munros.

a woodland path used to ascend by the Eas Chia-aig waterfall, and join a forest road.

above the 'beauty spot' falls, it now passes a turbine house and ascends a zigzag access road blasted out of the rock.



"after"

turbine shed
falls

Loch Arkaig

*zigzag road blasted out of
rockface can just be seen in
dark sector of image*

*below :
how green was my
woodland path*







*the crude, over-engineered access road leaves indelible rockwall scars and spoil banks.
unnecessary 'urban' signage proliferates.
this scheme is on Forestry Commission Scotland land.*





*the overscaled weir, elaborate pipe bridges
(and barricades) could not be more intrusive.
many walkers come this way.
no-one has cared a jot to blend the scheme in.*

3 Kingairloch

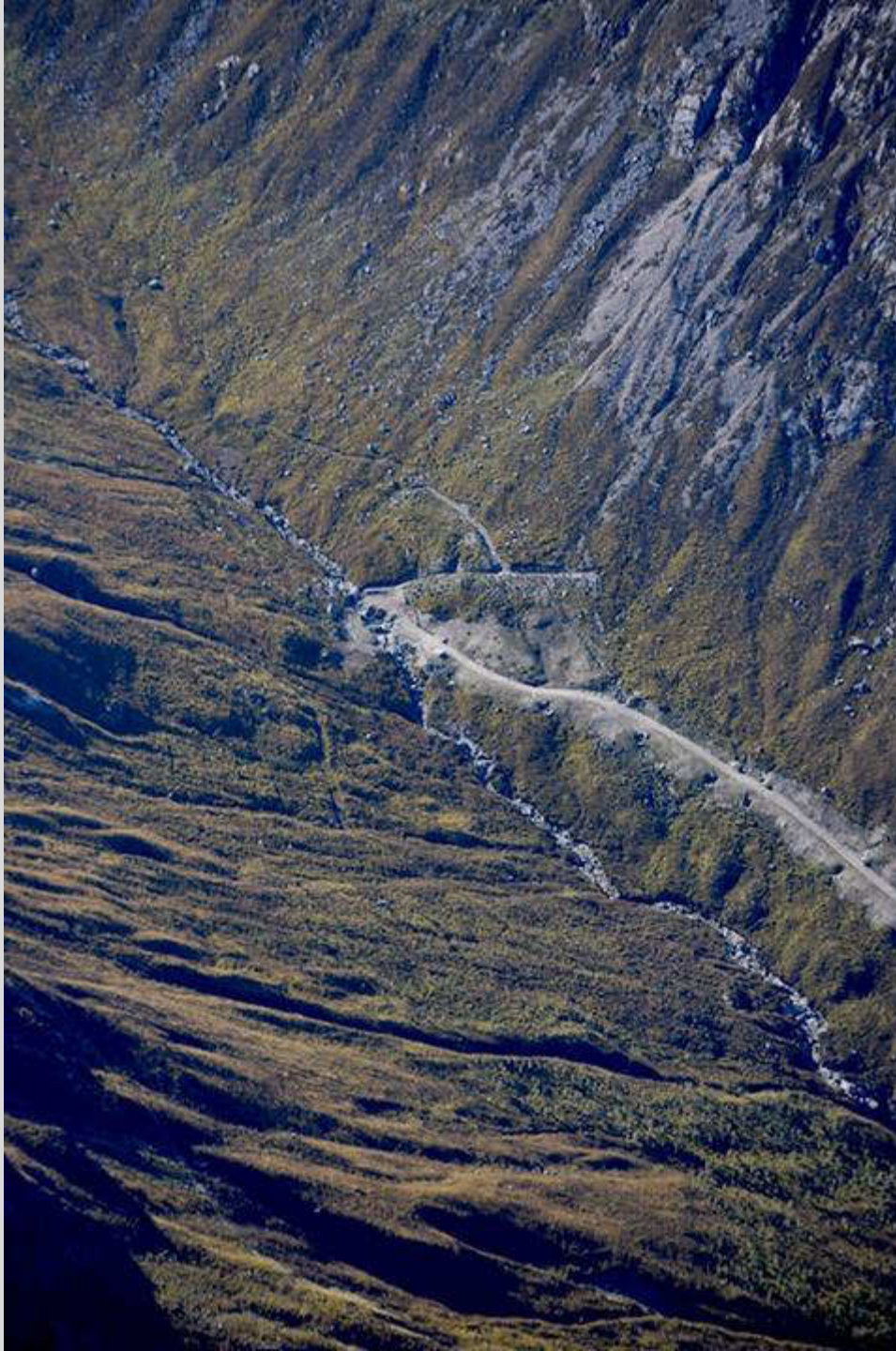
*this is a little-known wild, rugged tract just south of the main road from Corran Ferry to Strontian, Morvern and Ardnamurchan.
and this is **Fuar Bheinn**, a Corbett on the magnificent long-day ridge circuit*



and down there is the main road from Corran Ferry to Strontian, Morvern and Ardnamurchan.
and the steep, rough northern corries of **Fuar Bheinn**, have just been 'harnessed'



A 861



these three 2017 air photos are from the website of Patricia and Angus Macdonald (Aerographica).

they have long been celebrated for their work, which is displayed in Parliament and National Galleries.

they record, never comment.

they do not need to.

this is how the two corries were, just a wee while back



A 861

4 Auch, Bridge of Orchy

Ben More
Stobinian

viaduct

viaduct

(c) John Digney

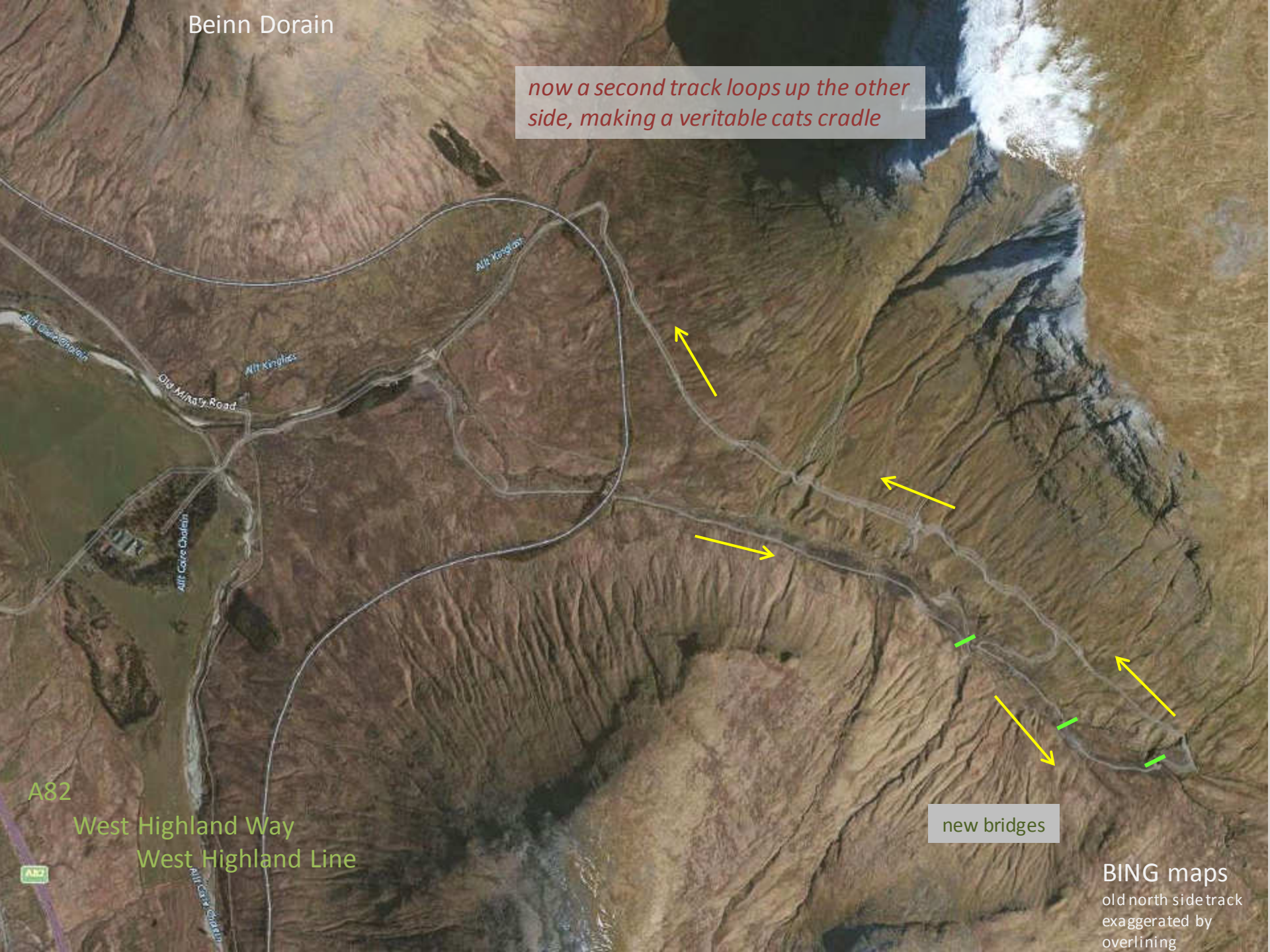
we are on **Beinn Dorain** in the **Orchy Munros**, looking down onto Auch Ghleann and the famous **Horseshoe Curve** on the West Highland Line.

this side valley offers secluded, quite wild walks through to Glen Lyon or **Tyndrum**.

already in this old slide, an estate track has been rather crudely bulldozed up it; it was healing slowly

Beinn Dorain

now a second track loops up the other side, making a veritable cats cradle



A82

West Highland Way
West Highland Line

new bridges

BING maps
old north sidetrack
exaggerated by
overlining



(c) Jane Meek

the cat's cradle dominates the whole glen - could one track at least not have been restored?

the new one has been smoothed off nicely - but looks as though pickups could roar up at 40 mph.

with the conspicuous weirs, three new bridges, and turbine shed, this is now a rural-industrialised landscape.



in this open, grassy glen, a well-designed Run-of-River scheme could have been acceptable, with a single, minimum-width maintenance/estate track, no bridges - and native woodland regeneration



5 *Ceannacroc, Glen Moriston*

*this is **Ceannacroc**.
hardly anyone has ever heard of it.
it is truly wild. or was.
yet it is just off the A87 **Road to Skye**.
three glorious long corries, culminating in
magnificent crags on high Munros.
one has a Prince Charlie's cave.
access tracks already penetrate right up them
- now upgraded to weirs well into two*

Sgurr nan
Conbhairean
1110m

Sgurr nan
Conbhairean

River Doe

Glen Moriston

< Cluanie Inn

A87

Loch Cluanie

Bun Loinn

BING maps



*Sgurr nan Conbhairean
and the middle
Ceannacroc corrie*

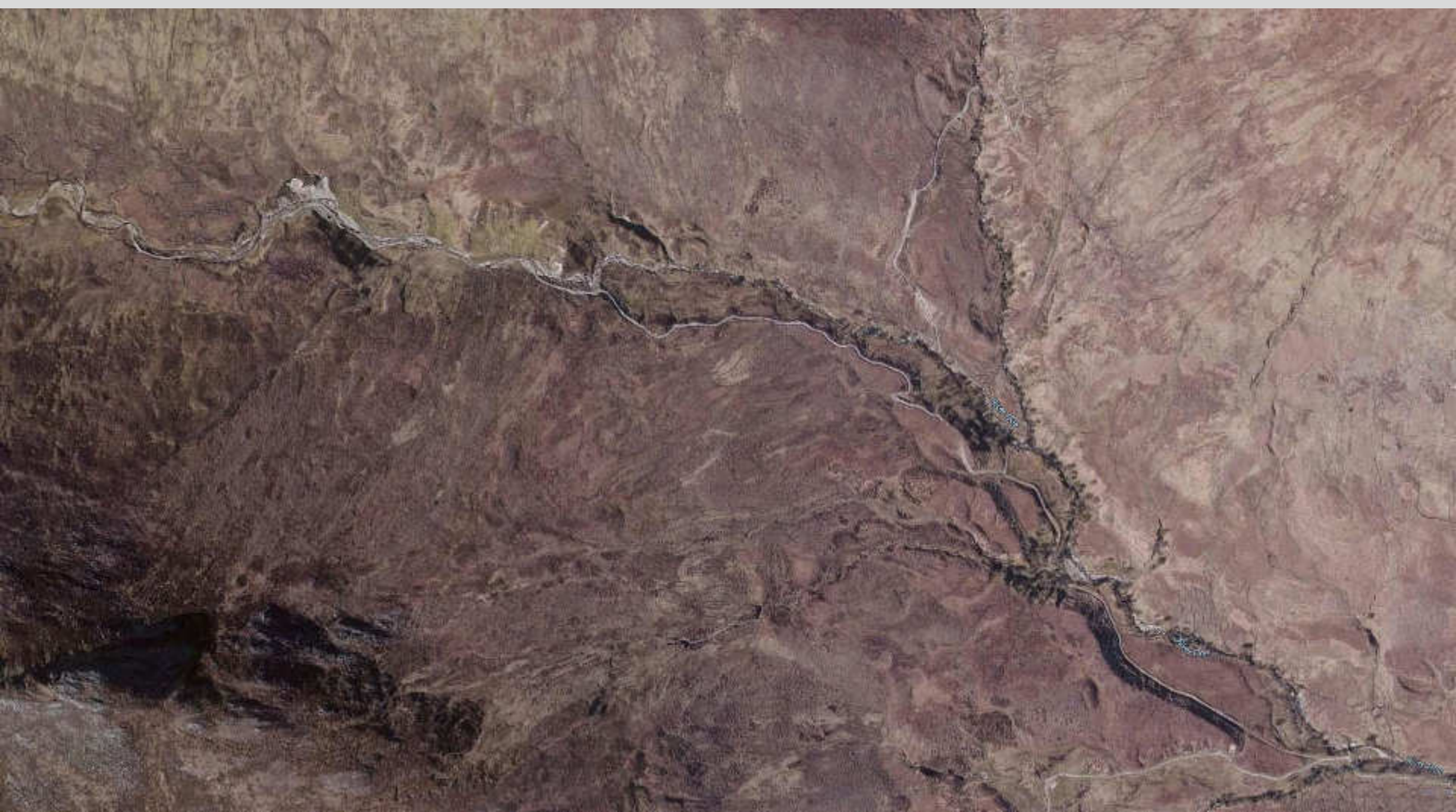
*such approaches
should be sacrosanct*

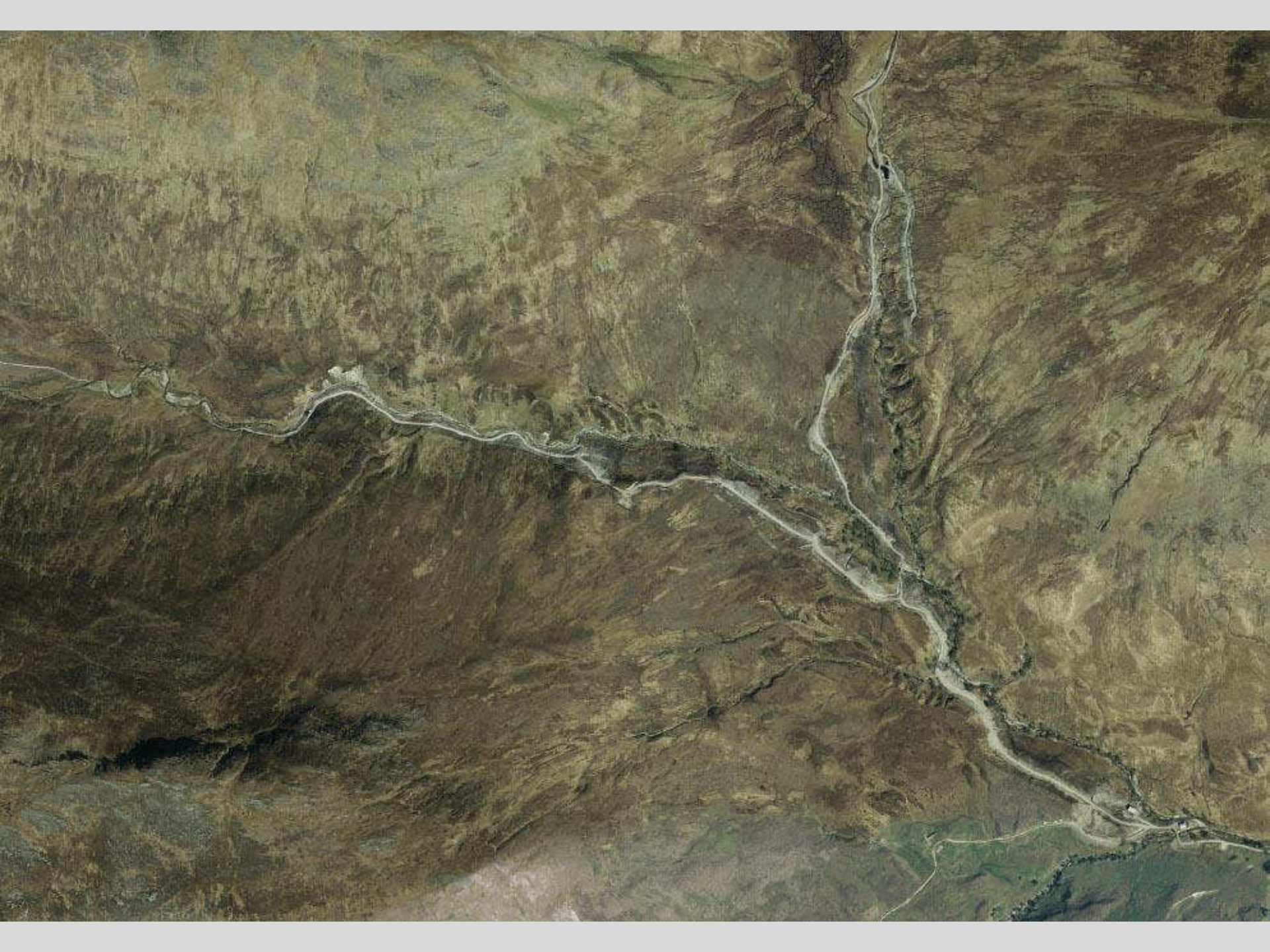
*Ceannacroc north corrie access track, as
seen from the north rim (Aonach
Shasuinn, Affric)
- actual weir locations tbv*

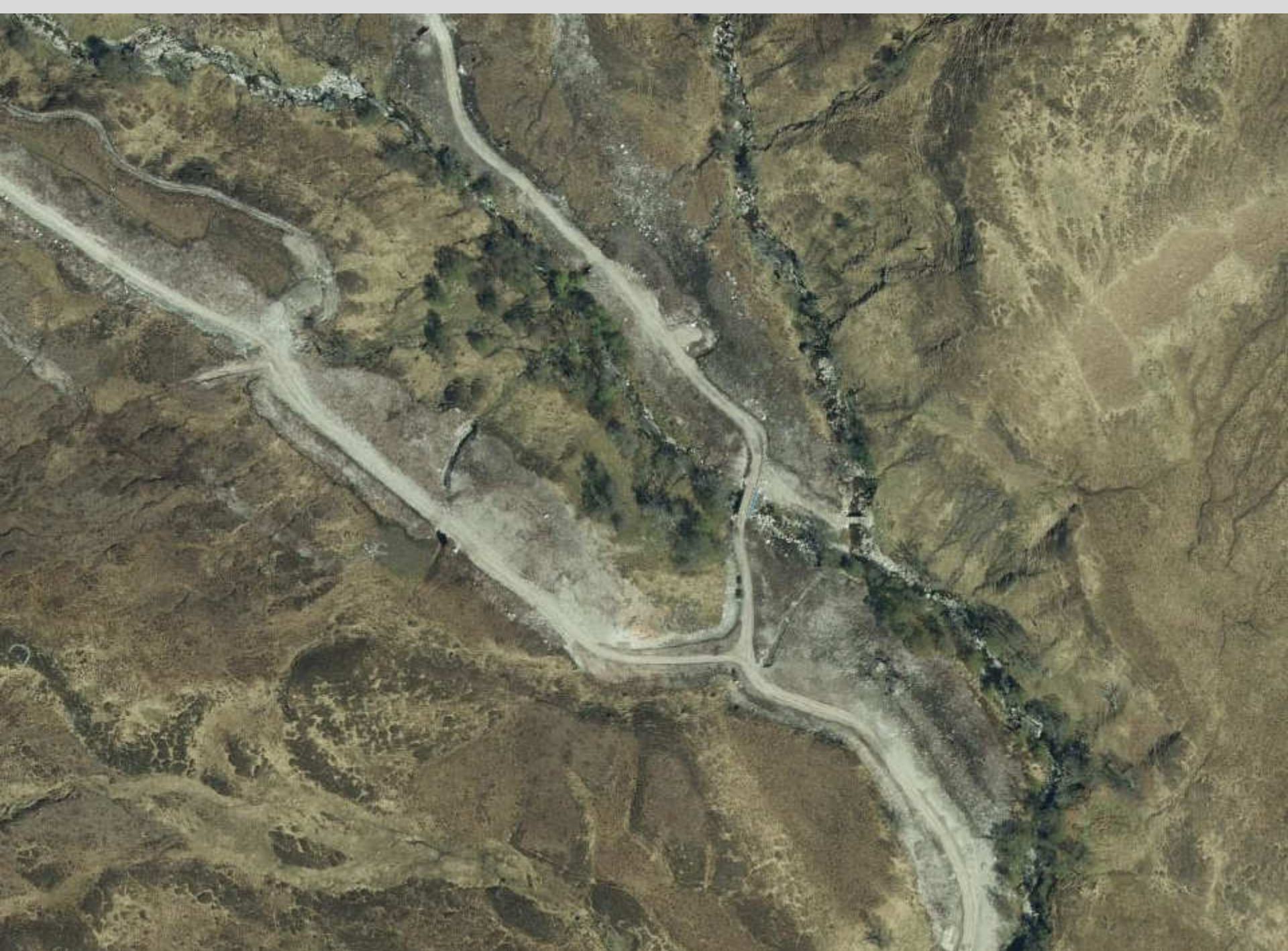


the next corrie north. these hydro access tracks will never be reinstated, they are useful to the estates.

a story about Ceannacroc, as seen from the north rim (Aonach Shasuinn, Affric) is appended



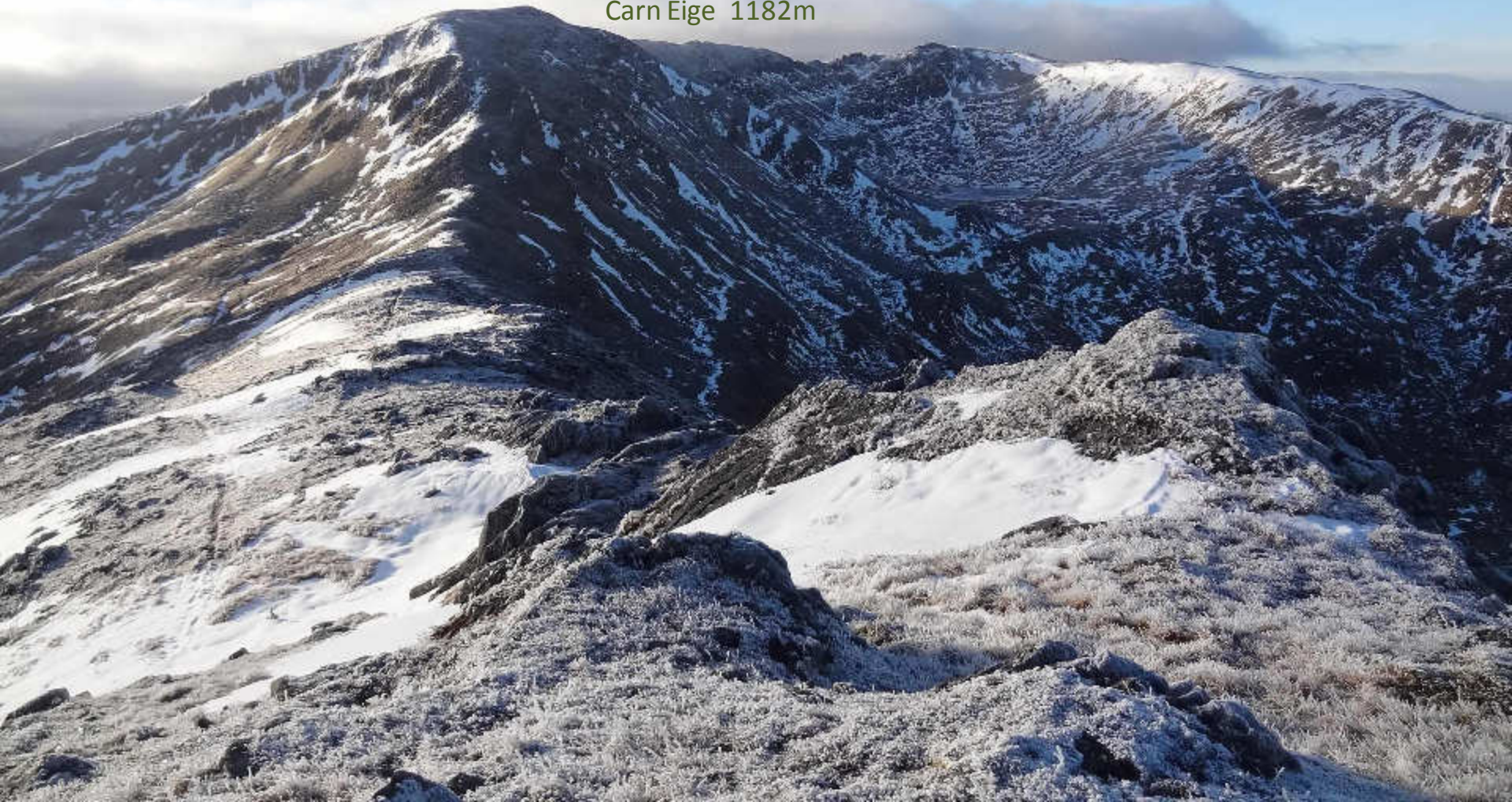




6 *Gleann nam Fiadh, Affric*

*these are the **North Affric Munros**, with our highest peak NW of the Great Glen in the distance
a stalkers' path leads up the open corrie on the left onto this fine ridge*

Carn Eige 1182m



*this is the main stalkers' path, along the riverbank up Gleann nam Fiadh.
our branch heads up right to the col in the previous picture.*

and the good news is - it is still like this, and is not threatened (well, not this time round)



*but the sad news is - to get to that point, you now have to walk up an RoR hydro road
- the weir is by the digger*

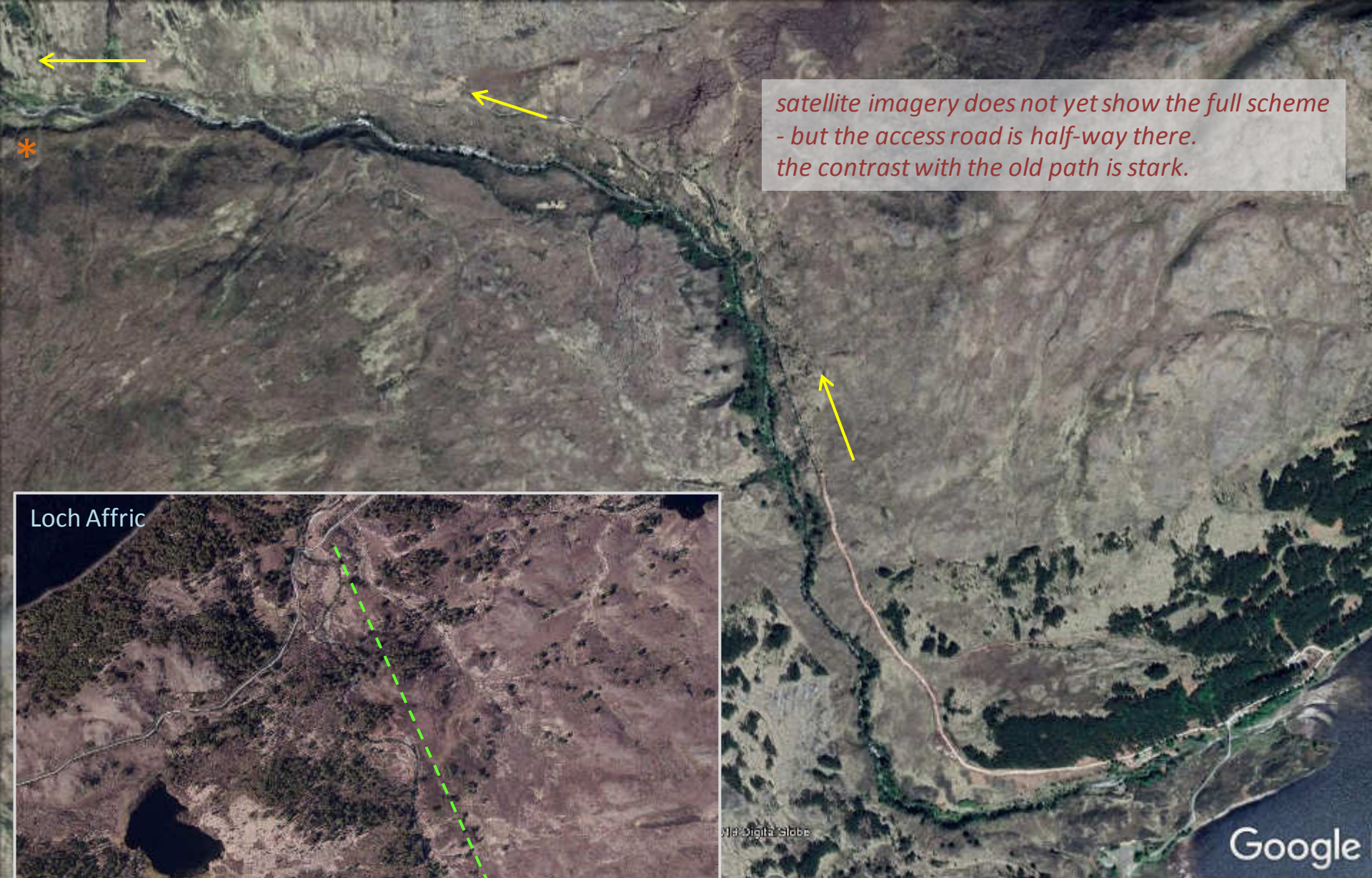


*the weir is at the Forestry Commission boundary. it pushes 'rural industry' right into the gates of wild land.
the scheme taps 200 m of fall. putting the weir at the top of the outer glen, with 100 m of fall, would have
halved the access road length and not intruded into the mountains.*



*that is 4 km of hard, unforgiving
footslogging (orange line) where
before was a nice, winding path*

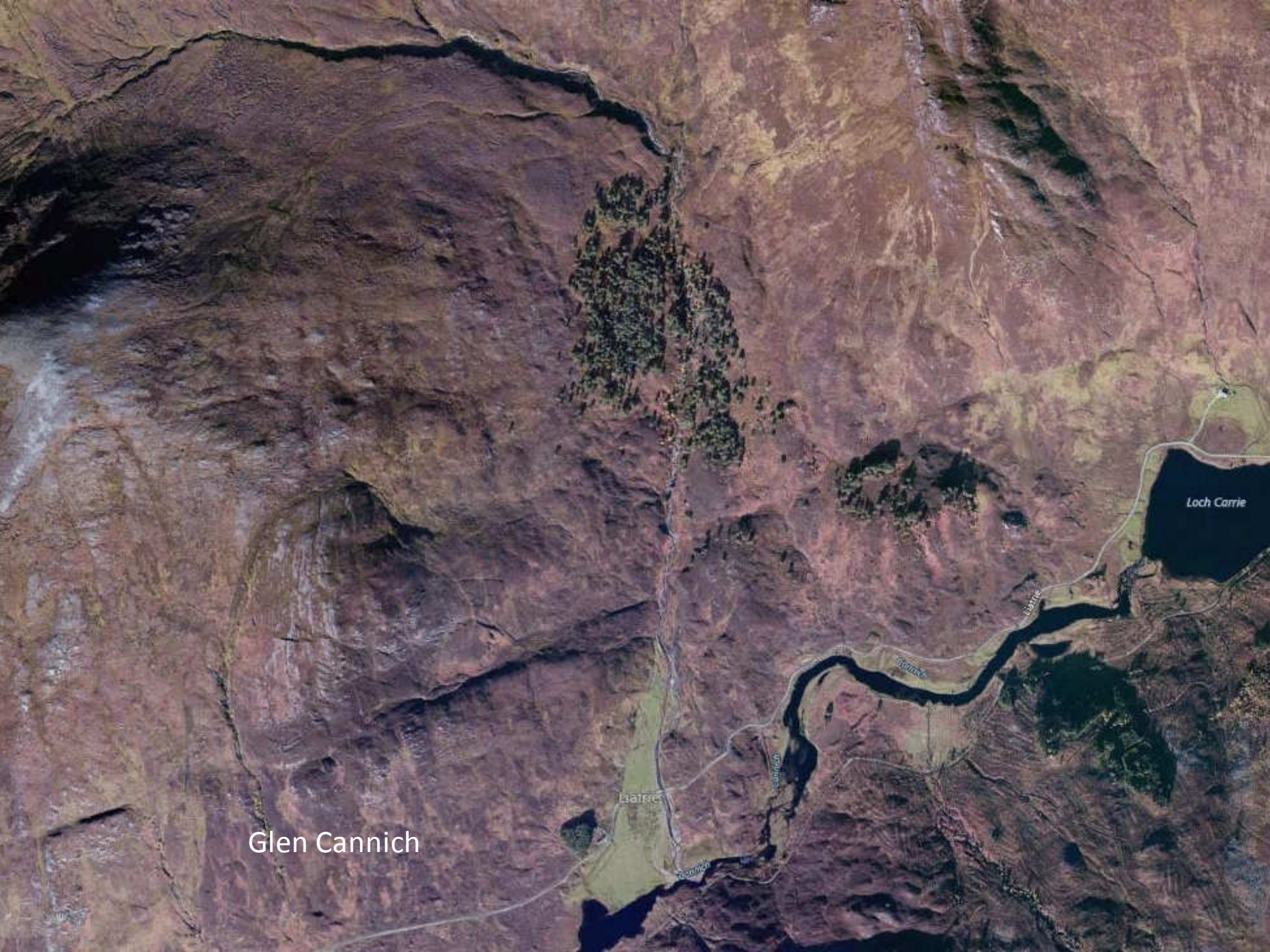




*satellite imagery does not yet show the full scheme
- but the access road is half-way there.
the contrast with the old path is stark.*

Loch Affric

*and on the south side of Glen Affric, we await
satellite imagery of an access road and pipeline up
through our finest surviving Caledonian pine forest.*



Glen Cannich

Loch Carrig

Cannich

Cannich

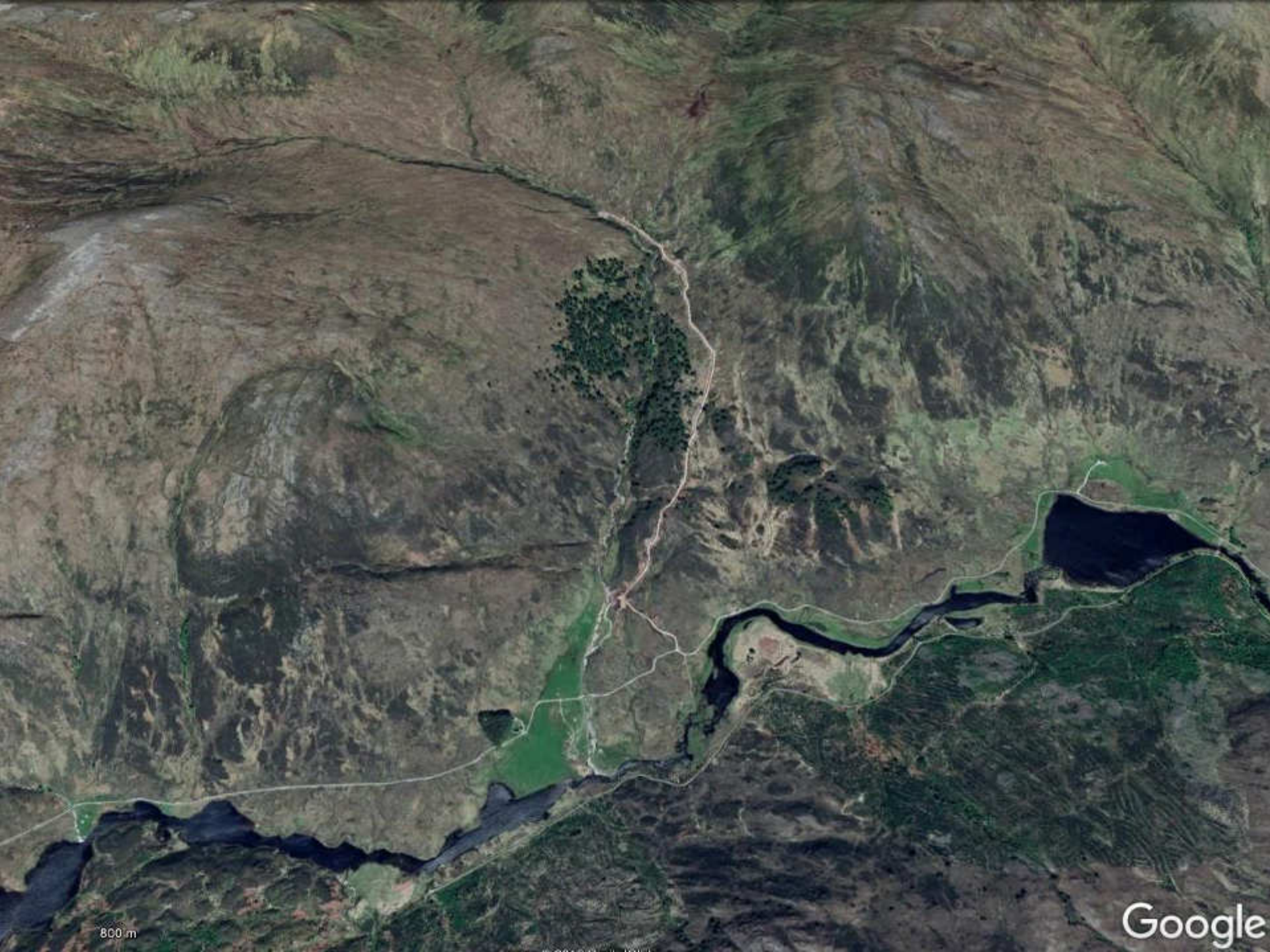
Cannich

Cannich



this is **Glen Cannich**. this is not Munro or Corbett country. but a once secret side valley above **Liattrie** harbours a perfect small remnant of our ancient **Caledonian pine forest**. it was trackless, and felt very wild. now :





800 m

Google



*the heart of the **Caledonian pine forest**, the tangled dell between the open wooded slopes, is now even more silent*



*before, it was completely trackless. not even a hint of stalkers' path on the map. just saying.
so why not insist the track be reinstated - as it can be done ?*



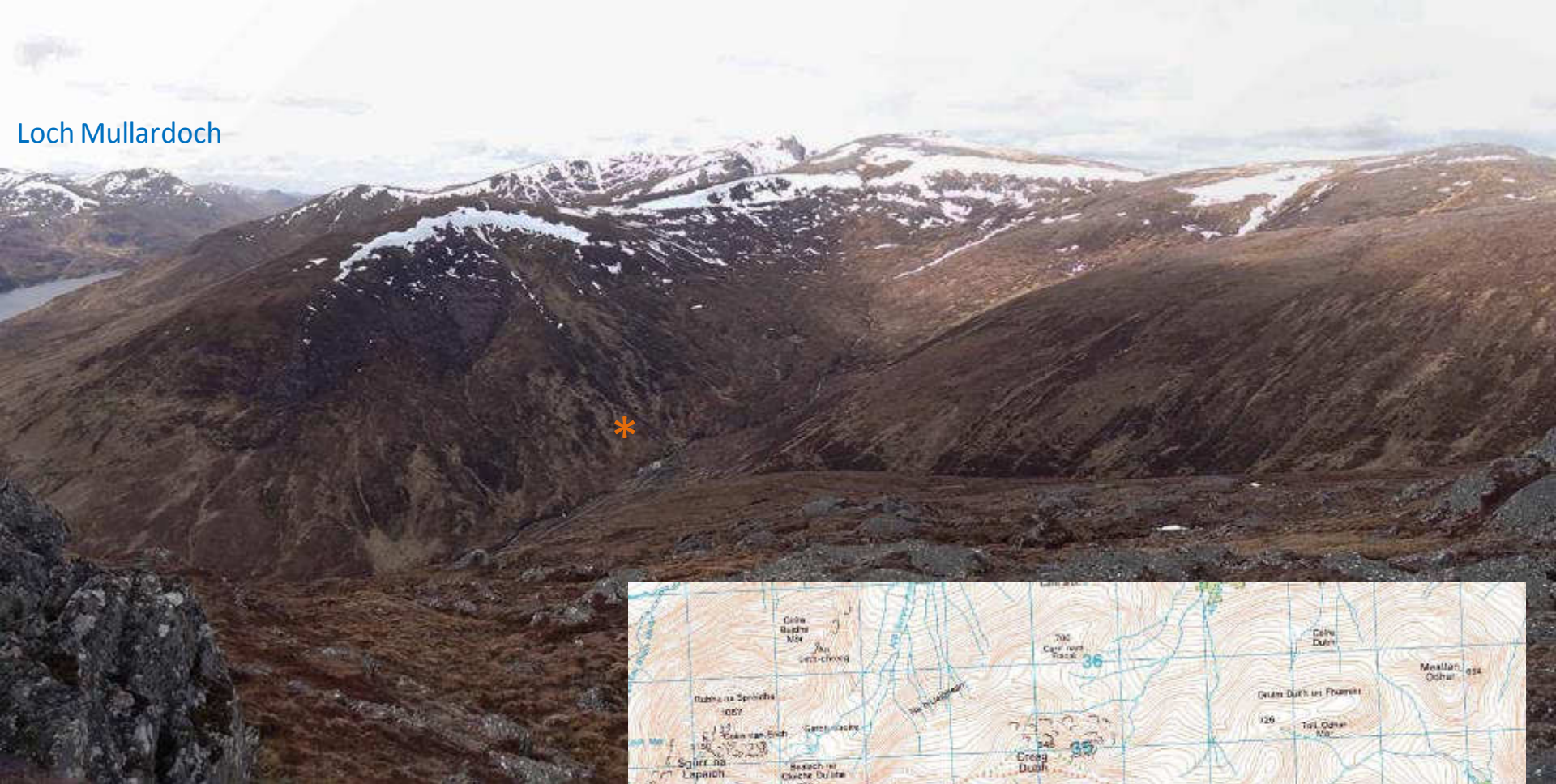
Sgurr na Lapaich 1151m

these are the eastern approaches to The Mullardoch Munros, from Glen Cannich. a wild, bleak, exposed, remote range. and down here, on the way to the first one you either look down onto or walk up this side valley :



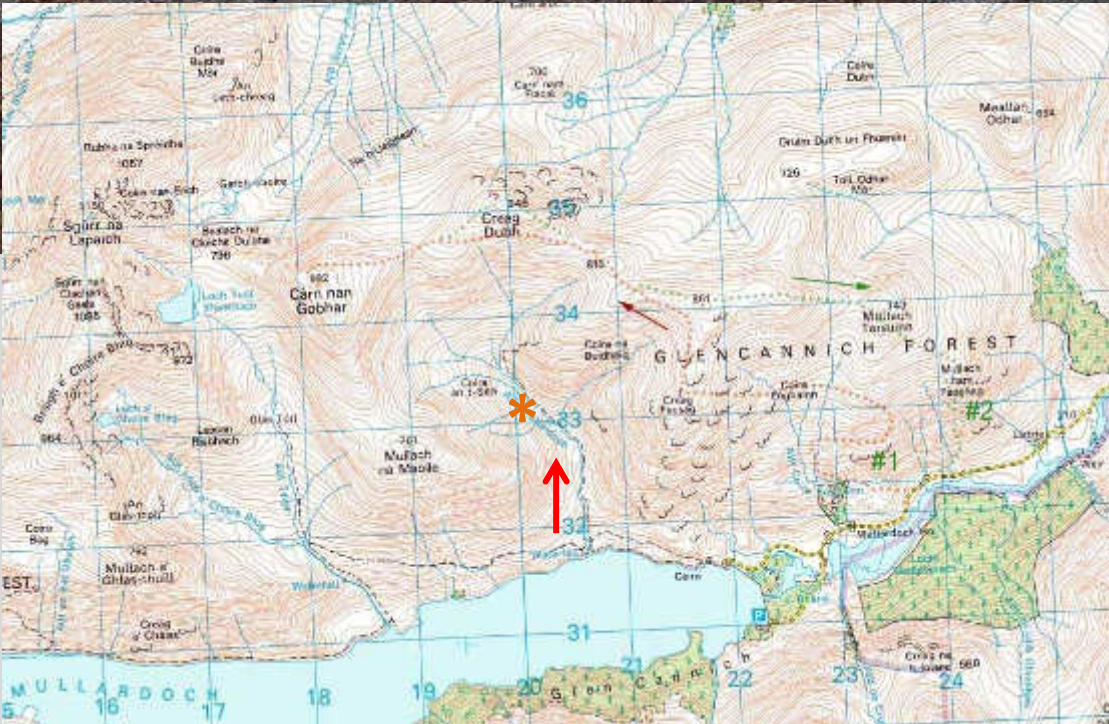
Carn nan Gobhar 992m


Loch Mullardoch



this side valley had a neat stalkers' path up it ↑ (which my son and I once went up by)
- now it has a bulldozed track to an intake weir

from up here, the weir may look an insignificant speck...



An aerial photograph of a rugged mountain landscape. The terrain is covered in brown and tan vegetation, with a network of small streams and a larger burn visible. A narrow, light-colored track or road winds through the lower part of the image. A small, white, rectangular object is visible on the left side of the track. The overall scene is a high-altitude, mountainous environment.

specks can be very eye-catching

*and, another silenced burn
to walk up beside, on a
hard track*



- (repeat) this side valley had a neat stalkers' path up it (which my son and I once went up by)*
- *now it has a bulldozed track to an intake weir*
 - *which is unlikely to be removed, so the whole approach has been comprehensively de-wilded*



Sgurr a' Choire Ghlais
1083m

*these are the high, graceful **Strathfarrar Munros**.
there were two and are now three man-made intrusions*

- 1 - Loch Monar** with hydro drawdown
- 2 - small forestry blocks** at Monar Lodge and in Strathfarrar
- 3 - Run-of-River hydro access track**

and a short stalkers' path :





Loch Monar



this is what an intact, well-used stalkers' path looks like

the old stalkers' path up Coire na Faochaige went as far as the red arrow, now a permanent road.

access to the weir goes right in to the heart of the corrie.

- inset shows poor design - a straight line, a conspicuous bridge

view west

in the summer of 2018, my 12-year-old grandson took me up his second Munro, a Strathfarrar.

on the way back, we detoured up a faint old stalkers' path (not on the map) to this col, for a view up Loch Monar to some of our most remote Munros. even in misty July, it is a thrilling prospect.

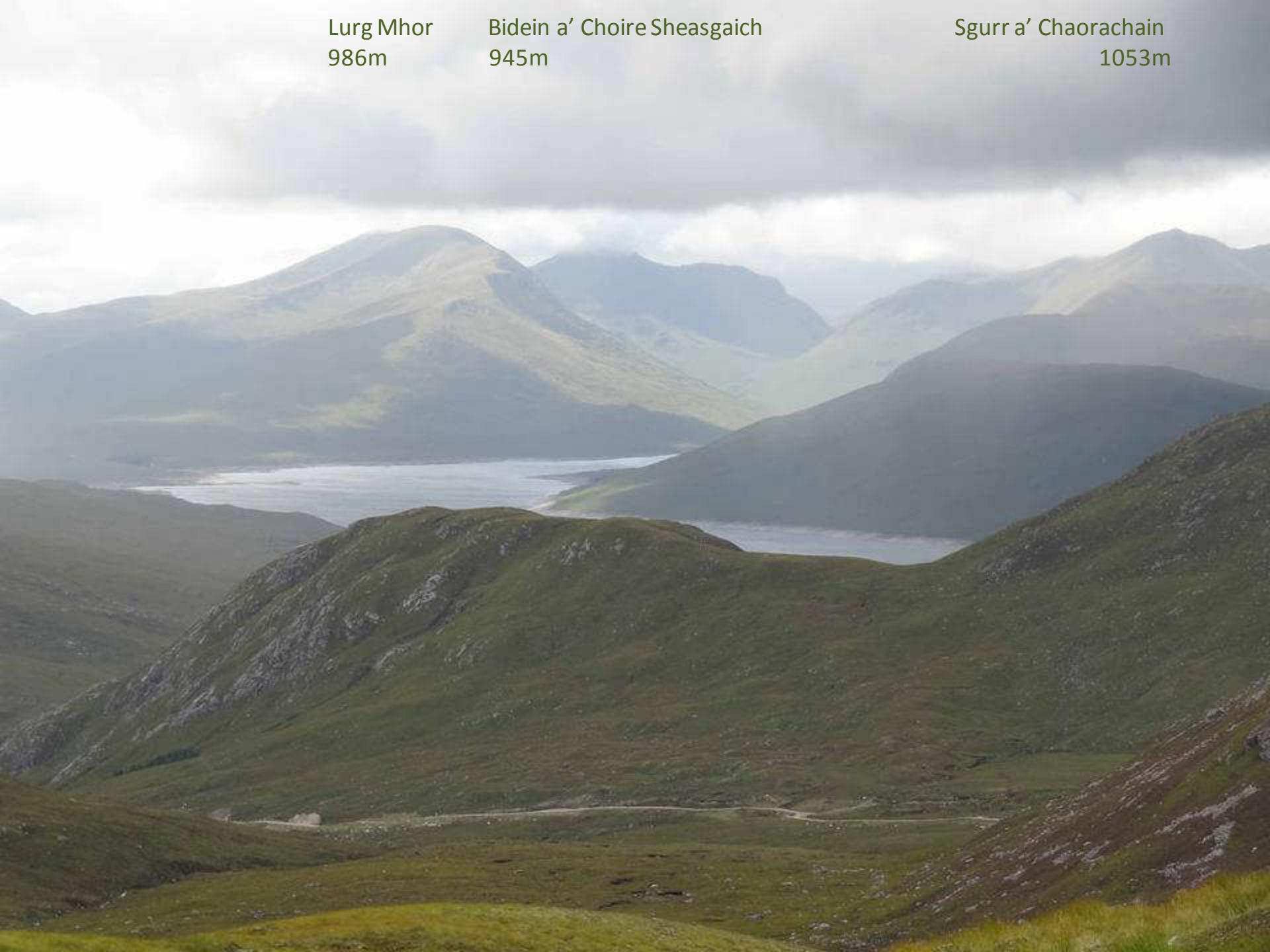
but his first indignant question was, "what ever's that ?"



Lurg Mhor
986m

Bidein a' Choire Sheasgaich
945m

Sgurr a' Chaorachain
1053m







*we are coming off the east
ridge of **Moruisg***

*before : short stalkers'
paths up the lower
burnside, no pre-existing
tracks, desolate but pristine*

*by contrast, this scheme beside the A890
Achnasheen--Kyle road is one of the less
obtrusive*

- *weir well hidden in a ravine*
- *lower half of access track fully reinstated,
not even a path*





*if no access is needed to the weir
here, why anywhere ?
(a wild land conscious owner ?)*


*BUT : the burn in spate is too dangerous to
cross, just above the weir - yet at the foot of
the ravine, it is easily stepped across.*

*and walking down beside it,
the burn is now silent.*





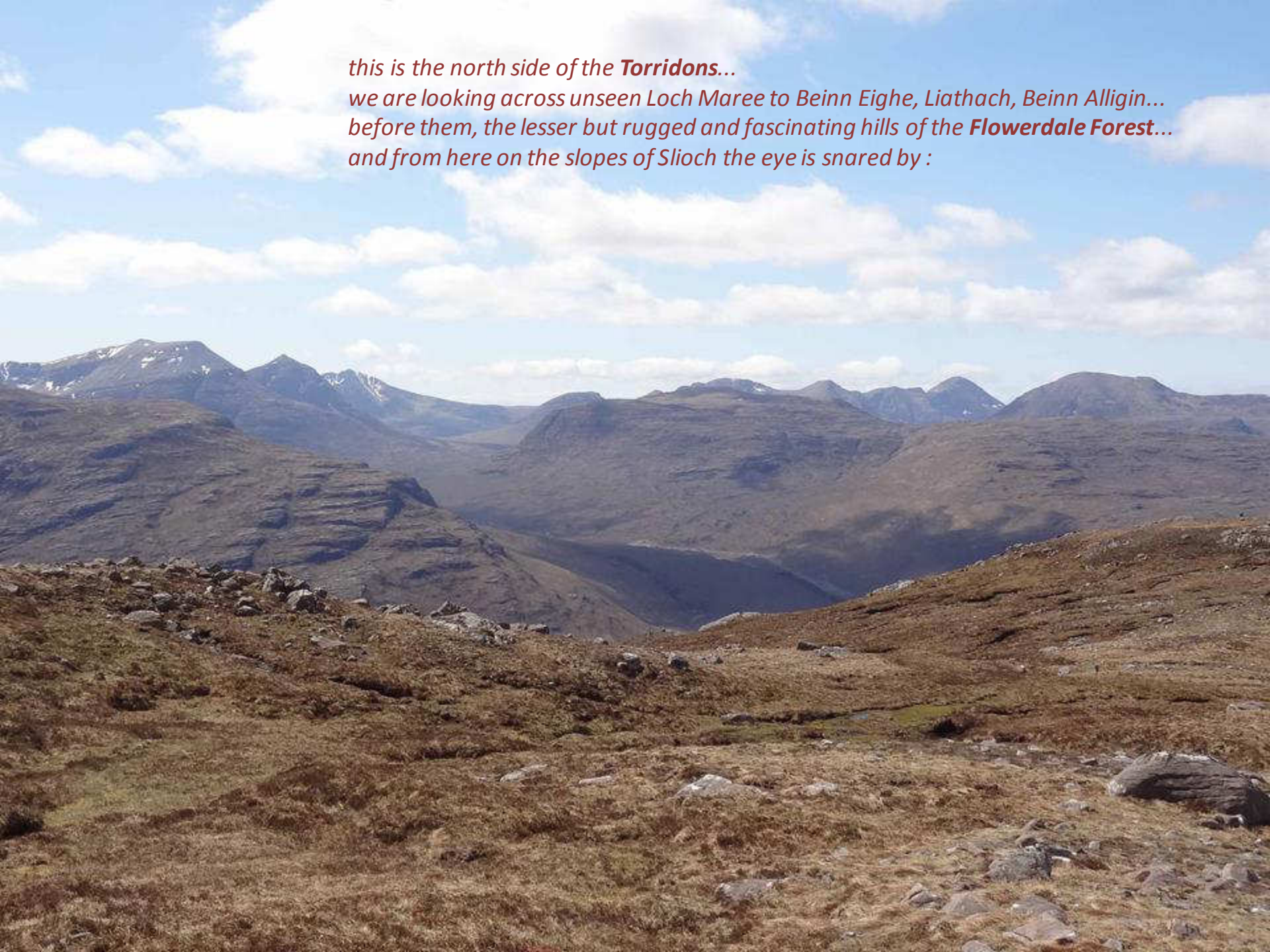
Fannaich Lodge

looking down from the high crest of this famous chain of Munros  above the Ullapool road, a new access track up open slopes to a weir is a conspicuous intrusion, where no path was before. will it be reinstated ?



*this is the north side of the **Torridons...***

*we are looking across unseen Loch Maree to Beinn Eighe, Liathach, Beinn Alligin...
before them, the lesser but rugged and fascinating hills of the **Flowerdale Forest...**
and from here on the slopes of Slioch the eye is snared by :*



*...a new access track where once was only a thin stalkers' path...
...which will remain, for the benefit of sporting access...
...as will, forever, the concrete weir and impounded artificial lochan*

weir

old stalkers' path

R Grudie
ravine



*this is the **Grudie Bridge** scheme*

*and this is the remarkable summit of Beinn a' Chearcaill -
the giants' football park - which we reach via Glen Grudie*



Beinn Eighe 1010m

Glen Grudie

weir site

Loch Maree

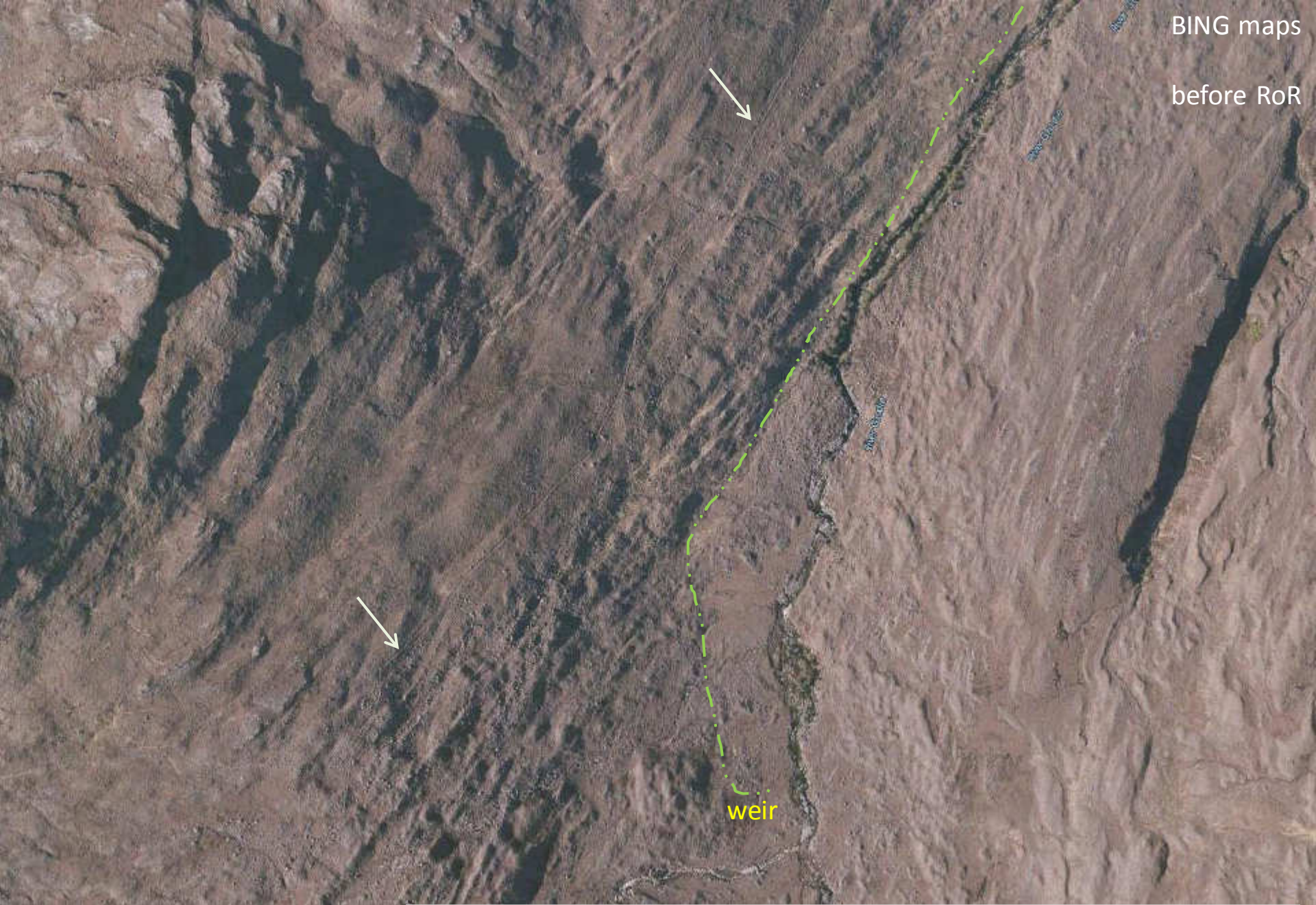
Image © 2019 Getmapping plc

Image © 2019 DigitalGlobe

Google Earth

Imagery Date: 9/9/2015 57°38'52.36" N 5°25'08.52" W elev 94 m eye alt 6.04 km

and this is how it was, just a few years ago



BING maps

before RoR

weir

Glen Grudie - in detail - the fine stalkers' path is just discernible (arrowed), now superseded by a track nearer the river; and the rare wooded gorge is now silent

south of **Torridon** are the Munros of the **Coulin Forest**

some of our finest stalkers' paths weave through their corries and bealachs down to Achnashellach and Strathcarron stations on the Kyle line

Beinn Liath Mor 925m

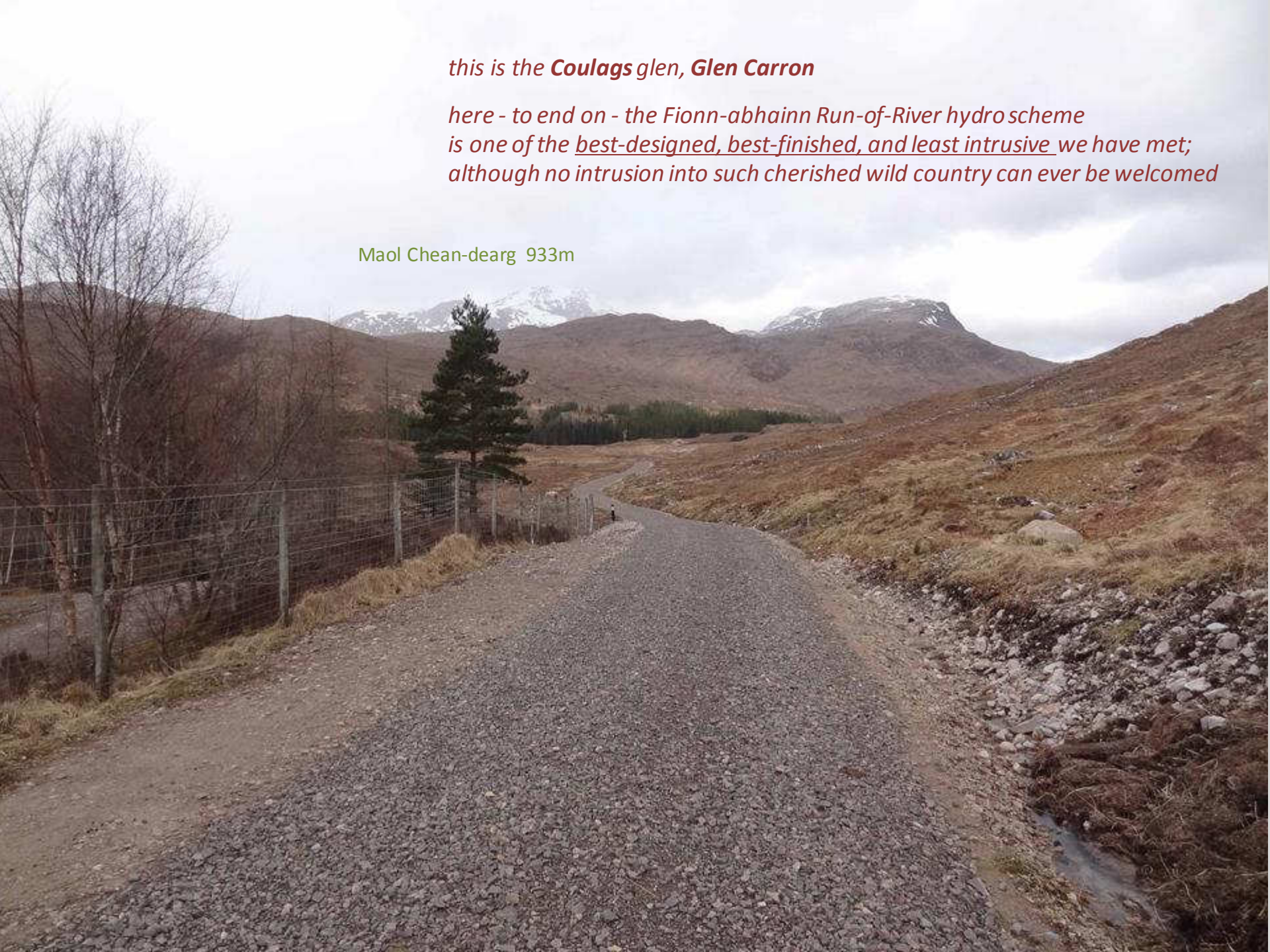
Maol Chean-dearg 933m



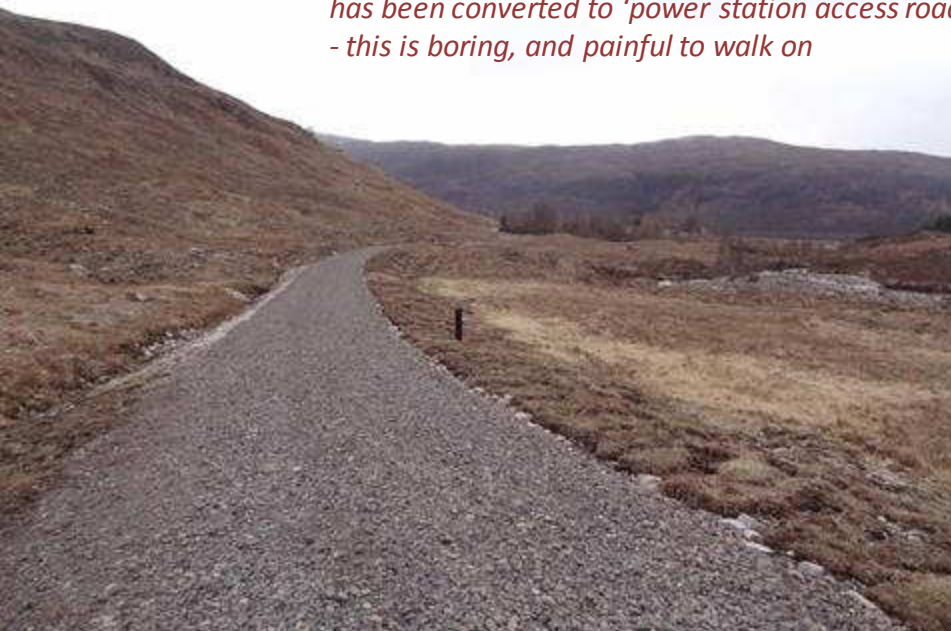
*this is the **Coulags** glen, **Glen Carron***

*here - to end on - the Fionn-abhainn Run-of-River hydro scheme
is one of the best-designed, best-finished, and least intrusive we have met;
although no intrusion into such cherished wild country can ever be welcomed*

Maol Chean-dearg 933m



*bad marks first : the initial half-mile of lovely old stalkers' path from Strath Carron over to Torridon
has been converted to 'power station access road'
- this is boring, and painful to walk on*



- but the detailing, signage and finishes are excellent



*good marks next : the power house is the best designed we've seen (pity about the white front gable peeping out)
- and the moraine-like screen bund is a delight*

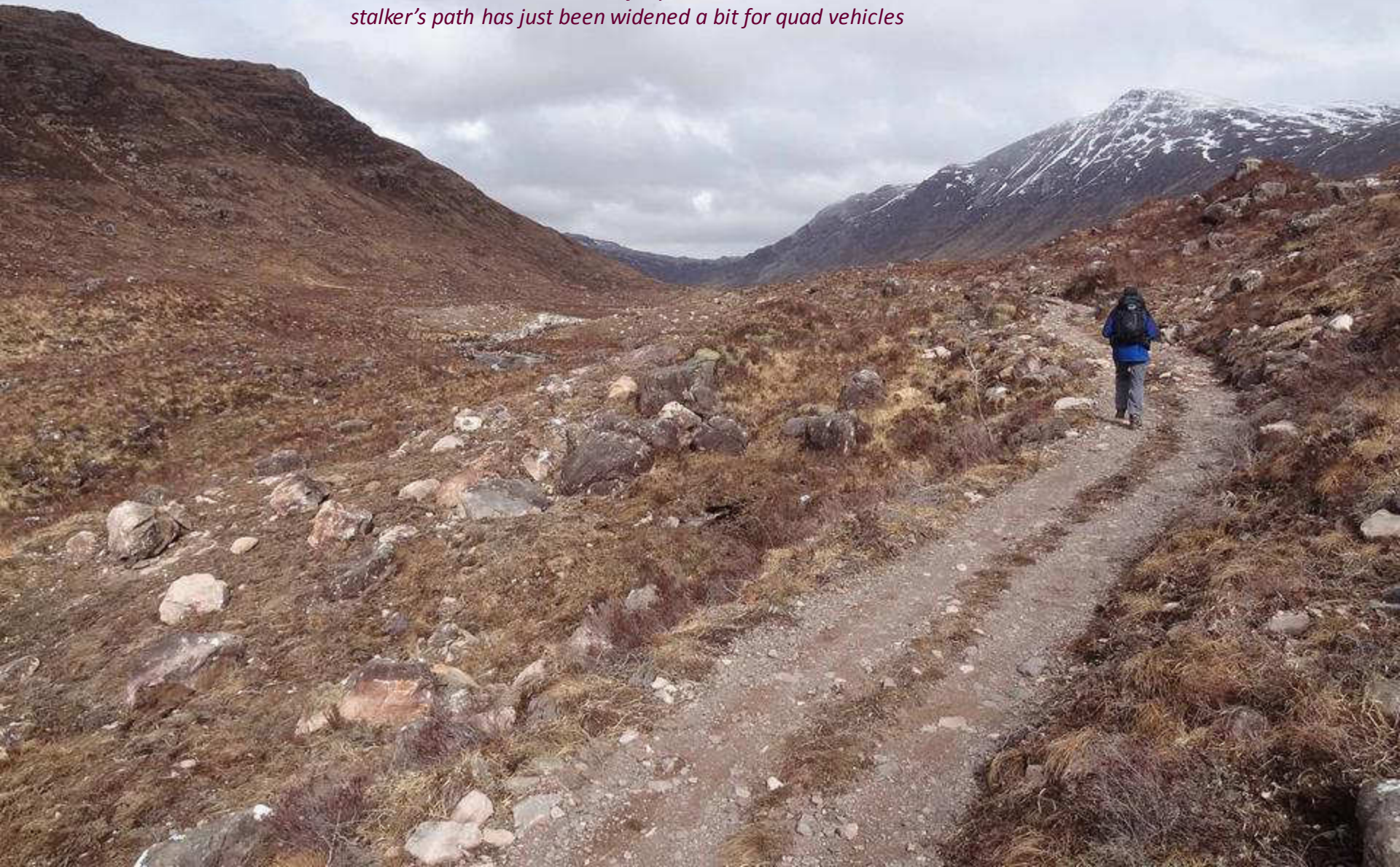


- native woodland regeneration around it would be even better ...



top marks here ☺ :

- the intake weir is well sited outwith the glen proper
(they could have been greedy and gone further in for a bit more 'fall')
- the access track to it is beautifully restored, and looks like the old
stalker's path has just been widened a bit for quad vehicles

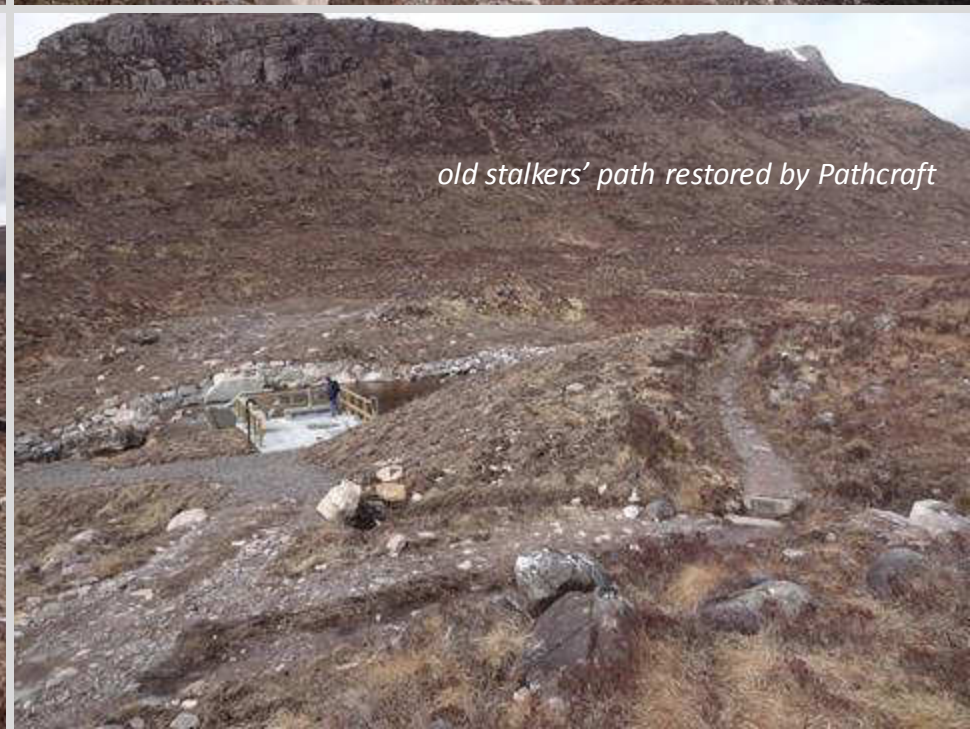
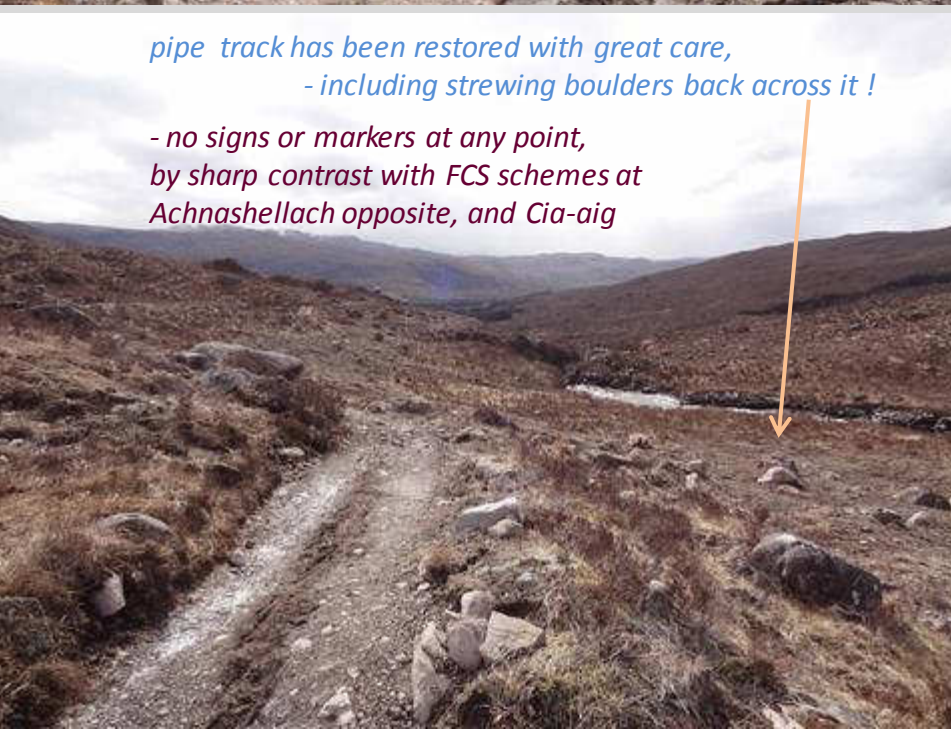


- fords for ATV access, if here then elsewhere please (bridge is for walkers)
- extending the grove of birches down the burn would be good



pipe track has been restored with great care,
- including strewing boulders back across it !

- no signs or markers at any point,
by sharp contrast with FCS schemes at
Achnashellach opposite, and Cia-aig



*intake weir is very neat
if a bit 'engineered' and
railings are too
conspicuous (are they
all needed ?)*

*- a local exclosure with
native woodland
restoration would blend
it all in nicely*



BEST RUN-of-RIVER HYDRO SCHEME SEEN YET

*a lesson for all others to emulate,
including retro-enhancements*

*visited by David Jarman and Richard Scothorne
2 April 2018*