

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

GLENSHIEL

10 June 1719

Local Authority: Highland

NGR centred: NH 996 137

Overview

The Battle of Glenshiel was the only battle fought during the 1719 Jacobite Rising (the Jacobites were supporters of the restoration of the House of Stuart). The catalyst for the uprising was the outbreak of war between Spain and Britain in 1718. The Spanish saw the benefit of resurrecting a Jacobite uprising for increasing pressure on the British government and helped to re-ignite their cause with the offer of an alliance and assistance in war.

The Spanish forces set out to invade Britain in March 1719. The fleet was wrecked by a storm and the invasion abandoned, but a small contingent of Jacobite and Spanish troops landed in Scotland. A Government force was dispatched from Inverness to counter the threat and met the Jacobite and Spanish army already in position on the steep slopes of Glenshiel. The following Government victory saw few losses on either side, with the majority of the Jacobite troops fleeing the field in the early stages of the battle. The Jacobite defeat at Glenshiel marked the end of the 1719 uprising.

The Battle

The main Spanish fleet had left Cadiz in March 1719 with a force of 5,000 men under the Irish Jacobite Duke of Ormonde, intent on invading Britain. A smaller expeditionary force made up of around 240-300 Spanish troops led by George Keith, the 10th Earl Marischal, sailed from Corunna and on 13 April landed on the shores of Loch Alsh and set up their headquarters in Eilean Donan Castle, a traditional stronghold of the MacKenzies. Although a small force, it was hoped that the promise of invasion from the south would prompt a general rising in Scotland, which would effectively trap the Government forces in a pincer movement from north and south. Unfortunately for the Jacobites, the main invasion fleet, like its more famous earlier counterpart, was wrecked in a storm, leaving the Scottish bound contingent to go it alone.

News of the wrecking of Ormonde's fleet did nothing to tempt the clans to the cause, and a disagreement over the command structure did little to aid matters. Eventually it was agreed that the Earl of Tullibardine, who was a Lieutenant-General in the exiled Stuart's service and had landed with the Spanish, would command the land forces and Keith, the Earl Marischal, the naval arm. It is said that when he heard of the main fleet's fate, Tullibardine was all for leaving the same way they had come, but the Earl Marischal settled the issue by sending the ships away, which was certainly within his power as he had the naval command. The arrival of Lord George Murray (Tullibardine's younger brother) from Perthshire, along with Rob Roy MacGregor, Cameron of Locheil and Lord Seaforth, brought together a combined force of around 1,000 men, most of them Highlanders.

However, things took another bad turn when a flotilla of Royal Navy warships arrived in Loch Alsh. On the evening of 10 May they proceeded to bombard Eilean Donan Castle, where most of the Jacobite provisions and ammunition were stored under the

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watchful eye of 45 Spanish troops. The Spanish had little option but to surrender both themselves and their charges, which consisted of 343 barrels of powder and 52 barrels of musket balls. A Government force led by Major General Wightman marched from Inverness on 5 June, and now it was the Jacobites who were in extreme danger of being caught in a pincer movement from both land and sea.

In order to stop Wightman's advance from Inverness, the Jacobites made the best use of a bottleneck in the pass of Glenshiel, erecting barricades along the road and across the high ground overlooking it, while the Spanish took up position on a fortified knoll immediately to the north of the road. On 10 June, Wightman began his final approach after leaving his camp beside Loch Clunie. The Jacobites, who had been waiting since 8 June, were deployed across both slopes of the glen, with the right located on a knoll protruding from the steep slopes just to the south of the river: their position is clearly shown on contemporary eyewitness plans. In response, the Government force formed into line across the glen, just less than a mile to the east of the Jacobite positions.

Battle commenced at about 5 pm, with Wightman's advance with the dragoons (mounted infantry) along the line of the road toward the Jacobite centre which occupied a strongly fortified promontory on the north side of the road. They were accompanied by the coehorn mortars (a portable mortar designed to be moveable by four men) and, upon reaching a point almost directly opposite the Jacobite right on the southern side of the road, used them to shell the knoll on which the advanced piquet (an infantry outpost or guard) was located. Immediately after this softening-up exercise, four platoons of Clayton's and Munro's regiments, positioned on the Government left, began their assault. It took several attempts to oust the Jacobites from their strong point. Initially, they fell back behind a defile to the west of the knoll, but despite attempts by Lord George Murray, McDougall and Avoch to rally the men, they eventually began to stream away to the west along the steep slopes of the glen. Bastide's plan shows a body of men moving from the Jacobite centre to assist in the struggle but to no avail.

Meanwhile, the coehorns were turned against the Spanish positions on the fortified promontory on the northern slopes of the glen (now known as Spanish Hill) and also the Jacobite barricade which blocked the road below the Spanish citadel: Bastide's plan shows the mortars located around 250 m to the east of these positions. The barrage failed to dislodge the enemy and so thirty-five dismounted dragoons advanced to the attack. This assault, which appears to have met stiff resistance, was supported at the foot of the hill by Clayton's and Munro's regiments, which crossed the river and successfully assaulted the barricade.

The main body of the Government army, comprising Harrison's and Huffel's regiments along with the grenadiers, moved across the northern slopes of the glen to engage with the Jacobite left, which was strung out across the northern slopes higher up and to the front (east) of the Spanish position. The Government troops, who had quite a steep climb to negotiate, first encountered Seaforth's party on the far left, where they may have been concealed by rocks. Seaforth was wounded in the arm during the fire fight, and the left began to retire, despite the efforts of Rob Roy and the MacKinnons, who moved up to assist. Rob Roy's men, seeing Seaforth's contingent in retreat, followed suit, along with the Camerons who were sent up the hill from the centre. A general rout of the Jacobite line quickly ensued.

At around 8 pm, if not before, by which time most of the Highland units had departed, Tullibardine, who was in command of the centre, organised an orderly fighting retreat of the Spanish troops, who apparently escaped without loss.

Despite the strength of the Jacobite position, the tenacity of the Government assault, along with the inexperience of the bulk of the Jacobite force in maintaining a fire fight

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and standing as a unit when others were seen to be leaving the field, ensured a Government victory.

Events & Participants

The Battle of Glenshiel is notable as the only battle of the 1719 uprising, which was effectively ended with the Government victory. It is also marked out from the other major battles related to the Jacobite Risings as it involved around 200 Spanish troops fighting alongside the Highland clans. The international character of the battle is also reflected of the Government force, which included British troops, Scottish clans loyal to King George and also Swiss and Dutch regiments brought over from Holland in the face of the emergency. The battle is also unusual for the Jacobites fighting from a defensive position instead of employing their preferred tactic of the charge.

A number of important figures took part on the Jacobite side, including Lord Seaforth, George Keith (10th Earl Marischal), John Cameron of Lochiel and Lord George Murray (commander of the Jacobite army during the '45) and Rob Roy MacGregor (a famous Scottish outlaw in later life). The Government force was commanded by Major General Wightman who had previously fought at the 1715 Battle of Sheriffmuir.

Three contemporary plans drawn up by John Bastide, a lieutenant in the Government army, provide eyewitness information that enables the events of the battle to be described in great detail. These are held at the National Library of Scotland.

Physical Remains & Potential

Jacobite field fortifications in the form of rough stone barricades or breastworks survive on the northern slopes of the glen. Such remains are extremely rare on British battlefields and they are protected as a Scheduled Monument.

A topographic survey carried out in 1997 revealed a variety of stone breastworks, cairns and structural features within the glen which may relate to the battle and graves constructed in the aftermath. A site visit in 2010 identified linear features on the lower slopes of the south side of the glen, across the river from and roughly opposite the approximate location of the Jacobite barricade of the mouth of the glen. Further investigations would have to be undertaken on these field monuments to confirm their date and function.

The only recorded artefact from the site is a lead ball exposed alongside a footpath during the 1997 survey.

Cultural Association

The battle is a largely overlooked incident in the over half century long period of Jacobite conflict. The failure of the Spanish fleet and the defeat of the Jacobite force before it could strike out from the western Highlands and recruit more supporters have effectively denied it the strong tradition of ballads and other remembrances common to events such as the '45. One contemporary ballad does survive called *A hymn to the victory in Scotland*, the title leaving little doubt as to its pro-Government affiliation.

The battle has had a lasting impact on the landscape, the summit of the north hill of the glen is known as the 'Sgurr nan Spainteach' or the Hill of the Spainards, with Coirein nan Spainteach 'Little Corrie of the Spainards' to its east and Bealach nan Spainteach 'the Pass of the Spaniards', to the south-west.

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There is a painting of the battle by the Flemish artist Peter Tillemans which may in part be based on maps drawn up by John Bastide, the latter being a participant on the Government side. This painting is reproduced on a National Trust for Scotland interpretation board located at the foot of Spanish Hill.

There does appear to be a memorial to the battle in the form of a small mortared cairn-like plinth with a large quartz fragment on its top. This is set into what must have been a quarry scoop related to road construction, but this has been modified with a stretch of low walling which forms a crescent feature framing the monument. The memorial's origins are not clear.

Battlefield Landscape

The location of the battle is well established through good primary sources including three detailed eyewitness plans by John Bastide. The battle was fought in Glenshiel, some 7 miles to the south-east of Shiel Bridge and around 16 miles (by the road) from Eilean Donan Castle, where the initial strong-point and arsenal was established.

In addition to the obvious case of Spanish Hill, it is possible to identify the various locations of the action through reference to Bastide's plans. The centre of the Government line, at its start position, sat on the wide part of the flood plain to the north of the river, opposite Lùb nan Coileach (bend or meander of the cock). The position of the Jacobite left, strung out along the north side of the glen, sat within the block of forestry immediately to the east of Spanish Hill. However, this forestry is patchy in places and the potential for identifying the location of Jacobite positions along the ridge line is high. Further action may have taken place higher up the slope, beyond the tree line, as the Jacobites retired to the west. Indeed, Bastide's map shows Government troops in formation on the outcrop which forms the eastern edge of the steep defile known as Bealach nan Spainteach (Pass of the Spaniards), and this is at a height of around 800 m.

The uphill advance by the right wing of the Government line is likely to have been along a ridge now obscured by the trees, as is the advance of the dragoons along, or just north of, the old drove road. A small bridge that survives as a culvert beneath the modern road close to the foot of Spanish Hill may relate to this drove road, though in its current form it probably relates to the military road built post 1719. The approach route of the Government left was on the south side of the river.

The Jacobite forward position was on the southern slopes of the glen – clearly defined on Bastide's plan and in the modern landscape by a prominent outcrop. The position of the barricade along the road was at the foot of Spanish Hill which has been obscured by the modern road. There are, however, features on the north and south side of the river at this point which could represent further examples of Jacobite defences.

The battle was fought within the very steep sided valley of Glenshiel. This mountainous landscape is defined by the sheer slopes on either side of the river and the knolls and spurs projecting from them. This easily defensible topography must have dictated the Jacobites choice of location, the manoeuvres of the troops and the outcome of the battle (it has often been suggested that the Jacobites were defeated as they could not revert to the more traditional Highland charge as deployed with such success at Killiecrankie in 1689 which would not have been possible down the precipitous hill slopes from the high position which they had placed themselves). This landscape survives almost intact and some elements are very well-preserved including the barricade features on the lower slopes of Spanish Hill. Tree plantations on the north and south side of the road will have had a detrimental effect on the

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potential for surviving battle debris in these areas though there is scope to open up important views from Spanish Hill down the glen.

Inventory Boundary

The Inventory boundary defines the area in which the main events of the battle are considered to have taken place (landscape context) and where associated physical remains and archaeological evidence occur or may be expected (specific qualities). The landscape context is described under *battlefield landscape*: it encompasses areas of fighting, key movements of troops across the landscape and other important locations, such the position of camps or vantage points. Although the landscape has changed to some extent since the time of the battle, key characteristics of the terrain at the time of the battle can still be identified, enabling events to be more fully understood and interpreted in their landscape context. Specific qualities are described under *physical remains and potential*: these include landscape features that played a significant role in the battle, other physical remains, such as enclosures or built structures, and areas of known or potential archaeological evidence.

The Inventory boundary for the Battle of Glenshiel is defined on the accompanying map and includes the following areas:

- Key positions of the battlefield landscape defined on Bastide's plans of the battle. The start of the Government line on the flood plain to the north of the river (opposite Lùb nan Coileach); the position of the Jacobite left and the advance of the Government line on the lower north slopes of Spanish Hill; the outcrop of Bealach nan Spainteach where Government troops are shown in formation; the approach road of the Government left on the south side of the river and the Jacobite forward position on a prominent outcrop on the south slopes of the glen.
- Earthworks associated with the static positions of the Jacobite army on the promontory on the north slopes of Spanish Hill.
- The upper slopes of Spanish Hill and westward along the valley base. The probable route of the Jacobite flight.
- The well preserved landscape features of the glen including the intact elements of the northern and southern slopes of the glen, the River Shiel, the valley floor and the surviving course of the old military road.

Relevant Publications

Anon 1997 'Battlefield Remains'. The *National Trust for Scotland Archaeology Bulletin*, Spring 1997.

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MacLeod, J. 1996 *Highlanders*. Hodder and Stoughton, London

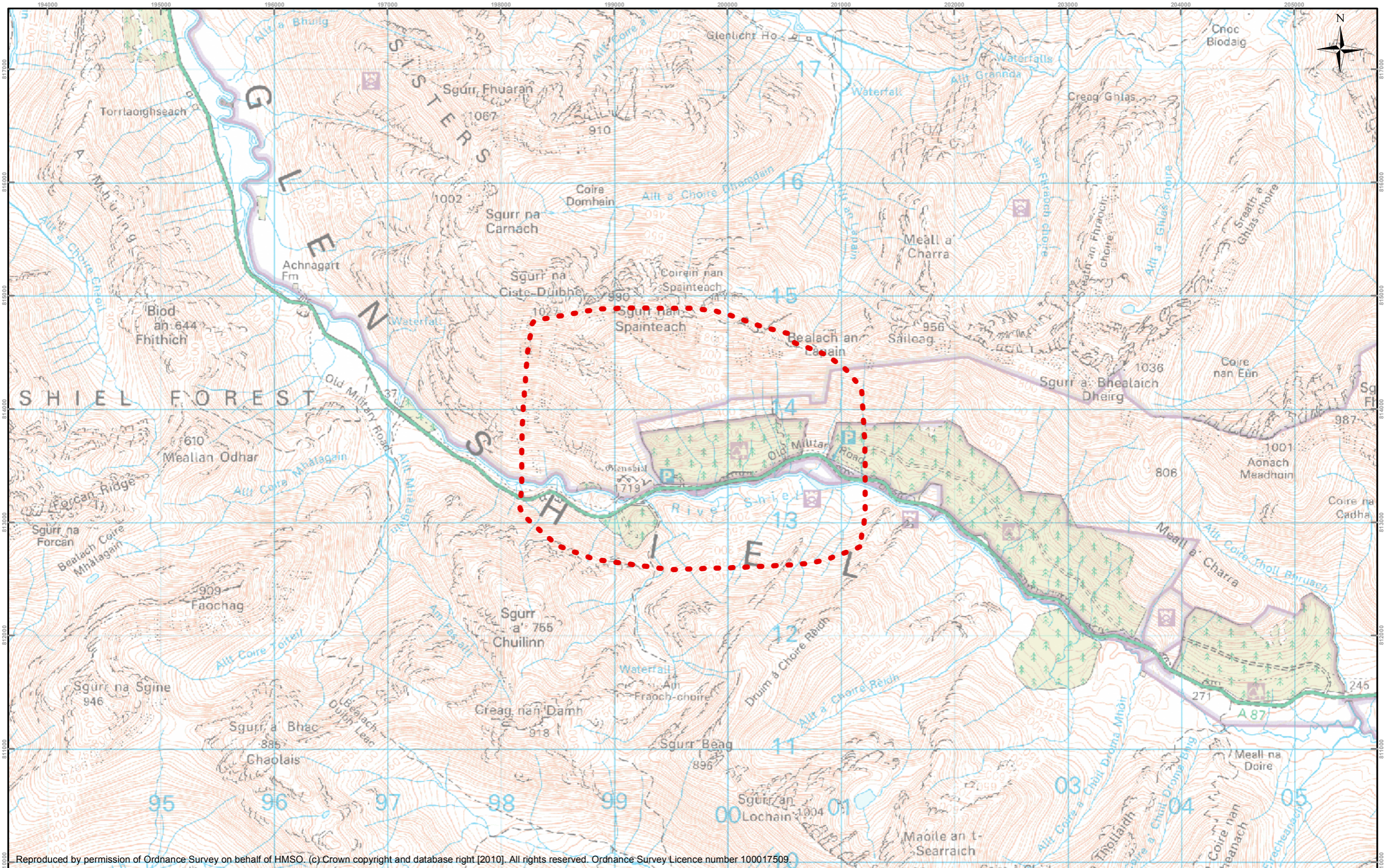
Millar, A.H. 1885 'The Battle of Glenshiel. Note upon an Unpublished Letter in the Possession of C.S. Home-Drummond-Moray, Esq of Abercairney'. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* VII, 1884-1885, 64-66.

Taylor, I. C. 1965 'The Affair in Glenshiel'. *Scotland's Magazine*, November 1965, 104-114.

Sadler, S. 1996 *Scottish Battles*. Canongate, Edinburgh.

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Sinclair-Stevenson, C. 1971 *Inglorious Rebellion: The Jacobite Risings of 1708, 1715 and 1719*. Panther reprint, St Albans (1973).



●●●● Inventory Boundary

0 250 500 Metres

BATTLE OF GLENSHIEL

10th June 1719

Highland
NGR: NH996137