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**LIGHTING UP THE PAST:** Ellie Bruce, from Inverurie, takes part in a "poor man's candles" workshop. Photograph: Kevin Emslie

## Bennachie guardians shed light on colonists

GROUP GIVES VISITORS A CHANCE TO LEARN ABOUT LIFE IN THE PAST

**BY ALISTAIR BEATON**

MEMBERS of the Bailies of Bennachie – a group that has been guardian to the landmark Aberdeenshire hill for almost 40 years – shed light yesterday on the people that lived on its slopes in the 19th century.

The team linked up with experts from the nearby Archaeolink prehistory park at Oyne to give visitors a chance to learn about life in the Bennachie Colony, and an opportunity to create the sort of "poor man's candles" the

colonists would have made and used in their heather-thatched cottages.

Families began the hillside colony in 1801 and by 1860 about 60 people were making their living on the slopes.

Local landowners gained control of the land soon afterwards and, in a north-east version of the Highland Clearances, colonists were evicted and their homes destroyed.

Over recent years several colony ruins have been excavated and yesterday Aberdeenshire Council rangers

gave people a chance to examine the sites and relics found there.

Aberdeenshire Council helped set up a Be A Bennachie Colonist day, and ranger Fiona Banks said: "It has been great.

"There had been a steady stream of people taking part in the hands-on history events happening throughout the day. It shows the real interest people have on their local heritage."

Throughout the afternoon visitors were also able to gather materials from wood-

land around the colony ruins to make the style of cruise lamp, or "poor man's candle" lighting, that the crofting and craft-making families would have made using rushes and fat.

The event was held in the forest-clearing Bennachie Centre, a modernistic visitor centre that is only a few hundred yards from the excavated colony cottages.

More than 125,000 hill-walkers use the network of Bennachie paths that run close to the visitor attraction colony site.