

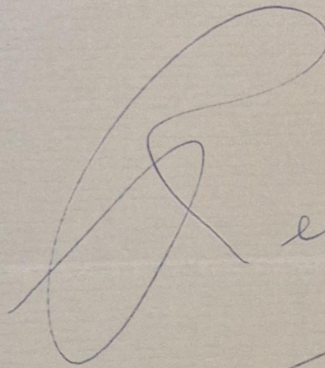
RENNIE McOWAN E.S.A. Scot.

6/1/9/1
AR 314

7 Williamfield Avenue
Stirling FK7 9AH
Stirling (0786) 61316

October 10 '90

With compliments, for file
or bucket!

 Rennie

RENNIE McOWAN E.S.A. Scot.

7 Williamfield Avenue
Stirling FK7 9AH
Stirling (0786) 61316

October 4, 1990

Dear Sheenah Cobb,

Thank you very much for sending me the Bennachie video - I have just played it and was deeply moved. I've been up Bennachie three or four times only (but am a Bailie) and have always found it a lovely hill and I can 'see' what it means to north-east people. I've had the pleasure of writing articles about it for "The Scotsman", "Scotland On Sunday" and for "Around Scotland" in "The Scots Magazine". I'll certainly do my best to publicise the video. It's an excellent job. (I included a chapter about ^{Bennachie} ~~it~~ in the book "Great Walks - Scotland" although a line about the Bailies was - alas - chopped at the proof stage).

Please, can I make an outsiders plea that at the annual rally everyone sing "Oh! Gin I were for Gadie rins". It would be marvellous.

Best wishes,

Rennie

(P.S. I'm not Robert except in my full name R.R. McOwan!)

Bennachie, hill with a fan club

6/1/9/2

WALKING

RENNIE McOWAN visits the ridge of hills which have a very special place in the hearts of north-east people

WHEN all the lovers drift away this evening it might well seem ungracious for people like me to have a tiny, personal regret that something was perhaps missing from the day.

There will be hundreds of them, drawn from over 3,000 in different parts of the world, and they will have had another day of pleasure and joy. The lovers, of course, are the Bailies of Bennachie (pronounced Bain-a-Hee), that association of volunteers who protect this small, near-mystical peak in the north-east. Although they are not all north-east folk, it is, nevertheless, the guardians from the Don and Dee and round about who have the most passionate feelings about their small hill.

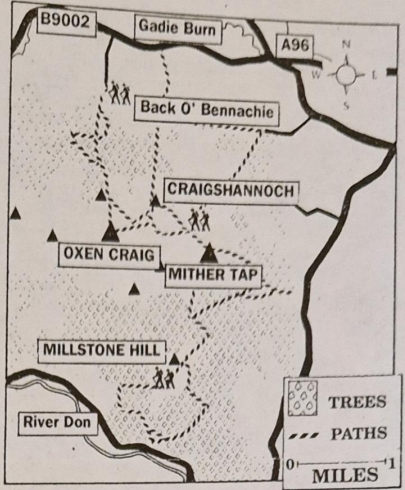
They meet this afternoon to hear speeches and to picnic and to inspect the object of their adoration, but the annual rally perhaps misses one thing which would make it perfect. The rally surely calls for the mass singing of that evocative song and pipe tune, *'Oh! Gin I were far Gadie rins ... at the fit o' Bennachie'*, sung with feeling by folk who would obviously mean it. After all, what loved one of prominence in all human history is not worshipped in music and the rally is held, literally, at the back o' Bennachie?

The Bailies successfully do that difficult thing: they actively promote interest in their 1,733ft hill, produce books, calendars, booklets, cards, maps and other memorabilia and yet they do not appear to wreck their ground with too much boot pressure.

The hill is some distance from large populations, it is not nationally known, and the voluntary Bailies strive to work harmoniously and effectively with the Forestry Commission and other landowners. So far they have avoided the worst excesses of visitor pressure which have disfigured other, larger hills.

Bennachie is a five-mile, east-west ridge between the rivers Don and Gadie (pronounced Gaadee) with five summits over 1,500ft (some argue there are really seven or eight tops), its slopes are clad in trees and heather and there are now discreet car parks and many permutations to the high ground.

It has so much: an Iron Age fort and traces of wells and huts, memories of the robber Leslie who used the hill as a stronghold and



TRAVELLERS' CHECK

Accommodation: In Alford is the Houghton Arms Hotel, recommended by the Scottish Tourist Board. A single room is £24-£26, a double £18-£20 per person. Tel: 0336 2026. There are several recommended bed and breakfasts in Alford, one of which is Sylvan, Main Street, 0336 2485, run by Mrs Wink. £8.50-£9.00 for a single room, £8.00-£8.50 per person for a double.

Information: Tourist Office, St Nicholas House, Broad Street, Aberdeen, (0224 642121); and at Town Hall, Inverurie, (0467 20600). The Bailies membership secretary is Mr Algy Watson, of Springbank, Oyne.

whose sons died at red Harlaw, myths and stories like the giant Jack o' Bennachie who crushed his rival and his stolen lady love by hurling a huge boulder at them, of sad Hosie's Well whose namesake was taken prisoner at Harlaw and who came back to find his sweetheart had married another, of the probing Romans and the growing feeling that the battle of Mons Graupius took place in this corner.

It is the hill, too, of hardy people who cut out crofts for themselves and then found their common land taken over by fatcat landowners, a bitter tale of tenacity and evictions.

Bennachie is seen from far afield, a great bastion of the Highlands thrust into the Howe of the Garioch (pronounced Gee-ree) and fishermen far out at sea take their bearings

from the red, granite mass of the best known top, the Mither Tap. Its cone and top ridge catch the eye from many corners and it has become almost a sacred hill in the hearts of north-east people and no-one can read the literature of the Bailies and fail to be deeply moved.

Dr Daniel Gordon, of Inverurie, and other friends, formed the Bailies in 1973 and they hit on the happy rule that once you joined as a member (£1) you were there for life. The name of Baillie was suggested by Dr James Gill based on the idea of the town baillie caring for law and order of his burgh or the country baillie looking after his cattle. They elect wardens to look after specific parts of the hill and in addition to conferences, rallies and work projects have held poetry recitations on the slopes.

It dominates the farmlands of the Garioch and Buchan, it symbolises childhood memories for many, it encapsulates the north-east for exiles and it is one of the first sights the returning migrant sees. No wonder the late Lord Aberdeen wrote: "To hell with your Alps, Rockies and Himalayas! Bennachie is the hill for me."

Some years ago I was eager to see what all the fuss was about and got lost in a maze of minor roads in the area of Monymusk, Alford and the ancient Chapel of Garioch, an area of strong farmlands of old pedigree, but the blue peak of Bennachie on the horizon kept catching my eye and I felt as if I could give the car its head, like a horse, and later I joined the Bailies as a long-distance member and have been back since.

Oddly enough, one of the best ways up the hill is not, initially, to the summit, Oxen Craig (pronounced Owsin), but from Esson's Croft car park on the east side of the hill on to the prominent and slightly lower eastern point, the Mither Tap. But each to his own.

There are problems ahead for the Bailies, of litter, boot pressure, changing landowners, Forestry Commission cut-backs and — believe it or not — a current plan to plant Sitka spruce in the area known as the Monymusk triangle, an act of near-sacrilege to many. But with such a vast army of dedicated guardians one can feel reasonably sure that this special hill will continue to get the protection it deserves. Try it sometimes. It is better than some Munros.

All the annual rally needs to make it perfect for outsiders like me is to have its anthem movingly sung at the annual rally. *'Oh! Gin I were far Gadie rins ...'* I tell you, it would break the heart.

SOS, Aug - 13
'89

6/11/9/16

With Thanks

14 Glenhome Court,
Dyce,
Aberdeen.

Wed. 10th Oct 1990

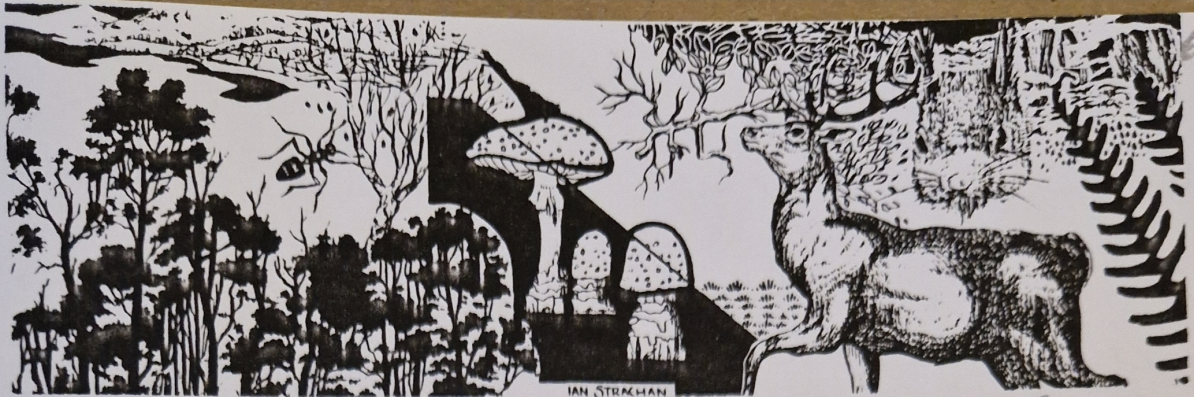
Dear Sheelah,

I felt honoured to be asked to help with the music for the Bennachie Videotape, and I was delighted to receive a copy. I am enjoying viewing it.

Please convey my thanks to the Bailies. I wish them every success in their venture.

Yours faithfully,

Anne Watt



Aloby-lips,
Burse,
Aboyne
6.11.90

Dear Jim,

I would like to congratulate you on your video of Bomeachie. I received my cassette last week and I am delighted with it. It is a lovely effort and captures the atmosphere very well.

There should be a mention of it in 'Seapark' - December issue. I had intended to publish a feature on the hill in the first part of 1991. May I contact you at a later date in connection with this.

I hope you are both well
and enjoying retirement.

I find that I am very
well occupied with different
activities.

We spend some time
up at the cottage in
Achittilue and at the
end of the year, carry out
any work that may be
required.

All the Best,

Yours sincerely,
Ian