

9/29

# Opposition to landowner's forestry pl

A POPULAR and long-established footpath leading up Bennachie will be lost if tree-planting plans by a North-east landowner go ahead.

And, although it has been made clear that an alternative path will be provided, the proposals, by Sir Archie Grant of Monymusk Estate, have whipped up considerable opposition.

As well as the loss of the footpath, objectors claim the land he is planning to plant, known as the Monymusk Triangle, currently provides an open view of Bennachie's summit.

Concern has also been expressed that the pro-

posed planting of primarily Sitka spruce would prevent the natural regeneration of species like Scots pine, which they say is going on there.

His first application, to the Forestry Commission last year, met with a welter of protests, and he produced a compromise plan earlier this year.

Both Grampian Regional Council and the Countryside Commission for Scotland, who were among the original objectors, withdrew their opposition, leaving the Bailies of Bennachie and the North East Mountain Trust against the amended plan.

Gordon District Council will decide after a site visit today if they are to sustain their objection.

Clerk to the Bailies of Bennachie, Mr Michael Davidson, said their

main objection was the removal of the footpath which, according to their records was widely used since the turn of the century.

He considered the path to be a right-of-way — a claim disputed by Sir Archie — and questioned whether public money should be used to provide a new path through the Forestry Grant Scheme.

"We don't see why the Commission should go out of their way to provide a footpath for a landowner. Surely he could accommodate the existing footpath which was there long before it was his land," said Mr Davidson.

The Bailies act as guardians of the hill and its surrounding countryside, and Sir Archie — as a landowner — is automatically a member.

The North East Mountain Trust say there

## By IAIN LUNDY

should be a presumption against afforestation on the triangle, and that no compromise should be reached, particularly one which involves public expense to replace an existing footpath.

Objecting to the new plan they say: "In any overall management plan for Bennachie, it is unlikely that this area would be deemed suitable for afforestation.

## EXPERIENCE

"The scheme represents a marginal contribution to timber production, obliterates an important footpath and destroys an area of natural regeneration."

Trust general secretary Mr Jim Conroy, said the triangle offers access to the Mither Tap, and the plateau beyond, and was

the first experience of the mountains for many people. As such, he felt it should be protected from Sitka spruce afforestation.

Part of the proposals visualises the new path winding through interesting and varied tree species with a viewpoint and some picnic seats for walkers to rest, plans which the trust feel would alter the character of the area.

They feel the application is not in the spirit of other understandings between landowners and the Bailies regarding afforestation and that, as access to the hill is the predominant value of the land, forestry would not be a suitable land use.

"It is widely agreed that afforestation of this area, quite apart from the marginal benefits to the total forest resource on Bennachie, is not in the wider public interest."

However, Sir Archie last night defended his plans, claiming that conservation groups like the trust could really have no complaints about his compromise proposals.

## PERMISSION

He claimed the path was not a right-of-way, contrary to the assertions of the Bailies, and stressed that all access to his land was with his permission.

He said the new path would be established before any tree-planting took place, so hillwalkers would at no point be without access to that part of the hill, which leads to the summit known as the Mither Tap.

Sir Archie questioned the trust's claims that there was natural regeneration within the triangle.

"If there is so much

regeneration then why is that area not all trees.

"I think there has been a lot of unnecessary worry about my intention. Access to the public is not being curtailed, and I feel a realistic view needs to be taken by conservationists."

He explained that Sitka spruce would be the dominant species in the area, because he was planting for commercial reasons to a large extent. However, there would also be areas of Scots pine, European larch, birch, rowan and other species.

"I think the Forestry Commission have done a very noble job in providing an alternative access, and I would far rather be in the situation of agreeing some compromise.

"In time, the new footpath will become every bit as liked as the existing one."



GENERAL secretary of Trust, Mr Jim Conroy trip to



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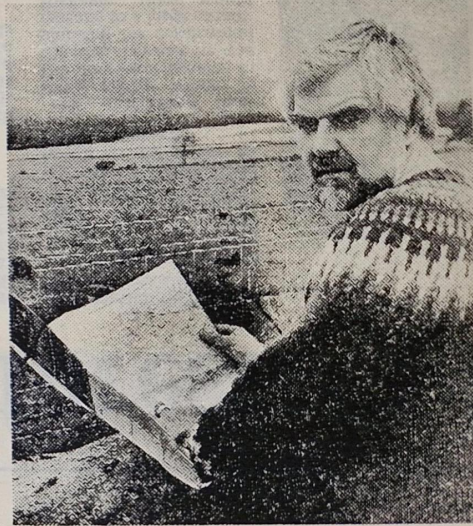
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GENERAL secretary of the North East Mountain Trust, Mr Jim Conroy checks the map during a trip to Bennachie.