

# Labour of love as hill footpath is restored - mostly by hand!

By JENNI MASSIE

**T**HE COMPLETION of an upgrading project to Aberdeenshire's famous landmark Bennachie was marked by a special reception this week.

The well-known Garioch hill has benefited from a major £122,000 investment in access improvement over the past year and the final stage of upgrading and renewing the Rowantree footpath was marked by a reception on Tuesday at Macdonald Pittodrie House Hotel.

Theo Smith, whose family has been involved with the estate for over 100 years, officially opened the footpath in the presence of Scottish Natural Heritage's Captain Robin Middleton, Gordon MSP Nora Radcliffe senior bailie James MacKay and representatives from funding partners.

Macdonald Pittodrie House

initiated and supported the project in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage (30 per cent), Grampian Enterprise Scotland (four per cent), Forestry Commission (eight per cent), and Aberdeenshire Council with EU Objective 5b (50 per cent).

Main contractors, Highland Conservation Services, worked through difficult winter conditions and foot and mouth restrictions to complete the path to the highest standards. Due to the sensitive nature of the high elevation site, much of the work had to be carried out by hand, minimising disturbance to adjacent moorland.

Using granite sourced at nearby Kennay Quarry and airlifted onto site, the final section required the laying of a pitched pavement to the summit of Mither Tap to endure the erosive conditions.

In total 2,720m of paths have been improved, building on other footpath improvements carried out by the Forestry Commission on Bennachie in recent years.

Said Mrs Radcliffe: "Bennachie is one of the natural landmarks of Aberdeenshire and it has always been a popular destination for walkers.

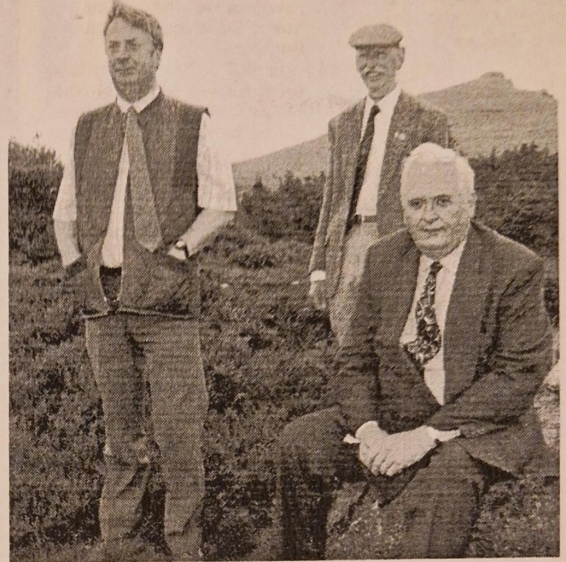
"This project of restoration will allow people to enjoy the walk to Mither Tap for many years to come.

"It was a pleasure to be invited to see the excellent work which has been done and to learn more about the project itself.

"Everyone involved in the restorations must be congratulated on their hard work and thanked for all their efforts, efforts from which many thousands of people will benefit.

"I hope that as many people as possible will make the most of the improved footpath and take the opportunity to see for themselves what has been achieved."

Pittodrie Estate's project and



Hilltop view: Scottish Natural Heritage's Robin Middleton (left) senior Bailie James MacKay and Pittodrie Estate owner Theo Smith (right) at the re-opening of the Rowantree footpath to the summit of the Mither Tap of Bennachie. (Picture by Still Images, Inverurie)

forest manager Bruce Taylor, of Scottish Woodlands, expressed the estate's appreciation to all those who had participated in providing a first class facility for the visitors and residents of Aberdeenshire alike.

He said: "The estate is privileged to own and invest in this part of the North-east's heritage, adding to the wider recreational opportunity existing and proposed at Pittodrie."

Theo Smith commented: "I am delighted we have been able to play our part in ensuring continued access to the Rowantree path for current and future hill walkers.

"The completion of this project

gives all those involved a great deal of satisfaction and we hope all those who enjoy walking will appreciate the much improved pathway."

Prior to opening, east area board SNH member and the Upper Deeside Access Trust director Robin Middleton said: "The project, costing some £122,000, is a prime example of how jointly funded programmes can be successfully achieved when landowners and agencies work together to promote responsible and safe access to well loved hills such as Bennachie.

"It is encouraging to see proactive policies resulting in this type of project."





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Pathwork: Some of those who attended the opening of the newly restored Rowantree footpath on Bennachie make their way back down the hill led by Pittodrie Estate owner Theo Smith. (Picture by Still Images, Inverurie)