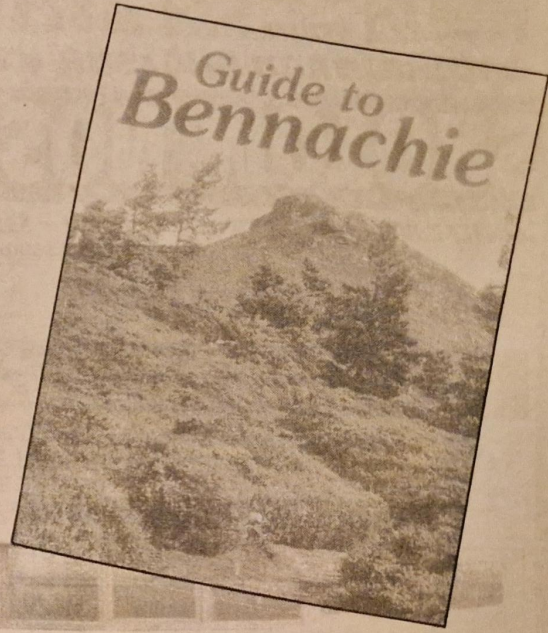


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Men of the hill



By KENNY SMITH

BENNACHIE is the best known, best loved and most popular hill in Grampian, visited annually by more than 100,000 visitors.

But sadly there is a danger that some who visit the landmark may be unintentionally destroying the features that attracted them in the first place.

To counteract the problem, the Bailies of Bennachie exist to look after and promote the hill.

Their work is co-ordinated by a council and Deputy Senior Bailie James Mackay told the *Advertiser* of their role in protecting the Mither Tap and surrounding peaks.

He said: "The Bailies of Bennachie were formed in 1973 - the brain behind it all was Dr Danny Gordon, a retired GP from Ellon, although he was born in the Clatt area.

"They then got a considerable government budget and they started spending quite a lot of money on Bennachie, constructing car parks, picnic areas, paths and this is where the bailies came in."

From an initial 40 members the group have expanded considerably.

Membership secretary Algy Watson explained: "We have members from all over the world with people in every continent although the majority of them are local to the Garioch and the North-east.

"There are many who are nostalgic and fond of the North-east and we have many members in central Scotland and in England.

"To join the bailies we have a fee of £1 for life. That amount was set in 1973 but we are considering altering it.

"Since 1973 we have had 4460



Hill rangers: Pictured in front of the Bennachie Centre are (from left) Chief Gordon Ranger Fred Gordon, John Nicol, John Gordon, Gordon...

the Clait area.
 "He was a very enthusiastic Bannachie man and a conservationist way ahead of his time. He spoke to a few of us and we became the founder members of the bailies.

"He was the chairman of the old Garioch District Council and became the catalyst behind the bailies.

"We all shared a concern that some of the things that we saw happening to beauty spots in England would happen to Bannachie and nothing was being done about it.

"At that point, the Forestry Commission existed to grow trees and then have them cut down - they existed just for the production of timber," he pointed out.

"It used to be that we weren't really welcome in the Forestry Commission planted areas and people were regarded as a nuisance.

"But thankfully in response to increasing pressures from those of us who spent time on the hills we were able to help change the attitude of the Commission.

members of all ages join, from newly-born infants right up to people in their 90s."

The society has been based around five main aims. These are:

- To preserve the amenity of the hill and to discourage litter and vandalism.
- To maintain footpaths and rights of way.
- To study plants, animals, rocks and their interaction.
- To collect and preserve the legends, ballads, poetry, literature, art, music and customs relevant to Bannachie.
- To encourage and stimulate public interest in, and care for the hill.

The bailies take part in the upkeep of the hill and one constant battle is against path erosion.

Most erosion is caused by rainwater and the bailies have occasional work parties who keep the drainage channels clear of stones and debris to ensure that water is allowed to drain off the paths.

to use the centre of pathways and not to take shortcuts even where the paths zig zag.

Mountain bikes are banned although there is a special path for bikes.

The bailies' annual rally is a highspot on their calendar. James explained:

"It was all thought up by Danny, who sadly died last year.

"We have a rally in August every year, attended by up to 500 people, and it is normally held at the Back o' Bannachie."

The bailies also have their AGM in September each year and produce Bannachie-related merchandise. Publications can be bought from their room in Inverurie town hall which is open on certain days of the week during the summer for visitors.

The latest edition of the guide to Bannachie containing all the latest walks was published last year and they have sold more than 15,000 copies altogether. The bailies published a book on Bannachie in 1976, which sold 4500 copies and a sequel, Bannachie Again, was published some years later.

The society has changed little over the past 21 years. James commented:

"We have become more involved in everything that is happening to the hill, managementwise. We have developed a good working relationship with Gordon District Council and the Forestry Commission."

"It's a very happy marriage," said fellow-founder member Algy. "There is tremendous co-operation between the bodies. We were worried for a time about privatisation of the Forestry Commission but that seems to have receded.

"And with the opening of the Bannachie Centre the bailies are going to become more involved in the future as we will be helping with manning it."

For further information on the Bailies of Bannachie contact Algy Watson, Springbank, Oyne, Inch, Aberdeenshire, AB52 6QR, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope.

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