

# th n el



## Managing beautiful Bennachie

**T**HE other evening I attended the annual meeting of an organisation that is absolutely unique. This remarkable body is the brainchild of a well-loved and equally remarkable retired Ellon GP who, for many years, has lived in a house with an uninterrupted view of the Don as it flows gently down to Inverurie.

His name is Dr Danny Gordon, and the organisation which he fathered is the Baillies of Bennachie.

As long ago as 1973, Dr Gordon saw the need for route marks and signposts on the famous hill that dominates central Aberdeenshire.

He also perceived that, with ever more folk finding pleasure in scaling — in the words of E Stephen in Poems of Bennachie — *Bennachie, dear hill o' haim, Sae calm and steadfast aye the same* — control and conservation was also needed.

The Baillies, though they have official blessing, could be said to be the unofficial managers of the hill. The title "managers" is cold and commonplace; the name Baillies is inspired and somehow absolutely right for those — and there are now almost 4000 of them scattered throughout the globe — who have a care for the mini-mountain that rises so majestically *Whar Gadie Rins*.

As with all organisations of this size, the actual work is left to a handful of enthusiasts. Everyone, be they Baillies or not, is indebted to this dedicated band.

Without their hard graft behind the scenes, Bennachie's paths would not be so trim and its feet-wetting bogs would still be wetting hill-walking feet. There would be no beneficial bearings indicator anywhere, nor would there be a single well laid out car park. There would be no — and this the latest amenity — Gordon Way. Neither would there be a much looked-forward-to tea-drinking, speech-making, community-singing rally and summer get-together of the faithful at the foot of the hill.

As former Senior Bailie James McKay, of The Dell, Blairdaff, said in the still-available Baillies' second publication, *Bennachie Again* which, like the now out of print first, was ably edited by the late Archie Whiteley of Monymusk.

"The popularity of Bennachie is not difficult to understand. It has a distinctive profile with the shapely peak of the Mither Tap rearing up Fujiyama-like at its eastern end. It has all the features of a true mountain — precipitous rocks, ravines, well-defined tops, tundra-type vegetation and a great feeling of wilderness, despite its accessibility."

As most seasoned ramblers already know, there are several approaches to choose from when the notion to climb takes them.

Perhaps the easiest for beginners, the less-fit or elderly is the popular route from the Rowan Tree Car Park just beyond Pittodrie, leading not to the highest peak which is Oxen Craig (1733ft) but to the most



had helped others.

had helped others.

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Brussels roaring, "It's a  
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was tell them not to do it

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court, Edith admitted to  
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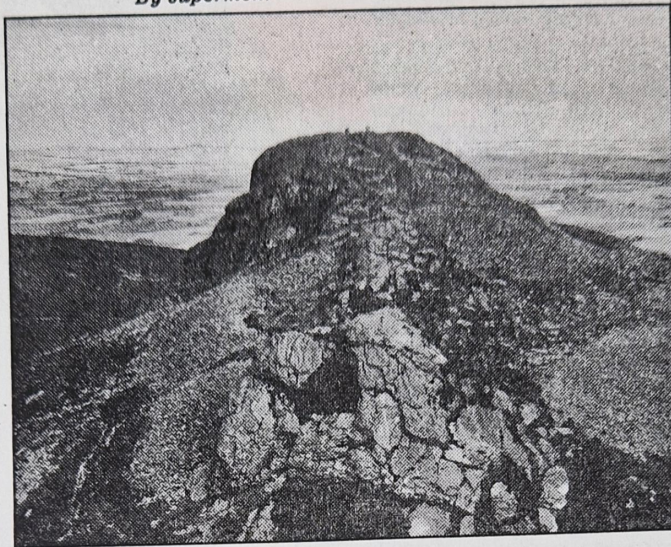
ian clergyman who was  
at the execution reported  
e died courageously and  
ly — as a soldier.

arp word of command was  
two volleys rang out at once  
without a word the accused  
the ground. Miss Cavell's  
was instantaneous."

Perhaps the easiest for beginners, the less fit or elderly is the popular route from the Rowan Tree Car Park just beyond Pittodrie, leading not to the highest peak which is Oxen Craig (1733ft) but to the most spectacular Mither Tap (1698ft). This is my own favourite climb because, though steepish up to the tree line, it is short and, except for the very last lap to the very top, is not all that difficult.

As James McLennan said in his contribution to the poems of Bennachie . . .

*Fan the Mither Tap is won,  
Tak tent o' a' yon fertile grun  
Spread lush anaith the glowin' sun  
Lairch, hill an' glen —  
Reclaimed fae bog an' stane an' whun  
By supermen!*



► **STARK BEAUTY:** of the Mither Tap on Bennachie.

## g the memory

unique, not only in  
Scotland but in Britain.

Robbie Shepherd, a great  
Dufton Scott enthusiast,  
will be giving the  
readings, both on the  
cassette and at a  
personal appearance at  
Central Library in  
November.

If the response is good,  
we may reissue some of  
the material in book  
form at a future date.

Dufton Scott was a  
highly talented man, and  
we think that his pawky  
humour will appeal not  
only to those who  
remember him but also  
to many who have yet to  
discover him.

Ian McKenzie Smith,  
City Arts Officer,  
Aberdeen.

Though caring for the hill is the prime preoccupation of the Bailies, their other activities include producing an evocative calendar each year, publishing pamphlets on Bennachie and collecting all the relevant literature they can find. Meantime, they maintain a little library in Inverurie Town Hall, though one day a comprehensive visitors' centre will somewhere arise — when funds permit.

The most recent Bailies' enterprise has been the preparation of a delightful half-hour video of such nostalgic shots as the unveiling of the indicator on Oxen Craig, the Turf Table at Shannoch Well, Harthill Cave and the Maiden Causeway.

This permanent record cannot fail to revive fond memories, and as Jean Pirie put it, also in Poems of Bennachie:

*I'm sure folks in far aff lan's  
a hantle they wad gae  
if only they could catch a glimpse  
o' their al' frien' Bennachie.*

Which, for a modest £9.99, plus a little extra for postage, they now can!

If members of the public find it difficult to secure a copy of the Bennachie video, any member of the Bailies Council can supply one. In Inverurie, the first contact should be Senior Bailie Bert Cadenhead (Tel: 0467 20287), or in Aberdeen, Helene Porter (Tel: 0224 640217).

For those who don't already know Bennachie, it is never too late to make its acquaintance by going to see, climb and conquer, or by sitting in an armchair, experiencing the pleasure of seeing it on the silver screen.

■ Jack at Large will now appear regularly in this spot and not on Saturday as in the past.

rd appear on page 8 of the new TV supplement