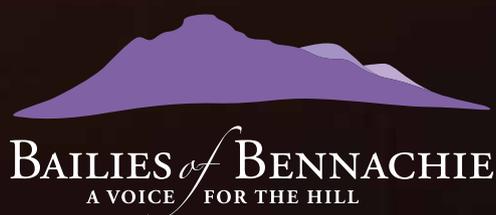


# Bailies of Bennachie

Annual Report 2025



**W**elcome to the Annual Report of the Bailies of Bennachie. It will fill you in on the many and varied activities that we have undertaken to be A Voice for the Hill during 2025. Our activities continue to benefit our members and volunteers, the landowners, the visiting public and ultimately, the hill itself and its flora and fauna.

Our year got off to a cracking start when we were presented with the King's Award for Voluntary Service (KAVS). This duty was undertaken by the Lord-Lieutenant of Aberdeenshire, Alexander Manson. The presentation took place at our Volunteer's morning on March 15th at the Garioch Heritage Centre. Commemorative badged water bottles were shared with attendees (see KAVS article).

A really big activity which has spanned over half of the year has been the design, build and commissioning of our new website. This has allowed us to adopt an easy to edit platform as well as prune our existing website which was sitting at over 6,000 pages of static information. The website offers an attractive format and graphics as well as a new shop. We are indebted to our former Secretary, Willie Linklater, who led the conversion work. Latterly, our Support Team have been busy ironing out teething problems and populating the shop in time for Christmas (see article on Website).

Also, at the beginning of the year, our environmental team deployed wildlife cameras at strategic locations on the hill. The films will be shared online at the beginning of 2026 (see Environmental report). We have also enjoyed a wide range of Wildlife Walks and Talks (see Wildlife report). Thank you to trustees David Bale and Lorna Bell.

Our Bennachie Landscapes Project Group (BLPG) had a very successful season. A Longhouse to the west of the Turnpike and just north of the Rushmill Burn was opened for the first time. The site was first identified by Barry Foster in 2016, then still under commercial forest. However Storm Arwen in 2021 resulted in the site being covered by fallen trees. The landowner, Foresight Sustainable

Forestry, and their land managers, RTS, were able to remove these trees and expose the site over the winter 2024/25, as well as those covering the Fog House. We were also assisted by Treelogic in stump removal. Our excavations exceeded all expectations. We would also thank Foresight / RTS for covering the costs of making the Fog House structurally sound after the damage from the trees. Thanks to our BLPG trustee Allan Will and the on-the-ground Event Leader Iain Ralston (see BLPG article).

An important initiative this year has been our efforts to get our Fun and Learning / Junior Bailies (F&L) up and running after a few years in the doldrums. These resources are very much directed at young people and seek to provide stimulating and engaging information. Where is the next generation of botanists and environmentalists coming from if we do not start providing them information about the hill and its many facets? A canvass of our volunteer cohort saw three people step forward; a primary school teacher, a secondary school teacher and a children's author. This dream-team have started to formulate plans for both the functionality of the website and thinking how to spread the word of these resources through the Aberdeenshire educational system. In complement to the upgrade of the main website, our Junior Bailies is undergoing a similar revamp as I write. We are actively seeking a new F&L trustee to direct this team.



**Peter Stock - Chair.**

Our Work Party team continues to grow and expand its influence. As well as the traditional activities and our newly added Electrical Work Parties, we have added dry stane dyking and footbridge repair to our repertoire. Thanks to Trustee David Caney and our Outdoor Coordinator Hugh Fraser (see Work Party article).

Saving the best to last, our big initiative which has attracted serious public attention has been our plans to upgrade about a kilometre of the Timeline Trail which has been heavily worn and presents danger in some parts. Feasibility studies undertaken at the start of the year suggested a price of the order of £100,000. In July of this year, the trustees agreed to pursue the project and appointed Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland (OATS) as our project managers. Through OATS, we have awarded a contract for the work and are trying to fix a start date on site between the landowner and the contractor.

In parallel we developed and launched our Help Your Hill initiative to fundraise. We were interviewed by Mark Stephen and were featured on Scotland Outdoors on BBC Radio Scotland on 25 October. We have received £17,500 towards our goal, including a grant of £3,000 from The Stafford Trust in 2025, and a most generous £5,000 from the Turriff Hillwalking Club in 2026. We also must recognise Little Brown Dog for the special Bailies edition gin for which a donation of £5 / bottle is being donated to the fund. Thank you to all who have donated to our appeal so far, it is truly appreciated. We will continue to actively fundraise for this project in 2026.

In the back office, Karen and Stella have been working on a myriad of topics that make our management of the charity and its activities ever more efficient and effective. This includes the membership refresh which now means our membership numbers confidently sit at about 700 and all communications are electronic, saving the Bailies considerable time and cost. They have also implemented our automatic emailing system, on-line event sign-up, run the on-line shop, maintain the website and our social media, deliver calendars...you name it, they turn their hand to it.

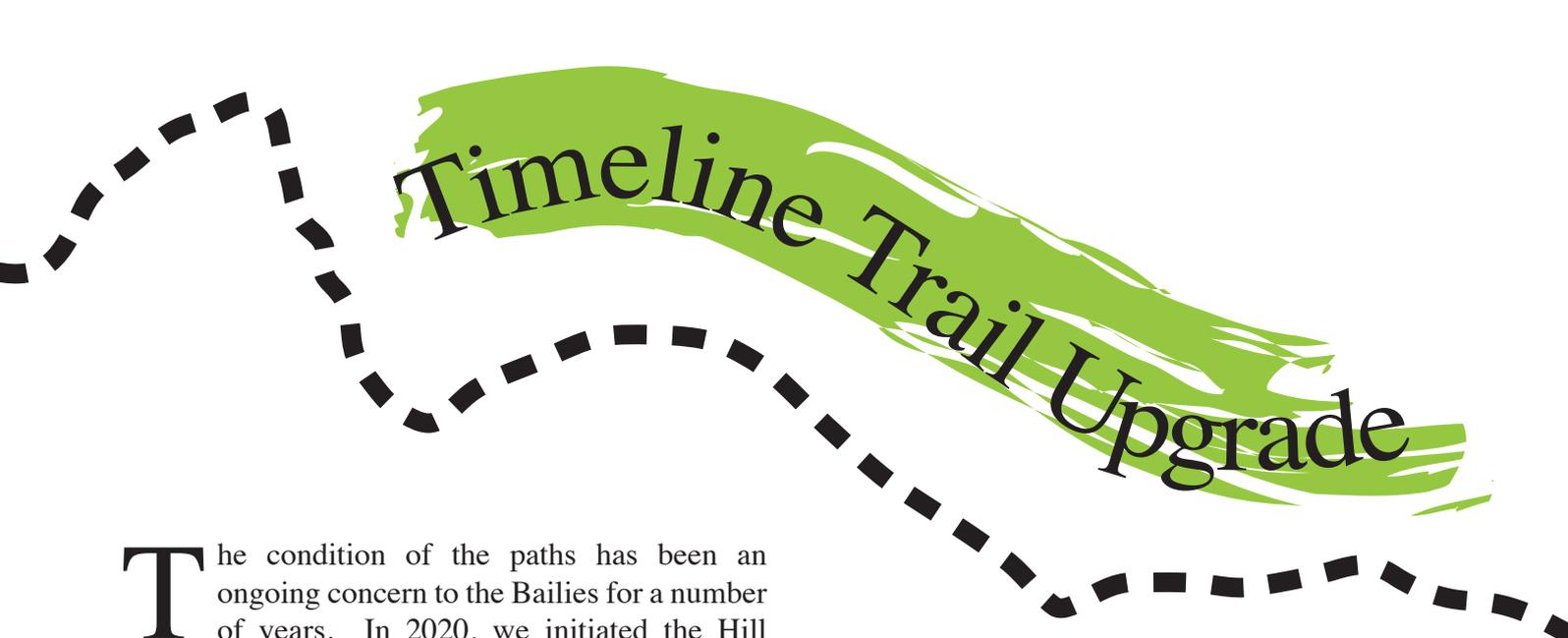
Looking forward into 2026, the building of the path will dominate our attention from both an operational and financial perspective. We have identified a number of other paths equally worthy of upgrade and will be commissioning feasibility studies of those. We are also planning to issue an Environmental Vision for Bennachie which we will share with stakeholders and hopefully be able to identify a few projects to take forward.

I'm sure you will agree that your trustees have not been idle. As I write, there are only seven of us, plus our support team of three.

I am constantly amazed that this tight but high functioning team can achieve so much. If you think you would like to help us give A Voice to the Hill, through either memberships, volunteering or at a trustee level, or donations, please email us at:

[info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk](mailto:info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk).

**“Thank you to all those who have donated to our Timeline Trail upgrade project, it is truly appreciated.”**



# Timeline Trail Upgrade

The condition of the paths has been an ongoing concern to the Bailies for a number of years. In 2020, we initiated the Hill Warden Scheme to better record the state of each named path on Bennachie, monitor its degradation and identify essential repairs.

As with the rest of the world, COVID rather derailed the ability of the landowners to undertake the needed repairs. Emerging from COVID, the landowners no longer had the budget for large expenditures necessary for all paths, and have had to severely prioritise their spending on other areas.

The Bailies saw there was really no option but to grab the baton and see what we could do for the hill and walkers visiting it. We are incredibly fortunate to have been given financial legacies and donations over the years, the donors of which we know would have wanted them directed towards the hill.

The hill has some of the highest footfall of any outdoor destination in Scotland. We therefore consider investment in Bennachie's footpaths a

high priority for both the hill and its visitors. Waiting for Bennachie's paths to become a national priority would have taken years, so if not now, then when...

Reviewing our potential path projects, it was decided that the upgrade of the Timeline Trail from the Colony Trail to the treeline was the preferred and most deserving project. The main reasons are the poor condition of this section of the path combined with its popularity and the large number of visitors that would benefit.

The Bailies initially started to investigate major hill path upgrades in late 2022 / early 2023 and started sharing ideas with the landowners. We are pleased to be able to prepare this project up to readiness to implement in 2025 and hopefully to be able to realise it in 2026.

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“The hill has some of the highest footfall of any outdoor destination in Scotland. We therefore consider investment in Bennachie's footpaths a high priority for both the hill and its visitors.”

# HELP YOUR HILL

The Bailies of Bennachie are reconstructing part of the main path to the Mither Tap

The upgrade project cost for 1000m of path is £100,000

We need your help to fund this!

Scan the QR Code or visit

[www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk](http://www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk)

**YOUR SUPPORT & GENEROSITY MAKES A DIFFERENCE...**  
Let's protect this unique landscape now and for future generations



**BAILIES of BENNACHIE**  
A VOICE FOR THE HILL



This poster is approved by  
Forestry and Land Scotland  
Coilltearachd agus Fearann Alba



# King's Award for Voluntary Service

**A**s foretold in last year's Annual Report, the Bailies were deeply honoured to have our activities recognised by the award of the King's Award for Voluntary Service (KAVS). We were notified of the award in November 2024 and the presentation ceremony took place at our Volunteers' Morning on March 15th 2025 at the Garioch Heritage Centre.

The Lord Lieutenant of Aberdeenshire, the King's representative in Aberdeenshire, Sandy Manson, presented the award. He attended with his wife Barbara and Deputy Lord Lieutenant Claire Thorogood. He gave a short speech, and included: "Fewer occasions give me greater pleasure than when I present the King's Award for Voluntary Service which is referred to as the M.B.E. of the voluntary groups.

"What Bailies of Bennachie does, engaging with so many volunteers in such a sustainable and impactful way. That impact is

immeasurable, with the good it brings in education, engagement, history, culture, flora and fauna, and wellbeing, giving positive impact on countless people. The volunteers are groups of people who His Majesty wants to celebrate because you do this for no personal reward, but just because it's the right thing to do and your own personal satisfaction. Nurturing, treasuring, maintaining, enhancing and protecting one of the most iconic spots in Aberdeenshire."

Peter Stock, Chair of the Bailies of Bennachie, was delighted to accept the award on behalf of the organisation. A certificate, signed by King Charles III, was presented along with a glass block with the King's Award logo etched inside.

Thanking Sandy Manson, he also presented him and his wife with some Bailies of Bennachie gifts, including an aluminium water bottle with the Bailies and King's Award for Voluntary Service logos.



## The King's Award for Voluntary Service

*The MBE for volunteer groups*





# Bailies Online Shop

**D**uring 2025, the Bailies of Bennachie ventured into new grounds with a shop on the website, selling our branded merchandise, photographs and of course our annual calendar.

We are very proud of our books for sale, with the Bennachie Landscapes Series now having books 1, 2 and 4 available to purchase, with book 3 as a 'PDF only' version to purchase as a download. Towards the end of 2025, a new publication, "Cultural Landscapes of North-east Scotland", edited by Colin Shepherd and sponsored by the Bailies, was nominated for the 'Current Archaeology' Book of the Year! See Bennachie Landscapes Project page for more details.

Utilising a third-party agent, our t-shirts, mugs, hats, etc., are printed to order and delivered directly to the end user, meaning we can avoid any unsold stock and can investigate lots of alternative suggestions for sale. We will continue to expand our range using this company over 2026.

Next in our remit is to have a selection of greetings cards, using some of the fabulous photographs that we have in our gallery. We will also look to expand the range of images available as Landscape Art Prints which will be available as canvas prints.

Trustee Alex Doig not only looks after publications, including the annual report and calendar, but has been behind many of the photographs, designs and ideas for products in the online shop.

With the weather as it is in winter, Beanie Hats and Neck Warmers will be some of the first items to be added to the shop, we are just ensuring the quality is correct for the exacting standards expected for any items with the Bailies of Bennachie logo on them. Hot on the heels of hats will be Sweatshirts and Hoodies.

The intention of the shop of course is to ensure that we fundraise for our Help Your Hill projects, the first one being the Timeline Trail. Please check out the items on the website regularly to see what new stock has been added. We would welcome your feedback and any ideas of new items that you would like to see. Drop us an email, we look forward to hearing from you - [info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk](mailto:info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk)



## Sign up HERE



David Caney - Trustee,  
Work Party Coordinator.



Hugh Fraser -  
Support Team, Work Parties.

It has been another productive year for Work Parties and as ever, the Bailies are very grateful to all volunteers – young, experienced and new. The Saturday sessions continue to be very friendly, sociable and everyone ‘mucks in’, learning new skills and the end results are always satisfying.

The electrical tools have gained momentum in use, and small groups have cleared more key paths of overgrown heather, bracken and gorse. Health & safety is always at the forefront with all Work Parties with eye protection and gloves a must but with particular attention when using the electrical tools. Those operating the brush cutters and hedge trimmers have all undergone training, and all volunteers are invited to attend the first aid course, funded by the Bailies and we hope that new and existing volunteers will undertake the training offered.

Hugh Fraser continues as our Work Party captain and Outdoor Coordinator which includes planning the Work Parties (scope and prioritisation), preparation of documentation, interface with landowners and leading the Work Parties on the day in particular overseeing health and safety aspects. Hugh has maintained his approach to engaging volunteers and throughout the year he has been very positive and encouraging. We are lucky to have him. During 2025, we clocked up approximately 1164 hours of volunteer time as well as continuing with the occasional ‘corporate’ Work Party.

Work this year has included the normal path maintenance on different areas of the hill and maintaining the various Colony sites. Cross drains and water bars have been cleared of debris and plants to alleviate erosion issues. As always, it’s a case of ‘many hands make light work’ and often, a problem has been solved with a ‘group brainstorm’. We finished the year on a strong note by repairing a bridge on a neglected path to the north of Hummel Craig (accessed from the Back of Bennachie) prior to tidying up the willow structures and toasting marshmallows over an open fire.

Work also started this year on repairing some of the dry stane dykes around the Colony area and a number of volunteers were trained on building dykes by an experienced tutor. As ever, health and safety is at the forefront with the end result very impressive. You can see the fruits of our labour walking along the colony trail past the site of the Shepherds Lodge.

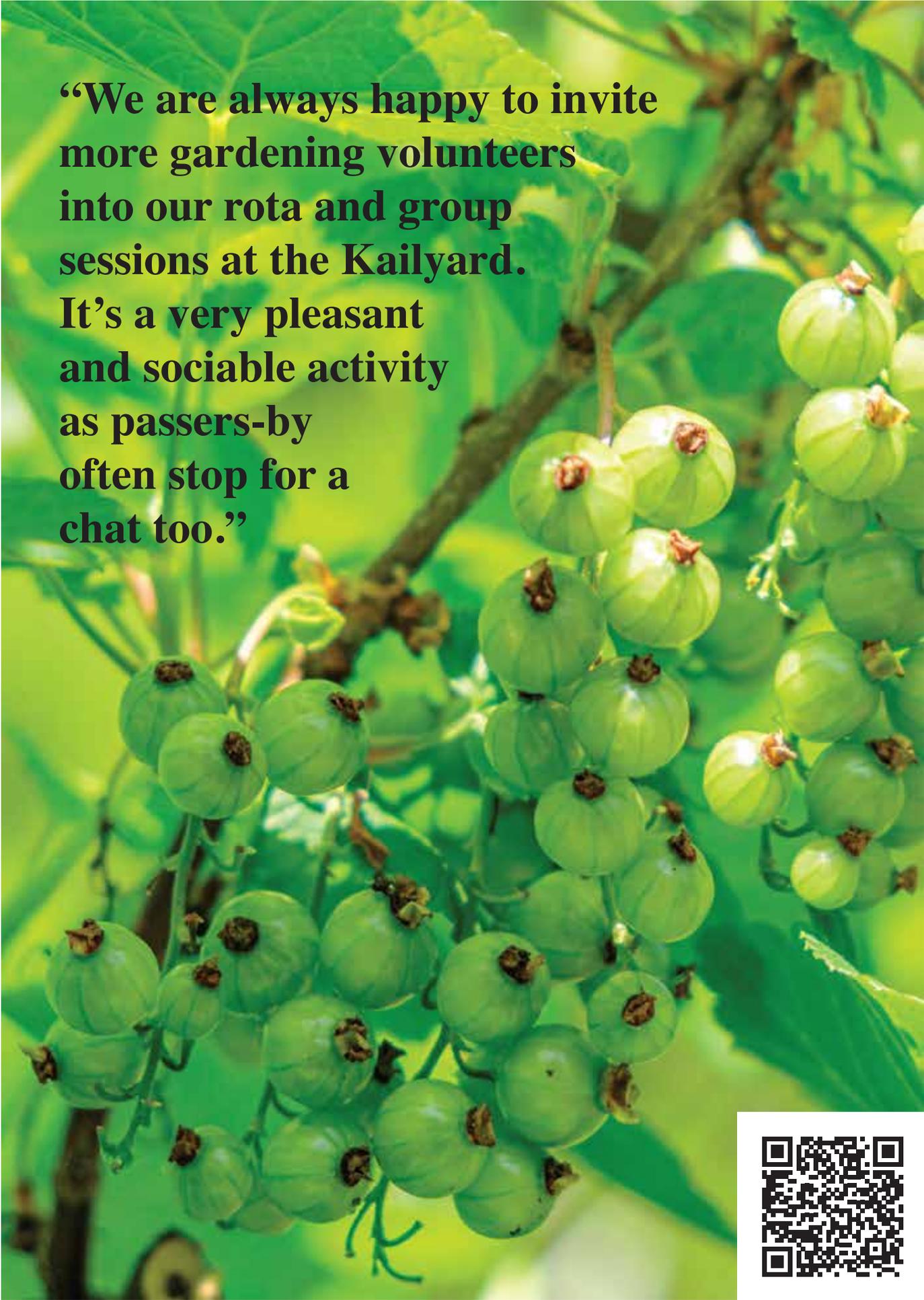
Next year, whilst we will of course continue to maintain the path network and other jobs as appropriate, we have a new project of repairing the much loved signs across the entire Bennachie area on a ‘when needed basis’ as many are still standing true and pointing the way, whilst others are in need of some TLC. If you do notice a sign that requires attention, do get in touch and we will hopefully get a small work party to fix it.

# Work Parties



We are always welcoming new volunteers. If you, or someone you know, is interested, please contact us. Work Parties take place on the first Saturday (weather permitting) of each month from March to December inclusive. It is a simple process to join as a volunteer, just follow the QR code on previous page or navigate via our website to complete the Volunteer Form. At the same time, you can become a member too for only £25. We would really like to hear from you. Should any further information be required please contact [info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk](mailto:info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk)





**“We are always happy to invite more gardening volunteers into our rota and group sessions at the Kailyard. It’s a very pleasant and sociable activity as passers-by often stop for a chat too.”**



# Kailyard Project

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It was another interesting and hard working year at the Shepherd's Lodge Kailyard. This is our reconstruction of a garden of a kind that might have been worked by the Bennachie crofters. Although we don't know exactly what they grew, we are using heritage varieties of fruit bushes that we are able to look after and might have been present in the Kailyard alongside root vegetables and greens. Volunteers keep everything neat and tidy on a monthly basis and share in the summertime harvest.

We began the year in March with a group session to carry out some late winter jobs – digging in manure and laying a new bracken mulch that adds further nutrients and keeps the weeds down, along with some pruning and weeding. Weeding continued through the summer, but we were faced with some prolonged dry spells. This made it beautiful to work in, but our summer and autumn raspberries did not do so well and the gooseberries were mixed too, perhaps suffering from the conditions. One of the gooseberry bushes has more or less died off, and we are wondering if the lower part of the Kailyard is not so productive. However, good crops of our reliable blackcurrants and whitecurrants were gained along with some redcurrants.

One job that has been a focus this year is looking after the fence, which was built when the Kailyard was started in 2017 mainly from conifer cuttings and brash – locally available materials in the spirit of the crofters, we felt. It has had some running repairs but we now have in hand more substantial work, using laurel that has been cut back as part of dyking work near the main path. Some of the laurel we have previously used as reinforcements has sprouted nicely with new growth! We also have willow from the Back o' Bennachie and so we should have a fence more worthy of the name soon. We are always happy to bring more gardening volunteers into our rota and group sessions at the Kailyard. It's a very pleasant and sociable activity

as passers-by often stop for a chat too. If you're interested in helping to look after the Kailyard, please contact us at the following address, or sign up as a Volunteer via our website to receive regular updates - [info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk](mailto:info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk).

Jo Vergunst, Kailyard Project.



# Bennachie Landscapes

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2025 has been an exciting year for the Bennachie Landscapes Project Group (BLPG) as we continue on our mission to research and promote the historic culture and heritage of Bennachie and its hinterland.

The Bennachie Colony is integral to a lot of the work we do and during 2025 we have continued to implement the Colony Management Plan as a means to monitor, protect and preserve this important site for generations to come. BLPG have been working with the work parties team in creating a scope of work that keeps the sites clear of vegetation to promote access and preserve the integrity of the archaeology. Having the electric power tool work parties deployed has been a real game changer in achieving this.

The Shepherds Lodge Kailyard continues to be a fascinating project for us all. A team of volunteers attend on a monthly rota to maintain the site and hopefully pick some fruit, however this contributor's month is September and it is usually all gone by then! A full report can be found elsewhere in this publication.



In October the Bailies supported another dry stane dyking course delivered by James Watt. The volunteers went on to successfully reconstruct 20 yards of the Shepherds Lodge Kailyard North dyke. The Bailies are now developing a skilled set of dyking volunteers that can be deployed on future projects around the hillside.

Whilst on the subject of the Colony, Debbie Duncan from Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada got in touch as she was researching her family tree and discovered that some of her descendants had lived at Boghead of Tullos. Debbie and some of her family took a trip to Scotland in September and visited the Colony. Some of our team had the pleasure of giving them a guided tour of the area where her ancestors lived and worked.



The Fog House is a cherished place on the hillside but the structure was in danger of collapse and required urgent attention. The Bailies had begun a project to stabilise the structure a few years back but Storm Arwen rendered the site inaccessible for years. Once the windblown trees had been removed we had the opportunity once more to revisit the project. We got in touch with Dab Hand Traditional Masonry from Inch who visited the site to assess the struc-

# Project Group



ture. A plan was made with the support of RTS Forestry who manage this area of the hill and work took place during the summer. We are all delighted with what was achieved! The integrity of the structure is now secure and done in a sympathetic traditional manner. Huge thanks must go to the landowner, Foresight Sustainable Forestry who fully funded this project.

Our annual archaeology dig this summer exceeded all our expectations. We started in June with visits from pupils from both Kemnay and Inverurie Academies. This was followed by a 6 day training dig where volunteers could learn some of the skills involved in field archaeology.

The main event ran for 15 days during July and August. We had a great turnout of volunteers. We made many exciting new discoveries this year and we shall return to the same site during 2026. A full report can be found elsewhere in this report.

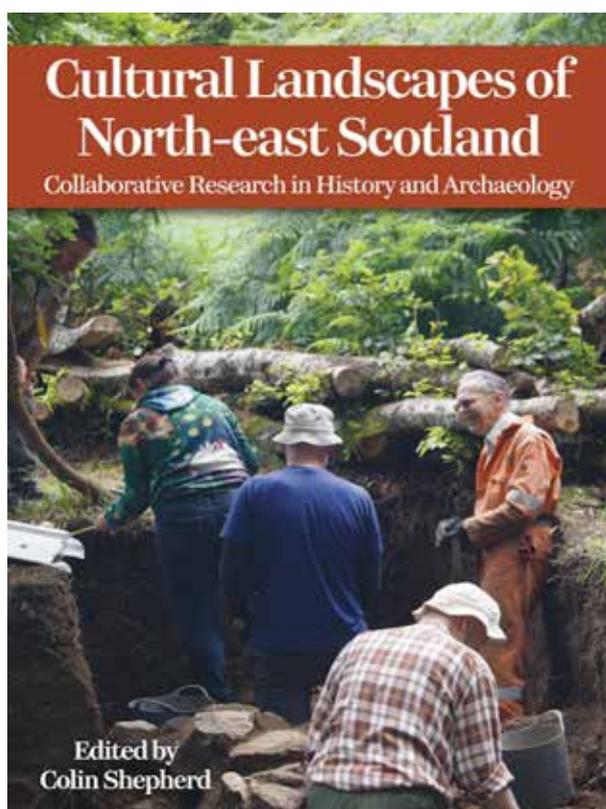
During the summer the Bailies helped facilitate a visit from Alford Academy pupils to our future native woodland site. They learned about Bio-diversity and Pollen analysis and we hope to arrange a return visit in 2026.

Our year ended with the fabulous news that The Bailies of Bennachie sponsored book, 'Cultural Landscapes of North-east Scotland: Collaborative Research in History and Archaeology' edited by Colin Shepherd has been nominated in the Book of the Year cate-

gory for the 2026 'Current Archaeology' Awards! All nominations are based on books that have been reviewed within the magazine over the last 12 months. You can pick up a copy of the book locally from Booth Scotland Ltd in Inverurie or from our online shop. There is a free, Open Access download of the book that the Bailies paid for available from Oxbow:

<https://www.oxbowbooks.com/9798888571576/cultural-landscapes-of-north-east-scotland/>

Allan Will, BLPG Trustee.

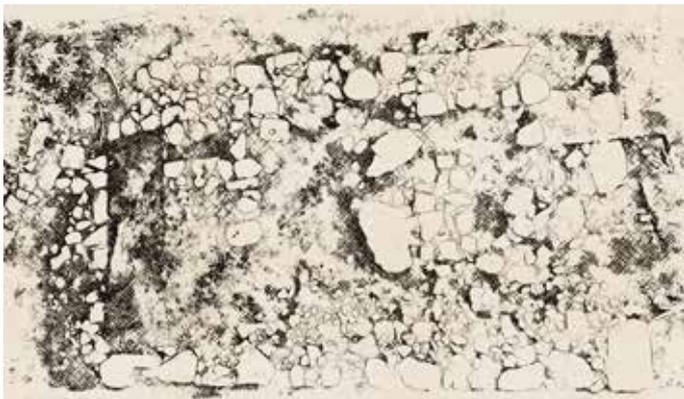


Join us  
HERE

# Pittodrie

This year saw the beginning of the exploration of the Longhouse originally identified some years ago by Barry Foster. Remarkably, though the area suffered terrible damage by Storm Arwen, the Longhouse ‘weathered’ the destruction fairly intact. This fortunate survival will permit the first detailed excavation of such a structure in the lowlands of the North-east. This year’s work was preparatory to those further excavations.

Longhouse remains are well-known from the uplands in the west of Aberdeenshire but have rarely survived in the lower lands. Here, late 18th and 19th century intensive farming practices removed most of them. The survival and examination of this one will permit a comparison across these distinctive ecological and topographical zones. However, perhaps of greater importance was the discovery, after the initial clearance of vegetation from the site, that there was also an underlying structure.



This, clearly, pre-dated the Longhouse and presents a unique opportunity to try to understand the development of the vernacular building tradition across the region. It should be remembered that we know more about the living accommodation of prehistoric peoples across the region than we do about how they lived a mere five hundred years ago! At the moment it is unknown whether enough evidence survives to date this important, underlying phase. Time will tell.

During site clearance, a further, formerly unknown structure emerged and this will also be more intensively interrogated next year. Signs of iron-working of some kind was evidenced by an extensive scatter of slag. McConnochie writes of local memories of a smith living amongst the dwellers of

the ‘clachan’ beside the Rush Mill Burn. The sites we are exploring most likely reflect the ‘clachan’ he refers to. Previous work on the other side of the Turnpike has already revealed their communal grain-drying kiln, possibly still in use when the Bede House was built in the 17th century.

Stretching back to a far earlier set of inhabitants, Andrew Wainwright’s work in ‘the bog’ has begun to reveal a multi-phase set of structures surviving in the waterlogged conditions there. Radiocarbon dates for a wickerwork structure returned early Pictish dates of the 3rd to 4th centuries AD (or CE, if you wish!). This came as a bit of a shock and demonstrates that evidence for almost two thousand years of settlement activity survives within this small patch of landscape on the north-east lower slopes of Bennachie. Obviously, over the course of these two thousand years, much alteration has gone on around ‘the mound’ and ‘the bog’, resulting in only scattered remnants of those former times. Enough exists in limited areas, however, to suggest what some of these may have been and to try to understand their purposes.

Extensive environmental sampling has been undertaken both from ‘the bog’ and from the sites west of the Turnpike. These are being processed by AOC in Edinburgh and will help us to answer some of the questions regarding ecological, agricultural and social change occurring in the area across this wide time-frame.

Grateful thanks to all the volunteers who helped to make this such an enjoyable and rewarding season and we look forward to seeing many of them again during 2026.



Report by Colin Shepherd, photo by Iain Ralston.



# Wildlife



The Bennachie Wildlife Group is an informal group which any Bailies of Bennachie member can join and take part in the various wildlife-orientated talks and walks which are organised. Information about events is sent to those on the group e-mail list giving them priority for booking as numbers are usually limited (see QR code to join Walks, or join as a Volunteer).

The first of the events in 2025 was a walk in March led by David Bale at Loch of Afforsk looking for signs of otters and other mammal tracks. Otter spraint and tracks were seen as well as some toad skins on the waterside. The flesh of the toads would have been eaten by the otter but the toxic skin would be left. The walk continued to the site of a nearby badger sett where signs of earth digging at the entrance holes was observed.

An early morning Dawn Chorus Walk from the Donview Centre in early May was led by John Wills. The 06.30 start was rewarded by the sight or sound of 22 bird species in total. This included wren, willow warbler, chiffchaff, blackcap, song thrush, redpoll, siskin, tree pipit, great spotted woodpecker (drumming and calling), sparrowhawk (distant flying), buzzard as well as an osprey on an established local nest.

Later in May a Spring Flower Walk was held in Tilliefoure Wood, led by David Bale looking at the woodland communities and some of the spring flowers found in each. The plant communities were seen to change with the soil types. On the clay soils, there was a rich variety of plants including bugle, pignut, honeysuckle and sweet-vernal grass, which has a very distinct flavour when chewed. Wood-sage with its square stems and crinkly leaves borne in alternating pairs was also found - this has a very bitter flavour so best not to try! There was a good variety of trees as well with pedunculate oak, birch, rowan, holly, ash. On the more acid soils we found Scots pine, which look self-sown. Sadly a

careless fire 18 months ago has burnt part of this area causing a lot of damage. Hand lenses were used to magnify the main plant characteristics to aid identification.

Also in May there was an Introduction to Pinewood Invertebrates Workshop and Walk. This was led by experts Jenni Stockan and Callum Maclure of the James Hutton Institute. After a brief introduction to the range of insects associated with pine trees, the group went outside to try out some of the sampling techniques. This included sweeping the ground vegetation with a large sweep net, beating a tree branch with a heavy stick to dislodge invertebrates which dropped into a wide white cloth funnel shaped structure and collecting specimens using a pooter – a device like a mouth operated tiny vacuum cleaner. The specimens were then emptied into a white tray so they could be seen. Some of the more interesting ones were placed in containers to look at more closely using a microscope. A wide range of invertebrates, including so-called marsh beetles, aphids, weevils, lacewings, ladybird larvae, bark beetles, slaver ants and spiders were identified.

At the end of June John Wills led a Riverside Bird Walk alongside the River Don at Tillyfour. After an initially quiet start to the walk, species numbers increased and birds expected in this river habitat were spotted. Water levels were low as a result of the fine dry weather with many of the boulders prominent above the water - good for perches! Altogether the group saw/heard 15 species of birds including heron, common sandpiper, pied wagtail, grey wagtail and dipper. Chiffchaff and blackcap were both singing.

An evening Bat Walk took place in August with a late night rendezvous at the Donview Centre. Aileen Salway, local bat expert, gave an informative talk on the species of bats seen in the area and their ecology. As if on cue as the sun set

the first of the bats came out! These were pipistrelle bats – common and soprano. As well as seeing the bats, bat detectors were used which pick up the frequency of echolocation which each bat species uses to locate and catch their prey. Prey species include midgies and the group were certainly grateful for all they could eat that night! The group were shown brown long-eared bats in their roosting site. Back by the water, many pipistrelles demonstrated their aerial displays.



Lorna M Bell - Trustee,  
Wildlife.

The last event of the year was a Moth ID morning in September led by Helen Rowe, Marr Countryside Ranger, to a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The site is oak woodland with birch, hazel and rowan and the event was the third year that the group have used this venue at different seasons to compare and expand the species list found. Two live moth traps were set up by the oak wood, using powerful lights to attract the moths. Helen identified each species found and described their habitat requirements. The highlight of the catch was four specimens of the wonderfully named Merveille du Jour (wonder of the day). This is a late summer flying, oak tree specialist and was a great addition to the ongoing list across the years. Overall, 34 species of moth were caught across the three locations. All were released unharmed.



David Bale - Trustee,  
Environment.

The Wildlife Group have a programme of events for 2026. If you would like to add your name to the mailing list please use the QR code in title or email [info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk](mailto:info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk) You are welcome to join us.

# Environment

*Strategy - To conserve and enhance the semi-natural habitats and diversity of native species across the hill and surrounding farmland as a response to the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss.*

There were 2 main projects during the year. The first was work on completing an Environmental Strategy for Bennachie and its environs. This document has been worked on over the last 2 years with input from volunteer experts in ecology, conservation and land management, brought together for the project by the Bailies. Its purpose is to set out the Bailies' vision and ideal objectives for the management of the hill to enhance its value for biodiversity and resilience against climate change. In doing so, we respect the fact that we do not own or manage any land in the area and that the hill's managers have a variety of objectives, including commercial forestry and agriculture. The hill is also used by a wide range of recreational interests.

Our aim is to use the finalised strategy as a sound basis for engagement with the hill's land managers and users so that we can influence their management plans so that commercial interests and users' needs are met while enhancing biodiversity and climate resilience.

The strategy sets out our vision and ideal objectives for the multiple habitats and associated species existing on Bennachie, such as the open moorlands, blanket bogs, fens, broadleaved woodlands and pine plantations along with the Loch of Afforsk plus the commercial plantations and the agricultural ground on the lower slopes surrounding the hill. Our intention is to publish the strategy early this coming year and start the process of engagement with managers and users with the aim of long-term benefit to the area in our capacity as a "Voice for the Hill".

The second project is with the Wildlife Volunteers working to increase our data on mammal and bird use of the hill. This project, deploying 10 trail cameras, will cover the whole of the hill over several years. During 2025, the cameras were set across the range of habitats found on the Castle Forbes Estate at the southwest end of the hill. We

are grateful to Lord Forbes for his permission to use his ground and to his staff for their support. The cameras were first set up over the summer to record large mammals. We then modified the focal length of the cameras and set them up in a baited box to record small mammals at the same general locations. Small mammals are generally very much under recorded, so this was a valuable part of the project. During early winter, we deployed the cameras next to the River Don, some of its tributaries and by a pond in the castle grounds.



Videos of animals recorded were badger and roe deer in abundance. Red deer were also recorded, together with pine marten, fox and red squirrel. Wood mice, bank and field voles were the commonest small mammals, but also recorded common and pygmy shrew. We were delighted that weasels visited some of the small mammal boxes, as these are very difficult to survey by other means. Otter and brown rat were seen at the waterside locations.

All the records are collated together with their national grid location, date and time and have been sent to the North East Biological Recording Centre for storage and retrieval. We will continue the project at a new part of the hill during 2026. Additional volunteers for this project are welcome, sign up as a Wildlife Volunteer.

Lorna M Bell & David Bale, Wildlife and Environment Trustees.

# Fun and Learning

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The Bailies are pleased to report the rejuvenation of our Fun and Learning (F&L) initiative. A considerable resource of online content directed primarily at young people had been assembled but the loss of the trustee caused it to hit the doldrums. The trustees decided to canvass our membership and volunteer cohort. We have been rewarded with three volunteers stepping forward; a primary school teacher, a secondary school teacher and a children's author; a bit of a dream-team in terms of skills and mindset. We are still actively looking for a replacement trustee to guide this team.

The team have proposed the following purpose statement:

*Giving young people the skills, knowledge and confidence to be the voice of the hill for future generations.*

Accompanying this vision is a long list of exciting

initiatives to enhance our newly formatted Junior Bailies website (see Website article) and are planning activities to raise the awareness of our resources amongst primary and secondary schools in Aberdeenshire.

It has long been recognised that education underpins all of our activities; an appreciation of why work parties, environmental activities or archaeology matters is based at heart on education and an appreciation of all aspects of our environment. Where are the next generation of botanists, historians and environmental workers coming from if we do not stimulate their interest in the world that they live in? Equally, where are the next generation of Bailies coming from if they do not develop a love of our hill from an early age?

Looking ahead to 2026, we are hopeful that our F&L team can gain some traction and start to implement some of their great ideas.



# Website

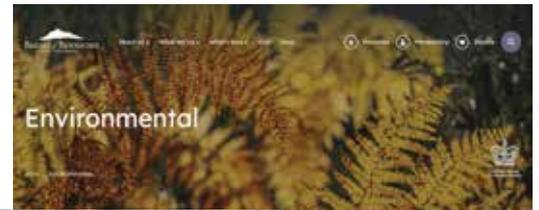
At the end of 2024, the trustees agreed to invest in a new, modern website. Given the size of the investment, a competitive tendering process was undertaken and the work awarded to CP&Co in Inverurie. An intense period of design and implementation was undertaken over the first half of 2025, led by our former Secretary, Willie Linklater.

Our new website was launched in August. The design offers clean lines, a visually attractive format and fantastic graphics. Behind the scenes, the platform has made the website very easy to maintain and update, saving the Admin team many hours.

Our original website was carrying over 6000 pages, many of which were out of date and not visited. We therefore used the process to prune, condense and sharpen our webpage content during the transfer process. NB, this data has not been deleted but archived for potential future access.

Another important feature is our improved online shop which we are now populating with Bailies and Bennachie related items. We had sold approximately 200 calendars through the shop by year end, to be sent all around the world. Please consider our shop when looking for gifts for anyone who loves the hill, and we welcome any suggestions and feedback on it.

As we write, our complementary website for young people, Junior Bailies, is being updated to the same platform and formatting. This too is a timely investment as we have recruited new volunteers to our Fun and Learning initiative and they will be able to take full advantage of the website's new functionality once the team is fully established.



# Income & Expenditure

	2024	£	2025	
<b>I N C O M E</b>	Membership and donations	3,734	15,455	
	Publications	5,283	7,215	
	Grants	-	3,000	
	Bank interest	9,843	8,311	
	Dividend income	53,197	48,824	
	<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>72,057</b>		<b>82,805</b>
<b>E X P E N D I T U R E</b>	Publications	2,796	3,981	
	Governance costs	12,687	13,519	
	Payments relating directly to charitable activities	40,353	35,321	
	Bennachie archaeological digs	12,581	7,784	
	Co-ordination support	23,603	18,789	
	Investment manager fees	14,703	15,016	
	Equipment and other ancillaries	13,053	1,853	
	<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>119,776</b>		<b>96,263</b>
	Net (expenditure) / income	(47,719)		(13,458)
	Net gains on investments	39,449		114,767
	<b>NET MOVEMENTS IN FUNDS</b>	<b>(8,270)</b>		<b>101,309</b>
Fund balances brought forward	2,320,243		2,311,973	
<b>FUND BALANCES AT 31ST DECEMBER</b>	<b>2,311,973</b>		<b>2,413,282</b>	

# Treasurer's Report

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It is our policy to keep healthy reserves so that we are in a position to help fund activities and major projects in relation to Bennachie. Each year the trustees consider whether the reserves remain sufficient to give this possibility and in general we aim to limit spending on annually recurring items excluding investment manager fees to roughly the level of income from dividends, bank interest, membership subscriptions and other sources of income.

Our income for the year was £82,805 which includes dividend income of £48,824, donations of £14,501 and bank interest of £8,311. In 2024 our income was £72,057.

Expenditure decreased in 2025 to £96,263 compared to £119,776 in 2024. This decrease in expenditure was mainly due to lower equipment costs in relation to work party support together with the absence of the significant cost incurred in 2024 to revalidate our membership records.

The net movement in funds for the year was an increase of £101,309 and year end funds amounted to £2,413,282.

## **Investment Policy and performance:**

The overall objective is to hold investments to generate income and provide capital growth in the medium to long term. The investment managers, Rathbones, are instructed to maximise the return of the investments, consistent with an acceptable level of risk as agreed by the trustees. The trustees meet Rathbones at least annually to review performance of the investments.

The portfolio ended the year with a market value of £2,218,904 which includes a net gain on investments over the year of £114,767. The trustees recognise that the stock market continues to be volatile and that gains or losses in one year may be cancelled out by losses or gains the next year. As noted above, the overall objective is to generate income and provide long term capital growth and discussions with the investment managers are focused on this objective.

Alan Henderson, Trustee Treasurer.



# Membership

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Following the big scale review of the membership in 2024 and a further clean up early in 2025, the membership has grown slightly and sits at approximately 700 at the end of the year. We have some regular contact with some members, mostly through our FaceBook articles and interesting stories are shared with us.

During 2025, we have adopted Mailer Lite to contact our members and volunteers, a streamlined media service which is easy to operate, manage and review how our mailings out are received. This has made it more colourful and our Newsletters are more regular too.

As we used the updated website to manage the donations for the Help Your Hill path upgrade, there are a lot of lovely messages left in the Comments and we share some of them with you.

Some people have been specifically named in shared memories, and these are acknowledged now: Grahame Henderson, Margaret & Dennis Cartwright, Bill Sinclair, Jean Hepburn and John Hern. Others have been named by their role in the memories, such as husband, wife, grand-parents and friends, but their love of the hill is ingrained with their memory too and especially the times walking the hill with families.

*"I've had a painting of Bennachie on my wall for many years but never visited due to my husband's disability. After his death, my son and I decided to get out more and Mither Tap was the first hill we climbed - up the Timeline trail, a bit of a baptism of fire really. Since then, we've done several hills and forests but Bennachie from Rowantree carpark remains our favourite." "My mother (sadly deceased) was born and brought up in Inch, and my sisters and I have visited the area several times for family history purposes. On one occasion we stayed in a lovely B&B in Oyne, at the foot of Bennachie. We have very fond memories of the area." "My late grandmother was an early Bailie. Both my parents loved Bennachie and I too feel a strong affinity to the hill." "Bennachie was the first 'mountain' I climbed with my father nearly 70 years*

*ago. I continue to enjoy climbing it now."*

*One lucky person writes: "When sitting at our meal table in Alford we look over to the Bennachie range of hills with Mither Tap looking splendid, especially when the sun is shining on the tip of this beautiful hill. One of the finest sights in Aberdeenshire."*

*Others have donated to the path upgrade because they have used them to climb the hill: "I have walked up Bennachie many times over the last forty years, with my children, grandchildren and dogs - everyone loves Bennachie." "Giving a little back, in return for all the pleasure Bennachie has given us." "Love walking the trails with my dog. We are there at least once a week. We meet so many lovely and interesting people."*

*Others see the benefit for the future users too: "I enjoy walking on Bennachie and would like to support the work of the Baillies to ensure the paths are safe and well-maintained. Bennachie is a major asset to the local area and it is important to look after it!" "I enjoy walking and the natural environment on Bennachie. It's important to maintain the paths to enable access for all." "I have recently joined the Bailies and I want to help preserve this special place." "I have walked on Bennachie for many years and gained great pleasure from the hill in that time. I see this as my contribution to the hill, maintaining access for others in the future."*

*And others yet have the most poetic turn of phrase that gives that evocative feeling of what Bennachie means: "It was an ascent of Bennachie on a wintry day in my school days, with powder snow being lifted by the wind in a low red sun, that fired my love of the hills. Since then, I have been up Bennachie numerous times, often with family, and in all conditions." "I am an 82 year old man. The hill has been like a magnet to me all of my life. Just read Charles Murray's poetry about the hill, 'Yons the hill an this is the howe. It rugs at yer heart fin yer awa'."*

Thank you for sharing your memories with your donations, we cannot include them all, but we are most grateful for the contribution to the funding and especially the contribution to the social history and impact that Bennachie brings to you, our members.



Stella Gauld,  
Support Team Member



Karen Noble,  
Support Team Member

# 53rd Annual General Meeting

**M**embers only are warmly invited to attend the fifty-third Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Bailies of Bennachie, at 19:00 on Thursday 19th March 2026, to be held at the Garioch Heritage Centre, Loco Works Road, Inverurie, AB51 4FY.

The AGM will also have a TEAMS link to allow for remote access for those members outside the local area or prevented from physically attending. This link will be emailed to you on the receipt of a request mailed to [info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk](mailto:info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk)

An open forum will take place after the AGM. Apologies and questions in advance can be sent to Bailies of Bennachie, Garioch Heritage Centre, Loco Works Road, Inverurie, AB51 4FY, or email: [info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk](mailto:info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk)

Existing Trustees: David Bale, Lorna Bell, David Caney, Alex Doig, Alan Henderson (Treasurer), Peter Stock (Chair), Allan Will (Deputy Chair).



Become a Member



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# The King's Award for Voluntary Service

*The MBE for volunteer groups*



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