

COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGIST UPDATE by Leaf Gould

It has been a busy three months since I began my post as a community archaeologist working on the Bennachie Landscapes Project. The focus of the project this year is the 19thC squatter Colony on the lower south east slopes of Bennachie.

Much of my work relates to the events that we are holding every two weeks in the Colony. We have been working predominantly on the Burnside settlement; surveying and photographing the structures, as well as undertaking extensive test pitting.

This has targeted both recovery of artefacts and the collection of data about the soil around the settlement. The composition of the soil in the various areas around the dwelling, ie the kailyard, the crop fields and unimproved areas, can give us a meaningful

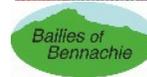


insight into the farming strategies of those living at Burnside. We've found that the improved ground in the kailyard is so deep that it could not have come from organic improvement alone; turf must have been cut from elsewhere on the hill and added to the kailyard. There is also evidence that the site was cleared with fire prior to the construction of the kailyard. The sheer number of person-hours involved in the various improvements indicate the colonists were investing in their community for the long term. Impressive revetment walls and field boundaries also shows a meaningful investment of time, and a high level of planning.

I am lucky to work with a group of pupils from Kemnay Academy too. This group of second-year students has begun to investigate a comparative site at the Back o' Bennachie. The group has cleared the site (a formidable task), and has begun test pitting over the associated field. So far little in the way of artefacts have been uncovered, except for a lovely fragment of hand-painted white ware, but the information regarding soil improvement has proved invaluable. This group has also been looking at historic maps of the area, and will be putting together some posters about this in future sessions.

We are looking forward to the full excavation on Hillside and Shepherd's Lodge in July. Bailies and community volunteers will work on the excavation alongside archaeology students from Aberdeen University. During the two week season, we will excavate the interior of the houses and some exterior areas to recover artefacts and obtain evidence of how the buildings were constructed. It is said that the roof of Shepherd's Lodge was burned when the family living there was evicted. We will be looking for evidence to confirm if this account is accurate.

Looking ahead, we hope to apply for funding to extend the Bennachie Landscapes Project. Many of you have already been in touch with ideas, but we'd love to hear from you if you have further suggestions for the future project.



2013 Newsletter

ANNUAL UPDATE by Jackie Cumberbirch, Senior Bailie

Thank you to everyone who replied to our questionnaire last year. The report of the survey is on our website. We are using the results to help us plan for the future because we want to make sure the Bailies continue to care for Bennachie for many years to come. A few more volunteers came forward as a result of the survey and are helping with our activities on the hill. The Bailies depend on volunteers and we're hugely grateful for the enormous amount of time volunteers put in to help with our work on Bennachie but we can always use more helpers, so please get in touch if you want to join us.

MEMORIAL CAIRN

On Sunday 2nd September 2103 the Bailies unveiled a cairn close to Oxen



Craig. The memorial commemorates 3 victims of two air crashes, the first in 1939 and the second in 1952. Relatives travelled from Canada, England and Scotland to attend the simple but poignant ceremony on top of the hill conducted by the padre from RAF Lossiemouth. This act of remembrance to these brave airmen was the culmination of many years of research by James Mackay. A lone piper playing

Highland Cathedral brought an emotional end to a very special day.

RESEARCHING THE COLONY

At the beginning of 2013 the Bailies joined forces with Aberdeen University to begin a new season of exploration into the lives of the 'Colonists'. A grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council is helping fund a community archaeologist called Aoife Gould. Aoife (aka "Leaf") is running archaeology events on the hill on alternate weekends. She is also organising a two week dig at the beginning of July - everyone is welcome to come along have a look.

BENNACHIE LANDSCAPES PROJECT

Colin Shepherd, coordinator of Bennachie Landscapes project, is working in the area around Bennachie too. His work complements that of the University. He has been working with the primary schools in Keig, Oyne and Kintore to investigate the local landscape.

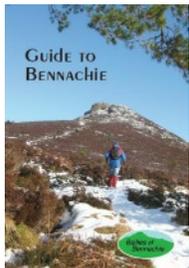
NATURAL BENNACHIE - Art Project

As part of our 40th anniversary celebrations, we are embracing "The Year of Natural Scotland" supported by Creative Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage. The Natural Bennachie project is coordinated by the Scottish Sculpture Workshop in partnership with the Bailies, Forestry Commission Scotland, Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service and Aberdeen University. Four acclaimed artists have been selected for the project. Throughout the summer these artists will be working on the hill and they will be hosting public events, including outdoor workshops, based on and around Bennachie.

For more details please see www.naturalbennachie.org.

MAMMAL RECORDING DAY

At the end of March 2013 we ran a mammal recording event at the Bennachie Centre. The aim was to encourage visitors to record any sightings of mammals and send them to the North East Biological Records Centre. The records will then be included in the new Mammal Atlas for North East Scotland.



NEW GUIDE TO BENNACHIE

In March we published the updated Guide to Bennachie by James Mackay and John Nicol. I thoroughly recommend this new guide which has the most comprehensive map of the footpaths on Bennachie. The publication is dedicated to the late Lord Forbes who died in March at the age of 95. Lord Forbes was the Guardian of Bennachie and always spoke passionately at our annual rally which he attended with his wife Lady Forbes.

40th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

The Bailies were formed on the 9th May 1973 so on Friday 10th May and Saturday 11 May we celebrated our 40th anniversary. We received a birthday mention in the Scottish Parliament and local baker JG Ross made special Bennachie Baps for our celebrations!

On Friday our popular Doric Night was highly entertaining once again thanks to some very talented performers. On Saturday morning visitors were able to join one of several guided walks on the hill. In the afternoon James Mackay, one of the founder members, gave a fascinating illustrated talk about the activities of the Bailies during the last 40 years.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Our new book, the second in our Bennachie Landscapes series, will be published in July. The 2014 calendar will be out soon too. We've enclosed an order form for you to get your orders in early.

ANNUAL PICNIC - Sunday 18th August 2pm at Back O' Bennachie.

I hope you to see you at our annual picnic on Sunday 18th August. We will be serving Strawberries/raspberries with cream accompanied by music, a green woodworking demonstration and stalls celebrating natural produce from Bennachie.



BENNACHIE – THE FOURTH DIMENSION by Colin Miller

It is a privileged experience to dig down into the thin mantle of Bennachie and gaze at the "natural" – the grey, gritty, granite sand and stones revealed on the land surface by the melting of the ice sheet more than 10,000 years ago. Just the other day, Bailies, volunteers, University of Aberdeen staff and students had the opportunity to do exactly that – viewing the base of a shallow trench excavated through the thin plough-soil of a field at the Colony on Bennachie. A mere 150 years ago that soil had last been turned over by a farm plough, pulled by a horse, or perhaps a couple of oxen if the going was hard, which was more than likely on this rough hillside. Field archaeology, delving into the past with spades and trowels, is one aspect of the Bennachie Landscapes Community Research Project that is underway throughout 2013, (and hopefully for long beyond that).

Another avenue into the past is offered by the archives, such as those held by the University of Aberdeen, who's Special Collections Centre holds probably the most extensive collection of documents relating to estates in north-east Scotland. This collection offers community volunteers, with help from University staff, the opportunity to find documents which will shed light on the lifestyle of the Colonists and other farmers in the locality. Likewise, the Bailies' publications and archives have much to offer.

A keen group of Bailies' volunteers are exploring the archival data on the Colony itself, the surrounding estates and tenant farms, as well as the domestic gardens and kailyard, quarries, track ways, peat mosses, contemporary newspaper reports and personal reminiscences which, taken together, will build a picture of the Bennachie Colonists and the world they inhabited. Meanwhile, the archaeological work has already begun to provide dating evidence and actual artefacts which will bring that picture to life.