



The Bailies of Bennachie Annual Report 2020



We care about Bennachie,
its natural environment, history
and culture - protecting this unique
landscape for future generations

BAILIES OF BENNACHIE AGM 2021

It is hoped that this can be an in person event but a decision will be made nearer the time based on what is happening with COVID restrictions. It will be later than usual – most likely May or June. An email will be sent out and notifications put out on the Bailies website and social media sites.

2020/21 Trustees

Chairperson and Senior Bailie: Jackie Cumberbirch

Treasurer: Brian Cornock

Secretary and Work Party Co-ordinator: Willie Linklater

Membership Secretary, Web Master and Social Media: Donna Taylor

Vice Chair and Publications: Ann Baillie

Archive: Andrew Wainwright

Hill Warden: Peter Stock

Planning: Dave Peter

Learning Officer and Wildlife Group: Margaret Garden

Angela Groat, Alex Doig, Daniel Montgomery, John Bain

**Please see our web site for more details www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk or write to:
Bailies of Bennachie, PO Box 11535, Huntly, AB54 9AD.**

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chair@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk (Senior Bailie)

outreach@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk (Fiona Cormack – press and publicity)

workparties@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk



Meet the new Trustees

Five new trustees were welcomed onto the board at the AGM bringing valuable skills and insights into the work of the Bailies.

Alex Doig

Alex is a keen mountain biker and photographer. He said “I’m new to the trustees but feel excited and privileged to be given the chance to promote and preserve the hill.”



Dan Montgomery

Dan has a particular interest in the Bennachie aircraft crash sites and walks the hill regularly. He says he was delighted to become a Hill Warden in January 2020 and a Trustee in July the same year.



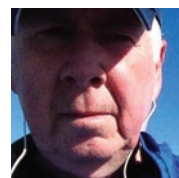
John Bain

John lives on the slopes of Bennachie and is on the hill every day – walking, running, biking or horse riding. Now that he has more time available, he says he wishes to “try to give a little back” through becoming a trustee.



Peter Stock

Peter can see Bennachie and Millstone Hill from the end of his driveway. He became a Hill Warden in January 2020 and was elected a Trustee in July 2020, with responsibilities for administering the Hill Warden scheme.



Report from the Chair



As I reflect over the past year, I realise that I have the honour as Chair to represent a group of resilient individuals who are all inspired and committed to our hill. This commitment never left the group and new approaches were developed during a difficult time. I must admit, in May, whilst working at home, it was good to see Bennachie in the distance as my anchor! So thanks to all who kept members informed and connected via the Facebook page, on our two new web sites and in the press!

Unfortunately, none of our planned events occurred in 2020. We were even going to celebrate 25 years of the opening of the Bennachie Visitor Centre. In addition, we did not have any work parties or clean the toilets at Rowantree Car Park. However, despite this, it was still good to see that the new hill wardens, when able to access the hill, carried on with their reports. The work parties are aware there is a lot of maintenance work on paths to do on the hill in 2021.

In Spring 2020, several Bailies created a series of short videos shared on our Facebook page under the title ‘A Breath O’ Bennachie’. This series of short videos included: ‘Walks to Mither Tap’, ‘Archaeology’, ‘Views of Bennachie’, ‘Past times’, ‘Seasons’, ‘Your Bennachie’, ‘Flora and Fauna on Bennachie’ and ‘Views on the Hill’. Unknown to the Bailies who created these short videos, they were appreciated by many people and a new audience developed as these videos were watched in several local care homes and brought some joy.

In late June, we held our first ever online Zoom AGM with a good turnout and it was great to welcome Bailies from Yorkshire. We also had five new trustees join us (another first!), so that was great too. In July, we created a new web site: ‘Outdoor with the Bailies’ at www.juniorbailies.org.uk, which is linked to our Bailies of Bennachie website. The aim is to create online activities that will help inspire young people to enjoy and appreciate the outdoor environment using wildlife as the inspiration. A lot of work has gone into this website and we are now getting advice from Aberdeenshire Council Education Department on how we can develop further our online activities to benefit teachers. Jock O’ Bennachie has been our mascot as we discover he has lots of entertaining stories to tell about the hill!

In September, several members of the Bennachie Landscapes project decided, as part of Scottish Archaeology month, to deliver several online articles, videos and presentations about the Bennachie Colonists. Later, during November, we launched ‘A Puckle of Days on Bennachie’, which was filmed by Alex Thompson in 2019. This film is a very gentle and reflective view and is definitely worth a watch.

As 2020 draws to a close I am sure I can say on behalf of the Bailies of Bennachie Trustees we wish you and your families well for 2021. I would like to say a BIG thank you to all the Trustees for their valuable contributions in 2020. Next year, we hope to be able to work with landowners and mountain bikers to make sure some of the trails appearing are sustainable, to continue to be inspired and to learn more about the wildlife found on the hill. And we shall continue to do our bit to look after our favourite hill.

Jackie Cumberbirch
Senior Bailie



Taken from Keithhall estate April 2020 near my home.

Treasurer's Report

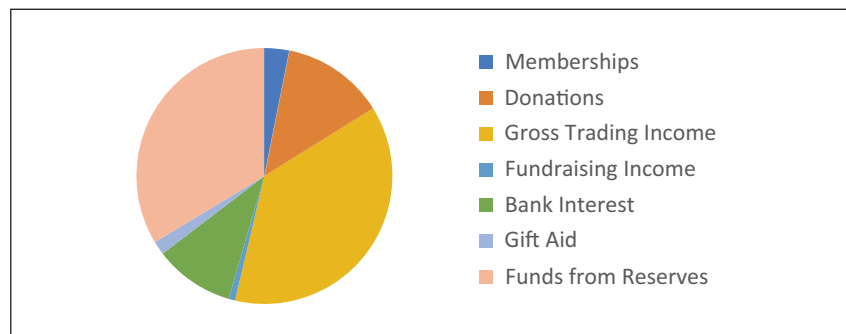
The 2020 figures are provisional and remain to be checked by the independent auditor.

Brian Cornock
Treasurer

The financial year for the Bailies of Bennachie (SCIO) is the calendar year and this summary is for calendar year 2020.

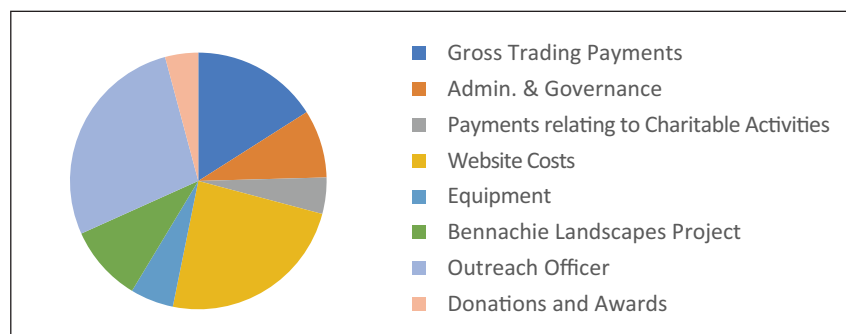
The two pie plots here show a split of income and expenditure for 2020. These plots have been shown at the same scale for ease of comparison. This highlights the £5240 of funding used from reserves in 2020, which compares with a drawdown of £9439 in 2019. The largest expenditures were on employment of an Outreach Officer and on development of the website.

At 31 Dec 2020, the Bailies had reserves of £129,561, which compares with £134,801 held at 31 Dec 2019, with all funds unrestricted.



Above: Source of funds for 2020 - £15,572.

Below: Expenditure for 2020 - £15,572.



Work Party News

Due to Covid-19 restrictions the only 2020 Work Party was in March when 260 Oak trees were planted on the lower slopes of Millstone Hill. The Bailies are helping Forestry and Land Scotland recreate a native woodland.

Work parties have since been postponed until early 2021, when we are really keen to get back taking part in maintaining our hill. A positive outcome this year has been the higher than normal number of new volunteers who have come forward wishing to join the work parties. It will be really good to see new and existing volunteers back out on the hill in the work parties as early as possible in 2021.

Willie Linklater

*Planting oak trees on Millstone Hill.
(Photo: Jackie Cumberbirch.)*



Bennachie Centre

As the Bard wrote, "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men...."

The 2020 season was to be a celebratory time for the Bennachie Visitor Centre, as plans had been put in place to mark its 25th Anniversary. The silver lining was that it did open, albeit in late August, though with much reduced opening times and facilities, in order to support the staff's wellbeing and put into practise the public health measures for Covid 19. The Bailies gave a donation to the Visitor Centre to help with the measures to allow the opening. Regular walkers and users of Bennachie returned to support the shop and acknowledge the work that had gone into the reopening.

New signs are being developed for the Centre which incorporate the red squirrel as part of the new logo design. The introduction of a Red Squirrel as the symbol for the Centre's logo justified a competition to name this much loved Scottish mammal. The name will be revealed soon.

A successful fundraising campaign helped the Bennachie Centre Trust to purchase a pad defibrillator. This has been installed on the wall outside the Centre to the right of the ladies toilets. Fund raising continues towards the cost of maintenance and training for this vital life-saving piece of equipment. The public now have Wi-Fi (free to use) in and around the Centre which is also a great bonus.

Although the Centre was only opened for around 13 weeks there has been much positive feedback from the public. With this in mind, during the closure of the Centre this winter, the toilets are planned to remain open Friday to Monday from 10 am to 3 pm.

Ann Baillie
Trustee



Hill Warden training. (Photo: Fiona Cormack.)

Membership

Welcome to all our new members; thank you for supporting the Bailies. Our membership is steadily growing each year and, with most members being online, it is easy for us to keep you all updated with news and events, either by email or via our Website and Facebook page. If you know anyone who is a member but is not receiving any updates etc. please ask them to email their details to info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk and I will update our database.

Not sure what present to buy? We can send a Bailies Gift Membership for you too. Please email for details.

Donna Taylor

Membership and Social Media Secretary

Hill Wardens

In January there was a re-launch of the Bailies Hill Warden scheme. A call was put out for volunteers and 15 people came forward. Two lots of training took place in February at the Bennachie Visitor Centre with volunteers being taken round paths by Neil Taylor, Visitor Centre ranger of Forestry Land Scotland and hearing more about the Bailies work parties.

The Hill Wardens are the collective eyes and ears of the Bailies on the hillside. They undertake to walk a section of path every six weeks and send a report back on the condition of the paths, car parks and other issues affecting the hill.

This can range from issues such as water pooling on the path, the state of the sign posts, vegetation growing over the path, to urgent issues such as a broken tree over the path. This information is then passed on to the work parties and Forestry Land Scotland and adjacent land owners. Wardens are also encouraged to undertake minor remedial works, such as drain clearance, where it is safe to do so. Many also pick up rubbish and notice signs of wildlife.

During 2020 all the paths have been walked and reported on, giving a clear baseline picture of the paths on the hill. There is a waiting list at the moment for new Hill Wardens but applications are still welcome. It is hoped the knowledge of the Hill Wardens can be used for such activities such as supplementing the manpower of the monthly work parties and feedback on revised signage on the Waymarked trails.

The Hill Warden scheme is administered by Peter Stock and he can be contacted at hillwardens@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk.

Jock O'Bennachie



*Ethan after his photographic competition win.
(Photo: Brian Garden)*

A new venture for the Bailies this year has been the creation of a fun and learning programme on the website for primary school children and their families. The resources use Jock O'Bennachie as a mascot to introduce children to activities and information about Bennachie and the natural world. Bailies Learning Officer Margaret Garden explains:

“The aim of the programme is to help promote amongst the young an interest in and a love for Bennachie as well as an understanding of the need to conserve its environment. We started with a summer holiday programme with packages of resources looking at birds, things that grow and mini beasts and pollinators. We have since added an autumn and winter section and hope this is something young people and schools will be able to use for years to come.

As well interesting facts and information the resources contain activities, Doric storytelling and even jokes. Activities range from trying to eat as a blackbird,

to fantastic leaf art and going on a minibeast adventure. The programme uses Bennachie as an inspiration to encourage families to go outdoors and explore the living world around them.”

The summer resources included a small competition which was won by five year old Ethan Podmore-Mills. He entered a photograph of amphibians and caterpillars at the pond on Bennachie. His mother, Sarah said, “We found the resources on the Bailies’ website excellent, especially during lockdown. I printed out some of them to use outside and it encouraged us to go out and do our own bug hunts and exploring.”

Margaret Garden added, “Never have the benefits of being outdoors and active been more important. The COVID lockdown has given many families a new appreciation of nature and the living world around us and made it clear how much we can use online content for learning and recreation. These ready to use packages of resources aim to provide north-east children with exciting relevant materials with a local flavour.”



Title page of Alex's film.

In November the Bailies released a new film, ‘A Puckle O’ Days on Bennachie’. The half hour feature celebrates the hill and shows how individuals and groups interact with and respond to Bennachie. Various aspects of life on the hill are captured including tree-felling, volunteers doing work, archaeology, wildlife footage and mountain bikers.

It was made by Inverurie film maker, Alex Thomson who studied Creative Communications: TV at NESCOL in Aberdeen, graduating in 2017. He has worked on film sets around Aberdeen and currently works as a freelance videographer.

Alex said: “It has been a real privilege working alongside the Bailies of Bennachie to make this film. It is a stunning landscape to photograph and I have tried to show what makes Bennachie such a loved hill to people throughout Aberdeenshire and beyond.”

Bailies’ chair, Jackie Cumberbirch said: “This is a beautifully shot, gentle film which gives an insight into some of the activity on the Bennachie hill range. It will be of interest to local people and anyone with an

interest in the environment, nature and sustainability. It is a great showcase for Bennachie and the Bailies. Due to current COVID restrictions it has been released online, but we hope it will also gain a screen audience at film clubs around the region during 2021.

The film takes in many events over the past 12 months including the Bennachie Bosie when 400 people came together to hug Mither Tap for breast cancer charities. We hope people will enjoy the film and that it will give a new appreciation of what makes this landscape so special. Any donation to the Bailies to help to cover the cost of the film is welcome and can be made via the website.”

Over a thousand people have viewed the film online since it was released. It has a showing scheduled at the Tullynessle film club whenever covid permits.

Fiona Cormack
Outreach Officer



Some of the cast enjoying a break from filming. On facing page, one of the extras enjoying his ‘equity’ wages.

Archaeology

Scottish Archaeology Month (SAM) is an annual event held in September and organised by Archaeology Scotland. Bailies of Bennachie had planned to conduct tours around the Bennachie Colony site this year as part of SAM 2020. Due to Covid-19, it was decided by the organisers that SAM would be an online event promoted on the Archaeology Scotland website. In response, Bailies of Bennachie/Bennachie Landscapes Project decided to produce online video presentations to tell the story of the Colony.

The team, including Chris Foster, Alison Kennedy, Colin Miller, Dave Peter and Alan Will, created presentations using Microsoft PowerPoint with embedded voiceovers. We wanted to highlight the archaeological and research work carried out on the Colony and to share what we learned about the Colonists and how they lived on the hill. Alan produced a presentation for YouTube outlining his experiences as a first time volunteer.

A presentation was released each week of SAM and uploaded to YouTube and the Bailies website. Regular snippets released into Facebook promoted the event and raised awareness. In addition to these desk-produced presentations, Alan also braved the elements to record snippet videos on the hillside.

Dave Peter
Planning



A Breath o' Bennachie

It was a 'bright idea' which was immediately voted down, and with good reason. With the joys of spring seemingly denied to us, how to bring 'A Breath o' Bennachie' to lift the spirits of people confined in care homes and hospitals, or restricted to 1 hour of informal outdoor exercise per day in their own immediate neighbourhoods? Of course! Just put together extracts from all the digital material the Bailies have amassed in recent years – videos, digital reconstructions, film, the Colony App – already 'in the can' and ready to put out online. What could be easier? Well, the message came across clearly that without the resources of Hollywood to mix and match all those diverse formats it would be wise to think again!

Keeping it simple turned out to be absolutely the right course. It became an all-consuming activity for a dedicated team occupying much of the three month period of severe lockdown. Eight 3-minute productions duly appeared, comprising captioned photo albums under the following titles: Archaeology; Flora and Fauna on Bennachie; Past Times; Seasons; Views of Bennachie; Views on the Hill; Walks to Mither Tap; Your Bennachie.

'Duly appeared' rather glosses over the hours of storyboarding, image gathering, image selection, caption writing, team consultation, technical production, proofing, publicising and (finally) uploading to YouTube. Uncountable hours went into the project. It was a demanding time, but not without a measure of job satisfaction. It was also rewarding to note that other similar organisations also had the idea of lifting peoples' spirits with online offerings during lockdown.

By 7th December, the total viewing figures had reached 2289. More than a third of these were for 'Walks to Bennachie', which may explain why the path from Rowantree, lockdown permitting, has been incredibly busy.

If you haven't already done so, search for 'A Breath o' Bennachie' on YouTube. You'll find all eight of the videos. At 3-minutes apiece, prepare for a magical half hour on the hill! Credits for 'A Breath o' Bennachie' go to Donna Taylor (production), Compilers (you know who you are!) and the many photographers whose images made it happen.

Colin Miller

The Bede House excavations as featured in 'A Breath of Bennachie'. (Photo: Iain Ralston.)

The Colony Kailyard - Year 4

The Kailyard reconstruction at Shepherds Lodge is an experimental project to help give better perception into the lives of the 19th century colonists. Now in its fourth year, the plants in the Kailyard have reached their full maturity. Our team of volunteers were all happy to carry on with their monthly garden rota duties during 2020, but due to the lockdown this was not always possible, so weeds and grass had their freedom to roam! Once restrictions were eased our volunteers soon had it shipshape again and we were even able to start picking some of the fruit. This year's crop has been quite good, the blackcurrants being the star of the show. Several volunteers picked and used the different fruits for a variety of recipes including an old fashioned one for fruit vinegars, used in the past to cure colds and sore throats. Anne Reid, our volunteer, reported back on her result saying "My blackcurrant vinegar is very rich and syrupy ...no taste of vinegar, lovely on salad. I can see how it could be used for colds!". It is quite possible the colonists could have used this recipe or something similar, even with different fruits.

The Kailyard is always open to visitors and we urge people to come and view. The objective of its reconstruction is to experience and consider what it might have been like for the colonist. Working in the Kailyard is giving us a better understanding of their labours, the conditions endured and methods of work. It has given us time to reflect and question these different ways of working and to explore avenues not before considered. Where we once said "I wonder if" or "would they have done that", we are now starting to get more conclusive answers to some of these questions, all of which will be added to the final report at the end of this project.

Our thanks go to all our volunteers who have done a great job in such unprecedented times. So to finish, a few words of appreciation received from a member of the public: - "It is great to see the land at Bennachie being used to grow things again, a credit to the Bailies and also - a point I like to see recognised - the extraordinary skills and hard work of the Settlers. Many things which were commonplace and continuous for generations in rural life and farming are now lost or



Protecting the rhubarb. (Photo: Chris Foster.)



Plump, juicy and ready to pick! (Photo: Chris Foster.)

disappearing. Retaining that knowledge and keeping it alive is of great value. That point makes all your work at Bennachie so commendable and useful." – M. Everett.

Chris Foster
Bennachie Landscapes Project

Bailies of Bennachie Wildlife Group

At the beginning of the year, 2020 was heralded as a 'super year' for Nature. But it didn't work out that way, did it?

In January the Bennachie Wildlife Group made a good start to the super year. More than 40 people turned out on a dark winter's night to hear Ian Francis from RSPB talk about geese and swans in Scotland, particularly NE Scotland. His talk was followed by updates on the wildlife group's activities. John Wills explained the bird activities he had led in 2019, including a special plea to everyone to record local whooper swans. Lizzie Bacon explained about the pine marten project and using trail cameras to record mammals on the hill. David Bale talked about the plant activities in 2019 and what we were planning for 2020.

Then, bang, Covid hit all of us, and that was it for 2020. We haven't had a meeting since, and we won't be getting together in 2021 until we're sure it's safe to do so. However, wildlife carries on living on and around Bennachie, so please carry on recording wildlife and sending your records to NESBRE.C.

During the lockdown in spring, we emailed the group a few challenges about our local wildlife, choosing species we might see or hear whilst out for daily exercise. The wonderful weather in the spring, combined with lack of traffic noise, allowed people all over the country, especially city folk, to become re-acquainted with bird melodies, a joy many seemed to have forgotten or not heard in their noisy 'normal' lives. Thanks to John's sonic bird challenges, some folk learned to recognise and appreciate the wonderful songs our local birds sing from their breeding territories. On plants, we had positive feedback from members managing to spot and identify the local species highlighted by David. Initially Lizzie had us chasing bees around the garden to try bee identification, but then she set us a challenge to identify mammal tracks which proved too daunting for most – except Jackie, our undaunted Senior Bailie, who successfully completed the challenge.

I can think of very few good things to have come out of the pandemic, but perhaps one positive note was that many people learned to appreciate local



Wildlife tracking. (Photos: Margaret Garden.)



green space and value nature more. We are fortunate to live alongside wildlife around Bennachie, but in many parts of the world nature is under attack.

Why was 2020 expected to be the 'super year for nature'. Well, the phrase was coined because there were significant global 'nature' meetings planned for 2020, but now all have been re-scheduled for 2021.

The foremost meeting is the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow. In a nutshell, every country has to pledge to reduce its carbon emissions and there will be thorny discussions about how, and who, should pay for this. Scotland has set a 'net zero target' for 2045. Already 'nature-based solutions' in Scotland include commitments (with associated budgets) to plant more trees and restore degraded peat lands to sequester carbon and curb greenhouse gas emissions – so our landscape is set to change as our climate warms.

The second global 'nature' meeting is the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15) to be held in Kunming, China. For biodiversity, 2020 marks

the end of a 10 year strategic plan (2011-2020) centred on 20 targets (the 'Aichi' targets) designed to stop the destruction of nature – these targets were adopted by each country. Sadly, in September 2020, the UN reported that none of the targets had been fully met.

My hope is that we all decide to make changes for the better. If we are to make a difference locally, then the key questions for the Bennachie Wildlife Group and the Bailies of Bennachie are, 'What actions can we take around Bennachie to play our part in this global agenda to halt biodiversity loss? Or, better still, 'What actions can we take to enhance biodiversity and improve our relationship with nature and climate?'

Let's do what we can for nature in 2021; as the slogan says: "Think Global, Act Local".

Jill Matthews
Bennachie Wildlife Group

Mountain Biking Policy Statement

A small focus group of Bailies have been formed to look at the issue of mountain biking on Bennachie. The group released a position statement in September. There has been a positive reaction to the statement from various groups on the hill including mountain biking groups and it is hoped it will be a starting point for further discussion next year. The statement is set out below:

"We have recognised the rapid increase in popularity of Mountain Biking on the hill over the last few years. More Mountain Bikers have been enjoying the area all year round and more trails are being built, registered and shared online, for others to discover and challenge themselves against.

Several routes, highlighted in apps such as Trailforks, include waymarked footpaths, maintained by Forestry and Land Scotland with the help of work parties from the Bailies of Bennachie, many others include unofficial or 'wild' MTB trails; i.e. trails established without the permission or knowledge of the landowner or manager, some of which may be potentially damaging to the hill and/or unsafe to its users.

Bennachie is a relatively compact area with an increasingly dense network of trails, and its environs contain: natural wildlife (several rare and protected species), historical and cultural-heritage features of public interest (the preservation of which comprise the main objectives of the Bailies). These are all susceptible

to irreparable damage, if key stakeholders fail to work and look after them together.

Bennachie is enjoyed every day by a wide variety of user-groups, from families - young and old - educational and special interest groups, dog walkers, trail runners, horse riders and, of course, cyclists. The risk of conflict between different groups can at times be real and safety is a growing concern, where unofficial trails exit onto/cross over waymarked routes, and/or on trails used heavily by others, e.g. the section between Mither Tap and Rowantree Car Park (Maiden's Causeway).

At the core of Mountain Biking in Aberdeenshire is a socially and environmentally responsible community. Far from wishing to deter this exciting sport and all the benefits it delivers, Mountain Biking on the hill is embraced by the Bailies, many of whom are keen cyclists and Mountain Bikers themselves.

The Bailies of Bennachie will make every effort to promote and encourage responsible and sustainable use of the hill by all user groups. We are committed to working with key stakeholders (e.g. land owners, Forest and Land Scotland, Bennachie Centre Trust, Trail Builders, Mountain Bikers themselves and other strategic groups) to ensure that potential conflict between groups is minimised, wildlife and heritage features are left undisturbed and Bennachie is protected and preserved for the enjoyment of future generations."

Alex Doig

Bailies Books, Cards and App

New! These great quality cards are perfect for any occasion. With fabulous views of Bennachie they are blank inside for your own message or letter. They are A6 size and come with envelopes. You can purchase them on the Bailies online shop via the web site.

Books. There are a range of informative and interesting books published by the Bailies about Bennachie. The four volumes of the Bennachie Landscapes Series tell the story of research into various areas and aspects of the hill range. There is a classic guide to the hill and copies of 'Bennachie Again' available.



The Bennachie App

And don't forget - if you've not done so already, download the Bennachie App and learn more about the squatter 'Colony' of Bennachie.

LEARN ABOUT THE COLONISTS AND WHAT THEIR LIVES WERE LIKE
TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE BENNACHIE COLONY

Download the free Bennachie Colony Trail App today!

Available now on

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