

## 8 THE BAILIES OF BENNACHIE



Born in the cataclysmic chaos of a young world, Bennachie is the lynchpin of local pride and folklore. As with all mountains and most hills all over the world, Bennachie (near Inverurie, Aberdeenshire) is a towering landmark that draws the human spirit whether you live on its heathery flanks or looktoward it for comfort or inspiration. This quality of wild places to inhabit people's thoughts throughout their lives, compels them to exercise stewardship over them to protect, covert or develop. So the hill of Bennachie is steeped in legend and events that characterise the area and its populace. Of all the stewards, from the lairds of the past and Commissions of the present one

group stands out as the epitome of guardianship - The Bailies of Bennachie. This group started out from the vision of Dr Danny Gordon and the Forestry Commission in 1973 after the government decided to open the forest for the purpose of regulating the popularity that Bennachie has with so many people who live or visit the area and the task of managing their impact on the commercial woodland and wildlife. Born of a desire to protect and educate, Bailies like Algy Watson and James McKay have diligently transformed a couple of old wartime tracks up Millstone hill to four main pathways and car parks expertly laid to control erosion and "saves fowk traipsing throu the rank hedder,"



James McKay collecting berries as Algy put it, when we visited the Bennachie Centre near Chapel of Garioch, the current home of the Bailies and Forest Rangers. The Bailies room where we met is filled with books of history, literacy and biology needed for their work. Originally membership cost £1.00 for life to make sure all who wished to contribute could do so easily which they did with as many as 1500 people attending rallies and picnics held on Bennachie. As membership slackened and became more far