

Bennachie to benefit from £200,000 boost

Scheme to highlight visitor attractions

by **Andrew Hopkins**

MORE of Bennachie's historic attractions will be accessible to visitors after a massive maintenance and improvement scheme.

The £200,000 scheme is the most expensive carried out on the Aberdeenshire mountain, the Forestry Commission said yesterday.

An EU grant of £110,000, plus contributions from the former Gordon District Council and Scottish Natural Heritage, mean modifications never tackled before are now being implemented.

The programme includes laying five miles of new path, enhancing the existing paths, and improving the leaflet and way-marking system.

Forestry Commission district manager Norman Davidson, who is overseeing the two-year project, said the money had been especially useful for work at the top of the mountain.

He said it could cost up to £70 to repair just one metre of pathway at the top.

"Over the past 10 to 15 years, we've always had the programme of maintaining paths at forest level but we've

them at the top, or on the steeper paths.

"We didn't have the money available, or the expertise, but we've had a concerted effort on the paths this time."

Now specialist firms, such as Pathcraft from Stirling, are helping, and helicopters have been used to take materials to the top of the mountain.

The improvement in the leaflet and way-marking system will be linked to the existing facilities at the Bennachie Centre.

Quality

Mr Davidson said: "If we provide better interpretative facilities, people will come away with a better impression of it."

The work, which is due to finish in winter, 1997, will make more archaeological sites on the mountain easily identifiable to visitors.

"The basis of the whole thing is to provide a service to the visitor that is of a reasonably high quality, and it must be sustainable," added Mr Davidson.

Interested parties have been consulted over how best to serve the estimated 100,000 annual visitors to