

# New footpath is opened

**T**HE red ribbon was cut on Tuesday (July 17) to mark the official opening of the new-look Rowantree footpath up North east landmark Bennachie, writes Tracey Stuart.

Completion of the project and the opening of the Rowantree footpath — which runs from the Rowantree car park to the Mither Tap — was marked by a morning reception at Macdonald Pittodrie House Hotel followed by a short walk along the path.

The footpath was declared officially open by hotel owner Theo Smith, whose family have been involved with the estate for over 100 years.

Among those present were Nora Radcliffe MSP, Captain Robin Middleton of Scottish Natural Heritage, James MacKay senior Baillie of Bennachie and representatives from funding partners.

Also unveiled was a new "Walkers Welcome" sign on the footpath, paying homage to all those involved in funding the access improvements.

Theo Smith — who now owns Pittodrie House in partnership with Macdonald Hotels — commented: "I am delighted we have been able to play our part in ensuring continued access to the Rowantree path for current and future hill walkers."

"The completion of this project gives all those involved a great deal of satisfaction and we hope all those who enjoy walking will appreciate the much improved pathway."

And, Mrs Radcliffe added: "Bennachie is one of the natural landmarks of Aberdeenshire and it has always been a popular destination for walkers."

"This project of restoration will allow people to enjoy the walk to Mither Tap for many years to come."

"I hope that as many people as possible

will make the most of the improved footpath and take the opportunity to see for themselves what has been achieved."

Revamping the Rowantree footpath had been initiated and supported by Macdonald Pittodrie House Hotel with 30 per cent of funding coming from Scottish Natural Heritage, 50 per cent from Aberdeenshire Council with AEU Objective, eight per cent from the Forestry Commission and four percent from Grampian Enterprise Scotland.

A total of £122,000 of investment has been pumped into 2,000 metres of access improvements over the past year, building on previous footpath improvements undertaken by the Forestry Commission.

Main contractors Highland Conservation Services worked through difficult winter conditions and foot and mouth restrictions to complete the path to the highest standards.

And, due to the sensitive nature of this high elevation site, much of the work had to be carried out by hand, minimising disturbance to adjacent moorland.

Using granite sourced at nearby Kemnay Quarry and airlifted onto site, the final section required the laying of a "pitched" pavement to the summit of Mither Tap to endure the erosive conditions.

At Tuesday's opening, Pittodrie Estate's project and forestry manager Bruce Taylor of Scottish Woodlands Ltd. expressed the Estate's appreciation to all those who had participated in providing a first class facility for the visitors and residents of Aberdeenshire alike.

Mr Taylor said: "The Estate is privileged to own and invest in this part of the North east's heritage, adding to the wider recreational opportunity existing and proposed at Pittodrie."



The reopening of the Rowantree footpath was marked by a special reception at Pittodrie House Hotel on Tuesday, July 17. Pictured, from left, are: Aberdeenshire Council director of planning Eric Melrose, Scottish Natural Heritage area board member Captain Robin Middleton, Julie Snodgrass of the Forestry Commission, Ed Gillespie of Grampian Enterprise and Pittodrie Estate owner Theo Smith (Picture by Heather Wilson).

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