



THE CENTRAL CAIRNGORM AND GRAMPIAN ESTATES

ADC
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THE GREAT ESTATES IN THE CAIRNGORM AND GRAMPIAN MOUNTAINS

INTRODUCTION

A. D. CHESSELL

During our travels across the vast high-level areas of Scotland, in mist, rain, howling gale, driving snow or complete whiteout, many of us have had cause to be grateful for encountering a line of rusting fence posts marking an old County boundary as shown on Ordnance Survey maps, thereby confirming that we were either on course or enabling us to correct our course, in the same way as Theseus must have clung to his line of twine when returning from the labyrinth. Many of these old County boundaries as shown on the map, coincide at times with estate boundaries, but the latter are seldom known to anyone except those owning or working the estates and certainly not with any great accuracy. Our Meets Secretary does have sufficient information of course to enable him to liaise with the estates regarding the areas visited by the Club, particularly during the shooting season and this relationship with the estates has proved to have been of great benefit over the years.

The writer, having often wondered exactly where he was in relation to the boundaries of the estates and having heard other members speculating on this whilst recuperating on various summit cairns, thought that some investigation would be helpful for those interested in the matter.

Information was obtained from the following sources:—

1. Grampian Regional Council — Department of Physical Planning, from a set of maps showing the ownership of landed estates prepared some years ago by Dr R Millman and others in the Geography Department of Aberdeen University and which cover six large areas of Northern Scotland.
2. A more recent study by the Nature Conservancy Council from information obtained directly from landowners.

It was necessary to interpret the information from both these sources and additional information has been given by some of the landowners and factors. As a result of these investigations, a fairly detailed record of the estate boundaries in the Cairngorm and Grampian Mountains — the areas of particular interest to the Club — is now available.

However, all the information obtained for these areas cannot be easily reproduced in the Journal as the small scale of the map would not allow the required detail to be interpreted by the reader.

The map reproduced here shows, in a simplified way, the boundaries of the central Cairngorm and Grampian estates, these being the great and historic estates which have been most closely associated with the activities of the Club since its early foundation.

Having obtained some of the "bones", it is interesting, if not essential, to provide some of the "meat" in the form of information on the estates in respect of such matters as history, acreage, broad land uses and other items of interest. Again, space does not permit a catalogue of every estate, even in this inner area and therefore, for the time being, brief information is given on two of these estates.

The owner of Glenavon Estate has kindly provided information about the estate within which is the spot where the Club was formed in 1887, Maghan na Banaraich (the Dairymaid's Field) on the shore of Loch Avon. The Resident Factor of Invercauld Estate has been kind enough to describe an estate which provides the setting for so many Club activities, covering as it does such a wide and interesting area in the Grampian mountains and extending southwards into Perthshire.

GLENAVON DEERFOREST

D. S. WILLS

Formerly one of the estates of the Duke of Gordon, it came first into the hands of the Gordons in 1490 when it was relinquished by the Stewarts. In 1935 it was acquired by Colonel Oliver Haig, a relative of the famous field Marshal and in 1963 was bought by the present owner D. S. Wills.

From the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries the river in its upper parts provided a useful route for the traffic in booty from Banffshire and Aberdeenshire to Lochaber and Speyside. Military garrisons were set up to try and prevent this. In 1667 the Earl of Athol was commissioned to raise a force and to this has been ascribed the origin of the Black Watch. As late as 1747 several military posts were set up, one at Inchrory. The estate which is sometimes referred to as Inchrory, the name given to the lodge, is reputedly derived from the fact that a certain Rory Mackenzie rested his cattle there in 1600 and in subsequent years when on his way south to the Trysts at Falkirk. The Estate is more correctly described as Glenavon.

The Estate stretches South and West from Tomintoul, some 14 miles from Grantown on Spey, on the Lecht Road. It lies largely within the wild and magnificent mountainous district of the Cairngorm Mountains. The lowest ground is 1250 feet above sea level and the highest point is Ben Muich Dhui at 4,296 feet. About 35,000 acres are above 1,500 feet and it probably has more ground over 3,750 feet than any other deer forest in Scotland. Loch Avon which lies wholly within the estate at the western extremity at the foot of the Cairngorm is about 2,500 feet above sea level. The River Avon, the fastest flowing river in Scotland, flows eastward

through the Estate for 23 miles and affords excellent salmon and seatrout fishing.

There is a derelict lodge at Faindouran from which it was possible to stalk the four western beats of the estate almost to the shores of Loch Avon. At the present time the remainder of the forest is divided into four beats and the country varies from the precipitous grandeur of the Slochd Mor to the rolling heather covered moors of Blairnamarrow to the South east.

The permanent staff comprises three stalkers and during the season three farmers can be called upon to act as ponymen. It is possible to have four rifles out on the forest in any wind.

In recent years 100 stags have been shot in a season at an average weight of 14 stone. Since 1964, winter feeding has been introduced and should result in improved weights as well as preventing the deer leaving the forest and marauding local farms and holdings where they will be indiscriminately shot. Prior to the formation of the Red Deer Commission in 1961 200 hinds were shot, but since then the forest has come within a control area and the Commission has insisted that a minimum of 300 be culled every year.

In addition to the deer forest the estate has extensive grouse moors and since the reintroduction of driving an average yearly total of over 1400 brace has been achieved. The yearly catch of salmon in the river exceeds 200.

INVERCAULD ESTATE

D. P. PETRIE

The history of the Estate is that it has been in the hands of various branches of the Farquharson family since at least 1500, although the whole property only came into the hands of the Invercauld Branch in the early 1800s, and it was of course, then much larger than it is now. It included at one time, parts of Cromar, Deskry Side, Glenmuick, Balmoral and Marlee in Perthshire.

The present acreage is something in excess of 200,000 acres, but being extremely mountainous, it is somewhat difficult to be completely accurate. So far as land use is concerned, along the north side of the Dee Valley, from Ballater 660' westward to Braemar at 1100', is farming land, being arable and livestock breeding/rearing. The sheep on the various farms also graze out to the much higher ground in Summer and the farms are both let and in hand.

Forestry takes place along the Dee Valley also, up to 1500' in some places, there being over 1,430 hectares of dedicated ground, the main

species being Scots Pine although Douglas Fir and Larch also do well in certain locations. The complete rotation is 100 years.

The open hill area up to 3,000' is managed as grouse moor and summer grazing for sheep, and virtually all this ground carries red deer, managed in the wild state in the traditional manner, and providing the finest of stalking.

The highest point on the Estate is the north top of Beinn A' Bhuid at 3924' and most of the Estate is over the 1000' mark, with a large number of tops over 3400'.

The Estate extends southwards into Perthshire on both the east and west sides of the A93 to the Spittal of Glenshee, and thereafter on the north bank of the Shee for a further 4 miles, where the pattern, except for forestry is very similar.

