

Co-operation in Footpath Repair on Clachnaben

Donald Thomas

The Clachnaben Path Trust is now entering the fourth season of construction work on the footpath in Glen Dye. The Trust is very grateful to the Cairngorm Club for their generous millennium donation. Many members have seen various stages in the work and will remember that much of the path was badly eroded. In places, the vegetation damage had spread to five metres wide and could be seen from afar. Water and frost damage had resulted in deep scouring.

The Clachnaben Path Trust was set up in 1998 when concerned local hillwalkers saw the need to put something back into the hills. The current trustees are Jim Maison, Hamish Lean, Becky Adron and Donald Thomas. We have been very encouraged by the support of the north-east clubs and many smaller donations from individual hillwalkers. The project has also received funding from Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Texaco, the Gannochy Trust and the Scottish Mountaineering Trust. The Glendye Estate owner, Charles Gladstone, has provided accommodation for workers and free materials.

Over the past three years construction work has been carried out by Northern Conservation (Ballater), Conserve Environmental Contractors (Carrbridge) and Axis Conservation Services (Carrbridge). Additional work has been carried out by Scottish Conservation Projects Trust, Skye Conservation and local volunteers, with Bristow Helicopters and 3 Flight Army Air Corps (Leuchars) assisting with the positioning of materials. The completed work has received acclaim from walkers, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and land managers alike.

In the first year (1998), we constructed sections of aggregate path with appropriate drainage and landscaping in and immediately above the wood. In the following year, Conserve built two technically demanding sections above the wood. The higher of these takes a new line in one wide curve to the north of the previous "desire line" path. In addition, several sections of irregular stone pitching were built and the eroded line partially reinstated. In 2000 we tackled a single section beneath the summit tor. The Club's donation formed part of the 25% matched funding for the work which consisted of stone pitching and a large area of landscaping of the exposed peat. Additional work was carried out in the woodland over the winter.

A cairn marking the completion of several stages of repairs was unveiled in July 2000, by outdoor writer and broadcaster Cameron McNeish. Around 40 members of local hillwalking groups and other bodies attended the ceremony. Walkers are now using the new line and



Steps on the New Path to Clachnaben

comments have been favourable. The existing completed sections are settling in well. Maintenance and minor repair work is necessary on a regular basis. We are also planning to try a number of methods to reinstate vegetation on the bypassed section of path.

This year's work should close the gap in the path on the open hillside, leaving further landscaping and maintenance to be carried out in future years. With the co-operation of the Estate, we have been able to plan the work despite the restrictions due to the foot and mouth outbreak. Final confirmation of grant funding is expected soon to allow the work to start.

Current proposals for changes in access legislation are only likely to increase the pressure on footpaths. Innovative approaches such as our own to tackle the problem are beginning to make a difference, but there is a long way to go. It is very heartening to be a member of a Club that leads the way in giving back to the hills, from which so many of us derive such pleasure. Anyone else wishing to contribute to the work (practically or financially) can contact us c/o Maclean and Lawson, 94 East High Street, Forfar.

Since this article was written the Trust has carried out a successful fourth season of footpath construction, which completes the work on the open hillside.