

## CROSSINGS IN THE CAIRNGORMS

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Crossing water has always held a special meaning – think of the Red Sea, the Rubicon, or the Rhine. For mountaineers, such a crossing is usually a notable point in an expedition, even if it is the low point of a trip aimed at the summits above. The Cairngorm Mountains are the source of many rivers and burns, all of which can present walkers with problems from time to time and have done since time immemorial. Their waters may flow deep and wide even in normal conditions. Crossing these obstacles has normally been achieved by bridges or fords (or ferries, lower down the main rivers), although tunnels and stilts (MacCannell, 2011) have been suggested, and in winter ice-crossings have occasionally been attempted.

This article, even though it is mostly restricted to crossings upstream of Braemar, Blair Atholl, Feshiebridge, Coylumbridge and Tomintoul, cannot possibly cover all the bridges and fords that have been used over the centuries. Indeed, to focus on only one river, “*The number of bridges that the Dee has swept away, whether of wood, stone or iron, would make a small book in itself*” (MacCannell, 2011). In the nineteenth century, estates erected many bridges, usually of wood, to serve deer stalking (the original inhabitants, and their cattle and sheep, being left to their own devices), but subsequently several metal and wooden bridges have been erected or funded by others, including the Club, as related below.

Apart from the normal watercourse features of width and depth, spates and floods have been notable historical events affecting bridges and, though less obviously, fords. The best-known spates occurred in 1769, August 1829 (the “Muckle Spate”), 1920, 1929, 1937 and August 1956 (the “Cairngorm Flood”, with another spate a fortnight earlier), but many other similar if smaller events have been recorded: 19 between 1768 and 1946 (SEPA, 2015). A Club writer (Perkins, 1957) carefully compared the 1829 and 1956 events in their effects on

the stones and trees of the Luibeg and concluded that *“It is more probable than not ... that the 1829 spate was greater than the 1956 one”*. The most recent spates (at time of writing!) have been in August 2014 (Hurricane Bertha) and late December 2015 (Storm Frank): contemporary photographs and videos are available on the [Cairngorm Wanderer blogsite](#) .

A survey of the records in Britain since 1750 (Macdonald and Sangster, 2017) finds major floods to be negatively correlated with the Winter North Atlantic Oscillation Index (NAOI) of relative air pressure between Iceland and Iberia. Unfortunately, that survey does not include the main rivers of the Cairngorms themselves, but only the Findhorn, which flows down from the Monadhliaths, and the Tay, into which the Tilt and Bruar flow, via the Garry. However, it concludes that the current (post-2000) “flood-rich” period is not unprecedented, though more evident in northern regions of Britain than southern ones. The period 1970–2000 is considered “flood-poor”, which may partly explain why recent floods are often perceived as extreme events. However, the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA, 2015) has reported data from measuring stations on the Spey and Dee which *“show a general trend for higher annual maximums over the time they were monitored”* (1951/52 and 1972/73 to 2005/06 respectively), although from uncertain causes.

There seems no simple way to order the many crossing points along several rivers and their tributaries distributed around a mountain massif. The organisation of the crossings in this article is as follows:

**North and East** of the main Cairngorms, in Rothiemurchus, Glen Avon, etc.

**The Upper Dee and its Northern Tributaries**, working anticlockwise from the Quoich, the Derry and the Lui

**The Ey, the Dee from the Linn** upstream, including the Geldie

**Ballater, Braemar and “round about”**, i.e. the Muick, the Girnock, the Gelder and the Clunie

**The South and West of the main Cairngorms**, i.e. the Feshie, the Tilt and the Shee

References to “the 1866 map” or similar are to the Ordnance Survey (OS) six-inch (about 1:10000) maps surveyed in or around that year. These and many other maps are available online and can be examined in minute detail at the [National Library of Scotland website](#). However, pre-OS estate maps for the Cairngorms have not yet been digitised, the OS six-inch series around 1900 omit several areas in the region, and the one-inch maps of that era are less detailed than the six-inch versions.

### **The North and East**

On the northern approach to the Lairig Ghru, the famous “Cairngorm Club Footbridge” crosses the Allt na-Béinne Moire coming down from Braeriach and the western slopes of Cairngorm. This had a succession of wooden bridges in the nineteenth century until the steel one was erected by the Cairngorm Club in 1912 under the supervision of the indefatigable engineer and Club member James A. Parker (see photographs on opposite page)). The total cost was £94. 4s 6d, less than the £100 estimate. On its centenary, in 2012, the entire bridge was repainted by the Club, and its stylish plaques refurbished. Much further upstream, according to Scroggie (1989, p. 40), “an old plank” spanned the Allt Druie near the site of the now demolished Sinclair Hut (1957-91), probably in the 1960s.

East of Glenmore, at the Bynack Stable, according to the [Adopt a Path website](#) “*a smart wooden bridge over the youthful, bubbling River Nethy*” eases access to the Lairig an Laoigh.

Allt na Beinne Bridge



Peter Mackay, Scotways

Cairngorm Bridge



Cairngorm Club Photo-Archive

The “Fords of Avon” is the major water crossing of the Lairig an Laoigh and possesses a set of rocks and natural stepping stones which ease passage in all but very abnormal conditions. Around 1970, a refuge was built on the northern bank for the convenience of stranded walkers, and this was rebuilt (and much improved) in 2011. Further downstream, there was in the 1920s “*sometimes a bridge over the Avon at Coire nan Clach below Beinn a’Charorruinn*” [sic], but nowadays only estate bridges cross the river; a mile or so downstream from Faindouran Lodge; below the Slochd Mor of Beinn a’Bhuird and Ben Avon, and below Big Garvoun a couple of miles above Inchroy.

Several vehicular estate bridges cross the River Gairn west of the public road at Gairnshiel and have done so for more than a century (the iron one was built to take the Deeside railway over the Gairn at Ballater) (A., 1919), and there are two footbridges beyond the Loch Builg junction. The highest of these footbridges – a broad wooden platform – enables access between Ben Avon and Invercauld over the Bealach Dearg.

### **The Upper Dee and Its Northern Tributaries**

The New Year floods of 2015/16 affected most of the crossings on the lower part of the Quoich, i.e. the vehicular bridge over to Allanaquoich, the footbridge over the Linn just downstream from the Punchbowl, and the small footbridge a mile or so upstream. The first of these bridges is currently “stranded” across dry land as the river has moved eastwards, and a replacement is still under discussion. The Punchbowl footbridge, though high above the usual water level, was moved a few inches (presumably by a tree being swept downstream), and on inspection was found to be suffering from rot in the handrails. A replacement was funded by a £25,000 donation from the Club and erected in December 2016; a plaque commemorating Club member Willie Robb, whose bequest made the donation possible, was affixed in March 2017 (see colour photograph No 16).

The 1866 map shows a footbridge (and a ford) over to Allanaquoich, and a footbridge over the Linn, with a sawmill between

the two, but no “tea-house” cottage. There was also a footbridge further upstream, at the site mentioned above, where the main glen track then ended, although no path or track is shown on the other (north) side.

Higher up the Quoich, there are at present no more bridges. The tributary Allt Dubh Gleann (near the site of a wooden bothy, long since vanished) bars access to Beinn a’Bhuird, although fording here is usually not a great problem. Further up the Quoich, the 1866 map shows a footbridge just upstream from the right-angled turn where the path over from Glen Slugain descends to the Quoich, but that is long gone. For those aiming at Beinn a’Bhuird this way, the fording of the Quoich can be a problem, with a risk of being cut off, on the return. A few years ago, a wire cage of boulders in the middle of the water at the usual fording point was of some assistance, but this has now disappeared.

Access from Braemar and Derry Lodge to the Lairig Ghru requires the crossing of the Lui Beg outflow from Ben Macdhui. Again, a wooden footbridge had “always” been there (e.g. Copland, 1901), but in 1948, Dr George Taylor, a Club member and an engineering lecturer at Aberdeen University, designed and supervised the erection of a new bridge made of aluminium alloy – probably the first in Britain (Taylor, 1948-49). Aluminium was preferred because steel might have been unobtainable at a time of rationing; it also corrodes more slowly (“*and more pleasantly*”) than steel, does not require painting, and is of course much lighter – an important consideration when a “cartie” was to be used (as well as human backs) before helicopters became available. This bridge lasted until the flood of mid-August 1956, when the abutments were undermined, and the whole superstructure carried downstream about 100 yards, amidst a scene “*fantastically unfamiliar*” (Taylor, 1957). A year later, the bridge being bent but still useable, it was re-erected across a rocky gorge about 200 yards upstream from the original site (Taylor, 1961). The 1866 map shows a footbridge at the mouth of this gorge, and a ford on the more direct route, which is still commonly used to avoid the detour to the metal bridge. The footpaths on both sides of the bridge and ford were improved in the early 2000s.

Halfway up Glen Derry, above Derry Lodge, a moraine lies athwart the glen, leaving the Derry Burn to exit, via a narrow gap on the eastern side, from an extensive stretch of flat land upstream. In the early nineteenth century, the Scots pines on the flats were felled by a well-known Deeside character, Alexander Davidson or “Rough Sanie” (1792-1843) and floated downstream with the assistance of water flowing from above an earth dam constructed to fill this gap. According to McConnachie (1900), the dam was swept away in the 1829 flood, and Davidson lost his investment (from smuggling) in timber speculation. A footbridge at the same point is shown on the 1866 and 1921-22 maps, but was occasionally swept away (e.g. McLaren, 1907). In 1937, “*the remains of the bridge over the Derry Burn, about three-quarters of a mile from the Lodge*” were recorded as part of the 50-year celebrations of the founding of the Club (*Cairngorm Club Journal*, July 1938, p. 296); this is probably the same place although the actual distance is about twice as much. In 1959, the then wooden bridge was replaced by a steel one erected by Nature Conservancy student volunteers, with advice, as at Corroul, from the Cairngorm Club’s Dr Taylor, and with the then novel use of a helicopter (Taylor, 1961). The floods of 2015 apparently left this bridge unaffected, but in 2017 the east abutment was found to be in a doubtful state, and a ‘closure’ notice was posted although generally ignored.

Further up Glen Derry, the Glas Allt Mor comes down from the Moine Bhealaich to the east. A bridge here was provided at the same time as at the Derry Dam (see below), but it was washed away in 1970, and has never been replaced. The crossing can normally be made across boulders without too much trouble but can be impossible during spate – even when the Fords of Avon are feasible. A little upstream from the Glas Allt, a small wooden footbridge over the Coire Etchachan burn was erected by Braemar locals in about 1980 and eases the route to the Hutchison Memorial Hut.

Where the Derry Burn flows into the Lui Beg burn, the Lodge lies on the east side of the confluence, and the keeper’s (“Bob Scott’s”)

cottage on the west side. In the nineteenth century, mutual access was obviously essential, and the 1866 map shows two pairs of footbridge and ford across both water courses despite their considerable width. In the 1950s, a vehicular bridge was built over the Lui Water just downstream from the confluence, and possibly also across the Derry. During the 1956 spate, *“the previously damaged access bridge to Luibeg Cottage [was] swept about a mile downstream”* (Taylor, 1957). Scroggie (1989, p. 45) records how in 1958 – after passing Queen Elizabeth’s convoy of cars coming down from the Lodge – he *“clumped over two broad wooden bridges, one across the Derry, and one across the Lui”*, to get to Bob Scott’s cottage and bothy (see photograph below).

Luibeg Bridge to Bob Scott’s



Cairngorm Club Photo-Archive

Dorward records: *“I remember sometime in the late 1970s a unit of Royal Engineers (Territorials I think) lived in the lodge for the few weeks it took them to build a bridge across the Laoigh near the*



*downstream edge of the plantation.*” The Lui bridge was again damaged in the 1970s and has not been replaced, making it difficult to cross the river to the cottage and onto Sgor Dubh: there is no easy ford.

Access from Derry Lodge to the Lairig Ghru and up the west side of the Derry Burn is now by a footbridge just beyond the Mountain Rescue post at Derry Lodge, a little upstream from the earlier bridge(s). This footbridge was washed away (probably by a tree coming downstream) in August 2014 but was swiftly replaced by one supplied by the Scottish Rights of Way Society (or ScotWays). Although “temporary”, this bridge survived the Storm Frank floods, and it seems destined to stay although its abutments may require strengthening (see photograph below).

#### Derry Bridge



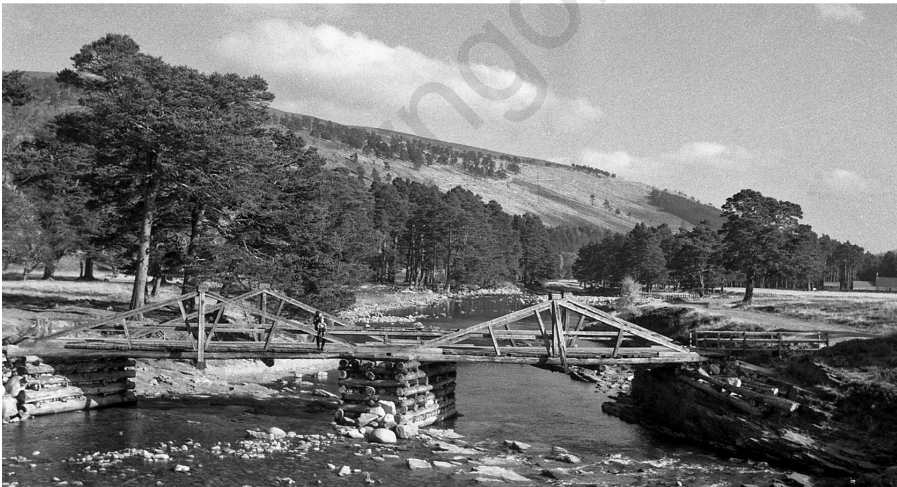
Cairngorm Club Photo-Archive

A footbridge at the present Black Bridge site appears to have been built in the early 1860s (it is marked on the 1866 map). Before (and probably after) that, the main route used by carriages and others would

have been the track over the shoulder of the hill from Mar Lodge. The vehicular bridge in place by 1947 (and perhaps long before) sustained “*rather extensive damage*” in the 1956 spate, and the Club, which at that time was leasing Derry Lodge, contributed fifty guineas to its repair.

Below the road bridge over the Lui, and the Lui-Dee confluence, Company 25, 2nd Forestry District, of the Canadian Forestry Corps built a sawmill during the Second World War on the north bank of the Dee upstream from Muir Cottage. A small railway from the mill over a substantial wooden bridge facilitated transport of cut boards onto the public road without having to negotiate the road bridges over the Lui and the Linn of Dee (see photograph below).

#### Canadian Bridge



Cairngorm Club Photo-Archive

The bridge remained crossable (although its approaches were damaged, and it was closed to traffic in 1956) until the 1960s, when it was demolished. Even after the New Year 2015/16 floods, the last remnants of the bridge (an eroded spiked log on either side of the river)

remained visible, but lack of conservation (or even interest, apparently; see criticism by Club member Peter Aikman on the Club Forum) by the current landowner, the National Trust for Scotland, means that these are unlikely to last for long.

### **The Ey, the Linn of Dee and Upstream**

On the Ey, Ricardo's Bridge crossed the river just below the confluence with the Allt Cristie. According to Dorward, it was probably named after John Lewis Ricardo who in 1841 married Catherine Duff, the niece of James, 4th Earl of Fife (owner of the extensive Mar estate) and was almost certainly the shooting tenant of the area in 1842. Until the 1930s, this was a footbridge, but it was converted – probably during the Second World War by the Canadian Forestry Corps who were active in the area (see Canadian Bridge) – into a vehicular bridge, which remained crossable, with care, until the 1960s. The abutments are still obvious. The 1866 map also marks a bridge – apparently vehicular, since it is not marked “Footbridge” – over the Ey at the present track site.

Further upstream, at Auchelie, the 1866 map (at “Aucherrie”) shows a footbridge over the Ey – this lasted, at least in the form of a fallen tree trunk, until the early 1990s – and another where the present track bridges the Allt an t-Sionnaich tributary just upriver. However, in 1897, *“For seven miles or so there is more or less of a road [up Glen Ey], although it cannot be said that much trouble has been taken as regards bridges. Two considerable streams have to be forded.”* (Anonymous, 1897). About halfway up Glen Ey, the “Double Fords Brig” (see [Alec Finlay blog](#)) takes the track from the west to the east side of the river, before entering the flats (which sometimes flood completely) up towards Altanour.

The 1866 map shows a footbridge across the Ey gorge near “Alltanodhar Shieling”, at the same site as presently used and another a little upstream, across that Allt. However, no bridge is shown downstream, where the main track to Altanour now crosses the Ey for

the final time on a wooden estate bridge; presumably it was simply forded.

At the Linn of Dee, “*a plank did duty*” at the beginning of the nineteenth century (McConnochie (1900)) and was replaced by “*an alpine wooden bridge*” about 1830. According to Dorward: “*The first bridge, built in the teens or twenties of the 19th century, was destroyed by the Muckle Spate of 1829. The second bridge replaced the first and was itself replaced by the third and current bridge in 1857*”. This bridge was opened by Queen Victoria, who wrote: “*we started in “Highland state” – Albert in a royal Stuart plaid, and I and the girls in skirts of the same, – with the ladies (who had only returned at five in the morning from the ball at Mar Lodge) and gentlemen, for the Linn of Dee, to open the new bridge there. .... On the bridge Lady Fife received us, and we drank in whisky “prosperity to the bridge”*”.

Further up the Dee, beyond a few estate bridges over side-streams, the White Bridge (on the 1866 map) was probably wide enough to take carriages up to Geldie and Bynack Lodges and was at some point (perhaps from its erection, and repeatedly) painted white, although that fades over time. According to McConnochie (1898, pp.13-14), it succeeded “*a footbridge with a ford a little lower down*”. However, there may be some confusion here with an old footbridge just below the Chest of Dee rapids before the White Bridge was erected (McConnochie, 1900, p. 225), and a ford was still visible nearer the junction with the Geldie.

High up the Dee itself, early visitors had to ford the Dee as best they could from the Lairig path near the entrance to Glen Geusachan (this can sometimes be done dryshod in summer, but fording becomes dangerous or impossible at other times; e.g. M’Connochie, 1896; Kyd, 1906b) to the watcher’s cottage (a bothy for over a century, though no bridge or cottage is shown on the 1866 or 1922 maps) under the Devil’s Point. A “plank and stilts” at Corroure are mentioned by McConnochie in 1898. In July 1951, as the result of a drowning the previous year (after Corroure had just been reconstructed by the Cairngorm Club), a cable crossing (see photograph on the following page), was erected by

Mr Jack Milne, a retired Aberdeen postal worker: Syd Scroggie used it during his first blind (and one-legged) trip into the Cairngorms in 1955 (Scroggie, 1989, p. 23). It “*provided a dry crossing, somewhat perilous for the aged and nervous but highly stimulating for the acrobatic*” (Taylor, 1961), but had collapsed by 1958. In 1959, the Nature Conservancy, which then managed the land, replaced it, with advice from Dr Taylor, by a metal bridge, with materials brought in by helicopter, and power-drilling of the rock for the foundations. Access from the Lairig path became extremely boggy over the years but was greatly improved in the early 2000s by path work by the new owner, the National Trust for Scotland

Pam Howgate on the Cable Bridge at Corrour



Peter Howgate

A mile or so south of White Bridge, the Geldie turns west near the Ruighe Ealasaid (Elisabeth’s Shiel) – long empty, but due to be refurbished as a bothy in 2018. The 1866 map shows only a ford, but later a footbridge existed, at least intermittently (1922 map; *Cairngorm*

*Club Journal*, 1939, p. 70). In the late 1960s, there was “a long and tottering footbridge which spans the river in two strides, using a shingly island in the middle for this purpose” (Scroggie, p. 60). Currently, only six concrete pillars – one overturned in midstream – are to be seen, with the most northerly one inscribed thus:

*Bob Scott  
Gordon Fraser  
Robbie Mitchell  
John Konig  
1968: Oor Brig*

There is occasional pressure to re-erect a bridge here (it is on a long-distance right of way and core path), but it lies on a broad and bouldery flood plain, and, apart from other considerations (see below), the risk of losing a support is plain.

Further up the Geldie, at least one old bridge site is plainly visible – at the Allt Dhaidh Beag, where a small footbridge has been installed relatively recently (see photograph below) and possibly a similar one existed further west at Allt Dhaidh Mor, which is now a boulder ford.

Allt Dhaidh Beag Bridge



No bridge site over to the Geldie Lodge is obvious, but one was apparently here in the 1930s (*Cairngorm Club Journal*, 80, p. 68). However, the river is easily fordable here in normal conditions.

Despite the apparent lack of a bridge over the Geldie at that time, the 1866 map shows a “Foot Bridge” over the Bynack Burn near the “Bynack Shieling” (or Lodge, now ruined), and as late as June 1961 a “*footbridge ... sagged over the burn*” (Scroggie, p. 97).

### **Ballater, Braemar and Roond About**

In Glen Muick, the bridge between the Spittal and Allt-na-Giubhsaich was renewed in the 1960s, when the track thereabouts was reinforced with military-style metal track for vehicles. The 1900 map records only a footbridge here. Similarly, the rather ugly concrete affair now across the Black Burn about halfway along the southern shore of Loch Muick probably replaced an earlier footbridge (e.g. on the 1900 map), when the army was brought in to establish the zigzag track up onto Sandy Hillock above the loch. The two small footbridges at the head of Loch Muick were swept away in the New Year 2015/16 floods but were quickly re-installed. Above the Glas Allt Falls, a relatively modern bridge replaces an earlier (e.g. 1900 map) footbridge.

In Glen Girnock, the next glen to the west, a giant weaver named Muckle Fleeman is supposed to have placed in the late sixteenth century an enormous flat stone across the Girnock river, near the now-vanished village of Greystone, where it served for two hundred years (MacCannell, 2011). Another source Deeside Tales has this event as the climax of a long-forgotten feud between the Gordons of Knock and Forbes of Strathgirnoc. Further upstream, and from the same source, “*The approach to Linqoch [also now vanished] is lovely, meandering as it does through the airy and scented Birk Wuid of Lynvaig, before coming to a halt at an old wooden bridge over the Girnock burn*”.

In the next glen, west again, no bridge is shown on the 1866 map at “Glengelder Lodge” (now Gelder Shiel, with its newly palatial bothy), but a crude vehicular bridge now goes over the watercourse just upstream from the buildings. Both approaches to this bridge were

damaged by the Storm Frank spate (as were many of the riparian mini-plantations just established in this and other Deeside glens) but were swiftly repaired. The 2001 1:25000 (but not the 1:50000) map marks a footbridge about 500m further upstream from the Lodge.

The stone road-bridges between and around Ballater and Braemar are too well known to need description here; instead, only the various smaller bridges in the area are mentioned. The suspension footbridge at Polhollick above Ballater – built by James Abernethy & Co. in 1892 – was rendered useless by the 2015/16 floods and awaits the repair of its piers. At Abergeldie Castle (which once lay to the north of the River Dee, so that the 2015/16 floods were perhaps merely trying to restore this course!), a rope-held wooden cradle or box once crossed the river but became disused after a tragedy in 1823. In 1885, the contraption was replaced by “*a handsome suspension bridge ... erected by the Queen*”, but this in turn became ruined, and was destroyed in the 2015/16 floods. Further upriver, there is another suspension footbridge at Easter Balmoral a short way below the road bridge built by Prince Albert to facilitate the stopping-up of the South Deeside route between Balmoral and Invercauld. Finally, a mile short of Invercauld is the Danzig suspension bridge (long blocked to casual visitors – though not to persistent mountaineers!), which leads to the Danzig (now Allt Garbh) Shiel built by Queen Victoria and visited by the poet-queen of Roumania, Carmen Sylva, who “*was overpowered by the weird and solemn grandeur of the forest, and [whose] imaginative nature revelled in the picturesque scene when a Highland torchlight dance celebrated the return of the Royal sportsmen with the deer*”, (Anonymous, 1910-12 ); it is now available for weekly rental. This bridge was also built by James Abernethy & Co. in 1924, like the Cambus o' May bridge (1905, reconstructed in 1988, and damaged in the 2015/16 flood). Further up the Allt Garbh, a humpbacked cast-iron bridge spans the fine falls of that burn on the track up through the Ballochbuie Forest and the Feindallacher Burn – the route that Victorians often took from Braemar up to Lochnagar. Higher up the



Burn, at the stables, a small planked bridge existed at least in 2009 but the burn can be easily leaped elsewhere.

At Braemar itself, there has been a public road bridge for many years over the Clunie between Castleton on the east and Auchindryne on the west, but a bridge over the Dee at Braemar itself is currently lacking, although the name Carn na Drochaide (“hill of the bridge”) to the north is suggestive. *“From time immemorial there [was] a ferry boat for the convenience of persons wishing to cross the river from Castleton of Braemar to that part of the road lying opposite this much-frequented village”* (at Inverchandlick), but this was removed shortly before 1852 when Mr James Farquharson closed the road between Invercauld Bridge and Allanaquoich to public use (“Scotus”, quoted in *Cairngorm Club Journal*, 1911). However, a private ferry still existed there, or perhaps opposite Invercauld House, in 1912 (Anonymous, 1912, p. 182). There appears to have been a footbridge at Braemar Castle in the 1930s (*Cairngorm Club Journal*, 80, p. 68) though it is not marked on the 1866 or 1894 maps. And so many generations, including climbers from the Fife Arms bar intent on Glen Slugain and beyond, have relied on fords, dependent on current and recent water levels, or have had to go around by Invercauld or Mar Lodge, creeping past the “big hoose” at least until recently. Plans, and even a design (see [The Happy Pontist blog](#)) costed at some £1 million, for a new foot and cycle bridge at Braemar were floated a few years ago, but there have been no recent signs of progress with this.

Going south, Fraser’s Bridge is the 18th century vehicle bridge over Clunie Water about 3 miles south of Braemar. It was built in 1749, or soon after, as part of the ‘New Military Road’ system set up after the Jacobite rising of 1745. It is shown on General Roy’s map circa 1755 and is still in public use. On the 1866 map, footbridges over the Clunie are shown at their present sites, i.e. between Newbigging and Coireyaltie, and between Alltamhait and Coirenalarig (where there is presently a rough vehicular bridge). Another footbridge, still present, is shown over the Baddoch Burn, but no more (or even a path) further up that tributary. Further up the Clunie, there was another footbridge over

the Allt a'Garbh Choire, onto the path up below Sron na Gaoithe; the main road seems to have had proper bridges (like Fraser's Bridge), e.g. the Sean Spittal Bridge over the Clunie a little downstream of that Allt.

At the foot of Glen Callater, the 1866 map marks a footbridge over Clunie Water at Auchallater: one is still there. On the same map, a footbridge (and ford) is marked where the track to the Lodge crosses the river halfway up. McConnochie (1900) has a "*wooden bridge*" here, with the road hereabouts being repaired by "*the hirers in Braemar, who are not unnaturally interested in preventing it from getting utterly impassable for vehicles*". Nowadays, there is a wooden vehicular bridge here, and at the Lodge itself. Above the loch, there is no bridge across the main watercourse, the Allt an Loch; walkers are advised to use the ford (also used by vehicles) a good deal further up the Jock's Road path, which also has a couple of excellent stepping stones over side-streams.

Going west of Braemar, a footbridge lies just below the Corriemulzie gorge, and a little way above the new hydroelectric turbine building. This bridge is marked on the 1866 map, but by the mid-20th century had become "*extremely rotten, moss-covered tree-trunks*" (Tewnion, 1946-47). Above the road bridge, a new vehicular bridge has been installed at the water intake. Then, further west still, the Victoria Bridge over to Mar Lodge is marked on the 1866 map as "*wooden*", presumably the one erected in Victoria's time (1848, according to one of the two inscriptions). The current metal version was erected (for King Edward VII) in 1905 but is in poor condition: see [YouTube](#). Upstream again, and until at least 1972, a white suspension bridge over the Dee could be crossed north of the houses of Inverey; this may have been constructed to serve a golf course on the intervening flats. Currently, only the tall metal uprights on both sides remain.

## The South and West

In the North Esk area, apart from several vehicular estate bridges, a footbridge crosses the burn beneath the Shank of Inchgrundle, another goes over the Water of Lee to ease access to the Falls of Unich, and a steel beam crosses the same Water below Hunt Hill. Mapped footbridges over the river lower down, near Tarfside, cannot all be relied upon.

In the upper South Esk glen, beyond the road-end car park, a footbridge crosses the river (or Burn of Gowal), beyond Moulzie Farm (as one did below the farm around 1900); (Anonymous, 1912, p. 174), as it has done since the 1860s. Just above Bachnagairn, the river is nowadays crossed by the Roy Tait Memorial Bridge, built in 1984 to commemorate a *Grampian Club* Member who died three years earlier on Lochnagar, and funded via the first Dundee Mountain Festival in 1983. Being on the Balmoral estate, this needed royal approval, which was given on condition that the width should not allow land-rover type vehicles. It was repaired in 2016 with EU outdoor access funds.

In upper Glen Shee, only a “*couple of planks ... from the old bridge*” over the Allt a’Ghlinne Bhig below the Devil’s Elbow were said to exist in 2009; a footbridge is marked on the 1866 map.

Above Blair Atholl, the Tilt and its tributaries carry several estate bridges, but the highest in the glen lies in the narrow gap below the Falls of Tarf. Replacing earlier bridges here (though at least one was removed in the mid-nineteenth century to obstruct a right of way), (Anonymous, 1911); the fine suspension-type Bedford Memorial Bridge was erected in 1886 by the family and friends of a young English visitor drowned in the pool below the falls. They were financially assisted by the Scottish Rights of Way Society, that organisation’s first venture into bridge-building. The bridge already needed repair in 1905 (Kyd, 1906a), and was last refurbished by the Society in 2000. According to Scroggie (1989, p.72), the sixteen-year-old Jamie Scroggie spent the night in his sleeping bag on this bridge, to avoid the “*spookiness*” of Lower Geldie Lodge. Up the Tarf, there was

once a bridge beside the lodge (now the “Tarf Hotel”) (Barclay, 1903), but nothing of this now remains.

On the Eidart, a major tributary of the Feshie and a major obstacle after rain or a thaw, a footbridge was erected before 1914 about 100 yards above the junction: “*it consists of two pairs of light trees laid end to end and spliced in the centre, where they are supported by similar but stronger pairs, which act as a pier and are secured by a considerable pile of stones. The footway has battens at intervals and a strong wire on the upper side to serve as a parapet. The bridge will be of immense service to mountaineers and tourists, and it is to be hoped that it will stand the stress of the winter floods*” (Anonymous, 1914). Presumably that hope was dashed! – certainly the wire, and probably the bridge, seems to have come and gone over the decades (e.g. Anderson, 1896; Anderson, 1902; Baker, 1902; Robertson, 1903; “Lady Pedestrian”, 1918).

Between the Wars, many, including the Club (e.g. Anonymous, 1919), supported a road between the Linn of Dee and the Feshie; that would have solved the crossing problem for walkers, but the proposal came to nothing.

The current Eidart bridge (see photograph on next page), is a narrow metal one, erected in July 1957 by 152 (H) Infantry Workshops (Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers), (T.A.) for the Scottish Rights of Way Society, as described by *WalkScotland*, “*in response to potential loss of life*” on an ancient right of way in a remote location downstream of a huge catchment area. Installed in an impressive situation just above a fine waterfall, it looks somewhat flimsy but appears to be in as good a state as it was when erected. Further down the Feshie, the Allt Coire Bhlairst has to be forded (which might be problematic in spate), before a land rover track nowadays goes down the eastern bank of the river.

The trestle bridge across the Feshie at Carnachuinn was washed away in 2009 (a bridge has been here since at least 1870), and its replacement has been held back by planning problems. Still further down the river, path work at the Allts Garbhach and Fhearnagan was

also washed away in early 2016, as was at least one of the bridges over the Allts Chromhraig and na Caoleig on the right of way west to Drumguish, (Heritage Paths). Around here, bridges over the main river seem to have come and gone over the decades since at least the nineteenth century (e.g. Anonymous, 1900).

### Eidart Bridge



Ken Thomson

### Final Thoughts

As the paragraphs above suggest, crossing the watercourses of the Cairngorms is an integral part of most long-distance travel in these parts, and many of the bridges described have been regarded as essential, as evidenced by the frequent re-building of those washed away by floods and spates. “*Access to the mountains*” has been a goal ever since the Club’s first President, James Bryce MP, introduced a Parliamentary Bill with that title in 1884. There has been progress since, notably in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 with its Access

Code, and the work of organisations such as the Upper Deeside (later the Cairngorm Outdoor Access Trust, and now the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland, OATS). Along with higher levels of public interest in hillwalking, and the development of the mountain bike, easing access by providing (and advertising) reliable means of crossing rivers and burns has seemed of unquestionable public benefit.

And yet, and yet ... In 1937, Percy Unna laid down 10 “views” (now generally called “principles”, e.g. by the National Trust for Scotland, which takes them as “*the key reference point when the Trust is considering management of mountainous properties*”). These include that “*the hills should not be made easier or safer to climb*”, and that no transport facilities, signs, shelters, etc. (Unna did not explicitly mention bridges) be provided on “*land [to] be maintained in its primitive condition*” (see National Trust for Scotland Wild Land Policy). More recently, the Scottish Wild Land Group was formed in 1982, and public concern has focussed on protecting “wild land” as a “*nationally important asset*” in the National Planning Framework. Scottish Natural Heritage has defined 42 Wild Land Areas in terms of “*a sense of remoteness, a perception of naturalness, rugged or challenging terrain and a lack of obvious modern influences on the landscape*”. Of course, “sense” is subjective, and a long-established bridge may not be regarded as “modern”, but it seems incontrovertible that bridges, like over-engineered paths, detract from “remoteness”, “naturalness” and “challenge”.

Thus, more and more bridges detract from what most people go to – or at least walk in – the Cairngorms for. The most prominent current case in point is bridging the Geldie, on an ancient right of way between Glen Dee and Glen Tilt, and now a core path in a Land Reform Act system that “*gives the public reasonable access throughout their area, ... [and] as a whole must cater for everyone, including those with disabilities*”. When considering a bridge instead of a ford here, is it significant that there has previously been a bridge at this point, or that without a bridge there may be safety risks for NTS employees and clients (this is a shooting area)?

Or take the bridge over to Corroul, certainly one used many times a month, Summer and Winter, in all conditions and by many groups including youthful ones. Its loss would sharply reduce the use of the bothy, and almost certainly place people in danger or at the least discomfort as they waited for the river to subside.

But the absence – one actual, the other hypothetical – of a bridge at each of these points corresponds to an immense area of truly remote country, “wild” by any (British) standard. The lack of the Geldie bridge is a well-known risk on the Tilt-Dee through-route and distances the An Sgarsoch-Carn Fhidhleir-Tarfside area from “easy access”. Without a Corroul bridge, the ascent of Cairn Toul from any direction would be a serious undertaking, and so would traversing the Lairig Ghru itself. But would that be so bad? With the proliferation of long-distance trails, there are plenty of long-distance (and well-signposted) off-road walks available; what is under threat – from hill tracks, “improved” paths, and bridges – is the essential core of the Cairngorms: high, remote and unfrequented hills. Crossing water should be like crossing land: a challenge to be met!

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**Author's Note:** As will be apparent from the above reference list, the compilation of this article has been greatly eased by reference to past issues of the *Cairngorm Club Journal*, and to the useful websites maintained by Joe Dorward and Neil Reid. The author will be grateful to learn from these or other sources of any corrections or additions.