

## CLACHNABEN FOOTPATH

*DONALD THOMAS*

In recent years the Club has carried out repairs to the Clachnaben footpath. There has been a path here for many years, enabling generations of walkers to reach the summit tor on this fine hill. An estate track crosses flat ground (“Miller’s Bog”) from where several routes made their way through the plantation to emerge at the foot of the hill proper. From there, the most direct “desire line” ascended over peat, passing several springs. With continued trampling, the peat was much eroded with a progressively widening and braided path, as walkers avoided the soft, wet ground. In the mid 1990’s, the late Jim Maison, a walker from Forfar, realised that the state of the path was largely due to visitors and had little to do with estate activities. He set about tackling the problem. With several other walkers drawn from local clubs, he formed a trust which was supported by Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish National Heritage (SNH) and Texaco. Over the following years, the trust funded contractors to repair the worst of the damage. The landowner, Charles Gladstone provided accommodation for the workers and had three pedestrian bridges constructed where the landrover track fords streams. He favoured a single line along the lower edge of the woodland, which had the benefit of views of the summit along the way (photograph 1 below).



1 The Tor in Sight

Donald Thomas

After several years of work, it was time to tackle the boggy section on the open hillside. Rather than stabilise a line through the peat, the decision was made to re-route this stretch of the path, taking it onto firmer ground a little closer to Mount Shade and re-joining the “old” route once the tor was clearly visible.

Too steep in places for an aggregate path, much of the new section is stone pitching. Most work on the hill was carried out by hand, with a power barrow and limited use of a mini excavator. Some of the stone for drainage features (photograph 2 on the following page) was moved from elsewhere on the estate by helicopter. Once the full length of path was in good repair, little maintenance was carried out, beyond removing fallen trees and occasional clearing of cross drains (photograph 3 the following pages). The hill remained popular with successive generations of walkers, with an estimated 10,000 visitors per year. The estate established a small car park in a former quarry, replacing roadside parking.

In 2017, the Cairngorm Club was alerted to the need for some fresh work. Several sections were eroded and there was a further fallen tree. Metal pins, once securing logs at the side of the path, now protruded into the walking surface in several places. The Club successfully applied for a lottery grant, enabling a detailed survey (by the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland) and the priority remedial work (by ACT Heritage) to be carried out. The Club, North East Mountain Trust and Ramblers Scotland made additional financial contributions towards this work. Volunteers from the John Muir Trust NE Scotland local group have cleared drains on several occasions.

The estate has recently (2021) changed hands and we await an indication of the new owner’s willingness to allow or support further work. One section is badly eroded, another is often wet and recent storms have brought down trees on the path (photographs 4&5 on the following pages).

The author also recently contributed an article on Mountain Path Construction published by North East Mountain Trust (Mountain Views 84, Autumn/Winter 2021/22).



2 Stone Pitching

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3 Cross Drain and ditching (funded by the Club)

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4 Path Erosion awaiting repair

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5 Fallen Trees (2022)

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