

Study to explore North-east's 'magic mountain'

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Bennachie

(PhysOrg.com) -- The enduring appeal of the North-east's most popular hill is set to be explored by a new study.

Bennachie, which lies just outside Inverurie, is the best known and most walked hill range in the region.

Mither Tap, the most prominent of its nine peaks, is crowned by an Iron Age Fort while remnants of a 19th century settlement can still be found on its slopes.

Considered a magical place by some locals, a study will now seek to gather anecdotes about why the hill is held so dear - and try to trace the

descendents of those who once lived on its slopes.

Jennifer Fagen, a researcher at the University of Aberdeen's Elphinstone Institute, is conducting the study on the Aberdeenshire landmark.

She said: "The title used by the press throughout the 20th century to describe Bennachie was the magic mountain and people still talk about it like it's a mythical place.

"If you ask them about their childhood experiences of Bennachie you get the most fantastic stories, whether they're ghost stories or tales from war time. Embarking on this study has brought home just how special a place it is for many people."

Ms Fagen is especially keen to get information about the descendents of The Bennachie Colonists - the people who lived on the slopes of Bennachie from the 1800s to early twentieth century.

By the 1850s around 60 people lived in the hills' shadow. They stayed in simple houses, built of granite walls packed with clay, and with wooden and heather turfed roofs. The walls of these houses can be seen to this day.

One of the reminiscences gathered so far comes from Aberdeen man George Pollock, whose first encounter with Bennachie was on a school trip during the war-torn summer of 1942.

He remembers Mither Tap re-emerging, "like a sort of black sunrise", as their group made their way up the hill.

"That night, as I was writing to tell my parents that I had climbed 'Benahee,' we heard the muffled sound of more bombs being dropped on Aberdeen. When the lorry was taking us back to the city at the end of the

week we saw how the ice-making factories in Poynernook Road and Palmerston Road had been wrecked by enemy aircraft aiming for the harbour."

Ms Fagen added: "Bennachie will hold many fond memories for people in the North-east and those from further afield who have made the journey to stand on the top of Mither Tap and enjoy the fabulous view.

"It is a gem in the crown of the Aberdeenshire landscape and a place with a fascinating history. I would be very interested to hear from anyone who thinks they might have a tale to tell about the hill or from someone who just wants to share a memory about why it has played a special part in their lives."

Provided by University of Aberdeen

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