

Cairngorms National Park Authority

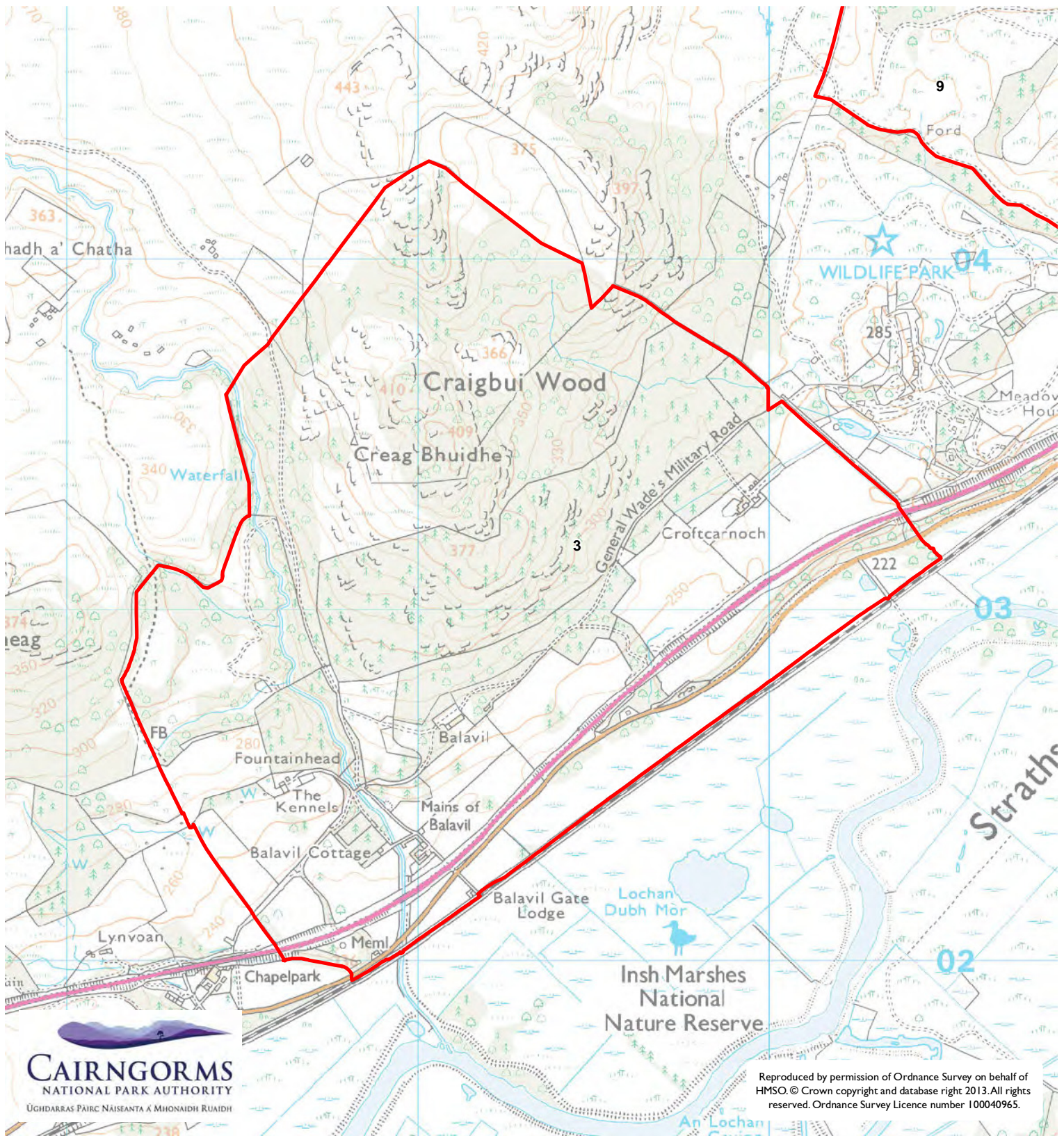
Cairngorms National Park
Historic Designed Landscapes Project

Site Research Report
03 Balavil

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May 2013

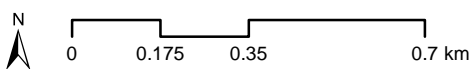


Legend

- Cairngorms National Park Boundary
- Designed landscape provisional boundary

Site 3

Balavil



May 2013

03 Balavil

County Inverness-shire
Parish Alvie
NGR NH 791 026; OS 1:25,000 Sheet 402

DESIGNATIONS

Listing Balavil House, HB Number 1652 – Category B (1971)
Balavil, bridge over Raitts Burn, HB Number 1653 – Category C (1979)
Mains and former steading, HB Number 1654 – Category B (1971)
Obelisk and burial ground, HB Number 1655 – Category B (1971)
East Lodge and gate piers, HB Number 1670 – Category C (1979)
West Lodge and gate piers, HB Number 1671 – Category C (1971)

Most of the surrounding planting designated as Ancient Woodland.

Most of the surrounding woodland subject of WGS Mark 3 Agreement

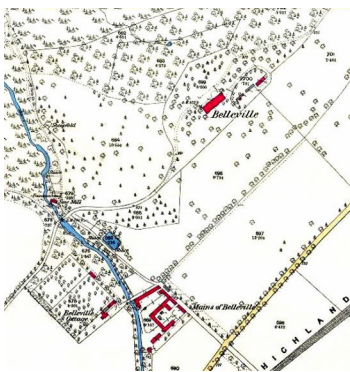
The line of General Wade's Military Road passes through the estate

LOCATION AND EXTENT

Balavil House is situated on rising ground, to the west of the A9, approximately 3km to the north and east of Kingussie. The house overlooks the River Spey, and the Insh Marshes National Nature Reserve. At this point the upgraded A9 runs very close to, and just to the west of the old road, now downgraded to the B9152. Parallel to and immediately alongside these roads is the Perth to Inverness railway line. The designed landscape comprises a small area of tree-studded parkland immediately below the house, and stretching westwards across the Raitts Burn, to include Mains of Balavil, Balavil Cottage and a walled garden. There are extensive plantations on the hill ground to the north and east on Craig Bhuidhe and Creag Bheag, some coniferous, some broadleaved and some mixed.



Roy's Military Survey c1750



Ordnance Survey 1:2,500 1st edition 1867

LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT

Maps and documentary evidence

Balavil House is built on or near the site of Raits Castle, a former stronghold, recorded by Robert Gordon (c.1640) as 'Rait', and by Roy (c1750) as 'Raiths'. Roy shows the former tower house (?) surrounded by several small, stone-walled enclosures, with a single township and an associated area of rig cultivation across the Raitts Burn to the west, and a substantial strip of woodland on sloping ground to the east. General Wade's Military Road is seen to pass through the farmland and woodland, running just to the south of the walled castle complex. There is little or no trace of this earlier landscape to be seen on the OS First Edition (1870), which shows the new 1790s mansion house and home farm of 'Belleville', together with mid-C19th gate lodges, walled garden, kennels and other features. Drives from the gate lodges, now cut off by the new A9, are seen to sweep up to the north arrival front of the mansion house, allowing open views from the south front across the parkland to Strathspey. A comparatively small area of parkland, together with surrounding fields, are seen to have some ornamental planting in the form of single standard trees, small clumps, strips and blocks of planting. Apart from the realignment of the A9, there are few obvious changes to the landscape be seen on the OS Second Edition (1899) and later maps.



*Balavil House, J Valentine
 postcard c1885 (St Andrews
 University)*

Building history and ownership

The existing house and landscape have their origins in the acquisition of the estate from the Mackintosh family in the 1790s by the locally-born poet and politician James Macpherson, supposed translator of the Poems of Ossian. James Macpherson's purpose, after having spent much of his life as an MP in England, was to return to his native country and establish himself as a highland laird. The house, built to a design by the celebrated Scots architect Robert Adam, was partially remodelled and extended in the mid C19th. A damaging fire occurred in 1903, after which the interior of the house was further remodelled. A mid-20th century account describes the house as 'empty and derelict'. The property has remained in the ownership of the Macpherson family, and is currently advertised as a sporting venue.



*Poet and politician James
 Macpherson, builder of Balavil
 (Macpherson Museum)*

APPENDIX

Historical notes

Rev. J Anderson 1790 (OSA) observed that "the country in general, owing to the scarcity of planted wood, has to the eye of the traveller a bleak and naked appearance".

Rev. G Shepherd 1835 (NSA) reported that "about the year [Mr. Macpherson] purchased a beautiful property lying chiefly in this, and partly in the neighbouring parish, to which he gave the name Belleville. His estate descended to his eldest son who possessed them till ... 1833, when they fell to his elder sister ... the proprietors are, we understand, desirous to introduce the new mode of farming over all their estates ... Of late years, much has been done in the way of reclaiming waste land, embanking and draining : and improvements in this way are still proceeding" .

Rev. John Macdonald 1835 (NSA) commented that "the house of Belleville, built by the translator of Ossian ... stands on a beautiful eminence, conspicuous from the public road, sheltered on the north by a plantation of Scotch fir, now grown to a considerable size, and by the beautiful rock Craighbuie, covered with natural birch, among which are some trees of unusual magnitude. The lawn in front of the house is adorned with upward of 100 trees of hardwood, and a fine row of elms along the old military road, planted by Brigadier Mackintosh in 1715 ...

Lochandu ... celebrated in Sir Thomas Dick Lauder's novel of that name ... was surrounded with a thick belt of natural birch that hid it from sight, till the late Mr Macpherson of Belleville, in the course of his improvements, laid it open to view".

J Murdoch 1852 described "the residence of the late J Macpherson Esq. ... an excellent modern building of two storeys, having a wing at each end, extended some distance in front. The grounds below the house are beautified with hardwood, forming several green parks. Plantations of larch and pine are extended on the brow of the romantic, rocky mountain which forms the background, while farther in the distance loftier mountains show you their snowy tops".

OS Name Book 1870 (Alvie, Inverness-shire Book 7, p25) records "...Belleville, a large substantial building, beautifully situated on the side of a sloping hill, and commands a magnificent view both up and down the valley of the Spey, and also of the mountains to the south. It is supposed to be the best building in the parish and is the property and residence of Colonel Macpherson ... Craigbui Wood – an extensive wood chiefly fir, stretching about a mile east of Belleville, and nearly a mile north on the west side, it is bounded by the Burn of Raitts".

Robert Hall 1885 noted "the Mansion house of Belleville [which] is picturesquely situated on an eminence commanding a splendid view of the valley of the Spey ... There are excellent stables, kennels, garden and pleasure grounds. Proprietor C J B Macpherson Esq."

Rev. A D McRae 1985 (TSA) described "a small but profitable rural industry, namely the growing of strawberries [which] has been started on the estate and is very profitable. The 'Balavil Strawberry' is gaining in popularity every year. The stately mansion house, built by James Macpherson, is now empty and derelict".
