

Cairngorms National Park Authority

Cairngorms National Park
Historic Designed Landscapes Project

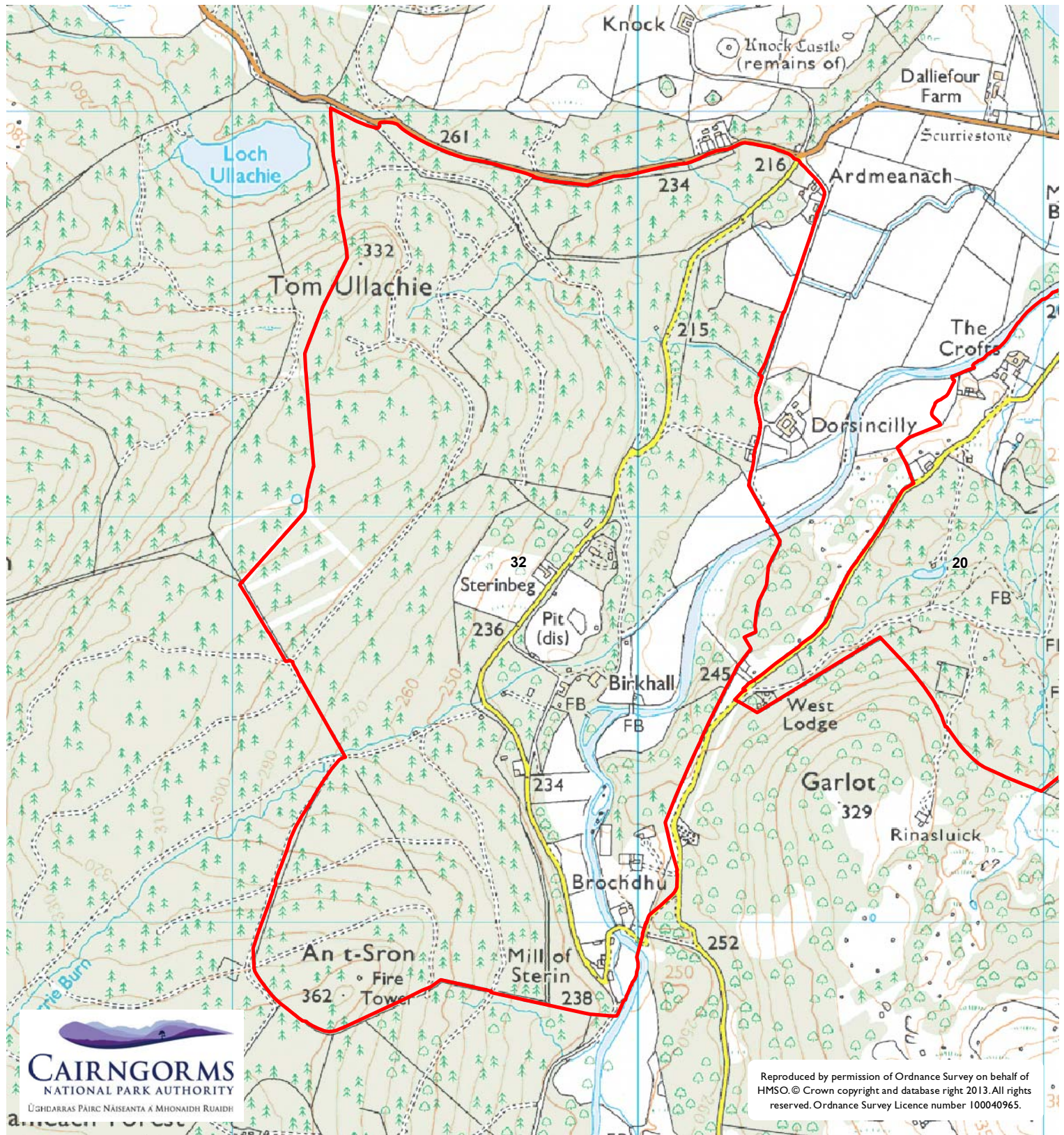
Site Research Report
22 Birkhall

Consultants



Peter McGowan Associates
Landscape Architects and Heritage Management Consultants
86 Constitution Street Edinburgh EH6 6RP
0131 261 6265 • pma@ednet.co.uk

and Christopher Dingwall

May 2013

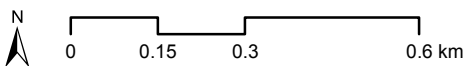


Legend

-  Cairngorms National Park Boundary
-  Designed landscape provisional boundary

Site 32

Birkhall



May 2013

22 Birkhall

County Aberdeenshire
Parish Glenmuick
NGR NO 348 936; OS 1:25,000 Sheet 388 (North)

DESIGNATIONS

Listing Birkhall, with summer house, Wendy house, garden gate and terraces, HB Number 9304 – Category B / Group Category A (1971)
Drive Bridge, HB Number 51445 – Category C (2010)
Keeper's House, HB Number 51446 – Category B (2010)
Larders, HB Number 51447 – Category C (2010)
Rope Bridge, HB Number 51448 – Category B (2010)
Stables (garage), HB 51449 – Category B (2010)
Sterinbeg & outbuilding, HB Number 51450 – Category C (2010)

The great majority of the woodland to the north of An t-Sron, surrounding Birkhall, is designated as Ancient Woodland.

Virtually all of the woodland surrounding Birkhall is the subject of an SFGS Agreement.

LOCATION AND EXTENT

Although it has not been possible to determine the precise extent of the Birkhall Estate, map evidence suggests that it occupies the whole of the western side of Glenmuick, together with a small area on the eastern side of the River Muick, where it is overlooked by the house. Birkhall lies close to, and on the west bank of the River Muick, approximately 3km south-west of Ballater, where it can be accessed via an unclassified road from Bridge of Muick and/or Ardmeanach. The small core landscape is surrounded and backed by extensive commercial plantations on the slopes of Tom Ullachie and An t-Sron, part of Alltcailleach Forest.

LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT

Map and documentary evidence

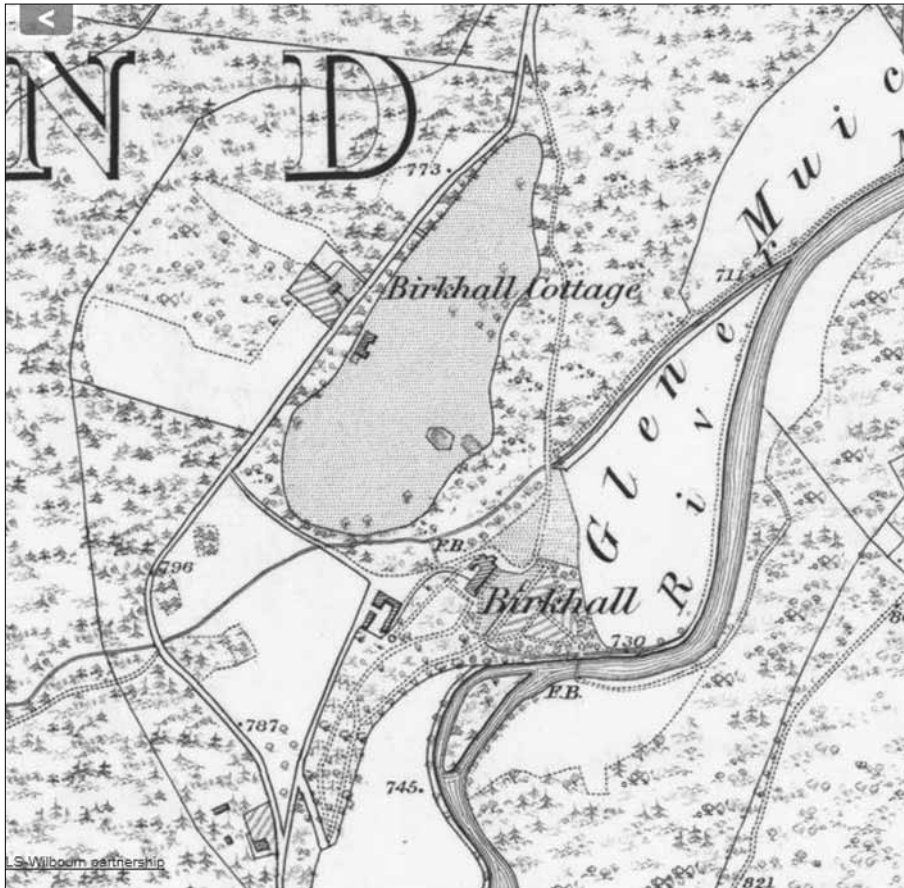
The name Birkhall first appears on Roy (c1750), who depicts fairly substantial (laird's ?) house within a walled garden or enclosure, set amongst a mixture of unenclosed woodland and rig cultivation on the west bank of the River Muick. The house is noted by Roberston (1822), also with surrounding woodland which extends down the valley towards the River Dee. Both the OS First Edition (1866) and OS Second Edition (1900) show a modest landscape comprising the house and offices, together with a small area of tree-studded parkland on the west side of the northern approach to the house. Below the house, on a fairly steep slope down towards the River Muick, is a near-semi-circular walled garden below a terrace at the front of the house. The OS Third Edition (1923) appears to show a significant southward extension of the pleasure grounds along the west bank of the River Muick, and the formation of a tree-nursery to the west of the house. Recent aerial photographs show a high level of maintenance of the walled garden and pleasure grounds, and new tree-planting on the riverside field to the east of the house, balanced by the loss of trees from the northern parkland.



Roy's Military Survey c1750



Robertson 1822



Ordnance Survey 1:10,560
2nd edition 1990

Building history and ownership

Birkhall was formerly associated with the Abergeldie estate, a little further up Strathdee towards Balmoral. Historic Scotland (1971) notes that the house of Birkhall was built by Capt. Charles Gordon of Abergeldie in 1715. Enclosure and improvement of the estate took place in the latter part of the C18th. The estate was eventually sold by his successor Michael Francis Gordon to Prince Albert in 1849 as a home for the Prince of Wales. As part of the Balmoral estate, it later served as the Highland home of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, and is now used as a summer residence by the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall. Modifications to the house in the 1880s are noted by Geddes (2001), and in the 1920s by Historic Scotland (1971). The latter source describes a replanting of the gardens in the 1930s by the Duke and Duchess of York. Historic Scotland records a Wendy house of c.1935 in the gardens. Other listed buildings include stables dating from c1800, a keeper's house and cottage of c1875, a steel rope bridge of c1885, a late 19th century cast-iron bridge on the drive, and game larders of c1935.



Suspension footbridge at
Birkhall

APPENDIX

Historical notes

Rev. George Brown 1793 (OSA) commented that "Mr Gordon of Abergeldie's farm of Birkhall is an instance of what the ground in this country is capable of producing when properly managed. He took this farm ... enclosed and subdivided it with stone fences and hedges, levelled and straightened the fields, trenched up balks and drained marshes ... His garden produces as early and well-flavoured fruit as any in Scotland – apples, pears, plumbs, cherries,

*View of Birkhall by G W
Wilson c1890 (University of
Aberdeen)*



gooseberries etc. And while Mr. Gordon farms to advantage, he has not lost sight of neatness and elegance. He has cleared away the rubbish of nature about his villa, and displayed her beauties, which are many, to the best advantage.

Rev. Hugh Burgess 1842 (NSA) noted Birkhill as one of “the chief modern buildings” in the parish ... adding that of “the general kind of trees planted is Scotch fir and larch, of indigenous it is birch and aller”.

A I McConnochie 1900 described “Birkhall, pleasantly situated among trees. Formerly part of the Abergeldie Estate, it was purchased for the Prince of Wales, from whom Her Majesty acquired it ... Although only a plain three-story house, Birkhall is a delightful residence, and is generally ‘lent’ by the Queen during the summer and autumn”.
