

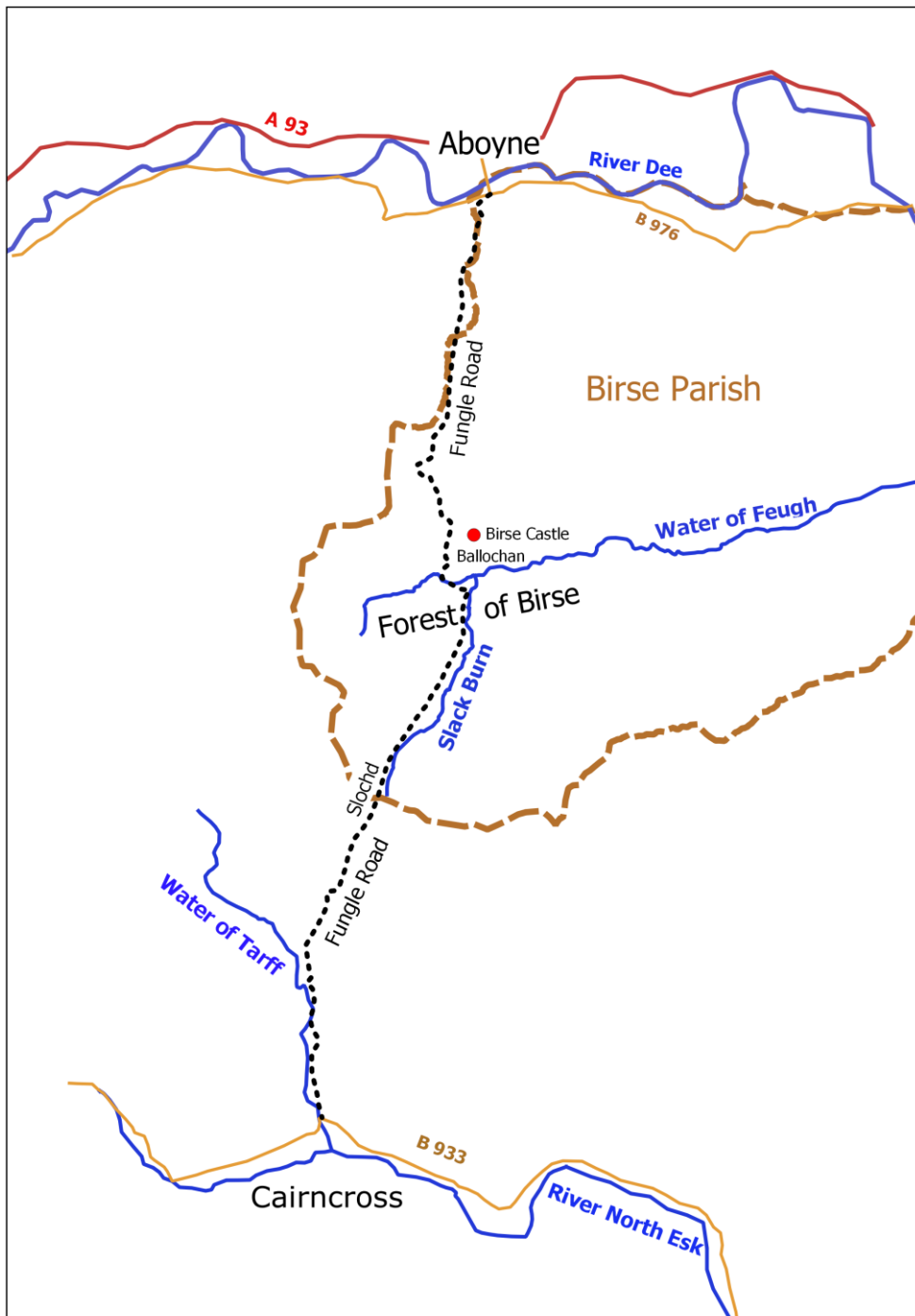
Birse Community Trust

**THE FUNGLE ROAD**

**Historical Notes about the Fungle in Birse Parish**

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# THE FUNGLE ROAD

## Historical Notes about the Fungle in Birse Parish

### Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide some background notes about the history and significance of the Fungle road in Birse parish.

The Fungle is the name of the ancient route between the river crossing over the Dee at Aboyne in the north and Cairncross on Tarfside in Glen Esk to the south. This is a distance of around 21 km.

The Fungle follows a natural north/south route through the hills and is one of the historic mounth (or moorland) passes through the Grampians that have been used by travellers for thousands of years.

The pass where the route crosses the watershed between Deeside and Glen Esk is known as the Slochd.<sup>1</sup> The watershed was the boundary between the counties of Angus and Aberdeenshire for many centuries and continues to be the boundary between those two local authority areas.

The majority of the length of the Fungle is to the north of the watershed in Birse parish. The distances are approximately 7.4 km from Cairncross to the watershed into the Forest of Birse, 8.1 km from there to the northern boundary of the Forest of Birse at the Black Moss, and 5.7 km from there down beside the Allt Dinnie burn to the bridge over the River Dee at Aboyne.

The first part of this paper is a sequence of notes on what is known about the history of the Fungle during past centuries and more recent times. The second part then provides notes on three topics - the historical significance of the Fungle compared to the Fir Mounth, the variations over time in the details of the route of the Fungle in Birse parish, and the origins of the Fungle's name.

### Part One - Timeline

#### Prehistory

The Fungle is a natural route through the hills and will, like the other main mounth passes, have been used by travellers since prehistoric times.

There is no known direct evidence of this early use. However, the archaeological remains recorded in the areas linked to the Fungle indicate fairly extensive prehistoric settlement.

These archaeological sites include the surviving evidence of round houses in the Balloch / Auchabrack area of the Forest of Birse. These show that there was settlement

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<sup>1</sup> Named on Ordnance Survey maps. Slochd is Gaelic for a pass.

there during at least part of the Iron and Bronze Age periods approximately 2,000-3,500 years ago.<sup>2</sup>

### Medieval Era

By 1,000 years ago in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Forest of Birse was a royal hunting reserve and the only settlement was the seasonal use of the Forest for summer shielings by the inhabitants of Birse parish. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Crown conveyed the Forest of Birse to the Bishops of Aberdeen and records show that the Forest of Birse had a reputation during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, as a 'wild and unruly' place' that harboured thieves and caterans.<sup>3</sup>

These caterans raided the neighbouring districts to the south for cattle and other goods, before returning to hide in the still largely wooded Forest of Birse. The route of the Fungle became named after these raids and as the Minister of Birse noted in 1842, it was still '*known to this day by the name of the "Catrin road"*'.<sup>4</sup> Some current walking guides also still refer to the Cateran Road as another name for the Fungle.

Evidence of other travellers using the Fungle during the medieval era comes from the record of a Spital in the Forest of Birse in the Bishop of Aberdeen's 1511 Rental Roll for the parish of Birse.<sup>5</sup> Spitals were a type of hostel for travellers and occurred on the other main mounth passes. The location of these is often still recorded in place names, for example, the Spital of Glenmuick, the Spital of Glenshee and the Spital Bridge over the Spital Burn on the Cairn o' Mount road.

Nothing more is known about the Forest of Birse Spital except its location, which was approximately at the site now occupied by Birse Castle. It is assumed that if the Spital still operated at the start of the 1500s, its use may not have survived the break up of the Bishop's lands in Birse during the Reformation in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century. The growing disputes over the Forest of Birse that followed, resulted in the original Forest of Birse Castle being built at the site of the Spital in 1610 as part of the first attempt to settle part of the Forest of Birse Commonty.<sup>6</sup>

The location of the Spital is recorded by the use of Spital site and name by one of the holdings when the head of the Forest of Birse was successfully settled from 1724. Other records also refer to the site, for example, in the description of the boundaries of Balloch area in the 1755 Decree Arbitral over the Forest of Birse Commonty.<sup>7</sup>

### 17<sup>th</sup> Century

Timothy Pont (1556-1614) mapped the eastern part of Birse parish. However, the first detailed map of the western end of the parish was produced by Robert Gordon of Straloch in the 1630s. A copy of part of that map is attached at the end of this paper.<sup>8</sup> Gordon's map does not show routes, but does record the name of the burn that flows into the Balloch area from the south as the Slack Burn.

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<sup>2</sup> Carter, S 'The Forest of Birse - An Archaeological Survey' (Headland Archaeology, 2000)

<sup>3</sup> Callander, R 'History in Birse' (BCT, 2000) p.89

<sup>4</sup> 'The Statistical Accounts of Birse Parish' (BCT, 2001) p.32

<sup>5</sup> A translation of the rent is given in Rev.Browne 'Records of the Forest of Birse...' (Chambers, 1923)

<sup>6</sup> Callander (op cit) p.91

<sup>7</sup> In Rev Browne (op cit)

<sup>8</sup> A copy of the full map is on the Birse Community Trust website

The name 'slack' or 'slock' is Scots for Slochd and the source of the Slack Burn is springs just below the Slochd. The Fungle runs beside this burn between the Balloch area and the Slochd. The name of the Slack Burn identifies it as the burn to follow to and from the Slochd. The confluence of the Slack Burn and Burn of Corn is the start of the Water of Feugh on Gordon's map.

The next map to name the burn appears to be the first Ordnance Survey map over 200 years later in 1865. It labels the Slack Burn as the Water of Feugh, while the three springs near the Slochd that give rise to the Slack Burn have become seen as the source of the Feugh.<sup>9</sup> There are, however, other tributaries south of Balloch that are longer and come from higher sources, and to identify the source of the Slack Burn as the source of the Feugh is a result of the labelling of the Slack Burn as part of the Feugh.

While Gordon's 1630s map does not mark the route of the Fungle, the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century is also the date of the oldest known list of the mounth passes. The list was written by Sir James Balfour of Denmilne (c.1600-c.1658), who recorded the Fungle as the 'Forest of Birse Mounth' and described it as from '*Cairn Corsse to Birse on Dee Syde*'.<sup>10</sup>

The production of the list by Balfour, who was a prominent national figure, reflected the importance of these routes for travel and the inclusion of the Fungle indicates its continuing significance at that time.

### 18<sup>th</sup> century

The continuing importance of the Fungle in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is reflected by its inclusion on General Roy's Map of Scotland (1747-55). Roy's map is the first map to show the route of the Fungle. However, the route is only indicative due to the inaccuracies in the representation of the landscape on Roy's map.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Fungle seems to have been well used by cattle drovers and other travellers. In 1791, the Minister of Birse reported that work had begun on a new road that was planned along the route of the Fungle.<sup>11</sup> The well-made ford over the Burn of Corn just west of Balloch farm is likely to date from these improvements. The level riverbed for the ford was created by building a weir across the burn in the same style as the surviving 18<sup>th</sup> century weir further up the burn for the Mill of Cranna. It can also still be seen that the ford was paved with stones to give a smooth crossing, although this now only survives around the edges.

The well-constructed fords further south along the Fungle that cross the Burns of Allalees, also seem likely to date from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century improvements. The modern land rover track south from Balloch stops just short of the fords, which use large stones on the downstream side to form a level area for the track to cross each of the burns.

The Minister also noted in 1791 that the improved road would '*greatly accommodate the travellers and traders, particularly the drovers and dealers in cattle*'.<sup>12</sup> This traffic on the Fungle in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century included its use by whisky smugglers as the trade in illicit whisky grew. The distillation of illicit whisky was an important activity in Birse from the 1780s until around the 1840s, with local production sold to smugglers who carried it south

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<sup>9</sup> Watson, A & Allan, E 'Some place names from areas near Upper Deeside' (Deeside Field 1988)(The Three Springs p.95) reproduced in Murray I and Watson A 'Place Name Discoveries...' (Paragon Publishing 2014)(p.113)

<sup>10</sup> Fraser, G 'The Old Deeside Road' (Callander, 1980)

<sup>11</sup> The Statistical Accounts... (op cit) p.19

<sup>12</sup> (op cit) p.19

to sell.<sup>13</sup> This use of the Fungle by the smugglers with whisky from Birse and other areas resulted in the Fungle being referred to as the Smugglers' Road. There is also a boulder south-west of Ballochran known as the Smugglers' Stane (north of OS ref. NO 509900).<sup>14</sup>

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, all the use of the Fungle continued to be by foot or horse as it had been since time immemorial. In Birse parish, there were no carts until the 1750s and the use of wheeled transport only developed slowly because of the poor condition of the roads. For most people, all travel was by foot as it always had been. As Dinnie commented in the 1860s, a hundred years before in the 18<sup>th</sup> century *'fifty miles by foot was thought nothing extra for a Birse peasant to perform in one day'*.<sup>15</sup>

The use of the Fungle will have included local traffic between Birse and Glen Esk. A notable example was the Brown family in the Mill of Cranna in the Forest of Birse from the 1730s, who had kin at Lochlee in Glen Esk. This link continued through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the Browns had moved to the Bucket Mill, with Peter Brown walking to Lochlee and back for church on Sundays. The drinking well erected by Peter Brown at a spring beside the road up the Forest of Birse still flows.

It is possible that there may also have been an occasional traveller on the Fungle in the past, who did not survive severe winter weather conditions on the route. There used to be a cairn beside the Fungle where a Jock Ross was found dead, but it is not known when or why he died. The cairn was demolished by estate track work in the 1970s or early 1980s.<sup>16</sup> Further south along the Fungle, there is another old cairn that has an upright stone in the top with the initials JRK chiselled on it.<sup>17</sup> This is not a boundary stone, but nothing further seems known about it.



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<sup>13</sup> Callander (op cit) p.61 et seq

<sup>14</sup> Watson, A and Allan, E (op cit) p.95

<sup>15</sup> Dinnie (op cit) p.14

<sup>16</sup> Watson, A and Allan, E (op cit) p.95

<sup>17</sup> At OS reference NO 510 875

## 19<sup>th</sup> century

The maps of Aberdeenshire produced by James Robertson in 1822 and John Thomson in 1826, give a more accurate representation of the route of the Fungle than Roy's 1755 map. Both Robertson's and Thomson's maps show the same route for the Fungle.<sup>18</sup> This is shown coming south up the side of the Allt Dinnie burn and then down into the Forest of Birse on the east side of the ruins of Birse Castle to Ballochan, where it is joined by the road up the Forest of Birse from the east.

The route of the Fungle to the south of Ballochan on the two 1820s maps, appears as if it went up the north side of the Burn of Allanstank to near the summit of Gannoch, before turning south over Tampie down into Glen Esk. However, this apparent route is a product of the inaccurate standard of the mapping in the hills and is also reflected, for example, in the pattern of burns and hill features. It is clear that the Fungle followed its current route to the Slochd at the time of these maps.<sup>19</sup>

By the time of these 1820s maps, there will have been significant changes taking place in the use of the Fungle. Both cattle droving and the smuggling of illicit whisky were declining rapidly. The wider changes in agriculture and the rural economy were also affecting the use.

The first accurate map of the route of the Fungle is the first edition of the Ordnance Survey in 1865, a copy of which is attached at the end of this paper. The map shows how the route from the south went north through the township of Ballochan and then split into eastern and western routes that go up around either side of Black Snob, the protruding hillside immediately north of Birse Castle.<sup>20</sup> The routes then came together again further up the hill slopes to the north at the area known as Channeller.<sup>21</sup>

The eastern route was the more direct way north and south. The fact that the 1820s maps show the route to the east of the Castle ruins, would appear to confirm that it was the main route. The western route, which is only slightly longer, goes through the location of the former Spital beside the subsequent castle site, and would appear to have been used historically by those detouring from the main route to visit the Spital.

The continuing changes in the rural economy by the time of the OS map, will have meant that the overall use of the Fungle was also continuing to decline. Improvements to other roads and the increased use of wheeled transport on the roads were part of this, as reflected in Robert Dinnie's comment at that time that the route "*cannot be much recommended, as it is very steep and almost impassable, excepting for riders and foot passengers*".<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> These maps can be viewed on the National Library of Scotland website.

<sup>19</sup> While there is an old track up the north side of the Allanstank between Achnashinn and the Keirn, this was never part of the route of the Fungle. The track leads up to the saddle between Achnashinn and the Gannoch and is possibly an old peat road. From that area, there is no scope for a realistic route up the Gannoch or south towards the Slochd because of the steepness of the slopes and the nature of the drainage patterns.

<sup>20</sup> Black Snob is recorded under the entry for Channeller in Alexander, W 'The Placenames of Aberdeenshire' (Spalding Club, 1952)

<sup>21</sup> Alexander (op cit) mistakenly suggests that Black Snob and Channeller are alternate names for the same feature, when Black Snob is the hillside and Channeller is a more restricted area near the top of the slope. Alexander does not offer a derivation or interpretation of the name Channeller. However, 'channel' was an old Scots word for gravel or shingle and the area named on the map has heavily fracture rock close to the surface, creating a gravelly appearance in places.

<sup>22</sup> Dinnie (op cit) p.53

Dinnie's comments will have come from personal experience of using the route, given his home in Birse parish and the amount of work he did as a stone mason in Glen Esk, examples of which can still be seen. There will also have been other local traffic across the Slochd. This will have included exchanges at gathering times of sheep that had strayed across the Slochd, given the larger flocks of sheep and more extensive grazing patterns that started to be used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>23</sup>

During the second half of the century, the hills along the route of the Fungle became intensively managed grouse moors.<sup>24</sup> Recreational walking also started to increase along the Fungle. It appears to have been during this period that the eastern route of the Fungle to the north of Ballochán went out of use. This was possibly as a result of the western route being improved as part of the grouse shooting.

While there appear to have been proposals still at the end of the century to upgrade the Fungle as a public road, nothing came of these in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>25</sup> However, legacies of the Fungle being regarded historically as a public road include, firstly, that the current Forest of Birse road is still a public road as far as the ford over the Burn of Corn and secondly, in addition to the short section of the historic route of the Fungle between Ballochán Farm and the Burn of Corn ford that remained a public road, the rest of the Fungle to the north and south became regarded as a public right of way.

## 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The sale of the Forest of Birse Estate by the Earl of Aboyne to Robert Heaven in 1897, resulted in the Birse Castle being re-built for use as a shooting lodge in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Estate was then sold to Viscount Cowdray of Dunecht Estates in 1911.

At the start of the 1920s, the historian GM Fraser recognised the Fungle as '*an old and important crossing of the hills*' and noted that the Fungle seems '*to have been used to a considerable extent and it is a well marked track yet*'.<sup>26</sup> He also recorded that, the north end along the Allt Dinnie was '*put in order*' by Sir William Cuncliffe Brooks of Glen Tanar Estate and was a favourite walk from Aboyne. He added that '*The rest of the track, through the moor, is in bad order, but quite sufficiently good for walking*'.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1920s and into the 1930s, the Cowdray family carried out a series of changes on the lands of Ballochán. These included re-developing and extending Birse Castle, as well as the buildings at Floors and Ballochán. The re-development of the Ballochán farm buildings closed off the traditional route of the Fungle through the site. The changed situation at the Castle following its restoration and development, also seems to have resulted in the start of issues over walkers following the traditional route past the Castle.

Dunecht Estate's approach to issues over the route of the Fungle through Ballochán was to try to direct walkers around the outside of the west end of the farm land at Ballochán. This approach continued during the post-war decades. By the end of the 1970s, the Estate had persuaded the Scottish Rights of Way Society (SRWS) through one of the

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<sup>23</sup> This contact 'over the hill' is a tradition that still continues, but to a limited and declining degree.

<sup>24</sup> This included the start of gamekeepers living in the Forest of Birse. They first appear in the Census in 1851 at Middyke, Ballochán, and in 1861 at Burnfoot on Auchabrack.

<sup>25</sup> BCT report 'Traditional Routes in Birse Parish' (BCT, 2003)

<sup>26</sup> GM Fraser op cit p.81-82

<sup>27</sup> op cit p.82

SRWS Board Members,<sup>28</sup> to provide SRWS signs showing the route of the Fungle going round to the west of the Ballochán farmland.

The SRWS signs, which still survive around Ballochán, include sign posting the route between the Forest of Birse Kirk car park and the Fungle north of the Castle, as being to walk to the south edge of Ballochán before going north around the west end of Ballochán. However, the indirect line of this route and its ill-defined nature around the outside of Ballochán, meant that walkers continued to use the track past the Castle despite the Estate's 'Private No Entry' signs. The Castle itself was relatively seldom occupied, principally only in the shooting and fishing seasons.

Also by the 1970s, the route of the Fungle to the north and south of the enclosed lands of Ballochán had evolved into land-rover tracks and the only use of the Fungle other than by the Dunecht and Ballogie Estates as part of their land management, had become recreational walkers and cyclists.

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century to date

After Birse Community Trust (BCT) was established in 1998 and became the holder of the ancient land use rights over the Forest of Birse Common other than shooting rights, BCT was directly involved in discussions in 2000 over the future status of the length of public road within Ballochán from the Forest of Birse Kirk car park to the Burn of Corn ford.

Aberdeenshire Council had identified during a routine inspection, that the small bridges within Ballochán over the Allachrowan and Auldgarney Burns were sub-standard for their weight bearing capacity and would need to be replaced. Dunecht Estate, which had long wanted the length of road within Ballochán delisted as a public road, said that it would take responsibility for replacing the bridges if the road was delisted.

The Council, however, decided not to delist the road and to repair the bridges itself following representations from BCT and others. As a result, the public road connection was maintained to the traditional route of the Fungle at Ballochán Farm and from there to the Burn of Corn. Then, in 2004-05, BCT undertook a major project to improve the Fungle from Ballochán to the Slochd.

The project involved improving the surface and drainage of the land rover track from the south edge of Ballochán to the foot of the final slope up to the Slochd, and re-establishing the route up that slope to the watershed with improved drainage and an improved surface. On a steep section of the ascent, where the historic route appeared to have zig-zagged up the slope, the actual route had become obscure and difficult to follow. Re-instatement of the route on that section represented the greatest improvement as part of the project.

In addition as part of the project, the surface of the 300 metres of the Fungle track within Ballochán from the Burn of Corn to the slope up to Ballochán farm, was improved and fenced off to try to protect it from cattle. BCT also carried out a follow-up project on the Fungle a few years later, to maintain and improve some of the drainage along the route.

BCT carried out both its original Fungle project and the follow-up maintenance project with grant funding from the Eastern Cairngorms Access Project, and the availability of this funding reflected the continued increase in interest in hill walking and mountain biking.

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<sup>28</sup> Professor Sandy Anton



Following BCT's Fungle projects, BCT continued to discuss with Dunecht Estate from time to time, the need to improve the route and signage of the Fungle through Balloch. In particular, BCT wanted to improve the route between the Fungle to the north of Balloch and the public road and Forest of Birse Kirk car park. In 2015, BCT proposed developing a route to the east of Birse Castle to address that problem and a map from that proposal is attached at the end of this paper.

The map shows the historic route of the Fungle and BCT's proposed new route. That involved re-developing historic route down the east side of Black Snob, which is clearly visible on the ground, into a new track. However, instead of following the historic route through the gate in the Balloch boundary dyke into what is now part of the Castle's policy woods, BCT's proposal involved continuing down the slope outside the dyke along a clearly identifiable route and entering Balloch by the gate through the dyke at the bottom of the slope. From there, there is an easy route along the top of the bank above the Auldgarney Burn to the Estate track that goes down east side of the burn to the public road.

The proposal would have benefited both the Estate and public access. The new route would have removed any pretext for walking or cycling passed the Castle, which has been the Estate's principal issue. It could also have reduced the need for Estate vehicles to go passed the Castle when it was occupied. The public would have benefited from a shorter and more straightforward link to and from the north to the public road and Forest of Birse car park.

BCT discussed its proposal with Dunecht Estate. However, despite the apparent benefits to the Estate, the Estate decided not to follow up the discussions and issues continue over the route of the Fungle within and around Balloch.

In 2020, Dunecht Estate erected an enclosure on Snob Hill north of Birse Castle and planted it with a game crop. While the enclosure is an encroachment of the Commonly, its location also means that it is likely to have damaged the evidence on the ground of the historic route of the Fungle on the eastern side of Snob Hill.



Also in 2020, Dunecht Estate put up a 'No unauthorised vehicular access beyond this point' notice at the cattle grid beside the Forest of Birse Kirk car park, despite the Estate knowing that the road west of the cattle grid continued to be a public road. However, following a complaint to Aberdeenshire Council by a member of the local community, the Council asked the Estate to remove the sign and the Estate then took it down.



## Part Two - Topics

### The Length of the Fungle

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a tendency for some people to name the length of the Fungle across the Slochd on Tarfside, as part of the Fir Mounth rather than the Fungle.<sup>29</sup> However, while the Fir Mounth will be an ancient route, the evidence is that the route of the Fungle was significantly more important historically and was the name of the whole route from Dee to Cairncross. The Fir Mounth was a branch off the Fungle rather than the other way round.

The Fir Mounth branches off the Fungle just south of the Slochd and heads north west over Tampie, passed Gannoch, down across Glen Tanar and over to the old Dee crossing near Dinnet. The route across Tampie and passed Gannoch is significantly higher at 720 m than the route of the Fungle through the Slochd at 600 m.

The Fungle was also particularly significant historically as an important north-south route. This is reflected in its proximity to the Cairn a' Mounth route as the major north-south route linking the lowlands and the towns round to Inverness and beyond, and which continued to be known as the Great North Road until well through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Historically, the Fungle, while higher than the Cairn o Mount crossing at 450 m, had the advantage for foot and horse travellers of being a shorter route south from many areas. As the Minister of Birse observed in 1791, it was "15 miles nearer from a great part of this country, to the county of Angus etc than by the Cairn o Mount Road".<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Fraser (op cit) p.81-82

<sup>30</sup> Statistical Accounts (op cit) p.20

The significance of the Fungle is also reflected in its route being shown on early maps, while the Fir Mounth is not shown on maps before the first edition of the Ordnance Survey in the 1860s. The oldest map of the area is Gordon's 1630s map of Birse and his reference to 'Month Ganiell' on the map is considered to refer to the route of the Fungle rather than the Fir mounth. While the map only shows the Slack Burn for a short distance before the bottom of the map, Gordon has written beside this '*Month Ganiell, a passage throw the hills to the south countreys*'. This passage is considered to be the Slochd and the old name for the Gannoch hill of Ganiell or Gennel is thought to be part of the origins of the Fungle's name.<sup>31</sup>

Roy's military map of 1755 shows the route of the Fungle and not the Fir Mounth. However, the Fir Mounth was improved as a military route in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Improvements were also carried out to the Fir Mounth by Sir William Cuncliffe Brooks of Glen Tanar from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. By that time, the significance of the Fungle as a traditional route had declined greatly and the condition of the track was poor. As a result, by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Fir Mounth had become the main and better known route for walkers and others.

The restoration and improvement by BCT ten years ago of the difficult final ascent of the Fungle on the north side of the Slochd, has helped open up the route again. There has also been renewed recognition by recent authors writing about the Mounth Passes, that the Fungle was historically more important than the Fir Mounth and that it is the Fungle that goes all the way between the River Dee and Cairncross in Glen Esk.<sup>32</sup>

### The Route of the Fungle

The Fungle is an ancient route and the details of the line followed by the route have changed in some places over the centuries, as the route has evolved with changing circumstances.

At the north end, the route changed in early 19<sup>th</sup> century when a bridge over the Dee at Aboyne replaced the ford and ferry. The route was also influenced by the development of the housing in Birse at the south end of the bridge in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. More recently in the 2000s, the Fungle was re-routed around the house and buildings at Craigendinnie Croft.

There have also been variations along each side of the Allt Dinnie as the route climbs up to the Black Moss, and then the changes with the east and west routes between the Channeller and Balloch, as described above. Along some of the lengths south of Balloch, the current land rover track has been made beside the older, sunken track ways. More recently, BCT's re-instatement of a route up the final steep slope to the Slochd in 2004-05, while aiming to restore the historic line up the hill, is a contemporary variation of it.

### The Name of the Fungle

The origins and derivation of the Fungle's name are often seen as having been lost in the mists of time. In the 1920s, when Fraser was discussing the Fungle as one of the Mounth

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<sup>31</sup> see final section of this paper

<sup>32</sup> for example, Ramsay, N and Pedersen, N (2014) 'Mounth Passes: A Heritage Guide to Old Ways through the Grampian Mountains' (Kindle Unlimited)

Passes, he comments that it *'has long had this curious name of the Fungle road'*<sup>33</sup>. A recent book on the Mounth Passes, after referring to the Cateran Road as a name used for the Fungle, comments that *'The current name for the pass, however, is something of a mystery. It remains unclear why the route is called the Fungle.'*<sup>34</sup>

The Fungle is not one of the names considered in MacDonald's Place Names of West Aberdeenshire (1899) and, while Alexander lists the Fungle in his Place Names of Aberdeenshire (1952), he does not suggest a derivation for it and mistakenly concludes that the name refers to the lower gully of the Allt Dinnie. Watson did not include the Fungle as one of the place names he considered in the Forest of Birse.<sup>35</sup> However, Dr Simon Taylor of Strathclyde University has recently suggested that the most likely origin of the Fungle's name is linked to the name of the hill now known as the Gannoch.<sup>36</sup>

The Gannoch is the highest hill in Birse parish (731 m) and the hill that the Fungle traverses on its way to the Slochd pass between the Gannoch and Mudlee Bracks. Watson gives the derivation of the Gannoch as *'Gaineamhach = sandy Month gaineach (Pont) and Month Ganiell (Gordon) indicate an original Monadh Gaineamhach = sandy hill.'*<sup>37</sup>

Alexander gives the same Gaelic derivation for the Gannoch as sandy hill. He also gives additional old spellings and adds that *'A good informant says that the hill is called either The Gennoch or The Gennel. This explains the term the Sands of Gennel, a bare sandy patch on this hill near St Colm's Well.'*<sup>38</sup> The old name of Gennel is reflected in Gordon's Month Ganiell for the route of the Fungle and the Mounth Gemmel used in Balfour's list.

It is suggested that the derivation of the Fungle's name involves the old name of Gennel preceded by fionn, which is the Gaelic for white or fair and which could possibly link to the white, gravelly granite sand on the Gannoch. It appears that fionn Gennel could have become truncated, as happens with many places names over time, into the fun-gle.<sup>39</sup>

While the Fungle is recognised as a very old spoken name, it is not known when the first written use of the name might have been.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Fraser (op cit) p.82

<sup>34</sup> Ramsay and Pedersen (op cit)

<sup>35</sup> Watson and Allan (op cit)

<sup>36</sup> This resulted from the involvement of Dr Simon Taylor as one of the expert speakers at a meeting about place names that was organised by BCT and the Cairngorms National Park in Finzean in March 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Watson and Allan (op cit)

<sup>38</sup> Alexander (op cit) p.284

<sup>39</sup> As Alexander notes, Fungle is always pronounced with a hard g as in 'bungle', potentially reflecting the abbreviation of Gennel to 'Gle' in Fun-gle.

<sup>40</sup> The Ministers of Birse who wrote the Old and New Statistical Accounts of the parish of 1791 and 1842, both refer to the route of the Fungle without naming it, and the same is the case with Robert Dinnie in his 1865 history of the parish.

Map by Robert Gordon of Straloch, c.1630s





