

The Descent of the Gillies 2010

The forthcoming protest by *Save Gillies Hill (SGH)* on Sunday 20th June when the route of the original *gillies* of 1314 is re-enacted, promises to be the biggest yet – for 4 days later, Stirling Council meets to decide whether to back the call from Cambusbarron Community Council for help with possible legal action in the Court of Session.

Save Gillies Hill was formed in 2007 after it became clear that quarriers were about to re-activate operations on the historic and environmentally vital landscape just south of Stirling. That such quarrying has not yet recommenced, is, says *SGH*, down to its 4 years of sustained campaigning. But now, difficult decisions have to be confronted.

For quarriers Hanson Aggregates and Tarmac have rejected Stirling Council's request to conduct an EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) – something that the Council admits should have been carried out in 2002 when permission to quarry was reviewed. Indeed, the council's own legal experts conceded that the 2002 ROMP (Review of Old Mineral Permissions), which rubber-stamped the renewal of quarrying, is legally flawed: legislation required an EIA. Now, legislative complexities prevent the Council from taking legal action to force an EIA – but, crucially, in 2008, it admitted that it could support a third party: Cambusbarron Community Council hopes – if it proves necessary - to be that party.

And, to back up its request, it has, in the last month, collected some 3,400 signatures from local people in a petition urging Stirling Council's support, to be submitted to its Petitions Panel in the next few days. Such backing from the Stirling community, *SGH* believes, will help persuade councillors to make the right decision.

As will what looks to be a record turn-out, such is the local feeling against both quarrying itself *and* the quarriers' refusal to conduct an EIA. And, a new danger: the threat of housing on whatever bits of the Hill remain after quarrying.

A *SGH* spokesperson said: "We're confident that the previous record of 600+ protestors will be beaten. People are now aware more than they have ever been, of what is at stake here: the destruction of a much-loved landscape used daily by walkers, runners, cyclists, climbers, photographers, bird-watchers, plant-lovers and children simply playing; a landscape of stunning views; a landscape of wild-life and rare plants such as peregrines, red squirrels giant sequoia and orchids."

And a landscape rich in history: leave aside the Bronze Age Gillies Hill Fort, a 'site of national importance' according to Historic Scotland (yet destined to be destroyed by quarrying); leave aside the early 19th century lime kilns and mines; but surely it's

impossible to sanction the destruction of a landscape that played such a vital part in the victory at Bannockburn – for it was here that Bruce, for safety, stationed his *sma folk*, the camp servants and boys, the *ghillies* that gave the Hill its name, before the battle, and from here, they made their dramatic intervention at a crucial stage in the conflict, their pots and pans looking, from the battlefield like swords and pikes, their dishcloths like flags, and the hard-pressed English, thinking them fresh Scottish troops, broke, and victory was assured.

Victory is far from assured in the present-day battle to save Gillies Hill. But the re-enactment of the descent of the original *ghillies* of 1314, from the Gillies Hill itself, onto the Field of Bannockburn at the Borestone, where the crowd will be addressed by local MP Ann McGuire, MSP Bruce Crawford, and the principal speaker Denis Canavan, should show all concerned how determined the Scottish people are to preserve this precious ground.

The procession, led, suitably, by pipers, leaves Cambusbarron Public Park at 1.45 on Sunday 20 June. The
For any further information, please feel free to contact me.

Peter Paterson
01786 463098
ptpaterson@hotmail.co.uk