

# JOCK THE GIANT OF BENNACHIE

“But Bennachie! Faith, yon's the hill/ Rugs at the hairt when ye're awa!” So wrote Alford-born poet, Charles Murray. Aberdeenshire's favourite hill stands at just over 1,700 feet and is a recognisable landmark with its hillfort dating from the Pictish period (200-900AD). Northeast of the main peak, Oxen Craig, is Craigshannoch; the 900 feet between it and two small tors is known as Little John's Length, but this John, or Jock, like the friend of Robin Hood, was a giant, and this was his bed. Jock o' Bennachie was one of the ancient inhabitants of Aberdeenshire who had retreated to the top of the hill when new tribes were moving in. But Jock was not alone, there were other giants living on the hills of Donside, including his great rival in love, Jock o'Noth, who lived on Tap o'Noth, the hill above the village of Rhynie, once the home of kings. Both Jocks competed for the hand of Lady Anne, a beautiful giantess who also lived locally.



Bennachie

Jock heard gossip that Anne and Jock o'Noth were flirting together up his hill, so to the top of Bennachie our Jock climbs to get a look, his eyesight being like a hawk's. To his horror, the rumour was true! There they were, cuddling up together on the hillside. Jock flew into a rage and picked up a huge boulder from Bennachie, throwing it with all his might towards Tap o'Noth. Jock o'Noth just saw the stone in time and deflected it with his foot, which sprung the missile back the way it had come, knocking a chunk out of the Mither Tap. Jock o'Bennachie was determined and flung another stone, just as Jock o'Noth raised up a boulder of his own. Just as he did, Anne pulled at his arm, and begged him to stop fighting. Jock shifted his position to reply, but in so doing, put her right in the path of the other flying rock, which crushed her to death against the hillside. Jock o'Bennachie could see what he had done and was horrified! He'd killed his beloved! He fled down the hill, fully expecting Jock o'Noth to come after him, but even by nightfall he saw and heard no-one.



## JOCK THE GIANT OF BENNACHIE

Jock wept for Lady Anne as he settled in the woods. He cried himself to sleep. Some time later, he was woken with the sound of a soft, familiar voice. To his huge surprise, there was Anne, in her beautiful white gown with flowers in her golden hair. “Jock, where have you been? I’ve been looking for ye everywhere!” she soothed.

“Oh me, my quine, thocht I’d killed ye! I sweir saw the rock hit ye!” he gasped. “Oh come here, my bonnie darling!” Anne wrapped her arms around him and began to kiss his lips with such fervour that Jock felt his cheeks redden. He closed his eyes, thinking that today had been a terrible nightmare.



Bennachie from East Aquhorthies Stone Circle

Suddenly, Jock opened his eyes and realised he was alone. He looked around and saw a shaft of light suddenly disappearing; there was a tall, ugly, angry fairy woman pulling shut a massive wooden door. “Aye Jock, ye did kill the peer quine, and ye’ll bide here till somebody braks my spell!” Jock screamed in protest, running towards the light, but too late, as the door banged behind the fairy woman. He thumped at it, kicked, shouted and swore oaths at it, but the door did not move. He was under a spell and there was nothing he could do about it.

The fairy put her story about, warning all that the whole country would suffer due to Jock’s crime. Her curse ran thus: Scotland will never be rich, be rich/  
Till they find the keys of Bennachie/ They shall be found by a wife's ae son, wi  
ae e'e,/ Aneath a juniper tree! It meant that Jock could only be freed by a one-eyed boy who was an only son, the keys to the hill’s secret dungeon to be found under a juniper tree. So far, Jock has not been released.



## JOCK THE GIANT OF BENNACHIE



Bennachie from East Aquhorthies Stone Circle

Jock o'Bennachie's stone-throwing antics are the explanation for Bennachie's rugged outline. Alexander Inkson McConnachie was responsible for putting the legend into print; Jock's story appears in his 1890 book, *Bennachie*, which was published in Aberdeen. He attributes the fairy's curse to Thomas the Rhymer, Scotland's medieval seer. Jock's story came from two poems or ballads which tell of his accidental murder of Anne and Jock o'Noth, and the visitation from the fairy in the guise of Lady Anne. McConnachie was clearly inspired by oral legend, which he shaped into poetry which suited the romantic appetites of his Victorian audience. Jock's story is part of a greater worldwide tradition of giant tales, from as far afield as Iraq, in the ancient epic, *Gilgamesh*, where King Izdubar is able to defeat the giant ogre, Khumbaba; to nearby Ulster, where the Giant's Causeway was built by Irish hero, Fionn MacCumhaill, only to be used by his Scots rival, Benadonner to meet him for a fight, which he is saved from by the clever actions of his wife, Oona.

Bennachie is fairly easy to climb by various routes and has a visitor centre near Pitcaple. Information can be found on the Baillies of Bennachie web site. The Baillies are a long-standing community group who act as guardians for the hill and the woods around the base.