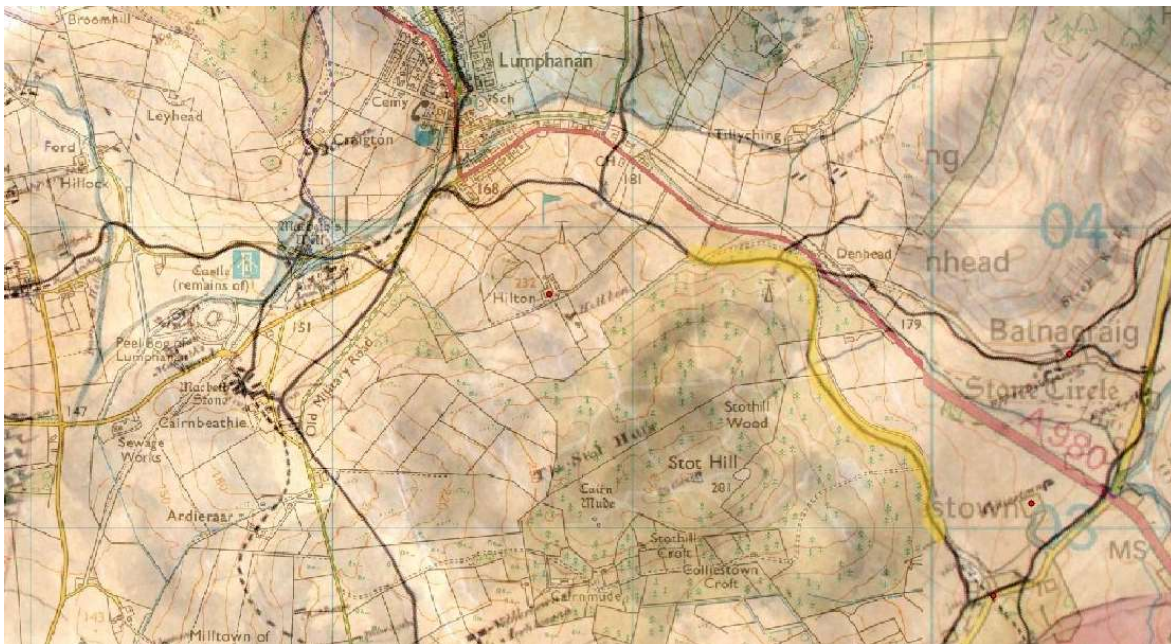


## Stothill forest operations:

### Plans afoot in Stothill wood opposite Satan's Den!

Lumphanan Paths Group (LPG) members met with Fred Drion of Highfield Forestry near Satan's Den on 1st April 2024. It had come to our notice that work was planned to start in early April with the building of an access road through the Stothill Wood, prior to extracting forest timber.

Fred was very helpful and we were reassured by him that Highfield and their contractors will do their best to preserve the ancient road that predates and runs parallel to the modern public (turnpike) road. This road is shown on an old Finzean estate map of 1835 when Finzean owned the Lumphanan bowl. It is a wide track with good banks on the north side and ditches in other sections. It was probably once a macadam road (that is, laid with stones and then compacted with crushed stone dust). After years of sitka pine needle drop, the track is now a soft grassy walkway. Sadly, a jumble of fallen trees lies over it on the east side. This track could eventually be part of a loop walk from the village, off the proposed Lumphanan/Torphins link (on the disused railway line) which currently awaits planning permission.



*Overlay of the 1835 Finzean Estate map and the modern Ordnance Survey, comparing roads and tracks around Lumphanan. The historic road traversing the slopes of Stothill is highlighted in yellow, and appears to be the only significant road into Lumphanan from the south east prior to the construction of the turnpike (current A980) from Torphins.*

*1835 Estate map image courtesy of Ann Raeburn. Overlay image ©Deb Munro 2023.*



*A view of the historic road to Lumphanan, pre-dating the current turnpike road (A980). Now a grassy track in this section through the lower forest at Stothill.*



*The modern (turnpike) road approaching Lumphanan with Stothill forest and the new access location on the left.*

Fred suggested Highfield could make and use a parallel track for forestry vehicles to avoid the old track and extract the forest timber and fallen trees that way. He advised that heavy forest machinery prefers to operate over brushings of brushwood, preventing soil compaction. Fred also agreed to plot the old road on GPS as an exclusion zone, which will automatically alert machinery drivers if they get too close. Future planting would be set further away from the old road to help protect the route in the future.

Forest clearance for the access road has already started and can now be seen down to the roadside. Building the access road will follow: Highfield plan to head up the mast track and then work down to the public road on the western (Lumphanan) edge where the bellmouth will be created. This means they shouldn't need traffic lights on the road as construction will proceed down through the wood.

Fred informed us that the price of timber is still low and hardly profitable after the glut from storm Arwen so only fallen areas of trees will be removed. Highfield see it as a 5-10 year plan, removing this woodland, as they wait for the timber price to rise. This may make it easier to walk up towards the trig point but their boundary does not extend that far up.

When the forests on Stothill were planted in the late 1970s/early 80s little regard was given to ancient cairns, old stone walled tracks, ruined crofts or to how accessible extraction might be. (There is a very good article about this sort of planting in the Cromar History latest Magazine – “Echoes”, available from <https://www.cromarhistorygroup.org.uk/>). Fortunately, these historic remains are usually afforded more respect these days. As this is our local history, which makes our local walks so interesting, we should try to protect what is there.

Nearby (outwith the Highfield managed site), recent damage was done to the cairns in the east side of woodland during timber extraction after Storm Arwen. Needless to say LPG is keen to see historic remnants in all of the remaining forest protected. We are pleased with the assurances from Highfield Forestry about protecting the historic road, and no doubt folk will be keen to **safely** keep an eye on what goes on!

Watch this space for a change in the landscape as you enter Lumphanan!