

Tarland Burn

The Tarland Burn is a tributary of the River Dee. It has its source in the hills above Tarland, gathering water as it flows down to Aboyne. Here it joins the Dee and then flows into the sea at Aberdeen. When we travel the Tarland Way we cross the Tarland Burn twice, over the bridge at Heughead and the Otter Bridge.



Crossing the Tarland Burn at Otter Bridge

Tarland Burn has been here throughout history and is shown on early maps of Tarland and Migvie. It has always played a very important role in the lives of local people. If you look up at the remains of Coull Castle, between Heughead and the stone bridge at Coull, you will see that Tarland Burn also forms part of the defences for the castle. It would be almost impossible for enemies to attack the castle from the steep slope down to the water by the remains of the gatehouse tower and the 'donjon' (dungeon).

In the nineteenth century about 5 kilometres of the burn was made wider and deeper like a canal. It was dug out by men with shovels, which must have been very hard work before the days of diggers and dumper trucks. The canalisation helped to lessen flooding and drain the wet and boggy land in that area. This reclaimed land was very good for farming as the soil was richer and the crops grew better than they had when the fields were waterlogged. However this did mean that the water in the Tarland catchment area drained away very quickly leading to flooding further down stream in Aboyne. In recent years there have been attempts, once again to slow the drainage through the use of 'buffer strips', areas of land next to the banks that can absorb water. Also some other areas were allowed to flood and some wetland areas were created to trap water and slow down its run off.



This section was 'canalised'

There has been a lot of interest and research into the Tarland Burn because it is the first tributary of the Dee that flows through land that is used in many ways, such as forestry, livestock, game birds and housing. Sometimes these uses can lead to pollution when such things as chemicals, manure, wastewater and sewage run off the land and drain into the burn. When this happens the water quality is affected which is bad for the living organisms and the creatures that live in and around the burn and its banks.

Tarland Burn used to be one of the most polluted burns in the area. In the past the sewage works (waste water treatment plant) used to discharge into the Tarland Burn and even the water from the laundry in a nursing home used to flow into it. Tarland has a new waste water treatment plant now (near the Bird Hide) which ensures that waste water is cleaned before it enters the burn.



The River Dee near Potarch

Recently scientists and land managers (farmers) have been working together to improve the water quality by allowing water to pass through wetland areas and buffer strips before reaching the burn. This lessens the amount of pollution reaching the river Dee, protecting the living things in the water.

The burn and its banks are home to many different animals. You might see, otter, heron, dipper, frogs, brown trout and salmon, or signs that they have been there,.....Keep a lookout !!!