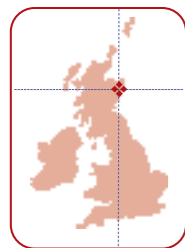




Colourful gardens at Crathes Castle, not far from the site

Bank account

John Bateman gives his views on a precious Club site in Banchory beside the glorious river Dee



Ordnance Survey Landranger Map 38

HIGH IN the snowy peaks of the Cairngorms, the river Dee springs into life and begins its purposeful 90-mile journey to the North Sea at Aberdeen. This sparkling gem of a waterway passes through some of the finest scenery Scotland has to offer as it cascades down over gleaming rocks, nourishes the scenic wonderland that is Royal Deeside, scurries along grassy glens and, from time to time, calls in on appreciative communities or rests awhile in crystal clear pools.

Salmon just love it and the river's fast-flowing, clean, glittering water has earned it a second title – the Silver Dee. What better name then than Silverbank for the Club site in Banchory, a busy little town alongside the river and overlooked by sheltering hills.

I have stayed at Silverbank many times over the years, watching its development in step with modern caravanning demands. It is not easy now to recall those earlier visits when, with its chunky wooden buildings, acres of open grassland and wide horizons,

the site almost warranted rolling up with a wagon and team of horses.

It was a site, I recall writing, where the Club met *Little House On The Prairie* but, oh my, what a difference now! Manicured lawns, colourful flowerbeds, decorative specimen trees, hardstanding pitches, hook-ups for all, plus the modern shower and toilet facilities that we have come to expect on a Club site – it's all there.

We may be in the Great Outdoors yet Banchory's shops are within walking distance and Aberdeen is just 20 miles away. There are castles in all directions and the Grampian Mountains, Cairngorms

buildings that retain the charm and character of the site's youthful days. Tasteful, sensitive development is not all that common these days but you'll find it here.

Happily, though, one thing hasn't changed – the wardens sit in wood-clad

National Park and Deeside's many splendours are spread out invitingly close.

With Braemar and the Club's Invercauld site only 40 miles away along the scenic A93, Silverbank is, for many, half of a two-site break. However, its facilities, quality and location mean it stands firmly on its own feet as a holiday base – as Aberdeen folk know well. With town and city options Silverbank scores highly, even if it's rainy – but in this north-eastern area, the dry weather record is better than average.

Silverbank is a members-only site, its flat 4½ acres comfortably accommodating 62 all-hardstanding pitches set into lawned, open areas that are easy on the eye. The toilet block, with privacy cubicles, also has the sort of vegetable preparation and laundry facilities you would expect. Television reception, I am informed, is good and Freeview is available. Dog walkers should take advantage of a woodland track just up the road from the site that leads to a number of paths running beside the river.

One, following an old railway line, avoids the water's edge, but you can walk closer to the river, which is a delight as long as your children and dog don't take chances with the Dee's power and depth. Acrobatic fish and a hungry heron provided company on my morning outings.

Banchory, where parkland merges pleasingly with urban bustle, is a popular spot offering plenty of things to do, particularly for active visitors. If you want to conserve energy and don't fancy walking into town, public transport is available 100 yards from the site. Ballater and Braemar are also within range beyond Banchory.

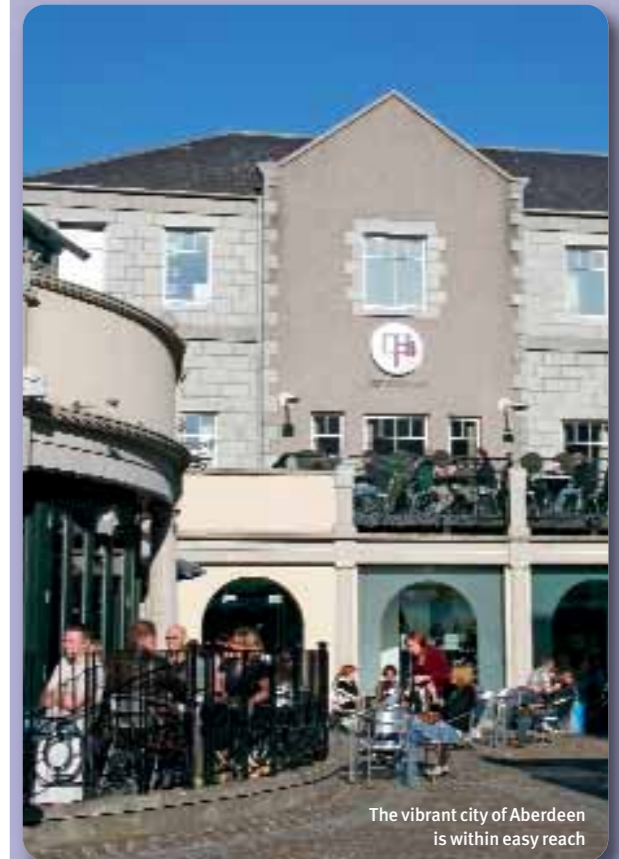
The Invercauld has for years been the local chart-topper where caravanning winter sports enthusiasts and others who want to spend Christmas and New Year in Deeside are concerned – but keep an eye on Silverbank's opening dates.

This year the site stayed open until early January as an experiment to test pitch demand, and I, for one, would wager that Wardens Errol and Kerry Crowe made it a fun and successful venture worthy of repeat. Unsurprisingly, Hogmanay was a sell-out.

Crathes Castle, with its fine interiors and colourful gardens, is another attraction within walking distance of the site and Drum Castle is less than 10 miles away. Then there's Balmoral and... Well, you've got the picture I'm sure. Make time to visit the Bridge of Feugh, just outside Banchory, from which you can enjoy mesmeric views of tumbling white water surging over rocks. Time it right and you will see salmon leaping, but you will find that the non-stop river drama, like much of the scenery in these parts, is highly satisfying even without the fish course. Silverbank serves it all up on a plate. ■

DID YOU KNOW?

Banchory Golf Club, beside the Dee, was established in 1905



The vibrant city of Aberdeen is within easy reach

INFORMATION

SITE

Full details can be found on p246 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2009/10*



TOURISM

- **Aberdeen City & Shire** – call 01224 288828 or see aberdeen-grampian.com
- **Banchory TIC** (seasonal) – call 01330 822000
- **Ballater TIC** – call 01339 755306
- **Braemar TIC** – call 01339 741600

CYCLING

Follow the Deeside Way, a mostly traffic-free railway path, all the way to Aberdeen. See sustrans.org.uk for more information.

ATTRACTIONS

- **Crathes Castle**, Banchory – call 0844 493 2166 or see nts.org.uk
- **Storybook Glen**, Maryculter – theme park full of fairytale characters. Call 01224 732941 or see storybookglenaberdeen.co.uk
- **Cairngorms National Park** – call 01479 873535 or see cairngorms.co.uk
- **Balmoral** – grounds, gardens and exhibitions open daily from 1 April until 31 July. Call 013397 42534 or see balmoral.castle.com
- **Satrosphere Science Centre**, Aberdeen – call 01224 640340 or see satrosphere.net
- **The Boat Inn**, Aboyne – call 01339 886137 or see theboatinnaboyne.co.uk
- **Deeside Activity Park**, Dess – outdoor activities centre offering quad biking, archery and more. Call 01339 883536 or see deesideactivitypark.com
- **Banchory** – lit up by thousands of spring bulbs planted in November by local volunteers