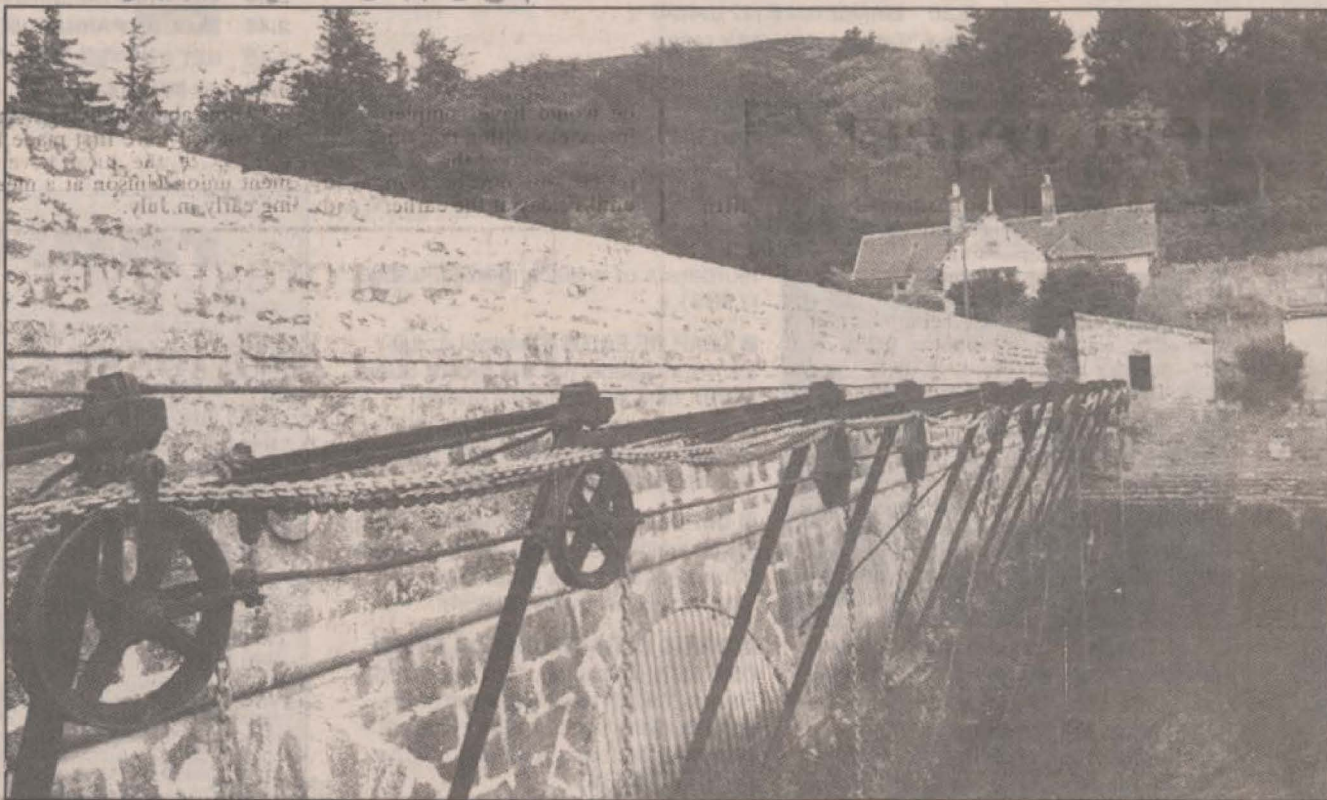


Trust finds home at Mound in ex-sluikekeeper's cottage

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■ The old Sluicekeeper's Cottage at The Mound, which the Scottish Wildlife Trust is planning to convert to a visitor centre.

THE Scottish Wildlife Trust has secured a home to set up its most northerly visitor centre.

It is buying the disused sluicekeeper's cottage at the north end of the Mound causeway in East Sutherland to provide year-round cover of the Loch Fleet Nature Reserve.

Fund-raising to achieve the £30,000 asking price is the culmination of the trust's three-year effort.

It will be used as a permanent base for a ranger and naturalist — the trust has had a seasonal ranger at the reserve for over a decade.

□ JUDITH NAPIER

Donations and with grant aid from Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise met the purchase price. Corporate sponsorship from United Distillers, owners of Clynelish Distillery at Brora, will help with the running costs.

The property was owned by Sutherland Estates prior to being bought by the Scottish Development Department during upgrading of the A9.

Case's £10,000 investment towards capital costs was allowed because the cottage was

not for sale on the open market.

Dr Kenneth Taylor, northern trust officer based near Culbokie, said: "There is amazing enthusiasm among both members and supporters, who like the idea of what we are doing at Loch Fleet.

"We are very optimistic that once we get things up and running it will generate a lot of interest in local towns."

The trust has 1,000 members in the North.

Loch Fleet Nature Reserve, straddling Sutherland and Cambusmore Estates, is

renowned for its woodlands, ospreys, wildcats and otters, plus outstanding birdlife on the estuary, a stopover point for wildfowl and wading birds.

Views to the West include the Mound pool and alder woods, and the sea to the east.

Dr Taylor said: "It really is custom made as it stands with beautiful views and signed car parking already there."

The Mound is a popular visitor stop for viewing salmon leaping. The visitor centre will feature interpretive displays, facilities for school tours and an expanded programme of guided walks.