

## BEINN A' GHLO.

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HIGH up among the round-backed mountains of Athole—a central disturbance on the troubled expanse of moorland that stretches unbroken from the Dee to the Garry, from the meadows of Angus to the struggling cultivation of Upper Strathspey—rise the triple peaks of Beinn a' Ghlo (the mountain of mist).

Lying wholly in Perthshire, and jealously guarded against access from Deeside by leagues of solitary moorland, it attracts but a small proportion of the crowd of visitors who gather in the season at Inverey and Braemar, and spread themselves broadcast over the other hills in the neighbourhood. To the nobler dust of the Cairngormer even, it is comparatively unknown. He has seen it many a time from Ben Muich Dhui, lifting its shapely crest high over the brown hills of Mar, or peering over the steep walls of Glen Tilt; but, unless he is more widely travelled than his fellows, he knows only by hearsay of the glories which await him on the summit. I had long been in that tantalising position, worshipping it from afar, but never finding an opportunity to make a nearer approach, till, in company with a clubmate, I made the ascent last month from Blair Athole. Approached from this, its vulnerable side, the mountain is really one of the most readily accessible in the central Highlands. From the railway station Carn Liath (3193), the outermost summit, is distant only  $4\frac{3}{4}$  miles in a bee-line, and a strong climber will make the ascent to Carn nan Gabhar, the highest peak, in less than four hours.

To reach Carn Liath from Blair Athole the route generally adopted is by Monzie farm, which stands in a most commanding position at the base of the mountain, some 800 feet above sea level. Monzie is  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the station, and is approached by a steep, winding road passing the Falls of Fender. The custom is to leave this road opposite the farm, and, after crossing some unpleasantly



rough and boggy ground, to follow the steep south-eastern ridge of the mountain, till it lands you at the summit. The better plan, however, is to follow the road past Loch Moraig till it reaches a sheep fence running straight up the face of the mountain, which is here at its steepest. Having no guiding hand to direct us except that of a rustic, who pointed to Carn Liath as the top of Beinn a' Ghlo, we left the road at the farm, crossed a few arable acres, climbed over a succession of palings, dodged the boggy ground to the best of our ability, and at last (blessed moment!) found ourselves on the bare hillside. The ridge now shot up from our feet in a perfectly straight line to the summit, and as we toiled slowly upwards, stopping occasionally to admire the view, we could appreciate the appropriateness of the name—"grey or hoary cairn". The hillside, from 1700 feet upwards, is broken up into a number of bare patches, which, added to the large blocks of quartzite that everywhere abound, give rise to a mottled appearance, which, at a distance, is translated into a dull grey. Quartzite being the geological formation of the mountain, these blocks are exceedingly common.

We had left Blair Athole at 11 o'clock, but so much time had been spent over lunch and those rough acres at the base of the hill that it was now approaching half-past two. The heat was intense, and the haze so thick that even Ben Vrackie, lying close at hand across the valley, had a blurred and misty appearance; while Schichallion, usually so majestic a figure, might easily have been mistaken for a dark cloud, so dim and shadowy was its outline. The heat and the gradient combined (the latter averaging  $28^{\circ}$ ) made climbing the reverse of easy, and I will not deny that a shout of joy went forth from two thirsty throats when the last ridge was topped, and a final spurt over the almost level summit placed us alongside the cairn (2:30).

View there was none except in one direction, but that was worth all the pains of the ascent. Lying on the opposite side of the deep, trench-like hollow which cuts into the steep northern face of Carn Liath, and connected with the latter by a narrow ridge, sloping gently to the west and



sharply to the east, were the two sister summits of Braigh Coire Chruinn-bhlagain (3505) and Carn nan Gabhar (3671). A more perfect specimen of mountain architecture, depending for its effect principally upon the happy proportion of the component parts, I had never before seen. There is nothing quite like it in the Cairngorms, which, in several respects, it most resembles, and especially in the absence of warmth and colour. Cold, grey, lifeless, scree slopes, streaked with the *debris* of a hundred water-courses, and bereft of all traces of verdure, except where, here and there, patches of scrubby heath crop out through the stones, make a gloomy and colourless picture; but the sharpness of the intersecting ridges and the extent and variety of the corries—all wild and desolate and storm-riven—raise the scene to a level of grandeur at which such faults almost appear virtues.

But time is flying, and we must away. Our course now leads us along the ridge before referred to, and as we can see that it dips to an unknown depth before joining Braigh Coire Chruinn-bhlagain (the brae of the round, bag-shaped corrie), we knit our muscles for fresh climbing. But the dip is less than we expected, the aneroid stopping on its downward career and beginning to reascend with its masters at 2550 feet. The ascent is easy and gradual, and, with the expenditure of the least possible amount of energy, we reach the summit of the polysyllabic peak (420). View worse than ever, except backwards to Carn Liath and forwards across the Bealach an Fhiodha to the summit of "all Beinn a' Ghlo"—Carn nan Gabhar (the goat's cairn). This Bealach an Fhiodha (pass of the timber) rises to a height of 2893 feet, and literally, as one writer puts it, "cuts the mountain in two". Be it observed, however, that it is the *col*, or highest point, which is called the Bealach an Fhiodha. The real pass, of which the Bealach is the summit level, begins at Glen Tilt, about two miles to the north of Forest Lodge, and extends as far south almost as the northern slopes of Carn Liath. From end to end it rejoices in the name of Glas Leathad, and is watered on the Glen Tilt side by the Allt Fheannach, a goodly stream, of whose waters we would gladly have drunk, as we crossed the Bealach and



breasted the 780 feet of ascent on the opposite side. At 6:20 we stood at the top of Carn nan Gabhar, and mournfully surveyed, *on a slip of paper*, the hills which we *would* have seen had the day been clear. For the benefit of the Cairngorm party this month, I cannot do better than reproduce the list, which is taken from the current number of the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*:—

“Due north are the Cairngorms, Cairn Toul, fifteen miles off, appearing over the broad moorland of Beinn Bhrotain, which is three miles nearer; Braeriach behind it, Ben Muich Dhui next, and then the uninteresting uplands of Beinn a' Bhuird; while to the left of Braeriach, across Carn an Fhidleir and An Sgarsoch, the moorland culminating in Sgoran Dubh. Eighteen miles E.N.E., Lochnagar stands out; while the level tops of the Braes of Angus, Glas Maol, &c., lie to the right, and somewhat nearer. Four and a half miles off, just across Loch Loch, rises the fine conical Carn an Righ, with Beinn Iutharn Mhor—Ben Uarn—on its left, and Glas Thulachan on its right, Mor Shron (Morrone Hill), above Braemar, being visible between them. Mount Blair, fourteen miles E.S.E. above the Kirkton of Glenisla, is easily distinguishable, tapering above the round-topped Forfarshire hills. Across the broad Strathmore, many of the details of which can be made out, rise the Sidlaws, culminating in Craig Owl, some thirty-two miles off. Behind them may be seen the smoke of Dundee. Further off to the right, the two Fifeshire Lomonds are conspicuous; while, when there is a strong wind to blow away the smoke, the Pentlands, seventy-five miles away, are plainly seen. Due south, and some forty miles away, are the billowy Ochils. Close at hand Ben Vrackie, above Killiecrankie, always graceful; and some way further off, above Dunkeld, Birnam Hill. Standing out from the heathery uplands, which rise to the south side of Loch Tay, is Ben Chonzie. Next come Ben Vorlich and Stuc a' Chroin, Ben Ledi, forty-seven miles off; Am Binnein (and presumably also Ben More), seen over Ben Lawers, Carn Mairg, and Schichallion, twenty miles off, but looking quite near. Nearer and lower, the broken topped Farragon Hill above Loch Tummel; Ben Cruachan, the Black Mount range; Ben Nevis, Ben Alder, and his neighbours, seen over Beinn Udlaman and the flat uplands of Dunnochter; while across Glen Tilt, Beinn Dearg, nine miles W.N.W., completes the circle. I



may add, from a recent visit to the Western Cairngorms in very clear weather, that it is certain that the whole range of the Western Inverness-shire and Ross-shire mountains, from Mam Sodhail, and possibly also Sgurr Fhuaran, as far as Ben Wyvis, including the Fannich mountains and the Ross-shire Beinn Dearg, can also be seen from Beinn a' Ghlo".

Shaping our course, after a halt at the cairn (there are three in all, but the centre one is the highest), along the ridge towards Meall Gharran, we passed a succession of magnificent corries, of which the largest—Coire Cas-eagal-lach (the terribly rough corrie)—falls in a series of break-neck pitches to little Loch Loch, lying snugly and picturesquely in the hollow between Carn nan Gabhar and Feith Ghuibhsachain (the Fir-tree Bog), whose acquaintance we were to make anon. Loch Loch is as fanciful in appearance as its name suggests. It is divided into three reaches by narrow tongues of land, which shoot out from both shores, and almost meet in the centre. Seen from above, with its mirror-like surface lying calm and peaceful, it looked like a gigantic hour-glass dropped into the hollow of the glen. It is said to be the home of quite a colony of trout and char.

Further north there is another corrie (Mearach), the appearance of which we liked better than the last, so we proceeded to make the descent. As a lesson in involuntary gymnastics the experience was perhaps not without value, but it had no other advantages which two weary mountaineers could be expected to appreciate. After at least a dozen falls, we reached the bottom, and, looking back, agreed that, if there is one thing worse than coming down, it is going up. I ought to mention that, scattered all over this part of the hill, we came upon numerous patches of cloud-berries bursting into blossom—an eloquent and delightful tribute to the earliness of the season.

The day was now drawing to a close, and the question uppermost in our minds was, how to get off the moorland before darkness settled down. Ultimately we decided to steer for the Pitlochry road, lying in an easterly direction from Loch Loch. To reach it we had to cross the Fir-tree



Bog, with regard to which I will only say, that it is a very prince of bogs, and, like all majesty, not to be lightly or irreverently approached. Darkness was closing around us as we cleared the last ditch, and, stepping from the heather, felt the firm road under foot. A thin mist was driving up from the south, stealing along the ground and enveloping everything in its silent embrace; but, above all, still and motionless in the clear air, the huge forms of the hills stood black against the pallid heavens. Not a sound was to be heard save the dull murmur of the mountain torrents, the cry of a grouse, or the bark of a wandering deer in the far-off glen. Then the moon rose in splendour over all and bore us grateful company on our homeward way.

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NOTE.—Reference has been made in the above article to the Club excursion arranged for this month. It will probably be found advantageous then to make the descent by an easier and more direct route than that described by Mr. Brown. From the top of Carn nan Gabhar a northerly course should be kept on the east side of Glas Leathad. By this route the head of Coire Cas-eagallach as well as Coire Mearach will be passed on the right. Allt Fheannach should be crossed near its junction with the Tilt. A very few yards below the confluence a bridge crosses the Tilt, the Glen track being on the right bank. The walk down Glen Tilt to Forest Lodge will be found exceedingly picturesque. The Tilt at Dail-an-eas Bridge, a short distance above Forest Lodge, is particularly interesting; while the road from the Lodge to Blair Athole is as pleasant a drive as could be desired.—ED.