

THE CAIRNGORM MOUNTAINS.

I.—THE EASTERN CAIRNGORMS.

BY ALEX. INKSON M'CONNOCHIE.

“Hills of the roe and deer,
Hills of the streamlets clear,
I love ye well”.

THE Cairngorm Mountains are a great cluster in the long Grampian chain which, with various ramifications, stretches across Scotland. While authorities are not at one as to what should be included under the name “Grampian”, there is no dubiety as to the boundaries of its most important group, the Cairngorm Mountains.* They are naturally divided into three sections—the Central, the Eastern, and the Western. The Learg Ghruamach separates the Central from the Western, and the Learg an Laoigh the Central from the Eastern. Beinn a' Bhuid (3924) and Ben Avon (3843) are the two principal summits in the latter division.†

* The Cairngorms comprehend an area of about 300 square miles of mountainous land in the centre of Scotland—the largest, and, for its extent, the highest on the mean above sea level in the British Isles. Occupying conterminous tracts in the highest parts of the Counties of Aberdeen, Inverness, and Banff, in the districts of Braemar, Badenoch, and Strathspey, the Cairngorms are bounded on the south by the Dee, westwards from Gleann an t-Slugain, and the Geldie; on the west by the Feshie from the Geldie to the Spey; on the north-west by the Spey between the Feshie and the Nethy; and on the east by the Learg an Laoigh to the Avon; thence, on the north, by the Avon to Inchrory; and thence, on the east, by Glen Bulg and the Bealach Dearg to the Dee.

† Mr. Lionel Hinxman, B.A., of the Geological Survey of Scotland, thus writes to the Editor on the geology of the district:—“Beinn a' Bhuid and Ben Avon form the eastern extremity of the great elevated plateau of granite that extends with a mean elevation of about 3800 feet for many miles along the borders of Aberdeen, Banff, and Inverness, and out of which the Cairngorm Mountains have been carved in the course of ages by the slow processes of denudation. Flanked on either side by the metamorphic schists and quartzites of the Highlands, the main mass of these mountains consists entirely of granite. The typical Cairngorm granite is flesh-coloured, coarse in grain, and composed chiefly of orthoclase felspar and glassy quartz, with a little black mica, varying in

Beinn a' Bhuid (the table mountain—so named from its flat summit) is mainly on the watershed of the Quoich in Aberdeenshire and the Avon in Banffshire. The summit is about seven miles, in an N.N.W. direction, from Castleton of Braemar, on the county march, in the parishes of Crathie-Braemar and Kirkmichael. Two cairns, about one and three-quarter miles apart, mark its great broad back, one at the North Top (the highest point) and the other at the South Top (3860). Ben Avon (the river mountain—perhaps from its numerous streamlets) is mainly on the watershed of the Gairn in Aberdeenshire and the Avon. The distance between it and Beinn a' Bhuid is a little over two and a half miles—the narrow connecting link is known as "The Sneek"—both mountains being in the same parishes. The principal dependencies of Beinn a' Bhuid are:—Cnap a' Chleirich (3811), Stob an t-Sluichd (3621), Beinn a' Chaorruinn (3553), Beinn a' Chaorruinn Bheag (3326), and Beinn Bhreac (3051); while Ben Avon includes Mullach Lochan nan Gabhar (3662), Stuc Gharbh Mhor (3625), Clach a' Chuitseich (3605), Carn Eas (3556), West Meur Gorm Craig (3354), East Meur Gorm Craig (3075), the two Craigandals, and Meall na Gainneimh (2989), with Clach Bhan (about 2800).

The Eastern Cairngorms, though comparatively *terra incognita*,* may be ascended from any side, but the most

amount, and sometimes altogether absent. The action of the atmosphere on the felspar causes the rock to disintegrate rapidly when exposed to the weather, while the more indestructible quartz grains falling apart go to make up the coarse sand which covers the hill-tops in many places. A striking feature of Ben Avon, as of many other granite hills, is the isolated tors that rise like great castles from the level summit. These represent harder portions of the rock which have to a certain degree resisted the wearing-down process. The rudely parallel, horizontal jointing, along which the rock most readily weathers, gives these tors the appearance of being built of Cyclopæan masonry".

* "Ben Avon's jagged peaks of protruding granite, as seen over the intervening hills, form one of the most attractive glimpses of mountain scenery to be got from the neighbourhood of Castleton. But, we daresay, of the visitors there who have seen and admired its rugged beauty from the banks of the Cluny, not one in a thousand has managed to find his way to the summit".—"Our Tour", by Alexander Copland (1880).

convenient points are Loch Builg—which may be reached either by Glen Gairn, Glen Feardar, or Glen Builg; Tomin-toul and Upper Donside, *via* Inchrory; and Braemar, *via* Gleann an t-Slugain* (the Queen's route). The direct ascent of Beinn a' Bhuid is made by the last route; while Ben Avon is most readily reached, from Ballater, *via* Loch Builg. Starting from Ballater, the Deeside road is left just beyond Bridge of Gairn, then up the Gairn all the way to Loch Builg, a total distance of 15 miles. Glen Gairn, with its broad rippling stream from Ben Avon, is typically Highland. Entering the glen its birch-clad slopes at once attract, juniper and bog myrtle also adding to its charms. Cultivation is confined to a narrow belt, sometimes contracting to vanishing point, at others laboriously broadening into crofts on the left bank. Glen Gairn has not forgotten its dedication to St. Mungo, while numerous thatch-covered houses are yet to be found. Its matrons and maidens are adepts at "a Scottish Washing", and if they have forgotten the art of making wine from the birches at their doors, they are still familiar with crotal. The "skirlin" curlew, the whistling plover, and the noisy oyster-catcher unite with the heath-cock in making the glen lively; while the sportsman might fill his bag from the road—where "cheepers" oft promenade. Sheep take the place of cows where the heather-covered soil refuses to be tickled into crop-bearing; but beyond the habitations of men the red deer claims possession. Last autumn a horn of a *Bos albifrons* was discovered in moss near Loch Builg at the root of a stump. It bears marks of fire; probably the animal had perished in one of the traditional forest fires.

Some few miles up Glen Gairn maps still show "Rinloan Inn"; but the inn has gone, as have the drovers from Speyside and Donside.† Above Rinloan, just before recrossing the Gairn, Daldownie, devoted to sheep, is passed; then

* Colloquially "Glen Sluggan", but formerly known as Glen Candlic; *cf.* Inverchandlic Cottage on the north side of the Dee almost opposite the confluence of the Cluny with the Dee.

† A "shoppie" has taken the place of the inn; here milk, &c. (occasionally a bed), may be had.

Corndavon Lodge, the uppermost permanently inhabited house, and the centre of a grouse moor, reposing in a tree-lined corrie at the foot of Brown Cow Hill, is reached. Thus approaching Ben Avon, a cursory glance gives one the idea of massiveness rather than picturesqueness. But gradually its merits dawn upon us, and the "mountain of the river" becomes a thing of beauty. Two of its huge "knots" or knobs of rock, marking the summit, are now particularly prominent. These are recognisable from distant points both on Spey and Dee, notably from the Blue Hill. Its north and south faces are much scarred by streamlets, in the upper corries of which snow often lingers beyond summer;* while its eastern front is cut up by deep hollows with steep braes—Loch Builg and its pretty little glen the extreme boundary.

Loch Builg lies at an altitude of 1586 feet, and is just within the Banffshire boundary. Apparently it drains into the Builg Burn and so by the Avon to the Spey, but it is actually on the watershed *between* the Spey and the Dee, flowing to *both* these rivers—for the outlet northwards is insignificant, and, at times, is dried up altogether, while there is a perennial subterranean flow to the Gairn. A burn on Loch Brae, at the head of the loch, forks in spates, sending its waters down the Brae right and left—to the Dee and the Spey. There are no fewer than eight lochans at the south end of the loch, all within the Aberdeenshire border. The largest of these is called Lochan Ora (the golden lochlet) † and the next Lochan Feurach. The latter has a

* "There I saw Mount Benawne, with a furr'd mist upon his snowie head instead of a nightcap: for you must understand that the oldest man alive never saw but the snow on the top of divers of those hills, both in summer as well as in winter".—"The Pennyless Pilgrimage, or the Moneylesse Perambulation of John Taylor, *alias* the King's Majesties Water-Poet" (1618). ". . . . the hill of Glen Avon, which is a very high and rugged mountain; . . . and is so cold that snow is ever to be found in its hollows, which are many, even in the hottest summer".—"Don: A Poem" (Notes).

† Lochan Ora was at one time believed to contain gold. An enterprising Gael commenced operations with a view to drain the loch and so find the precious metal. But the guardian water-kelpie appeared, and the

bubbling spring at its north end—the subterranean flow from Loch Builg. Here it looks as though a few hours of a couple of spade-men would drain out all the water of the loch—a catastrophe which, according to popular belief, is provided against in the Invercauld title deeds!* Loch Builg is about three-quarters of a mile in length, with a breadth of about a furlong. The slope on its west side is Loch Brae; on the east is Carn Ullie, a minor height of the Geal Charns from which issues the Don. It abounds in charr and trout, but is perhaps rather under-fished. Two tiny islets adorn the north end; wild birds, from geese downwards, are at times to be seen in the neighbourhood. Glen Builg, winding along, continually presents new views to the pedestrian. The Bealach Dearg—here now all but impassable for wheels†—runs through it; it is believed to be a portion of an old Roman road which extended from Glen Shee to Speyside. An old right-of-way, it leaves the Braemar turnpike at the churchyard, and passing between Culardoch (2953) and Carn Liath (2821) makes for the Gairn, which it crosses due south from Loch Builg. But a driving road more to the east has recently been provided by the proprietor. This new road branches from the Aberarder road in Glen Feardar and crosses the Gairn near the same point as the Bealach Dearg.

Loch Builg Cottage is on the estate of Invercauld, at the south end of the loch and directly at the foot of Carn Dearg (2538), marked on some old maps “Red Cairn”, one of the

Highlander barely escaped with life! Another version has it that here “a bull’s skin full of gold was sunk by a man going to the wars. Some tried to drain the lochan (the marks may still be seen), but a red-capped apparition sent them to flight”.

* Despite the county march, the south shore of the loch belongs to Invercauld, who pays a nominal rent to the Duke of Richmond and Gordon for the right to fish and have a boat on the loch. A tradition still lingers in the district that if the water should run out at the south end, instead of the north, the loch would belong to Invercauld. The position reminds one of the vagaries of the head-stream of the Don.

† “The Bealach Dearg’s the roughest road
My weary feet hae ever trod”.

—John Milne’s “Poems in the Aberdeenshire Dialect”.

lesser eminences of Ben Avon. An unyielding deer fence and an upright forester separate the cottage from the Bealach, but an "Open Sesame" from Allt Dowrie gave the editorial party a few days' freedom of cottage and forest. Inchrory Lodge on the Avon, at the mouth of Glen Builg (about three miles distant), and Corndavon Lodge, nearly the same distance down the Gairn, are the nearest houses. The cottage is only in use during "the season". A thunder-storm, apparently issuing from the head of Glen Gairn, followed our arrival, but it soon passed away.* Thereafter we had a pleasant row down the loch; a hunt for ferns in some of the little gorges that open into the glen; and a clamber to see the young Don. Then back to the cottage, finishing the day with an ascent of Carn Dearn, reached by a pony-path from the back of the cottage. From this summit, a great heather-clad slope, Big Brae, well named, faced us across Feith an Laoigh, a grassy hollow, with a stream, the main source of the Builg Burn. Carn Dearn is on the county march, and is continued westward by Carn Tiekeiver, a slightly lower eminence.

There are two routes from Loch Builg to the top of Ben Avon, one proceeding by Carn Dearn, the other by the Gairn and its chief tributary, Allt an Eas Mhoir, colloquially the Meikle Eas. Preference may be given to the ascent by Carn Dearn, descending in that case by Meikle Eas. Moreover, if one cares, after having negotiated Carn Dearn, a descent may be made to the Feith Burn, and the summit will be easily reached by its head streams. But he who will climb will make for the *col*—having crossed over, or along, Carns Dearn and Tiekiever; the path is continued by the left bank of Allt Phouple, ending at a height of 2800 feet, about 400 feet below the source of that burn. Once on the ridge the rocky humps, the Barns of Ben Avon, are found to be very numerous; very probably they have never been numbered, and certainly they have never all been named. As we ascend we pass by not a few,

* For a description of a thunder-storm on the Cairngorms as seen from Ben Avon, see "Deeside Tales", by Rev. J. G. Michie (1872).

some not particularly worthy of notice; but the pinnacles of Stuc Gharbh Mhor on the left attract attention, and the Stuc is seen to be appropriately named. Clach a' Chuitseich, however, excels its neighbours in bulk and height; it is on the county march, but Aberdeenshire claims the greater part of the rock. The Clach rises, or rather has been left standing, on a little plain. The origin of the name (Coutts's Stone) has been lost; the modern name is "Invercauld's Stables", from deer ponies being often taken there. Nearly a quarter of a mile to the north is another big "wart", the highest point of Mullach Lochan nan Gabhar. We made our way along the "Mullach" to the head of Caol Ghleann. Westward we had Stob an t-Sluichd; northward the Avon; and eastward, close at hand, Lochan nan Gabhar, beyond which are the Meur Gorm Craigs. The lochan is grandly situated at the north end of the "Mullach", almost encompassed by crags about 600 feet in height, while green patches on its north-western side add to its picturesqueness. Its confined situation, however, prevents its being much frequented by deer. It holds trout, but they are reported to be "soft". Last season a stag was shot just above the lochan, with the result that he fell to the bank, smashed beyond use. The Meur Gorm Craigs are long ridges with rocky outcrops; between them, at the head of Meur Gorm, the dividing stream, is a rock known as "The Man's Face" on account of its outline. North-east of the Craigs is Meall na Gaineimh with Clach Bhan—reserved for another day. There is an interesting rock between the head of Caol Ghleann and Coire Odhar, Clach Bun Ruadh-tair, but which foresters now expressively call "The Needles".

We turn our backs on Caol Ghleann with regret. Where it joins the Avon the name (the narrow glen) is appropriate; but it soon loses its significance. We wander from rock to rock, interested in the disintegration that is going on day by day, in which process innumerable "pot-holes" play an important part. A particular halt was made at Stob Dubh Bruach an Fhurain and Sron na h-Iolaire admired, while a low, artificial, stone enclosure—probably the remains of a

forester's "shelter"—rather puzzled us. But, presently, a great patch of snow in Garbh Choire, at the head of Allt an t-Sluichd, with numerous dark objects dotted over it, attracted our attention. The telescope revealed a big family party of hinds and calves. The day was warm and breezeless, and so the deer lolled with evident zest on the snow. Anon a few would get up, stretch their legs, and nibble at the snow; then one or two would walk off seeking the surrounding pasture, but soon returning to their fellows. Calves formed the bulk of the party, not a few hinds being followed by two or three calves of different years. At a very moderate computation over a thousand deer were seen at pretty close quarters in the course of the day. But at last we made for the summit rock; we had started at six o'clock and it was now eleven. This tor is called Clach an t-Saighdeir (the soldier's rock), and lies nearly three-quarters of a mile due west from Clach a' Chutseich. It is, like the latter, an enormous mass of weathered and fissured granite, with the Ordnance Survey cairn *above*; the rock of Cloch-naben—which, large though it is, would on Ben Avon be considered nothing remarkable—is, on the other hand, ignored in the height. Clach an t-Saighdeir can be easily climbed from the north side, but presents a precipitous front of about a hundred feet to the south. "Pot-holes" show themselves even here, and, in time, will complete the splitting up, in default of other natural causes, of this masonry of nature. Snow buntings flitted around it, caring little for our presence,* and evidences were not wanting of recent visits of eagles and foxes. A couple of Snow buntings nested in a certain corrie of Beinn a' Bhuid in 1893; in which year also, in one day, was found on Ben Avon a Snow bunting's nest, as well as that of a Dotterel—a bird now exceedingly rare.

The first feeling on sitting down on the Clach of Ben Avon was one of intense satisfaction, for both the mountain and the prospect exceeded anticipation. The near view was charming, the distant magnificent and full of problems,

* For an account of the finding of a Snow bunting's nest on Ben Avon, see "Annals of Scottish Natural History", Vol. II., page 181.

some of which were left unsolved. The prospect included :— The Cairnwell and Glen Ey hills, Beinn a' Ghlo, Farragon Hills (?), Beinn a' Bhuird, Beinn Bhrotain, Ben Muich Dhui, Braeriach, Beinn Mheadhoin, Cairngorm, Stob an t-Sluichd, Ben Bynac (with its Barns and Little Barns), Meall a' Bhuachaille, Strathspey, Glen Avon, Ben Rinnes, Corryhabbie Hill, Cook's Cairn, Buck, Tap o' Noth, Bennachie, Knock, Morven, Hill of Fare, Clochnaben, Mount Battock, Coyles of Muick, Mount Keen, Conachcraig Hill, Capel Mounth, Meikle Pap, Lochnagar, and Carn Liath.* Ben Avon, like its big neighbour, has been called "broad-backed", but this term is scarcely applicable. True it has no sharp central ridge, but fairly steep ascents can easily be found by those who regard a mountain as otherwise uninteresting. The general appearance to the south, with which most are familiar, is much inferior to that on the north where "combs" or "fiacaills", crags and gorges, not to mention the Barns, amply redeem Ben Avon from any suspicion of mediocrity. Nor must it be forgotten that it was formerly famous for its "cairngorms", the Eastern Cairngorms producing larger specimens of these stones than Cairngorm itself.† In 1810, the Rev. Dr. George Skene Keith writes‡

* "We saw the Moray Firth and the coast of Sutherland or Caithness, in which direction the atmosphere was clearest. . . . The Hill of Fare was also a distinct object, and Morven painfully so as there was no seeing over his broad back. . . . We took in the whole northern face of Lochnagar, and in the mid-distance the Castleton, Invercauld, and the green wooded valley of the Dee for miles. . . . To the west Beinn a' Bhuird shut out Cairn Toul, but did not prevent us from looking up Glen Avon to Ben Muich Dhui with its accustomed snowy mantle, on the Feith Buidhe above Loch Avon, nor Cairngorm and his gigantic associates, Ben Bynac and Beinn Mheadhoin".—"A Day on Ben Avon", by Alexander Copland.

† "The largest rock crystal ever found in Scotland is in the possession of Mr. Farquharson of Invercauld, and was found upon his estate in this county [Aberdeen]. It is nearly the size of a child's body at the age of four, and has a small crystal shot out from it. On Mr. Farquharson's estate have also been got amethysts and *aqua marines*, equal both in colour and hardness to the oriental".—"Scots Magazine" (1798). This stone was found by a Castleton woman, Effie Murray, on the top of Ben Avon in 1788. The weight is 49 lbs., the girth 26 ins., and the length 20 ins. It is said that Invercauld gave £40 for it.

‡ "Agriculture of Aberdeenshire".

that "several Scottish topazes and beryls" have been found both on Ben Avon and Beinn a' Bhuid; while in 1814 an artist-writer makes rather startling statements about the value of such stones.* But in 1830 slightly more moderate language is used.† The Meikle Eas rises between Clach an t-Saighdeir and Clach a' Chutseich, within the lower fork of which may yet be seen the ruins of a building which was the temporary residence, about eighty years ago, of a party of "miners".‡ The mountaineer will frequently stumble across traces on the Eastern Cairngorms of "mining operations"—notably by the Meikle Eas, along which a track, stony enough in many places, leads to the path in Glen Gairn. By the burn-side, above the "miners' hut", there is a "Poachers' Cave" capable of sheltering about half-a-dozen men.

Starting for Beinn a' Bhuid, we soon find ourselves at the head of the Sneck, overlooking the Meikle Slochd on the right. A "big hollow" it undoubtedly is. There is nothing like it among the other Cairngorms, unless one can picture the gorge of Loch Avon without the loch, or better still, Loch Eunach, only the ravine is longer. The depth varies from 1000 to 1500 feet, and, drained by Allt an t-Sluichd, a north flowing tributary of the Avon, the length is about three miles. The Sneck, or Saddle, as such

* "Ben Avon has recently become famous for the beautiful crystals that have been discovered on it: on that part of the mountain which belongs to the Invercauld estate many precious stones of the beryl and topaz kind have been found; the value of one of these was estimated at £1000, and some others at £500 each".—"Scenery of the Grampian Mountains", by G. Fennell Robson.

† "Ben Avon is at present reckoned the most productive, yielding the proprietor about £150 or £200 a year [from cairngorms]. The yield is said now to be nearly exhausted".—"Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal" (1830), p. 276; *vide* also "Wernerian Memoirs", Vol. III., pp. 117-8.

‡ Eight "miners" are said to have met their death from a disease contracted through drinking the gravelly water of the mountain burns. About the end of last century the workmen at Invercauld were in the habit of going to Ben Avon for a week at a time to dig for cairngorms. A James Abercrombie is said to have been fortunate enough to have found a stone valued at £40. The water of the Meikle Eas, by the way, is yet held in evil repute, though for "brose"-making purposes it is considered to possess excellent qualities!

mountain-links are frequently called, is sharp and well defined—a big drop of water may so fall on the rocky march as to be divided between the two counties! On the south side rises Glas Allt Mor, the easterly head stream of the Quoich, flanked on the east by the broad, steep slope of Carn Eas and on the west by Cnap a' Chleirich. But while rocks and stones characterise the great hollow on the north side,* grass mostly abounds on the Aberdeenshire side. The Sneck is at an altitude of about 3200 feet, the descent from Beinn a' Bhuid being about 700 feet and from Ben Avon 600 feet. In the six-inch map the name given to the gorge on the north side of the Sneck is Slochd an Araich, while in "Thomson's Atlas of Scotland" (1832) the name is Sloch Garich; now it is known as the Meikle Slochd. Stob an t-Sluichd, its north-west boundary, has a rocky ridge which, viewed from Glen Avon, well warrants the term "Stob", but which, seen from the neighbourhood of the Sneck, is not so descriptive. A lower parallel ridge, Carn nam Mult, faces Allt an t-Sluichd. The Stob is surmounted by a diminutive cairn, apparently not erected on the very highest point; the staff still remains. Descending to the Sneck from Ben Avon, the summit of Cnap a' Chleirich, culminating in a rocky peak, is prominently in view. Even as one ascends the Cnap it appears well defined—for a considerable flat separates it from its parent, Beinn a' Bhuid. The peak is on the county march, and from this point, at least, the mountaineer begins to thoroughly realise the picturesque grandeur of Beinn a' Bhuid, not unobserved by Macculloch† from the valley of the Dee. Avoiding a tempting divergence to the Stob,

* Tradition tells of a shepherdess who had a small "kail-yard" here. Eagles nested in the Slochd in 1893.

† "This mountain, as its name expresses, is a flat table; yet so broad and simple are its lines and its precipices, and so grand the long sweeping lines of the hills which support it, that it produces, with the valley, a landscape not less grand than the very different pyramidal composition in which Lochnagar is the principal object. At one point, where the two-arched Bridge of Dec becomes a main feature in the middle ground, the pictures are peculiarly complete and fine".—"The Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland".

we hold a little to the left the better to peer into its two great corries, still well filled with snow in spite of the summer sun. The northerly one is Coire nan Clach, the next Coire an Dubh-lochain; while still more to the southward are two smaller corries, Coire na Ciche and Coire Buidhe. Coire an Dubh-lochain is separated from Coire na Ciche by a rocky prominence, appropriately named A Chioch, the breast. The water of Dubh Lochan (a lochlet in the second corrie) is sometimes of a deep blue colour, smooth as a mirror, and reflecting the sides of its embosoming corrie. A golden border of gravel on its west side tells another tale; often the water is dashed against its western rocky and almost perpendicular wall. This lochlet is about 330 yards in breadth and covers about 12 acres; it is the chief source of the Quoich. Its banks are plentifully margined with boulders. The outflowing burn soon expands into another lochlet, small, narrow, and irregular-shaped, Dubh Lochain, thereafter resuming its normal breadth. After a long look at the corries—the two largest are familiar to many of us from the Blue Hill—we make for the North Top. Such a cairn there, only about two feet in height, for such a mountain! It is from 100 to 110 yards north-west from the edge of the northerly lip of Coire nan Clach; a knowledge of this fact may be of service in mist. Standing on a great grassy, gravelly flat, it is very difficult to find in mist, and even at other times it may not be observed at once.* One is apt to forget that Banffshire claims equal rights with Aberdeenshire in Beinn a' Bhuid, but the latter county embraces the more picturesque parts of the mountain. Within the Banffshire march, to the north-east of the cairn,

* Here three proprietors' lands meet—the Duke of Richmond and Gordon (Glen Avon), the Duke of Fife (Mar), and Farquharson of Invercauld. The Glen Avon boundary is the watershed of the Avon, while that between Mar and Invercauld is as follows:—The ridge from the North Top to the South Top and along to Bruach Mhor, thence across the Quoich, taking in to Mar the upper part of the wood known as the Beachan (part of the ancient Forest of Beachan) to Carn na Criche, thence along the watershed to the top of Carn na Drochaide, and thence in a straight line to the march between the farms of Allamore (Invercauld) and Allanaquoich (Mar) on the north side of the Dee.

in Lag Buidhe nam Damh, are the head streams of the Feith Ghuibhasachan Burn, a tributary of the Avon; to the north-west are the sources of Allt Coire Ruairidh, a tributary of Allt Cumhang na Coinnich.

Beinn a' Bhuid attracted the attention of Pennant* in 1769; while both it and Ben Avon were ascended in 1810 by the Rev. Dr. Keith in his mountain-measuring excursion.† Robson presents us with a view of Beinn a' Bhuid "from an elevated station south of Invercauld".‡ The *doyen* of Scottish mountaineers, in the middle of the century, had not time, in his "Fortnight on Deeside", to make more than a passing reference to the Eastern Cairngorms.§ The Queen had just ascended Beinn a' Bhuid, *via* Invercauld and Glen Sluggan, before his arrival at Braemar.|| In 1819, 1830, and 1850, Professor Macgillivray,

* Having described Invercauld, he says that "naked summits (the highest is called Beinn a' Bhuid, under which is a small loch, which I was told had ice the latter end of July) of a surprising height succeed, many of them topped with perpetual snow. . . . Some of these hills are supposed to be the highest part of Great Britain".—"A Tour in Scotland"; 3rd Ed., 1774.

† The former he describes as "an immense mass, without beauty or fertility, extending about three miles in length, and almost flat on the top"; the latter he found "more interesting, having greater variety of surface".—"Agriculture of Aberdeenshire".

‡ "Scenery of the Grampian Mountains".

§ He says Beinn a' Bhuid and Ben Avon are "by no means difficult of ascent"; while the latter "derives its appellation from the number of streams which issue from it on every side".—"Autumnal Rambles Among the Scottish Mountains", by the Rev. Thomas Grierson (1851).

|| "We drove to Invercauld, about three-quarters of a mile beyond the house. . . . We then walked a little way, after which we mounted our ponies and began the ascent towards Beinn a' Bhuid. There is an excellent path, almost a narrow road, made up to within the last two miles and a half, which are very steep and rocky. The scenery is beautiful. We first rode up a very narrow, rocky, and precipitous glen, called the Sluggan. Some little distance after this the country opens widely before you, with Beinn a' Bhuid rising towards the left. . . . There is a very pretty little shooting-box, called Sluggan Lodge, which is half-way from Invercauld to the top of Beinn a' Bhuid. Below this is the Quoch, which we forded. The last bit of the real road is a long steep ascent on the brow of a hill. . . . The ascent, after the path ceases, is very stony; in fact, nothing but bare granite. Albert had walked

LL.D., visited the Eastern Cairngorms, and was particularly impressed with the scene from the top of Beinn a' Bhuid.*

Beinn a' Bhuid is excellent vantage ground for observing Ben Muich Dhui and his fellows. The view of these and of Beinn a' Ghlo is particularly imposing. We jotted down the following as seen from the North Top:—The Cairnwell and Glen Ey Hills, Glas Thulachan, Carn an Rìgh, Beinn a' Ghlo, Carn Cloch Mhuiluin, Beinn Bhrotain, Monadh Mor, Devil's Point, Derry Cairngorm, Cairn Toul—finely peaked, Ben Muich Dhui, Braeriach, Loch Etchachan, Beinn Mheadhoin, Feith Buidhe, Cairngorm, Garbh Allt (Nethy), Ben Bynac, Cromdale Hills, Ben Rinnes, the Convals (?), Corryhabbie Hill, Cook's Cairn, Buck, Ben Avon, Morven, Hill of Fare, Mount Battock, Mount Keen, Meikle Pap, and Lochnagar.† The walk from the North to

a great deal, and we ladies got off after it became more uneven, and when we were no longer very far from the top. We came upon a number of 'cairngorms', which we all began picking up, and found some very pretty ones. We sat down at a cairn and had our luncheon. . . . The view from the top was magnificent and most extensive".—"Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highlands". "Sluggan Lodge" is marked on the O.S. maps as "Ciach Lodge". The original building was erected by Lord Castlereagh about 50 years ago and stood higher up, facing Beinn a' Bhuid; the present lodge was built about 20 years ago.

* "All around mountains appeared behind mountains, with their rocks, ridges, and valleys. A solemn stillness prevailed; nor was a living creature to be seen; the clouds rolled their dusky wreaths along the ridges".—"The Natural History of Deeside and Braemar" (1855).

† "Lochnagar appears in all its magnificent proportions. The valley of the Dee, and the noble mansion of Invercauld, with all its beautiful surroundings of diversified woodlands, intermingled clumps of birch and pine, its lawns and meadows, the winding Dee, Craigs Cluny and Coinnich, and the higher hills in the background—a picture of grandeur, magnificence, and beauty is spread before and around the beholder that cannot be surpassed, turn where he may. . . . But what shall we say of the Coire nan Clach and the Coire an Dubh-lochain, upon whose edges we stand, with their two little lakes—Dubh Lochan and Dubh Lochain—in their bosoms 800 feet below us? Simply this, if you wish to see corries in perfection, try Beinn a' Bhuid. Dubh Lochan rests at an elevation of 3080 feet. The ridge of precipice above and surrounding it stands at from 3800 to 3900 feet above sea level—a huge wall of serrated precipice scooped into the mountain culminating in the grand rocky pinnacle, A Chioch. These corries are wealthy fields for the botanist".—"Two Days and a Night in the Wilderness", by Alexander Copland.

the South Top is a pleasant one; nothing similar can be compared to it except a saunter on the plateau of Braeriach. On the right are the principal summits of the Cairngorms, on the left the model corries of Beinn a' Bhuid. How precipitous these corries are, falling, in many places, sheer away from the grassy edge of the great table-land along which we are proceeding! About the year 1820 a herd of thirty cattle, driven by a great storm from Glen Avon, fell down Coire an Dubh-lochain, and were, of course, killed. In walking southward the corries are hugged; their symmetrical shape, their snow-lined sides, and the blue lochlet, 800 feet below, are enchanting on a summer day. A little to the north of the South Top is a circle of stones which has puzzled not a few. This circle is known as "Lamont's Seat"; it is on the Duke of Fife's side of Beinn a' Bhuid, and was used as a look-out post by "watchers" in the Mar Forest. The South Top is to the west of Coire na Ciche, its cairn quite a contrast to the one just left, being a substantial structure with the remains of the staff. But then stones are plentiful in the neighbourhood. The view from it has its distinctive features, and is a very enjoyable one. The valley of the Dee is well seen, so is Invercauld House; a bit of the Glen Cluny road, appearing almost pure white; the Dubh Ghleann, the western boundary of Beinn a' Bhuid proper; Glen Lui; Glen Geldie; Glen Dee; Glen Lui Beg; Glen Derry; Sgor an Lochan Uaine (Angel's Peak)—now into view, but the highest part of Braeriach is lost; the tops of the Beinn a' Bhuid corries; and Ben Avon. Craigendinnie and Craigandaroch are also visible; at the foot of the latter may be seen Ballater and its church spire. The North and South Tops are not visible from each other.

A race across Ear-choire Sneachdach, with its broad white carpet; more carefully descending Coire na Ciche, for the angle is 34° ; a walk along Allt Coire na Ciche (still showing "remains of the ancient Caledonian Forest"), with many a backward glance at A Choich; fording the Quoich; and, hey, presto! a path. Successfully wrestling with a temptation to make for the Saddle between the two summits of Carn Eas* (North Top, 3556, and South

* The name is slightly misplaced in the one-inch map.

Top, 3189), the shoulder of Carn na h-Uamha Duibhe, a dependency of the latter, is rounded. Thus, after a slight ascent, the source of the Gairn is reached, a good path accompanying the stream all the way to Loch Builg Cottage. Near the source of the Gairn, the ruins of the Black Shiel, one of the walls of which dates previous to the flood, are passed on the left. Thence there is entered, between "the two Craigandals",* a great gorge, noticeable as one goes up Glen Gairn; here may be seen, at right angles to the river, a low stone dyke which, built for another purpose,† reminds one of the time when the glen was in possession of "bonnet lairds". Past the mouth of Allt an Aiteil, a burn which rises between the tops of Carn Eas, the Little and the Meikle Eas are successively forded. Larachs begin to abound by the mouth of the Little Eas, a stream which hurries down a cleft parallel to the Meikle Eas. Then across Allt Bad a' Mhonaidh, near which there is an old hut and a foot-bridge over the Gairn, the latter at the mouth of a stream to the west of Bealach Dearg; then fording Allt Phouple, the Cottage is reached, fifteen hours after leaving it.

Meall na Gainimh lies in the angle formed by Allt na Gainimh with the Avon, and is noticeable from distant points by the "wart" on its western shoulder. Allt na

* Creag na Dala Moire on the west and Creag na Dala Bige on the east—the former the precipitous side to the Gairn of Carn Eas, the latter part of Carn Liath. They are better known as, respectively, the Meikle and the Little Craigandal.

† This fence was probably built about the year 1816. Commencing on the north side of the Dee it crosses Meall Alvie, Craggan Rour, Creag a' Chait, and Carn Liath to the Gairn between the Craigandals, to prevent sheep from going west into the forest. The garrison at Braemar Castle assisted at the building of the dyke, for which each private received fourpence a day with meal and milk. The oldest stag's head in Invercauld House was killed in 1795 by John Bowman, forester. In those days, and down to about 1830, when venison was required foresters would have to go out sometimes *for days* before getting a shot. They used to lodge in a shiel at the mouth of Allt an da Choir Snechdach; this shiel is still known as the Foresters' Shiel, but only the *larach* remains. The sanctuary of the Invercauld Forest is the ground between Glen Sluggan and Glen Gairn, the east boundary being a line drawn north and south from the top of Carn Liath.

Gaineimh, in the lower part of its course, divides Meall an t-Seangain from Meall na Gaineimh, the former a flat, smooth, "lumpy" hill, probably owing its separate existence to the burn. Further south is Feith an Laoigh Burn, which, if uninteresting in the middle of its course, becomes a real Highland stream, rushing through a rocky ravine ere it receives the burn from Loch Builg. Meall na Gaineimh is best ascended from Inchrory or the lower end of Glen Builg. Its summit is flattish, small stones lying about. Clach Bhan (the woman's rock), part of the Meall, is situated a little to the north-west of the cairn, between the sources of the two easterly branches of the Caol Ghleann Burn. It is a great mass of rock about 400 feet long by 150 feet broad, with an average height of about 10 feet, and is almost honeycombed with "pot-holes", as described by Mr. Hinxman in the letter already mentioned.* They are numerous also on other rocks in the vicinity, some of them shallow, others deep, but all round or oval-shaped. The most symmetrically formed are circular and of greater depth than diameter. A particular example measured 36 inches by 26 inches, and 20 inches deep. Near it were five perfectly formed specimens, not to mention others more indefinite in shape. Two of these are each 18 inches in diameter and 32 inches deep and open to the front, being on the edge of the rock; the other three are shallow. At another part is a particularly well-formed example, quite

* "On the top of Clach Bhan is to be seen a curious effect of 'sub-aerial' denudation, the flat surface of the rock being indented with numerous perfectly circular basins. They have at first sight a very artificial appearance, and remind one of the so-called 'cup-markings' found in some parts of Scotland. But a closer examination reveals their natural origin. Except in very dry weather they will be found to contain more or less water, and at the bottom a few loose grains or crystals of quartz. And it is these quartz grains, whirled round with the water by the furious winds that sweep over this elevated region, that have acted as graving-tools to produce these 'pot-holes'—exactly as the pot-holes in a mountain stream are formed by the whirling round of the pebbles which they contain. Similar rock-basins are found on the granite tors of Devon and Cornwall. The determining cause of each basin has doubtless been a natural depression in the rock in which the rain-water would be retained".

circular; the diameter is about three feet and the depth two feet. Around it are other six or seven of lesser sizes. "Lady" Fingal is fabled to have had a bath here; the water is clear and over six feet in depth, shut in on three sides by rocky walls—a capital place for a bath, once there! The first mention, apparently, of Clach Bhan is to be found in *The Statistical Account of Scotland* (1794),* Robson following in 1814† and Smith in 1875. The latter shows‡ that the *Statistical* writer had been in error in using the expression "till of late" with regard to ladies' visits to this rock, journeys to which were also made by childless couples in the belief that the result would be favourable to the hopes of the barren wives. Even so late as 1860 a Strathspey writer§ says that Clach Bhan was "once, and sometimes even now, the resort of females in an interesting condition, to ensure them an auspicious hour". The particular part of the rock—which, according to one legend, was dropped from the apron of a giantess on her way to the Avon—affected by ladies is the pot-holes described as "open to the front". Many a festive scene also has been witnessed in this extreme corner of the Cairngorms, the pot-holes having been occasionally used for the making of Athole Brose.

Inchrory is seen to advantage from Meall na Gainneimh

* "In the face of it [Clach Bhan], two seats have been excavated, resembling that of an armed chair. Till of late this stone used to be visited by pregnant women, not only of this, but from distant countries, impressed with the superstitious idea that by sitting in these seats the pains of travail would become easy to them, and other obstetrical assistance rendered unnecessary".

† "According to tradition, one of these rocky protuberances, which . . . contains a pool of clear water, was used as a bath by the lady of Fingal; and from a supernatural power, thus supposed to be conferred upon it, the place became a temple where pregnant women resorted, to pay their vows to this Lucina of the Highlands".—"Scenery of the Grampian Mountains".

‡ "In the end of August, 1836, the writer witnessed the *chairing* of twelve full-bodied women, who had that morning come from Speyside, over 20 miles, to undergo the operation".—"A New History of Aberdeenshire".

§ "Lectures on the Mountains", by William Grant Stewart.

and Clach Bhan. The lodge is situated at the great bend of the Avon to the north, and is a plain building with a picturesque situation. The remotest permanently inhabited house in Glen Avon, it is eight miles above Tomintoul, and has the remains of an ancient graveyard close by. The Linn of Avon—where, with a slight fall, the river rushes through a cleft into a deep rocky gorge—is less than a mile up the stream from the lodge; here Fingal's wife, according to tradition, was drowned. The only house in Glen Avon, above Inchrory, is Findouran Lodge,* which is used only in "the season". A pony path on the left bank of the Avon, commencing near the Learg an Laoigh† ford, connects it with Inchrory; there are paths on both sides of the river between Inverloin and Inchrory. Inchrory is believed to have derived its name from a Roderick Mackenzie, "Rory More", who, some three centuries ago, was wont to rest his cattle here on their southward journeys. In course of time it became "half farm-house, half hostel"; now it is the shooting-box of Glen Avon deer forest, with Lagganauil, the forester's residence, in the immediate vicinity. Christopher North and the Ettrick Shepherd have made Glen Avon classic ground. It is a long glen, the Cairngorm portion even being considerable. It has taken five hours, with a little snow on the ground, from the Learg ford to Inchrory; while on a sultry summer day, handicapped by a heavy knapsack, an hour longer has been consumed.‡ One feature may here be referred to—the lowness of the hills on the left bank, below the Learg ford, compared to the great heights on the other side as far as Glen Bulg. Stob an t-Sluichd and Ben Avon appear to the best advantage along the glen, but Beinn a' Bhuid has a somewhat uninteresting appearance.

* Built since the O.S. maps were printed, it is situated on the left bank of the Avon near the figures "1920" on the one-inch map where two streamlets enter the Avon close together. It lies in the north-east angle formed by the lower, the burn from Feith an Dobhrain (of which "Findouran" is a corruption), with the Avon.

† The old drove road from Dee to Spey by Glen Lui, Glen Derry, the east side of Ben Bynac, and the Nethy.

‡ See "The Round Table Club", by James Brown, p. 17 (1873).

An English writer* in the beginning of the century describes Glen Avon as "a desert place", "uncommonly cold" in winter, so much so that a heron "found the foot on which it had stood so frozen, when it had been sleeping, that in the morning it was not able to get away"! The sanctuary of the Glen Avon forest is on the left bank of the river between Feith Buidhe and Inchrory. Above Inchrory the Avon is crossed by five foot-bridges—Inchrory, Inverloin, Meikle Slochd, Feith Ghuibhasachan, and Beinn a' Chaorruinn.

Beinn Bhreac is the most south-westerly point of the Eastern Cairngorms over 3000 feet in height. Lying, however, between Dubh Ghleann and Glen Derry it is "on the road to nowhere", as far as mountaineers generally are concerned. Beinn Bhreac is led up to, from Glen Lui, by Meall na Guaille (misprinted Guaille in the one-inch map), a broad, monotonous slope reaching an altitude of 2550 feet. It is separated from Beinn Bhreac by the deep cut of Allt Lochan a' Bhata, the lochan itself somewhat marshy. Ascending the Meall from Glen Lui, the glen road will be left at the ford of Allt a' Mhadaidh, keeping that stream on the left. At first long heather renders the ascent tedious, but at last it becomes shorter, and, as the flat top is neared, quite dwarfed. A five-foot cairn (with staff) marks the highest point. Descending towards Allt a' Lochan Bhata, the Derry will be observed on the left and the Duglen Water on the right. Thence the ascent of Beinn Bhreac is very easy, being over hard ground. The top is marked by two cairns, the lower only at first visible. *The* cairn is about four feet in height, and has the remains of the staff. Westward from Beinn Bhreac is Allt Coire Bhoghadaire; which receives Allt na Beinne Brice on the east; this burn, as it enters the Derry a little below the upper foot-bridge, has some rather pretty waterfalls as artists have lately found out. A little to the north of the source of Allt Coire Bhoghadaire is flat-topped Craig Derry,

* "Travels in Scotland", by Rev. James Hall (1807). Speaking of Enzie, he gravely says: "Of this district, I suppose, the clan Mac-enzie were the Aborigines".

worthy of mention here only for its name ; opposite it, on the other side of the glen, is Derry Cairngorm.

There are, of course, many other ways of traversing the Eastern Cairngorms than that described. Once for all, it may be remarked that the conscientious mountaineer respects the rights of others while insisting on his own ; he will therefore endeavour so to time his excursions and arrange his routes as to cause the minimum of annoyance to others. The excursions noted here were all made at such times as did not interfere with "sport". The tourist may, on occasion, content himself with a simple ascent of Ben Avon *via* Carn Dearg, descending by the Meikle Eas (or this may be reversed). The range may also be crossed from east to west, and Glen Derry reached (*via* Glas Allt) within ten hours (very moderate walking). Reversing this, the summits of Beinn a' Bhuid and Ben Avon have been crossed and Ballater reached, *via* Loch Builg and Rinloan, within thirteen hours. From Rinloan there is note of an ascent of Meall na Gainimh, Clach Bhan, and the top of Ben Avon and back in about eleven hours. In this instance the descent from the top to Rinloan (*via* the Meikle Eas) was accomplished in three hours and forty minutes. Starting from Aberarder at 6:10 a.m. for Carn Eas, Inverey was reached at 8:45 p.m. The descent was made by the Quoich and over Creag a' Bhuilg (2190) to Old Mar Lodge—an exceedingly pleasant day's outing. Driving from below Tomintoul, up the Avon—a very fine drive—Inchrory was left at noon, the Linn visited, and Clach Bhan ascended, whence the top of Ben Avon was made for. The party broke up at the Sneck, one portion descending the Meikle Slochd and reaching Inchrory at 7:0 ; the other visiting the top of Stob an t-Sluichd, passing the North Top of Beinn a' Bhuid in thick mist, and reaching Derry Lodge at 10:25. The descent from Beinn a' Bhuid was accomplished in rain and dense mist ; the original intention was to enter Glen Derry by Glas Allt, but frequent (and apparently trifling) divergences to avoid bogging made it necessary ultimately to go by Dubh Ghleann and Clais na Fearnna (where there is an excellent path) to Glen Lui. Another time, leaving

Loch Builg at 9:10, Meall na Gainimh and Clach Bhan were ascended, Lochan nan Gabhar visited, Ben Avon and Beinn a' Bhuid crossed, and Derry Lodge reached, *via* Dubh Ghleann, at 10:45. An excursion from the Shelter Stone was as follows:—Left Stone at 11:15 a.m.; top of Beinn a' Chaorruinn at 1:35; North Top of Beinn a' Bhuid at 3:45; waited an hour there for the mist to disperse—which it didn't; reached the Shelter Stone again at 10:0 p.m. Beinn a' Chaorruinn is the extreme north-westerly point of the Eastern Cairngorms, and may conveniently be ascended from the neighbourhood of Dubh Lochan in the Learg an Laoigh. The climb commences from the right bank of Allt an t-Seallaidh up red scree slopes, stones being exchanged for boulders as the summit is neared.* Formerly Beinn a' Chaorruinn was much dug and delved for “cairngorms”. Three-quarters of a mile to the east of the top—which is on the Aberdeen-Banff march—Beinn a' Chaorruinn Bheag juts into Banffshire; it partakes of the character of its parent. South from these two tops is Moine Bhealaidh, a big moss, the birth-place of Glas Allt—a moss to be reckoned with when one ascends Beinn a' Bhuid from Glen Derry. This route is otherwise rather commonplace, and is only relieved by the backward views. On another occasion the top of Beinn a' Chaorruinn was put on the right, crossing Allt Cumhang na Coinnich and a slight track which connects Glen Avon with Dubh Ghleann. A passing visit was paid to an odd-shaped tarn-let which gives birth to the head stream, Allt Coire Ruaridh, of Allt an Dubh-ghlinne (locally the Duglen Water). The return route to the Shelter Stone was by Allt Cumhang na Coinnich and Glen Avon. The same upward route from the Shelter Stone was taken another year. Again beset by mist at the top; after a long weary wait the descent was made to Glen Quoich by the north-east side of Coire nan Clach. The Quoich Water has a winding course of about fourteen

* Sir Thomas Dick Lauder describes a ravine made by the flood of '29 on the north face of Beinn a' Chaorruinn which extends a mile in length, with a breadth of from 40 to 50 yards and of proportional depth.—“Account of the Great Floods of August, 1829, in the Province of Moray”.

miles through a very fine glen. At no part is the glen uninteresting; the stream is a lively one all along, having a descent of over 2000 feet. Moreover for some distance above its famous Falls—more picturesque some think than even the Linn of Dee—it rushes over rocky ledges and through narrow clefts. The pines and birches with which it is graced in the lower reaches add to its beauties; while many a noble fir, rotting where it fell, speaks of storms and hurricanes that have decimated the forest.* Hurrying down the glen, passing on the left the track leading to Glen Gairn, a short distance further down a path from Glen Sluggan is entered, near where it crosses the Quoich on its way towards the South Top. But in this instance the right bank of the stream was made for, favoured by intermittent tracks till the Duglen Water is reached. These tracks mostly keep close by the stream, at other times they wind pleasantly through the trees. The Duglen Water is smaller than the Quoich, yet in some old maps the name Quoich is attached to it. Crossing the Duglen Water by a foot-bridge near its mouth, an old cart-track was struck leading to Old Mar Lodge over Creag a' Bhuilg. Leaving this track after half a mile or so, a foot-path was entered on which in a short time developed into a tolerable cart-track, the upper part of which is apparently seldom used. The Duglen Water crossed, larachs were numerous in Glen Quoich. From the Falls Allanaquoich was passed, then crossing the Dee by boat, Castleton of Braemar was reached.

The illustrations accompanying this article are from sketches presented to the Club by the artist, Mr. J. G. Murray, Glasgow and Stirling.

* "Glen Quoich is a long, romantic, winding valley, bounded by sloping mountains, whose declivities were formerly covered with wood; but, in 1695, a sawmill was built at the mouth of the glen; and the timber, yearly after, was cut down and sold to a great amount: one only now observes, amid the highest cliffs, those detached trees the workmen could not reach".—"Antiquities and Scenery of the North of Scotland" (1780), by the Rev. Chas. Cordiner. The sawmill celebrates its bi-centenary this year, but nevertheless trees seem as flourishing as ever. Pennant, writing of Dalmore (Old Mar Lodge), says:—"Single trees have been sold out of it for six guineas; they were from eighty to ninety feet high, without a lateral branch". There are still many noble trees here.