

THE CAIRNGORM MOUNTAINS.

II.—THE CENTRAL CAIRNGORMS.

I.—THE BEN MUICH DHUI DIVISION.

BY ALEX. INKSON M'CONNOCHIE.

“ Amid this vast, tremendous solitude,
Where nought is heard except the wild wind's sigh,
Or savage raven's deep and hollow cry,
With awful thought the spirit is embued !
Around—around, for many a weary mile,
The Alpine masses stretch ; the heavy cloud
Cleaves round their brows, concealing with its shroud
Bleak, barren rocks, unthawed by summer's smile.
Nought but the desert mountains and lone sky
Are here ;—birds sing not, and the wandering bee
Searches for flowers in vain ; nor shrub, nor tree,
Nor human habitation greets the eye
Of heart-struck pilgrim ; while around him lie
Silence and desolation, what is he ” !

THE Central Cairngorms, so well defined by the two Larigs, contain the best known and most frequented summits of the whole group. They are dominated by Ben Muich Dhui (4296), the highest of the Cairngorms—long considered the highest mountain in Scotland, though now yielding that eminence to Ben Nevis—and Cairngorm (4084). Notwithstanding the fact that the latter summit ranks only fourth of the group in height it has secured the honour of being its titular peak.

Yet the name “Cairngorm Mountains” is, comparatively speaking, of yesterday, their original and more appropriate designation being Monadh Ruadh, the red mountains ; Cairngorm, a name of not infrequent occurrence in the Highlands, signifying the blue mountain. Monadh Ruadh is appropriately descriptive from a geologist's point of view, and was in contradistinction to Monadh Liath, the gray mountains, on the left bank of the Spey. An Aberdeenshire

rhyme perpetuates a name which has now fallen into desuetude :

“There’s four great landmarks frae the sea,
Brae o’ Mar, Lochnagar, Clochnaben, an’ Bennachie”.

Robert Chambers* gives this couplet in a slightly different form :

“The four great landmarks on the sea
Are Mount Mar, Lochnagar, Clochnaben, and Bennachie”.

Brae o’ Mar is, we believe, the older form, and, doubtless, has reference to the Cairngorms.

As a group, the Cairngorms are much better seen from Speyside than Deeside, and doubtless always attracted more attention from the great thoroughfare in the neighbourhood of Aviemore than from the once little-frequented Deeside road terminating in Braemar. The gashes and landslips of red granitic *debris* could not fail to suggest to the ancient Gael the name “*Monadh Ruadh*”. In modern times one is not inclined to quarrel with the designation “*Cairngorm Mountains*”, which, though not especially descriptive, is euphonious. It is probable that both names were originally bestowed by the natives of Strathspey, in whose vision Cairngorm bulks most prominently, for Beinn a’ Bhuird and Ben Avon, irrespective of their lower elevation, lie too far from the Spey to be considered, while Ben Muich Dhui and Braeriach, both flat-topped, have not the full advantage of their greater height in the eyes of the ordinary observer. Cairn Toul, being invisible from the lower points in the valley, does not enter into the competition at all. The actual summit of Cairngorm, however, is readily observable from many points in Strathspey on account of its isolated position, and thus had suggested the modern name — a name which has met with such favour that now it is recognised by all topographers. Moreover, even so late as last century, a few hundred feet more or less in the height of a mountain was a little considered matter, and

* “*Popular Rhymes of Scotland*”, new edition (1870).

extraordinary notions prevailed as to the comparative height of mountains. We find Pennant* lamenting "the disgrace of *Snowdon*, once esteemed the highest hill in the island, but now must yield the palm to a *Caledonian* mountain".

Even the then minister of Elgin had evidently regarded Cairngorm as the most important peak of the group from his remarks in the Appendix to Pennant's book. Little wonder then that the standard topographical works of last century ignored every other summit visible between Kingussie and Carr Bridge along the great highland road from Perth to Inverness, contenting themselves with some such observation as—"Not far from this is seen the lofty top of Cairngorm".† We have also the authority of a poet‡ in the early years of the present century that Cairngorm was then accounted the principal mountain in the district. The Ordnance Survey arrived too late to deprive Cairngorm of its popular honours.

Ben Muich Dhui is generally held to mean *the mountain of the black sow*, and has been named either from its hog-backed ungainly appearance, or from some hunting incident in the days when wild swine abounded there, as they did in many parts of Scotland. It is situated on the watershed of the Dee and the Spey, mainly on the boundary line between the counties of Aberdeen and Banff. The Aberdeenshire portion is in the united parish of Crathie-Braemar, the Banffshire in Kirkmichael. Cairngorm is on the boundary between the counties of Inverness and Banff, and drains to the Spey—the southern side by the Avon in the parish of Kirkmichael. The Inverness-shire side, on the north, is in the united parish of Abernethy-Kincardine, and on the north-west in the united parish of Duthil-Rothiemurchus. The distance between the summits of Ben Muich Dhui and Cairngorm is about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles. The dividing line between the two is the Lochan Buidhe Burn, the Garbh Uisge (after

* "A Tour in Scotland" (in 1769). 3rd Ed., 1774.

† "Scotland Delineated", 2nd Ed., 1799.

‡ "The Grampians Desolate", by Alexander Campbell (1804).

their confluence), and Loch Avon. The principal dependencies of Ben Muich Dhui are:—Beinn Mhèadhoin (3883), Derry Cairngorm (3788), Cairn Etchachan (3673), and Carn a' Mhaim (3329); under Cairngorm are included Cairn an Lochain (3983), Ben Bynac (3574), Creag na Leacinn (3448), and Meall a' Bhuachaille (2654).

The Central Cairngorms may be conveniently reached from either Dee or Spey—Braemar or any point between Nethy Bridge and Aviemore. Ben Muich Dhui is probably most frequently climbed from Deeside, and Cairngorm from Speyside, but a favourite excursion is to pass from the one valley to the other, across both summits. As the Ben surmounts all, it shall be first described, along with a brief outline of the Braemar approach as well as of the two Larigs.

The first stage in an excursion to Ben Muich Dhui from Aberdeen is by rail to Ballater (43½ miles). Then follows a drive by coach to Braemar (16½ miles). It is unnecessary to describe here the numerous objects of interest and picturesque scenery continually within the gaze of the tourist; suffice it to say that Abergeldie Castle, Balmoral Castle, and Invercauld House are passed, and that Lochnagar is often in view, while Beinn a' Bhuird and Ben Avon can also be seen. Castletown of Braemar is an excellent mountaineering centre (reached also from Blairgowrie by the Spital of Glen Shee), from which the end of the third stage, Derry Lodge, is about ten miles distant by a capital driving road. Here the final stage begins, the summit cairn being 8 or 6 miles distant according to the route selected. This must be accomplished on foot, unless the doubtful luxury of a pony be indulged in. By the longer route ponies may be taken all the way to the top.

Leaving Braemar on the third stage the mountaineer's attention becomes concentrated on the object of his journey, for now the character of the scenery begins to change, and he is introduced to the longed-for mountains. The first six miles, while allowing him many a peep of the Cairngorms, present Highland scenery at its best, the valley of the Dee here affording an excellent example of the blending of the

grand and the picturesque.* Nor are particular objects of interest wanting, among which are the Falls of Corriemulzie, Mar Lodge, Old Mar Lodge, Inverey, and the Linn of Dee. The Falls are three miles west from Castletown, and another quarter of a mile brings the tourist to Mar Lodge,† the highland residence of the Duke of Fife. Old Mar Lodge, anciently called Dalmore, is a plain structure opposite the fourth milestone from Castletown; there is here a private bridge across the Dee, the use of which is frequently granted to the public. A "short cut" is thus gained into Glen Lui, saving the round by Linn of Dee. The village of Inverey—where the tourist may occasionally find accommodation—is situated on both sides of the Ey Burn, about five miles from Castletown. The ruins of an old castle of the now extinct Farquharsons of Inverey will be observed on the right. The Linn of Dee is a unique freak of nature, where, 1243 feet above sea level, the river rushes along a rock-bound channel of about 80 yards in length, and in some places less than four feet in breadth. Here the south road ends, the Dee being crossed by a handsome granite bridge. The road on the north side is continued westward to Geldie Lodge, in Glen Geldie, crossing the river at White Bridge (the uppermost bridge over the Dee), three miles from the Linn, where the Geldie joins the river at the south end of Learg Ghruamach. Our route, however, proceeds eastward from the Linn by the north road for about half a mile (ignoring a "short cut" of doubtful advantage due north from the Linn Bridge), till the Lui Water, a clear, sparkling stream, is reached, when a road will be observed turning northward up Glen Lui, by the right bank of the stream. This is an excellent forest road always open to the public, leading to Derry Lodge and Luibeg, two houses used in working Mar Forest. Many *larachs* will be observed on both sides of the stream, and traces of cultivation are numerous. A short distance above the confluence of the Lui with the Dee there are two water-falls worth a passing

* "Deeside", 2nd Ed., by Alex. Inkson M'Connochie.

† Burned down last month.

visit, but the deer-fence protecting the young plantation renders this no easy matter. These falls prevent the passage of salmon. At the base of Creag an Duichd, on the right bank of the stream, the road crosses the Lui at Black Bridge, where the "short cut" by Old Mar Lodge ends, about a mile and a half from the Linn. About a mile further along the Allt a' Mhadaidh is forded, a path here connecting Glen Lui with Glen Quoich. There is a considerable extent of hilly ground between Glen Lui and Glen Dee, of no interest whatever to the mountaineer. The highest point is Sgor Mor (2666); other summits are Sgor Dubh, Creagan nan Gabhar, Carn Mor, and Leachd nan Uidhean, of which latter Creag an Duichd is a part.

Derry Lodge and Luibeg are situated near the confluence of the Derry and Luibeg Burns, which form the Lui Water, the two houses being three furlongs apart. Except during the season they are only occupied by foresters. Two tracks here take the place of the driving road: the path on the right (north)—up Glen Derry—is part of the Learg an Laoigh, while the path on the left (west)—up Glen Luibeg—joins the Learg Ghruamach after rounding Carn a' Mhaim. The first shieling erected by the Earl of Fife in this neighbourhood was about half a mile above the present lodge, and on the opposite side of the burn. About a century ago, as we learn from the travels of an English lady in the Highlands,* Lord Fife at times left part of the shieling open for the convenience of travellers between Strathspey and Braemar, "but the depredation of poachers" put an end to this convenience. There were also several shielings in Glen Luibeg on the opposite side from the present house on a little haugh known as Dail a' Mhoraire. Cordiner,† writing of a descent from Cairn Toul, says that "the first object is the sequestered habitation (on a plot of grass that spreads along the sides of a brook) which Lord Fife has built for a temporary accommodation when

* "Guide to the Beauties of Scotland", 3rd Ed., 1810, by the Hon. Mrs. Murray.

† "North Britain", written in 1788, published in 1795.

benighted in these vast solitudes of the forest, and from its situation has denominated Dee Cot”.

The time and cause of the destruction of the great Caledonian forest, under which name many writers seem to include all the forests in Scotland, are still puzzling questions. The wanderer on the Cairngorms continually comes across evidences of the former enormous extent of the woods, which must have almost covered the Highlands. In the vicinity of Derry Lodge burnt wood is frequently found below moss and tree roots at a depth of from two to three feet; and even *three* depths, or layers, of tree roots have been found by one of the head streams of the Dee. Sir Thomas Dick Lauder attributed the destruction of the forests to fire*—some fires accidental, others lighted for the purpose of driving away wild beasts, and others made to clear ground for hunting and pasture. Evidence is not wanting that much high ground now treeless was covered with wood at the beginning of the eighteenth century, yet Sir Thomas, in spite of all his efforts, was unable to glean any account, legendary or otherwise, of the extirpation of the forests at a period so comparatively recent. Roots show that the pine was the prevailing tree, but birch, alder, and hazel had been common, and oak not infrequent.

The final stage of the excursion being now entered on, the mountaineer has to exercise his option of proceeding by Glen Derry or Glen Luibeg. The former is the stereotyped route to the summit, but should the excursionist propose to return to Braemar the ascent had better be made by the one and the descent by the other. Leaving the Lodge (1400) behind, the Derry Burn is crossed and the right bank of the stream kept in the lower portion of the glen. A good many large pines will be passed in the vicinity of the Lodge, but as we progress the trees become fewer (many having been uprooted by a recent storm—November, 1893), and only weather-beaten and lightning-shivered trunks meet the eye. The glen is narrow, with rather steep hills on both sides—on the right (east) Meall na

* “Highland Rambles”.

Guaille, Beinn Bhreac, and Craig Derry; on the left Cairn Crom (2847), a spur of Derry Cairngorm, and the latter mountain itself. The conical top of Derry Cairngorm is observable both from Glen Lui and Glen Derry. Now the crags and "Barns" of Beinn Mheadhoin attract attention. The burn is recrossed at what was the outlet of the "Derry Dam", a large pond constructed by Alexander Davidson, "Rough Sanie" (1792-1843), for floating cut trees down to the Dee. But the money which he had earned by smuggling disappeared in this timber speculation. The 1829 "flood" broke up the "dam", and it was never repaired. In the beginning of the present century the timber in the glens of the head-streams of the Dee was accounted of particularly good quality, many of the trees measuring 100 feet in height.* Shortly before reaching the Dam Bridge the Allt Coire Bhoghadaire, from Craig Derry and Beinn Bhreac, will be observed; near its confluence with the Derry, at a point not unknown to artists, it is quite picturesque, with little rapids and groups of pines. The remains of smuggling bothies may still be traced in the vicinity. Above the bridge the glen evidently affords good pasture, as, thoroughfare though it be, the red deer testify by their frequent presence. The track at the entrance to the glen is not particularly distinct, though the mountaineer will have no difficulty in following the main route. Above the upper bridge its character changes, but does not improve. The path, now very narrow, is stony, marshy, and grassy by turns, but always well defined. Several *larachs* will be noted, but, though the human inhabitants have long been removed from the glens now within the deer forest, the mole remains in Glen Derry. Moraines are not infrequent; the opinion has even been expressed that probably Glen Derry sheltered the last glacier in the British Isles.† Heather and scree will be observed on the hills sloping to the west as the glen is ascended, but an abrupt transition to grass occurs as the Glas Allt ravine is neared. Forging

* Souter's "Agriculture of Banffshire" (1812).

† "Deeside Tales", by the Rev. J. G. Michie (1872).

the Glas Allt—no easy matter in a spate—from Beinn a' Chaoruinn, the Derry soon turns to the left (west), the track crossing it at a ford, and at last the real ascent is begun. The great gap which the mountaineer will have observed for some time on the left is Coire Etchachan, which in $1\frac{5}{8}$ miles rises from 2047 feet at the ford to 3050 feet at Loch Etchachan. The corrie has a steep side of Beinn Mheadhoin on the right (north) and Creagan a' Choire Etchachan on the left (south). The Creagan form the north side of Derry Cairngorm. Loch Etchachan, the gathering pond of Derry Burn, is a typical mountain tarn, covering an area of about 68 acres. A semicircular wall of rocky precipices bounds it on the west; on the north and south (especially the former) there is an easy slope; while the outlet is at the east end. It has a tiny "tail-piece", known among foresters as Little Loch Etchachan; one may, at certain times, cross between the two sheets of water. Loch Etchachan contains trout, and formerly a boat was kept on it for the use of fishermen, but it was maliciously destroyed. The Eastern Cairngorms come into view when the level of the loch has been reached.

The track to the summit keeps a little away from Loch Etchachan in a south-westerly direction, and rises to the 4000 feet line in a mile and a quarter. Gradually approaching the loch's only visible feeder, a miniature tarn, whose source (3750) it passes, having on the south the lochan and corries at the head of Glen Luibeg, with their precipitous rocks, the track leaves Aberdeenshire and enters Banffshire. The latter county here projects a narrow "tongue" (about half a mile in breadth) into the former, walking across which we find ourselves upon the great boulder-covered plateau of the mountain. A peep of Loch Avon will be had on the right (north), after which the Royal Engineers' "kitchen" comes into view, and, immediately thereafter, the cairn. Thus Ben Muich Dhui is reached by the Royal route.* A short distance north from the cairn is Coire Mor, where Allt a' Choire Mhoir rises.

* "Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highlands".

The mountaineer who selects the Glen Luibeg route shortens his mileage, but finds the ascent more toilsome—excellent reasons to many for its adoption. Crossing the Derry at the Lodge, a bridle-path makes an excellent commencement on the left bank of Luibeg Burn. The mountaineer will now have Carn Crom on the right (north) and Sgor Dubh (2429) on the left (south). The forester's house at Luibeg and the region of trees left behind, the lower part of the glen is not particularly interesting, but it is redeemed by views of Beinn Bhrotain and Carn a' Mhaim. As the glen turns to the right (north) the burn is crossed by a foot-bridge,* and the bridle-path, rounding Carn a' Mhaim, becomes merged in Learg Ghruamach. But we keep by Glen Luibeg, following a narrow track round Carn Crom that quickly "disperses" itself among the heather. A point is by and by reached where the burn forks (1800). The main stream rises in Coire an Sput Dheirg, with a tributary from Lochan Uaine,† a little tarn, 9 acres in extent. The westerly branch, Allt Carn a' Mhaim, rises on Sron Riach and flows in a great hollow, dividing Ben Muich Dhui from Carn a' Mhaim. It is at this forking, 2½ miles from the summit, that the ascent may be said to begin, as the centre of the ridge, here known as "The Green" from its colour, but which higher up is named Sron Riach, has to be kept. Having safely negotiated all the boulders that cumber the Sron, and passing a big rock with pot-holes at a height of 3200 feet, Lochan Uaine will be overlooked when a height of about 3500 feet has been attained. Still ascending, Coire Clach nan Taillear, with marks of digging for Cairngorm stones, at the head of Allt Clach nan Taillear, will be passed on the left (west) and the track of the Royal route will be found. In descending by Glen Luibeg care must be taken, in mist, to avoid Allt Clach nan Taillear, which should be crossed a few yards below its source.

* The best near view of Ben Muich Dhui is obtained in this vicinity. *Vide* illustration facing p. 57, Vol. I., *C.C.J.*

† On 24th July, 1879, this lochan was still covered with unbroken ice of the previous winter.

Ben Muich Dhui was ascended on 13th August, 1847, by an Edinburgh professor at the head of a botanical party, by the Luibeg route. The ascent was thus immortalised :

<p>“They cam’ to poo Some girss that grew On Ben Muich Dhu, Whar ne’er a coo Had set her moo. If a’ be true,</p>	<p>’Tween me and you, They sair did rue They ere did view The big <i>black soo</i> Or Larig Ghru”. &c., &c.*</p>
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The occasion was further memorable from being followed on the return journey by the celebrated encounter in Glen Tilt with the Duke of Athole :

“The Sassenach chap they ca’ Balfour,
Wi’ ither five or sax, man,
Frae ’ yont the Braes o’ Mar cam’ o’er,
Wi’ boxes on their backs, man.
Some thocht he was a chapman chiel,
Some thocht they cam’ the deer to steal ;
But nae ane saw
Them, after a’,
Do ocht ava’
Against the law,
Among the Hielan’ hills, man.

“Some folk ’ll tak’ a heap o’ fash
For unco little en’, man ;
An’ meikle time an’ meikle cash,
For nocht ava’ they ’ll spen’, man.
Thae chaps had come a hunder’ mile,
For what was hardly worth their while :
’Twas a’ to poo
Some girss that grew
On Ben Muich Dhu,
That ne’er a coo
Would care to pit her mouth till”.†

Learg Ghruamach — a name sometimes shortened to Larig Ghru — presents no difficulty of entrance at White Bridge, the Braemar end, but it is a different matter from the

* “Autumnal Rambles Among the Scottish Mountains”, by the Rev. Thomas Grierson (1851).

† Maclagan’s “Nugæ Canoræ Medicæ”, 2nd Ed., 1873.

Aviemore approach. This arises partly from the low wooded ground for the first four miles or so that separates Aviemore from the actual entrance between Carn Elrick and Castle Hill, and partly from the numerous and conflicting cross tracks which abound in the Rothiemurchus forest. There is no difficulty of course with the turnpike from Aviemore to Coylum Bridge, a few yards short (west) of which the actual path commences. There two gates will be observed, the larger the entrance to the road to Loch Eunach, the smaller the northern termination of the Larig. The road may be taken for about one-third of a mile, then an indifferent path hugs the Bennie for two miles, when a foot-bridge (1006)—too often in an unsafe condition—will be reached and the Bennie crossed. The road may, however, be followed all the way to the bridge, care being taken to turn at right angles to the left (east) at Cross Roads, due west from the bridge. The Scottish Rights of Way Society has erected guide-posts which will be found of considerable service in this neighbourhood. Having crossed the Bennie, and holding up-stream, the confluence of Allt na Leirg Gruamaich with the Bennie will be passed, the road now proceeding through rich old pasture opposite, on the left bank of the Larig Burn, the ruins of Aultdrue. Then passing an apparently unoccupied building on the left (north), the road makes a bend, at the east end of which a narrow path will, with the aid of the guide-post, be observed. This path holds southward, and is the continuation of our way along the Learg Ghruamach. (The road just left at the guide-post leads to the sluices of Loch Morlich.) The pass now becomes more confined, and our path leads at first through wood and long heather for about a mile, till a height of 1600 feet or thereby has been reached. As the pass narrows the track becomes better and less obscure. Carn Elrick bounds the gorge on the right (west) and Castle Hill on the left (east), and the further one advances the higher are the mountains. Creag na Leacainn, with its shattered rock pinnacles, is the most interesting point on the east; on the west, as the col is neared, Sron na Leirg presents the great "wall" of Braeriach. The Larig Burn in its upper parts

becomes intermittent, and towards its source can only be *heard* below numerous fragments of rock that have fallen as stone-avalanches from the sides of the mountains. The col (2750) is on the Inverness-Aberdeen march, both sides being equally cumbered with the *debris* of the mountains, and consequently for a considerable distance the "going" is, for a pass, about as rough as one could conceive. The track here becomes of doubtful service, and is little more than an imaginary line striving for a way through a long field of boulders. Aberdeenshire entered, the Pools of Dee, the source of another Allt na Leirg Gruamaich, will soon be passed; they are three tarns—the uppermost rather minute—formed by *debris* from Ben Muich Dhui and Braeriach, between which the mountaineer now finds himself. A few yards south of the lowermost the burn can be seen struggling to escape from under the *debris* which rises up mound-like below the pool. Shortly after, it receives the Allt a' Choire Mhoir from Ben Muich Dhui, the path here crossing the stream (2299) to the left bank. Half a mile below this confluence the burn joins the "infant Dee" from Braeriach. The young river thereafter receives Allt Clach nan Taillear, fully half a mile below which is Clach nan Taillear, opposite the mouth of Allt Coire an t-Saighdeir from Cairn Toul. Clach nan Taillear (the tailors' stone) is said to owe its name to three Rothiemurchus tailors who perished at this "Clach"—really *three* stones. They had started from Rothiemurchus, for a wager, to attend a ball at Braemar, but the exertion, and possibly other circumstances, proved too much for them. Not a few people have lost their lives in Learg Ghruamach, in most cases weakly persons overtaken by sudden storms. Cairn Toul and the Devil's Point now command the pass on the west, on the east is Carn a' Mhaim. Opposite the Devil's Point the track forks, the principal branch sweeping round Carn a' Mhaim direct for Derry Lodge. But a more or less faintly visible path still keeps southward along the Dee to White Bridge, though few seek to follow it—unless indeed *en route* for Glen Tilt, a stiff day's work. Below Carn a' Mhaim the hills on the

east side sink below the 3000 feet line; on the west, however, there is burly Beinn Bhrotain. From Aviemore Station to Castletown of Braemar is a distance of 30 miles by this pass: Coylum Bridge, 2 miles; Pools of Dee, 10 miles; Derry Lodge, 8 miles; Braemar, 10 miles. Neither the length nor the roughness of the pass need, however, deter tourists, for the journey has been made by ladies alone. Ben Muich Dhui is not unfrequently ascended from the neighbourhood of the Pools, the steep mountain side there finding considerable favour.

Ben Muich Dhui was used, from 6th June to 16th August, 1847, as a trigonometrical station in the Ordnance Survey. The site of the station—the only one in the Cairngorm district in the “Great Trig.”—is marked by a hole about six inches deep, in an enormous stone, over which a large cairn, about 22 feet high, was erected. This cairn was originally circular, but not of the usual shape for trigonometrical stations; it was perpendicular for a few feet and then reduced in circumference. The “broad arrow” may be observed on an earth-fast stone at the base. The cairn is still a pretty large one, surrounded by a platform of stones and by lesser cairns. Grierson, who visited it in 1850, described it as the largest he had ever seen. It was then “in the Tower of Babel style”, with four distinct storeys, the pinnacle reaching a height, he presumed, of from 20 to 25 feet. The erection of this cairn was attributed, he found, to the then Earl of Fife. But a much more ambitious structure would seem to have been contemplated in the beginning of the century*. Owing to the flatness of the ground round the cairn it is necessary, in order to get full advantage of the near view, to move a short distance towards Learg Ghruamach. The Pools of Dee can thus be brought within sight.

* “And Bhin-na-mach on-daigh, now Bhin Macduff, 4300 feet above the level: belonging to the Right Hon. the Earl of Fife, who is building on the summit a sepulchral pyramid 100 feet high; burial vault, 17 feet by 7; the whole to be surrounded by a dwarf stone wall and cast-iron balustrade. Plans are to be lodged with Mr. Cumming, Braemar”. “The Caledonian Itinerary”, by Alexander Laing (1819). The book is dedicated to James, Earl of Fife.

At the summit of Ben Muich Dhui a rich reward awaits the climber. He is now able to appreciate its relative importance as well as the grandeur and desolation of the scene. There are so many compensations that the disadvantage caused by the lack of striking outlines among the flat-topped Cairngorms is forgotten. The extraordinary vista, stretching from Caithness to the Lothians* and from sea to sea, is not so interesting to many as are the nearer views of the fellow-giants of the group and the beautifully wooded valleys of the Spey and Dee. For the lover of the Cairngorms these nearer views possess a peculiarly fascinating charm that even repeated visits cannot weaken. Of these the prospect to the west, across Learg Ghruamach, is undoubtedly the most striking: Braeriach, with its long, steep front, streaked with snow during the greater part of the year; the sharp-peaked summit of Cairn Toul, and the still more pointed Sgòr an Lochain Uaine; An Garbh-choire, *par excellence* "the rough corrie", the mighty rift between two great mountains, down which the "infant Dee" dashes impetuously on its way to the huge ravine, 2000 feet deep, at our feet; and the ugly, sheer precipice of the Devil's Point, black and repelling. The distance, as the crow flies, between the tops of Ben Muich Dhui and Cairn Toul is under two miles, which, in certain conditions of the atmosphere, seems contracted to a few hundred yards. The distant prospect is very extensive, varying of course with the state of the weather. One sometimes thinks that all the higher mountains of Scotland are visible, and from our viewpoint it seems to consist of little but mountains. Like the waves of the sea they appear interminable; lines of mountains like billows pressing on each other so closely that they hide from sight the little bits of cultivated land in the narrow glens. Looking first to the southward, the Ochils, with the Lammermuir and Pentland Hills in the extreme distance, will be descried. But the grandest sight in this direction will be found to be the Beinn a' Ghlo group on the east side of Glen Tilt—a cluster of mountains that

* *C.C.J.*, Vol. I., p. 166.

will have several times attracted attention in the ascent—all the principal summits being visible, with Carn nan Gabhar, rising from the head of narrow Loch Loch, presiding over them. Beinn Dearg and other mountains will also be noticed on the other side of Glen Tilt, beyond them the great cone of Schichallion and the gigantic mass of Ben Lawers. More to the westward nothing but mountain tops can be seen, among which Ben Alder and his fellows, near the foot of Loch Ericht, are prominent. Looking westward, between Braeriach and Cairn Toul, Ben Nevis can be distinguished, while under the most favourable conditions the Coolins in Skye will be made out. North-westward, over the Monadh Liath, Mam Sodhail (Soul) and Scur na Lapich may be picked out from an apparently continuous mountain mass. Further to the north are Ben Wyvis and Beinn Cleith-bric, while almost due north are the Paps of Caithness, Ben-achiet 87 miles off. Ben Aigan, Findlay Seat, Ben Rinnes, Corryhabbie Hill, Buck of the Cabrach, are laid out towards the north-east, the low hill of Mormond, near Fraserburgh, closing the view in this direction. Bennachie, so prominent from many points, is visible among the nearer hills, among which we may include Morven, Kerloch, Clochnaben, Mount Keen, Mount Battock, Glas Maol, with other of the Cairnwell summits, the Ben Uarns, An Sgarsoch, and Carn an Fhìdhleir. Cairngorm itself is well seen across Feith Buidhe. Beinn Mheadhoin also bulks largely in the view, and of course the Eastern Cairngorms make a magnificent picture.

Should the mountaineer wish to continue the excursion, and not to descend to Derry Lodge, there are several recognised routes. A descent may at once be made to Learg Ghruamach and the journey continued to Aviemore; or the county march (Aberdeen-Banff) may be taken in a northerly direction, passing Lochan Buidhe, till the junction with Inverness-shire is reached. Thence the journey may be continued along the ridge, dropping into the Larig at some convenient point. Another favourite route is to descend by Garbh Uisge, a burn rising north-north-east of the cairn, to

the Shelter Stone and Loch Avon. By this route a visit may be paid to Cairn Etchachan, a quarter of a mile north-west from Loch Etchachan. This cairn marks a change in the county (Aberdeen-Banff) boundary; beside it Lochs Avon and Etchachan, differing in level about 700 feet, can be seen at the same time. The descent by the rocks of Garbh Uisge and its feeders looks at first rather forbidding, but is quite easy and safe. Or, best of all, Cairngorm should be made for. By this route the direction is at first due north, taking the ridge between Garbh Uisge and its tributary Garbh Uisge Beag, crossing the latter a little above their confluence; then cross another ridge and descend on Feith Buidhe, crossing its burn a short distance to the west of the crags, then holding north towards the source of Coire Domhain Burn. From the latter point the county march (Banff-Inverness) along the top of Coire an t-Sneachda may be taken, or one may hold a little to the right (east), towards the source of Coire Raibert Burn, whence an easy climb will land the mountaineer on the summit of Cairngorm. The walk across can be easily accomplished in from two to three hours. An interesting account of Jubilee Day on Ben Muich Dhui, followed by a visit to Loch Avon and the Shelter Stone, contributed by the Rev. Mr. Lippe to the first number of the Journal, will well repay perusal.

Learg an Laoigh having been described from Derry Lodge to Coire Etchachan—the most frequented portion on the Braemar side—it will now be convenient to complete the description. It is frequently spoken of as the East Larig (Learg Ghruamach being the West), and has not quite ceased to be used as a drovers' road, for almost every year a flock of sheep passes through Glen Derry. A poinding-fold may be noticed on the left bank of Luibeg Burn, near the bridge leading to the house. The genuine "tramp" is not quite unknown, but the yearly numbers do not average a score. Passing the lower end of Coire Etchachan and holding northward, the track rises to the county (Aberdeen-Banff) march (2450), having now Beinn a' Chaoruinn on the right (east) and Beinn Mheadhoin on the left (west).

Descending towards the Avon it keeps by the right bank of Allt an t-Seallaidh (from Beinn Mheadhoin) and Dubh Lochan, bleak tarns, expansions of this stream*. The track crosses the burn a short distance below the lochans, thence making direct for the Avon at an indifferent ford (2245), highly dangerous when the river is in flood. The scene in this neighbourhood is of the most desolate description. The Avon forded, the track, still holding northward, crosses Allt Dearg. It then keeps by the east side of this burn, which has its highest source on A' Choinneach, a shoulder of Ben Bynac, and along the east bank of Lochan a' Bhainne. Then crossing Glas-ath, a head stream of the Water of Caiplich—which, when it suddenly changes its course to north-east, is called the Water of Ailnack, and flows into the Avon a little above Tomintoul†—it next crosses the county (Banff-Inverness) march and the Caiplich, and holds north-west for Rebhoan, Ben Bynac being gradually rounded. The Caiplich crossed, *a ridge has to be ascended* so as to cross the watershed of the Avon and the Nethy. Every year, for want of attention to the direction just given in italics, there are cases of tourists missing their way and descending by the Caiplich to Tomintoul. To a stranger without precise information, and especially in mist, the Caiplich has every appearance of being the proper route, a delusion aided by the fact that the track almost vanishes when it would be of most service. A memorial cairn (2275) with an inscribed stone, marked "I. G", will be passed on the right (east), a short distance below which the track forks; the path on the right is the old right-of-way, which, keeping by the east side of the Nethy, and passing Sluichd‡, Inchtomach, and Boglechynack, crosses the Nethy

* In Robertson's Map (1822) the name given to the stream is Ault Dulochan.

† In Johnston's map the name is Ailnack from the very source; Robertson's map has the same, only Glas-ath is there considered the source.

‡ Here there are a few weathered old pines, on one of which an eagle nested for several years. A dozen years ago an Abernethy man resolved to pay the nest a visit. Having almost reached the level of the nest one

at Lynmacgilbert near Forest Lodge. But this path has become rather indistinct, and the tourist will do well to keep to the left and cross the Nethy at a foot-bridge three-quarters of a mile north from the top of Mam Suim. A driving road now takes the place of the bridle path, and, crossing a small stream, Allt a' Gharbh-choire, from a narrow corrie, An Garbh-choire to the left (south), and passing Loch a' Gharbh-choire, joins the road in the Pass of Rebhoan. The distance of Braemar from Nethy Bridge by this route is 32 miles, the intermediate distances being: Derry Lodge, 10 miles; Avon Ford, 7 miles; Nethy foot-bridge, $6\frac{1}{2}$ miles; Rebhoan, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles; Nethy Bridge, 7 miles. The last section will be described in connection with the ascent of Cairngorm from Nethy Bridge. Like many other long highland passes, Learg an Laoigh has claimed its victims. On 4th January, 1805, five out of a party of seven privates of the Inverness-shire Militia, on their way through the Larig to Abernethy on furlough, perished in a severe snow-storm*. A song, "The Lads who were lost on the Hill", gives an account of the tragic occurrence; the style of the verses may be gathered from the following specimen:

" Eighteen months pass'd away ere the last lad, they say,
Was found by his friends broken-hearted ;
Down in a low green his red coat was seen,
But his head from his body was parted".

Beinn Mheadhoin, the principal dependency of Ben Muich Dhui, though but seldom ascended, is well worth a passing visit. The ascent is a very simple matter from Loch Etchachan, from which the top is about a mile to the north-east. It may also be ascended from the south-east side of Loch Avon, and from the Learg an Laoigh. The latter route gives an interesting climb, which should be commenced near where Allt an t-Seallaidh receives its first

of the parent birds arrived on the scene, and, swooping down, fixed on the visitor's hat with which it flew away—possibly with the idea that there was a head inside !

* *Scots Magazine*, Vol. LXX., p. 70.

tributary, Coire nan Saibhlean Burn. The cairn of Beinn Mheadhoin is on a big outstanding rock flanked right and left by lower rocks—all well seen from Glen Derry and known as “The Barns”. These rocks (which are not without “pot-holes”), together with several lesser “humps” along the summit, render the hill readily recognisable at a great distance. On the loch side of the mountain are two particular crags; the one at the upper end of the loch is Stacan Dubha; the other, at the lower end, is Stac an Luich. Sron Ghorm is to the north, facing the River Avon, with a crag above Dubh Lochan. The South Top (3551) is marked by an O.S. cairn on the top of the crags on the county march about two-thirds of a mile south from the Barns. The view from the summit is extremely good, particularly Cairngorm, here seen as from no other point. The prospect includes Ben Bynac, Ben Rinnes, Creag Mhor, Corryhabbie Hill, Cook’s Cairn, Buck of Cabrach, Tap o’ Noth, Bennachie, Stob an t-Sluichd, Ben Avon, Beinn a’ Chaorruinn, Beinn a’ Bhuird, Lochnagar, the Ben Uarns, Derry Cairngorm, Beinn a’ Ghlo, Ben Muich Dhui (crags above Shelter Stone, kitchen, and cairn), Loch Etchachan (seen from a little below the Barns), Braeriach, Cairn an Lochain, Cairngorm, the Feith Buidhe, Mam Suim, Strathspay, the Moray Firth, and the hollow of Loch Avon, the head of the loch being seen from the same point as Loch Etchachan. There is an easy descent to Loch Avon by Coire Buidhe, and a steeper to the Avon by Sron Ghorm. Shaw, in the text of his work*, has “Cairngormbeg”, altered to “Cairngormloi” in the errata, as the name of Beinn Mheadhoin.

Derry Cairngorm meets with even less favour than Beinn Mheadhoin, though the summit is but $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles south-east from the track between Loch Etchachan and Ben Muich Dhui, only entailing an extra climb of a little over 500 feet. Lying between Glen Derry and Glen Luibeg, it may also be ascended from these glens—routes that are, however, only traversed by foresters. Should the

* “Province of Moray” (1775).

climb be commenced from a point *below* Loch Etchachan, it may be found uncomfortably steep by some. There is a large area on the summit covered with smallish stones. The view is good, and includes Lochan Uaine (Ben Muich Dhui), Beinn Bhrotain, Carn a' Mhaim, Devil's Point, and Cairn Toul, not to mention Lochnagar and the Forfarshire hills. The green-banked Lui and the upper glens of the Dee are probably the most interesting portion of the panorama. Derry Cairngorm also boasts of a Lochan Uaine, a small tarn in Coire an Lochain Uaine about half a mile to the north-east. The stream from the Lochan is known as Allt an Lochan Uaine, and flows into the Derry. William Smith, better known as "Ulleam-Ridhe-noamh", poet and deer-stalker, a native of Rynuaie, Abernethy, who long indulged in the pleasures of the chase, on his own account, among the Cairngorms, but ultimately served under Sir John Moore, wrote some songs which breathe the very essence of poetry*. The best of them is entitled "Allt an Lochain Uaine", alongside which streamlet he had erected a rude turf "shieling". The first stanza of this song is given, with a translation which does *not*, however, do justice to the original:

Aig Allt an Lochan Uaine,	At the burn of Lochan Uaine
Bha mi uair 'tamm,	Once I did reside ;
Ged bha 'n t-aite fuar	Although cold was the place,
Bha 'n fhardach fuasach blath,	Very warm was the dwelling ;
Ged thigeadh gaoth 'o thuath orm	And although winds from the
'Us cathadh luath o 'n aird,	north came on me
Bha Allt an Lochan Uaine,	With swift drifting snow from
Le' fhuaim ga m' chuir gu pramh.	the heights,
	The burn of Lochan Uaine
	With its sound lulled me to rest.

Ultimately foresters set fire to Smith's hut; some of the contents were carried off as trophies, and are still preserved in Braemar.

Derry Cairngorm is also known as the Eastern or Lesser Cairngorm. More than one old guide-book gives a caution against being imposed upon by Braemar guides: "the

* "Highland Legends", by "Glenmore", 2nd Ed., 1859.

tourist will have to take care that he is not conducted to the lesser instead of to the true and higher mountain"*. Carn Crom is the southern spur of Derry Cairngorm, with Creag an t-Seabhaig immediately overlooking the confluence of the Derry and Luibeg Burns. There is a corrie between the top of Carn Crom and Creag an t-Seabhaig named Coire na Craoibh Ora, a name derived, it is said, from a Mackenzie of Dalmore having once hid his money there. The last Mackenzie of Dalmore had to part with his lands after the Rebellion of 1715.

Carn a' Mhaim, the southerly spur of Ben Muich Dhui, from which it is cut off on the north by Allt Clach nan Taillear, Allt Carn a' Mhaim separating it on the north-east, is easy of ascent, but the prospect from the summit is only of local interest, as its lowness and position do not permit of an extended view. The top is marked by a neat little cairn, six feet in height, on a rocky point. The path from Derry Lodge to Learg Ghruamach rounds it at a height of about 2000 feet, and the mountaineer who is anxious to "bag a peak" may make the ascent from the south at any convenient point of the track. A small tributary of the Luibeg Burn, known as Allt Preas a' Mheirlich, flows along the southern base. The western face is named Ceann Crionn Carn a' Mhaim, and has a rather steep slope to Learg Ghruamach.

Loch Avon is the great glory of the Central Cairngorms, and its famed Shelter Stone is the Mecca of many a mountain excursion. The loch is about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles in length, with a breadth of little more than a furlong, and lies at an altitude of about 2450 feet in a great hollow formed by Ben Muich Dhui, Cairngorm, and Beinn Mheadhoin. From its lower end issues the River Avon, the largest tributary of the Spey, which has a length of 38 miles and a basin of 210 square miles. The real source of the Avon, however, has to be looked for on Ben Muich Dhui. The precipitous rocks on both sides and at the upper end of the

* Anderson's "Guide to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland" (1842).

loch have an appearance, as seen from the outlet*, of stern grandeur, and from the head the prospect is equally magnificent. For in the latter case the falling away towards the outlet is amply compensated for by the majestic rocks here forming a semicircle. The intense solitariness, the utter lack of life, and the noise of the torrents which hurry down to join the loch add a weirdness to the scene which has the effect of making the beholder imagine man and his busy world much farther off than they really are. Loch Avon is unique, with nothing commonplace about it, and accordingly is an accepted standard for the comparison of other mountain lochs. In winter, when the sides of the mountains are covered and their corries packed with snow, the burns imprisoned and silent, and the loch sealed up by ice, the only relief from the universal whiteness being the perpendicular black rocks affording no hold for snow, a scene of arctic desolation is presented which is without parallel in our island. Loch Avon, says a famous Scottish writer†, is like a fragment of the Alps imported and set down in Scotland; in winter an Alpine devotee might console himself here, and in a few other recesses of the Cairngorm range, realising all the dangers, excitements, and phenomena of Alpine feats. Loch Avon, however, is not equally impressive on all beholders; "And that's Loch Avon! Weel, weel, I thinkna muckle o't; it's owre faur frae hame", was the observation made to the writer by a native of Abernethy when he first saw the famous sheet of water. According to an old popular belief, a splendid brilliant is seen at night by the side of the loch‡. Shepherds have been credited with endeavouring to obtain it, one having even been let down a precipice by means of ropes; but all attempts to obtain the glittering prize have been unsuccessful. The loch had at one time been lined with pines, as numerous tree-roots still testify. The upper end

* Wilson, in "Scenery of the Highlands", recommends an approach to it from Glen Avon.

† "The Cairngorm Mountains", by John Hill Burton (1864)

‡ "The Highland Note-book", by R. Carruthers (1843).

has a border of gravel. The *larach* of a shepherd's bothy may still be seen at the east end, as well as another at the Learg an Laoigh ford across the river. Formerly cattle came up in summer and grazed by the loch-side, seeking pasture even as far as the upper end. The remains of a rough stone dyke across the Garbh Allt, erected to prevent the cattle wandering up at other seasons, are still visible. The loch is not unfrequently visited by deer, but the writer in his many visits, and particularly during a ten days' residence at the Shelter Stone, never saw one. On a certain occasion a large herd, estimated at from 300 to 400, was seen from The Saddle disporting themselves in its cooling waters—some swimming with only heads and antlers visible, others standing by the shore, or shaking themselves dry on the bank. As soon as the herd observed "strangers" they bolted up Beinn Mheadhoin. Loch Avon may be reached from Derry Lodge by Learg an Laoigh, rounding the north side of Beinn Mheadhoin. This route entails little climbing, but is not so popular as a visit from Cairngorm or Ben Muich Dhui. It is frequently descended on from Loch Etchachan, a little to the north of which a good view may be obtained of the upper end.

The Shelter Stone (Clach Dhian) is at the upper end of Loch Avon on the south side of Garbh Uisge. It has long been noted as a place of shelter, and has been credited with accommodation for more than four times as many as could actually repose under its roof. The number that can be "comfortably housed" is five; or at a pinch, six. The external dimensions of the Stone are: length, 44 feet; breadth, 21 feet; average height, 22 feet; and its weight is calculated to be 1700 tons, but the available inside space is not commensurate with its other dimensions. It is but one of many gigantic blocks split by frost or lightning from the towering rocks above; the particular rock from which this stone fell being probably the precipice 800 feet in height, with the square flat top so conspicuous from the loch, and on which at one time eagles nested. In falling it finally rested on other two stones—and thus the "Shelter" was produced. All sizes of boulders from a cottage downward, abound in extraordinary



SUMMITS OF PRECIPICES ABOVE SHELTER STONE.

numbers in the neighbourhood, yet the Shelter Stone can be readily picked out, even at a distance, owing to the peculiar lichen markings on its front. Walking up from the head of the loch a narrow indifferent path conducts one to the desired refuge, its immediate proximity being indicated by empty tins, broken glass and crockery. In summer and autumn the Shelter Stone is much frequented and is undoubtedly a convenience to mountaineers. But its comforts as an asylum from the weather might be greatly improved. The upper end is in a chronic state of over-ventilation, and as there are also other openings it is rather draughty. Then the accumulation of snow in winter and spring causes a dampness of the floor which demands a remedy of a more permanent character than can be applied by a casual visitor. Of old poachers were blamed for resorting to it, and foresters were credited with endeavouring to destroy the sheltering amenities of the Stone; but now that poaching is here a thing of the past, an arrangement might be made with the owner, the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, whereby permission could be obtained for thoroughly "repairing" the Stone. Cordiner could only have had the Shelter Stone in his mind when, writing of this district, he speaks of a "hideous cavern, awful as ever hermit retired to, yawning over the end of a dreary lake. It chills one's blood to enter it". The Garbh Uisge (Rough Burn—a name well applied) subsides into peace when it gets abreast of the Shelter Stone, and, broadening out, seems to enter the loch with much reluctance. Its little boulder-strewn plain at the head of the loch is named Maghan na Banaraich (the Dairymaid's Field); he must have been a highly humorous Celt who first applied the name. Above the Stone, Garbh Uisge dashes down in a series of cataracts, having just received the Feith Buidhe and Coire Domhain Burns. The ascent of Ben Muich Dhui by Garbh Uisge is, despite appearances, quite an easy matter—the left bank of the stream being kept—and should be accomplished in about two hours. Cairngorm may also be reached by Coire Domhain, but the better route is Coire Raibert by which the ascent can be made in

less than two hours. The route to Loch Etchachan is by the left bank of Stacan Dubha Burn; the nearer that burn is kept the fewer boulders will be encountered. Rebhoan is sometimes reached from the Shelter Stone *via* The Saddle (2670) at the head of Garbh Allt, one-sixth of a mile to the north of the loch, to which there is a wretched track along the loch-side. The "going" along Garbh Allt is rough in places, at times somewhat reminding one of portions of Learg Ghruamach. The right bank of the burn, which in dry weather is intermittent, should be kept. About half a mile short of the road at the Nethy foot-bridge it will be observed that the stream had at one time been partly diverted. This was with the view of increasing the volume of water in Loch a' Gharbh-choire for tree-floating purposes. The foot-bridge is a smart three hours' walk from the Shelter Stone. During last century and the beginning of the present "cud bear or cup moss", a species of lichen then used for dyeing purposes, was gathered from the rocks in this neighbourhood, as well as by the head streams of the Dee, but it has now no commercial value.

The illustrations accompanying this article are drawn by Mr. J. G. Murray, A.R.P.E., from photographs.