

THREE DAYS IN SKYE.

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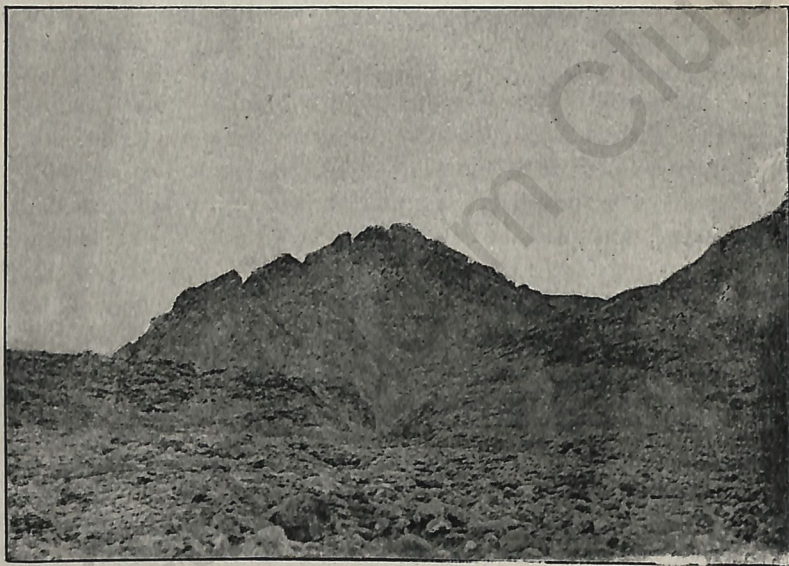
SKYE has many natural features standing out with remarkable prominence, but possibly the one which provokes most comment from, and causes the greatest discomfort to, the tourist, is its climate, which seems to be always saturated with moisture. When it is stated that the mean annual rainfall at Sligachan is 92 inches, as against 26 to 30 inches along the Firth of Forth, and 32 inches at Aberdeen, the drawbacks to mountaineering in the Isle of Mist can be readily understood. Meteorological reports show April to be the driest month of the year in Skye, and May is not a bad second. We were fortunate, however, in our Skye holiday of last August, only one of our three days being wet.

We set out from Sligachan Hotel for Sgurr nan Gillean on a rather unpromising morning. Excellent centre for the Coolins as that hotel is, it has a very bare and solitary appearance, with only a few stunted bushes around to relieve the monotony of the desolate moor on which it stands. Starting at 11.0 we followed a bee line across the moor for the shoulder and the corrie on the east side of the hill, whence we were to make the top of the ridge. An hour's tramp brought us to the corrie, and we commenced scrambling, but on rising to the 1000 feet line the mist became so dense that nothing could be seen beyond a few yards. The ascent of this corrie is comparatively easy, notwithstanding the steep scree slope, in climbing which it is well for a party to keep together. The fine rain which was now descending was so penetrating and cold that it made the ascent extremely uncomfortable, especially with the howling wind blowing up the corrie. It was, therefore, with no small degree of pleasure that, on reaching the top of the ridge, which culminates in a narrow edge dipping rapidly to the west, we gained some shelter from the storm by descending a few yards on the western side. The ridge

runs almost due north, terminating in Sgurr nan Gillean, and rises gradually till nearing the summit, where the ascent is very steep and rough, necessitating the use of hands as well as feet. Along the top of the ridge, boulders, varying in size from a Sussex pea to a crofter's hut, are strewn about in a most heterogeneous fashion, making progress slow and difficult. The mist had become so thick that great caution had to be exercised, but judging by the time and the stiff work in front, we inferred, unless we were much out of our reckoning, that the summit could not be far away. We continued climbing over very rough ground, which is hard on the hands unless well gloved, and were rewarded in a short time by gaining the cairn (3'0). Here the atmospheric conditions were exceedingly depressing, and little calculated to inspire the most ardent climber with enthusiasm, for there was, of course, no view, and we were thoroughly soaked. The top is conical, and about twelve feet across, with steep, and, in some places, almost precipitous sides. The short neck which connects the main ridge with the summit is very narrow, and, as the wind was so strong, it was considered advisable to negotiate it on all fours.

Only a few minutes were spent on the top. When the ridge had been re-traversed for some time, the difficulty of knowing when to turn sharply to the east in order to reach safely the Sligachan valley confronted us; but, fortunately, a few bearings had been taken during the ascent, and a careful note of the time; and although the huge rough boulders presented quite a different appearance returning, yet we were lucky to strike a corrie very near to the one by which the ascent was made. Emerging from the clouds, a thrill of pleasure ran through the party, for the view was most charming; Glen Sligachan seemed from the height to be covered with a network of miniature lagoons, connected with each other by tiny canals, all running towards the River Sligachan. The valley was quickly gained, and, to vary the route, we forded the river in order to reach the track leading from Loch Coruisk to Sligachan, which, however, turned out to be no advantage, being longer and no

better walking than the peat and heather. The hotel was reached at 6:30, five hours having been spent in mist so dense that nothing could be seen outside a radius of a few yards. It was a small grain of comfort to learn that MacKenzie, the guide, who had set out soon after us with a party, to make the ascent by the Pinnacle Route, had not ventured beyond the third pinnacle.



SGURR NAN GILLEAN, SHOWING PINNACLE ROUTE.

Camasunary was our goal for the next day, the proposed route being by the Bhasteir ridge, Lota and Harta Corries, Druim nan Ramh (Drumhain), and Loch Coruisk. Leaving Sligachan at noon, we followed the course of Allt Dearg Beag almost to its source, a track which affords magnificent views of the surrounding scenery, and some excellent scrambling with a "chimney" here and there. The climb up the corrie between Sgurr nan Gillean and Sgurr a' Bhasteir was somewhat tedious, owing chiefly to its want of difficulties, though the surface is bad enough, consisting largely of considerable boulders. But the view from the saddle (Bealach a' Bhasteir) fully repaid us, for here an unequalled panorama surrounds us. The sun shone forth

brilliantly, and lit up the whole landscape, revealing Portree away in the north, with the Old Man of Storr standing like a huge obelisk against the sky, and Raasay, with its verdant hills, towards the north-east. On the east are Glamaig and Marsco, with the Ross-shire mountains of a most lovely deep blue colour fading away in the distance, whilst immediately above is Sgurr nan Gillean wearing a most forbidding aspect. To the south the view beggars description. Yawning below is Lota Corrie, like the remains of a huge extinct volcano, with its steeply sloping, and in some places perpendicular, sides, and crowded with climbing possibilities; whilst westwards might be seen Sgurr Thuilm and Sgurr a' Bhasteir with the Atlantic beyond.

We found it impossible to reach Lota Corrie from this point of the ridge, here very narrow, without making a drop of about a hundred feet, and as no one felt inclined to indulge in acrobatic feats, this necessitated a detour of the Tooth. Before again arriving at the ridge, the weather suddenly changed and the mist came down so thick that everything outside a radius of a few yards was entirely obscured, and caused us some little anxiety in deciding which of two corries that now presented themselves should be taken.

It would seem that from this point there is only one route leading to Lota Corrie, by descending the steep scree slopes at the foot of the precipice of Bhasteir, formed by a fault in the rock. The descent is, however, tolerably easy, the scree affording excellent footing. We now began to experience how much pain and discomfort might have been avoided had we followed the advice regarding the use of gloves given in a previous number of the Journal.

When nearing half-way the climber would do well to keep to the burn which flows out of the rocks, and he will have little difficulty in reaching the bottom, and will also meet numerous pretty bits of scrambling. This advice is offered because we made a serious mistake at this point, involving the loss of valuable time, and subsequently proving fatal to our plan of reaching Loch Coruisk that day.

Thinking time would be saved by not descending to the foot of Lota Corrie, a straight line was taken for Drumhain, but after scrambling for about an hour we reached a precipice of a few hundred feet of smooth rock, leaving no alternative but to retrace our steps. The ordinary track appears to lead across the face of a beautiful waterfall, tumbling and roaring over an enormous mass of rock, worn smooth by the action of the water. It was now 6.0, so the idea of crossing Drumhain had reluctantly to be abandoned.

Harta Corrie, which is simply a continuation of Lota Corrie at a lower level winding eastwards, has nothing of deep interest beyond the Bloody Stone, famous for some ferocious deed in days when lives were not considered of much value. On arriving at Loch Dubh (7.30), at the head of Glen Sligachan, the track leading to Camasunary was struck, and turning almost due south we skirted the western rugged slopes of Blaven (Blath Bheinn) in all its magnificent grandeur, with its beetling crags towering above, whose gorgeous colouring was enhanced by the ruddy glow of a western sky. Camasunary, a well-built farm house, was reached at 9.0.

It stands on a little strath on the east side of the head of Loch Scavaig, and forms an excellent centre for visiting Loch Coruisk or climbing Blaven. It is matter for regret that its comforts can only be counted upon by the belated climber. The easiest and quickest route, and that adopted by most tourists, for visiting Loch Coruisk is by boat; but a very rugged and well-worn track along the shore, devoid of any excitement until we reach the "Bad Step", of which one hears so much, leads to Coruisk in an hour. With ordinary care, the "Bad Step" can be easily negotiated, although a person of nervous temperament would doubtless regard it with a certain amount of trepidation, and consider it impracticable. It is about thirty feet long, is made by a very narrow cleft in the rock, which rises at a sharp angle and dips about thirty feet perpendicularly into the sea. Loch Coruisk is probably the wildest and grandest in our isles, and forms a noble arena to the sombre, rugged, en-

circling hills, whose deep shadows lend a most gloomy and weird aspect to the scene.

The path from Camasunary to Strathaird House, where it strikes the high road from Broadford to Elgol, is well defined, and rises rapidly for 500 feet on leaving Loch Scavaig, after which it is easy walking across Strathaird, whence we have noble views of Loch Slapin and its varied beauty. The high road is, like all the main roads in Skye, well made and kept in excellent repair. At Faodean a ferry across to Torran saves a long walk round the head of Loch Slapin. Torran is a township of considerable size, but the majority of the crofters' huts are of the most wretched description.

There is nothing of particular note along Strath Suardal except the site of St. Bridget's Chapel and Cill Chriosd (Kilchrist), with its surrounding graveyard, which we found in a very untidy and dilapidated condition. We arrived at Broadford Hotel, a most comfortable house, at 7.0, all sorry to have reached the last stage of our tour, and the busy world with its stern realities of life.