

THE CAIRNGORM MOUNTAINS.

II.—THE CENTRAL CAIRNGORMS.

II.—THE CAIRNGORM DIVISION.

BY ALEX. INKSON M'CONNOCHIE.

“Mid wastes that dorn and dreary lie,
One mountain rears his mighty form,
Disturbs the moon in passing by,
And smiles above the thunder storm.
There matin hymn was never sung ;
Nor vesper, save the plover's wail ;
But mountain eagles breed their young,
And aerial spirits ride the gale”.

CAIRNGORM is readily accessible from Speyside between Grantown and Kingussie. But Nethy Bridge, Boat of Garten, and Aviemore are the particular points from which the base of the mountain is usually approached. Each of these places has its peculiar advantages as a basis for excursions to the Cairngorms, the Speyside approaches to Cairngorm itself all concentrating at Glenmore Lodge. Nethy Bridge is a station on the Strathspey section of the Great North of Scotland Railway in the parish of Abernethy-Kincardine. On the other (west) side of the Spey, at a distance of about $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles, is Broomhill station on the Highland Railway. As the village of Nethy Bridge is provided with a hotel and not a few lodging-houses, the mountaineer should have no difficulty in securing accommodation suitable to his wants. As may be gathered from the name, the Nethy is there crossed by a bridge, the county road, along the right bank of the Spey, passing through the village. The Nethy, ranking as the sixth tributary of the Spey, has a course of 14 miles. It rises on Cairngorm, and flows almost due north to the Spey near Broomhill station, the upper part, between Cairngorm and

Ben Bynac, being known as Garbh Allt. Proceeding by the left bank of the Nethy from the village to Glenmore Lodge, the mountaineer has a pleasant walk—or drive—of 10 miles before him. The stream is thoroughly Highland, and in summer and autumn the lower part of the strath is very beautiful. The Abernethy Forest is entered as the village and Dell of Abernethy are left behind, and in 3 miles the road joins another at right angles. If driving, the left (east) turn is taken, and, half a mile further on, near Forest Lodge—the shooting-box in connection with the Abernethy Forest—a sharp turn is made to the right (north). But if walking an obvious “short cut” through the wood presents itself, saving the detour by the lodge. Beyond this there is only one inhabited house in Strath Nethy, Rynettin*, a forester’s house on the eastern slope of Carn Rynettin (1549). This house passed, the road holds to the left (east), making its way through a field, after which it joins another road whence the direction is south to Rebhoan. On the east side of the Nethy will be observed the ruins of Boglechynack and Inchtomach. The *larach* of Rynuie will be passed on the right (west) between Rynettin and Rebhoan. The latter was formerly a farm, on the eastern slope of Meall a’ Bhuachaille, but is now part of the deer forest, the house (1300) being used as a shieling during “the season”. Three small tarns, good for trout, will be passed as the buildings are neared; below, to the east, is Loch a’ Gharbh-choire, where water was stored for raising the volume of the Nethy to float trees to the Spey when the Abernethy forest (sold for £7000 to a Yorkshire company in 1730) was cut down. On the way up to Rebhoan Cairngorm and Ben Bynac will have frequently attracted attention; now descending to Glen More—for Rebhoan is on the watershed of Strath Nethy and Glen More—a charming change of scenery will be experienced. The head of Glen More is a picturesque narrow gorge, known as the Pass of Rebhoan (frequently also called the

* In coming *down* Strath Nethy particular care must be taken, in approaching Rynettin, to take the uninviting turn to the left (west).

Thieves' Pass), with steep pine-clad slopes. On the right (west) is Creag Loisgte of Meall a' Bhuachaille, on the left (east) Creag nan Gall of Cairngorm, a small tarn, An Lochan Uaine*, lying in the hollow. Thereafter the glen opens out, and Glenmore Lodge, near the head of Loch Morlich, is soon reached.

A longer route from Nethy Bridge to Glenmore Lodge is by Kincardine Church and the Slugan, a distance of about 12 miles. From Nethy Bridge to a little beyond Kincardine Church the Speyside road is kept. In the churchyard a tombstone has been erected to the memory of "Walter Stuart, grandson of Robert II. of Scotland, and his family who possessed the Barony of Kincardine, 1374-1683", and of "one of their descendants", who died in 1884. The lairds were known as the Barons of Kincardine. One of them married a daughter of Lochiel, receiving with his bride twelve clansmen as a dowry; hence the Camerons of Abernethy! Nearly half a mile beyond the church the road for Glenmore Lodge leaves the turnpike at right angles, holding southward by the left bank of Milton Burn, through the Slugan and the Sanctuary of Glenmore forest, to Loch Morlich. Thence the glen road hugs the north shore of the loch to Glenmore Lodge. A right-of-way difficulty has been satisfactorily settled by the public road having been continued along the foot of the lodge garden, thus avoiding a close approach to the house.

Boat of Garten is a rising village, with a hotel close to the station. It is on the Highland Railway, and is also the terminus of the Strathspey section of the Great North of Scotland Railway. The village is on the left bank of the Spey, a carriage-ferry connecting it with the other side. Having crossed the river, the road from Nethy Bridge to Kincardine Church is reached. The distance from Boat of Garten to Glenmore Lodge is about 9 miles.

Aviemore is a favourite starting point for the Cairngorms, the distance to Glenmore Lodge being only about 7 miles. Unfortunately it has at present no hotel, and

* *Vide C.C.J.*, Vol. I., p. 294.

there is little accommodation of any kind for passing tourists. When the direct route by the Highland Railway from Aviemore to Inverness is opened, a hotel may possibly be built to meet the increased requirements of so important a junction. The station is on the left bank of the Spey, almost opposite the mouth of the Druie, a considerable stream formed by the drainage of Glen More, Learg Ghruamach, and Glen Eunach. Immediately to the west of the station is the hill from which the slogan of the Grants, "Stand Fast, Craigellachie", is derived. The view of the Cairngorms from Aviemore and its vicinity is one of the finest that can be obtained. The passing tourist is impressed with the extraordinary mass, as well as with the magnificent corries and the deep pass, Learg Ghruamach, which forms such a gigantic V on the horizon. An eminent judge* had a high opinion of them, but he would seem to have been content with the view from his carriage. More than once he refers to the subject, and always in glowing language. In his opinion the Cairngorms exhibit one of the finest pieces of mountain scenery in Britain, snow only adding to their grandeur. The railway journey between Nethy Bridge (or Grantown) and Aviemore affords glorious mountain views, ever varying, especially when the corries are streaked with snow. The prospect from the road on the left bank of the river, between Boat of Garten and Aviemore, is even better than that obtained from the train. The Spey is crossed at Aviemore by an iron bridge, the road to Glenmore Lodge keeping by the left bank of the Druie, passing Inverdruie and the Free Church of Rothiemurchus, to Coylum Bridge, about two miles from the station. Both at Inverdruie and Coylum Bridge there are several cottages where visitors may occasionally find accommodation. The Speyside (right bank) road crosses the Druie at Coylum Bridge, at the east end of which is the entrance gate to Drumintoul Lodge, the shooting-box in connection with the Rothiemurchus Forest. A few yards above the bridge two streams unite and form the Druie,

* "Circuit Journeys", by Lord Cockburn.

the more northerly being the Luineag* from Loch Morlich, the other, Allt na Beinne Moire—better known as the Bennie—from Loch Eunach. The Glenmore road keeps by the right bank of the Luineag, along which excellent views of the Cairngorms continually present themselves, Coylum Bridge left behind, Aultnancaber (a forester's house), two mineral wells on the left bank of the stream, formerly of some repute, and the *larach* of Inchonie, will be successively passed. Thence, as already indicated, the road keeps by the north shore of Loch Morlich to the Lodge.

Loch Morlich, the largest of the lochs in the Cairngorm district, is a mile long by five furlongs broad. Many a weary mountaineer, doubtful of his position as he makes the descent of Cairngorm to Rothiemurchus, has been invigorated on recognising the pine-surrounded loch shining in the afternoon sun, when the mist has suddenly lifted, pointing out the route Speywards. It lies at an altitude of 1046 feet, and has at the upper end a great bank of fine sand—encroaching even on the road—driven up by wind. At the lower end, where the Luineag debouches, sluices will be observed. These were used for damming up the loch in the tree-floating days. A particularly large pine has been selected by ospreys for nesting, but they have not bred there for several years, on account of the malicious persecution to which they were subjected. The loch, once famous for trout, is now, perhaps, more noted for its pike. The stream entering at the upper end is Allt Mor—a combination of burns from Cairngorm, Creag na Leacainn, and the Pass of Rebhoan. The situation of Glenmore Lodge, near the head of the loch, and facing the “snowy corries” of Cairngorm, is one of the finest in the Highlands. It is the shooting-box of the noted deer forest of that name, which so late as 1859 was under sheep.

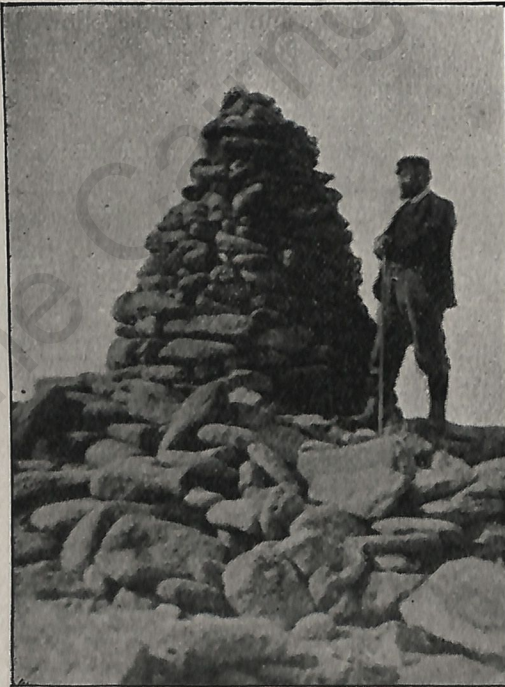
* The Luineag, however, formerly flowed into Loch Phitiulais (on the east side of the Speyside road between Coylum Bridge and Kincardine Church), as may be seen from evidences of its old channel a little above Coylum Bridge.

The ascent of Cairngorm from Glenmore Lodge is both direct and easy and presents not the least difficulty. The distance, as the crow flies, is four miles; the time required will vary from two to three hours, according to circumstances. Almost the whole route is visible from the Lodge: there is no mistaking the summit, which rises boldly to the east of the fine line of corries which the mountaineer cannot fail to have admired on the way to the Lodge. A road leads down from the Lodge to Allt Mor, which is crossed by a foot-bridge and a ford at an altitude of 1060 feet. The burn crossed, the road is continued to an old house, Rieaconachan, the original site of Glenmore Lodge, after which it deteriorates rapidly, and soon becomes a mere bridle-path along the left bank of the stream. When a height of about 1400 feet, however, has been attained, the Allt Mor is recrossed, the ascent becomes steeper, and the track forks. The branch on the right is a forest path of no service to the climber, the other leads to An t-Aonach (2118), a minor height of Cairngorm, and should be followed till it begins to hold to the left, when the ridge should be taken all the way to the cairn. The "going" is exceptionally good, in many places even to absolute smoothness, not to mention a "moss carpet" of considerable extent with no boulders to negotiate. A threatening specimen, Clach Parraig, will be observed from Glenmore Lodge, and will be passed some distance to the left of the upper part of the path. A few yards beyond Clach Parraig a considerably smaller boulder will be passed on the right; immediately below it is M'Connochie's Well, the last spring that can be depended on till the neighbourhood of the cairn is reached. Above this the climber should gradually "feel" towards the centre of the ridge, having on the right Allt a' Choire Chais—a burn from the corrie of that name* immediately to the west of the cairn—on the left a larger burn, with a deeper gorge, Allt na Ciste. At a height of about 3150 feet a granite tor, dubbed "Black Castle", will be

* Coire Cas frequently remains snow-patched for the greater part of summer.

passed on the left. The final rise, Sron an Aonaich, is now tackled, easily surmounting which, a few flat boulders near the top being no hindrance to a rapid advance, the summit of Cairngorm will be put under foot. The cairn is erected on a little low mass of rock which has not the appearance of being the *very* highest point of the mountain.

During the final stage of the ascent of Cairngorm the climber cannot fail to be struck with the gradually increasing view to the northward. It is in this direction that the titular peak presents the finest picture, especially before the winter's snow has quite disappeared from the mountains of Ross and Caithness. Then the distant hills across the Moray Firth appear to stand out boldly and even to approach the observer—under certain atmospheric conditions—with startling effect. This prospect alone will amply repay the little trouble of the excursion; for it is a picture to “gaze on long and lovingly”.



The view from the cairn has thus been described by the first Chairman of the Club:

“To the north-west the ample form of Ben Wyvis towered dimly through the cloud, and what we judged from their shadowy outline in the distance due north the Caithness Hills. The coast line of Ross, Cromarty, and Sutherland stretched northwards, fading into, or blending with the haze in that

direction. The Moray Firth, extending eastward and westward of our position, marked off its coast line by its lighter colour, which became brighter and clearer as the blurring rain-showers swept south-easterly in constant procession. To the north-east Ben Rinnes reared his conspicuous cairn, and the Buck of the Cabrach, and his neighbour, the Tap o' Noth, showed their well-known forms. In the far north east Bennachie projects his picturesque outline of Mither Tap and Oxen Craig Almost due east Morven, by its proximity, shuts out the view beyond and looms grandly in the distance. Eastwards also are Beinn Mheadhoin, Beinn a' Chaoruinn, Stob an t-Sluichd, Ben Avon, and Beinn a' Bhuid. Lochnagar is in grand form in the south-east, and, over his lofty neighbour, Cairn Taggart, Cairn Bannoch asserts itself, and Tolmount and Cairn na Glasha trend south-westwards towards the Glas Maol. The mountains of Glen Ey continue the southern zone to Beinn a' Ghlo, beyond which, and far, far, to the south and south-west, heaven-kissed hills rivet our admiring gaze. In the south-west the Sow of Athole dominates the Boar of Badenoch, and the mighty Ben Alder frowns upon both. A little south of west, through the depression between Braeriach and Cairn Toul, the lofty massive outline of Ben Nevis lifts his proud crest to the clouds. Northwards and westwards the everlasting hills of Inverness, Ross, and Skye show more or less distinctly as distance or cloud limits the view. In the near foreground, across the smiling valley of the Spey, through which the river winds in graceful curves, the long lofty range of the Monadh Liath stretches from Lochindorb to Loch Lochy. Nearer among the dark wooded grounds in the wide valley Loch Morlich, Loch an Eilein, and Loch Alvie shine like molten silver, and on Airgiod Meall, the left foot, and Mam Suim, the right foot, of Cairngorm are silver buckles, in the shape of two small lochans, both placed about the 1800 feet contour line. The grandeur and beauty of the corries to the right and left, and on the neighbouring mountains of Braeriach, Cairn Toul, Ben Muich Dhui, Beinn a' Bhuid, and Ben Avon, we humbly confess our inability to describe".

Cairngorm, somewhat cone-shaped, slopes more or less rapidly all round its summit; on the north, as we have seen, to Glen More, on the east to Garbh Allt, on the south to Loch Avon, and westward to Coire Raibert. A descent

may be made from the cairn to The Saddle, but to the east and north-east the slope to the Garbh Allt is precipitous, and has to be attempted with care.* Towards the south also there are "Stacs" that render the descent, except by one particular route, rather dangerous. Immediately to the west of The Saddle, Stac an Fharaidh frowns down upon Loch Avon; a slender stream, another Feith Buidhe Burn, finds a way over it to the loch. About a third of a mile from the head of the loch the Coire Raibert Burn discharges itself to the west of Stac an Fharaidh; to the west of the latter burn are the Stag Rocks, equally formidable to those lower down the loch. It is by the Coire Raibert Burn that the descent to Loch Avon is generally made—a steep enough route in the lower portion. This burn rises to the south-west of the cairn, and, below its fork, should be kept on the left (east).

Before leaving the summit there are two near objects worthy of attention. A short distance to the east will be observed an excrescence of rough granite which often assists in the recognition of Cairngorm from a distance. There is also Fuaran-a-Mharcuic, the Marquis's Well—so named from the Marquis of Huntly, when that family owned such extensive tracts of land in Badenoch and Strathspey. The Marquis's Well, the source of the Allt na Ciste, is situated at a height about 150 feet lower than the summit, from which it is about 270 paces to the E.N.E. There is a cairn at the Well, and also a "leading" cairn 175 paces from the summit cairn. It is a considerable spring, with an abundant supply of excellent water. A great snow-field will often be found here, quite concealing the Well even in the beginning of summer. The mountaineer who makes the ascent from Glen More, returning by the same route, should descend southward a short distance so as to have a view of Loch Avon. Ciste Mhairearaid (see page 134) should also be visited. At one time known as the "Snow House", this corrie is the main source of the Nethy, for the Garbh Allt

* Lewis Smith (a nephew of William Smith of Rynuie) was killed here; while following ptarmigan he slipped over the smooth rock.

issues from the snow which is always found here. Seen from the neighbourhood of Nethy Bridge, Cairngorm has the appearance of descending to the Strath by three great "steps". Of these the lowermost is known as Sron a' Chano (*c.* 3200), the middle is Cnap Coire na Spreidhe (3772), while the highest is, of course, the cone itself. The two first-named are particularly prominent, as they seem to overhang the deep, narrow gorge of the Nethy. The Cnap has half a dozen little "warts", and may be reached in a few minutes from Ciste Mhairearaid. As seen from the Cnap the "pass" below is here worthy of comparison with the rougher portions of the Larig Ghru. Snow buntings seem to nest in the vicinity.

The first ascent of Cairngorm of which we have any detailed record was made by a lady in 1801*, and on that account, as well as to shew the general ideas then as to the "difficulties" of mountain-climbing, the following extract is given :

"The 7th of September, the day of the earthquake, we left the Doune [Rothiemurchus] at a very early hour, and went to Mr. Osborne's† house in Glenmore to breakfast ; Mr. Grant [of Rothiemurchus], Mr. Osborne's two sons, with another gentleman and myself, were bound for the top of Cairngorm. I rode on Mrs. Grant's pony to nearly the summit of it ; the gentlemen walked. The view from its summit is very extensive, and the sublimity and terrific grandeur of the prospect, on the side towards Braemar, cannot be described ; but those who mount that eminence should walk to the edge of the precipices hanging over the hollow towards Loch Avon, and to the Snow House. The Snow House is not far from the cairn or heap of stones on the highest part of Cairngorm, and is a hollow, in extent an acre or two. This hollow is filled with snow, and although it faces the South (*sic*), it is never melted either by the sun or rain. Near its boundary on the south side, runs a stream of the purest water ; in its bed

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

† Mr. William Osborne, merchant, Hull, bought the timber in the forest of Glen More in 1783 for £10,000. It took 22 years to cut down the trees, on which the Hull firm is reputed to have made a profit of £70,000.

are large stones standing high and thick, serving for supporters to the roof of snow, which seems to be in some degree petrified. There was little water in this stream the day I was at it, I therefore, by bending my body, walked up the bed of this rivulet for three or four yards, without getting very wet; but it was so intensely cold under snow and in water, that I was obliged quickly to return, though not before I had collected some fine specimens of rock and feldspar crystallizations. Near the pinnacle of Cairngorm is a well of the finest spring water I ever tasted, and it is also the coldest I ever touched. . . . To ride up Cairngorm is an arduous task, and to walk down it a very fatiguing one”.

Cairn an Lochain may be visited in crossing from Cairngorm to Ben Muich Dhui by keeping along the edge of Coire an t-Sneachda. In like manner, in making for it from Ben Muich Dhui, the county (Inverness-Banff) march will be sought, thus keeping higher than absolutely necessary in a mere walk across to Cairngorm. Another route is by Creag na Leacainn, described in the next paragraph. Cairn an Lochain is distinguished by an O.S. cairn within a ring of stones and overlooks Coire an Lochain. The rocks in this corrie are fissured in all directions, shivering and crumbling to pieces on their way to the bottom. The lower part of the rocks has been swept quite bare by stone avalanches, and presents a uniform smooth surface. The top of the corrie is an appalling place should the mountaineer find himself there on a sudden lifting of the mist, as it is flush with the plateau on the south, and parts of it remind one of the corrie of Lochnagar, especially at the Black Spout, only there can be no descent, on foot, here. The view is very pleasant; Loch Morlich seems to lie just below, with Glenmore Lodge embowered among trees. Fiacail Coire an t-Sneachda is a particular feature, especially the portion at the upper end dividing the two great corries, Coire an t-Sneachda and Coire an Lochain. The former has one small tarn at the bottom, a thousand feet below, the latter has three—hence the name. Both these corries are well worth a visit from below, crossing from the one to the other by the Fiacail. If the winter's snow has



COIRE AN T-SNEACHDA, CAIRNGORM.

not disappeared a camera may advantageously form part of the *impedimenta*. Indeed, these corries sometimes contain snow—patches as hard as ice—all the year round. In spring avalanches frequently occur, the snow breaking off from the tops of the corries and falling considerable distances. A fine example might have been seen in Coire Cas in 1894, the snow gradually breaking into innumerable pieces as it descended, making a track strewn with “snow-débris” which was visible from a considerable distance below. The same season, also, a huge avalanche fell in Coire Domhain, but as evidently the snow had been exceedingly soft its downward passage had been retarded, and it broke up into great rectangular blocks before reaching the bottom. The snow cornice which had fallen on this occasion must have weighed several hundred tons. Early in the season the steep sides of the corries will frequently be seen lightly scored all over by little balls of snow which have gathered at the top and literally “made tracks” for the bottom. Coire Cas is separated from Coire an t-Sneachda by Fiacail a’ Choire Chais—*fiacail* is a tooth or prong-shaped ridge.

Creag na Leacainn, locally and better known as the Lurcher’s Rock, is a prominent summit on the east side of Learg Ghruamach, from which it is most readily approachable. The track should be left at an altitude of about 1825 feet, a little below a great boulder on the west side of the path and opposite the deep V-cut made by Allt Druidh as it leaves its plateau and seeks the bottom of the pass. There is, however, quite a choice of routes from the pass—easy, difficult, and dangerous, the two latter by scrambling up the tottering rock face of the Creag. We take the easy route, an hour landing us at the summit. Some scree slopes will be encountered near the top, one in particular a veritable staircase, most of the stones stable, but many yielding to the least touch. On the ascent an excellent “framed” view of Meall a’ Bhuachaille may be obtained through a “window” between Creag a’ Chalamain and Creag na Leacainn. Two cairns surmount Creag na Leacainn, their altitudes being respectively 3365 and 3448

feet; the former is known as the North Top, the latter as the South Top. The North Top is rather insignificant, and indeed were it not for the O.S. cairn (a four-foot one with a staff) and a few boulders it might well be ignored. The South Top, on the other hand, is a natural "Stuc", towering over a thousand feet above the level of the pass; the cairn is but a few stones thrown together. The view, particularly the near prospect, is good, and includes the upper part of Glen Dee. The Devil's Point looms quite majestic, standing out sharply outlined. Braeriach's "wall" rises up from the Larig with a uniform steepness not unworthy of that term, its face marked by storm-rills, black rock above all; little patches of verdure below. The northern corries of Braeriach give one, from this point, the impression of three gigantic pits. Sgoran Dubh, double-peaked, rises above loch and glen; farther down is the Argyle Stone, Cadha Mor, the Duke of Gordon's Monument, Carn Elrick, Ord Bain, and Loch an Eilein. On the other side of the Spey Geal Charn of the Monadh Liaths blocks the distant prospect; nearer the great flat of the glens converging on the Spey opposite Craigellachie makes a beautiful forest picture. Then we have Meall a' Bhuachaille, An Lochan Uaine, Strath Nethy, Ben Rinnes, The Buck, Mam Suim, Cairngorm and its corries. To the south-east Miadan Creag na Leacainn (the plain of Creag na Leacainn) appears to offer very smooth walking towards the Feith Buidhe or Ben Muich Dhui; a shoulder rises up to a height of 3931 feet where three counties, Inverness, Aberdeen, and Banff, meet. The monarch of the group looks from here a great mountain with steep slopes to the pass. What a deep cut the pass seems from this perch! As the Lurcher's Rock alone is but a short excursion from Aviemore, the mountaineer may as well proceed as far as Lochan Buidhe, unless a greater height is in the programme, thus making the best of the day. Keeping pretty much by the march between the parishes of Abernethy-Kincardine and Duthil-Rothiemurchus, and crossing the Miadan, the spot where the three counties meet will be first made for. From the little cairn marking the junction Cairn Toul, with Lochan

Uaine, and Sgoran Lochan Uaine are in view, but the Devil's Point has lost its commanding appearance; Beinn Bhrotain and Monadh Mor are also visible. Eastward are Derry Cairngorm, Beinn a' Bhuid, Beinn Mheadhoin, and Ben Avon. Proceeding to the head of the Feith Buidhe a most interesting, but too seldom visited, spot is next reached. The Feith Buidhe Burn issues from Lochan Buidhe, a tarn at a height of about 3600 feet. Its upper (western) bank is close to the Aberdeen-Banff march*, on the other (Aberdeen) side of which are the springs of March Burn, one of the head-streams of the Dee. Viewed from below it appears to come toppling down as though issuing full-born from a miniature gorge—often a little snow tunnel—but as seen at the source it has a different appearance. Little labour would be necessary to give this burn a tarn as a gathering-ground corresponding to that of the Feith Buidhe Burn. As it is the burn near its source spreads and sprawls—hence mosses of all hues from brilliant green to imperial purple and gold. By descending a short distance along the March Burn the Pools of Dee may be seen, the two upper seemingly with little more than a bucketful of water. It is to these that the March Burn makes its way, but just ere it reaches the bottom of the slope it is drunk up by the thirsty and ever-falling *debris* and is lost to sight. Here the sides of the Larig appear very red, recalling the ancient name of the Cairngorms; right in front Sron na Leirg appears, a massive enough “nose”. More to the south is (the Larig) Coire Ruadh with a zig-zag path towards the summit of Braeriach; northwards is the intermittent Allt na Leirg Gruamaich, the track, a mere scratch on the surface, more easily picked out from above than when seen from the level. Creag na Leacainn and Carn Elrick are very prominent from this stand-point. Retracing our steps a little stone-shelter is passed on the left bank of the burn—probably the work of a forester, a cairn near by indicating its position. Descending the Feith Buidhe, its burn will be observed to

*A venerable native recently informed the writer that the correct name of this tarn is “Lochan na Criche”, the lochan of the march, a very appropriate name.

broaden considerably in the middle part of the Feith (a slushy region during snow-melting), but as it leaves the gravel—from which the name, signifying “Yellow Bog”, is derived—and makes for the rocks above the head of Loch Avon, it contracts to normal dimensions. Cairn an Lochain may now be visited by holding N.N.W.; but a more direct course could have been made from Creag na Leacainn by crossing the Miadan and keeping due east. Now making direct for the Miadan the source of Allt Creag na Leacainn is crossed, and, avoiding the actual summit of the Lurcher's Rock, the descent may be made to the point in the Larig whence the ascent was commenced.

The summit of Creag na Leacainn is marked on the six-inch map as some distance east of the edge of the precipice, whereas the cairn and the edge coincide. In this map there is also an indication, considerably overdrawn, of rock on the north side of Lochan Buidhe. The words, “Large Stone”, in the same map on the county march west of this lochan refer to a comparatively large stone lying across the march, of which advantage was taken in marking the boundary. The Aberdeen-Inverness march across the Larig, a short distance to the north of March Burn, seems to the ordinary observer to be an arbitrary one, an idea borne out by the circumstance that foresters consider the March Burn the boundary between these counties.

Creag a' Chalamain (about 2340) and Castle Hill are points on the ridge, the parish march, leading up to the Lurcher's Rock. The former has a peak of rock and stone, surmounted by a small cairn, and is noted for Eag Coire a' Choinneachaidh, which has a fine echo. Castle Hill is roundish, with a flat top covered with short heather. An excellent view is obtained of numberless lochs and tarns sparkling in the sun like diamonds; the trees by Loch Morlich can be seen reflected in the water. “Castle Hill” is but a translation of the old Gaelic name. On the west slope of the hill the *larach* of a habitation is pointed out, still called in Gaelic the “Bothy of the Castle”. The origin of the name is unknown. Airgiod-meall (2118) slopes from Castle Hill towards Loch Morlich, having on its

east side Lochan Dubh a' Cadha, a very noticeable tarn from the north side of Cairngorm.

Ben Bynac, both on account of its position and its somewhat serrated outline as seen from a distance, is one of the best known minor heights of the Cairngorms. It may best be ascended from Rebhoan—from which it is about $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles distant—or it may be taken in the walk along the Learg an Laoigh from Braemar to Speyside. It presents a grand steep front to the track—enlivened by the “Barns”—and is rather an inviting climb. The Water of Caiplich rises on its eastern slope, and possibly from this circumstance the summit is inaccurately marked “Caiplich” in the O.S. maps. If ascended from Rebhoan, the Larig track should be kept till about half a mile beyond the “memorial” cairn, whence the climb is begun. The hill will be observed to have two tops, colloquially called the Two Bynacs, the Meikle and the Little. The former is the higher, towering considerably above its neighbour on the west. The corrie to the west is Coire Dearg, more to the north is Coire Dubh; each has its burn descending to Garbh Allt. Due south from the cairn are the “Little Barns of Bynac”, outstanding masses of rock not unlike, at a distance, the ruined walls of ancient castles; a little to the east of the “Little Barns” are the “Barns of Bynac”.* These “Barns” remind one of the similar rock excrescences on Ben Avon. Ben Bynac was once noted for a male ghost known as Fhua Mhoir Bein Baynac, who seems to have had the habit of ill-treating a neighbouring lady ghost, Clashnichd Aulnaic. On account of his ungallant behaviour, James Gray, tenant of Balbig of Delnabo, shot him with an arrow through a large mole on his left breast, on which Fhua Mhoir vanished for ever.† A brief account of the view from the summit has already appeared in the *Journal* (pp. 49 and 135-6), where also Meall a' Bhuachaille and Mam Suim have been noticed. This Meall slopes to the Spey by Creagan Gorm (2403) and Craiggowrie (2237)—a range

* *Vide* illustration at p. 137, Vol. I., *C.C.J.*

† “Highland Superstition”, by W. Grant Stewart (1823).

known as the Kincardine Hills. On Craiggowrie is Uaimh Iain Rhuaidh, John Roy's Cave, where Colonel John Roy Stuart, a descendant of the royal Stuarts of Kincardine, a noted swordsman and poet, took refuge after the battle of Culloden. The district of Tulloch, on the north side of the Kincardine Hills, lays claim to having produced the famous Reel of Tulloch, supporting the pretension by a legend having the respectable antiquity of about three hundred years! Here, also, are Lochs Garten and Mallachie, two beautiful forest sheets of water, readily accessible from either Nethy Bridge or Boat of Garten. Loch Garten affords excellent sport to the fisherman. The burn from these lochs, which joins the Spey about half a mile south of Boat of Garten Ferry, labours under the "curse of Aultgharrach", which entails bad luck on all marriage parties crossing it, and, accordingly, in many such cases it has been most carefully avoided.*

Immediately to the west of Stuc na h-Ioliare of Mam Suim is a ridge called Carn Lochan na Beinne, with a small tarn, Lochan na Beinne, swarming with trout. North from Stac na h-Iolaire is Sron a' Chano (already referred to) descending on the east to Garbh Allt, opposite Coire Dubh of Ben Bynac. There is a small corrie, visible from Glenmore Lodge, between Sron a' Chano and Cnap Coire na Spreidhe, named Coire an Laoigh Mhoir, in which rises Allt Clais a' Mheirlich, a burn receiving the surplus water of Lochan na Beinne and developing into Allt Ban, a tributary of Allt Mor. Allt na Ciste is a tributary of, and flows mostly parallel to, Allt Ban, their upper courses being separated by Creagan Dubh.

"The brown Cairngorm, whose feet with native pine
Are, ever-during, girt; his frozen head
Is sprinkled early with autumnal snow,
And crumbled rocks are strewed with brilliant gems

* According to tradition, a bridge at Hoxne, near Eye, in Suffolk, had, owing to a certain incident which had happened there, the inscription—"Cursed be the wedding party that passes this bridge". The bridge was avoided accordingly.

Whose brightness, sparkling in Altera's hair,
Or blissful, on her panting bosom hung,
The topaz envies, not of citron tint,
In circlet bound about Circassia's neck".*

Cairngorm crystals, as indicated in the preceding article, have long been found on these mountains, and from this circumstance Cairngorm itself has doubtless derived not a little of its fame. But owing to the great fall in their value systematic search for them has ceased, though both in last century and the present it afforded employment for a considerable number of people, whose families, during the summer months, resided with them on the mountains. Lapidaries came from the south to purchase the stones or to hire labourers to dig for them at the rate of from 5s. to 10s. per day. In 1811 it was estimated that not less than £2000 worth were found on the Cairngorms.† Yet towards the end of the previous century Cairngorm mining was stated to be "an employment by no means worth following"‡. The value of Cairngorm stones in the middle of last century is referred to by the Chevalier de Johnstone from whose Memoirs§ the following passage is quoted (he had spent the previous night in Glen More):

"near a mountain called Cairngorm where the shepherds often find precious stones of different kinds, without knowing their value. For some years I had made a collection of these stones, without being on the spot where they are found, and some of them were very beautiful; especially a very fine ruby, which cost me no more than a crown in its rough state, but for which, when polished, I refused fifty guineas from the Duke of Hamilton. This stone was of the size of a bean, the colour was a little deep, and the fire equal to that of the most beautiful diamond. All the jewellers of Edinburgh had taken it for an oriental ruby. I made a present of it to Lady Jane Douglas [sister of the Duke of Douglas], who paid me amply for it some

* "Wallace's Views", quoted in *Scots Magazine* (1798).

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

‡ "A Survey of the Province of Moray" (1798).

§ "Memoirs of the Rebellion in 1745 and 1746", translated from a French MS. of the Chevalier de Johnstone, 3rd edition, 1822.

time afterwards, by saving my life. I had likewise a very fine hyacinth, and a topaz of the size of a pigeon's egg, of a beautiful colour, on which I caused the arms of Great Britain to be engraved; both of which I, afterwards, presented to Prince Charles; the hyacinth at Perth, when I joined him, and the topaz, with his arms, on our arrival at Edinburgh. . . . Forgetting, for a moment, our disasters, I rose at an early hour and flew immediately to the mountains, among the herdsmen, where I found some pretty and beautiful topazes, two of which, sufficiently large to serve for seals, I afterwards presented to the Duke of York [Henry Stuart, brother of the young Pretender] at Paris".

But a time came when Cairngorms were not to be picked up in a walk before breakfast; in 1810 we read that no less than 25 acres had been trenched to a depth of from five to six feet. Ben Muich Dhui and the other mountains in the Forest of Mar also yielded at one time a plentiful supply, from which the Earl of Fife was reputed to derive annually "a handsome sum"*. According to geologists these crystals are found in cavities in rock and in the *debris* of the burns, the common colours being white, pink, dark brown, and black; the topaz and beryl likewise occur†. A fine specimen, weighing about 56 lbs., was, along with two small crystals, purchased by the Queen for £50 from the finder, a native of Strath Nethy, who discovered the prize on the Garbh Allt side of Cairngorm.

* "The Highland Note-Book", by R. Carruthers (1843).

† Nicol's "Geology of Scotland" (1844).