

BEINN BHROTAIN AND MONADH MÒR.

BY JOHN CLARKE, M.A.

LOOKING west from the neighbourhood of the Roman Catholic church in Braemar, or from below the Invercauld Arms Hotel, to the right of Creag à Bhuilg one catches sight of a long, and apparently low, ridge to the south of Cairn Toul: what its exact position is, and what its relation to other parts of the range, it is from either point impossible to say. Again, in the ascent of Morrone (Mor Shron), about Tomintoul, to the left of Creag à Bhuilg, appears a noteworthy peak, a little further on found to be but an outlier to a larger mass which is soon seen rising to the north. I had often wondered what exactly these heights were; apparently they belonged to some high mountain system not far from Cairn Toul, and I had set myself the task of answering on the first opportunity the question of their relation to it and to each other.

The weather, proverbially fickle and uncertain, is none of the best in the month of July, and it is not always practicable to take the advice offered me once by a Skye ghillie: "Oh", he said, "you ought never to start before about two o'clock, and then you will be seeing whether it will be fine". On the day selected I did wait as long as 9:30 before committing myself, and then, like "the course of empire", westward I took my way with all speed. By 10:30 my "Humber" had set me down in safety at the Linn, beyond which it did not seem prudent to attempt cycling; by 11:30 I was at the Bridge of Dee (the White Bridge of the Club's map), and ready to enter on the real business of the day.

Beinn Bhrotain and Monadh Mòr, to anticipate a little for the sake of clearness, form the southern members of the great mountain mass to the west of the Larig Ghru. The northern portion consists of Braeriach and its buttresses, and, roughly speaking, Cairn Toul is the centre. A parallel

range to the west borders on and faces Glen Feshie, and indeed these two ranges seem to stand back to back, there being no considerable depression between them, save where the great rent occupied by Loch Eunach forces its way right up between Braeriach and Sgòran Dubh, the extreme northern portions of the ranges respectively.

As few people have leisure to explore the whole district, it is natural for those who can afford only a day or two to select the higher and, in every way, grander peaks for ascent. In this way several peaks of very great interest receive less than their due share of attention. Sgòran Dubh itself, hardly inferior in interest to Cairngorm or Braeriach, is one of these, and Beinn Bhrotain is another. From the Bridge of Dee, some 65 miles west of that so familiar to Aberdonians, two routes are open for the ascent of Beinn Bhrotain and Monadh Mòr; the one is to cross the Dee, proceed along the right bank till a convenient spot is reached for diverging to the left hand for the ascent of Beinn Bhrotain, whence Monadh Mòr is easily reached, and the return made by Glen Geusachan and the Larig to the point of departure: or the route can be reversed. I adopted the latter course, first because I did not know, and from the summit was unlikely to be able to see, what the descent into Glen Geusachan was like, and, secondly, because it is a good principle, especially when one is alone, to reach one's furthest point as soon as possible, and thence to work homewards.

The Larig route, by which the way lay for the first few miles needs no description. The first two miles are rather dreary, the sparkling and tumbling river being the chief object of interest. The retrospect includes the Geldie, the entrance by the Bynack to Glen Tilt, and An Sgarsoch and Carn an Fhidleir in the distance, the latter peak being, however, soon lost. Then the view in front begins to open up, first the bold shoulder of Beinn Bhrotain, then the whole mass of the mountain, further on the Devil's Point and the shoulder of Ben Muich Dhui. Forging the Dee a short distance below the point where it is joined by the Geusachan Burn, I worked my way round the slope to the

left and got fairly into the glen. Glen Geusachan is a narrow and comparatively short valley; the sides are so steep as to be at places almost precipitous. The feature of it is distinctly the Devil's Point which rises very grandly to the north. The ascent could readily be made a little way up the glen; at the mouth of the glen and overlooking Glen Dee the mountain is faced with steeply shelving rock, covered in many places with water, and the ascent would, even where practicable, be very risky. Another danger of steep ascents was illustrated very forcibly when a large stone, dislodged no doubt by natural action, but from no very apparent cause, started in wild career down the steep slope.

“Down from yon cliff a fragment broke;
It thundered down with fire and smoke,
And hitherward pursued its way”.

Nearing the head of Glen Geusachan I saw that Monadh Mòr lay as a huge barrier in front, much in the position seen from Braemar. The ascent was to be accomplished either by gradually mounting toward the right by the Geusachan, or keeping straight on, by Coire Creagach, and making direct for the top, which, however, was not visible and could be located only conjecturally. The latter course seemed preferable, though the climb is very stiff and rough, bog, steep shelving and sometimes slippery rock, and streams all being abundant. These added to the zest of the climb, and in due course—at 3.15 of the clock—the top (3651) was gained in safety. The formation of the range had become clear during the ascent. Monadh Mòr is a long ridge, the continuation of Cairn Toul to the south; a deep “sneck” cuts it off from Beinn Bhrotain which lies to the south-east and is distinctly a mass, blunt and irregular in form, throwing out its roots toward the Dee, the Geldie, and the Eidart. In crossing from Cairn Toul to Monadh Mòr the route would lie by Lochan Suarach (the more correct form, I understand, is Loch na Stirtag or Loch Sturtack) and would hardly come below the 3000 feet contour at any point. The

"sneck" is hardly so high as this, but the descent being very abrupt on both sides, it looks a deep depression.

The view from Monadh Mòr is exceedingly interesting: it is much more extensive than would be supposed from the position of the mountain—in fact, it is clear in all directions save where Beinn Bhrotain blocks it to the south-east and the shoulder of Ben Muich Dhui to the north-east. The interest is in part due to the splendid contrasts of mountain and glen presented close at hand. Westward the view is uninterrupted as far as the eye can reach. Not to mention Cairn Toul, Braeriach, and Lochan Suarach, the Glen Feshie range, embracing Meall Tionail, Meall Dubh-achaidh, Carn Ban, and Sgòran Dubh, seems close at hand, then passing to the south-west and south by Beinn Dearg and Beinn a' Ghlo we come to Lochnagar and Mount Keen and so round to Beinn a' Bhuid. The glens are no less interesting, and in particular the valley of the Dee stretches out due east apparently in almost a straight line, and nearly the first object that strikes the eye is the village of Ballater.

But the day wears on, and it is a far cry to Braemar. Keeping right along the ridge and descending suddenly into the "sneck" I mounted Beinn Bhrotain at 4:50 without difficulty. That side of the mountain is, like many of the higher summits, notably Ben Muich Dhui, a mass of tumbled boulders. Care is necessary at times in order to avoid risk of sprains, but otherwise the footing is very firm and the walking pleasant. Not much requires to be said about the view from Beinn Bhrotain (3795). Though the summit is nearly 150 feet higher than Monadh Mòr yet the view is much inferior in interest. Perhaps it is that it has already been got and enjoyed, but there seems a further reason. There is not so much of the striking contrast observed from its neighbour, while to the south the effectiveness of the view, here unbroken, is rather spoiled by the great expanse of uninteresting moorland that stretches away toward Beinn a' Ghlo and the Ben Urns.

South of Beinn Bhrotain rises the subsidiary height Carn Cloich-mhuilinn (3087). It is the peak, at first sight a notable looking one, that was referred to as visible in the

ascent of Morrone. It may be reached from Beinn Bhrotain without difficulty by a ridge to the right (west), but the shorter and more direct way which I chose involves a slight ascent again. The formation of such an excrescence is interesting, but it is so much lower than its chief that the view is hardly an object after the higher one has been gained. Without loss of time, the hour being now 5:55, I sped down the slope over rather soft ground towards the Dee, reflecting that I had been well advised to choose the other route for the ascent. Keeping the right bank this time, as not much was to be gained by crossing, I reached the Bridge of Dee at 6:45, the Linn at 7:55, and Braemar at 8:35. The day had kept fine, and was in every way enjoyable, and I felt I had made a real accession to my knowledge of Cairngorm topography. It is to be hoped that in future the region will be visited more frequently as one well repaying the outlay of energy required to explore it.



THE CAIRN, BEN MUICH DHUI.