

BEN VORLICH AND STÙC A CHRÒIN.

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LOOKING westward from the ramparts of Stirling Castle, the horizon presents a beautifully varied outline formed by the peaks of the Perthshire Grampians, and at all times and seasons this panorama is a grand spectacle. In the early morning when the sun lights up the hollows; in the evening when the hills are silhouettes of purple on a background of gold; in spring when snow-drifts linger in the corries; or on warm autumn days when their forms are dimly seen through the heat haze—each has its special charm as it throws a glamour of mystery and poetry around them. The long level carse through which the Forth winds its serpentine course adds dignity and grandeur to the mountains; fit theatre for the stirring and romantic scenes of bygone days.

Near the northern end of this panorama, two summits, Ben Vorlich (3224) and Stùc a Chròin (3189), attract, on account of their outline, the attention of the beholder. The one is the complement of the other—Stùc a Chròin a rugged ridge, Ben Vorlich a peak, surrounded by a group of lesser heights descending to Callander and the Braes of Doune on the south and Loch Earn on the north. To a mountaineer they seem most inviting, and are not disappointing on closer acquaintance, for they afford a variety of surface and angle, which at different seasons of the year should satisfy even the most exacting climbers.

There are several routes more or less advantageous for the ascent: from Callander along Keltie Water; from King's House or Lochearnhead across Glen Ample; from Comrie up Glen Artney; from Comrie to Ardvorlich, on Loch Earn, thence up Glen Vorlich. Ardvorlich may also be made for from Lochearnhead. The ascent by Glen Vorlich is the easiest, and one can drive to Ardvorlich either from

Lochearnhead or Comrie. Our party trained to Lochearnhead, walking to Ardvorlich. The walk is a beautiful one along the loch side, past the old castle of Edinample to the junction of the Vorlich Burn with the loch (306), where a memorial stone forcibly reminds one of highland excursions of a different class. The inscription runs :

“Near this spot we | re interred the bo | dies of 7 M'Donalds | of Glencoe killed | when attempting | to harry Ardvorlich | Anno Domini 1620”.

For the ascent up Glen Vorlich that glen is entered on the east side of the burn, passing Ardvorlich on the right, and crossing to the west side a little above the house. Thence a hill path keeps parallel with the stream, disappearing only when the slope becomes steep. The mountain rises right in front of the climber with the cairn visible most of the way. It looks so near that an hour might be considered a fair estimate for the climb ; but on a May day, under favourable conditions, it took our party two and a half hours to reach the summit, there being neither haste nor undue leisure. At the 1000 feet line a halt was made under the inviting shade of a big boulder. Away down at the glen-foot lay Loch Earn an intense blue, on the right the burn pursued its course with musical swish under a canopy of birchen boughs, while up on the hillside the cuckoo's call was borne with haunting cadence on the breeze. Between Loch Earn and Loch Tay rose low brown hills, intersected by Glen Beich and Glen Tarken, their bases fringed with wood adorned with summer's garb of green. Ben Chonzie, Schichallion, and Ben Lawers were visible with small patches of snow still lingering in their corries.

A fresh start made, the path by and by led over marshy ground, and though the “going” was easy, it did not require much imagination to conjure its appearance in wet weather. Beyond the 2000 feet line the ascent became rougher and steeper, the slope showing an angle of 35°, as the final climb, up Sgiath nan Tarmachan, with a small snow patch on the east side, was tackled. The appearance of ptarmigan warranted this name, while

mountain hares scurried up the brae-face. Nearing the summit the resemblance between this "Sgiath" and the "Sneck" at Ben Avon was most marked.

After a scramble a deer fence was reached along which we picked our way to the cairn, which stands on an exceedingly narrow ridge descending abruptly to the north and south. Here there is certainly little accommodation for a crowd of visitors, a circumstance which enhanced the sense of elevation frequently marred by a plateau-shaped summit. South-eastwards the Ochils were easily recognised with Bencleuch and the two tops of Dunnyat agreeably breaking the line. More to the southward Abbey Craig and Stirling Castle were visible; beyond, showing as a faint blue line, were the Pentland Hills. The beautifully wooded valley of the Teith running from west to east basked in the sunshine; across it, shimmering through the hazy heat, lay the Gargunnoch, Kilsyth, and Campsie hills, with Meikle Bin in the middle and Dungoyn at the western end—the only points breaking their flatness. South-westwards, over the top of Stùc a Chròin, part of Ben Ledi was visible; while still further westward the mountains around Loch Katrine as well as Ben Lomond and the Arrochar Alps were spread out before us. A little further round the Braes of Balquhiddier came into view with Loch Voil nestling at their base, the mighty Ben More and Am Binnein their crowning glory. Lochearnhead was just visible over the ridge with deep Glen Ogle leading right into the heart of the Western Highlands, where peak rose over peak in rapid succession till the eye rested with satisfaction on the huge snow cap of Ben Nevis.

The descent towards Stùc a Chròin by the deer fence is rather rough and entails a dip of 800 feet, at the bottom of which there is a barrier of boulders. Here two routes to the Stùc present themselves—one up the rock-face, the other a detour to the right, gaining the summit by a ridge. We selected the direct route which lay at an angle varying from 50° to 70° with jutting ledges, round which it was necessary to wriggle. As the crow flies it is little over a mile between the summit of Ben Vorlich and Stùc a

Chròin, but owing to the depth and steepness of the dip we required an hour and a half.

Three cairns adorn the summit of Stùc a Chròin, the middle one marking the actual top. It is much broader and flatter than Ben Vorlich with a long ridge running down towards Callander. The view is very similar to that from Ben Vorlich. On the south side, a little below the summit, lies a lochan from which issues one of the head streams of the Keltie, descending through a rocky gorge in a succession of waterfalls to Gleann a' Chroin.

A rapid descent was now begun in the direction of Callander, following the course of the burn to near Arivurichardich whence a straight course across the moor soon brought us to the road—a pleasant change after the long heather. A magnificent view is obtained of the Trossachs valley as the descent is made to Callander. When we reached the last ridge “the western waves of ebbing day” filled the long hollow and Loch Vennacher lay like a sheet of glass glittering in the sunshine. Here we rested, entranced by the scene, till the approach of train time demanded that we should hurry to the station.