

THE CAIRNGORM MOUNTAINS.

III.—THE WESTERN CAIRNGORMS.

BY ALEX. INKSON M'CONNOCHE.

“Here brew ship-foundering storms their force divine,
Here gush the fountains of wild-flooding rivers ;
Here the strong thunder frames the bolt that shivers
The giant strength of the old twisted pine ”.

THE Western Cairngorms are even better defined than the Central group, from which they are separated by the Larig Ghru, while, on the west, they are confined by Glen Feshie. The northern boundary is the River Spey, the southern the Geldie, with a portion of the Feshie. The Western division ranks second in importance from the point of altitude, being culminated by Braeriach (4248) and Cairn Toul (4241). These mountains were long more familiar as viewed from Ben Muich Dhui than by actual ascent, but latterly they have received more intimate attention from hillmen. Their attractions are numerous and varied, and he who would know the Cairngorms well must become familiar with the mighty mountain-mass between the Larig and Glen Feshie, with its lochs and tarns, its corries and precipices, and its immense plateaus. There is no lack of the grand and picturesque, and the various members of the group will afford mountaineers every variety of climbing. Among their other attractions must be added that of a great river source—for the Dee rises on the summit of Braeriach.

Braeriach is situated on the Aberdeen-Inverness march, in the parishes of Crathie-Braemar and Duthil-Rothiemurchus, being drained by the Dee, the Eidart, and tributaries of the Bennie—marked on the O.S. maps “Alt na Beinne Moire”. It stretches Spey-wards to Carn Elrick (2435), a conical hill in the angle between the Bennie and the Allt na Leirg Gruamaich, presenting a particularly bold front to the Larig, while it is separated from Cairn Toul by the well-known An Gharbh-choire, the huge corrie, almost



BRAERIACH, FROM CAIRN TOUL.

approaching the dignity of a glen, so familiar to Ben Muich Dhui visitors. Cairn Toul is in the county of Aberdeen, and is bounded on the south by Glen Geusachan, in the angle of which glen with the Dee is its rocky dependency, the Devil's Point (3303), while an exceedingly prominent peak, Sgor an Lochan Uaine (known also as the Angel's Peak), faces the great corrie. Between Glen Geusachan and Glen Geldie, Beinn Bhrotain (3795) bears sway, having for a minor summit Carn Cloich-mhuilinn (3087).

Sgoran Dubh (3658) is the most important of the other tops of the group, which is almost broken up into two subdivisions by Glen Eunach. Sgoran Dubh faces that glen, but is mainly drained by streams which run to the Feshie. Cadha Mor (2313) is the northern end of the Sgoran Dubh chain and looks across to Carn Elrick. Sgoran Dubh has a lower height (3635) and the Argyle Stone (2766) between it and its northern extremity, both lying on the march between the parishes of Duthil-Rothiemurchus and Alvie. In the latter parish, and drained by Feshie tributaries, Carn Ban (3443), Meall Buidhe (3185), Geal-charn (3019), and Creag Mhigeachaidh (2429) may be named as forming a sort of background to Sgoran Dubh. The remaining Feshie hills are (working from Carn Ban in an opposite direction), Meall Dubh-achaidh (3268), Meall Tionail (3338), Diollaid Coire Eindard (3184), and Monadh Mor (3651)—the latter on the Aberdeen-Inverness march and partly draining to Glen Geusachan.

The Western Cairngorms may be best ascended from Speyside, but Braeriach and Cairn Toul are so situated that they are also easy of access from Braemar. In the latter case starting from Derry Lodge the mountaineer will follow the path up Glen Luibeg and its continuation on the south side of Carn a' Mhaim and so enter the Larig. Cairn Toul may then be attacked by fording the Dee and walking up Glen Geusachan; or by a more direct (and necessarily steeper) route, holding a little farther up the Larig before crossing the Dee and making a course to the summit from Allt a' Choire Odhar or Allt Coire an t-Saighdeir. Cairn Toul may also be ascended from An Garbh-choire—the

steepest of all the routes. Braeriach will be most conveniently ascended from Derry Lodge by keeping to the Larig till the neighbourhood of the Pools of Dee is reached where a zig-zag track leads up (the Larig) Coire Ruadh to the summit, passing a lower cairn on the way. Or a course may be struck up An Garbh-choire (crossing Allt na Leirg Gruamaich near its junction with the "infant Dee", the Allt a' Gharbh-choire), thence clambering over boulders to the corrie. There are several recognised routes to Braeriach from Speyside, the best of which is the excellent driving road from Aviemore, up Glen Eunach to the lower end of the loch. Thence a path leads from a bothy up Coire Dhonndail (on the east side of the loch), the top of which reached a short mile to the east leads one to the lip of An Garbh-choire, which should then be rounded from the left. Cairn Toul is also very conveniently reached from the top of Coire Dhonndail the route thence being almost due east. A little short of the loch bothy a zig-zag track gives a direct eastward route to the top of Braeriach, while another route is by leaving the road at the Little Bennie bothy, at the junction of the Little Bennie with the Bennie, thence making for the narrow ridge between Coire an Lochain and Coire Ruadh. The most direct route for an ascent from Glen Feshie is by Allt Fhearnachan and over Carn Ban eastward, which is the route also generally taken from Kinraig and Kingussie.

Sgoran Dubh is easy of access both from Glen Eunach and Glen Feshie. By the former glen the ascent may be made almost at any angle—the most gradual climb by crossing the Bennie between the two bothies, the steepest by starting right away from the west side of Loch Eunach, and another by keeping on the path along that side of the loch, and making the ascent by Coire Odhar—a round-about route, but with attractions, and steep towards the top of the corrie. From Glen Feshie there are two routes—up Allt Fhearnachan and thence holding northwards, or up Allt Ruadh, and its head stream Allt nam Bo, the southerly branch of the latter leading right to the summit.

The direct route from Aviemore to Braeriach, Cairn Toul,

or Sgoran Dubh, is by Glen Eunach, joining the glen road at Coylum Bridge (Vol. I., p. 320), and the course is southerly the whole way. The glen, however, can scarcely be said to be entered till Carn Elrick has been placed on the left, and Cadha Mor on the right, and then the pines on the Rothiemurchus forest will have been left behind—a few stragglers only being found beyond the northern face of these guardian hills. The conical form of Carn Elrick with its steepish symmetrical slopes will be readily recognised from a distance, while a nearer view, with the Bennie brattling at its base, past pines and birches, will by no means disenchant the visitor. The well-defined north-facing corries of Braeriach will have impressed him as he starts from Aviemore, Sgoran Dubh next demanding attention as its long steep front comes into view. The road crosses to the right bank of the Bennie a little above its junction with Allt Ruigh na Sroine, the “Sron” being a hillock where, some seventy years ago, there was a shieling from which the half-witted inhabitant mysteriously disappeared. The Allt Ruigh na Sroine rises near the Argyle Stone in the vicinity of which it is said that the Earl of Argyle halted with his army before the battle of Glen Livet, where he encountered and was defeated by the “Popish Lords”, headed by the Earl of Huntly, in 1594. Tradition says that Argyle breakfasted here on the occasion. In some maps it is named the Earl of Athole’s Stone, Athole having accompanied Argyle. According to the “New Statistical Account”, an Earl of Athole fleeing took shelter behind a large stone on Inchriach, of the Sgoran Dubh range, called, in allusion to this event, Clach Mhic Allan, the Earl of Athole’s Stone. Soon after passing a well (Dr. Quain’s) on the left, we reach the Little Bennie bothy. On the opposite side of the Bennie (but invisible) is Loch Mhic Ghille-chaoile (the loch of the slender dark lad). Here a party of cattle-lifters was overtaken, and in the skirmish which ensued one of the pursuers was killed—hence the name of the loch. A few years ago an old rusty dirk was found close to its banks. Proceeding up the glen the Bennie will be observed, after issuing from Loch Eunach, to flow sluggishly through the moor.

Behind the loch bothy a picturesque waterfall may be noticed.

Loch Eunach (*eunach*, abounding in birds) resembles in many respects the more famous Loch Avon. It is a narrow sheet of water, over a mile in length, hemmed in by Braeriach on the east and Sgoran Dubh on the west, and precipitous rocks at the upper (the south) end. A burn from Lochan nan Cnapan descends over these rocks in a series of cascades; another stream, the Allt a' Choire Odhar, also makes a rapid descent, from Carn Ban, into the head of the loch. The "setting" of Loch Eunach is magnificent; situated at an altitude of 1650 feet, the precipices of Sgoran Dubh tower 2000 feet above it on the one hand; on the other the higher, though less steep, Creag an Loch of Braeriach, seems to crush against the south-east end of the loch. Under certain aspects Loch Eunach is a formidable rival to Loch Avon*; but each has its special grandeur and beauty. The former impresses one most in winter or spring before snow has left the upper line of rocks on the Sgoran. Then when the mist curls up the crags, alternately exposing them to view and hiding them from sight, or giving but partial vision of their gloomy mass, the scene around Loch Eunach cannot be excelled among the Cairngorms. Char are to be found in the loch in great abundance, no less than twenty dozen having been caught by one rod in a few hours, and trout are also plentiful. There is excellent feeding ground for deer at the head of the loch, particularly in Coire Odhar. In the beginning of the present century all around this neighbourhood was a great sheep-grazing district, and the remains of several shepherds' huts may still be seen, the mountains and glens here, and for a considerable distance into Aberdeenshire even, being let to Badenoch farmers. Curiously enough, deer were plentiful in Rothiemurchus previous to the beginning of the century, *but they had to give way to sheep*. A boulder about twenty tons in weight, on the right bank of the Lochan nan Cnapan Burn, near

*Indeed Robson, the artist, says that its "bold and dreary shores rival in grandeur those of Loch Avon".

where it enters the loch, which had at some remote period fallen from the Boddach (a towering rocky face of Creag an Loch), was in 1873 turned over and moved along a good few yards towards the head of the loch. An avalanche, doubtless, had been responsible for the latter movements. A Grant of Rothiemurchus was born at the head of Loch Eunach in a summer shieling, the ruins of which are still visible close to the large stone just mentioned, receiving the name, from the place of his birth, of John of Coire Odhar. He entered the army, and having made a moderate competence, left money to build Coylum Bridge and a house at the head of Loch Eunach, *which should always have meal in it*. As Loch Avon has Lochan Buidhe for a feeder, Loch Eunach has Lochan nan Cnapan. The latter word is descriptive of the situation—"knaps" abounding in the neighbourhood. At the north-west end of Loch Eunach several moraines may be observed.

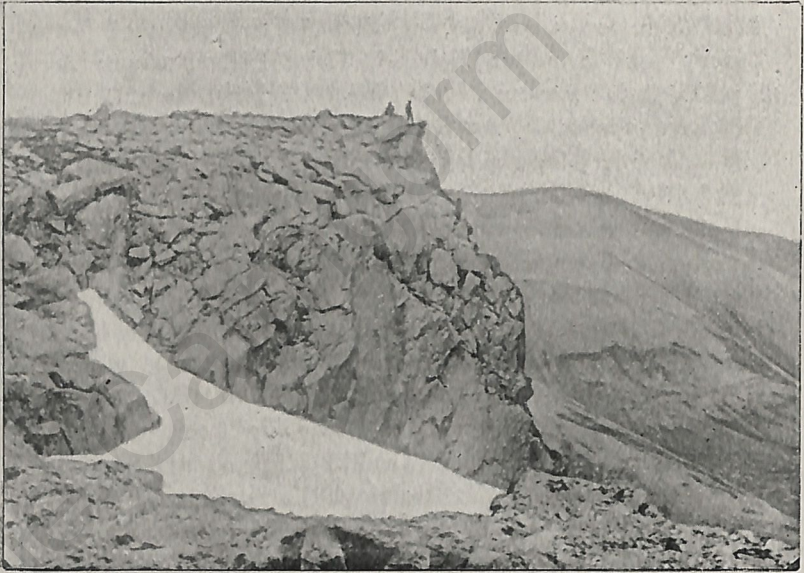
Braeriach is remarkable for its great extent of gravelly summit plateau and for its stupendous corries. Making the ascent by Loch Eunach, the mountaineer is favoured with its western corries—Coire Bogha-cloich, Coire Clach, and Coire Dhonndail—the track towards the summit leading by the east side of the loch through the latter corrie. Coire Dhonndail is of considerable dimensions and affords a steep climb, especially in the upper portion. As the ascent is made, Loch Eunach and the frowning front of Sgoran Dubh will afford of themselves good and sufficient excuses for frequent halts. The track comes to an end at an altitude of about 3500 feet—when indeed there is little further use for it, for the "going" thereafter is easy, and the ascent has practically been accomplished. An Garbh-choire is generally made for, and, the edge of that stupendous rift reached, the mountaineer will be fain to explore all along its lip to the cairn. Below him will be seen, as a silver thread, the "infant Dee," hurrying into Glen Dee; on the right Cairn Toul, with Lochan Uaine perched on its shoulder; Ben Muich Dhui's huge mass is just opposite; while the highest point of Braeriach will be observed to the left. Two lesser cairns mark the county boundary—March

Cairn (4149), the highest point in the district of Badenoch, at the meeting-point of three parishes, Crathie-Braemar, Alvie, and Duthil-Rothiemurchus, and Eunach Cairn (4061) about due east from the middle of Loch Eunach. It is near the latter cairn that the Wells of Dee are to be found, in an interesting spot the slight detour to which should not be omitted. The main sources of the Dee are springs in the gravel at heights of over 4000 feet, and are often covered with snow, even in the month of July. It is matter of surprise to observe the steady and considerable springs of water from these wells, so unlike the sources of many mountain burns that are only to be found in oozy ground. Round about the Wells may be seen innumerable little gravelly channels, or "tear tracks" (the particles of disintegrated granite reaching often the size of peas or hazel nuts), that add their quota to the infant river when a rain-storm sheds its water. The young river, reinforced by a lesser stream from the direction of the summit cairn, leaps over the Fuar Gharbh-choire and thus forms one of the finest and highest waterfalls in the Highlands. Snow often lingers on the lip of this corrie, and then the descending stream is seen to advantage as it finds its way under a snow-arch, re-appearing and disappearing again under the thick wreaths which the sun has not been able to melt. To the north of Fuar Gharbh-choire, which is indeed only a division of An Gharbh-choire (*the Rough Corrie par excellence*), the summit of the mountain is particularly flat, and it is difficult there at times to determine whether the water flows Spey- or Dee-wards. Coire an Lochain is immediately to the north of Fuar Gharbh-choire, and holds Loch Coire an Lochain, a typical mountain tarn, distinguished as the largest of its size in Scotland at such an altitude (3250). The lochlet is frozen for a great portion of the year, but at other times, when a strong wind is blowing, the water is dashed against the sides of the corrie. A tiny burn rises almost on the boundary line between Aberdeen and Inverness, and, flowing northwards, falls almost perpendicularly over the precipice to the lochlet. At the source of this burn the ground is gravelly and flattish, the water apparently issuing from

five wells, so the name recently proposed for it, Coig-fuarain, may be considered not inappropriate. East of Coire an Lochain is Coire Ruadh, a finely-shaped boulder-lined corrie, east again of which is Coire Bennie. These are the three north-facing corries so distinctly seen from the neighbourhood of Aviemore, and are, especially Coire an Lochain, often patched with snow till late in the season. Away to the right (east), on the county march, is Sron na Leirg (3875), a huge rocky "nose" facing the Larig, and to the east of Coire Bennie. At the top of Coire Bennie is a small circle of stones, the remains of a shelter, known in Gaelic as the Tailor's Cove, from a tailor having lived there for some time. A little to the north of Coire Bennie and Sron na Leirg is Coire Odhar, where Allt Druidh finds its source. This burn, the head stream of the Inverness-shire Allt na Leirg Gruamaich, flows through a lochan before it descends on the Larig. The remains may still be seen at the mouth of this lochan of a sluice which was in use to dam up water when the trees in the Rothiemurchus forest were cut down. There is a good deal of flattish ground between the Larig and Glen Eunach, and, indeed, little effort would be required to empty the lochan into the latter glen. At one time the ground here was the sanctuary of the forest, and at the end of the season as many as between 2000 and 3000 deer might occasionally be seen together. The name "Druidh" appears again twice—in *Auldrue*, the ruined hamlet at the north foot of Carn Elrick, and in *Druie*, the name of the united stream of the Bennie and the Luineag.

The ascent of Braeriach by Allt a' Gharbh-choire (the Garchary for short) is not without interest when one happens to be in the Larig. The cairn may be directly made for from the junction of the stream from the Pools with that from the Wells, or the Garchary Burn may be kept till it forks at a height of 2750 feet. Near the lower fork, where the streamlet from Lochan Uaine enters, the water may, when wind is blowing, be observed to leave that lochan in the form of spray; it has a fall of almost a thousand feet to the Garchary. From the upper fork the

cairn lies to the northward—a route both stony and steep, but neither difficult nor dangerous. Not so the ascent as made on 17th July, 1810, by Dr. Skene Keith,* who describes the Garchary as “tumbling in great majesty over the mountain in a chain of natural cascades, about 1300 feet high. It was in flood at this time, from the melting of the snow, and the late rains; and what was most remarkable, an arch of snow covered the narrow glen from which it tumbled over the rocks. . . . We approached so near to the cataract as to know that there was no other lake or stream; and then we had to climb



THE SUMMIT OF BRAERIACH.

among huge rocks, and to catch hold of the stones or fragments that projected, while we ascended at an angle of 70 or 80 degrees”. Professor Macgillivray also describes an ascent by this route made in September, 1819, by “a poor student of King’s College, Aberdeen”, “the poor student” being himself. He had spent a cheerless night

* “Agricultural Survey of Aberdeenshire”.

† “Natural History of Deeside and Braemar”.

near the upper fork (2750), and in the morning held to the northward, by the larger stream, which led him to a "magnificent corrie, in the form of a deep hollow scooped out of the great ridge . . . the sides formed of sloping rocks of vast height. The rivulet came tumbling down the centre in the form of a cataract. Here the rocks were most abrupt; but I determined to proceed—at least to attempt the ascent. Before I reached the base of the rocks, I felt very weak, and was obliged to halt every now and then. However, I proceeded, and at length, being well accustomed to rock-climbing, found myself on the very summit of this vast mass of rock". He also mentions coming on "an immense mass of snow, frozen so hard that it did not even give rise to a rill" in the same corrie on 14th August, 1850.

Braeriach (the contracted form of Braigh-riabhach)—the streaked, speckled, or brindled brae or mountain—is the third highest mountain in the British Isles. The cairn is built on a small platform of stones and overlooks Coire Bhrochain, another sub-corrie of An Garbh-choire. Coire Bhrochain is steep even to overhanging, and perhaps that may be the reason why the Royal Engineers placed their cairn a few feet from the very highest point of the ground! The name signifies "the gruel or porridge corrie" and is said to have been so called from a herd of deer having fallen over the precipice here and been reduced to "brochan"! The view is in many respects similar to that from Ben Muich Dhui, but westwards and Spey-wards the prospect is more extended. The nearer views are particularly worthy of notice—Ben Muich Dhui across the deep (2200 feet), narrow Larig, with the tiny river rushing along in the bottom of the glen; the foot-track a mere scratch but perfectly distinct. Then looking across to Cairn Toul, only $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles to the south-south-east, one seems to feel the magnitude and wildness of An Garbh-choire. Lochan Uaine looks the picture of solitude in a setting of desolation. At our feet we seem to have Badenoch and Strathspey, with numerous lochs shining brightly in the foreground. Cairngorm presents its cone to our gaze, and among the other summits of the group may be particularly named Beinn Mheadhoin,

Beinn a' Bhuid, Ben Avon, and Sgoran Dubh. But the distant prospect is enchanting and affords ample room for speculation. Mountains press on mountains as billow follows billow, so that "admiration is raised to enthusiasm and seems to expand with the extent of the prospect"; almost the whole land seems devoted to mountains. Beginning with Ben Rinnés in the north-east we look across the Moray Firth to apparently continuous lines of mountains, one towering behind another, from Caithness to Inverness. Among these may be named Ben Wyvis and Mam Sodhail. To the westward Ben Nevis may be picked out from a herd of giants that seems at this distance to press on him—among them Creag Meaghaidh, Ben Alder, and the mountains of Glen Coe. More to the south Ben Cruachan stands sentinel over Loch Awe, and Beinn Laoigh gives birth to the chief head stream of the Tay. Ben More and Am Binnein, the twin peaks whose distant outline is so familiar to mountaineers, may also be distinguished; nearer is the bulky Ben Lawers overlooking Loch Tay, and an indication of the presence of Schichallion. Still nearer and almost due south the summits of Beinn a' Ghlo form an imposing group, eastward and a little to the north of which the Ben Urns and Glas Thulachan may readily be discerned, as well as Glas Maol and his fellows, with the classic Lochnagar in the south-east.

Cairn Toul, as seen from Glen Dee or Ben Muich Dhui, has quite a different appearance compared to the shape it presents as viewed from Moine Mhor or the heights to the west. In the former case there is a long steep front to the Larig, extending from the Garchary to the Devil's Point; in the latter Cairn Toul shows only its double-cairned top, so that the "barn" shape, to which many contend that it owes its name, is irresistibly impressing.

Cairn Toul is frequently ascended from Braeriach (and *vice versa*) by following the edge of the corrie. The walk round the corrie affords excellent opportunity of viewing to advantage the magnificent prospect, far and near, presented from such an elevated plateau. In clear weather there is not the least difficulty in passing from the one summit to



CAIRN TOUL, FROM BEN MUICH DHUI.

the other; in mist, however, even when provided with a compass, the route will be found not so easy to follow as may have been anticipated. The last mile or so of the "walk" entails a scrambling over boulders ere the cairn can be negotiated, and includes Sgor an Lochain Uaine (4095)—a "sgor" which considerably adds to the picturesque outline of Cairn Toul, whether seen from the east side of the Larig, or from Braeriach, or the neighbourhood of Carn Ban.

From Glen Dee the Glen Geusachan route is almost monotonously easy, gradually landing one, without any very steep climbing, at the cairn. The mouth of Glen Geusachan, however, presents one or two features of interest. The Dee is crossed just above the confluence with the Geusachan Burn, and, unless the river be in flood, its fording can be accomplished dry-shod. The Devil's Point, as here seen, is entitled to its designation. It is a great rocky pointed mass, rising precipitously from the Larig, to which it presents a seemingly inaccessible face. It may, however, be ascended from the Larig along Allt a' Choire Odhar—there is a rough track for some distance—starting from a watcher's bothy known as Corrou; or it may be taken from Glen Geusachan parallel to the tributary burn to the west of the top (Vol. I., p. 397). Beinn Bhrotain's steep front commands the other side of Glen Geusachan, and, as we turn northward in the glen, Monadh Mor also slopes to our left. Almost on the county boundary is Lochan Suarach (the more correct name, experts contend, is Loch na Stirtag, frequently corrupted to Sturtack). It is a small lochlet, situated at an altitude of 2840 feet, rather bleak, with mossy ground in the vicinity, and a little grassy patch of an islet near its centre. Deer may frequently be observed feeding around it, or in warm weather splashing in its blue water, from which issues a head stream of the Geusachan. But for a rough, steep climb, through a wilderness of boulders, try the ascent of Cairn Toul from the Larig, passing through Coire an t-Saighdeir (the soldier's corrie) with its fissured crags. This route is direct, presenting the rougher and steeper side of the mountain to the climber;

the descent may be varied by re-entering the Larig *via* Lochan Uaine—quite as steep a route.

Cairn Toul being wholly within the Aberdeenshire march, and not on the county watershed, may be regarded as an example of “some of the highest and most imposing summits, instead of occupying the crown of the ridge, being found in lateral subordinate ranges, or even in the mere spurs or offsets of the great chain of Alps”*. It ranks fourth among Scottish mountains, being only seven feet lower than its neighbour Braeriach. It is the most shapely peaked of the higher summits of the Cairngorms, and is marked by two cairns about 150 yards apart. The higher is the northern one, but the southern is only fourteen feet lower. There is a remarkable corrie almost on the very top, shaped like a gigantic saucer and visible at a great distance. To the south of the “saucer corrie” is Coire an t-Saighdeir, where the snow bunting breeds and is frequently seen. But not a nest has been found there spite of persistent efforts to obtain one, a circumstance easily accounted for by the size and number of the boulders that line the corrie. The appearance of Cairn Toul from Ben Muich Dhui has been thus described by the Rev. James M. Crombie† :

“But, of them all, our eye lingers longest upon Cairn Toul, which is, undoubtedly, the noblest looking of the mountains in Braemar, and differs from all the others in its summit being peaked. Taken in connection with the nearest ridge of Braeriach, and viewed from the western extremity of the mountain, where its whole outline from the base is distinctly visible, it presents a picture of sublimity which probably nowhere else we could look upon nearer than the Alps—to some of which, before the snow has disappeared from its summit, it bears a great resemblance. Its corries, the largest of which is visible before us, with the small circular loch of Uaine in its bosom, form the richest botanising ground in the district for Alpine plants ; and were we to spend a night upon the hills, and commence our search early in the morning, we would find that before sunset we had collected a rich

* See also *C.C.J.*, Vol. I., p. 342.

† “Braemar : Its Topography and Natural History” (1861).

harvest indeed—a richer, probably, than any catalogue of their flora yet contains”.

“Two Days and a Night in the Wilderness”,* gives an interesting account of an excursion to Cairn Toul:

“Keeping along the north side of the glen, and gradually shogging up the south flank of Cairn Toul, we turned northwards at Buidheanach of Cairn Toul, and following and keeping well above the Geusachan, we gradually wrought up towards the source of the burn. . . . Our view to the far west was bounded by Ben Nevis, while in the near foreground and below us lay, on the opposite side of the glen, Lochan Suarach. An extensive tableland extended to the west of this loch, and in the far distance we could discern, through the haze, shining like ingots of gold and silver, Loch Laggan, and several small lochans in its neighbourhood beyond the line of the Highland Railway. . . . Keeping a little to the south-east, we soon reach the edge of the ridge, and look down upon the Dee from the edge of the Coire an t-Saighdeir, 2100 feet right down. The corrie is semicircular, of vast extent, with fissured crags, and steep stony slopes. Its concave bottom is covered with blocks and stones, and the vegetation appears to be of the scantiest. We keep along the ridge and make for the peak, which, so far as we can discern by what we are climbing amongst, consists of a huge mass of blocks of granite, of all shapes and sizes. Millions of tons of stones are here piled one above the other. The view was extensive to the south-east, south-west, and north-west. We could see Morven, Mount Keen, Lochnagar, Carn an Tuirc, Glas Maol, Beinn Iutharn, Beinn a’ Ghlo, and other Bens far to the south and south-west. But in the east it was interrupted by the summit of Ben Muich Dhui, and on the north by the precipitous ridge of Braeriach. . . . The view was restricted by the haze, and so we did not linger long, but prepared to descend to Lochan Uaine. . . . The descent from the cairn to this Lochan . . . is about 1200 feet, and the walls of the corrie are exceedingly steep, with much of the disintegrated granite as difficult to walk among as scoriae. We had to spread out and climb parallel to each other, as the stones set loose by our progress often went thundering down before us, and would have been dangerous to one climbing below another. . . . We made for the north

* By Alexander Copland and T. R. Gillies.

edge of the corrie, so as to descend to the Garchary, but found ourselves on a high, rocky, precipitous ridge, with water pouring over deep shelving rocks, and after climbing down several hundred feet we could get no farther, and had to climb back again and seek another outlet. This was ultimately found, and we got to the glen below, not without difficulty and danger, the descent being about another 1200 feet, and exceedingly steep”.

Sgoran Dubh is the generally accepted name of the short but steep range on the west side of Loch Eunach, but the Ordnance Surveyors have been unfortunate with their nomenclature. In the six-inch map the words “Sgoran Dubh” are placed a little to the north of the height “3658”, while “Sgor Ghaoith” is written in similar letters to the south of that height and a little to the west of the crags, on a bouldery knoll in the parish of Alvie, a knoll which has no existence except on this map. Sgor Ghaoith (the windy sgor—an excellently fitting name) should be placed at the “3658” height and the words “Sgoran Dubh Beag” deleted from the Club Map of the Cairngorm Mountains. The Hon. Mrs. Murray* visited Glen Eunach in the end of last century and evidently refers to Sgor Ghaoith when she mentions “Scor-i-grui”. The minister of Elgin contributed an article on the Province of Moray in the Appendix to Pennant’s “Tour in Scotland”. He writes:—“Of the mountains in this province [Moray] I shall name but two or three: the *Carngorm* in Strathspey *Benalar* in Badenoch *Scorgave* in Rothiemurchus”, “Scorgave” being a form of Sgor Ghaoith. In Robertson’s map (1822) the principal summit on the west side of Loch Eunach is properly marked, and is named in his accompanying list “Scorgie Hill”, and at the present time this peak is locally known as Sgor Ghaoith. Sgoran Dubh Mhor (3635) is situated as marked on the Club Map; while the real Sgoran Dubh Bheag is an unheighted peak a short distance to the north and several hundred feet lower in elevation. The distance between Sgor Ghaoith and Sgoran Dubh Mhor is about three quarters of a mile. We shall use

* “Guide to the Beauties of Scotland”, 3rd ed., 1810.

the general name Sgoran Dubh when referring to the range, particularising the summits as occasion requires.

The Glen Eunach route to Sgoran Dubh is the same as that to Braeriach, as far as the lower end of Loch Eunach. Seen from the neighbourhood of the lower bothy, the two Sgorans—Mhor and Bheag—have the appearance of being almost equal in altitude, while Sgor Ghaoith is considerably depressed and seemingly is of much lower elevation. It is only from a few points, and with careful observation, that an accurate estimate of the relative heights can be obtained. Little wonder that the shepherds, predecessors of the foresters, discussed and differed among themselves as to the relative heights of the peaks overlooking Loch Eunach. Perhaps the easiest route from Glen Eunach is by "taking the hill" from the glen a little short of the loch and thus reaching Sgoran Dubh Mhor, but the more ambitious mountaineer will be inclined to make the ascent direct from the loch. As seen from a height of about two thousand feet, on the Coire Dhonndail path, this route would seem to many to be quite impracticable, but the apparent impossibilities and dangers vanish when tackled at close quarters. Indeed the summit may thus be reached in at least a dozen ways and an excellent bit of "sporting" climb will be experienced. The walk along the Corrou path (on the west side of the loch) is a most enjoyable one, affording capital near views of the crags. This path zig-zags up the steep at the upper end of the loch and lands one on the plateau at the head of Coire Odhar, whence the route to the summits of the range is easy. At the top of Coire Odhar, at a height of about 3300 feet, may be observed the remains of a shooting bothy; on the other side of the burn is a very fine spring, Fuaran-diotach (the breakfast well), from which Cairn Toul is visible. The corrie below, to the north of Coire Odhar, is Coire na Cailleach. The latter corrie extends a little beyond Sgor Ghaoith; a particular rock is still pointed out as the Cailleach* (opposite the Boddach of

* A name which was indeed sometimes applied, in the forms of An Cailleach and Sgor na Cailleach, to Sgor Ghaoith itself.

Braeriach), and is noted as a breeding place for eagles. The northward continuation of Coire na Cailleach is known as Coire Mheadhoin. The ascent of Sgoran Dubh from Glen Feshie is of quite a different character, for the climb is gradual, as the range presents a precipitous face to the east only. Glen Feshie may be left at Achlean, a farm near the junction of Allt Fhearnachan with the Feshie. There is little chance of passing by Achlean unwittingly or unobserved, for it is the residence of a noted fox-hunter (Clark), whose numerous dogs*, deer-hounds, fox-hounds, collies, and Scottish terriers, are certain to give passers-by a kindly, if noisy, welcome; and it may be well to mention that their master possesses a most intimate knowledge of the Western Cairngorms. An excellent pony-path leads up the north side of Allt Fhearnachan, towards Carn Ban. Or Glen Feshie may be left at Ballachroichk (940), near the junction of Allt Ruadh with the Feshie. When the track on the north side of the beautiful gorge formed by Allt Ruadh has disappeared, Allt nam Bo† should be made for and struck at a height of about 2000 feet and Coire Gorm entered. This corrie, the upper part of which is steep, gives birth to the southerly head stream of Allt nam Bo, which leads directly on to the summit of Sgor Ghaoith. Between Sgor Ghaoith and Sgoran Dubh Mhor, at a height of about 3550 feet, may be seen the remains of a semaphore, with the watcher's box adjoining, for signalling the position of deer to the sportsmen in the glen below. The use of this contrivance has long been given up.

If the ascent of Sgoran Dubh from Glen Feshie be somewhat commonplace, not so is the view which unexpectedly bursts on the climber as he steps out of Coire Gorm to stand on Sgor Ghaoith. The ascent seems to come to an abrupt termination; another step, in mist, and an awkward fall would be experienced. For Loch Eunach lies 2000 feet below, and though the upward climb from it

* Some of them lineal descendants of those used by Landseer as models when he painted in Glen Feshie.

† The natives say that this name applies only to another tributary lower down and that the correct name is Crom Allt Mor.

is safe and laborious, *facilis descensus Averni*. The earliest recorded ascent from Glen Feshie was in the beginning of the century by Colonel Thornton*, an eager sportsman who saw more than game when he was hunting. His account of the ascent—probably made by Allt Fhearnachan—the dangers and difficulties of which, like all mountain ascents a hundred years ago, he ridiculously overdraws, is so interesting that one or two extracts may be given :

“Up the Vale of Feshie is an extreme wild view ; at ten o'clock, we were at the foot of the mountain, the heat intense [August 6], the mercury standing at 84° F. A severe labour we had to ascend the mountain, as steep as the side of a house : rocky, and sometimes boggy . . . At twelve o'clock, we got up to the first snow, and, before one, we thought we were near the mouth (*sic*) of Glen Eunach, and then, depositing our champaign, lime, shrub, porter, etc., in one of the large snow-drifts, beneath an arch, from which ran a charming spring, we agreed to dine there . . . They then kept moving forward, according to my directions, over large stones, which was not effected without frequently making use of both hands and feet, and taking the greatest care not to allow the horses to turn their heads round . . . They at last arrived at the top. It is impossible to describe the astonishment of the whole party when they perceived themselves on the brink of that frightful precipice, which separated them from the lake below ! They remained motionless a considerable time, equally struck with admiration and horror. The mountains above them, to the right, chequered with drifts of snow, and differing but little from it in colour ; the immense rocks to the left, separated by large fissures, the safe abode of eagles ; and even the precipices around, appeared to them truly majestic ; nor is this saying too much, for such is the impression they naturally inspire . . . Yet the eye having dwelt awhile on these frightful, naked piles, is soon relieved, and feels an agreeable composure from the scene beneath, where the lake, like a sheet of glass, reflects, in its extensive bosom, all the objects around ; this, bordered by soft, sandy banks, where fine, but partial verdure, scattered over with small herds of cattle, grazing and bleating ; and a single *bothee* : the temporary residence of the lonely herdsman ; softens, in some

* Thornton's "Sporting Tour through the Northern Parts of England and great parts of the Highlands of Scotland", 1804.

measure, the unpleasant idea of danger, which is apt to arise; while the solemn silence, interrupted only by the hoarse notes of ptarmigants, increasing at the approach of strangers, or by the dashing of the never-ceasing cascades, soothes the mind with the most agreeable emotions”.

The sporting Colonel made a similar excursion ten days later:

“Went up again to Loch and Glen Eunach. After a pretty good walk of three hours, we ascended, and saw the lake below us, said to be full of *char*, and on the cloud-cap't mountains above are found *ptarmigants*, *cairvanes*, and some *dotrel*. We dined at possibly the coldest spring in the world, running most rapidly, and had very good punch made with shrub, brought from Invereshie”.

The view from Sgor Ghaoith, though restricted as compared to that from the giants of the Cairngorms, is extensive, and has its own grandeur. Again the near prospects excel the more distant—the loch below enchants one, and the corrie'd side of Braeriach is laid bare, as it were, to the gaze. Cairngorm is also in sight, and the upper valley of the Spey forms a natural picture to which the eye returns again and again*. Sgor Ghaoith is cairn-less; not so Sgoran Dubh Mhor.

Sgoran Dubh is backed by several lower hills, which, owing to their position, require little notice. Geal-charn is to the north-west, and overlooks Creag Mhigeachaidh—a crag which seems a fitting sentinel for the north-west boundary of the Cairngorms. Seen from Kincaig its steep tree-clad and scarred slope is not unimposing, and, indeed, a climb to the summit—continued possibly to Geal-charn—is remunerative enough on an afternoon when time will not permit of a more extended excursion. Meall Buidhe is on the west side of the source of Allt na Criche—Sgoran Dubh Mhor, its immediate neighbour, being on the east side—by which stream the descent from Sgoran Dubh may be varied. Fully half-way down this burn it enters on a gorge not unlike that of the Allt Ruadh; while on the

* See Vol. I., pages 36 and 306.

low ground there is a natural paddock for hinds. Provision is made for the entrance, at will, of stags, who, whoever, enter only to find themselves prisoners. Allt na Criche enters the Feshie near Lagganlia, and the lower part of its course, sluggish and uninteresting, is in striking contrast to its upper and middle reaches. The summit of Carn Ban is rather uninteresting—as a summit—but its surroundings quite redeem its character. On the north it is approached by Coire Ruadh, a steep heathery corrie of Allt Ruadh; on



THE CAIRN ON SGORAN DUBH MHOR.

the west Ciste Mhairearaid of Allt Fhearnachan has to be climbed; while Moine Mhor, the great moss, stretches from Carn Ban on the north to Diollaid Coire Eindard on the south. The "moss" is, indeed, of enormous extent, and one marvels to find such a flat at so great an altitude. It has its use, however, and adds to the value of the Glen Feshie forest, for in the hot days of summer and autumn the deer

may be seen cooling and disporting themselves in its stagnant pools.

Ciste Mhairearaid—Margaret's coffin—contains snow till very late in the season. "Margaret", who was jilted by Macintosh of Moy Hall, and who cursed his family to sterility, is said to have died here in her mad wanderings*. According to another account she had lost her way, when "at the peats", from Rothiemurchus; and yet another tradition contends that she died in the neighbouring corrie, Coire Fennach, and that the funeral party only rested in Ciste Mhairearaid. Cairngorm also has a corrie of that name.

The summits of the Western Cairngorms to the south and south-east of Carn Ban have no connection with Sgoran Dubh and may be classed in two divisions—west and east of the Eidart (or Etchart). This stream, rising on Braeriach, Carn Ban and Sgor Ghaoith, is the principal tributary of the Feshie, and indeed it is even contended that it should bear its own name to the Spey. West of the Eidart we have Meall Dubh-achaidh, Meall Tionail, and Diollaid Coire Eindard; to the east there are Monadh Mor, Beinn Bhrotain, and Carn Cloich-mhuilinn.

Meall Dubh-achaidh may be classed with Carn Ban, but deserves particular notice from the grand corrie—Coire Garbhloch—which leads up to it from Glen Feshie. The gorge cut by Allt Garbhloch is one of the most noted features in Glen Feshie, and cannot fail to be noticed as one proceeds along that glen. It is rocky, steep, long, and narrow, and thus meets all the requirements of picturesque grandeur which are generally associated with Highland corries, and is worth a visit for its own attractions—a circumstance only comparatively recently found out by visitors to the district. It has a sub-corrie, Coire Feunach, between it and the top of Meall Dubh-achaidh, a halt in which affords perhaps the best view of the scene. Here the hillman may frequently have an unpremeditated stalk, coming on a little herd of deer as unexpectedly to them as to himself, and will marvel at the sudden transition from

* Macbain's "Badenoch : Its History, Clans, and Place Names".

the moss of Moine Mhor to the crags of the corrie, with the stream falling headlong from such an elevation that one is inclined to estimate the height not in feet but in a fraction of a mile. The lower angle formed by the Feshie and Allt Garbhlach was at one time a place of considerable resort, for it was the site of a market claiming to be the origin of the great Falkirk Trysts. In the present day such a position for a cattle market seems rather absurd, but on reflection a good deal is to be said for the convenience of the situation, being on one of the main drove routes between the Highlands and the south. From Glen Feshie the market was removed to An Sgarsoch in Glen Geldie; thence to Crieff and latterly to Falkirk—though by what stages we cannot precisely say. The further north the market was held the more the southern dealers objected, for they asserted that occasionally the Highlanders turned homewards with both cattle and money! A short distance below the market stance the Feshie is crossed by Polluach Bridge at a rocky gorge; a few yards below the bridge (right bank) is the site of an old burial ground.

An ascent of Diollaid Coire Eindard and Meall Tionail is described in the last Number by Mr. Robert Anderson, while Mr. Clarke in the present deals with Beinn Bhrotain and its more immediate neighbours. Carn Geldie (2039) and Duke's Chair (2010) lie to the south of Carn Cloich-mhuilinn on the left bank of the Geldie. Duke's Chair is a modern name; the reference is to the Duke of Leeds who rented the forest of Mar. Concerning Carn Geldie there is an interesting tradition* in connection with a laird of Dalmore who buried a bag of gold in the Garchary. He removed the treasure, however, to Coire na Craoibh Ora (*C. C. J.*, Vol. I., p. 330), but on learning that there were certain lands for sale in Cromar he set out there with his gold. Overlooking Cromar from Culbleen, there was then little to be seen but log and loch, and so he turned back, exclaiming, "God forbid that I should throw my gold into the water". Thereafter he hid it near the top of Carn Geldie,

* "Legends of the Braes o' Mar", by John Grant, 1876.

covering it over with a huge stone, on which he cut the figure of a horse's shoe. And there it still remains. True, an ancient shepherdess came across the stone and stuck her distaff into the ground beside it and then went for help, but on her return at the head of a party of men, lo! the whole hillside appeared bristling with spindles. In course of time a Grant, known as Taillear Ruadh, also came across the marked boulder, but when he returned with his friends the stone was not to be seen. Stupid tailor! Had he only placed a piece of money on it he would have had no difficulty in finding the spot the second time. The treasure is reserved for a Ruadhraidh Ruadh, a Red Roderick, a Mackenzie both by the father and mother's side; he will come on it some misty evening while searching for a strayed ox.

“ With frowning front Craigellachie, with awful brow Cairngorm,
 Tower giant-guardians of the Strath, and shield it from the storm,
 Where roams she by Kinrara's woods, Loch Alvie's silent shore,
 The fairest on the banks of Spey—the Maid of Aviemore.
 Loch an Eilein on thy lovely banks, ah! would I had a home,
 With her in fond companionship through all my days to come.
 Let vain ambition crave for state, and avarice covet store,
 Much more were mine had I but her—the Maid of Aviemore”.

Reference has more than once been made in these articles to Aviemore as a starting point for Cairngorm ascents, and as a centre for mountain exploration it possesses many advantages. The immediate surroundings are charming, while the varied views of the Cairngorm mountains are full of interest. The undoubted gem of the locality is Loch an Eilein. Situated in Rothiemurchus at an altitude of 840 feet above the sea level, having an irregular circumference of about three miles, bordered by pines and birches and enclosed by mountains, and its ancient, hoary, ruined castle on a little island (said to be artificial), Loch an Eilein is possibly not equalled, certainly it is not excelled, by any similar sheet of water in the Highlands. Indeed the scene, as viewed from the west margin, opposite the castle, is said to form an almost faultless composition. It is sheltered on the south-east by Cadha Mor, the opposite side

being protected by Ord Bain (1405), on which, in olden times, signal fires were lighted. The latter hill is beautifully wooded, and an excellent view may be had from the summit. The prospect embraces Ben Nevis, but Badenoch and Strathspey are the chief features in the landscape. Half-a-dozen of the neighbouring lochs are visible, and the forests of Glen More and Rothiemurchus are seen as a great wooded flat extending from the Pass of Rebhoan to Ord Bain.

The castle, famous as a retreat of the notorious "Wolf of Badenoch", is now better known as the breeding place of the Osprey. Occasionally the birds desert Loch an Eilein for a season or two, and have been known to nest by the side of Loch Morlich, but now every effort is made to induce them to return annually to Rothiemurchus. The nest is a large pile of twigs—some of them of the dimensions of branches, of which there is a good cart-load—the accumulation of at least half-a-century, and may be seen, with the birds, from the shore. A little to the west of the castle there is a very good echo. The defeated at the battle of Cromdale, a few miles farther down the Spey, vainly sought shelter within the castle, which was a ruin before the middle of the seventeenth century,

"This island castle, that with ruin hoar
Frowns on the forest, thro' whose silent glade
Winds yonder secret pathway, which, of yore,
Marauding clans with frequent booty made".

A sluice at the lower end formerly enabled the water to be stored up, and the extended boundary thus caused may yet be seen in several places. A road leads round the loch, but is not now passable for vehicles on the south side. There is a small lochlet at the upper end, called Loch Gamhna, in a picturesque situation somewhat marred by the devastation caused by the woodman's axe. It is skirted by an old road, Rathad-na-meirlich (the thieves' road), along which the Lochaber men frequently made cattle-lifting excursions into Strathspey. Hence, possibly, the name of the loch, which means the Stirks' Loch. Loch an Eilein, it may be mentioned, is a favourite

pic-nic resort, and is frequently visited by mountaineers on the return drive from Loch Eunach. The Doune is the mansion house of Grant of Rothiemurchus, and is situated on the right bank of the Spey about two miles south-south-west of Aviemore station. The situation and aspect of Rothiemurchus are unsurpassed. Abounding in mountains and glens, and diversified with brattling burns, mountain tarns and lochs, and clad here and there with pine and birch, the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime are so harmoniously blended that the very name, Rothiemurchus, suggests all that is attractive in highland scenery. A sept of the famed Clan Chattan, the Shaws, formerly possessed the district. Indeed, tradition has it that Shaw Sgorfhiachlach (Shaw of the buck teeth), whose dust, it is believed, lies in the Rothiemurchus churchyard (about half-a-mile south from the Doune), was at the head of the party of the Clan Chattan, who in 1396 fought so ferociously on the North Inch of Perth. The Shaws also from this quarter, to the number of fourteen, fought at Harlaw in 1411 on the side of Donald, Lord of the Isles. As shewing the deadly strife that sometime subsisted between the Shaws and the Grants, who ultimately acquired the district, tradition says that one of the latter on his death-bed asked to be buried near the gate of the Rothiemurchus churchyard—the Shaws' burying ground being well within—so that at the resurrection he might have an opportunity of making good his escape from his inveterate enemies!

Lynwilg, about two and a half miles from Aviemore, with its inn near the northern shore of Loch Alvie, is also a convenient as well as beautiful rendezvous for the Cairngorms—especially the Western portion. The Spey may be crossed at Aviemore, or at a private ferry at Kinrara—even forded there upon occasion. The Tor of Alvie is well known, were it only for its graceful 90 feet monument to the last of the old Dukes of Gordon, as well as a cairn to the memory of the Highlanders of the 42nd and 92nd Regiments who fell at Waterloo. On the south side of the Tor is Kinrara, beautiful Kinrara, the favourite residence and the burial place of Jean, Duchess of Gordon.

Kineraig (the station for the lower part of Glen Feshie) is conveniently situated for the ascent of the Western Cairngorms. Creag Mhigeachaidh as seen from the station—which has one of the finest positions on the Highland Railway—appears a bold sentinel for this extreme corner of the Cairngorms, while the Sgoran Dubh range stands prominently out. The Spey is now crossed by a wooden bridge which takes the place of a ferry familiar as “Boat of Insh”. The road leads by the ancient church of Insh and the lower end of Loch Insh (721), past Invereshie House (Proprietor, Sir George Macpherson Grant, Bart., of Ballindalloch), to Feshie Bridge. Here the right bank Speyside road crosses the Feshie—continuing down the river by Coylum Bridge and Nethy Bridge—at a picturesque point, the bed of the river being rocky and the banks lined with trees, reminding one somewhat of the Bridge of Feugh. A driving road leads up the right bank of the Feshie as far as Achlean—where the stream may be forded and the drive continued to Glenfeshie Lodge—passing Lagganlia and Ballachroichk. Evident “short cuts” (three) for pedestrians may be observed between Insh church and Lagganlia.

Kingussie, the “capital” of Badenoch, as Cairngorm headquarters, is the extreme point in that direction and is quite outside the district dealt with in these articles. The drive (10 miles) to Glenfeshie Lodge is, in the tourist season, exceedingly popular, whether the lodge, with its grand surroundings, is the objective, or the starting point for a mountain excursion. The glen road is joined opposite Achlean.