

THE
Cairngorm Club Journal.

Vol. II.

JANUARY, 1897.

No. 8.

THE HORIZON FROM BEN MUICH DHUI.

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THE endeavour to put upon paper the outline of the distant hill view seen from the summit of Ben Muich Dhui is no joke. If anyone thinks otherwise, let him try to conscientiously perform the work. There is no hotel in the neighbourhood of "The Cairn" where the observer can put up, and that foxes' hole under the Shelter Stone may serve for protection on a wet night, but a protracted lodgment there is not to be thought of. The "artist" who will do the view from Ben Muich Dhui must needs wander many "a weary fit", and put up with disappointment after disappointment from capricious weather before he can accomplish his object. Now, much of this labour and discomfort might have been saved. Why did not the accomplished staff employed on the Ordnance Survey do this work? They had ample opportunity and first-rate capacity for it. Look at their splendid performance in the matter of the maps they have produced. They are admirable pictures of the country, marvels of artistic skill and accuracy. In the old days of the "Great Trig" the giants of the Survey, we are told, were perched the most part of their time on the summits of our mountain ranges. They beheld from thence "the marvellous multiform aspects of nature", and evidently had distant views, the very thought of which makes one envious; and yet they never appear to have thought it would interest the public to have pictorial reproductions of the hill horizon as seen

from our highest mountains. If they are to resume their work, if they are to revise their maps as, ten years ago, Lieut.-Colonel Pilkington White suggested they should be employed to do, so as to keep them from swelling the ranks of the unemployed, let them at the same time not neglect to give the public the "horizons" as seen from our most elevated Scottish mountains.

We have frankly avowed our appreciation of the maps produced by the Survey, yet it must be allowed that, owing to their very excellence, they have created a disadvantage. They have, in large degree, superseded the fraternity of guides to the mountains. Happily the bicycle and the motor car, as at present constructed, cannot tackle Corrie Etchachan, and a superannuated guide may still occasionally be seen with his ponies in Glen Derry, conveying ladies to the summit of Ben Muich Dhui. But ladies also now, one-inch map in hand, do the Larigs without masculine escort, and scramble up the stony slope of Coire Clach nan Taillear in corrugated foot gear. It was otherwise in the days when our departed friend, John, or Johnnie Downie, of Tomintoul, Braemar, was in his *potistawtar*, forty or fifty years ago. There were no Ordnance maps of the district then, and few were so daring as to attempt Ben Muich Dhui without a guide. Of course, on reaching the summit of the mountain then, as now, the absorbing object of interest was Ben Nevis—that is, provided it could be seen, which was not always the case. We have heard that John's topography was not faultless. Tradition tells of a heated discussion which ensued on one occasion between the members of an English party and John, as to which of the distant detached mountain masses was the monarch not only of Scottish but of British mountains, and we have been told that, as often happens in such cases, both parties were wrong. The observers had a map which an amused spectator saw they did not place according to the mariner's compass, and hence they could not locate Ben Nevis. John, on the other hand, had somehow transferred his allegiance from the monarch who was entitled to it, to some less distant but more imposing eminence. The pacificator attempted, by properly placing

the map, to reconcile the differences, but he scarcely succeeded, as John set tradition above and beyond any map, and whether up to the day of his death he was convinced of the precise location of Ben Nevis, is more than we know. Now, had our friends the Sappers made an outline from south to west, as we have imperfectly attempted to do, how easy could the party have feasted their eyes upon the blue outline of Ben Nevis, and returned to tell their friends and neighbours of their felicity. Some clever people can, of course, make out, by map and compass, Ben Nevis from Ben Muich Dhui on a clear day, but it is not given to every one to accomplish that, and a pictorial outline would be helpful. Indeed, it is marvellous the mistakes people make with maps, even Ordnance maps. In Jubilee year, for example, a party of ladies and gentlemen was discovered painfully clambering up the slope of Beinn a' Chaorruinn in the mistaken belief that they were ascending Ben Muich Dhui! The leader of the party had somehow imagined Glen Derry was Glen Dee, and the water of the Derry that of the Dee, and so the day being far spent Ben Muich Dhui was unattainable. The feelings of that leader may be imagined, but not felt, as our informant heard one of the ladies, in a somewhat loud aside, make the stinging remark, "You're a pretty guide"! He must have been a husband or a brother. Again, an amusing instance of the misleading tendency of maps occurred to a party that set out from Braemar for Kingussie, *via* the summit of Ben Muich Dhui. The day was beautiful and the prospect charming, as they trekked among the pines of Glen Derry; yet that same party was descried, at eight p.m. of the same day, at the east end of Glen Luibeg, inquiring the direction of Kingussie! They were told their faces were set for Braemar, when it dawned upon them that they had seen the landscape they were gazing upon in the morning, and to Braemar they had to return. Now, had either of these parties put themselves under the guidance of John Downie, such misadventures could not have happened. But John was despised in his latter days by the Sassenach stranger. We remember an occasion, however, when he had his revenge. John had been sent for to

guide a party to Ben Muich Dhui when he was well through the seventies. To those who did not know the stuff he was made of, his appearance was an anxiety for such a tramp. The party—a lot of hearty English young fellows, soft and juicy—when they surveyed the proffered guide, demanded of “Boots” if he meant to insult them by selecting a decrepit old man to walk with them. “Boots” said John could do the tramp, and was well accustomed to do it, and John interposed with his cheery “Try me, gentlemen, try me”! As it was a case of Hobson’s choice, they did try him, and John used to relate with glee that before the “Englishmen” were half up Corrie Etchachan on that hot day they were “pechin’ aifter him like a flock o’ hens”, and Flodden was farther avenged.

But “pechin’”, we are obliged to admit, is not confined to Englishmen by those who essay the ascent of Ben Muich Dhui. We prefer the long summer day for our visits, leaving to the stalwarts of the Club the fierce joy of Christmas or New-Year’s Day climbs. If the reader care to accompany us on a sketching excursion we will start *via* Glen Luibeg on a bright morning in June. The morning of our selection must be preceded by one or two days of drenching rain and wind to clear the air. Then, with a serene bright sky above and a gentle breeze below, Mar Forest is an earthly paradise. Crossing the foot-bridge over the Derry Water and, facing westwards, the snow-splashed bosoms of massive Beinn Bhrotain and Monadh Mòr bound the western view. Carn Crom on the right hand, and the steep, pine-covered slope of Sgor Dubh on the left, bound the eastern entrance of Glen Luibeg. The foot-path lies along the left grassy bank of the clear, sparkling, dancing waters of the Luibeg. The invigorating air is scented with perfumes from the grouse heather and the ancient pines pencilled by Robson and sung of by Blackie. The deer have retired to their lairs in the corries after a night’s browsing on the rich meadow grass of the glen, and animal life is represented by the sleek black kine of the forester and his faithful collie, who gives warning of the approach of the stranger. But, though unseen, the forest is not tenantless. The cuckoo makes solitude

melodious with his name-call from dewy morn till latest eve, the wagtails are darting after insects among the grass or among the stones at the edge of the stream, and the chaffinches ring out their primeval ditty of "Ring, ring, rattle, chuck wido," and "Ring, ring, rattle, Jack White" as clear and cheerfully as their predecessors sang centuries ago. Perchance we may see the nimble squirrel swiftly circle upwards to a safe perch on his favourite pine, or an adder in the grass or heather make off from our unsympathetic presence. These sneaking reptiles are by no means uncommon here. Last June we killed three adders—two in Glen Luibeg and one in Glen Lui—the largest measured 26 inches. There is a popular fallacy that these creatures sting, possibly originated by mistaking the long vibrating tongue which the reptile protrudes for a sting. Their weapons of offence—and very effective they are—are fangs. When the creature is in its ordinary peaceful mood the poison fangs lie flat on the palate in the upper part of the mouth. They are tapered to a very fine point, are exceedingly sharp, and perforated. When battle has to be done, the enemy erects his fangs by a powerful muscle provided for that purpose, and as there are poison bags at the root of each fang the bite presses the root of the fang upon the poison bag and the poison is squirted into the wound. The thing, you will perceive, is cleverly and naturally accomplished, and without any "mechanique", as the professor of legerdemain would explain. Insect life is manifested by the active movements of the green and gold spotted tiger beetles, *cicendella campestris*, which, like flies, are constantly alighting on and taking flight from the path in front of you, and on the heather you may perceive the beautiful large caterpillars of the emperor and the oak egger-moths. Butterflies and bees are busy among the flowers, which are spread in wealthy and endless variety around the lichen-draped rocks and boulders, and the rich colouring of the mosses which mark the breaking forth of springs, and the variety of tint on the scarred sides and summits of the mountains are at once the admiration and despair of the painter. Is not this world with its uncultivated wastes—which cannot be cultivated—a magnificent and glorious

creation—a wonder beyond all belief and wonderment if merely the fortuitous product of chance.

Crossing the moraines at the eastern inlet to the glen, a walk of about two miles brings us to a gorge on the right, bounded on the east by Carn Crom and on the west by Carn a' Mhaim, through which the Luibeg water from the north is flowing. Keeping the left bank of the stream we soon see before us the long green Sron of Ben Muich Dhui, and two miles farther brings us to the point where the waters of the Allt Carn a' Mhaim and the stream coming from the glen to the right of Sron Riach unite, and form the Luibeg Water. The ground at the base of the Sron is boggy, and our elevation above sea level at the meeting of the waters is about 1850 feet, so that we have about 2446 feet perpendicular to ascend. A few hundred feet of ascent takes us beyond the soft ground and heather, and we reach protruding masses of weathered granite about the 3000 feet line. While taking a breathing space here, and surveying the expanding mountain range to the south, it may be proper to remind the Club that, although this route may be allowable in early summer, it should not be taken towards the shooting season, because the appearance of strangers there at that season is certain to disturb the deer and spoil sport. The route by Glen Derry, *via* Corrie Etchachan, to and from the summit of Ben Muich Dhui, is available at all seasons, and there is little difference in distance either way, so there is all the more reason to consider and respect the rights of the noble proprietor of the deer forest, who has most readily granted any reasonable request that the Club or its members have asked of him. Let us give an example of how easily deer are disturbed. While resting here with a friend well versed in knowledge of the habits of the deer, we saw a troop of stags in single file passing from Glen Carn a' Mhaim to the eastern glen, bounded by Derry Cairngorm. They had to cross the line of our ascent over a bare stretch of gravel. Although the deer were far below us on the slope, and the wind was blowing from them in our direction, our friend remarked that they would detect our having been there.

Sure enough the leader of the herd, when he came to our line of march, made a dead halt, sniffed the ground, and, tossing his head aloft with disturbed aspect, set off at the trot. The others, each and all, when they reached the tainted spot, followed suit. Possibly, had they actually seen us, they would not have been so much put about, but, seeing us not, yet scenting us, the hidden mystery had a disturbing tendency. A friend, considering the matter from the standpoint of the deer, imagines that we—that, of course, is mankind, not us personally—carry a bad smell about us, and are, in short, endowed with the odour of teufelsdröck. We are loth to admit that, and trust a more satisfactory explanation may be found for our offence to deer.

A question often put to the excursionist on his return is—“Did you see any deer”? The answer is frequently in the negative—that there was none to be seen. That is, however, frequently not the case. The cause of failure on the part of the excursionist was the want of the educated eye, and some little knowledge of the habits of the animal. On a bright, warm morning in summer, and in the early part of the day, the deer will be well up among the corries and the grassy spots by the sides of streams. If you look well towards such places you will see them moving, leisurely feeding, or appearing like groups of brown, red, or dun bundles dotted about. An English tourist, returning with us from Ben Muich Dhui, and enthusiastic about the splendour and grandeur of the scenery, complained of just one drawback to his complete satisfaction. He had not seen any red deer in his travels. While he was speaking we directed his attention to a herd on the green plateau half-way up the side of Cairngorm of Derry, many of whom were apparently enjoying an early afternoon *siesta*, and he went home to flat, uninteresting Lincolnshire rejoicing. Above the plateau towards the summit of the Derry Cairngorm a sportsman one day fired at a stag and evidently hit. The herd made off over rising ground and stoned out of sight, and the wounded stag among them. Upon topping the ridge and scanning the expanse of stony ground beyond, the stag was at length descried standing still among a mass of large

scattered blocks. The shot had broken the bone of a fore-leg, and the leg dangling, hanging by the skin, had caught between two large stones, and securely moored the poor animal, which was mercifully then and there despatched. Young deer are sometimes made pets of, but often turn out unsatisfactory. A good many years ago a hind calf was brought up in this forest which developed a somewhat wilful and skittish disposition. It would, when displeased, use its fore-legs like a practised boxer, and its enormities culminated when, in gratifying that taste for finery which is inherent in hinds, it found its way one day unperceived into Old Mar Lodge, ascended the stairs, and ate some of the window curtains.

It is advisable, if at all inclined to drink, that you "slock" before leaving the stream at the foot of the mountain, as running water will not be found on our route until you reach about 3600 feet on Sron Riach. There are, however, perforations—pot holes in the protruding granite—which you will pass more than 600 feet below that elevation, where goblets of distilled water, wonderfully clear and cool, may be dipped into, and, mixed judiciously, the liquid will be found refreshing on a hot day. Some of these "cuachs" we measured and found their diameters to run from one to two feet, and their depths from six to fourteen inches, curiously and symmetrically turned out by the agency of wind, gravel, stones, and water. Consider what the force of the wind must be while at work of this kind.

By the time we have reached the 3000 feet contour line vegetation, except in sheltered spots, has given up the struggle for existence. The moss campion, however, blushes unseen in sunny nooks, or among sheltering stone blocks, along with *Azalea procumbens*, and the crowberry blooms and abundantly ripens its fruit among the massive debris, exposed to the sunny south 3500 feet on Sron Riach. Here you may disconcert Reynard stalking ptarmigan by your unexpected appearance, and you are likely to be diverted by the antics of that unsophisticated bird when she wishes to avoid an introduction to her numerous family. On such occasion, you will witness a deliberate intention

to deceive and lead you astray, and, if you have any sense of humour, your fancy will be hugely tickled. Mother Ptarmigan assumes a very dowdy deportment, as with draggling wings she tries to make you believe she is unable to take flight, and that you may easily capture her. She invites you to do so. She is perfectly aware that she is humbugging you. Men, no doubt, "were deceivers ever", but so were and are ptarmigan. Poor things, between the fox, and the eaglé, and the elements, they seem to have a hard time of it, and yet they continue to croak among the solitudes of our stony mountain tops. One day an eminent botanist, clambering among the rocky fissures of The Devil's Point, saw a white bird flash past him, and before he could demand of a companion what kind of bird it was, a mighty rush of wings was upon him, and a golden eagle in hot pursuit swept into the air away from its quarry, which was saved by the presence of humanity. The eagle came unwittingly within a few feet of the botanist, and he was so excited by the magnificence of the spectacle, that he declared loudly it was worth his while to come all the way from London to witness the incident, although he had seen nothing more. We have several times seen eagles among the Cairngorms, but not the raven for many years past.

At 3578 feet on Sron Riach you look down upon Lochan Uaine 450 feet below, where, in the month of June, we have seen massive slabs of ice covering its surface. The range of precipice here rapidly rises to 4095 feet at the corrie of the Sput Dheirg, and forms the massive rocky crest fronting the dome of the mountain, well seen from the carriage road at Inverey or at the Carr Rock opposite Glen Quoich. You now perceive, a short distance to the west, on the steep slope, the outcrop of a spring from Sron Riach, which speedily forms a burn, falling westwards down the mountain to join the Allt Carn a' Mhaim. Among the stones surrounding this spring the parsley fern may be found in sturdy bunches. Keeping to the right and still ascending, we speedily top Sron Riach and reach an extensive sandy plain slightly depressed, drained by the Allt Clach nan Taillear, which flows through the corrie of that name and

joins the Dee in Glen Dee. Between the south bank of this stream and the rocky crest of the Sput Dheirg you may light upon several spots where the digger for cairngorms has been prospecting, and may pick up among the debris fractured specimens of the crystal. Also, on the banks of this stream and the flat ground on either side you will find growing abundantly the smallest willow in Great Britain, *Salix herbacea*. The jilted troubadour who resolved to hang his harp on the willow tree and set off to the wars again, would have found some difficulty in accomplishing his purpose here, as the branches of this willow rise only about half an inch from the ground. An attempt was made recently to deprive Scotland of the honour of growing the smallest tree in the world. It was published abroad—aye, even in Aberdeen newspapers—that Iceland had that pre-eminence, because there birches grow some three feet high! Compare that with the height and growth of *Salix herbacea*. We have now only about 300 feet more to ascend to reach the Cairn, and that is easily attained, because the distance makes the slope gradual. The roofless walls of the Sappers' Kitchen are soon in view, and after that the Cairn, in the neighbourhood of which, in October last, in detestible weather—snow-drift and sleet—we encountered a far-travelled mouse vainly seeking shelter.

THE VIEW FROM THE CAIRN.

Section I.—From South Westwards (0° to 90°).

The bearings of distant objects obtained by the Ordnance Survey staff from their station on Ben Muich Dhui (the Cairn) were referred to an approximate south meridian line. We thought it might be convenient to adhere to this arrangement in our endeavour to trace the horizon as seen from the same point, and we have done so. From the elevated stand-point of the spectator, with no interposing higher summits in the immediate neighbourhood south, west, and northwards the distant view is necessarily extensive, varied, and interesting. To the east the view is

interrupted by the high elongated range of Beinn a' Bhuid, and to some extent in the north-east by Cairngorm. Southwards—according to the record of the Trigonometrical Survey—the view extends to Says Law (1739), in the Lammermuir Hill range (bearing from the Cairn 335°), 93 miles distant, and northwards to Ben-a-chielt in Caithness (940) (bearing 187°), 87 miles distant. The eastern recorded bearing (247°) is that of the Hill of Dudwick (562) in Buchan, 66 miles distant; and westwards we have Ben Nevis (4406) (bearing 70°), distant 54 miles; and Mam Sodhail (3862) (bearing 105°), distant 57 miles. In the gaps in the outline, however, between Ben Nevis and Creag Meaghaidh and between Ben Alder and Ben Nevis, it is evident that the westward view extends far beyond the latter mountain.

Looking due south, Loch Loch is seen cradled in the hollow to the east of the picturesque mass of the Beinn a' Ghlo mountains (3671), distant 17 miles. The Ochil Hills, distant upwards of 60 miles, outline the horizon in the gap between Ben Vuroch and Beinn a' Ghlo, with Bencluech (2363) (bearing 3° west of the loch) observable if the view is ordinarily clear. Ben Vrackie may be picked out over the depression in the middle of the Beinn a' Ghlo range. In the near foreground, the summit of Carn a' Mhaim (3328) protrudes beyond the edge of the dome of Ben Muich Dhui, inviting attention. Along the south side of this mountain lies the western portion of Glen Luibeg. Glen Dee also runs along its western range, bounded on the west by Beinn Bhrotain and The Devil's Point of Cairn Toul. Glen Geusachan extends westwards between the northern slope of Beinn Bhrotain and the backward running ridge from The Devil's Point. Looking southwards over the broad back of Beinn Bhrotain (3797), An Sgarsoch extends westward to the peculiar termination of Carn an Fhìdhleir (3276). Looking from thence southwards along the sky line, we perceive the top of Ben Chonzie (3048), 46 miles away. Tending westwards, the conspicuous twin conical summits of Ben Vorlich (3224) and Stuc a Chroin (3189) are visible 55 miles distant, over the extended

line of hill range. Further westward, Ben Ledi, with its neighbour Ben Vane, 64 miles off, is dominated by the nearer mass of Ben Lawers (3984) (bearing 30°), 42 miles distant. In front of Ben Lawers, the conical outline of Schichallion (3547), 34 miles away, is backed to the right by the ridge of Carn Mairg; while over the skyline, west of Ben Lawers, several isolated hill tops peep—one of which, the one immediately west of Ben Lawers, we take to be Ben Lomond. Proceeding along the ridge, we reach Ben More's symmetrical cone, with his twin brother, Am Binnein, distant 60 miles, peering above the extended summit of Meall Ghaordie (3407), 48 miles distant. Further westward, Ben Laoigh (Lui) (3708), between which and Meall Ghaordie, however, we think we see the outline of Beinn Chaluum (3354) of Mamlorn Forest. Westwards still, beyond Ben Laoigh, we get among the lofty summits of the mountains between Glen Orchy and the head of Glen Lyon, and ultimately the noble mass of Ben Cruachan (3611) at the head of Loch Awe, distant 70 miles, is before us. Still west, and we are among the Black Mount mountains, until the rising mass of the summit of Cairn Toul beyond Coire an t-Saighdeir, interrupts the view. Between the high up-standing crest of Cairn Toul and Sgor an Lochain Uaine of An Garbh-choire, some interesting mountain masses come into view. First we have Beinn Udlaman (3306), 30 miles distant, in the gap between which and Ben Alder (3757) (bearing 60°), we think we see Buchaille Etive Mor. Then we have the Glencoe Mountains, and several lofty ranges, beyond which Ben Nevis towers. In the gap between it and the nearer mass of Creag Meaghaidh (3700), 36 miles distant, there is a range of distant mountains, which we take to be about Loch Shiel. Over Braeriach, which now fronts us, there is a gap or sneck between the north end of Creag Meaghaidh and Carn Liath, called "the window", which is distinctly perceivable. We have now due west, in front of us, the Fuar Gharbh-choire, or Dee Corrie, of Braeriach, down which the infant Dee leaps from the extensive table-land of the mountain, where it takes its rise upwards of 4000 feet above sea level. Beyond this

depression, looking westwards, we perceive, peering beyond the western outline of the depression on the broad bosom of Braeriach—the gathering ground of the Dee—the edge of the black precipitous range of Sgoran Dubh, which bounds the west side of Loch Eunach. Beyond it there is a far distant mountain range, which invites attention. The detached mountain masses in this range we have not as yet been able to locate, and must reserve for a future opportunity.

While we have laboured to trace this portion of the horizon—from south to west—as viewed from the summit of Ben Muich Dhui, as carefully as time, weather conditions, and our own unskilled endeavours would permit, we are only too sensible of its imperfections. Indeed, to accomplish the work as its deserves to be done, requires a trained hand and eye, with plenty of time, suitable weather, and accommodation near the summit of the mountain; as otherwise, however near the observer may be located to his point for observation, the journey to and from it will occupy at least eight hours of the day.