

GLAS MAOL.

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FROM many a summit of the Cairngorms there is seen southwards such an array of heights that one is almost insensibly led to desire a view of the great group itself from one of those many standpoints.

From one point or another in the southern group such a view can be had, and from not a few of them we have in the past carried away impressions, not to be pictured in words, of the beauty and majestic proportions of the group of mountains which acknowledges Ben Muich Dhui as king.

During the last July holiday, in company with two other members of the Club, the privilege was given us of obtaining a view of the Cairngorms from a point which none of us had previously enjoyed.

The ascent of Glas Maol, however, from Aberdeen in the time at our disposal required a little consideration as to ways and means, and the method we followed may not be thought unworthy of recital for the guidance of others who may be similarly placed. Leaving the city by the mid-day train, we found ourselves at Blairgowrie about half-past four o'clock, and then decided that the best way of completing our journey to Spital of Glenshee—our objective for the night—was to hire to Persie Inn (nine miles), and walk the remaining eleven miles. This arrangement we found worked out admirably, giving ample time for a comfortable meal at Persie, and yet enabling us to accomplish our journey within reasonable hours.

It is not our province to describe the well-known coach route between Blairgowrie and Braemar, further than to remark that the scenery along the route from Blair to Spital is beautiful, and to one who passes through it for the first time far surpasses anything he could well have imagined. Instead of the wildness and stunted growth of

the Highland glen, with which we were more or less accustomed, and here expected to find, nature has rather been more than ordinarily lavish in her gifts, and the glen in the glowing tints of the setting sun that July evening was most lovely. Craighall, the supposed original of the home of the Barons of Bradwardine in "Waverley"; the Bridge of Cally, at the meeting of the Shee and the Ardlle Waters, which go to form the Ericht; and many another picturesque spot, will well repay the traveller who delights in scenery where nature expresses herself in her milder aspects.

Our approach to Spital was made known by the vigorous playing of the bagpipes, and so still was the evening that the distance at which we heard the music led us more than once to imagine the journey at an end, when another stretch of road undeceived us. On arriving at the hotel we found the visitors and domestics engaged in a dance in the open, which accounted sufficiently for the bagpipe playing.

The following morning we started for Glas Maol, and were surprised to find that the short glen, known as Glen Beg, along which our road lay, has nothing in common with Glenshee, but has all the characteristics of a genuine Highland glen. About two miles above the hotel we struck off the road to the right, crossed the burn, and took to the hill, our intention being to walk along the ridge, which is clearly defined from the road.

The walking along the hill-side is very pleasant going, and height is soon made, but as the day was extremely warm, we were glad to rest for a short time by a stream that dashes down the hill-side in its hurry to join Allt a' Ghlinne Bhig below. The prospect looking down Glen Beg is a pleasant one, and as the ascent is made the tops of Carn Mor (2846), the Cairnwell (3059), and other hills beyond, which had loomed up very conspicuously at first, begin gradually to take their proper place among surrounding heights. An hour and a half's fair walking from the point where we left the public road brought us to the top of the ridge, where the view became much more extensive and

varied. The ridge on which we found ourselves was not unlike that on the summit of Ben Vorlich, being sharp, narrow, and cumbered with large quantities of loose stones. At the point near where we struck it the ridge assumes a distinct point or summit, and is known as Carn Aighe (2824). Passing along the ridge, which in some places is quite narrow, the crags falling away sharply to right and left, the walking proved rather slow as we made for the next sharp, conical top known as Creag Leacach (3238). From this point the real top of the Glas Maol became visible for the first time. The west view of this crag is very fine, dropping down as it does with almost perpendicular abruptness, the surface being thickly coated with scree. From Creag Leacach the route lay over boulders of stone, and the going was rather slow and tiresome, but fortunately there is not much of it. Descending to a saddle some 120 feet below the last point, we passed a pretty large sheet of snow, which we were rather surprised to find on the *southern* slope of the hill in the middle of July. As we approached it a large herd of deer that had been browsing on the slope below crossed over the snow, and the bright russet of their coats stood out in sharp contrast against the white background. From the saddle to the top of Glas Maol is something over a mile, and during this distance an additional height of 380 feet is made. The walking over the latter part of the hill is easy, as the ground is covered with short heather. The actual top of Glas Maol is in shape a large, rounded mass, which takes away much of its appearance as a height, and it does not contrast so favourably in this respect as an actual summit as against Creag Leacach, although 300 feet higher.

The height of Glas Maol is 3502 feet, and the actual summit is marked by a cairn. The ridge along which we walked from Carn Aighe forms the boundary line between Forfarshire and Perthshire, and a small cairn, a little to the north-west of the actual summit of Glas Maol, marks the boundary of the three parishes of Kirkmichael, Glen Isla, and Crathie-Braemar, as well as of the counties of Perth, Forfar, and Aberdeen.

The position of Glas Maol at the junction of three

counties has been rather unfortunate in respect that references to it are scanty, from the fact, we suppose, that the hill belongs to neither county exclusively.

In Gordon's map of the Midland Provinces of Scotland, published by Blaeu at Amsterdam in 1664, no mention is made of Glas Maol, although the ridge of which it forms part is well defined. The name Carnwallak is given probably for the Cairnwell, and Glen Brachy is evidently Glen Brighty, while Spital and Forter are correctly shewn.

The name of the hill in latter times has not had a uniform spelling. In Knox's map of the Basin of the Tay, &c., published in 1831, the name is given as Glash Mell; the minister of Glenisla, writing for the Statistical Account of 1843, calls it the Glassmile; while the minister of Kirkbean—"Autumnal Rambles"—writing in 1851, when speaking of a probable journey across to Loch Muick, calls it "a very high mountain, one extremity of which is called (as near as I could catch the abominable jargon) Glassmeal and the other Craig-Leggich". The spelling adopted in the Ordnance Survey is Glas Maol, and the name rendered as the grey, lumpy hill, or more probably we think, the grey, bare or bald, hill, which is a truer description of Glas Maol. An older form of the word may have been Glas Mal, the grey king, having just sufficient "from the shoulder upwards" to enable it to claim the kingship of the group which more immediately surrounds it.

We were exceptionally fortunate in obtaining a splendid view of the Cairngorms, which were laid out before us like a huge panorama. From west to east the following were some of the principal points which were clearly made out:—Beinn Bhrotain; the Angel's Peak, Cairn Toul; the opening of the Allt a' Gharbh-choire (Garchory); Braeriach, with the point of the Devil's Point just appearing; Carn a' Mhaim; Ben Muich Dhui, with Cairngorm appearing over its eastern shoulder; crags of Coire an Sput Dheirg, with Derry Cairngorm range in front; Beinn Mheadhoin, and the crags of Coire Etchachan; Beinn a' Chaorruinn, two peaks; Beinn a' Bhuird, two tops, with the valley of the Quoich opening out in front; the "sneck" between

Beinn a' Bhuid and Ben Avon; the valley of the Gairn; Culardoch, and beyond the hills on the east side of the Gairn. Many a height besides those mentioned were seen, but sufficient has been given to shew what an extended view of the Cairngorms can be got from Glas Maol under suitable conditions. Although the view northward was very extended, we did not get much in other directions. To the south-west Beinn a' Ghlo was distinct, Beinn Dearg looked imposing, and Schichallion was about the furthest we could make out in that direction for the heat haze. The western view is entirely shut out by the Cairnwell and Carn Bhinnein.* In the immediate foreground looking north was Cairn na Glasha (3484), and to our right Tolmount, Broad Cairn, and Tom Buidhe close in the view. Southwards we look down into two beautiful little glens, at the head of Glen Isla, Canlochan running south-east and Canness south-west, and beyond them, southwards, the course of the Isla can be traced for a considerable distance. Had time permitted we should liked to have returned by Canlochan Glen, of whose beauties we had heard much, but this would have entailed a considerable round. On leaving the top, therefore, we struck to the left, and caught up the Cairnwell road about a mile above Ruidh Dorch, about five miles from Spital. Parties intending to go by Braemar may either catch up the foot-path that comes up Canlochan Glen, and runs between Glas Maol and Cairn na Glasha,† or keep the ridge to the left by Meall Odhar, which leads on to the Cairnwell road about a mile above the Devil's Elbow.

In the evening we paid a visit to the tomb of Diarmid, one of the Fingalian heroes, which lies on the other side of the water, almost opposite the hotel. Here we found that the stone pillar which at one time marked the tomb had, as we were informed, been recently thrown into the loch close at hand by the tenant of the neighbouring croft. It is a pity that in such a remote district as Glenshee objects

* Cf. *C.C.J.*, Vol. I., p. 169, for heights seen from Glas Maol, and made use of in the large Trig. Survey.

† Near this large quantities of Least Willow are to be found, which might be easily missed, from the diminutive size of the plant.

of antiquarian interest such as this crom-leaca should be so wantonly destroyed. In a bygone day it was said that in this parish a superstitious regard was paid to such monoliths by the people, but this state of things has evidently passed away.

The ground here is classic territory, for Glenshee is one of the two places which dispute for the honour of being the resting-place of the famous chieftain. The story is that Fingal having fallen in love with Grainne, Diarmid's wife, proposed a boar hunt on Beinn Gulabin, at the head of Glenshee, where the hero killed the boar, in place of being himself killed, as Fingal had hoped. Baffled in this, Fingal asked Diarmid twice to measure the dead boar with his naked feet, so that he might be poisoned with the bristles. In this the vindictive Fingal succeeded, and Diarmid was buried here by his comrades alongside of his beautiful wife, who was unable to exist without her hero. For the confirmation of the unbelieving have we not still the names which a simple people gave to the principal scenes of the story, Tobar nan Fionn, the fountain of the Fingalians; the boar's bed on Beinn Gulabin; Loch an Tuire, the boar's loch, whose dark waters engulfed the dead boar as well as Fingal's magic cup; and lastly—most convincing proof of all—Diarmid's grave itself? Close beside this interesting grave is a small tumulus, marked by four stones, one of many such monuments for which the parish of Kirkmichael is noted.

On the following day the forenoon was spent in ascending Maol Uain (2600), opposite the Hotel, where on a clear day a very good view can be obtained. Unfortunately the day was hazy, and beyond the immediate surroundings no view was obtained, that towards Pitlochry being the best. The foot-path from Spital to the latter place passes over a shoulder of Maol Uain.

In the afternoon we began our journey homewards, returning by Glen Isla to Alyth. This route strikes off the Glenshee road about four miles below Spital, crosses the Shee, and winds round the side of Mount Blair—a prominent hill between the glens of the Shee and the Isla.

By following this route we passed the ruined castle of Forter, the burning of which by the Campbells in 1640 is commemorated in the ballad of the "Burning of the Bonnie House of Airlie". The difference between Glen Isla and Glenshee in picturesqueness is very marked, and the contrast is certainly not in favour of the former, although Glen Isla has not a few things of its own worthy of a visit.

Our journey from Spital to Aberdeen was accomplished in a little over six hours, which, considering all things, was not a bad record in its way.