

TWO DAYS IN GLEN SPEAN.

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ON arriving in Scotland in May, 1896, I followed my usual custom of going to Arran for a week or so to begin with. I strongly recommend such a procedure, as the hills are not very high, and afford splendid ground for improving the condition of the would-be climber. After performing this rite of purification, I joined two friends at Roy Bridge, in Glen Spean. Our object in view was traversing a long ridge, consisting of nine recognised tops, over 3000 feet in altitude.

The evening of our arrival was fine and sunny, every hill was clear, and I was surprised at the amount of snow that still remained on the hills. The hill Stob Coire nan Ceann, that was to be attacked first, is easily seen from Roy Bridge, and appears as a graceful cone, capped with white quartz, rising to a height of 3720 feet. The ridge culminates in Stob Choire Claurigh, which is about a mile south-west of Stob Coire nan Ceann, and is separated from it by a drop of about four to five hundred feet. Next day at 9 a.m. we set out; following the road to Tulloch, we crossed the Spean by a bridge about a mile from the hotel. After returning with the Spean for half a mile towards Roy Bridge we struck up the hill-side. The day was somewhat close and cloudy, and in consequence the going was slow and the way toilsome. Still we reached the old road that runs from Spean Bridge to Loch Treig-head at last, and reached the foot of Coire nan Ceann. The corrie is flanked by Stob Coire nan Ceann—a somewhat knobbly quartz ridge on the left hand. At its centre is a shoulder of Stob Choire Claurigh, from which a long, flat ridge stretches away northward, Stob Coire Gaibhre. In the corrie is a lonely lochan of black water, with white quartz scree coming nearly to its margin. The ascent from the lochan is largely over quartz

scree. This was my first introduction to such scree, and I can safely affirm that it is abominable stuff to cross, much more so to ascend. There are blocks of all sizes—all unstable, smooth, slippery, and so hard that boot nails do not bite. When the scree is passed one reaches a series of baby quartz buttresses, with intervening grooves, which offer great variety for the ascent of the last hundred feet or so. The fracture of the quartz is here placed the right way for hand- and foot-holds. We gained the ridge at the top of the shoulder of Stob Choire Claurigh, about 3600 feet. The ridge connecting it with Stob Coire nan Ceann is narrow, and has a three-walled shelter at its lowest part. After visiting this peak we indulged in a second edition of lunch on a patch of snow situated in a most desolate hollow between Stob Choire Claurigh and its shoulder. Stob Choire Claurigh rises to the height of 3858 feet, and is graced with a large saucer-shaped cairn. From here onwards the ridge runs generally south-west, and is broad, consisting of grass and outcrops of quartz. There are numerous tops on the ridge, some of which have cairns, some have not. One cannot follow the tops as given in the 6-in. map, and soon gets quite out of reckoning till Stob Choire an Laoigh (cairn) is reached. The ridge at this place takes a sharp turn W.N.W. to Stob Coire an Easain (cairn). The going is quite easy, the drops being inconsiderable, and a driving mist permitted some splendid views. Binnein Mor, in the Mamore Forest, looked specially graceful, but best of all was Bidean nam Bian, in Glencoe, with its many streaks of snow. From the top of Stob Coire an Easain we had a splendid view of Aonach Beag and Mor, and, deciding to give up Sgor a' Choinnich Mor and Beag, turned northward over Beinn na Socaich. Most climbers like to have an easy way down of a hill no matter how they may seek ridges, buttresses, and gulleys for ascent. The ridge of Beinn na Socaich fulfils every requirement of easy descent. In fact, it is a most gentlemanly ridge, never being abrupt and rudely hurrying your pace, but always lets you down firmly and gently. Joining the Coire at its fork, we again refreshed, and started on our toilsome trudge over bumpy

and boggy moorland, colloquially and collectively termed "puddings". The Spean was struck at the ford just behind the hotel, and, as the boat was securely padlocked, we completed the day by wading across.

The ridge traversed runs for a little over two miles as the crow flies in a south-westerly direction. We never once dropped below 3250 feet. The tops we went over are given as follows in the 6-in. map:—Stob Coire nan Ceann (3720), Stob Choire Claurigh (3858), Stob a' Choire Leith (3629), Stob Coire Cath na Sgine (3529), Caisteal (3609), Stob Choire an Laoigh (3659), Stob Coire an Easain (3545), and Beinn na Socaich (3000—contour). The two tops we omitted are Sgor a' Choinnich Mor and Beag, 3603 and 3175 feet respectively. Mr. Munro, in the *S.M.C.J.*, divides the range into three separate mountains, viz.:—Stob Choire Claurigh, Stob Choire an Laoigh, and Sgor a' Choinnich Mor.

The next day we moved to Spean Bridge, and spent the evening admiring Ben Nevis and the Aonachs. Half-past nine on the following morning found us in a heavy rain and wind, battling with "puddings" that lie between the base of the Aonachs and the road. The burn descending from the corrie, An cul Coire, between Aonach Mor and its east ridge, was in splendid form, descending by a series of magnificent falls. Following the right bank until the falls ceased, we struck up the easy slopes that rise to Aonach an Nid. Mr. Munro rightly does not regard this as a separate top, for there is no defined spot on which a cairn could be placed that could be said to mark the top. The ridge is mossy in parts, and strewn with stones. As it is the bounden duty of every mountaineer to pause and worship, even if only for a few minutes, at the shrine of every respectable top, we were immensely distressed at having unconsciously walked over one with the utmost unconcern. Our self-respect did not return until we found out later that the insulted "peak" was no top, but only a name without habitation. The ridge rises gently to the summit of Aonach Mor. The actual summit is found with some difficulty on a many-acred boulder-strewn plateau. It is recognised solely by the fact that the Ordnance Survey people have

built a cairn there, and one must heartily congratulate them on having ascertained the point, and still more for their scrupulously accurate estimation of its height—3999 feet. What a difference that other foot would make to its respectability! It might even figure in geography books, and bore unfortunate children; or, at anyrate, it would be in a position to complain if omitted.

The mist which had joined us in our ascent now began to become ragged, and through a window thus kindly made we perceived the east ridge of Aonach Mor, and saw that there was no sign-post or other indication as to where we must leave the plateau in order to get on to this ridge, so we built a cairn on a rock. This is due east of the cairn of Aonach Mor. We now trotted down 400 feet to the col adjoining Aonach Beag, and, after a somewhat steeper pull up, arrived at a distinctly decrepit cairn that marked its summit, 4060 feet. Crawling under a snow-wreath, we proceeded to gain further supplies of chemical potential energy. Every hill had now had the courtesy to doff its cap of mist to us except Ben Nevis. We thought something was wrong in this, and were not surprised when we were soon driven off the top by a fierce hailstorm, which represented Ben Nevis' welcome to us. Aonach Beag is exactly 61 feet higher than Aonach Mor, but the anomaly of the names is explained by the fact that the former is infinitely less in bulk.

The top of Aonach Mor was soon regained—this time in a very thick mist—but we easily found the ridge by means of our cairn (due east of Aonach Mor cairn). After about 700-800 feet of descent we rose again to a distinct rocky top, nameless in all maps, and called by Mr. Munro "Top of An cul Coire" (3580). No view of the great north-east ridge of Aonach Beag, which was one of the objects of the day, was gained, owing to rain and mist. From here a rocky, but quite easy, ridge trends round in a northerly direction, and has two peaks on it, one a fairly definite top, Stob Coire an Fhir Dhuibh, 3250 (contour), and, after a gentle, grassy descent, ends in a scarcely recognisable top, Tom na Sroine, 3000 (contour). The charac-

ter of the ridge soon changes after leaving the last top, and the most difficult part that the day's climb has offered is reached. The slope becomes steep, covered with long, wet grass, and with scattered trees, rotten and otherwise seamed with baby burns, and with many boggy patches scattered at haphazard on it. The first event, bar collisions with trees, of importance was a slight accident to the writer, which ended in the complete fracture of a stout ash staff. The slope had now to be faced stickless; no longer existed a "tripod of safety" that the Badminton talks about in dealing with the use and abuse of the stick. The descent was accomplished by means of a series of graceful, though involuntary, evolutions and revolutions, which caused great amusement. I should like to offer some advice to those who may adopt this mode of progression. This advice is that it should only be used in places devoid of trees, and, still more important, bogs. The former are distinctly painful to the body, and the latter to one's personal pride. When safety was at length reached a considerable time was spent in trying to find a place to ford the Allt an Loin, followed by the usual "pudding" going as far as the road.

The view from Aonach Beag is very fine. All the tops east of us, which we had traversed two days before, shewed up white with their quartz. All the Mamore peaks were capped with white quartz also, except Mullach nan Coirean, the most western, and its corrie (Coire Dearg) which are red. The Aonachs are distinctly brown, whilst Carn Mor Dearg and Carn Dearg Mheadonach were of warm, brick-red colour, with Ben Nevis in the background, capped with mist, shewing his savage black north cliffs. Between these two long lines of hills lay the beautiful, green Glen Nevis. All this grand scenery was enhanced by means of a driving mist, without which hardly any mountain scenery is seen at its best. The day was distinctly various in other particulars besides the mist, for we got wet and dry many times, besides having some hail. The methods of progression have also been referred to.

Spean Bridge Hotel was at last reached—I believe about 10 p.m., but am not certain. At anyrate, I decline to state

that we dined, for it seems so half-hearted ; but I must say most emphatically that we fed and dutifully toasted the hills we had pilgrimaged to. The following day brought about the dissolution of the party, one returning to London, another to Kingussie, and the writer pursued his lonely way to Fort-William.

The first day described could have been as easily and more comfortably done from Spean Bridge by crossing the moor behind the station until the road over the pass between Stob Coire nan Ceann and Sgor na h-Innse to Loch Treig-head is struck. This is easily seen on the map. The two days represent only ridge-walking and peak-bagging ; the ridges in this part lend themselves to this form of enjoyment. Thus in two days' walking we visited no fewer than thirteen recognised and separate tops, one—Aonach Mor—being visited twice.