

BEINN DEARG.

BY ALEX. INKSON M'CONNOCHIE.

"DEARG" is an adjective frequently applied to hills; *the* Beinn Dearg is a Ross-shire mountain, twin, in height, to Schichallion (3547).

Seen from the Fannichs (*C.C.J.*, Vol. II., p. 22), Beinn Dearg is most attractive, possibly all the more so that its position evidently places it beyond general reach. Yet it can be negotiated in a week-end excursion from the headquarters of the Club, and the member who makes it his first Ross-shire ascent will be rewarded beyond expectation, and will have humbled ideas of the prospect from the summits of his favourite Cairngorms. Beinn Dearg has a commanding position on the watershed of Scotland; Loch Broom acts as receiver for the Minch of its western slope streams, while the Cromarty Firth performs that office on the other side for the Moray Firth.

The long Garve and Ullapool road affords comparatively easy access to Beinn Dearg, albeit there is only one inn between the extreme points. The mail coach, necessarily heavily subsidised, is not without advantage to the mountaineer who has fixed on Aultguish Inn, ten miles from Garve, as his base of operations. Between the Inn and the point (six miles) where it is necessary to leave the turnpike, milestones are more frequent than houses, and the telegraph poles have to be protected from the attacks of the deer during the rutting season. It is an ideal district, therefore, it will be perceived, for a townsman's holiday. The ten miles from Garve Station may be considerably curtailed by the pedestrian who uses the "short cut", part of the old main thoroughfare, which, passing over a long hilly moor, has the additional advantages of utter solitude and inacquaintance with Macadam or his works. Aultguish Inn is situated on the right bank of

Glascarnoch River, known lower down as Black Water, a tributary of the Conon, which enters Cromarty Firth near Dingwall. The route between Garve and Aultgish Inn, following the windings of the river, has been described as "pretty", the next nine miles being designated "dreary", while the remainder to the coast passes "through some of the finest and most remarkable scenery in the Western Highlands". We do not quite agree to the middle portion being called "dreary" without qualification. True, it is almost houseless and treeless, and the hills are low and bare; but the desolation is attractive, and the view of the Challeachs, even from the Inn door, sufficiently inspiring for a very minor poet! Indeed, the prospect up the glen, from a hillman's point of view, is superb—he seems placed at the gate of a mountaineering paradise. As we approached the Inn, even dull, shapeless Ben Wyvis was for a time resplendent in gold and bronze. For the setting sun turned the western sky into gold and silver, and lighted up the slope of Ben Wyvis; as it sank, the line of light on the Ben crept higher and higher, till only the crest reflected the departing glory. At last it vanished altogether, and Ben Wyvis was colourless—till another day.

We made a leisurely start for Beinn Dearg, for it was not till 10.15 that we set out from the Inn. It would have been fruitless, however, to start earlier, for mist coquetted with the hilltops and danced on the snow-patches till noon. We left the turnpike at Torrandubh Bridge, afraid (needlessly as it happened) to go further westward and utilise a convenient bridle-path leading towards Loch a' Gharbh Raoin, a featureless tarn which could be easily enlarged. There are several larachs at the head of the loch, which only add to the solitariness of the scene. From this sheet of water we made for another—Loch nan Eilean—by its burn Allt Loch nan Eilean, a succession of little pools and miniature cascades, apparently much frequented by hinds and fawns. Loch nan Eilean is quite unlike its Rothiemurchus namesake; its banks are almost sterile, being bouldery and bare, and frowned on by the crags of Beinn Dearg. The islands are little bits of low rock. Resuming

the climb, we ascend by the trickling streamlet which feeds this tarn, and, the top of the ridge reached (nearly 3000 feet), a mountain view bursts on us—hills beyond hills, shapely peaks and jagged rocky contours. The summit of the mountain now faces us, with its fine southern corrie, Coire Beinn Dearg, still splashed with snow, and having tiny tarns at its base. We make a little detour, however, the sooner and the better to see *the* sight of the neighbourhood, Coire Granda, with its dark blue loch below—Loch a' Choire Ghranda. We look down and across a fearsome gorge, cleaving Cona' Mheall (3200) from Beinn Dearg—deep, narrow, and precipitously rocky; truly a magnificent and terrible scene. Linger long, we gaze on the unrippled loch, entranced with the majesty of the corrie. We could not avoid connecting the English adjective “grand” with the name, but later we learned that it meant “nasty”.

The last few hundred feet of the ascent are somewhat steep—we thought of the ascent of Stuc a' Chroin from Ben Vorlich, though the hands are less in request on Beinn Dearg. As for the view from the cairn, we are utterly unable even to attempt a catalogue; we missed the Vice-President with his Dolland, his Theodolite, and his Maps! Suffice it to say, that we were in heaven for an hour, and mentally feasted on hilltops as we had seldom banqueted before. Southward and eastward there was a triple line of peaks; westward the Atlantic cut deeply into the coast by Loch Broom and Little Loch Broom, cunningly commingling land and water. The Challeachs and the Fannichs we have already referred to; we would only particularise certain hills to the northward of Ullapool—Ben More of Coigach, Cul Mor, Suilven, Canisp, and Ben More of Assynt.

The summit of Beinn Dearg yields an abundant crop of stones. All was lifeless around us, except for a mother ptarmigan with two chicks, which we unwittingly disturbed near the cairn; but we could see several herds of deer in the distance. There are, by the way, three cairns—the centre one is *the* cairn, and is an excellent specimen of its class, still retaining part of the staff; the eastern suits

the Glascarnoch view; the western commands Loch Broom. We spent an hour at these cairns, and could have enjoyed another, but the weather had been extremely sultry, and frequent rests had been necessary. The summit was left at 4.15, and we picked our way down a great scree slope on Creag Dhubh Mhucarnaich and by Allt Beinn Dearg, a burn to the north-westward of, and parallel with, Allt Loch nan Eilean. The former streamlet runs over great shelving rocks, which form a rather precipitous "channel". And so we came to Allt Mhucarnaich, as the upper part of Allt a' Gharbh Raoin is known; but there was some rather "mixed walking", as "Bobs" would call it, before we could take advantage of the bridle path that we had avoided in the morning. At 6.40 we struck the turnpike near Loch Droma—to be precise, at telegraph pole No. 280, which is a few yards west of a communicative milestone: "Dingwall, 29; Garve, 16; Ullapool, 16". Loch Droma is a long, narrow sheet of water in Dirrie More, with black mossy banks, recently planted with firs. We took to the road in excellent form, and had even "a trot for the avenue", for we reached our Inn at 8.20. We met no one the whole day.