

THE RIDGES OF GLEN NEVIS.

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As is well known to members of this Club, there are eight separate mountains in Scotland over 4000 feet high. Five of these are situated in the region which is the special care of the Cairngorm Club, and the other three are in Lochaber. Ben Nevis has been dealt with by Mr. Brown (Vol. II., p. 1) with respect to its rocky features, and Mr. Begg (Vol. II., p. 253) has given an interesting account of the life in the Observatory at the summit. Of Aonach Beag I have given a short account (Vol. II., p. 226). The last of the monarchs of the Scottish mountains, and also the least, is Carn Mor Dearg (4012), and of this no description has been given in the Journal. It is my intention to bring this hill into notice, and give an account of some days that I have spent on the north and south ridges of Glen Nevis. After the excellent paper of Mr. Brown's above referred to, and the many articles in the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, it would be foolhardiness on my part to attempt any account of the climbing facilities or difficulties. The fact that no notice is taken of these in this paper is therefore explained.

I made my first acquaintance with Ben Nevis on 19th June, 1896. The clouds were low down on the hills of Glen Nevis, and there was more than a suspicion of rain as I walked up the north bank of the Nevis. The track up the mountain begins at the farm of Achintee, where water-logging refreshments are bought by tourists to aid (?) them in the ascent. The path skirts up the southern flank of Meall an t-Suidhe till it reaches a gorge down which flows Allt Dearg. Round this gorge it makes a great horse-shoe, and then winds up the south-eastern slopes of Ben Nevis until the ridge near the summit is reached. The northern end of the horse-shoe, just by Lochan Meall an t-Suidhe, is the place where the track is left in order to traverse round

the foot of Carn Dearg and get into the magnificent northern corrie. I found the top of Ben Nevis enjoying its summer in thick mist, sleet, and snow, with half a gale of wind. The ridge from here to Carn Mor Dearg under these circumstances is very difficult to find, especially by a newcomer. In the attempt to do this I fell into the natural mistake of getting to the top of the North-east Buttress and climbing about there for an hour and a half. My temperature was reduced below comfort point, and so I returned to the summit and its hotel, and heated myself by means of hot bovril. The return was made by the track as far as Lochan Meall an t-Suidhe, and the Glen Spean road joined at the birthplace of Long John whisky, whence there was a walk of about two miles to Fort William. On June the 24th I thought I would find the missing ridge joining Ben Nevis and Carn Mor Dearg by reversing my route and ascending the latter hill first. This is a method extremely commonly practised in prospecting, but it is not often that in an ordinary hill walk one is reduced to that level. Passing again by the font where the dew of Nevis is christened, I made up towards Allt a' Mhuilinn, subsequently crossing it and taking to the easy, grassy slopes of Carn Beag Dearg. The black precipices on the opposite side of the corrie were over modest, and would only allow me to see their wet, black feet, though here and there a glimmer of white could be seen higher up. This was the only view that I had of these precipices during my stay.

On reaching the cairn of Carn Beag Dearg (3264) I was enclosed in the mist, from which I did not emerge until I was half-way down Ben Nevis to Fort William again. There is a delightful feeling in walking along the ridges alone when surrounded by the flying intangible greyness of the mist. The solitude of the mountains is then fully appreciated, and everything in sight wears a ghostly appearance. The wind makes music in the rocks and cairns, sometimes piping joyously, but more often singing a sad dirge, to which the weird, looming forms of the rocks make a fitting audience. It was with feelings such as these that I made my way along to Carn Dearg Meadhonach (3875). Quite close to

the cairn a pinnacled ridge runs down into the corrie between this peak and Aonach Mor. Up to this point, with the exception of one very small dip, the ridge has risen nearly the whole way. But between here and Carn Mor Dearg there is a slight depression. The summit of Carn Mor Dearg is a fairly narrow ridge, a few yards long, from the southern end of which a ridge descends somewhat steeply to the saddle connecting it with the Aonachs. Beyond Carn Mor Dearg the ridge narrows considerably, and sweeps round to the south until it abuts on Ben Nevis. The ridge has been described as "delightfully narrow", but offers no real difficulty. Care must, however, be taken to avoid loose stones, for the slopes are steep on either hand, and especially to the north. The best way is to keep to the sky-line, where there are several little scrambles over rocky towers. The lowest part of the ridge is about 3400 feet, and there are one or two small summits on it. Where it abuts on Ben Nevis one is landed on a slope of rock and scree, and thence, passing some cairns, the summit is reached. The route is entirely south of the North-east Buttress, and is separated from it by a gully. The reason why this ridge is difficult to find in the mist is because one has to leave the edge of the precipices of Ben Nevis and go down a stony slope just south of the North-east Buttress, past some cairns. The view from the summit extended for a circle of some 20-50 yards. Still, one was amply repaid by seeing the mist whirling in spirals down the dark, mysterious-looking gullies and hearing the gusts roar up from their depths. The descent was made by indulging in the "bumpy delights of the path".

My next visit to this district was on 27th December, 1897. On the 28th I set out and followed the track to the upper part of the horse-shoe, where the half-way hut is placed. I now took to the snow slopes and made straight for the ridge. The snow was very soft, and a strong wind that it was impossible to face swept across the southern slopes of Ben Nevis. After some time I got tired of this, and, turning my shoulder to the wind, made for the Carn

Dearg ridge. This ridge must not be confused with the one I have described above, which lies on the other side (east) of the mountain, whilst the ridge I made for follows the line of the precipices of Ben Nevis round to Carn Dearg. As there was a large cornice I could not get near enough to the edge to examine the rocky walls from above, so was merely blown by the wind to the cairn of Carn Dearg (3961). Feeling hungry and that I deserved some sustenance, I proceeded to try and undo my rucksack. But it was not to be, for the buckles had got wet through with the rain below, and now were sheeted with ice. Besides, my fingers, though gloved, were stiff, and had hardly any sensation in them. So, cold and disconsolate, I descended as fast as possible to below the snow-line, where, with some coaxing, I was at last able to get at my larder. During the remainder of the descent it was interesting to note the snow squalls flying along the southern ridge of Glen Nevis. Next day, as it rained hard, I crossed over a low pass from the Loch Leven road to Glen Nevis. On 30th December I again ascended Ben Nevis, this time by one of the northern gullies. On New-Year's Day, after driving up Glen Nevis to Achriavach, the ascent of the southern Carn Dearg was accomplished. It was a most beautiful day, and Glen Nevis was filled with white, woolly mist, which later in the day rose and disappeared. The summit of Carn Dearg (3348) has a cairn; it is separated from the southern slopes of Ben Nevis by a drop of 200 feet or so. The ascent of Ben Nevis from here was easy, and the descent was made by glissading from the near end of Carn Mor Dearg *arête* into the great northern corrie of Ben Nevis, traversing under the foot of Carn Dearg, and reaching the track just below the half-way house.

On January 3rd an early start caused us to set out in the morning starlight, and again we followed the ridge round over Carn Mor Dearg to Ben Nevis. The sunrise as we were breasting the slopes was very beautiful, all the hills to the north being clear and rosy. Later the warm glow touched the snow patches on the black precipices of Ben Nevis, making them look far less savage than

they do with completely white drapery. The traverse of the Carn Mor Dearg *arête* in the snow was really easier than in summer. It took about one-and-a-half hours from summit to summit, but photography was responsible for some of it. In one place the snow had frozen into a true *arête*, which necessitated step-cutting. The gorgeous colours of the sunset, from green to crimson, formed a fitting ending to the day that had begun with so fine a dawn. This completes the brief account of my five ascents of Ben Nevis.

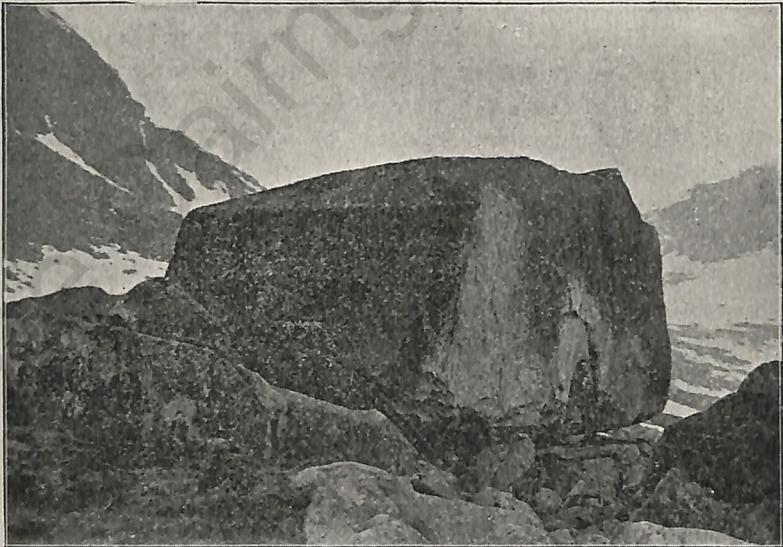
As the reader who may be unfamiliar with this group of mountains will undoubtedly be vexed in mind as to the numerous "Carn Deargs", I give the following topographical note. The mountain mass is divisible into two parts—the Ben Nevis group on the west, and the Carn Mor Dearg group on the east. These two groups are connected by the long, narrow Carn Mor Dearg *arête*. The Carn Mor Dearg ridge runs about north-north-west and south-south-east, and, beginning with the most northerly, its summits are Carn Beag Dearg (3264), Carn Dearg Meadhonach (3875), and Carn Mor Dearg (4012). The western group consists of Ben Nevis (4406), from which a ridge runs westward and, finally curving to the north, ends in Carn Dearg (3961), which is about west-north-west of the Ben Nevis cairn. South-west from Ben Nevis is another Carn Dearg (3348), from which a northern ridge abuts on the southern aspect of Ben Nevis. Thus there are five Carn Deargs neighbouring on Ben Nevis.

The south ridge of Glen Nevis forms the Mamore Forest. These hills are of different aspect from the northern ridge in that, with the exception of Mullach nan Coirean and Coire Dearg, they consist of white quartz, which contrasts well with the green of Glen Nevis, the black of Ben Nevis, and the red of Carn Mor Dearg and Mullach nan Coirean, thus giving Glen Nevis the most exquisite colouring. The southern hills are also lower. On 21st June, 1896, I sauntered up Glen Nevis, keeping to the carriage-road. Down in the glen it was intolerably stuffy and enervating; so my desires for the fresh air of the ridges

increased, but my horror of the necessary toil did so also. As I was longing for a long day on the hilltops of Mamore, I adopted a plan which I have not infrequently been reduced to. I firmly assured myself that I really should accomplish only one top that day, and, as it was yet early, I need not hurry. The best place to lounge about on was at a low pass on the hills close at hand. By this deception I arrived at the pass, which was only 750 feet high. After a good rest I allowed my curiosity to urge me to the next top, just over a thousand feet. From here I was very disgusted to find another drop to 750 feet. At the second col I said to myself that now I really was ascending my day's mountain, and toiled slowly on, with frequent halts at springs and otherwise. In this way I passed Sgor Chalum (1823), and arrived at a beautiful spring. It was pleasant in the cooler air to calculate the foot pounds of work done, think of the hours it took to do it, bask in the sun, and assure yourself that sometime you will reach the top. In this way I beguiled myself in five hours to the top of Mullach nan Coirean (3077). In fairness to myself, I must say that it is about eight miles to the top, and that about five of these consisted in pounding up and over the vagaries of a ridge beginning at 750 feet. From the summit a beautiful view and cool breeze awoke me from my lethargy, and, in a few minutes, I started down the grassy ridge to the next top, that of Coire Dearg (3004). The ridge here is narrower and stony, and great screes descend, especially to the south. The saddle between these two tops was about 2875 feet. Walking along the ridge to the next saddle (2850) I ascended the grassy northern shoulder of Stob Ban, and on to the summit (3274). The summit is a narrow quartz ridge, with a splendid drop to the north-east, which face is seamed with steep gullies. The top of Stob Ban is the finest peak in Mamore, and is well seen from the entrance of Glen Nevis; the summit ridges of Gearanach and Binnan Mor are very fine and narrow, I believe, though I cannot speak from experience. The time from Mullach nan Coirean was $1\frac{1}{4}$ hours, and was very fair. But the indiscretions of the morning had given rise to great thirst.

At the col between this and the next hill I saw two tiny lochans, so I ran hard to gain them, arriving extremely hot only to find about four tadpoles to every cubic inch of water. The descent was 800 feet, the height of the col being about 2550 feet. A far sadder, and, I hope, wiser, man, I ascended the easy slopes of Sgor an Iubhair (3250 contour). Partially retracing my steps, I descended to the foot of the ridge which runs out northwards from here. The height of the col is about 3000 feet, and the character of the ridge changes from a flat quartz and grass surface to a sharp, narrow, grassy ridge. The sky-line is beset with little grassy towers and pinnacles. The drop to the east is steep, and that to the west a little less so. The summit of this ridge is about 3300 feet, and is not marked with a cairn. Between the summit and Sgor a' Mhaim (3601), the north end of the ridge, is another col, in the ridge leading to which is a small break. The passage of this break was made quite easy by means of a jammed but wobbly stone. I have heard tales of a more difficult passage of this break. It is the only place where it is necessary to use one's hands, and, if so desired, is easily avoided. The height of the col is about 3000 feet. The ascent of Sgor a' Mhaim is made from the col by a grassy slope. I arrived at the top at 5.45, that is to say, three-and-a-quarter hours from the top of Mullach nan Coirean. The view was superb. There was not a cloud in sight, and every hill stood up sharp and well defined. Close at hand were the quartz ridges of Mamore and the Stob Coire Claurigh group, then the Aonachs, Carn Deargs, and Ben Nevis. To the south Bidean nan Bian looked magnificent with the sun shining on the snow in its gullies. Ben Cruachan, Beinn Laoigh, the Black Mount Hills, showed up, then the twin peaks of Ben More and Am Binnein, with the Braes of Balquhidder, and, further round, Ben Lawers, Carn Mairg, and Schichallion's graceful cone. The Cairngorms showed as long, low-lying ridges, and, nearer to hand, was the Ben Alder group; whilst, to the north, was a sea of summits, and, to the north-west, the jagged outline of Skye and then Rum could be seen, and, still further south, Ben

More, in the island of Mull. I spent over an hour enjoying this view, some divinity ordaining that a spring should rise at the summit and help to wash down the remaining "much-worn stick of chocolate" "encrusted with all kinds of additional nutriment from the bottom of one's pocket". Then there was tobacco to stay hunger and add to comfort. Reluctantly the top was left, and the descent made by the north-west ridge until the road was struck just above Achriavach. The 6-7 mile walk down Glen Nevis was most enjoyable in the cool of the evening, and I arrived at Fort William at about 9.15. The eastern summits of the Mamore Forest are difficult of access. The easiest way to get at them would be by stopping at the shepherd's house at Steall, about nine miles above Fort William.



THE SHELTER STONE.