

THE  
Cairngorm Club Journal.

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Vol. III.

JULY, 1899.

No. 13.

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THE CLOVA HILLS.

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CLOVA is perhaps best known as one of the stages and a convenient halting-place on the pedestrian routes from Forfarshire to Ballater and Braemar. To Ballater an undisputed public track leads over the Capel Mounth and past Loch Muick ; another public path goes by Bachnagairn ; and it is now matter of ancient history how the public right-of-way from Clova to Braemar through the picturesque valley of the Doll and over the Tolmount was vindicated through the exertions of the Scottish Rights-of-Way Society.

But Clova is more than the mere *terminus ad quem* or *terminus a quo* of a right-of-way. It is a centre from which much interesting hill work may be done, either among the near-at-hand hills that cluster round Glen Doll, or the further-off summits of the Lochnagar and Glas Maol ranges.

Clova can, however, hardly be described as a "climbing centre" in the sense in which that term is understood by the modern mountaineer. There is to be found in the district none of these impossible rock faces and inaccessible pinnacles that attract the votaries of Skye and Glencoe. It is true that in the Winter Corrie of Driesh and on the rocky promontories of Craig Rennet and Craig Maud some



not contemptible scrambling may be had. But, on the whole, it is the "hill walker" who prefers the gentler pleasures of a Cairngorm ascent to the sterner excitement of a rock climb that will be most strongly attracted by Clova and its hills.

And, indeed, for the hill walker Clova has many attractions. The hills are all within easy range of a most comfortable hotel. Few of the nearer tops, it may be, are much over the magic limit of 3000 feet, which separates the mere hill from the dignified mountain. But nearly all of them, situated as they are just on the fringe of the highlands, command most extensive and diversified views ranging over the pastoral districts of Forfar and Perth, far as the eye can reach, on the one hand, and, on the other, over the undulating uplands of the neighbouring Benchinnans, and the more distant monarchs of the Cairngorm range. It is also to be noted that to anyone who has a knowledge of botany there is probably no spot in the Highlands of Scotland more fruitful of interest than the hills of Clova. They have been visited by the most distinguished botanists in Britain, and there are to be found on them numbers of the rarest plants, including some that have not been discovered in any other district in the kingdom.

One of the greatest charms of Clova for the *dolce far niente* mountaineer lies in the proximity of its hills to the base of operations. There are no long dusty roads: you step at once, as it were, from the hotel door on to the heather. And once a steep ascent is won, and a cairn is reached, you may walk along the ridge, or "riggin" as it is locally called, for miles, passing from cairn to cairn, with kaleidoscopic change of view, and visiting half-a-dozen tops by the way.

Take, for example, a circuit which may be made, embracing the mountain tops of Driesh (3105) and Mayar (3043). These tops are the highest peaks of a range that extends along the south-western sides of Glen Clova and the valley of the Doll. Right opposite the hotel is Cairn Inks (2483), the second hill of the range, and, although the inclination is fairly steep, it is a very easy hour-and-a-half's climb to the



cairn, even although one is not in the best of condition. Looking back, as one nears the top, Loch Brandy may be seen on the eastern side of the glen, embosomed in the surrounding hills, Boustie Ley, The Snub, and the Green Hill, and by the time the cairn is reached, the conical top of Broad Cairn, the huge mass of the White Mounth—white enough as the writer saw it on one of the last days of April—and the graceful outline of Cac Carn Beag and the Cuidhe Crom are full in view to the north-west.

When the top of Cairn Inks is reached the hard work of the day is done. An easy ridge walk, with gentle ascents to the succeeding cairns, is what lies before. Keeping the glen well in view, the Bassie (2691) is first reached, from which a detour may be made to the left to Hill of Strome (2778), a rather undefined top, without a cairn. From Hill of Strome, Driesh may be easily reached in about three-quarters of an hour, and here a complete change of view takes place. Near at hand is Mayar; but, beyond, the whole range of Creag Leacach, the Glas Maol, and Cairn na Glasha attract attention, and on the north-east the peaked outline of Mount Keen stands out prominently above the surrounding hills.

From Driesh along the ridge on to Mayar is about an hour's walk, the dip between the two hills being only between three and four hundred feet; and from Mayar it is easy to continue the walk over Craig Rennet and Craig Maud which jut precipitously into Glen Doll, on to the head of that Glen, till Jock's Road is reached. The return to Clova may then be made by the delightful path through Glen Doll which has been well described in an interesting article by the late Mr. W. J. Jamieson, entitled "By Glen Doll and the Capel", which will be found in one of the early numbers of the Journal. This walk, however, may be shortened by turning back at Mayar to the col between that hill and Driesh, whence an easy descent may be made down Corrie Kilbo by a stalkers' path on the left side of the corrie, which will lead the visitor to the right-of-way path near the House of the Doll. Or, the right side of the corrie may be taken, and, rounding the steeply conical



outpost of Driesh that lies between Corrie Kilbo and the Winter Corrie, one may rapidly descend to the low-lying haughs along the side of the Esk and ultimately reach the highway, which, starting at Braedownie, the farmhouse near the mouth of Glen Doll, runs through Glen Clova on to Kirriemuir.

This leads me to say a word as to the corries of Driesh. As one walks along the three miles of turnpike from the hotel to Braedownie—the only bit of road that need vex the visitor—the steep sides of Cairn Inks and the Bassie guard the way on the left for a couple of miles or so. The first break in the rampart is Corrie Farkel, which lies, as it were, between the Bassie and Driesh. From the road the corrie looks as if it might contain possibilities; but a nearer inspection proves disappointing. Its easy slopes and grassy banks form a great contrast to the dark precipitous gorges of the Winter Corrie, which forms the next break in the ridge. This Winter Corrie is indeed *the* feature of Glen Clova. Lying just at the head of the Glen, and flanked as it is on the right by a towering pinnacle of rock, it forms an impressive landmark. This pinnacle is just at the angle between Glen Clova and Glen Doll, and the next corrie in order is the Corrie Kilbo already mentioned. It is full in view as one walks up the first part of Glen Doll; and in this corrie, it may be mentioned, some of the rarer botanical specimens are said to be found. Then, still further up Glen Doll, we have Corrie Fee—which is, however, a corrie of Mayar—with the rocks of Craig Rennet on its right.

Another of the Clova walks to be noted is that to Tom Buidhe (3140), and the Tolmount (3143). Leaving the hotel, we take first the turnpike to Braedownie, passing in about half a mile the mouldering remains of the old castle of Clova, which local tradition reports to have been destroyed in the days of Oliver Cromwell. Not so many years ago considerable remains of the old “peel” existed; but the gradual process of decay, and the fall only a short time ago of a large portion of the walls have left very little now to attest its former extent. A more effective reminder of the past, speaking of the “clearances” of by-



gone days, comes from the ruined shielings that lie here and there along the road side. But the three miles and a "bittock" of road soon pass, and as we near Braedownie the bluff headland of Craig Mellon lies straight before us, with at its base the white House of the Doll nestling cosily in its shelter of pine.

At Braedownie, as we have said, the turnpike ends, and there is a choice of hill paths. To the left of Craig Mellon lies our route by Glen Doll; the path on the right leads by Bachnagairn to Broad Cairn, and about a mile up this path, near the point where the Capel burn joins the Esk, the track over the Capel Mounth to Ballater branches off. Taking the Glen Doll path then—and it is in going *up* this path from Clova that one is probably most impressed by the cliffs and gorges of Craig Rennet and Craig Maud—one soon reaches the zig-zags of Jock's Road (who Jock was, by the way, no tradition seems to indicate), and at the point where a finger post marks the way to Braemar, the route to Tom Buidhe turns to the left. From this hill one of the finest views in the district is to be got. The mass of Cairn na Glasha and the Glas Maol shuts out the distant view on the west; but on all other sides the view is superb. To the north-west the whole Cairngorm range from Beinn Bhrotain to Ben Muich Dhui and from Ben Muich Dhui to Beinn a' Bhuird and Ben Avon stands out magnificently. Nearer at hand on the north are Fafernie, Cairn Taggart, Cairn Bannoch, Broad Cairn, and, above all, the white peak of Lochnagar; while, far away, forty miles off, in the lowlands of Aberdeenshire, the Mither Tap and other tops of Bennachie may be clearly distinguished. From Tom Buidhe to the Tolmount is only a step—three-quarters of a mile as the crow flies—and here a repetition of the view, in some respects improved, may be got. From the Tolmount it is but another step to Crow Craigies, a distinct top, lying to the east, 3014 feet high. In a long summer day it would not be a great matter to walk on from the Tolmount to the Spital of Glenshee by way of Cairn na Glasha, the Glas Maol, and Creag Leacach; but in the shorter spring day, with soft snow on the ground, the return



journey to Clova either by way of Loch Esk and Bachnagairn or by Jock's Road and Glen Doll completes a fair day's walk.

But possibly the finest walk from Clova is that to Broad Cairn (3268). The turnpike road is followed as before to Braedownie, and then with Craig Mellon on the left, we take the path "that takes you to the Paradise o' Pines at Bachnagairn"—to quote a well-remembered line of the Poet Laureate of the Club. Bachnagairn—a ruined shooting lodge—passed, the "yellow winding footpath" that takes you to Bachnagairn from the other side is gained, and it is easy then to reach the top of the Cairn. The most notable feature of Bachnagairn, however, it may be noted *en passant*, is not its pines of which our poet sings, but its waterfall, a magnificent cascade on the Esk of at least 60 feet in height, quite close to the remains of the old shooting lodge. The extended view from Broad Cairn, particularly towards the Cairngorm range, and the steep descent from the Cairn to the Dubh Loch must be fresh in the memories of the many members of the Club who visited the mountain on the Spring Holiday of 1896.

Among the nearer hills to Broad Cairn, are Cairn Bannoch and Fafernie, there being only about a mile between their tops. From Fafernie, one might drop to the Tolmount path and reach Clova again by Glen Doll and the White Water.

All the routes that have been sketched, it may be noted, on the map, lie on the western side of the Glen. On the eastern side, it is not a great walk across the hills to Invermark, Lochlee, and the picturesque hamlet of Tarfside, with Mount Keen in the background. But nearer at hand, affording an easy walk for a lounging day, is the range of hills that form the eastern rampart of Glen Clova, Red Craig, Ben Reid, Boustie Ley, along with the Snub and the Green Hill, encircling Loch Brandy. The loch, which has a circumference of about a mile and a half, and lies at an altitude of over 2000 feet, is reached by a path from the hotel, and appears to be the stock "place of interest" in the neighbourhood to which the attention of tourists is directed. It is,



however, a charming spot, and whether it is seen on a summer day or under lowering skies with the swirling mist curling up the dark rocks behind it, Loch Brandy will not be readily forgot.

Such are some of the possibilities of Clova as a holiday centre. It must be noted in conclusion—as a practical consideration—that while Glen Clova itself is largely under sheep, Glen Doll is a strictly preserved deer forest, and that some of the routes sketched, such as the walk down Corrie Kilbo, would not be possible, and should not be attempted, during the shooting season. Deerstalkers and shooting tenants have their rights as well as mountaineers. In the spring and very early summer, however, it will be found that there are few or no restrictions; and, of course, the Glen Doll path and similar walks are always open to the pedestrian.



BEN NEVIS, FROM BANAVIE.