

A DAY ON BRAERIACH.

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THE three Aberdeenshire stalwarts and the Englishman [see *C.C.J.*, III., 122] met at 7.30 on a mid-August morning, near Loch an Eilein, and spent a hot, hazy, breezy day in an enjoyable stroll over Braeriach. The walk to the lower bothy of Glen Eunach was made somewhat heavy by the strong southerly breeze, which, however, kept us from becoming too much heated. We had made, many times, the usual ascents of Braeriach, and decided to try a new one that promised to introduce us to some interesting fresh ground. Accordingly from the bothy we turned along the glen of the Little Bennie, a glen that seems to have no distinctive name, though it is surely worthy of one. There is an intermittent track on the north side of the stream and considerably above it for about two-thirds of the length of the glen. Then, as Coire Ruadh is opened out, the easiest walking is in the hollow, and close by the stream. Near the separating ridge between Coire Ruadh and Coire na Bennie the stream is underground, except in very wet weather, but beyond this ridge is again visible—and very welcome!

We now were in the remotest section of the glen. The hollow is richly grassed with a thick, soft turf, and is evidently a favourite haunt of the red deer, a small herd of which retreated before us. The meadow land is surrounded by a scree of fallen stones, and among these ferns are luxuriant and beautiful—parsley, oak, beech, lady, and sweet mountain ferns abounding. The upper part of the corrie, towards the ridge of Braeriach, is grim and stony, and has two deep pockets that invite closer inspection. Having rested awhile by the musical stream, and enjoyed sandwiches (and pipes), we made our way up to the lowest point of the neck joining Sron na Leirg to the main mass of Braeriach. Here we expected to find rough and difficult

going, but were agreeably dissatisfied. Evidently the deer took the route that commended itself to us, and they had trodden out a rough staircase that made the ascent extremely easy. We saw many Alpine flowers, notably fine patches of Mountain Chickweed, Scurvy Grass, and Moss Campion. We knew that hereabouts Alastair Tailleir had his summer dwelling, in which he watched for the deer, while making-up mythical clothing. And truly Alastair was a man of right good taste in the matter of scenery, for his lodge in the wilderness—the exact site of which we could not determine, though one of us had once previously seen it—commanded a thoroughly typical Highland mountain-scape—corrie and glen, crag and meadow, heather and rushing stream. When we reached the top of the ascent, and were just able to look across to the other side of the Larig Ghru, we became aware of two stags lying on the hillside, their bodies not visible to us, but their heads and horns finely silhouetted against the sky. One of them had but a single horn, the other a good pair. We lay still, and through the field-glass had a long look at them, for they were not quite 360 paces away, and they did not know of our presence. When we rose, they ran away, but in a leisurely manner, and with many halts and backward glances.

A few minutes later we were on the narrow ridge of Braeriach, and looking into and across the mighty rift of the Garbh Coire, with Cairn Toul and Sgor an Lochan Uaine towering up on the other side, and the Lochan Uaine itself nestling darkly in its remote hollow, its surface now and again shaken into shimmering brightness as eddies of the breeze struck down on to it. But the general haziness prevented any strong contrasts of light and shadow, and the prevailing impression of the outlook was that of dark solemnity and massive grandeur. In all conditions of weather, bright or dark, calm or storm, rain or snow, this Garbh Coire is supremely impressive; the sense of remoteness, of the magnificence of outline and size takes possession of the feelings of the beholder perhaps more completely than anywhere else among our Cairngorms.

For an hour we walked leisurely along the finely scarped ridge, turning from side to side to note its narrowness—it is at its narrowest not more than 35 feet across—scrambling warily out on some of the pinnacled buttresses, the better to gaze into the depths below, passing the two cairns, and so making our way to where the infant Dee throws itself over a cliff some 600 feet from the plateau into the hollow of the Garbh Coire Dhe. Here we sat and took our mid-day lunch, and watched through the field-glass a herd of a dozen deer at rest in the quiet of the inner corrie, and quite unaware of human beings far above them.

Then we followed the Dee up to its sources in the “Wells of Dee”. These were in fairly full flow, though the most southerly stream was partly underground. The most westerly one was very full and strong, but sorely disfigured by the debris of the lunch of previous visitors. It is greatly to be regretted that we have not more of the fine old Greek reverence for the beauty and purity of springs; and one is filled with indignation to find that people have defiled with decaying bones and soiled paper a spot so worthy of respect, if not reverence, as the highest stream source in the country. We cleaned up the place as well as was possible, and cursed and prayed for the evil-doers. May they see this, and repent! Hereabouts we saw many ptarmigan, young ones that looked on men as a strange curiosity, and older ones that warily kept their distance. We also smelt and heard deer, but could not get a sight of them. Then we crossed the great plateau to the head of the zig-zag pony path, and lay awhile on the heather to enjoy the wide expanse of Glen Eunach. We had in full view all five of its lochs—Eunach, an t’Seilich, na Bennie, mhic Ghillie Chaoile, and nan Deurt—and beyond and above them the ridge of the Sgoran Dubh, scene of our adventure of a year ago. Then in the warmth of the afternoon glow we dropped into the glen, and by 6.30 had reached Loch an Eilein, and parted. There was but one note of regret about the day’s proceedings—we saw no white heather.