

MEALL NA CUAICH.

BY JAMES H. BROWN.

MEALL NA CUAICH is a round-topped mountain (3120) in Inverness-shire, about five miles north-east from Dalwhinnie. Neither the name nor the situation is given on the one-inch map, but the summit is within the 3000 contour immediately to the east of Loch na Cuaich.

We had arranged to spend a short winter holiday among the mountains of Badenoch, and so reached Kincaig station on the afternoon of 29th December last. "It has been raining here for thirteen months", was the disheartening reply to our remark on the "soft" weather, and, later, Dalnavert's observation, however witty in a way, that the roads were all a "general wade" did not raise our spirits. Leaving the station we took a path along the left bank of the Spey, which, with the Feshie, was in semi-flood. In the distance, on the opposite side, the deep green of the pines contrasted with the brown heath of the lower hills, capped in grey mist. About a mile down the river we crossed to the right bank by a foot-bridge, and a short walk across the haugh landed us at Dalnavert. This was the last possession of the Shaws; here also the local volunteers of the early part of last century had their headquarters.

Our programme for next day was to cross Meall na Cuaich from Dalwhinnie to Gaick Lodge, and go down Glen Tromie to Kingussie. The cold during the night had warned us of a change in the weather, and we were rejoiced to see the hills covered with snow to the 2000 feet line, and to feel the ground hard under foot. Arriving at Dalwhinnie at 9.20, we negotiated the Truim by the railway bridge, and thence struck across the moor over Allt a' Choire Chaim and Allt a' Choire Chais to a point near the lower end of Loch na Cuaich. It would probably, however, have been better to go farther along the railway, and so keep closer to Allt Cuaich. Just above the confluence of Allt Coire na Cuaich with the latter stream there is a big grassy patch about half-a-mile in length,

almost covered with *larachs*, indicating that it had once been a favourite resort of the inhabitants of the district with their flocks during summer.

We reached the base of the Meall about 11.30, and, having passed the *larachs*, commenced the ascent from the south side, thus avoiding the steep slope overlooking Loch na Cuaich. We had soon a grand view of Ben Alder and Creag Meaghaidh, both, of course, masses of pure white. As the sun shone on their giant forms, revealing their corries and fissures, a prospect of grandeur and magnificence not to be easily surpassed was presented to us. As we got nearer the summit the half-moon, which had been overhead all day, seemed to rest on the cairn. The top was reached about 1.15, and, after a short halt, a start was made for Gaick. Mist now enshrouded us, and we floundered not a little in the soft snow, though we kept by the wire fence as much as possible to the watershed between Bogha-cloiche (2945) and Meall na Cuaich. By this time the day was so far advanced that it was evident our programme was out of the question, so we contented ourselves with a climb up Coire na Cuaich. Here a pair of ravens "went forth to and fro", croaking loudly, and apparently challenging our right or perhaps our sanity in entering their solitary domain at such a time. The centre of this large corrie is somewhat precipitous, so our ice-axes were useful in the descent.

Daylight had faded into moonlight when we reached Loch na Cuaich. Thereafter we kept closely by the left bank of Allt Cuaich, the moon standing us in good stead as we jumped some tributary burns and crossed others by wire fences. We were not sorry when we came on the railway, and so to an end of our little difficulties.

Along both Allt Cuaich and Allt Coire na Cuaich we observed splendid specimens of moraines, especially on the right bank of the former. One of the moraines on Allt Cuaich had the appearance of an immense railway embankment. Some on the south slope of the Meall were at a height of about 1600 feet, and everywhere there was evidence that the kingdom of ice had, long years ago, ruled supreme.