

## THE BLACK MOUNT.

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IN No. 14 of the *Cairngorm Club Journal* Mr. A. C. Waters has recorded a few days' holiday that we had together in Lochaber. We parted on the 23rd of February, 1898, he returning home whilst I went on further journeyings alone. On a cold but beautiful morning two days later I drove very early from Fort William to Kinlochmore, at the head of Loch Leven, and, as I could not get put up at the keeper's house, crossed the ridge of Aonach Eagach, north of Glen Coe, and slept at the Clachaig. From this delightful little inn, placed in the depths of Glen Coe, another beautiful day gave a most pleasurable journey over Bidean nam Bian (3766), the monarch of Glen Coe, to the Kingshouse Inn, whence I made my first acquaintance with the Black Mount.

Although readers of this *Journal* are well acquainted with the White Mount of the Eastern Highlands, but few know of the Black Mount of the Western side. The group of hills that is called by this latter name is situated on the south-west of the Moor of Rannoch, and forms the eastern boundary to Glen Etive, and is also in the deer forest of the Marquis of Breadalbane. They may be approached from two inns, each of which is well situated. For comfort the Inveroran Inn upon Loch Tulla can be most warmly recommended, whilst the Kingshouse Inn has the glories of Buchaille Etive Mor to tempt rock-climbers.

Four mountains form the Black Mount, and two of them are many-headed. They form two natural groups, the north and the south, that are separated by a saddle, about 2100 feet high. The more northern group consists of the Clachlet (3602) and Meall a Bhuiridh (3636), the highest in the Black Mount, between them being a drop of about 500 feet. Meall a Bhuiridh is the eastern spur, unnamed in

Bartholomew's map. The Clachlet has four other tops upon its northern ridge which are, proceeding northwards, Mam Coire Easain (3506), a nameless top (3600), Stob Glas Choire (3207), and finally a small peak, which forms the imposing north-western buttress, as seen from Kingshouse, Sron a' Greise (2952).

The winter view from Kingshouse is extremely grand, and, as the inn is 800 feet above sea-level, the air is most bracing. The Western Highlands, in February, 1898, had given me eleven consecutive days of sunshine and frost! But the forbearance of the weather was now used up, and it was under most gloomy auspices that I left the Kingshouse one morning just before 8. The ordinary coach road towards Inveroran was followed for a mile or two, and then came a long trudge over the moorland towards the eastern ridge of Meall a Bhuiridh. It was here that the weather broke up entirely. As the higher ground was reached, the rain changed to sleet, and a furious wind rose up. As a result of the cold and rain, the snow had an icy surface that rendered walking an ungraceful and laborious pastime. When climbing alone one should be particularly careful; and yet how often the lonely mountaineer disregards all rules! As it would have taken far too long to cut steps up this long slope, I ascended it by digging my axe in, and floundering up two or three steps at a time. After many slips and much exertion the ridge was gained, only to find all prospects of ease and comfort blown away by the gale, with its sleet and ice. The summit of Meall a Bhuiridh was soon reached, and much more quickly left behind. At the col between this mountain and Mam Coire Easain, the gale was less furious, and, though I was still in a kind of witches' frolic of mist, time could be fairly comfortably spent in restoring feeling to one's nose and ears. The ascent of Mam Coire Easain from the col consisted of kicking steps up a steep slope of hard snow, followed by the manipulation of a cornice. When once the summit plateau was reached the fun began again. What were the exact tops and cairns visited I cannot truthfully say. But after stumbling upon that of the Clachlet, all thoughts of

ascending Stob Ghabhar vanished, and I slipped and slithered my way into Corrie Ba, which lies on the eastern side of the col, connecting the northern and southern groups of the Black Mount. It is a peaceful and flat-bottomed corrie which afforded a pleasant change from the warfare of the elements higher up. The rain still continued, but I could now indulge in some refreshment. The coach road was joined at Ba Bridge, and followed for some five miles to Inveroran.

At Inveroran I intended to stay and vanquish Stob Ghabhar next day, but fate decreed otherwise. The former landlord had just departed, and the new one was just going in, the house being entirely dismantled. Mr. Cameron, the new landlord, kindly set me in front of a fire and gave me some tea; my wet condition being no obstacle, as no carpets or anything were yet down. The thought of some seven or eight miles of road to be traversed was not a pleasant idea to a man wet through already. Shortly, it was discovered that there was a train southward bound, due in about 35 minutes at the Bridge of Orchy, three miles off. The station was on my way, and, in any case, the sooner the ground was covered the better. Therefore the pace was considerably forced, and that train was caught. But before it had started I had wired to that friend of all mountaineers, Mr. Stewart of Tyndrum, for "warm bath, dry clothes, and dinner". That evening I spent in great comfort, being arrayed in my landlord's clothes--though I must confess that I could not fill them.

Such was my experience of the northern group of the Black Mount, and it was not until April, 1900, that I was able to attack the southern portion. The attack was made in the company of two friends, inexperienced in mountain travel, who had been decked out from my wardrobe, plus the gloves, boots, and ice-axe of a friend departing south. It was a dull morning as we left Inveroran, and, passing the keeper's house, we followed the north bank of the Linne nam Beathach, and then that of the Allt Toaig. The mist soon became our constant companion, and in it we crossed the col between Stob Ghabhar and Stob a' Coire

Odhar of Beinn Toaig, reaching the great north-eastern corrie of the former. We progressed up this corrie and found the lochs frozen over, but in the mist discovered ourselves on Sron nan Giubhas (3174) instead of Stob Ghabhar. The rim of the corrie was followed round, and in cold and mist we thought what fools our friends at home would think us. In one place the ridge grew narrow, and one of the party, whose first experience it was, was much impressed by seeing the slopes on either hand plunge steeply into the weird greyness of the mist. Later, our timorous friend was also much impressed by the beautiful cornices that fringed all the corries. Try as we would, he would not be convinced of the pure and unadulterated beauty of our surroundings. Stob Ghabhar is 3565 feet high, and is the 55th highest mountain in Scotland, and equal to the highest mountain of the British Isles, out of Scotland, Snowdon. Westward from the cairn is an undulating ridge with two tops upon it, Sron a' Ghearrain (3240) and Stob a' Bruaich Leith (3083). Along this ridge we walked until, after some five hours of mist, we yielded to our friend's feelings and agreed to descend. But then the question of where to descend cropped up. Before us was a steep snow slope, visible for a few feet—and then blending with the soft greyness of the mist. Our companion gently murmured "Not there", and the influence of the rope, both moral and physical, had to be employed. Shortly afterwards we could indulge in long glissades, going very gently and on the rope. First, one anchored, and let the others down to the full length of the rope, about 90 feet; then the bottom man took a hitch round his axe, and the others gently slid past him until they were brought up. When the mist was left and the road reached, our friend breathed freely once again, and after dinner expressed the opinion that climbing was not so bad.

Next day was very lazy, and was mostly spent in watching cows and smoking. When left by myself I had time once more to ascend Stob Ghabhar. This time I walked up its easy south-east shoulder, Aonach Eagach (3272), and from the summit had my only view from the

Black Mount. But a beautiful view it was. Mist and cloud curled and uncurled round Bidean, the Buchailles, and all the grand Lochaber hills. The scene was ever changing; now all the hills were dark and gloomy, and now again a tiny shaft of sunshine would make some monarch's mantle of snow glitter. What a wonderful mass is formed by the conglomeration of peaks called Bidean nam Bian. It is full of grace, majesty, and beauty, making a glorious picture picked out in black and white. Over the Glencoe hills stood out Ben Nevis' broad white brow, whilst eastward from it stretched a splendid array of peaks and ridges, peerless on the Scottish mainland. How one's heart rejoiced to pick out, recognise, and name many an old and trusted friend. There were the two shapely cones of Stob Choire an Easain Mhoir and Stob a' Choire Mheadhonaiche, the twin queens of Loch Treig. East of this loch the hills and ridges lose their outlines and grace to culminate in the undulating moors and gentler slopes of the Eastern Highlands. Yet no one can deny for one instant that the latter have beauties of various kinds which their more shapely western brethren lack. The Highlands of the West are blessed with more beauty and variety of shape, and have great and glorious lochs scattered through almost every glen and corrie. With such characters, these hills win back, again and again, the climber to their tops and ridges. The greater rainfall of the West materially aids in the production of finer landscape pictures, just as it has been pointed out the wetter climate of Norway does as compared with that of the Alps.