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THE BEN UARNS.

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“ Double the labour of my task,
Lessen my poor and scanty fare,
But give, O give me what I ask—
The sunlight and the mountain air ”.

THERE is probably no one who is fond of walking among our Scottish hills who has not had the tantalising experience of gazing day after day at a distant range of mountains without any immediate prospect of being able to spend a day on their summits. In the spring particularly, when a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of Bens and Stucs and Carns and Mealls, he longs more than ever to be up and away on a long “stravaig” among these hills, and if this opportunity is denied he must needs interest himself on bright clear days in endeavouring to identify the various heights by the aid of his maps and field glass.

In such manner the writer used to occupy a little of his spare time in the earlier part of last year. If any members of the Club have an hour or two to spend in Perth, and wish to enjoy a good view of the Eastern Grampians as seen from that neighbourhood, they cannot do better than make their way to Corsiehill, on the northern slope of the Hill of Kinnoull. From this point a splendid panorama of mountain summits

is visible, particularly to the north and north-east. Most of these can be identified without undue difficulty, but several of the hills give one a little trouble. To the east of Beinn a' Ghlo and Ben Vuroch there is a break without any prominent mountain, but then comes a great "hornet's nest" of hills stretching between Glen Tilt and the Cairnwell. My friend M. and I spent some little time in trying to clear up to our own satisfaction the topography of this region, but though we felt sure as to the identity of Glas Thulachan and several of his companions, we had a difficulty with regard to others. We accordingly resolved, with a view to solving our doubts, to have a little walk of exploration in this district.

With this purpose before us we left Perth one afternoon at the end of June last year, and made our way from Blair Atholl up Glen Tilt. The night was fair but cloudy, and mist rolled round the summits of Beinn a' Ghlo. The few glimpses we had of Carn nan Gabhar, with the mist trailing over its dark corries, were impressive in the extreme.

I suppose no reader of "St. Ives" can ever forget the cry of the watch as he passed along the back of the castle rock, when the French prisoners were waiting the hour of their escape—"Past yin o'clock, and a dark, haary moarnin'". The condition of the morning was not much better when, a little later than "yin o'clock", M. and I set out for Carn an Righ (3377). At 8.40 we reached the bridge across the Gleann Beag Burn, on the Kirkmichael road. The weather was improving a little, but the higher part of the hill was wrapped in mist. A lofty spur of the mountain overhung the road in front of us and was clear, but the summit was evidently further east. Fearing that there might be a fall between the two points we kept well to the east, but, after walking a little distance, we saw that a ridge connected the point first seen with the summit. We accordingly turned towards the height that was clear, and reached it at 9.35. The walking was very easy—over short heather. As indicated, our best course would have been to climb direct to this point, and thence along the

ridge to the summit of the mountain. We hoped to see Loch Loch from the spot we had reached, but in this expectation we were mistaken. In fact we had little or no view in any direction, though Carn nan Gabhar to the south loomed grandly through the mist. But while there was no distant view to be had, we gazed on the green, grassy haughs at our feet, and wondered on which of these stood the famous rustic palace which the Earl of Atholl erected for King James V. when he came on a hunting expedition to this lonely district in 1529. Some writers state that the site of this palace was on the bank of the Tilt near Blair Atholl, and this was pointed out to Queen Victoria as the true site when she visited Athole in 1844. An old map before the writer, however, gives "Remains of James Vth Sylvan Palace" on the banks of a stream to the north of Loch Loch; an old guide to Perthshire refers to the vestiges of the palace as being near Loch Loch, and to this view we shall adhere, for is not Carn an Righ "the hill of the king"? It is a little uncertain, however, whether the site is visible from the spot where we stood. Lindsay of Pitscottie gives the following quaint and interesting account of this "sylvan pavilion":—

"In the summer of the year 1529, King James the Fifth, accompanied by Queen Margaret and the Pope's Ambassador, went to hunt in Athole, where he remained three days, most nobly entertained by the Earl of Athole, and killed thirty score of hart and hynd, with other small beasts, as roe and roebuck, wolf and fox, and wild cats. The Earl of Athole, hearing of the King's coming, made great provision for him in all things pertaining to a Prince, so that he was as well served and eased with all things necessary to his estate as he had been in his own Palace of Edinburgh. For, I heard say, this noble Earl gart make a curious palace to the King, his mother, and the Ambassador, where they were as honourably lodged as they had been in England, France, Italy, or Spain, concerning the time and equivalent for their hunting or pastime; which was builded in midst of a fair meadow, a palace of green timber, wound with green birks, that were green both under and above, which was fashioned in four quarters, and in every quarter and nuke thereof a great round, as it had

been a block-house, which was lofted and geisted, the space of three house height; the floors laid with green scharets and spreats, medwards and flowers, that no man knew whereon he zied, but as he had been in a garden. Further, there were two great rounds on ilk side of the gate, and a great portcullis of tree, falling down with the manner of a barrace, with a drawbridge, and a great stank of water of sixteen feet deep, and thirty feet of breadth. And also this palace within was hung with fine tapestry and arasses of silk, and lighted with fine glass windows in all airths; that this palace was as pleasantly decored with all necessaries pertaining to a Prince as it had been his own Royal palace at home. Farther, this Earl gart make such provision for the King and his mother, that they had all manner of meats, drinks, and delicates that were to be gotten at that time in Scotland, either in burgh or land—viz., all kind of drink, as ale, beer, wine, etc.; of meats, with fleshes, etc.; and also the stanks that were round about the palace were full of delicate fishes, as salmonds, trouts, pearches, pikes, eels, and all other kind of delicate fishes that could be gotten in fresh waters, and all ready for the banquet. Syne were there proper stewards, etc.; and the halls and chambers were prepared with costly bedding, vessels, and napry, according for a King; so that he wanted none of his orders more than he had been at home. The King remained in this wilderness at the hunting the space of three days and three nights, and his company, as I have shewn. I heard men say it cost the Earl of Athole, every day, in expenses, a thousand pounds. All this sumptuous edifice was purposely consumed by fire on the King's departure”.

An easy walk along the ridge to the east brought us to the highest point of Carn an Righ at 10 a.m.* From this

* It is thought that the “time quotations” given are fairly reliable, at least for the earlier part of the day, but, through the kindness of a fellow-member who walked over this district in 1893, and to whom we were much indebted for the information he gave us, I am able to note some further “quotations” which will be of service to any members of the Club who think of walking over these hills :—

- Carn Aosda to Carn Geoidh, 1 hr. 15 min.
- Carn Geoidh to Cairnwell, 1 hr. 5 min.
- Creag Easgaidh to Loch nan Eun, 30 min.
- Loch nan Eun to Glas Thulachan, 1 hr.
- Glas Thulachan to Carn an Righ, 1 hr.
- Carn an Righ to Mam nan Carn, 1 hr.
- Mam nan Carn to Ben Uarn Beg, 40 min.

position nothing was to be seen, as the mist kept whirling round us without rising for a moment. Only the dim outline of Glas Thulachan was occasionally visible across the valley to the east.

We spent little or no time here, and at once set out for Beinn Iutharn Mhor (Ben Uarn Mor) (3424). Descending towards the north-east we reached the valley between the two mountains in about half-an-hour. The sun now shone out for the first time that day, and we felt joyful, but our joy was brief. For a few moments, however, Ben Uarn, "the mountain of hell", stood out before us, sparkling in the sun, its southern slope rising in one long, gradual incline from the spot where we stood. The screes on its speckled side glittered in the morning light; the sky was bright blue overhead. We climbed along a pathway leading upwards in a gentle depression between Ben Uarn and Mam nan Carn (3217), and, striking to the left, reached the summit of the former at 11.10. Our hopes were born to disappointment, as we got to the top just in time to be enveloped once more. We were slightly better off, however, than on Carn an Righ, as the mist kept lifting occasionally, when we did our best to make out the chief features of the landscape to the north. A haze lay over everything, but the Larig Ghru was visible, with Beinn Bhrotain and Ben Muich Dhui—and the Devil's Point was distinctly seen. We had a view down Glen Ey, and across to Beinn Iutharn Bheag (Ben Uarn Beg) (3011), which, with the hill on which we stood, forms the grand "gateway" of that glen from the south; but the hills to the north of the Dee in that direction were invisible.

If, however, the distant view was lost to us, there are always compensations in life, and the view at our feet, as we looked down the steep slope towards the tiny Lochan Uaine, was charming. The little tarn lay darkly blue in the hollow. On the hillside, just below us, a deer was feeding, unconscious of our presence. The mist whirled along the northern ridges of the mountain, now rising and now falling, and magnifying a hundred fold the grandeur of the corrie.

From Ben Uarn Mor, a walk along the north side of Mam nan Carn, over ground which proved very good going indeed, brought us in less than an hour to Ben Uarn Beg and Loch nan Eun, "the loch of the birds". In the latter I found a great disappointment. I was prepared to see a mountain loch like Loch Brandy in Glen Clova, with high hills rising abruptly from its shores. In a flat stretch of moorland lay a small sheet of water, leaden gray under the dull sky, little distinguishable in its appearance and general surroundings from dozens of lochs in less mountainous districts. One point of difference, which gave some interest to the scene, was the presence of an enormous number of gulls and other birds, which make this lonely and comparatively inaccessible loch their breeding-ground. Rising in hundreds from its shores, and from the little islet it contains, with their mournful cries they added a touch of gloom and melancholy to our surroundings, all the more striking as the day had now settled down into a condition of dull, cloudy grayness. Loch nan Eun may appear to more advantage under other conditions, but dreariness without grandeur is the recollection that at present remains in the writer's mind.

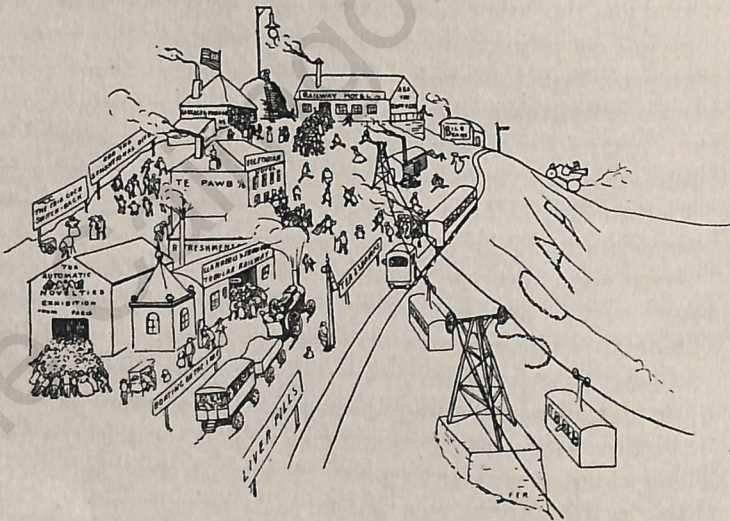
Ben Uarn Beg rises in a gradual slope from the north side of the loch, and after a short ascent the summit was reached at 12.50. There was no view, as mist and haze seemed now to have settled like a pall over all the landscape. After a descent to the shore of the loch, where we had lunch, M. made various efforts to obtain a photo of the fine mass of An Socach (3073) on the west side of the Baddoch glen, but, unfortunately, these had no success. We then turned our gaze eastward. Carn Aosda (3003) was seen, and a part of Loch Brothachan; while beyond these lay a mountain in the far distance, which seemed to lie bathed in a chance stream of sunlight, but which we could not identify.

For what hill should we make next was now the question. Glas Thulachan lay too far out of our course; but, on the east side of the deep glen leading southward from Loch nan Eun, towards the Spittal of Glenshee, there rose a

noble looking mountain, with conical peak, which a glance at our map showed to be Carn Bhinnein (3006). This beautiful summit, as seen from this point, was very striking, in the boldness of its outline. So far as we had seen, it was the finest looking hill in this range.

We then set out over the ground between Creag Easgaidh and the Baddoch watershed, intending to make for the ridge between Carn Bhinnein and Carn Geoidh (3194), and we found the walking over this part the roughest of the day. The heather was long, while every now and again we came on holes, several feet in depth, which made careful walking necessary. The monotony of this was broken for a little by a view down the Baddoch glen to the Braemar road, which we thought was visible at a point near Alltamhait. We were neither of us sorry to find ourselves in the little valley at the foot of Carn Bhinnein, which was reached about 2.30. Climbing in a leisurely fashion up the steep, grassy slopes of the hill, we found ourselves on the ridge, and debated whether we should make direct east for Carn Geoidh, the Cairnwell, and the Braemar and Blairgowrie road, or turn to the right to Carn Bhinnein. The day continued as dull as ever, so, having no temptation to continue our walk on the high ground, we struck out for Carn Bhinnein, which we reached at 3.45. The view across the valley to Glas Thulachan was very fine, and left us with a strong desire to return to this mountain on a clear day, when the distant view to the south would be likely to reward the climber. Even as it was, however, we bade Carn Bhinnein farewell with regret, and descended to the glen. We reached the foot of the hill at 4.40, and a walk without incident brought us to Glenloch, by which we reached the Spittal of Glenshee and welcome quarters there at 6.10. We were well satisfied with the increase in our knowledge of the topography of the district obtained from this walk, as it helped us to settle the question of which hills in this range are visible from the view point previously referred to. Carn an Rìgh, Glas Thulachan, Carn Bhinnein, and Carn Geoidh are all seen, but not the Ben Uarns.

During the greater part of the day we had the misfortune to be without sunshine, and even without the compensation of the grandeur of the mist. It was a cold, gray, uninteresting day, but, even so, it was a most enjoyable one, long to be remembered. The fine lines by Eliza Cook, which appear at the head of this paper (let every member of the Cairngorm Club know them by heart, and repeat them aloud when he sits down to his humble little lunch on the hill side), are therefore to be read in a slightly ironical sense. Alas, we missed the sunlight, but we had the mountain air, and we may have better fortune next time, for we mean to go back.



SNOWDON SUMMIT IN 1960 (see page 32).