

## EXCURSIONS AND NOTES.

A VISIT to Bennachie must be a *sine qua non* to a mountaineering club whose headquarters are in the "Silver City by the Sea". It

is one of the nearest hills, it is very accessible, and THE CLUB it stands out prominently alone as the central ON BENNACHIE. figure of Aberdeenshire. Wherever one may wander throughout the county its graceful outline rises up to vision, and its strikingly protuberant features attract the attention of all travellers. Not only is "The Mither Tap o' Bennachie, the sailors' lan'mark frae the sea", but also it is a characteristic silhouette of grandeur in the shire. Although it has no pretension as to length of range or height of summit, yet it seems to stand out in clear profile from many points, and is recognised from a distance of 40 to 70 miles in a clear atmosphere. Being thus a distinctive mark in Aberdeenshire, and standing between the classic Gadie and the Don from which Aberdeen takes its name, Bennachie claims the first attention of an Aberdonian mountaineer. Working from the centre to the circumference the hill climber finds Bennachie a good beginning for the season's exploits, and might be taken as the first step of the training ground for the ascent of 3000 feet which is the standard for membership of the Cairngorm Club. The journey can be accomplished with ease and comfort in an afternoon, and forms a delightful excursion from the city. Bennachie can be ascended from several points—the most popular being Oyne and Pitcaple on the one side, and Monymusk and Kemnay on the other. It is generally recognised that *via* Oyne is the most direct route, and the nearest.

On 4th June, 1904, the Cairngorm Club, to the number of 30, bound on their climbing accoutrements and, instead of an "alpenstock", seized a cudgel and went forth to the Gariochland with the intent of again "doing" Bennachie.

When Oyne was reached (for this was the route chosen) one would have thought that only a few steps were necessary to reach the summit. To the uninitiated the top right opposite the railway station is regarded as the same peak that was visible from the train on the journey. The ascent, however, soon reveals the fallacy. Craig Shannoch looks down quite imposingly upon the village at its base, but when one reaches the summit it loses its majestic appearance beside "Oxen Craig" and "Mither Tap".

Proceeding from Oyne the party set forth by the banks of the Gill Burn, which rises between Oxen Craig and Craig Shannoch and flows into the Gadie at Oyne Station. Along by the rugged bed of

this little stream that wimples placidly in times of summer drought but which breaks forth in roaring torrents when the storm bursts on the high ground, the party wended its way onwards. Crossing the old Aberdeen highway near the croft of Howeford—a place no doubt taking its name from the “Three fords”, or place where three burns met—the ascent proper was begun. Instead of following the path by the old beech trees and Shannoch Well, a straight course was steered through wood, bracken, and heather to Craig Shannoch. On the face of the crag, about 1000 feet up, a splendid view is obtained of the valley of the Gadie with its strange admixture of ancient and modern picturesqueness. There is the old road from Huntly to Aberdeen close by the foot of the hill, and there is the wider turnpike road nearer the level. Then there is the modern mansion of Petmathen, with its red roof appearing to advantage with the background of dark green trees on the slopes of Parnassus Hill and there is the more ancient house of Westhall with its old fashioned tower and foreground of fine old trees; but further to the eastward there is to be seen a mark of antiquity dating at least to the beginning of the 17th century, the Castle of Harthill. It stands in the midst of modern peace as a memorial of the troublous times of old. This hoary pile is now a stately ruin, but its presence marks the age of pillage and plunder, and tells of the clang of war and fierce conflict. Near the top of Craig Shannoch can be seen a cave formed by a projecting rock, and it is reputed that the last laird of Harthill hid himself there to watch his castle smouldering in the flames.

But now the first peak is reached and the eye naturally takes a longer radius and forms a wider arc to the north-west. Standing at an elevation of about 1600 feet, the Foudland Hills, Dunnideer, Buck of Cabrach, and Tap o' Noth could easily be discerned. Faintly, behind the Noth, the dim shadow of Ben Rinnes appeared through the heat haze. Only a short stay was made here as the desire seemed to be to reach the Mither Tap, as the point most prominent, although not the highest.

Oxen Craig (1733) was left unvisited by the majority of the Club, and the coign of vantage for the day was to be the Mither Tap (1698). This is the most popular peak of the range, partly, no doubt, because it is the most imposing, and partly because it abounds most in historical interest. On its rocky summit a good view is got of the beautiful valley of the Don winding through woodland to the sea; and sweeping the eye from left to right one can distinguish, under favourable conditions, Clochnaben, Mount Battock, Mount Keen, Lochnagar, Morven, Ben Avon, Ben Muich Dhui, and Cairngorm on the south-south-west, while to the east the North Sea may be discerned. But perhaps the chief concern of the mountaineer lies in the local topography of the summit. One may cast the eye around in calm deliberation in the twentieth century, but at the same time one can easily imagine the furtive look that

may have been cast from this same rocky ledge in the wild proceedings related in early Scottish history. There are here sufficient traces of a fortification, which must have done service in the past; an outer and inner rampart are still partially visible, and the very place to which the tourist now joyously hies his way had no doubt been the scene of more anxious outlook than at the present day. It does not require any great stretch of imagination to conceive that such a conspicuous mark in the natural contour of the country should be converted into a watch-tower and stronghold for the safety and defence of the district. And there is little doubt that Tap o' Noth, Dunnideer, and Mither Tap had been a chain of forts along the valley and highway, from which signals could be swiftly sped in the times of danger or invasion. Connected also with the Mither Tap, report says that there was an ancient "Causeway" known as the "Maiden Causeway", stretching down past Hosie's Well, through Pittodrie Woods, but whether this is of Roman origin or simply a road made in warlike times for the better access to the fortifications it is impossible to speculate. However, there is much legendary lore respecting the "Causeway", the "Maiden Stone", and the Hill-fort itself, which was left to be meditated upon and discussed by the members in the quiet of the winter hours when they are living over again their pleasant ramble on Bennachie.

Tea was waiting the party at the Oyne Hotel on the descent, and the arrangements allowed time for a pleasant chat among members and guests. Among the latter were Rev. A. Galloway and P. S. Bisset, Oyne; and Rev. W. Cruickshank, Leslie.  
—P. S. BISSET.

It is with much regret that we have to report that no Osprey has put in an appearance at Loch-an-Eilein this season. There is reason to fear that this bird is doomed to rank among our  
THE OSPREY. extinct species. Last season there was no Osprey at Loch-an-Eilein, and but one at Loch Arkaig. This season no Osprey has been recorded as building anywhere in the British Isles, though there is a rumour that one was killed in the Lake district.

Mr. William Garden, Advocate, gave an interesting address on "The Rocky and Selkirk Ranges" to the Aberdeen branch of the

MR. W. GARDEN  
IN THE  
CANADIAN ROCKIES. Royal Scottish Geographical Society on 8th March. He accompanied Mr. William Douglas, of Edinburgh, to Canada, in August of last year, and took part with him in the ascent of Assiniboine, the loftiest peak in the Canadian Rockies (11,860 feet). The last part of the ascent was made by Mr. Douglas alone, Mr. Garden remaining in the final camp pitched (at an elevation of 7175 feet) and watching his companion through a telescope. Ascents were made of various other mountains, including Mount Sir Donald (10,645 feet), named after Lord Stratheona.