

SNOW CLIMBS IN PERTHSHIRE.

I.—BY WILLIAM BARCLAY.

ON the Edinburgh Spring Holiday (18th April, 1904), a friend and the writer spent a most enjoyable day on the mountains at the source of the Tay. Leaving the "Waverley" at 4.30 a.m., the railway journey was uneventful till the beauties of the west began to open up. Arrochar was passed just as the last fringe of mist disappeared from the snowy peak of Ben Lomond. Then, as Crianlarich was neared, an amorous passenger along the corridor was heard remarking about the snow-crested peaks, "These are places where the foot of mortal man hath never trod"! I wonder what observation he made as we dropped from the train at the next station, armed with an iceaxe. Between Crianlarich and Tyndrum a peep is always to be had of Beinn Laoigh, and this morning we were not disappointed; there he was, towering above the head of Choninish Glen, a study in white.

We left the West Highland station of Tyndrum at 8.15, and made our way down through "the village" to the station of the rival railway company.

BEINN LAOIGH. From the vicinity of the latter a path runs over the shoulder of the hill into Glen Choninish, joining the main road about a couple of miles on, thus forming a profitable short cut. The remaining four-mile walk up the glen was soon accomplished, and at 10 a.m. we were at the junction of the three head streams of the lordly Tay, right under the great front of Beinn Laoigh. In another five minutes we had commenced the ascent, the first 500 feet or so being over grass, and then at a height of about 1800 feet we struck the snow. At first this was softish, but as we got higher up the condition improved, though now the heat of the sun began to be felt.

As we stepped into the hollow of the "big corrie" the sight that met our eyes was one not soon to be forgotten. In front and on either side towered steep slopes of dazzling whiteness, broken up here and there by long black streaks where the huge rocky buttresses pierced the white mantle. All round the summit these great slopes carried huge overhanging cornices, which were continually breaking off and sending miniature avalanches hissing down into the great basin.

Our course was now diagonally upwards for the ridge connecting Stob Garbh with the summit, and when this was topped it was seen that the western side of the hill carried even more snow than did the great corrie. Then we kept directly upwards, intending to strike the cornice at a point where it appeared to be somewhat smaller. The gradient was steep, but the snow was hard, so we rapidly cut our way upward and were soon beneath the cornice. Here the slope was much steeper, or, as my companion put it, "almost perpendicular", and our position somewhat sensational. Above us towered the cornice, overhanging to some extent, while from our feet the snow stretched in one long chute of 1500 feet. Next came the task of breaking through the cornice, but this was accomplished without much difficulty by the help of the iceaxe, and I was able to pull myself on to the top. My companion followed, and as the cairn was only about 50 yards off we were at the official summit of our mountain at 11.55. There was a slight haze below, but despite that the prospect was one to be remembered. Though it was grand all round, that to the west and north-west undoubtedly carried off the palm—the many tops of Ben Cruachan, Beinn Eunach, and Beinn á Chochuill, the great bulk of the Black Mount overtopped by the Glencoe hills, and these again by the "King of Mountains". Lochs Awe, Fyne, and Lomond were visible, as well as innumerable smaller sheets of water. My friend was enraptured with the sight—it was his first view from a mountain top. As he humorously expressed it, he had learned two things that day, one that a person

could go up the side of a house provided it was covered with snow; the other that he had no idea there were so many mountains in Scotland.

We spent half-an-hour on the summit and then wandered down to the col between Beinn Laoigh and his neighbour, Beinn Oss. Here

BEINN OSS AND by the infant waters of the Tay
BEINN DUBH-CHRAIGE. we lunched, thereafter walking
in a very leisurely fashion up
the slopes of Beinn Oss. The snow was now intermittent, large patches alternating with slopes of grass and stone. The ascent from this side is very gradual, in striking contrast to that from Glen Choninish, and affords splendid backward views of Beinn Laoigh. We were at the small cairn (3374) at 2 p.m. It was now decided to climb Beinn Dubh-Chraige, so we descended towards that hill. The east side of Beinn Oss had a very deep covering of snow, rather wet for glissading, but just suitable for a run, so off we set at a breakneck pace, reaching the hollow in "no time". Two long streaks in the snow, continuous from the top to the bottom of the slope, indicated our line of descent. A very steep, rocky slope now faced us, but once we had surmounted that the rest was plain sailing—long, gradual snow slopes. The cairn (3204), a goodly sized one, was reached at 2.55. The wind had now risen, so the haze disappeared, and the circle of our vision was increased. We were particularly interested in the Crianlarich hills as viewed from this point. Beinn Dubh-Chraige is much flatter than either Beinn Laoigh or Beinn Oss, and abounds in gentler slopes, all grass covered, except that to the south, which is steeper and more rocky.

We descended on long snow-beds to Allt Gleann Achrioch and followed that stream, through a somewhat straggling wood, to its junction with Abhainn Choninish, crossing the united streams by the railway bridge. Thus we gained the road, and as we had still 40 minutes before train time we lay down on the grass just outside the station in full view of these three fine hills, and climbed them over again—by telescope.

The long chain of mountains rising above Loch Tay on the north is divided into two groups by the pass of the Lochan na Lairige, crossing from Glen Lyon to Loch Tayside.

THE
BEN LAWERS RANGE. The wild and rugged summits of the Tarmachans lie to the west of this pass, while the higher and more massive group of Ben Lawers rises to the east. The latter range includes the following summits:—

1. Ben Lawers (3984).
2. Beinn Ghlas (3657); 1 mile south-west of Ben Lawers.
3. Meall Corranaich (3530); $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles west of Ben Lawers.
4. Sron dha-Murchdi (3040); $\frac{1}{2}$ mile south-south-west of Meall Corranaich.
5. Meall a' Choire Leith (3033); 2 miles north-west of Ben Lawers.
6. Creag an Fhithich (3430); $\frac{1}{2}$ mile north of Ben Lawers.
7. An Stuc (3643); 1 mile north-by-east of Ben Lawers.
8. Meall Garbh (3661); $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles north-north-east of Ben Lawers.
9. Meall Gruaidh (3280); 3 miles north-east of Ben Lawers.

Creag an Fhithich is a rocky prominence on the north side of Ben Lawers, while Sron dha-Murchdi culminates the south running ridge of Meall Corranaich. With these exceptions, the above are separate and distinct peaks.

During the first week of May, I was on holiday at Killin, and had at least one good day on the hills. For three or four days previously there had been almost constant rain on the low ground, and every morning the hills showed a fresh coating of snow; so that when a good day did come I was all the more able to appreciate it. The morning of the 4th was clear, calm, and bright, the hills looked only half their distance away, and the snow on their summits appeared exceptionally white. I walked (this time without the pleasure of a companion) along the north side of Loch Tay for about four miles to Edramuchy, and there joined the Lochan na Lairige road coming over the hills from Glen Lyon. This was followed uphill to near the Lochan, under the frowning crags of Meall nan Tarmachan; then I struck off to the right on an old and somewhat indistinct cart track, which wormed its way through the boggy ground of Coire Odhar and

ended in the hollow between Beinn Ghlas and Meall Corranaich, the two most westerly summits of the Lawers range. In the hollow of the corrie I found snow in large patches, but on the slopes above it was continuous.

Between the termination of the path and the summit of Meall Corranaich there is only a difference in level of something like 1500 feet, so that the actual ascent is small. A breathing space will now bring to notice the upper part of Ben Lawers, looking over the slope of his lesser neighbour, Beinn Ghlas, and away down the corrie, over the loch and the low hills between, rise the stately forms of Ben Vorlich and Stùc a' Chroin. Just before I stepped on to the summit crest I encountered the remains of a handsome cornice, in the shape of a vertical wall of snow nearly ten feet in height.

It was 11.30 when I reached the summit—there are two small cairns a considerable distance apart—of Meall Corranaich, and found it completely under snow, so much so that the fence which runs over it was at places invisible. The view was magnificent: from Ben Ledi to the Cairngorms stretched one long, billowy line of snow-clad mountains, from the knobby tops of the Tarmachans in front right on to, and perhaps beyond, the burly Ben Nevis. Of course to the east I had the other summits of Lawers.

Meall a' Choire Lèith I did not think worth visiting, as it is simply the shoulder of the ridge running north from Meall Corranaich. There is only a dip of about 500 feet between this (Meall Corranaich) and the next summit, Beinn Ghlas, so I rapidly dropped down into the hollow, and within 40 minutes was on top number two. Although not honoured with a cairn, Beinn Ghlas is a fine hill, with a large, north-facing corrie. To the east now rose the steep face of Ben Lawers itself, 327 feet above me, but separated by a dip of 400 feet. The ascent of the slope before me, though steeper than either of the previous ones, could hardly be called severe, so at 1.25 I planted foot on the summit of the biggest hill in the big county. There are now two cairns on the top

of Ben Lawers, but only a few feet from one another, and, no doubt, the stones composing the smaller have been poached from its larger neighbour. This, the remains of that elaborate structure erected by Mr. Malcolm Ferguson in 1878, and rebuilt in 1898, is again in ruins, though it still retains something of its former glory in its wide-spreading base.

After spending some time in a further examination of the horizon, I turned my steps northwards, and descended over Creag an Fhithich, and so reached An Stuc. This is a fine rocky hill just above Lochan a' Chait. Its east and north-east sides are very steep and rocky, and I found considerable difficulty in getting down the north-east face. The slope was snow-clad, and the rocks glazed with ice, so that it took fully an hour to descend this 400 feet. From the dip, however, it was an easy pull up to the summit of Meall Garbh. From this top I had a fine backward view of the great north-east face of Ben Lawers, thickly coated with snow for 1400 feet. The surface of the little Lochan a' Chait at my feet was covered with huge blocks of ice, as if it had only lately broken up. On Meall Garbh there was much less snow than on the other tops; although its north face was well covered, it was present only in patches on the other sides.

There remained yet another summit, Meall Gruaidh, to be conquered. This one is separated from Meall Garbh by a dip of 1100 feet, but the slopes though long are very gradual. I reached the hollow in 20 minutes, and the ascent occupied about the same time, so that after passing over one or two subsidiary tops I arrived at the cairn at 4.20. By this time the weather had undergone a complete change: it had become cold, the wind had risen, and a thick haze had fallen all around; thus the sun was obscured, and it began to get chilly. After a halt of a quarter of an hour, I descended to the path by the Lawers Burn, and so got on to the Loch Tayside road.

There was now $8\frac{1}{2}$ miles between me and home, and as there was no chance of a steamer or other conveyance

I had just to use my shanks still. Such a tramp, over a hard metallated road, following a big day on the hills, is always a severe trial to the feet, but in due course I reached Killin at 7.55, as the last rays of the setting sun were gilding the summit of Creag Hialach.

II.—BY E. R. BEARD.

WE (H. Stewart and the writer) left Auld Reekie on Monday, 23rd May, by "that dreadful train", the 4.30 a.m., and on reaching Tyndrum were welcomed by BEINN LAOIGH. rain, mist, and all uncharitableness.

Without delay we crossed the Meall Odhar shoulder and descended to Choninish Glen after nearly making for the Beinn Chuirn corrie, which the mist for a minute revealed to us and which looked magnificent. However, thanks to compass and map, and a momentary glimpse of a great corrie in front of us, all doubts were removed. That glorious expanse of snow could be no other than the Big Corrie of Beinn Laoigh, and what cared we then for rain or mist or cold? We took snap-shots here and there, lunched under the shadow of Stob Garbh, and reached the snow line at 11.15. We donned the rope, and, Stewart leading, went straight up, it being manifestly impossible in the mist to make sure of any definite gully. Up and up we went, finding the snow in fair condition but avalanche-marked on every side. We were destined to make a closer acquaintance with these foes of climbers, for at one point, when we were resting for a moment from the labours of step-cutting, there was a sudden ominous hiss from above, and through the mist came hurrying down a stream of snow. Fortunately we were firmly hitched, but to the writer it was a somewhat awesome sight to see the snow keep pouring out of the unseen above, rise about our bodies, and vanish into the unseen below. Stewart was unorthodox enough to view it with undisguised satisfaction,

and that too though we were on a slope which, as it seemed to be over 60° , was probably quite 45° . Still we cut steps up and up, and the gully became hemmed in with rock walls, looming finely through the rain and mist. At last we came to a point where, on seeing forbidding rocks ahead, we traversed through a gap in the rock wall to our left into a narrow, steep gully, and in a few minutes reached the ridge, which at this point bore no cornice. The gully by which we had ascended must be, I think, that which is known as the South Central Gully. (See *S.M.C.J.*, Vol. VI., No. 35.)

By the slippery, ice-clad ridge we gained the top with some difficulty, and our efforts were rewarded by a view extending to perhaps 10 feet. Such are the pleasures enjoyed by those "who go up to the mountains in the snow". It was now 3.15, still raining, still misty, so we abandoned the plan of bagging Beinn a' Chleibh, Beinn Oss, and Beinn Dubh-Chraige, and resolved to make straight for Crianlarich. We struck the head waters of the Allt nan Caorrunn, and then came mile after mile of dreary trudging past an interminable series of moraines, varied occasionally by a walk through the burn. At last, however, woods were seen, a track emerged apparently from nowhere, and the burn is now called the Dubh Eas. The river scenery is magnificent: copse, rocky hill-side, here a black pool, there a foaming waterfall; but its romantic beauties seem quite unknown and unappreciated. We tramped up Glen Falloch in gathering darkness, and I need hardly add, in torrents of rain, and reached Crianlarich at 9. In the morning we had left sleeping-bags and other impedimenta at the station, proposing to sleep out; now, having procured these, we made straight tracks for the hotel and for supper, having subsisted on *one* Vienna roll all day.

When we awoke next morning the rain was still pouring. It was still pouring when we passed Loch Dochart and climbed Ben More. Thanks to the mist, we were blissfully unconscious that any corrie existed on the mountain, and simply walked from Ben More

BEN MORE AND
AM BINNEIN.

farmhouse up the steep, grassy slope. On the N.E. face was a great snowfield, but we met with little snow till near the top. By this time it was actually fair, and above the sea of mist shone the blue sky—a wonderful picture. But the mist gave no sign of rising, so we set off towards Am Binnein, when suddenly, at a breath of wind, the mist parted as a curtain and revealed the snowy side of Cruach Ardran. Then it settled down again, but not for long; and at length we were rewarded by seeing it disappear on every side. And then, O goddess of the mountains, with what a scene thou didst reward us! Lochs sparkling in the sunshine; Matterhorn-like Ben Vorlich and Stuc à Chroin; the snowwhite hills of Lomond, Ledi, Laoigh, Cruachan; Ben Lawers, Ben Alder; the Glencoe and Black Mount monarchs; and the soaring head of Ben Nevis. To see Stewart on a steep ice-slope humbly salaaming the Alpine peaks, then shouting for the camera which was on his own back, added no little interest to the scene! We then climbed the graceful Hill of Birds, and, having exhausted every plate and film, discovered we had barely time to catch the train. Then followed cross country running down the slope of Am Binnein, over rocks and snow, through the glen, and along the high road, upon which even now I look back with feelings of horror: my thoughts and expressions at the time on the few occasions when Stewart allowed me to rest and take breath must have been appalling. With a minute to spare we caught the train, convinced more than ever that no pastime can compare with the glorious fascination of “spieling the braes”.