

THE MAMORE FOREST.

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IN the January numbers of 1898 and 1899 I wrote two accounts of some excursions of mine amongst the hills of Lochaber. It is a district without the boundaries indicated by the name of our Club. But the coach from Kingussie to Tulloch brings it within moderate range. These two papers have been supplemented by a short one in the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal* on the "Loch Treig Hills". It is my intention to expand still further the knowledge of this famous and favourite region, unequalled in Scotland for the practice of our sport, the love of which has led to the formation of the Cairngorm Club. The papers that have appeared in our *Journal* and in the other one mentioned leave only one set of hills between Fort William and Loch Treig which have not been mentioned, namely, those in the eastern division of the Forest of Mamore. Yet these have forms and individualities that will always attract the true lover of the hills. For a good day spent roving amongst their ridges will rejoice the heart of any of our kind, be he walker or rock climber. There is no apology needed in introducing these hills to notice, except for the inadequacy of my pen to do them justice.

In the paper, page 383, of the second volume of our *Journal*, four of the western of the mountains of the Mamore Forest were mentioned, namely, Mullach nan Coirean, Stob Ban, Sgor nan Iubhair, and Sgor a Mhaim. It is a pure, unadulterated pleasure to recall the glorious days spent on these hills. Even without a blush is it remembered how once, on a terribly hot and thirsty day, I burst into metre, rather than poesy, on the subject of drinking. The title selected was "The Vision of Vats". The place of action was a cool cellar, filled with creaming barrels, a glorious vision for a hot, parched climber,

without food or drink, who absolutely refused to quit the mountain tops before the sun. It was a glorious day, and it is a glorious memory! The date was the 21st of June, 1896, eight years ago. Since that date, though ascents of these hills have been repeated, further exploration of the Mamore Range has not been made. On page 274 of the third volume of our *Journal*, I recorded some notes on the Black Mount, and in the first paragraph stated that I drove from Fort William to the head of Loch Leven, where I could not be lodged, though the keepers' and shepherds' houses at the head of this loch form the best starting place for the exploration of the eastern mountains of Mamore. After this failure it was not till May, 1901, that any further attempt was made. On the beautiful morning of May the 16th we drove to that charming spot, the head of Glen Nevis. It seemed even more beautiful that morning! We then followed the lower of the two tracks which lead through the narrow gorge at the head of the glen. This brought us up to the flatter and more open country by the forester's house at Steall. All the while our eyes were feasted with the magnificent fall of water out of the corrie of Mhail, just west of Sgor a Mhaim. It might be expected that this corrie would be called Coire a Mhaim, being under the mountain Sgor a Mhaim, but it is called Coire a Mhail. This is perhaps an Ordnance Survey error. But perhaps some Gaelic scholar who is a member of our Club can tell us what differences exist between the two words. Entrance into this corrie is apparently cut off by a high cliff, over which the burn tumbles in a splendid cascade. A little above Steall there is a bridge, which allows us to cross the burn. We then started upwards over the slopes of Gearanach into Coire na Ghabalach, the big corrie west of the monarch of the Mamore Forest, Binnein Mor. At the burn we lunched, and then struck up the long, steep grass slopes of Binnein Mor. Grass slopes which are steep are more easily and quickly passed than those of a smaller gradient. We speedily arrived on the ridge, which we followed to the summit. All the hills in Mamore except Mullach nan

Coirean are made of quartz. All of them are narrow, and form most beautiful snow *arêtes*. The slopes are all steep, so that these hills look their best when seen end on, as Binnein Mor seen from Stob Coire an Easain (Vol. II., page 227). When the same mountain is seen from the south, as from the east end of the Aonach Eagach ridge of Glencoe, its main ridge is seen to divide into two gigantic arms which it extends to its neighbours. The actual summit of Binnein Mor is at the south end of a nearly level stretch of narrow ridge, where there is a large cairn. The height is 3700 feet. From here the ridge runs south, abutting on the main Mamore ridge, whose direction is east and west. Turning east after we had crossed the subsidiary Top of Coire nan Laoigh (3475 feet), we were soon breasting the steep slopes of A Grugach. Between the Top of Coire an Laogh and A Grugach is a drop of 300 feet. Mr. Munro in his famous tables has not dignified this eminence a separate mountain. This seems wrong as the two tops of A Grugach are well separated by both dip and distance from Binnein Mor on the west; whilst on its east is a drop of at least 800 feet. The heights of the two tops are 3442 feet for the west and 3404 feet for the east. The dip between them is about 200 feet. Their slopes rise steeply from both ridge and corrie. The view from the summits is very fine. All the peaks of Glencoe are easily distinguished and named. In all directions old friends are seen and welcomed.

Between this and the next peak eastwards is a drop of 800 odd feet, the descent of which is easily accomplished at a run. An easy rise of 600-700 feet brings one to the cairn of Stob Coire a Chairn, 3219 feet high. This peak is on the main, east to west, ridge of Mamore, and at this point we leave it for a subsidiary northern ridge. On this secondary spur is situated a distinct mountain with two tops. The illustration, Vol. II., page 253, shows this ridge in the centre, with a top at either end of it. To the right is seen Stob Coire a Chairn, and to the left the predominant heights of A Grugach, which almost

hide the Top of Coire nan Laogh immediately behind them. Close to the left hand of the illustration is the summit of Binnein Mor, its height dwarfed by its distance. On the extreme right is the ridge leading up to Am Bodach. The picture shows all the high level parts of this day's work.

After a drop of 400 feet, we commence the ascent of the southern peak of the ridge, namely, Garbhanach, 3200 feet approximately. The ridge is distinctly narrow, but easy. The whole crest of the ridge as far as the southern top of Gearanach, also about 3200 feet high, is a similar "knife edge". Mr. Munro has stated that this is the most Coolin-like ridge in the mainland of Scotland. This praise certainly needs a good deal of qualification. And the ridge of Aonach Eagach in Glencoe is certainly a closer approximation. We now descended and crossed the same bridge over the stream, rejoining our track of the morning, and also later our trap at the head of Glen Nevis. We had had a most enjoyable day in every sense of the word, the pleasures of the climbing being intensified by the beauties of the scenery and weather. In fact, we could not have asked for a better day.

To the above I must append some geographical notes on this range of hills. They present marked characters which are well defined and noted.

The main ridge may be said to start in the west at the Cow Hill, 901 feet high, just behind Fort William. Its direction is practically east and west, both ends curling round northwards. Along this long line no spurs of note are given off in a southerly direction, whilst there are six to the north. The tendency of all these northern spurs is to be narrower and steeper than the main ridge is. This character is well seen in Binnein Mor, Garbhanach, Gearanach, etc. The northern extremity of these spurs frequently ends in a rounded hill, as seen in Sgor a Mhaim, Binnein Beag, etc. It is now possible to give a short, simple sketch of the main ridge and its six northern spurs.

FROM EAST TO WEST.

1. Mullach nan Coirean, 3077 feet.
A broad mountain, joined by the northern ridge 1, which begins in the rounded hill of Sgor Chalum, 1823 feet. This spur is not so narrow as its western brethren. Between this mountain and the pass is the Top of Coire Dearg, 3004 feet.
Pass, 2800 feet.
2. Stob Ban, 3274 feet.
A sharp, quartz top, joined at its shoulder by the northern ridge 2.
Pass, 2450 feet.
3. Sgor Iubhair, 3300 feet approximately.
A rounded top, joined by the magnificent northern ridge 3, which begins at the north in the rounded hill of Sgor a Mhaim, 3601 feet, which is joined to Sgor Iubhair by a narrow grassy ridge, with a summit on it about 3300 feet high, cut off on either side by a drop of about 250 feet. This point has no name.
Pass, 2800 feet.
4. Am Bodach, 3382 feet.
A fine, rocky peak on the main ridge.
Pass, 2800 feet.
5. Stob Coire a Chairn, 3219 feet.
A small, grassy top, joined by the sharp northern ridge 4 of Garbhanach and Gearanach, both about 3200 feet high, and separated from it by a drop of 300-400 feet.
Pass, 2600 feet.
6. A Grugach.
Two fine tops, separated by a dip of 200 feet. Height of the eastern one 3442 feet, and of the western 3404 feet.
Pass, 3100 feet.
7. Top of Coire Laogh, 3475 feet.
A poorly marked top, which is joined by the mightiest northern ridge 5, on which is situated Binnein Mor, the monarch of the forest, 3700 feet high.

This spur begins at its northern end in the rounded hill of Binnein Beag, 3083 feet, which is separated from Binnein Mor by a col 2400 feet high.

Pass, drop insignificant.

8. Sgor na h-Eilde Beag, 3140 feet.

A top poorly marked from the west, but with a good drop on the east.

Pass, with lochan, 2400 feet.

9. Sgor na h-Eilde, 3279 feet.

This is a broad top at the most western end of the range. It is joined by the 6th northern ridge, which is broad and unlike the others, beginning in Meall Doire na h-Achlais.

The heights of the passes are only approximate.

This brief survey closes the account I offer of one of the most delightful regions of the Scottish mountains.



AN ABERDEENSHIRE EYRY.

[Photo by Seton P. Gordon.