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TWO DAYS' RIDGE-WALKING IN ARRAN.

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ON the evening of Friday, the 5th of May, we set foot on the good ship the Duchess of Rothesay, lying at Ardrossan and bound for Arran. On Thursday I had suggested the trip to my friend Mr. J. M. Moyes; but the suggestion was declined with thanks, an engagement on the Saturday forming an insurmountable barrier. On Friday morning, however, the gods being propitious, I received word that the engagement was off; and it required only a few winged words on my part to effect the decision that we leave the hurly-burly behind us, and set our faces towards that Island of the Blessed, lying in the western sea.

The passage across to Brodick was very enjoyable, although the weather prospects were by no means hopeful. The sun was visible for only one brief moment, and its red glare seen through the black smoke produced an almost weird effect, such as in superstitious days might have seemed a bad omen. Rain was falling persistently, and heavy mist hung low on the Arran hills, Ben Nuis alone soaring up like a great horn. And when, thanks to the "rope mannies", as the sailors were dubbed by a tinker's boy on board, the Duchess was made fast to the Brodick pier, it was with an anxiety to get under cover that we began to hunt for rooms. Then came a brisk walk to restore circulation, during which we extracted from a venerable looking native the following hopeful weather

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forecast. "I wadna say", declared the oracle, "but what it wad be wet. It's been a baad spring, wind an' rain, an' rain an' wind. Och aye, I doot it's to be wet, wet". But the hills were by this time clearer, and the prospect both charmed and surprised me. Having come that week from the snow-clad Glen Clova hills, it was a considerable surprise to lift my eyes to hills of almost equal height and find no vestige of snow. And the clearness, moreover, not only showed us the entrancing forms of the hills, but was also hopeful of good weather to come, so that, as we turned in for the night, we trusted that as so often before, now too, oracle wisdom might prove not altogether infallible.

On awakening early next morning we found that our prophet *had* been mistaken. One glance from the window was enough to show a windless ocean and a cloudless sky. We rose at once, but our enthusiasm was soon severely tested. Breakfast would not be ready for half an hour, and of lunch supplies we had none. Did we, then, after the manner of two illustrious mountaineers (see *Journal*, Vol. I., p. 58), set off at once to feed our souls on visions of peak and pinnacle? Alas! gentle reader, more than our souls craved to be satisfied, and, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, our enthusiasm succumbed ingloriously. An hour afterwards two figures might have been seen executing a Devil's March on the grocer's unopened door in search of further provender. We laid in a mighty store of buns and chocolate bars, and at 7.45 started off for Ben Nuis. The only guide book we had taken was No. 43 of the *S.M.C.J.*, containing an excellent article on Arran. We had not had time to consult any other.

The hills of Arran may be divided for convenience into three groups, running in a roughly parallel direction from south to north:—

1. The Western Group. This group lies in the west of the island, separated from the middle group by the wide and bare Glen Iorsa. Of these rounded, heathery hills, the principal are Beinn Bharrain—the barren mountain (2345) in the south; half a mile further north Mullach

Buidhe (2368); and another mile and a half north Bheinn Bhreac—the spotted mountain, with its two cairns (2305) and (2333). Two miles on is the Meall nan Damh—the hill of the bucks (1870), where the ridge terminates. Little climbing is to be had in this group, which bears the same relation to the nobler groups eastwards that in Skye the Red Hills bear to the Black Coolin.

2. The Central Group, the longest and finest of the three ridges. Proceeding again from south to north the various tops are Ben Nuis—the face mountain (2597); Ben Tarsuinn—the transverse mountain (2706); A' Chir—the comb (2335); Cir Mhor—the big comb (2618); Caisteal Abhail—the fortress of the ptarmigan (2817); Suidhe Fhearghas—the seat of Fergus (2156). Here the ridge descends steeply to the sea.

The most important branch ridge is that running south-east from a point between Ben Tarsuinn and A' Chir. Its highest point is Ben A' Chliabhain (2217).

3. The Eastern Group, separated from 2 by Glen Rosa or Rosie in the south—the Red Glen, and in the north by Glen Sannox—the glen with the sandy bay. The watershed between these two glens, known as the Saddle, will be found much more difficult than represented in the majority of guide books. The main tops of this group are Goatfell—the sacred mountain (2866), the name of which is pronounced by the islanders with the emphasis on the first syllable; North Goatfell (2716); and in the north, Cioch na h' Oighe—the maiden's breast (2168).

Three ridges diverge from this group, all running east:

- (1) from Goatfell, culminating in Meall Breac to the south of the White Water glen,
- (2) from North Goatfell, the Am Binnein (2172) ridge to the north of the White Water glen,
- (3) half a mile further north the Mullach Buidhe (2541) ridge, dividing Coire nan Larach on the south from the famous Coire na Ciche on the north.

Our plan of campaign, as made out before breakfast,

was to climb Ben Nuis, and, following the ridge to Cir Mhor, descend to the Saddle; climb North Goatfell and follow the eastern ridge to Cioch na h' Oighe, descending by Glen Sannox and returning thence by the shore to Brodick. On the Sunday we proposed to climb Goatfell and Cir Mhor, and go on to Suidhe Fhearghas by the Castles and the Carline's Leap. Such a plan would enable us to do Cir Mhor twice, for it is undoubtedly the finest hill in the island.

We set off then in high spirits for Ben Nuis, and, passing the Duke of Hamilton's statue and the Druidstone, soon arrived before Brodick Church. Here is presented a choice of routes. The traveller may follow the String Road, so called from its appearance as seen from the sea, and strike right across the moor—a route, however, to be avoided after rain. The second route, which we followed, leads right in front of the church. A little burn is crossed by means of a footbridge, a few houses are passed on the left, an iron gate is opened, and, leaving the last house behind us on the right, we find ourselves in Glen Rosa. The lower part of the glen is sometimes called Glen Shant (the Glen of Enchantment), as opposed to the wild upper part. Generally, however, the name Glen Rosa is bestowed on the whole glen. The magnificent view which gladdened our eyes as we left Brodick is now curtailed. The argent cone of Goatfell, glittering with snow fallen during the night, and the splintered crags of Cir Mhor are now hidden, but the peaceful beauties of this part of the glen form a fitting introduction to the wild magnificence beyond. Turning northwards in the glen, a few minutes' level walking brings us to the Garbh Allt, where we are more than three miles distant from Brodick. We crossed this aptly named burn by a wooden bridge, and a tiresome ascent up a steep, grassy slope on the left bank led us to the shoulder of Ben a' Chliabhain. Here again we had a choice of routes. We could ascend the rarely climbed Ben a' Chliabhain, and, descending into Coire a' Bhradain, reach the top of Ben Nuis by a steep track winding round Coire nan Mean, or try one of the numerous unclimbed gullies

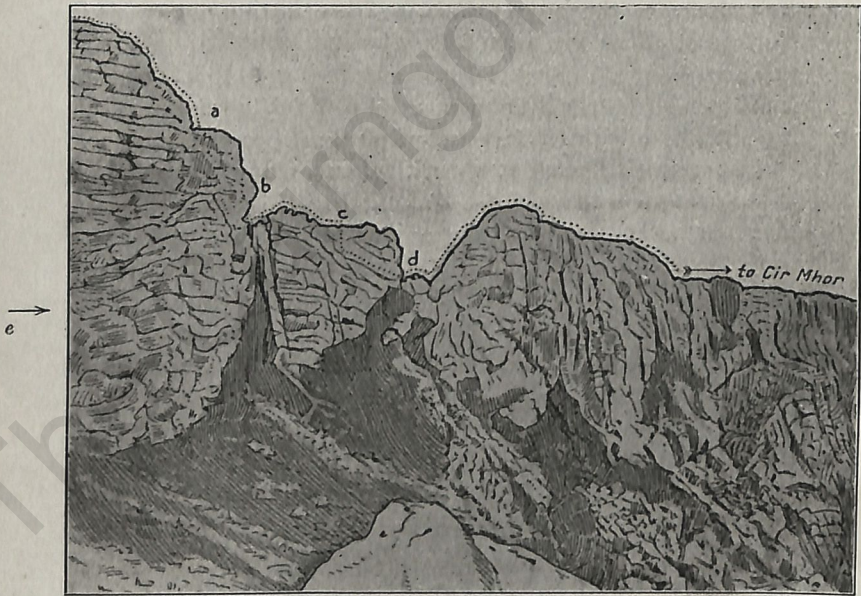
in its face. Having no rope, however, and being bent more on general exploration than on particular climbs, we adopted the second course, and ascended the heathery slope, keeping the precipices to our right.

We recrossed the Garbh Allt, whose waters we took credit for diminishing not inconsiderably; and passing under a rock slightly to the south of the top, which in rain would prove a welcome shelter-stone, we speedily gained the summit. Quite forgotten now was the tedious ascent from Glen Rosa in the magnificent panorama spread around us. To such a scene no word-painting can do justice, but in my memory there will long abide that vision of amazing beauty. To the west were the heather slopes of Ben Bhreac, the blue waters of the sea, with here and there great patches of sunlight, the green fields of Kintyre, the hills of Mull and Jura. Northwards the eye ranged over peak after peak of snow-clad hills uplifting their brilliant summits into heaven, the dazzling ramparts of the Highlands. In the foreground loomed up the noble peak of Goatfell, and the spears and wild pinnacles of Cir Mhor.

But we had a long day's work before us, and, as the view is pretty much the same all along the ridge, we set our faces northwards, and about a mile's easy walking brought us to Ben Tarsuinn. This summit, though higher than Ben Nuis, is not such a favourite, but for rock-climbers the field in the immediate neighbourhood seems a rich one. We spent some time bouldering here, and then descended to the Bealach an Fhir Bhogha—the Bowmen's Pass (2250), so called, perhaps, from having been the scene in primitive times of ambushes laid for deer. These were driven through the Bealach, and were picked off by stationed Nimrods, who thus combined shooting practice with material advantage. The pass connects the Ealta Choire with Glen Iorsa, and its crossing, though rough, is a matter of no difficulty. Shortly after this, the Ben a' Chliabhain ridge strikes off on the right, separating Coire Daingean from Coire a' Bhradain. Then we passed the lowest point (2106) in this part of the ridge, and began a delightful scramble along the rocky crest of A' Chir. The top was

reached without difficulty, and here we halted for a few minutes to lighten our hearts by gazing on the scene and our pockets by abstracting a bun or two. It was now that we resolved on a change of programme. Such a day we might not get to-morrow, and we determined to include in our Saturday's tramp the Castles and Suidhe Fhearghas, leaving the comparatively short walk along the eastern ridge to be our Sabbath day's journey.

This point settled, we moved on without taking the trouble to look at the guide book and find whether any difficulties lay before us. In a few minutes, however, we found that we had come to a place which under certain conditions might prove awkward, not to say dangerous. The accompanying diagram Mr. Douglas has kindly



allowed me to reproduce from his article in the *S.M.C.J.*, Vol. III., page 202.

From the summit of A' Chir we made our way over some rocks, and, making use of the same grass-filled crack

to which Mr. Douglas refers, we descended to the col (*b*) by a narrow, gravelly gully on the Iorsa side, with crumbling holds. An alternative route is given by Mr. Goggs, *S.M.C.J.*, Vol. VIII., page 28.

On reaching (*b*) we found the ridge to be very narrow, and at one point a yawning gulf about a foot in breadth separates the climber from the next point of the ridge. To step across this gulf does not require the athletic gifts of the Carline, and let not a person with "nerves" be disheartened. By lowering himself a little he will find a good foothold, and with the help of a projecting bit of rock on the other side will pull himself up to the desired place of security. This open place we crossed without many qualms of conscience, but a short distance further we unanimously performed the military motion summarised under the term "halt." The ridge descends to (*d*) in a manner which might be negotiable for flies or angels. Not being flies, however, and, our friends assure us, not being angels, and the days of flying carpets and other adventitious mountaineering paraphernalia being over, our course was brought to an abrupt conclusion. No hand-holds were visible, and on the rocks was written very distinctly, "No road this way. Trespassers injured." We failed to notice the route (*c-d*) on the Glen Rosa side, where a rock wall with excellent hand-holds, a diagonal grass ledge, and a little chimney lead to the col (*d*), whence the rest of the ridge is easy.

As it was, we made a hearty lunch and discussed matters. The ridge slopes very steeply on either side, but towards Glen Iorsa there led a gravelly water-course. The first part gave poor holds, then it jumped over a boulder, and its subsequent career was a matter for curiosity. That route, though apparently the only way on the west side, was not very inviting, so we turned to look at the Glen Rosa side. Here we saw a narrow, steep gully, certainly better than anything the Glen Iorsa side promised, and by this gully we resolved to descend if no better route was available. But near the towering mass of A' Chir there lay an easy way for some distance at least. So, after

completing our lunch, we scrambled down to a spot which I have roughly marked (*e*). Here was a big drop, with no very secure landing place, but a narrow ledge ran out to the left, and seemed to offer a way out of the difficulty. I moved a foot or two along it only to find that, like other good things of this world, it came to an end. Anchored here by my jacket tail being twisted somewhat after the manner of John Chinaman's pigtail, and grasped by Moyes, whose fervent exhortations to me not to overstretch myself, gave no very satisfactory assurance of his own hold, or of his power of resisting the laws of gravity, I cleared off a foot or two of moss and succeeded in finding an excellent hand-hold. The remaining biscuit bags were dropped on to a ledge some 15 feet below, whither Moyes lowered himself by means of my right leg, stretching it vigorously in the process, and with a short drop landed safely on the top of the ledge—and the biscuits. It was too narrow and shaky, however, to receive me also, so Moyes passed over a rather awkward corner into the lower part of the gully, and prospected for my descent. I had meanwhile regained a position of greater security, and was directed by him to come down the gully. Back I scrambled to the top, and began cautiously to descend. "Hullo! what noise is that?" Crash! crash! crash! off go some rocks to the left away down to the glen, occasioning some alarm lest the writer should share a fate resembling the accident that befell the individual immortalised by Bret Harte:

"Then Abner Dean of Angel's raised a point of order—when
A chunk of old red sand-stone took him in the abdomen;
And he smiled a kind of sickly smile, and curled up on the floor,
And the subsequent proceedings interested him no more."

In the process of descending I contrived to heap coals of fire on Moyes' head for using my leg as if endeavouring to stretch an elastic cord. That is, I bestowed bounteous showers of stones and gravel upon his firmly wedged body, stationed below to check any undue precipitation on my part. In holding on to the icy rocks, his fingers experienced something of that feeling which afterwards

produces a delightfully glowing sensation, but at the time (when the temperature is 6° below freezing point) is not conducive to thoughts of admiration at the prudence and cautious deliberation exhibited by a companion.

The mystery of a piton which was noticed at the top of the gully was explained by reading the *S.M.C.J.*, Vol. II., page 80. Its appearance is due to a party of climbers who, on January 30th, 1892, descending by this route, drove it into the rocks. It may be mentioned at this point that there is only one record of the crest of A' Chir ridge being kept to all the way. The party hitched the rope and descended to (*d*), but found themselves unable, on returning to the col, to retrace their airy flight further.

We left our buns where they lay, to feed the hungry or interest the curious climber. *Experientia*, says the proverb, does it; and never, never again, shall the writer carry buns to the hill tops. Scones, though crushed, preserve some semblance of size and solidity; buns tend to illustrate the Lucretian theory of atoms, and struggle their owner never so hard to convey them to their assigned destination, he finds that they exhibit a lively and extraordinary preference for any other resting place.

We regained the ridge immediately, and a gentle slope led us to the summit of Cir Mhor. What can one say of that glorious hill? "Were I to discourse," writes Mr. Whymper, in speaking of the Meije, "upon these things without the aid of pictures, or endeavour to convey in words a sense of the loveliness of curves, of the beauty of colour, of the harmonies of sound, I should try to accomplish that which is impossible". And so neither can the majesty of the precipices or the grandeur of the view seen from this hill in Arran be translated into language. To rock-climbers the face offers attractions irresistible, and several climbs have been done, but the precipice is far from being exhausted. A delightful scramble again is provided by the Rosa Pinnacle, some little distance to the south, and surmounted by a small cairn; its west side still remains unscalded. Cir Mhor, however, appeals to an even wider circle, and the purpose of this paper is to bring it and

its neighbours under the notice of the Cairngorm Club. Bring forth the big hob-nailers, and hurry south, and you will not be disappointed.

Reluctantly we quitted the scene, and proceeded towards the Castles. On the slope leading to them we came upon an excellent spring, and searched our pockets diligently for food. Our search was rewarded, and for a few minutes we sat eating crumbs, and threads, and granite, and admiring the grim ridges of A' Chir, cast into deeper gloom by the snow on Ben Tarsuinn. After some difficulty with an ice-coated ledge, we climbed the highest Castle, and passed on to the Carline's Leap, keeping on the skyline along a succession of delightful pinnacles, none of which presents difficulty. The views gained occasionally through unexpected chinks in the rocks were very fine, but they were all surpassed by the weirdness of the view seen from the startlingly narrow ridge between the two great granite walls that form the Leum na Caillich.

The westerly wall of this extraordinary cleft, about 200 feet in height, slopes comparatively gently, but the easterly one is of a more formidable nature, and towers above the col with an indescribably fine appearance. Coming down the westerly side, a slip by Moyes in a part where there were few hand-holds led to the discovery that the nails on his boots had become a fast vanishing quantity. Such a discovery, along with the look of the steep grassy upper portion, which seemed frosty and therefore slippery, led to a sermon, preached by the reluctant writer to a reluctant audience, from the text of "He who climbs and runs away, lives to climb another day." Very sorrowfully we went back to the top of the west wall, and then came a moment of hesitation. Was the climb as dangerous as it looked? Did we really need a rope? But the sight of clouds of mist rolling along the other side of the glen and pouring up from the corries round Cir Mhor weighed down the scales in favour of prudence. We effected what is called a masterly retreat, composing divers Limericks in abuse of the Carline and in defiance of all rules of rhyme and geography. We vowed, too, that we would return and conquer in the

near future. For the present, we hastened over some enormous boulders into North Glen Sannox, regained the ridge, and, amid a sharp shower of hail, arrived at Suidhe Fhearghas. Hither, once upon a time, came the good King Fergus to survey his possessions, and on the top acted as better known mountaineers are said to act—he sat down to dine.

By this time the sun was close on the horizon and the mists were creeping nearer and lower; so we went down the steep, heathery north side of the hill at a pace that was surprising. After a wash in the Sannox Burn, and a long look up that wild glen, guarded by its silent sentinels—Suidhe Fhearghas and the misty peak of Cioch na h' Oighe, we passed the little churchyard with its boulder recalling the pathetic tragedy of 1889, and emerged on the Corrie road.

A suggestion on the part of the writer to attempt the giant boulders on the way to Brodick was not received enthusiastically. What thoughts, I wondered, filled Moyes' mind as he absent-mindedly replied: "We'll do them to-morrow. It's too late to-night"? Was he thinking of the mystery of the hills, or delighting in this beautiful road, in the sound and smell of the sea, the colouring of the trees, the music of the . . .? Ah! a solemn voice breaks in upon my musings, and my curiosity is about to be satisfied. "I say, . . . I *do* hope they'll have supper ready. I'm hungry enough to eat anything". And the ensuing vows, though alarming enough in all conscience, yet fell mighty short of the performance when, at 8:45, we arrived at Brodick; and an attempt to get the bootmaker to insert nails in Moyes' boots proving fruitless, we sat down to supper. Over such scenes, however, the modest historian hastens to draw a veil.

Sunday dawned rainy and cold, and we tramped up Glen Rosa in a steady shower of rain, intending to climb Goatfell by the Dearg Choirein, a corrie on the N.W. face of the mountain. On going up the glen, however, we came upon a burn smaller than the Allt an Dearg

Choirein, hurrying over enormous slabs to join the Rosa. Though unmarked on the 6-inch map it can hardly be mistaken, for close to its source, on the right bank, is a pile of rocks very noticeable to one going up Glen Rosa, and lying slightly N.W. of the summit. An ascent of the hill at this point promised to be interesting, and we started off, keeping the burn to our left. The route more than fulfilled expectations. Though it cannot be ranked as a climb, hands are required for a distance which is certainly over 1,500 feet. The angle throughout is severe, and parts are sensational enough, owing to the paucity and poorness of the holds, the effect being heightened if you look down on the burn to the left. Here and there the holds consist solely of heather bunches growing in the face of the rock, and here and there trust has to be put on distinctly untrustworthy rocks. We made the ascent as difficult as possible, and found it very enjoyable. I can confidently recommend it to parties unprovided with a rope who enjoy a stiffish scramble. With a rope the slabs on the right bank should be tackled, and would probably give good sport.

After some piles of rocks are surmounted, the angle eases off, and a leisurely walk brought us to the Cyclopean wall that forms the west side of the summit. We climbed it by a well-marked gully, easy but interesting. Its left wall runs out for a considerable distance, and on the right the regular lines on the great rocks are suggestive of masonry. In the gully itself, which we found to be a tight fit, are three jammed blocks, the highest being more loose than the others. Shortly after surmounting it we traversed to the left, scrambled over some rocks, and stood on the highest point of Goatfell.

There we remained for some time enjoying the sunshine and listening to the exultant note of a cuckoo in the Brodick Woods, proclaiming that, to him at least, life was worth living. The view is glorious. "The jagged and spiry peaks of the surrounding mountains", says Professor Ramsay, "the dark hollows and deep shady corries into which the rays of the sun scarce ever penetrate, the open swelling hills beyond,

the winding shores of Loch Fyne, and the broad Firth of Clyde, studded with its peaceful and fertile islands, the rugged mountains of Argyllshire, and the gentle curves of the hills of the Western Isles, their outlines softened in the distance, form a scene of the most surpassing grandeur and loveliness". Add to this that deeper colouring that comes after rain, the free play of sun and wind among the hills, the sight of little ships tacking on the sea, and a thousand other glories, and we appreciate the Paisley weaver's criticism, "Man, Jock, are the works o' God no jist deevelish?" We could trace the tourist path to Goatfell, and the White Water Glen through which you pass if climbing from Corrie, and the contrast between this view towards the east and that embracing the serrated peaks westward was very striking.

We scrambled down to the small spring just to the left of the scree slope on the east, and scrambled back again to see heavy clouds massing to the east and moving steadily towards us. Snow began to fall, and mist slowly but surely crept round us. A prolonged stay under such conditions was not desirable, especially as the wind began to moan among the rocks; and compass and guide book being consulted we moved on to North Goatfell. An easy track lies along the ridge, but it is far pleasanter to stick to the skyline and scramble over the intervening piles of rocks. We found compensation for the loss of the view in climbing everything that we encountered, sometimes, indeed, going out of our way to do so. Though we saw only for about 20 feet round us, and could not see the bottom of the gullies and rock walls on our left, the snow falling on the black crags, all but invisible in the dense mist, produced a very fine effect.

After climbing North Goatfell, we struck off in a N.E. direction in order to get to Cioch na h' Oighe, and followed a ridge, which however we soon discovered led us due east. We tried again to strike the ridge leading to Cioch na h' Oighe, but the compass brought us to a precipitous descent, and the fast increasing darkness, neither of us having a

watch, induced us to give up the search. We found our way down the steep Coire Larach, and after doing some mild rock-climbing there, reached the road four miles from Brodick.

Thus, the great boulders like the Leum na Caillich and the Cioch na h' Oighe we failed to do; but for the most part we had carried out our plans, and we had stored up many pleasant memories of glen and ridge and pinnacle, of the mingled perfumes of sea and wood, of peaks, now bathed in sunshine, now wrapt in the gloom of mists. When, after rushing to the pier on Monday morning, we stepped panting on board, at 6.45, and the Duchess cast off half a minute afterwards, our minds were tinged by various emotions—pleasure in our stay, regret at our departure, and a firm determination to revisit soon the glorious peaks of Arran.