

LOCHNAGAR IN APRIL AND MAY.

IN APRIL—BY SETON P. GORDON, F.Z.S.

IN late summer, when the winter's snows have disappeared from its vast precipices, Lochnagar is certainly "dark," but this could not have truthfully been said of it when we made the ascent in April.

Before the sun was well up the writer, accompanied by a friend, left the cottage where we had been staying overnight, resolved upon reaching Loch Dubh, a small circular loch at an altitude of about 3,000 feet, nestling in a western corrie of Lochnagar.

At first, walking was comparatively easy, our way for some distance leading through a large pine forest, where incidentally we discovered several old nests of grey crows, which are very numerous in this locality.

At about 2,000 feet we reached the snow, at first in small patches only, but gradually increasing until huge snowfields had to be traversed, on which the sun was shining with blinding brilliance.

Several burns were crossed, not without some risk, as the snow had formed in immense wreaths over their courses, and for long distances the only evidence of the proximity of water was the sound of it rushing far under our feet.

Luckily for us, the snow was as yet very hard beneath the surface, but even as it was, great care had to be exercised when crossing these "snow-bridges."

About half-way to our destination, we noticed a small flock of common gulls flying across from the hill. These gulls nest regularly on the shores of a small loch just beneath Loch Dubh, called Lochan-an-Eoin, but on reaching this loch the cause of their departure was quickly discovered, for it was completely frozen over, and the shores were as yet hardly suited for nesting purposes, being covered with deep snow drifts! The gulls were evidently an advance guard sent up to report to the main colony as to the condition of

their summer quarters, and were returning with the news that nesting there was out of the question.

At last Loch Dubh was reached, after five hours steady walking, and some idea of the difficulties of the journey may be gathered when it is stated that the distance from our starting point was only about six miles. The southern side of the loch is bounded by a lofty precipice, down which every now and again an avalanche came rushing, and the loch itself lay still beneath a thick sheet of ice, which was strong enough to bear us. Several ptarmigan were put up, and while we were at the loch they kept up their hoarse croaking all around. We also noticed several wheat-ears flitting about amongst the snow, which seemed rather remarkable, as they are summer visitors, arriving in the spring when all frost and snow have as a rule disappeared. A golden eagle too came soaring round with outstretched wings and settled on one of the rocks of the precipice, evidently on the look-out for ptarmigan.

During the climb, the giant hills to the west had been constantly hidden by snow showers, but while we were at the loch, the clouds suddenly lifted all round, and a splendid view of the Cairngorms was obtained. Ben Muich Dhui stood out completely shrouded in white, as also Braeriach, conspicuous by its immense precipices. To the north lay Ben Avon, famous for the huge granite tors on its summit, and Beinn a' Bhuid with its extensive corries, where snow usually lingers all through the summer. To the east the view extended down to the North Sea, about 50 miles distant, but so much heather was being burned in this direction as to render the sky quite hazy and somewhat restrict the view.

The return journey was uneventful, save that two grouse and a ptarmigan were flushed together, which is believed to be rather an unusual occurrence, and several herds of deer were also seen, which watched us suspiciously from a distance.

IN MAY—BY HARRY JOHNSTON.

The first of May of this year dawned, dull, misty and rainy, once more foreshadowing a day of rain for the Aberdeen Spring Holiday.

Some two dozen members of the Club, bound for Lochnagar, left Aberdeen by the 8.5. a.m. train to Ballater, thence driving to Allt-naguibhsaich Lodge, which was reached as 11.30. An immediate start was made for the hill, the first halt being at the Fox Cairn Well. On restarting, the party crossed the first field of snow, and unfortunately it now



Photo by W. Watt.

became evident that so far as obtaining a good view was concerned the excursion was doomed to failure, for the mist became denser and denser, until it was a matter of difficulty to discern anything clearly at the distance of more than a few yards. "The Ladder" was completely covered with snow, so a bee-line was made for the plateau above, the party ascending in single file, [the "step-maker" being the club member with most inches in the accompanying photograph—Ed., C. C. J.] The final climb to the top was absolutely

featureless, being a blind stumble in the mist over the snow, with an occasional glimpse of a huge snow cornice overhanging the deep precipitous corrie.

The Cac Carn Mor reached, the usual meeting of the Club



MR. ALEX. CAMERON.

took place, and a candidate who had been admitted on Braeriach last July was duly initiated, according to the ancient rites and ceremonial of mountaineers. It was intimated that Mr. Alexander Cameron, His Majesty's stalker at Allt-na-guibhsaich Lodge for the past 27 years, was to retire on a well-earned pension at Whitsunday, and it was unanimously agreed that the Club and a few hill-climbing friends should present him with a gold Albert as a slight acknowledgment of his unflinching courtesy to all moun-

taineers who passed through his gate on the way to Lochnagar. The presentation (it may be here mentioned)

was duly made on 29th May, the subscriptions permitting of a gold brooch being also handed to Mr. Cameron for his niece and housekeeper, Miss Mary Kennedy.

The descent was then begun, and was accomplished without any untoward event, except that on "the Ladder" one member, losing his balance, made a brilliant glissade down the snow head first, stopping so naturally at the foot that some who saw only the finish were of opinion that it was a premeditated performance, and were inclined to congratulate him on his pluck and daring.

Alltnaguibhsaich Lodge reached, a rapid drive brought the party to Ballater, where they dined comfortably and well at the Invercauld Arms Hotel under the presidency of the Chairman, Mr. M'Gregor. The return railway journey was commenced at 7.30, and the day's outing, most enjoyable notwithstanding the mist, was brought to a close.