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SKYE WITH CYCLE AND CAMERA.

BY ALEX. SIMPSON.

ON more than one occasion we had viewed from the mainland "the misty Isle," and had experienced a little of the fascination of the distant Coolins, which are seen so prominently from many points of the Ross-shire coast. When touring in Wester Ross in 1904, we had looked with longing eyes across the strip of water that separated us from the crofters' isle, but time would not then permit. Last year, a perusal of Mr. McCulloch's recently published and most excellent book decided us. We must go to Skye.

Our holiday was essentially a cycling one, and on that account an apology is almost necessary for venturing these notes in the pages of a mountaineering journal. While, however, obtaining a general idea of the island by means of its roads, we contrived to snatch two afternoons on the hills, —one on the rocks of the Quirang and another on the lower ridges of Sgurr-nan-Gillean.

Starting from Inverness one Saturday morning in early September, we (an ideal party of two) took the well-known road skirting the Canal and Loch Ness to Drumnadrochit. We could, of course, have gone by rail from Dingwall, but we desired to explore *en route* Glen Moriston, Glen Clunie and Glen Shiel. The morning was a beautiful one, the sun shining brilliantly in almost a cloudless sky, and we wheeled along in high spirits in the hope of reaching Shiel Inn the same evening. Bagging a photograph or two at Drum-

nadrochit, we pushed on to Invermoriston in time for lunch. The river was very full, rain having evidently fallen heavily up the glen, and we had a magnificent view of the falls. Just below the bridge that spans the river a huge rock rears itself up from the middle of the stream, and the volume of water encountering this obstruction divides and plunges over the fall in two sections, sending the spray flying into the air. Below the fall the descent is still steep, and the stream rushes along between its wooded banks in miniature rapids until, subsiding on the lower level, it falls placidly into the waters of Loch Ness.

Pursuing our way up Glen Moriston, we found the aspect of the day had changed. The sun had been blotted out, and ominous masses of moisture-laden clouds were being driven above us before a strong westerly wind. Five minutes after leaving the hotel we were in the midst of a heavy shower, and from that moment our enjoyment for the day was over. The next five hours saw us in almost continuous rain, plodding doggedly up the glen with little thought of the surrounding scenery, sometimes cycling, more often walking, pushing and squelching through the mud, until we reached Cluanie Inn, about 7 p.m., sodden, weary and exhausted.

Much has been said and written in execration of the rainfall of the West Coast, and we should have been glad if our experience had enabled us to refrain from adding our own anathemas in this respect, but honesty will not permit of it. When we record that during the first five days of our holiday we were never really dry, it will be readily seen that the weather lived up to its reputation. The situation of Cluanie Inn is almost depressing in its solitary grandeur. The hills, both north and south, rise abruptly from the glen, and one feels shut in from the busy world beyond.

In the morning the weather showed no signs of improvement, and we mooned about for an hour or two, admiring the mist effects on the surrounding peaks. Now the sharp ridge of Ciste Dhubh and the steep slopes of Garhh Leac, again the corries and ridges of Maim Cheann Dearg on the south would disappear from view, while ever and anon the whole glen became enveloped in a drenching shower, to be followed

a few minutes later by brilliant sunshine. About mid-day we started, and were almost washed down Glen Shiel. Notwithstanding the rain, however, we paused again and again to admire the savage wildness of this glen, which, in our opinion, is one of the finest in Scotland. The river, dashing down in its steep and rocky descent towards the loch, and the adjacent hills, among them being Sgurr a' Bealaich Dheirg and lower down Sgurr Fhuaran on the one side, and very prominently the sharp conical peak of The Saddle on the other, all present a scene that will dwell in our memory. Lower down the glen the rain ceased, and ere we reached Shiel Inn the landscape was smiling in the rays of the sun. Cheered by this improvement, after lunch we breasted the slopes of Mam Ratachan, pausing often times to look back at the "Five Sisters of Kintail," standing like sentinels at the head of the loch.

While descending into Glenelg we again encountered our inveterate enemy, whose unwelcome attentions rapidly increased, until, on crossing the ferry, and planting our feet for the first time on the "misty Isle," the heavens opened, drenching us within two minutes. Thus did Skye greet us, and we were accordingly obliged to house up for the night at the Inn at Kyle Rhea.

Next morning a watery haze hung over the scene, and shortly after starting we received a heavy shower, but with this exception the day turned out remarkably good. Our road led up the shoulder of Sgurr-na-Coinnich to an altitude of 900 feet, then came a glorious run down Glen Arroch to Lusa, where we joined the road from Kyleakin to Broadford. The village of Broadford is a rambling one, fringing the bay of the same name, and the views seaward are delightful. One looks north on the Inner Sound dotted with islands—Scalpay, the Crowlins, and numerous smaller ones—while from several points the flat topped Dun Caan, on Raasay Island, may be seen. To the North-west one gets a peep up the Straits of Raasay, in the direction of Portree, with a distant view of the mighty cliffs which run along the north part of the island. Towards the east we could distinguish Loch Carron with Loch Kishorn opening into the

mainland, and the coast line north towards Loch Torridon, all backed by a jumbled mass of peaks comprising the Applecross and Torridon hills.

The road from Broadford to Sligachan, 15 miles, is not often traversed, and from our experience of it we are not surprised if the tourist prefers to take steamer to Portree.

It is a rough and toilsome journey, but we vote it worth the effort. Leaving Broadford, the road winds round the foot of the Red Hills, rising 300 feet above sea level, then plunges into the hollow in which lies lonely Loch Ainort. The view at the head of the loch is wild in the extreme, including as it does the bald stony summits of Glamaig and Beinn Dearg, with Marsco and the shattered peaks of Blaven (Blath Bheinn). The stillness is unbroken save for the murmur of the numerous rivulets which dash impetuously down the steep corries towards the loch. Doubling round the end of the loch, the road again rises, and shortly we reach the shore of Loch Sligachan, along which the run of three miles to the Inn is made interesting and delightful by the gradually unfolding views of Glen Sligachan and the northernmost peaks of the Coolins—Sgurr Bhasteir and Sgurr-nan-Gillean. Nine short miles over a good moorland road down Glen Varragill brought us to Portree, the chief town of Skye.

“Hope springs eternal,” and in us for the moment the hope was strong, fostered by the improved condition of the day, that Dame Nature would continue to smile during our stay. This, in spite of the well-known axiom that two consecutive fine days in Skye are little short of a miracle. When we awoke next morning, we realised by the patter of rain drops on the window panes that the weather clerk had decided to be disagreeably orthodox.

Portree is beautifully situated at the head of the bay which receives the waters of several rivers. The entrance to the harbour is very narrow, and is flanked on both sides by lofty cliffs—Ben Tianavaig on the south and the Bealach Camhang on the north, while farther south the peaks of the Coolins add their more rugged charm to the scene. On the morning of which we write, however, the hills were shrouded



THE BHASTEIR TOOTH.



Photos by

THE QUIRANG.

Arthur Simpson.

in mist, and the town looked wet, disagreeable, and dirty. Portree is an admirable centre from which excursions may be made, north to the peninsula of Trotternish, north-west and west to Vaternish and Duirnish, or south to Minginish, all of which districts present special features well worthy of a visit. Our route for the day led us to the northern peninsula of Trotternish, to view the cliffs and needles of the Quirang. Over the moorland from Portree our road winds, now rising, now dipping to Loch Snizort Beag (in the vicinity of which Flora Macdonald lived, and, at a later time, Johnson and Boswell slept) past the little village of Snizort with its church and school, ever with vague blurred views of hill, loch, headland or island, until we reach Uig, 15 miles from Portree, in a perfect deluge of rain. The bay round which the village lies is surrounded by steep grassy slopes, terminating in the bold cliffs of Ru Idrigil and Ru Chorachan. The King touched here while cruising round the Western Isles about two years ago, and the villagers are very proud of the fact.

From Uig the road doubles up the steep slope to the tableland above, following the course of the River Rha, 6 miles bringing us in sight of the Quirang. The rain had ceased, but a fierce gale had sprung up which made locomotion somewhat difficult. A rough path led us along the foot of the main precipice, down which numerous rivulets dashed and leaped, until we stood amid a bewildering scene of cliffs and pinnacles. Great masses of rock lay detached from the main cliff, torn and fissured into the most fantastic shapes, chief among them being the famous Needle Rock, rising 120 feet. Diverging to the right we clambered on all fours up the Prison Rock, and spent some time near the summit. After a heavy shower, during which we took shelter in the lee of an overhanging rock, the sky cleared, the sun shone out, and we had a good although not a distant view. Soon, however, the scene again changed, the mist rolled over and upward, and we retraced our steps to the main road, returning to Uig and its comfortable hotel.

Our plans for the following day included a run to historic Dunvegan and picturesque Loch Bracadale, but

as we sat steaming before a huge fire, listening to the pitiless rain, and realising that the weather appeared determined to exhibit its most forbidding aspect, we practically made up our minds to give it up and return to Portree. The fates, however, proved kinder than we anticipated, and we were able to carry out our plan. Our run was very enjoyable, although affording nothing of a particularly striking character, unless we mention our daily drenching as we neared Dunvegan. We visited the Castle, the seat of the Macleods—said to be the most ancient inhabited house in Scotland. It stands on a promontory on the shore of Loch Dunvegan, and, although considerably modernised, viewed from the shore of, the loch it still preserves much of its grim appearance. History teems with tales of the tragic scenes which were enacted within its walls in the old fierce days, during the never-ending feuds between the Macleods and the Macdonalds. After an hour's rambling through the grounds, we mounted our steeds, and passing again through Dunvegan village, took the road leading south round the shores of Loch Bracadale. This loch, like most of the sea lochs of Skye, is guarded at its entrance by bold cliffs—on the north by Idrigill Point and Macleod's Maidens, on the south by the dark headland of Talisker. The coast line of the loch is broken up into several smaller lochs—Varkasaig, Caroy, Beag and Harport—while numerous islets dot the surface of the water, and the traveller, as peninsula after peninsula is crossed, is charmed with the wonderfully diversified views which are afforded. The evening was a beautiful one, the rain had cleared off, the sun was sinking to rest, and the whole moorland lay bathed in a soft golden light. Even the frowning bluff of Talisker lost much of its grimness in the mellow light of the departing day. The air was soft and warm, laden with the perfume of bog-myrtle and moorland grasses. After tea at Struan Inn, where we lodged for the night, we ascended a bit of rising ground and lingered, watching the moon rise over the summits of the Coolins, casting its long silvery light on the waters of the loch. It was a night to be remembered.

Next morning we were up betimes, glad to see the sun riding clear in the heavens, giving promise of a good day.

And we were not disappointed. Doubling round the head of Loch Beag the road rises, and for a few miles runs parallel to Loch Harport, when it descends again to the head of the loch at Drynoch. On the opposite shore towards the right the famous Talisker Distillery is seen. Before descending the hill to Drynoch, a very comprehensive view of the Coolin range is obtained, and we had no difficulty in recognising Sgurr-nan-Gillean, Sgurr-a-Bhastier, Bruach-na-Frithe, Sgurr Madaidh, Sgurr Thuilm, Sgurr-na-Banachdich and Sgurr-nan-Gobhar, the long ridge of the last hiding the more southern summits.

Pushing on to Sligachan Inn, where we left our "bikes," we started over the moor, which was rendered very marshy owing to the recent rains, crossed the Allt Dearg Beag, and made for the ridge to the west of the first pinnacle of Sgurr-nan-Gillean. We knew the "Pinnacle Route" was inaccessible to us, and decided to make for the saddle between Sgurr-nan-Gillean and Sgurr Bhasteir. Descending a little into the corrie, we found the slopes to be most tedious scrambling, and we bore to the left towards the main ridge. Time would not allow us seriously to attempt to reach the summit, although one or two gullies, up which we did a little scrambling, looked feasible. On reaching the saddle a glorious view burst upon us. At our feet Lota Corrie lay like a vast cup surrounded by almost perpendicular cliffs, farther off was the larger Harta Corrie, with the low ridge of Drumhain, still beyond the hollow in which lies lonely Coruisk could be traced, with a glimpse of the waters of Loch Scavaig in the distance, while the whole semicircular range of the Coolins, jagged and serrated, stretched before us. To the east towered Blaven with its twin peaks, looking solitary and grand on the other side of Glen Sligachan. Above us reared the mighty ridge of Sgurr-nan-Gillean, from this point the summit appearing unattainable. Turning to the north, the Corrie Bhasteir sloped abruptly from our feet, Sligachan and its loch, and in the distance the hills beyond Portree, with the Old Man of Storr, were plainly visible in the clear light. Truly it was a wonderful panorama. But the afternoon was slipping away, and we had to make a hurried descent, reaching the Inn at 6 p.m., and Portree at 7.

Next day we bade adieu to Skye, but as we steamed down the Sound of Sleat, and watched the Coolins receding in the distance, we determined to return at some future time to experience something more of the rugged beauties of this unique range.

“THE CROFTIE BY THE SPEY.”

Lettoch, August, 1905.

I.

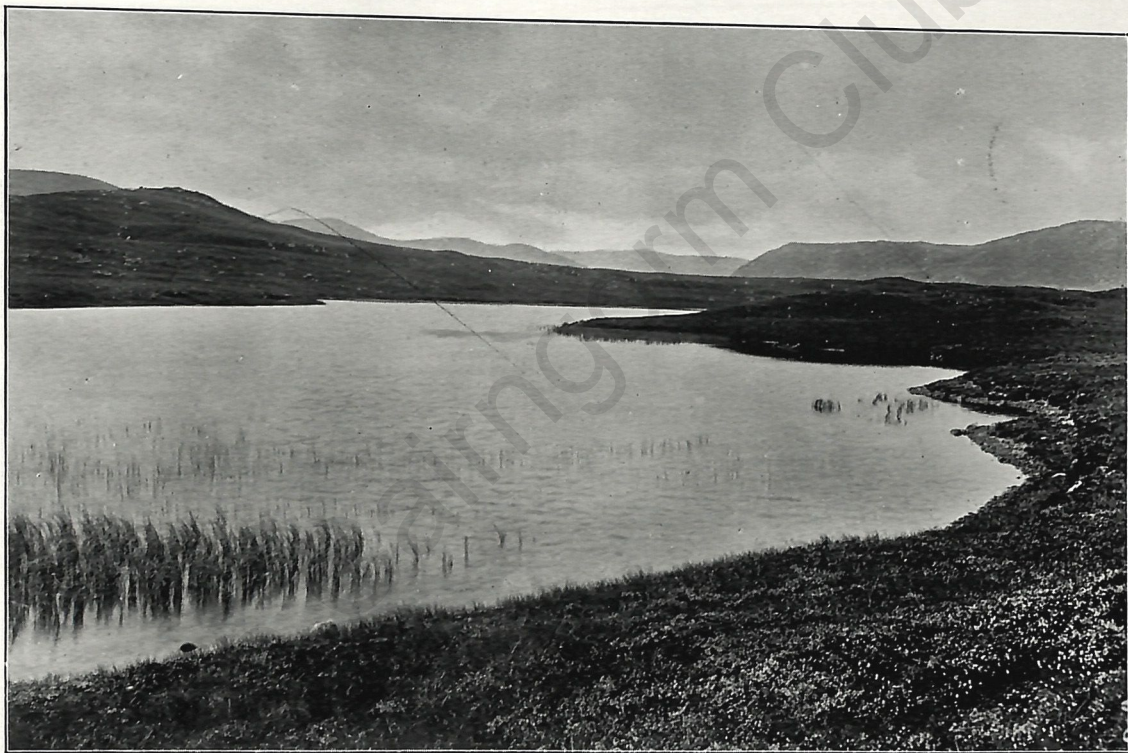
It's hid amid the silver pines
 That cled the mountain glen,
 But weel it's kent tae a' the herds
 And hillside men.
 When wark is ower, an' nicht slips doon,
 They'll meet at close o' day
 Wi' aye a Highland welcome in
 The Croftie by the Spey.

II.

It's red the rowans cluster ower
 The shady burn side,
 And green the fir boughs waver whaur
 The thatch-roofs hide ;
 But aye it's bonniest at the dawn
 When morning mists are grey,
 And blue the peat-reek curtains ower
 The Croftie by the Spey.

III.

And whiles I dream at even'-fa'
 O yonder Highland hame,
 Nae wish for wealth e'er fills my breast,
 Nae thocht for fame.
 But, weary o' the world's din,
 My thochts will aft-times stray
 To kindly Highland faces in
 The Croftie by the Spey.



LOCH SPEY, from Porter's "*Views of Speyside.*"