

BEINN HEASGARNICH AND OTHERS.

BY JOHN RITCHIE.

IT is surprising to note how comparatively accessible most of the higher mountains in Perthshire have become, owing to the spread of railways and other means of travel. Ben Lawers, Ben More and Am Binnein, Ben Laoigh, Beinn a' Ghlo, Schichallion, Ben Vorlich and Ben Ledi readily occur to one as examples. Railway, coach, or steamer will soon carry us to the foot of any of them. There is a certain pleasure, therefore, in being able to reach some more inaccessible Ben, from whose sides no puff of smoke from the passing train is ever seen, and no shriek of railway whistle is ever heard.

It is a common subject of remark that the opportunities for romantic travel in the world are daily growing less and less. In the course of years, few unexplored spaces will be left to men. Railwaymaking and bridgebuilding will leave to the world a very different Africa from that which Speke and Grant and Livingstone knew. The future traveller in quest of adventure will with difficulty seek out the unknown parts of the once dark continent, and if he does light on a part less travelled over, there also will be gathered the most savage tribes yet remaining, whose senseless fury against the inoffensive wanderer will be apt to make his life a burden—of the carrying of which they would fain relieve him if they could. May we compare great things with small and suggest the working out of an analogy between Africa and our country? In the latter, the gillies and the sporting tenants will of course take the place of the savage tribes and their chiefs. With this hint for the subject of a paper by some future contributor to the Journal we leave the matter.

Some of our mountains, however, are not "gillie-fenced," and whether they are or not, let us spread the map on the table and seek out some remote and lofty Ben for an ex-

cursion. Here is the group of mountains that "guards Loch Lyon round," and here is Beinn Heasgarnich (3530) standing on the south side of the Loch and well off the beaten track. Long had the tireless W. B. wished to ascend this mountain, (had not the Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal referred to it as little known, and invited information for its "Guide Book"?) so we planned a visit to the hill for a day in June, 1905. Several courses are open for the approach, but we chose Glen Lochay, which is probably the best. The visitor to Loch Tay who sails up to Killin and the head of the Loch has two glens branching off before him, Glen Lochay to the right and Glen Dochart to the left. From Killin it is a walk of about ten miles up Glen Lochay to the foot of our mountain. Setting out from Perth about five o'clock one afternoon in June, 1905, and travelling by the Crieff and Lochearnhead railway, we reached Killin about 7.30, and half an hour more saw us on our way up the glen to Lubchurran, a shepherd's cottage where we had secured quarters for the night.

Glen Lochay resembles many more Highland glens, in that it is well wooded in its lower reaches, and more wild and bare as we ascend to its head. We visit the beautiful falls of Lochay about two miles up from the entrance to the glen at Bridge of Lochay, and pass a most romantic part where the river runs through the woods on our left in a series of loud-sounding rapids. The peaks of the forest of Mamlorn which close in the head of the glen soon come in view, rising boldly into the western sky. Let us for a moment discard our pedestrian pen and set down the eloquent words of Dr. Macmillan about the view, as seen, not in the gloaming, but at high noon. "In the far distance the glen is shut up by the great ghostly peaks of the Forest of Mamlorn, streaked with snow, appearing and disappearing through a dim haze, at the foot of which are miles of treeless pastoral lands, sun-steeped in the drowsy noon, whose monotony oppresses the soul, and whose profound silence becomes almost audible. The sigh of the wind and the murmur of the

river produce a peculiarly sad effect in the universal loneliness, like the cry of the curlew and the wail of the plover. You seem here to lose consciousness of the human world altogether, while your own existence becomes more intense amid the immeasurable solitudes." Be that as it may, there is no peculiarly sad effect produced in my companion and myself as we step westwards into the growing darkness. We feel supremely happy as we leave the farms behind us and look forward with cheerful confidence to "a fine day on the riggins the morn." Long shall we remember the delight of the walk up Glen Lochay in the gloaming of that perfect day.

At last darkness has fallen and we must be drawing near our destination. A light gleams across the moorland on the left, and we bend our steps in that direction. A narrow wooden bridge swinging high over the Lochay, and seeming strangely insecure in the darkness, gives us a crossing to the other bank of the river, and in a short time we have reached our comfortable quarters.

The next day broke bright and clear, and we were early on foot. "Where is Beinn Heasgarnich, shepherd?" "That's him, sir, just in front of us across the glen." "What! that is surely far too close at hand for our Ben." "That's 'Easgarnich sure enough, and that high peak further to the left is Creag Mhor, and that's Ben Chalum there with the sun shining on it." How lovely the green-grey giants looked, sleeping in the morning sunshine! We bade good-bye to our kind host and hostess, crossed the Lochay and made tracks for the top of our hill. We climbed upwards in a long slant towards the west, and after a time we reached the corrie from which a burn known as Allt Badour runs down to meet the Lochay. The summit of the mountain lies just to the west of this hollow. The clearness and freshness of the early morning had passed away to some extent—though it was still early—and everything seemed to promise a very hot day.

Our walk to this point had been wholly over grass, and indeed most of the mountains in this district are grass-

covered to their summits.¹ Beinn Heasgarnich, though it affords a pleasant and easy climb, is not a specially attractive mountain to look at. Its top consists of a long ridge running north and south. The highest part of the mountain is at the north end of this ridge. An easy walk over a number of grassy slopes running parallel to that of the summit soon brought us to the highest point, where we lay down and basked in the pleasant sunshine for a couple of hours. The view was remarkably good, and we were able to identify most of the mountains that rose on all sides as far as the eye could reach. A number of the Cairngorm summits were visible, including Beinn a' Bhuid, Ben Muich Dhui and Braeriach.

The nearer view was fine. There below us to the north lay the little Loch Lyon. Its shores are not specially interesting, as the lack of wood and its comparatively regular shape do not tend to make it a very remarkable feature in the landscape. "A pleasing sheet of water two miles long and quarter of a mile wide," says Murray's Handbook. A pleasing sheet of water is a suitable and not unduly enthusiastic phrase. From the loch the River Lyon takes its course eastward down the glen that bears its name, and we can trace the long white ribbon of the glen road till it is lost to sight near Meggernie. The feature of the near view, however, is the noble group of mountains to the north of us. Close at hand, and rising from the northern shore of the loch are Ben Vannoch (3125) and Ben Chuirn (2795), and behind these—forming a splendid arc—are Beinn Creachan, Beinn Achallader, Beinn an Dothaidh and Beinn Doireann. From this point the conical summit of Ben Creachan was especially

¹The writer is unfortunately not a botanist, but he is indebted to Mr. R. H. Meldrum, the Schoolhouse, Tibbermore, who knows Beinn Heasgarnich, for the following note: "To a botanist Beinn Heasgarnich is interesting as being the scene of the re-discovery of *Carex ustulata* in Britain. This rare Alpine sedge was recorded [1810] from Ben Lawers by George Don, but as no other botanist could find it in that neighbourhood doubts of Don's veracity began to be freely expressed. About 20 years ago, [1885], however, the plant was found on Beinn Heasgarnich by Mr. Brebner, Dundee, and somewhat later on [1892], Ben Lawers itself by Mr. Paul, Edinburgh, thereby completely establishing Don's good faith."

noble in its appearance, and we vowed that we must reach that mountain "next time."

We now retraced our steps and walked southward along the ridge. It was only about eleven o'clock, and we looked around for another summit to climb. Creag Mhor (3505) stood out boldly to the south-west, separated from the point on which we stood by a deep and narrow valley. In shape this mountain is a great contrast to Beinn Heasgarnich. The latter, as has been indicated, is rather massive than handsome, while Creag Mhor, on the other hand, towers aloft—a real "craig"—with conical rounded head. We at once set out for this fine summit, and after a steep descent of about 1,600 feet we reached the dip between the mountains in about half an hour and sat down for lunch by the side of the Allt Fionn a' Ghlinne, which runs north towards Loch Lyon. The day had now become oppressively hot, and the steep climb to the top of Creag Mhor seemed the hardest part of the day's work. The view from the top is very similar to that from Beinn Heasgarnich, but Am Binnein or Stobinian, one of the noblest of Perthshire mountains, now made its appearance, opening out behind Ben More. These two mountains are distant only about eight miles from the summit on which we stand. The twin peaks rising sharply into the air are one of the finest features of the view from the Loch Lyon group. A glimpse of Loch Awe was also had, while Ben Cruachan with its two summits almost rivalled Ben More and Am Binnein in grandeur.

Leaving the top about half past one o'clock we had a descent of 1,600 feet to the Allt Learg Macbheathie, and then followed another climb over the ridge running northward and separating us from Beinn a Chaisteil. As we crossed this slope the writer began to feel that he had had enough of this great Mamlorn switchback for the day, but W. B. held on heartlessly. On reaching the foot of Beinn a Chaisteil (2897) we turned southward, crossed the county march between Perthshire and Argyleshire, then rounding the base of the mountain on our right, we entered Glen Choillean, which runs west to the West Highland Railway at the famous "horse shoe," between Tyndrum and Bridge

of Orchy. It is a fine glen with Beinn Odhar (2948) on the left, Beinn a Chaisteil on the right, and, noblest of all, Beinn Doireann's steep sides in front. The railway was reached at last, and then a walk of about four miles brought us to Tyndrum at 5 o'clock. By 7.30 we reached Perth, and our long and happy day on the "riggins" had come to an end.

Another year passes, and with the return of summer comes the wish to go back to some of the Loch Lyon hills. A walk over Beinn Achallader and Beinn Creachan is decided on, and our company is made up for the excursion. W. B. cannot join us, for he is "living in the Midlands that are sodden and unkind" (though at all times one knows that "the great hills of the North Country come back into his mind"). F., however, is willing to join in a tramp that promises sunshine and the pleasant light of day in contrast to a former midnight wander over Beinn a Ghlo, and B. and M., two other intimate friends, make up the party. Quarters for a night were secured near Loch Lyon, and our plan was to travel to Bridge of Orchy by train, climb Beinn Achallader (3399) then walk along the ridge to the north-east over Meall Buidhe to Beinn Creachan (3540) and descend to our lodging for the night. Next day was to be spent on Beinn Doireann (Ben Douran), from which we were to return to Tyndrum for the night, and so get back to Perth on the following day. The best laid schemes——

We set out early one morning in June, 1906, and travelled to Tyndrum. There the silly competition of rival railway companies left us, as usual, to kick our heels for several hours before we got a train to Bridge of Orchy. Beinn Doireann had a cap of mist, and generally the chance of a settled day seemed far from certain. However, in the early afternoon we reached Bridge of Orchy, and set off in good spirits to walk the four miles or so that lay between us and the foot of Beinn Achallader. We took the railway track as being the most direct road. A drizzling rain set in very soon after we left the station, and it continued to fall in a steady, unintermittent way, which made the prospect of a walk over the hills to Loch Lyon a somewhat cheerless one. A dreary mist lay along the slopes of Beinn na

Dothaidh and the other mountains on our right. Mist shrouded the peaks of the Black Mount away to the left, while over Loch Tulla and the moor of Rannoch in front of us brooded the blank solitude of rain.

Beinn Achallader rises close to the railway, and the top can be approached by a northern or a southern ridge. In the weather conditions then prevailing it was difficult to say which was the better line to take, but at last we resolved to climb up the northern slope and bear back in a southerly direction to reach the summit. A subsequent examination of the hill in good weather seems to show that this is a mistake, and that the better course is to climb by the southern slope, leaving the railway soon after crossing the Achallader burn. We passed this fine stream, which came tearing down a deep and rocky gorge on our right, and passed the ruins of Achallader Castle on our left, where the massacre of Glencoe is said to have been planned.

We turned aside to a surfaceman's cottage to ask where we could find "the main road over to Glen Lyon." "Oh, dear me!" said the woman who came to the door. "There's no ony main road to Glen Lyon. You're never thinking o' gaen' ower the hill in a day like this." Thus spoke the "mistress", and other members of the family crowded into the doorway to gaze on the "chiels" that were so hard up for something to do as to be set on crossing the hill on "siccan a day."

At last it seemed to me we had had enough of the exhilarating exercise of walking over railway sleepers, and I called to my friends that it was time to take to the hill, setting out myself across the heather to strike the northern ridge. I thought the others would follow at once, but they kept along the railway for about half a mile further in the hope that they would find a better starting place. As I climbed up, the heather soon gave way to the grass that covers so much of this range. On reaching a point on the ridge under the line of mist I waited for my companions. F. made his way to the place where I stood, but the others who were lower down the hillside to the north of us evidently hesitated as to the best course to take for the further ascent.

The day had now become so bad that F. and I discussed the question of whether we should not abandon the idea of crossing to Glen Lyon and return to Bridge of Orchy, and we waited till our companions should come up to give us their opinion. We saw them set out, and in a few minutes they disappeared behind some rising ground. We thought they were taking what they considered the easiest course to reach us and we waited for a considerable time, but they never came in sight. The mist began to roll lower and lower down the mountain, enveloping the spot where we stood, the rain kept driving along the hillside, and to our deep vexation we found ourselves completely separated from our companions. We made our way in the direction in which we had last seen them,—shouting and hallooing in the hope that we might attract their attention. We climbed a little higher up the mountain and then descended, walking along the side of the great corrie on the north side of Beinn Achallader and shouting as we went, but all was of no avail. They were not to be seen walking up the corrie as we had half hoped, and at last we had to come to the conclusion that, whatever course they had taken, it was useless trying to find them on that hillside. We stood debating what our friends were likely to have done—to have gone on or turned back. At last we concluded they had followed the latter course, and we were confirmed in this opinion by the fact that they had neither map nor compass, and that they were quite unacquainted with the district. At the point where we stood we were, so far as we could judge, about 700 or 800 feet from the top of the mountain, and the mist, when it lifted a little at intervals, showed a grand rocky slope in front of us. At last, with reluctance, we began to descend, scanning the railway below us—when once we were clear of the mist—for any sign of the “strays,” but they were not to be seen. We got down to the railway about five o’clock, and anxiously inquired of a surfaceman whom we met if he had seen two men with bags on their backs walking towards Bridge of Orchy. Yes, he had seen them. Our spirits rose, but a few further questions brought out the fact that they were two tramps who had passed more than an hour ago.

As we walked back and could see or hear nothing of B. and M., we had to come to the conclusion that they had gone over the hill after all, but it was too late for us to follow them now, and we resolved to make our way to Inveroran Inn at the west end of Loch Tulla and spend the night there. A man whom we met on the line advised us to save a couple of miles' walk, by crossing the Orchy on some stepping-stones to which he directed us. He assured us we would cross dryshod. Let future wanderers shun that man; the truth is not in him. We were wet enough already but we were wetter still when we reached the other side of that river. However, we had only a few miles to walk to Inveroran, and we tramped along at a good pace. We kept wondering what had become of our friends and how they were faring, but we were encouraged in the hope that they would reach their destination without mishap, as a great improvement had taken place in the weather, the rain had stopped, and for a time the summit of Ben Achallader stood out quite clear, glowing in the light of the evening sun. It was not the least tantalising experience of that tantalising day. We soon passed through the fine fir wood that makes the south side of Loch Tulla so beautiful, and arrived at our inn a little before eight o'clock.

Next day broke bright and clear, and we made an early start for Bridge of Orchy, intending to keep to this part of our original programme and climb Beinn Doireann and possibly Beinn an Dothaidh. We crossed the railway at Bridge of Orchy station, and struck up to the left towards the top of Beinn an Dothaidh. An uneventful and comparatively easy walk of about an hour and a quarter brought us to the top of the ridge that overlooks Bridge of Orchy, and we sat down to gaze upon the glorious prospect of the Black Mount summits spread before us to the west. Clachlet and Stob Ghabhar were most prominent, but away behind Inveroran and Loch Dochard rose a fascinating peak, which reference to the map showed to be Stob Coiran Albannaich (3425). Thither, if fortune favours and gillies are not too numerous, we must travel on some future day. To the north are seen the remains of the old Caledonian forest north of Beinn Creachan; beyond lies the

gloomy solitude of the Moor of Rannoch with Loch Laidon and numberless smaller lochs shining brightly in the sun. In the south-west Glen Orchy, with its streak of river running between grassy banks, led the eye towards Dalmally and Loch Awe.

Poor F. gazed in rapture on the glorious prospect spread before him, and unslung from his back a heavy camera which he had carried for many a mile in the hope that some such mountain panorama as this would present itself. The stand was fixed up and a few plates were found, but unfortunately while at Tyndrum, before setting out, we had, in the kindness of our hearts, distributed amongst us F.'s photographic apparatus with a view to lighten his burden, and among other things the lost men had the "changing bag." F. was not to be daunted, however, and at his request I bound his hands and arms fast in his emptied rucksack, while he wrestled in the interior in the effort to change his plates. I gazed with admiration while he struggled, resembling for all the world Mr. Stuart Cumberland endeavouring to unloose himself in the course of his famous entertainment. The task proved too difficult, however, and the heroic F. had to give it up.

An easy stroll from the ridge on which we sat brought us to the top of Beinn an Dothaidh about 12.30, and after an equally easy descent we crossed the col between this mountain and Beinn Doireann (3523), and struck up towards the summit of the latter, which we reached about 3.30. (We took things very leisurely, so these times are no guide.) Beinn Doireann is a delightful mountain. Duncan Ban MacIntyre, the famous Gaelic poet, who was born in this district, has sung of it in strains that may seem a little exaggerated as we read them in Professor's Blackie's rendering—

Honour o'er all Bens
On Ben Douran be,
Of all the hills the sun kens
Beautifullest he.
For Ben Douran lifts his head
In the air,
That no Ben was ever seen
With his grassy mantle spread
And rich swell of leafy green
May compare.

But, whether exaggerated or not, Beinn Doireann is well worthy of a "day" from members of the club. Seldom have I walked over more springy ground than the turf and moss we crossed as we drew near the conical point to which the summit of the Ben rises, and the view was superb. We were at one in declaring we could not remember a more delightful day on the hills. The weather was very different from that of the day on Beinn Heasgarnich a year before. There was no sultriness in the air to-day. It was bright, invigorating, "washed" clear after the preceding day's rain.

The view from Beinn Doireann has been sufficiently described by Mr. Barclay in Vol. IV. of the C. C. J., p. 233, so it is unnecessary to dwell on it here. It may be noted, however, that from one point we saw very well the south end of Loch Ericht, lying darkly in its cut among the hills; Loch Lyon, dark blue in its colour to-day, lay to the west of us; old friends like Beinn Heasgarnich and Creag Mhor reared their lofty heads into the air. The finest part of the nearer view, however, consisted of the arc of mountains stretching northwards from us—Beinn an Dothaidh, which we had just left, Beinn Achallader and Beinn Creachan.

Many glances did we cast from the high ground on which we had been spending our day, up Glen Chonoghlais, for by this route were our lost friends likely to make their way from Loch Lyon towards our rendezvous at Tyndrum. They were not to be seen, and visions of their possibly having been benighted and spending the night on the hills rose before our minds and gave us some anxiety.

We descended the very steep south side of Beinn Doireann, over stony screes and down long and deep grassy hollows till, at 5.30, we reached the foot at the point where the road from Bridge of Orchy to Tyndrum crosses the Chonoghlais. We then set out down the road to Tyndrum, and as we drew near our destination we were delighted to meet B. walking up the road to meet us. From him we learned that he and his companion had come to the conclusion that we were taking an unnecessarily difficult course over Beinn Achallader, and, thinking that we should under-

stand their intention, they struck up the corrie, crossed the col to the north of the mountain, and after much tiresome wandering descended on Loch Lyon. They had reached their destination about 7.30, and were surprised to find we were not there before them. At last they had to give up hope of our arriving that night, and concluded we had gone back. On the following day they contented themselves with the walk down Glen Chonoghlais to Tyndrum. It is very desirable that some travellers should record how often the burn has to be crossed in this glen—our friends thought somewhere between thirty and a hundred times.

Thus ended another "varied and interesting" excursion among these mountains. Let us hope that more are in store for us—with no such unfortunate accident as attended this one. Here's to you, Ben Creachan! Here's to you, Stob Coir an Albannaich! On this rainy gusty November night we look towards you.