

CAMPING ON THE CAIRNGORMS.

BY WILLIAM C. WELSH.

FOR many years our Cairngorm rambles have had the Shelter Stone as headquarters, the excursions generally lasting for a fortnight. Last year we changed the programme somewhat—following the Dee to its source, instead of going up Glen Derry as had been our custom.

We were three, Alexander Reid, Hugh D. Welsh, and the writer. The first had his knapsack crammed with provisions, changes of socks, etc., small tubes for insects and spiders, and photographic plates. He carried also a blanket and a water-proof sheet, and a camera and stand. Hugh's load consisted of six dozen plates and a changing bag and camera, and some tent pegs. The writer carried the tent, the cooking utensils, and material for fire and light.

In due time on Saturday, 29th June, we reached the Linn of Dee, rain meantime falling in torrents. Crossing the bridge we turned to the left, and this confirmed the suspicions of a party we passed earlier in the afternoon, which were that we were members of the forces then skirmishing in Perthshire, and were spying out the land by descending on the scene of operations through Glen Tilt. By and by the rain ceased and we arrived at White Bridge.

One of the chief delights of such a holiday as ours is the study of animal life, of plant life, and of geology. A short distance from White Bridge is the Chest of Dee, overhanging one of the deep pools of which is a birch tree, with the nest of a hooded crow. There was one youngster in the nest, and it did not seem at all scared at our visit. It was too dark to obtain a photograph of the nest and its tenant, so we determined to return next day. A mile further on we camped by the side of a small stream, a spot the writer had camped on five years previously. The evening turned out fine, so when all was in readiness for bed we started to explore,

and, following up the course of the burn, collected enough dry and bleached heather to build a large fire.

SUNDAY.

The sun shone brilliantly on Sunday morning. After breakfast we retraced our steps to the Chest of Dee. We had difficulty in placing the cameras, but after some manœuvring they were tied to the branches about three or four feet from the nest. Thereafter we went to White Bridge and took a photograph of it.

It was pretty late in the day before we struck camp, and as soon as we started, down came the rain in torrents. Several times we came upon the remains of nests, with the empty egg shells in the heather.

As we were opposite the entrance of the valley leading to the Derry, we descried two figures on the sky-line just entering Glen Dee. They seemed to be doubtful as to what their next step should be, but as soon as they saw that we were making towards them they came down to meet us. Each had a slight limp which was caused by each having sprained an ankle some weeks previously.

Glen Geusachan by this time was filled with mist, while the Larig was belching forth black storm-clouds. The two wanderers resolved to come along with us for a few miles, so as to be able to say they had been in the Larig. All this time the rain came down, and well for us was it that we were supplied with ample waterproof covering. When we had passed the Devil's Point, our two new allies said "good-bye," and turned to go back to the Linn of Dee, where they had left their cycles. Our intention had been to reach the watershed in the Pass and there camp for the night, but so heavy had the storm become that we stopped where we were, and pitched the tent in a hollow by the river-side.

All through the night sleet came down and mist filled the valley, but how comfortable we were under the blankets! Our legs had been protected by strong leggings, so we were comparatively dry.

After some hot coffee, etc., we lit the candles and settled down to read Tyndal's "Glaciers of the Alps," and several

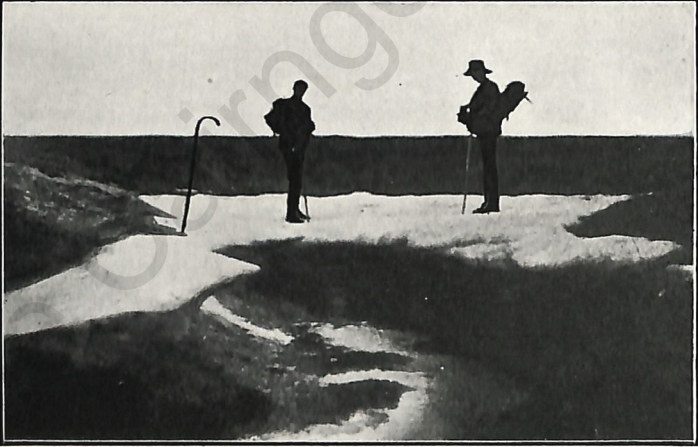
magazines, feeling very comfortable indeed. All night long the noise of the elements was deafening; the nature of the ground, however, prevented the spot we were camped on becoming water-logged.

MONDAY.

Morning came; suddenly we were awakened by a shout, a cry of surprise and relief. Anyone coming down the Pass would not be able to see our tent till he came up to it, hence the intonation of surprise in the shout. In a trice the writer was outside, to find two young men shivering with cold, for the hour was somewhere about four or five o'clock. Their waterproofs were soaked through, but overcoats underneath had kept their clothes moderately dry. Their faces were blue and pinched, and they looked what they indeed were—cold. They asked if we could supply them with spirits, as they were about to drop with cold and exhaustion. But we never carried any! However, in a short time we had the lamp burning and water boiling, while they gave an account of themselves. They had left Aviemore on Sunday evening about seven o'clock, with the intention of going through the Larig to Inverey, but they had no idea what was before them. When they arrived at the watershed the mist fell and they found themselves in darkness.

They got as far as the uppermost of the Pools of Dee, when down came sleet in blinding showers. Further progress was barred, so they lay down and spent the night as best they could. At the first glimmer of light they got up and continued their course, and when they were feeling at their worst our tent came in view. They spent some hours with us, and after being warmed up amongst the blankets they were able to proceed to their destination.

Shortly afterwards we caught sight of the Corour Bothy watcher, accompanied by another watcher on the back of a hill pony, coming over the shoulder of Carn a' Mhaim. We waited till they reached the Bothy, and then plunged across the river to renew our acquaintance. After obtaining photographs of the Bothy and the watchers, we said good-bye, and started for camp.



ON BRAERIACH, 3RD JULY, 1907.

(1) Our Tent. (2) At the Wells of Dee.

Rain began to fall again, and when we had arrived at the foot of the zigzag path leading up Braeriach we decided to pitch our tent. This was indeed a short day's work, but we intended climbing Braeriach next day, so a rest would do no harm. During the day snow fell; Braeriach, Cairn Toul, and Ben Muich Dhui were covered with freshly fallen snow. The precipices were magnificent—the black of the crags showing deep and sombre in contrast with the white of the snow in the crevices and gullies.

TUESDAY.

Tuesday turned out a fine day, so we commenced to climb Braeriach. The path was obliterated by huge snow-wreaths, which were too steep to ascend, so we had to strike up on a very steep edge. To leave us as little encumbered as possible we left some food and photographic plates where we had encamped in the Larig. On the way up we came across a fox chasing a pair of ptarmigan. No doubt the birds were leading the fox on a false scent away from their brood, which was hid among the boulders.

After a stiff climb we reached the top, and were rewarded with a magnificent view. Away to the south amid the multitudinous ranges of hills a storm was rising. Now and then the mist came swirling up from the corries like clouds of condensed steam from the funnel of a locomotive engine, while the roar of the wind among the precipices, combined with a peculiar swishing noise as it struck against the huge walls of ice and snow on the crags, fell on our ears continuously.

It was early in the day, but we pitched the tent a few yards from the cairn. The tent pegs would not hold in the gravelly ground, so we had to pile stones to keep down the pegs, and at the same time prevent the wind from getting under the flap and lifting the tent up in the air to be blown over into the corrie.

Sleet now began to fall, so we got under canvas and proceeded to cook some food. Just as we were preparing for sleep the wind rose, and soon we were in the midst of a roaring storm. Sleet fell, and the wind lashed the little tent till

we feared it would break its fastenings, but all through the night it stood the strain. Indeed this was one of the most comfortable nights we had ever spent among the hills.

WEDNESDAY.

Wednesday morning came, and still sleet fell, while at the same time the mist remained. When the mist had lifted, we struck camp and made for the Eunach Cairn, and on the way we photographed one of the Wells of Dee, and though it was covered by a snowfield we were able to see the water bubbling up through the gravel.

In a short time we struck down Coire Dhonndail into one of the most wild and picturesque glens in the country. Glen Eunach, especially near the loch, is rich in Alpine Flora, and for variety of plants is marvellous.

Without mishap other than a twisted ankle to the writer, we arrived at the lower Bothy in time to have a chat with Cameron the watcher. The floods of the past winter had swept away several of the bridges over the burns, and we had perforce to cross them bare-footed.

At Coylum Bridge we halted and had a square meal, for we had not tasted food since we had had breakfast on the summit of Braeriach. Later we visited the Dell of Rothiemurchus, and camped not far from the farm-house. We were pleased to locate Moonwort Ferns here. We had previously found them in Glens Dee, Lui, and Derry.

THURSDAY.

Next day we visited Aviemore and Loch an Eilein, but again rain spoilt the excursion.

FRIDAY.

After another night at the Dell, we struck camp and made for the Larig, carrying with us a supply of provisions for our "At Home," which was to take place next day at the Shelter Stone. The trek through the Larig was without incident, and in due time we arrived at the Pools of Dee. Last winter and spring must have been pretty severe in this neighbourhood, for the scree slopes were covered with fresh debris and the channels were pretty deep, giving a good idea

of the force of the storms. We had intended spending the night in our old Camp, at the foot of the Braeriach path, but having reached the Pools sooner than we expected, we decided to strike up Ben Muich Dhui and so land at the Stone.

The plateau reached, we found ourselves in a sleet storm coming from the right with blinding force; in a short time our capes were frozen hard on to our shoulders. A short trot brought us to the Feith Buidhe and the snowfields, and soon, wet through, we arrived at the Dairymaid's Field. We found at the Stone several messages from friends who had missed us, and we discovered also a supply of boiled ham, which had been kindly left for our "At Home."

The ground on which we were encamped was exceedingly wet, but the waterproof sheet protected us. After a warm drink and a meal we settled ourselves for sleep. All night the rain came down in torrents, and as the gale curled over the tops of the precipices, it dashed the rain against the canvas, and threatened every instant to lift the tent from the ground.

SATURDAY.

In the early hours of morning, we all became restless with a premonition of something wrong. We could hardly make ourselves heard amidst the noise of the elements and the tumbling of the water over the crags, but we could feel that not all was right, for trickling underneath our blankets were little streams of water, which increased in volume to such an extent that we had to get up and make a rush for the more solid, though cold, comfort of the Shelter Stone. We left the tent standing where we had pitched it, taking with us only the blankets and sheet. The ground was covered with water, and as we had camped on a slope, the water was swilling down it. All the holes and channels about the place were filled with water. At 2 a.m. we were under the Stone, but so draughty was it that we could hardly keep the candle alight. However, after some trouble we got everything arranged to our satisfaction, and in a short time we were enjoying the hottest coffee we could brew.

The weather still continued bad, and we gave up all hopes of seeing any of our guests. The forenoon passed, and early in the afternoon a shout came floating through the storm—our first, and as it turned out to be our only guests had arrived. They were Burnett of the Aberdeen Central Higher Grade School; Rennie of Robert Gordon's College, Aberdeen; and Hartley of the Observatory, Trinity College, Cambridge. Under the circumstances they were rather doubtful as to enjoying a tramp in such weather, but where there is a will there is a way, and so they found themselves at the Stone. In a short time we got the fire going, for we had brought wood from Rothiemurchus, and water was soon ready. The Menu which had been decided on was as follows—

Menu.

Owing to the peculiarities in taste of each guest, and owing to the lack of transport service on the Cairngorms, it is expedient and desired that guests bring their own wines.

The following are recommended :

VINS.

SHERRY.

Gonzalez, Byass & Co.

Royal Pale.

CHAMPAGNE.

Heidsieck & Co.

Dry Monopole '98.

PORT.

Warre's Finest Old.

WATER.

Fresh from the snow always

to be got.

HORS D'OEUVRE.

Farine à l'eau

POTAGE.

Lemco.

POISSONS.

Darne de Saumon—Melangé.

ENTREES.

Farine au Lemco.

RELEVÉ.

Pain étendu du beurre sur.

ROTI.

Gateaux des avoines au fromage grillé.

Poudings farineuse.

LEGUMES.

Persil en branches.

ENTREMETS.

Farine à l'eau encore une fois.

Gateaux des avoines.

DESSERT.

Café au lait.

Thé à la S. S. Cocotier.

MUSIC.

During the Banquet the Wind will play Selections among the precipices, while the solitary Bee will play a Bugle Solo. Trains in Aviemore, if heard, will accompany now and again on their Whistles.

Such was the effusion we had sent to our guests. We did not stick to the Menu, for we had left a few odds and ends in the Larig.

While we were standing up toasting each other, we were astonished to see a bumble bee sailing up towards us, humming as it came. We had not bargained for this, even though we had put it down as part of the programme, and with incomprehensible unanimity we doffed our bonnets to the visitor, and gave it a welcome. It did not stay long, however, but flew off as though knowing that it had accomplished its mission.

In about an hour our guests were on their way to the Derry. There was little use in staying where we were when the weather was so bad, so we struck camp and followed them an hour later. The journey to Inverey was uneventful, and we put up for the night at Thistle Cottage. The next day (Sunday) promised well. The writer went off by himself to climb Ben Muich Dhui *en route* for the Larig, where some food and photographic plates had been left. There was nothing to impede progress, so the summit was soon reached. He crossed several snowfields, some of them very large and exceedingly soft, and occasionally he sank up to the knees. The surface of the snow was covered with dead flies. Several broods of ptarmigan scattered on his approach, and twice he could have captured the mother birds.

The cairn was one huge icicle, but the view was unobstructed. In a short time the Larig was reached, and a sleep indulged in, which was, however, disturbed by rain. No living creatures seemed to be about but deer, hundreds of which were feeding in the glens. Next day saw us in Aberdeen and home, ready for another mountain holiday, but desirous of better weather.