

A HIGH LEVEL TRAMP.

BY WM. BARCLAY AND A. E. MCKENZIE.

ONCE again the writers had arranged to spend a mountaineering holiday together, but in 1907 instead of climbing from a fixed base as had been our wont we decided to spend the time at our disposal in a high level tramp. By this means we were able to visit districts not very accessible to the average individual, and ascend mountains rather far removed from any of the so-called climbing centres. In addition, there is a greater charm, and one feels freer and more able to enter into the proper holiday spirit, in thus moving about from place to place, in all sorts of weathers, and with one's all on one's back.

Thus we started from Dalwhinnie and picked our way eastwards by Loch Ericht and Ben Alder, Beinn Eibhinn and Geal Charn, and over the Corrour tops of Sgor Gaibhre and Carn Dearg to the "wide and wasted" Moor of Rannoch, on by Loch Treig and the Binneins to the deep and narrow Glen Nevis, across the great hog-backed Aonachs to Glen Spean and Fort William, and then by Ben Nevis and Carn Mor Darg to Creag Meaghaidh, which we ascended on the way home.

June of 1907 will long be remembered as one of the coldest and wettest "Months of Roses" on record, and of that the last ten or twelve days produced their own share of abnormalities, for on the mountains day after day we were subjected to the vilest of vile weather—rain and hail, snow and sleet and cold—a wicked combination, seasonable enough for April, but very much out of place in the middle of summer.

Many a time when travelling between Perth and Inverness have we enjoyed the peep down Loch Ericht to "Lone Ben Alder," and as many times have we resolved within ourselves to set foot on that noble yet inaccessible mountain.

Yet once did we attempt a midnight assault on him ; breaking our journey at Dalwhinnie, we left that station in the "sma' hours," tramped along to the lodge and up to Loch Pattack ; but as the morning was so disappointing and our time was limited, we were forced to return. On this occasion it was in the cool of a beautiful evening in June that we left Dalwhinnie and turned our faces westwards.

Next day (Sunday) was spent on that great mountain just to the north-west of Ben Alder, separated from it by the Bealach Dubh and the glen of the Uisge Labhrach, and carrying the summits of Beinn Eibhinn, Aonach Beag and Geal Charn. We approached them from the west end of Loch Ericht, taking advantage of the path by the Alder Burn, as far as the Bealach between Ben Alder and Beinn

BEINN
EIBHINN,
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AND
GEAL CHARN.

Chumhann ; then we dropped down to the river and ascended the slopes of Beinn Eibhinn opposite. As this was our first ascent of the year we naturally took it easy and "enjoyed the view." However we ultimately struck the crest, and followed the edge of a north-facing corrie round to the cairn (3611), situated at the west end of a short ridge. The outlook to the west was immense, many noble heads appearing, but overtopping all was the exceedingly sharp cone of Binnan Mor, while to the north we had an uninterrupted view of Creag Meaghaidh with its great accumulations of snow. Up till now the weather had been excellent, but we could see that a change was approaching, for to the west peak after peak was suddenly disappearing, and "something" was coming our way. Well, we turned eastwards down the ridge to the dip, then up the short ascent to Aonach Beag (3646). This is a much flatter top than Beinn Eibhinn, and not such a well formed mountain, in fact it might very well be classed as a shoulder of the great hulk of Geal Charn. The highest point is marked with a stick and a few stones. The storm was now upon us, and a sharp shower of snow drove us along the great tableland to Geal Charn (3688). There was no shelter here, not even a cairn (only a few stones), so we simply crossed its grassy

surface and descended towards the Bealach Dubh. Some very extensive snow fields were passed, but as the wind was now bringing stinging showers of sleet with it, bitterly cold, we had no time for dallying, but made with all speed for shelter. This was not secured till we had descended about 1000 feet, when a large boulder presented itself. Here we had some lunch, and by then the worst of the storm had passed, so we dropped down to the path and dawdled away the rest of the day by the burnside.

The morrow broke wild and stormy, black and creeping mist and pouring rain keeping us indoors till well on in the afternoon. It was about 3 o'clock when the rain

BEN ALDER. stopped and the clouds began to lighten, so we started for Ben Alder. Our approach was by way of the stalker's house at Alder Bay and the burn coming down behind it, and so on to the south corner of the vast tableland comprising the summit. On the steepest part of the slope we were exposed to the full sweep of a fierce blizzard, which plastered us over and nearly blinded us, but when about half-way along to the cairn the snow ceased, and the mist cleared off. We struck the summit plateau at the southern end of the Garrachorries, just beside a small cairn, and then followed the heavily corniced edge right round to the summit cairn. A nice half hour was whiled away here, though the wind was very keen. The outlook was good, the horizon being clear all round. Of all mountains visible, Schiehallion impressed us the most, rising a veritable Matterhorn from beyond Loch Rannoch. Another rather lasting snowstorm forced us to leave the shelter of the Engineers' hut, so we raced along the summit level and down by Prince Charlie's Cave to the lochside and home.

The rain never ceased the whole night through, and when we peered out, about 6 a.m., it was a wild looking morning, just a repetition of the previous day.

LOCH ERICHT However, to Glen Nevis we must go, so
TO we breakfasted in silence. There was
GLEN NEVIS. little improvement when we left at 7.30
and made tracks for our first landmark—

Sgor Gaibhre. This little known peak lies pretty well back from Loch Ericht, and on the present occasion was separated by a good four miles of bog. Everything above 2000 feet was in mist, but by working our way westwards along the right bank of the Allt Tom a' Chogaidh, we knew that we should land just under the eastern slope of our mountain.

Long before we reached that spot there were indications of a change in the weather, and the morning began to improve, though very slowly; first the rain stopped, then the mists began to roll up, and there was revealed to us the sharp conical outline of the Sgor scarcely a mile away. Ben Alder also began to show his flanks, streaked with long silver threads, but to the north the outlook was still black. Here we made the acquaintance of a little brown lizard, which demonstrated to us the facility with which these reptiles can part with their members when in danger, in so much that, seeing he had fallen into the hands of monsters, he promptly dropped his tail and ran, leaving us with that appendage in our hand. It was now a short, though steep, pull up to the summit (3128) of Sgor Gaibhre, which was reached at 9.30, or two hours from Loch Erichtside. Leaving the very small cairn, we started down the long broad saddle towards Carn Dearg. There is a fall of 760 feet here, but we found it nothing more than a nice easy walk over short grass, and affording a fine view of Corroul Lodge, standing at the east end of Loch Ossian.

In 50 minutes' time we were on the top of Carn Dearg (3084), a triple cairned peak commanding a most impressive outlook to the west—from the wide Moor of Rannoch under our feet, with its hundred and one little lochans and bog pools, shimmering in the sun, to the vast amphitheatre of peaks circling round in one grand sweep from Beinn Creachan and Achallader, and the Black Mount tops, on by the Buchaille and Glencoe giants to the Binnans and the Aonachs. Aye, that slit between Binnan Mor and Aonach Beg still seems a long way off, but the day is young yet—and so are we.

On the morrow we were doubtful what to do, but as it was

a nice morning we made up our minds for a walk to the top of Carn Mor Dearg, in hopes of securing a few photos of the precipices of Ben Nevis. Following our footsteps of yesterday round Meall an t-Suie, and up by the Allt a' Mhuilinn to the base of the Carn Deargs, we diagonaled up the slope, and enjoyed to the full the awful impressiveness of the mighty cliffs of "The Ben" opposite. The mist was just playing about their crest, and we secured a characteristic photograph. Then we passed on to the summit (4012), crossing over a minor top first. There was a slight mist here, so we sat down and had lunch, hoping by the time we had finished all would be clear. But this was not to be, for a heavy shower of hail came on, and, although we sheltered for the best part of an hour and a half, there was no abatement, nor any signs of one; so we left the top in disgust, and descended to the valley of the Allt a' Mhuilinn. There was little to be seen of the precipices now, for the mist was round them, still there was no snow here, and it was warmer.

We caught the six o'clock train next morning for Tulloch, then walked along the Laggan road for nearly four miles. It was another very promising morning, though a bit squally, but of course it was early yet, and as the day wore on, things *might* improve. We left the road just where Allt-na-h-Uamha comes down in a fine spout, and struck over the moorland for the south-running spur of Creag Meaghaidh that comes down between two burns. Following this ridge upwards, we once again had to bow under the chastening hand of the weather. This time it was sleet—cold, biting sleet from the north-west. We sheltered for some time behind a dyke, but as the wind was veering round and finding us out, we thought it more profitable to move, so proceeded to grope our way along the very extensive flat of Meaghaidh towards the cairn. Passing a long line of heaped up cornices above the source of the Moy burn, we soon reached the large summit cairn (3700)—the last top on our High Level Tramp.