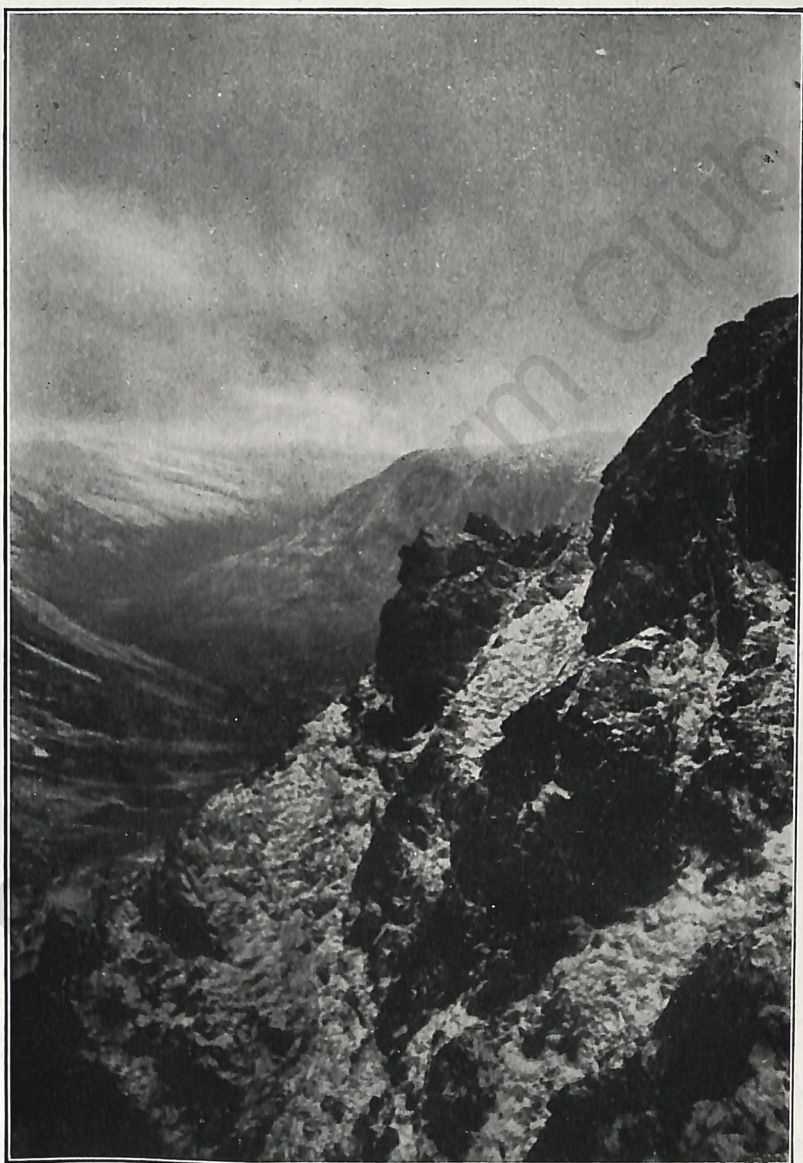


## CLIMBS IN GLEN CLOVA AND GLEN DOLL.

BY HOWARD G. DRUMMOND.

To discover a district teeming with virgin climbs within a short distance of one's native city is a blessing undreamt of by the mountaineer of to-day, when almost every rock face of comparatively easy access has been at least tested by his brethren of the mountain and the crag. Many on high level tramps from Braemar to Clova must have gazed on the frowning precipices of Craig Rennet and Craig Maud, many must have peered from the shores of Loch Brandy across the sunlit valley into the dark recesses of the Winter Corrie of Driesh, but none seem to have craved the stern joy of an assault on their steep ramparts. Possibly they lacked time, or had read Mr. Duncan's article on the Clova Hills (C.C.J. vol. III, page 1) and concluded that the climbs afforded by these faces were either mere scrambles or impossible.

On New Year's day, 1910, two strangers to the Glen, J. A. Parker and myself (H. Alexander, Jun., the originator of the idea unfortunately having been recalled to Aberdeen) were able to record a climb on the east face of Craig Rennet, and on 2nd January, with J. Bruce Miller, an ascent of the west face of Winter Corrie, Driesh. These expeditions have been recorded by Parker in an article in the Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal, (vol. xi., page 29). I will therefore, for the benefit of those to whom that paper is not available, give a short account of these climbs, partially extracted with his kind permission from that article, and confine myself more particularly to our adventures of 3rd January, 1911, when we barley escaped defeat in an attack on the north-eastern face of Craig Maud. A sharp frost held the ground underfoot as we passed through the pine wood round Glen Doll lodge in the early winter morning of New Year's day 1910, tramping steadily towards Craig Rennet, which fills the angle between



*Photo by*

*H. G. Drummond.*

THE PINNACLE RIDGE, CRAIG MAUD AND GLEN DOLL.



Glen Doll and the Glen of the Fee burn, occupying a corresponding position in Glen Doll to the Devil's Point in Glen Dee.

The summit was shrouded in mist, and we could see little of what was before us, but were much struck by the appearance of the buttress of Driesh, called the Scorrie, which stands at the meeting of Glen Doll and Glen Clova, and determined to inspect it next day.

"Looked at from the east in the half light of a dull winter day, the east face of Craig Rennet appeared of unrelieved steepness with practically no snow on it. On closer inspection a very shallow and ill-defined gully was seen to run up the east face for about two-thirds of the total height, and then to terminate. The route which we took struck the rocks at their lowest point to the left of the gully, and kept pretty close to the latter all the way up. The gully was entered about half way up, but was immediately left by an easy traverse to the left on to the rocks, which from this point assumed the character of an ill-defined ridge. Near the top the face became more broken up, and the angle easing off considerably, no further difficulty was encountered."

The height of our climb would be about 700 feet, the average gradient  $55^{\circ}$ , and the time occupied two hours. My strongest personal recollection of this climb, as well as of the others recorded in the district, is of a succession of steep chimneys up which we squirmed, to find ourselves emerging on sloping ledges of frozen turf and ice, which afforded little or no hold to pull ourselves out by, and it was only with difficulty that we resisted the inclination to slide down faster than we had wormed up. All the climbs would probably be much easier in summer than in winter. Leaving the summit of Craig Rennet (2,443 feet) we made through the mist for Jock's Road crossing en route Craig Maud, the buttresses and gullies of which impressed us greatly.

Joined by Bruce Miller, the early morning of the next day found us at the base of the Scorrie, but the sight of the dark precipices of Winter Corrie changed our purpose, and we advanced to their inspection.



“Looked at from the entrance to the corrie, the rocks of the west face were seen to be divided vertically at their highest point by a conspicuous gully, which extended about half of the total height of the face. The floor of the gully was, however, cut off from the screes by a band of vertical rock, extending round the top of the screes, over which, in line with the gully, poured a small waterfall.”

We commenced our climb a short distance to the left of the waterfall, and after some exciting experiences, which included a watery passage of the fall, and an avalanche of ice fragments from above, we reached a grass saddle at the base of the main gully. The traverse into its right hand upper branch over bulging masses of ice involved some tricky step cutting, but above that we were able to kick steps.

“Half way up, however, we were stopped by a pitch of rock covered with soft snow up which the leader could not go unaided. Had the top portion of the chimney looked feasible we would possibly have surmounted this pitch, but as it consisted of an overhanging pitch garnished with ice beneath, and a number of large and possibly loose blocks overhead, we did not try; the fact that there was not much daylight left for experiments being a deciding factor in our councils. We therefore retraced our steps to the head of the big gully, and as soon as possible traversed out to the north across a steep heather slope, climbed up a stiffish heather and rock corner, on to more heather, and then under a projecting nose of rock by a narrow ledge. This took us to the foot of a steep chimney of frozen scree, a climb up which placed us on the top of the steep face of the hill at a point some little height above the pinnacle whose chimney had beaten us.”

This most interesting climb occupied between four and five hours, and whetted our appetite for an attack on Craig Maud. However, beyond a flying visit over the Capel and Doll tourist route in September, it was not till January, 1911, that we were able to return to the attack. On New Year's eve Parker and I were again at Clova



under the kindly wing of Mrs. Birse. The somewhat lengthy drive of the previous year from Kirriemuir had been very much shortened by the hotel motor, a new importation, and we determined, that if necessary, we would use it to reduce our walking, and give us longer daylight. New Year's day was bright and sunny, but alas! for our hopes of a rock climb, a furious gale was blowing, which, as we proceeded up the Glen increased to such violence that it would have been impossible to keep one's balance on any steep or exposed place:—

“Sunrays leaning on our northern hills and lighting  
Wild cloud-mountains that drag the hills along.”

The amount of ice everywhere was particularly noticeable, and greatly in excess of what we had experienced the previous year; any gully climbing would have required a great deal of time and constant step-cutting.

From the valley opposite Craig Maud we made a minute examination of our peak through the glasses. The north-eastern face, as will be seen by the accompanying illustration, consists of several almost perpendicular faces of rock joined by steep slopes of snow-coated turf. The direct ascent of these faces would probably be possible under good conditions, but covered as the rocks were with sheets of ice, this was manifestly out of the question. Two noticeable gullies, however, flanked this main face, either of which appeared feasible for a considerable portion of the ascent, after which a traverse could be made on to the face. Two outstanding pinnacles could be seen on the sky line to the right of the highest point, and we felt that, if they were once gained, the worst difficulty was over. Fain would we have climbed in the bright sunshine, but it was impossible, so we contented ourselves with a long hill walk. Jock's Road surmounted, we directed our steps towards the summit of Tom Buidhe (3,140 feet). The frozen bog made good going, but sometimes a backward slide was unavoidable. Then we visited the Caenlochan Glen, and as we peered into its depths from the shelter on the point to the north of Finalty Hill, we could feel the



mountain shaking with the mighty wind. The run before it to the top of Mayar (3,043 feet) was a mere bagatelle. On the lee side of the summit we rested and fed, wondering if it were possible that the wind was still rising. We rose from our shelter and proceeded into the open, to fling ourselves immediately flat on the ground, holding on for dear life with hands and ice axes to any projection available. The next half hour saw us doing a horizontal climb downwards, clinging to a wire fence. Such was the violence of the wind that we could scarcely breathe, and had to seek cover to restore ourselves. More sheltered ground was reached and the descent concluded by Kilbo Corrie without further incident.

In the evening Alexander and Miller arrived, and though the evening was cold and cloudy, hopes for the morrow ran high:—

“Oft ends the day of your shifting brilliant laughter  
Chill as a dull face frowning on a song.”

Alas! the wind had brought snow in its train, and a blizzard reigned throughout the 2nd January. An attempt was made to reach Loch Lee, after climbing a sheltered gully at the head of Loch Brandy, but a mile or two was enough, so four small icebergs descended to the frozen shores of Loch Wharral, and thence to Clova. Parker had unwillingly to leave us and proved our Jonah. The third of January dawned bright and clear, with plenty of sun and no wind. The motor whirled us to Braedownie, and in high spirits we tramped up the Glen. Choosing the left hand gully, as being more on the face of the peak than the other, we quickly surmounted the steep lower slopes. Ahead of us, our gully led into a black rocky chasm, disappeared, and again worked its way to the summit ridge further to the left. Cutting and kicking steps we advanced till we saw into this miniature corrie, and realized that our advance was checked in that direction. High pendant icicles festooned the rocks, and the gully above was solid ice. Could we traverse on to the main face, and if so could we get up it? The rope was now put on, and a tricky piece of climbing over frozen scree and ice got us out of the gully; then cutting a few



steps across two subsidiary ones, we gained a foothold immediately underneath one of the steep bands of rock, but lower down than we had originally intended to strike the face. Plenty of chimneys led upwards, but they were all very steep. However, selecting the most promising, we made an attempt. For half an hour I struggled there with freezing fingers, but ice, ice everywhere, nor anything to hold by. Sarcastic remarks kept floating up, and finally there was open mutiny. Alexander unroped, and disappeared round a corner. Excited shouts proclaimed a find, and he returned with a tale of a "through route." I commenced to descend, then to slide, but well fielded by my second man, landed safely. Our former traverse was continued, and we came on a curious break or gateway in the cliff, almost in a direct line beneath the pinnacles towering above us. Passing under this natural arch, we easily surmounted the first rocks from the back by a convenient staircase, and found ourselves on the main ridge or backbone of the mountain. A noticeable feature of the climb from this stage onward was the way in which we were perpetually forced on to this arête, thus getting sensational views to the bottom of the Glen, which seemed directly beneath us. The going was distinctly tricky, but we made good progress towards the pinnacles. Landing on an easier slope above the first steep pitch, we examined the gully which had detained us so long, and found it overhanging at the top, and that all the others appeared equally difficult. Easier rocks led us to the ridge running between the pinnacles and the summit. This ridge was extremely narrow, and we straddled across it at its lowest point immediately behind the pinnacles. The drop to the right was sheer for 700 or 800 feet, and that on the left scarcely less so.

Our final difficulty now confronted us, a large slab which shelved at a nasty angle into the big drop to the right. There appeared to be only the most minute holds on it, and the surface was covered with a coating of snow which looked as if it would enjoy sliding off. However, Miller gallantly advanced to the attack, while we



sat tight on the ridge. Having spread-eagled himself for sometime, a difficult piece of climbing left him anchored well above us on the ridge. He had however, in his struggles packed the snow on the slab well into the small holds, and it now presented a surface like a slide, so that by the time it was the poor last man's turn to negotiate it, he was fain to become cargo and be hauled up ignominiously on the rope. Our troubles were now over, and in a short time we gained the summit. As we came out on the skyline in the strong sunlight we must have been clearly visible to anyone in the valley below, and a distant halloo was borne up to us from some unseen watcher for whom we looked in vain. The difficulty of this ascent throughout was caused by the extremely adverse condition in which the previous day's blizzard had left the rocks. Under ordinary circumstances the climb should not give much trouble, consisting more of route-finding than of any actual technical difficulty. Any particularly severe pitch would that day have beaten us, and had we not found our through route we would not have succeeded in the ascent. Thanks to an early start our climb was over while the day was young.

After lunching, we again rounded Jock's Road, and struck northward towards lonely Loch Esk. The scenery all round was magnificent, the sun shining on the white snow carpet and black crags made a picture not readily forgotten on one of the finest winter days it has been my lot to spend in our Scottish mountain fastnesses. A herd of deer feeding near the dark pines at Bachnagairn added to the charm. Those weird-looking pines, like grim sentinels guarding the lonely shieling, seemed to challenge us:—"Enter these enchanted woods, you who dare." Homeward, now, the sun sinking in the raying west, and the joy of victory in our hearts.