

A WESTWARD TRAMP IN ROSS-SHIRE.

BY ALEX. EMSLIE SMITH, JUN.

WE had long wished to do the walk through Glen Affric, and to all but one of us the whole route was new ground and the part from Affric Lodge was new ground to him also, so our plans were laid, and on Friday, 15th July, 1910, in rather dull and doubtful weather, off we set by the 5.50 a.m. train from Aberdeen.

It was an early start, but the women folks and baggage went right through by train to Aird Ferry, where Loch Alsh, Loch Long, and Loch Duich meet; and this lovely spot was to be our place of meeting and headquarters for a week.

We four tramps were Dr. L. and Dr. P. of Bradford, Dr. A. R. G. and A. E. S., Jr. of Aberdeen, and though the party was water-logged with medical lore we got along swimmingly together.

Creature comforts are not studied by the good people of Beauly, as enquiries for a barber produced the reply that the town did not possess one; so one of the party had to go unshaved till we reached Invercannich.

Nowhere in Scotland, can such river scenes be found as we passed on the Beauly, the Glass, and the Affric; fall succeeds fall, deep gorges abound, trees clad with birch and fir, sometimes so steep that notice boards warn you back lest the bank break and cause you to fall nearly a hundred feet into the river.

The first important falls on our route were those of Kilmorack, two miles and a half from Beauly. There the river Beauly forces its way through a deep gorge of conglomerate rock, and the scene is one of powerful grandeur. Here we have seen large salmon which have failed to jump the falls lying stunned for a few seconds on a flat rock.

The road is on the north bank, and to see the falls to best advantage one should cross the black bridge below

the falls—from the bridge a good view is got of the Lower Falls—then go up along the south side by the footpath which winds along the ravine to the Upper Falls by wooden stairs and gangways that hang over the river. As we were somewhat late we contented ourselves with following the north bank for about a quarter of a mile. Very wet we found the long grass as we started from the back of the old Church and Churchyard of Kilmorack, which are perched picturesquely on the brink.

The Church, as its name indicates, was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, but the "Old Statistical Account of Scotland" has a quaintly humorous version of the origin of the name. In this interesting old work the Presbyterian ministers in writing a description of their parishes usually began by giving their ideas on the origin and meaning of the Gaelic place names. Whether the good man wrote with the intention of pleasing the local magnate, or from pure ignorance I cannot tell, but this is how the Rev. John Fraser translates the name of his parish:—

"Like many other parishes in the Highlands of Scotland, this derives its name from having afforded burial ground, either to some reputed saint, or some person of distinction; Gill Mhorac signifying the Cell or Chapel of Young Mary; but from what family this lady sprung cannot with certainty be ascertained, though it seems most likely she was a descendant of one of the Lairds of Chisholm."

Along the road we went, passing, between the fourth and fifth mile, the Druim Falls with the three rocks rising out of the river bed and the water foaming round. They are quite as grand as those of Kilmorack, and a splendid view of them is got from the road. Shortly after the fifth mile we reached Crask of Aigas with the very fine cascades. A little farther on the river divides round an island called Eilean Aigas with its shooting Lodge.

The two brothers Sobieski Stuart, who claimed to be the last of the Royal House of Stuart, lived on Eilean Aigas, and the house is full of relics of Prince Charlie. The views all along are very fine; at parts the road is cut out of the solid rock which rises steeply on the right, and on

the left falls sharply down to the river running in the channel far below; the slopes where possible are beautifully wooded, and ferns of many sorts grow luxuriantly. We found on a retaining wall quantities of the Wallrue fern, and the iron-shod tip of a mountain staff came in very handy to dislodge a few specimens which were posted that night to a fern collector at home. The outstanding feature of the scenery here is the beauty of the birch woods. The mountain slopes right up to the sky-line are in all directions adorned with the most beautiful and graceful birches. No wonder that MacWhirter drew his first inspiration to paint birch trees from this favoured locality, and that he always declared Glen Affric to be the finest glen in Scotland.

Near the tenth mile we passed Erchless Castle; then through a dense wood of splendid firs and larches planted some sixty years ago by the late Chisholm, and in a short mile we reached Struy, where the river ceases to be called the Beauly. One branch, the Farrar, comes down Glen Strathfarrar on the right, and the main stream, the river Glass, comes down Strath Glass. Just before entering Struy the valley widens out, and the conformation of the ground shows that this was an old lake bottom before the river had cut through the hill the deep passage in which it now runs. We halted at Struy (ten and three quarter miles) for lunch. The place seems obsessed by Mr. Walter Winans, the American who recently rented large deer forests here. The inn is full of photographs of him, surrounded, in every style of grouping, by the trophies of his gun. He smiles at you from the walls, and in every second book you open, or loose photo you take up, there is friend Winans again in another attitude. It is all very "Amurrican." We saw the tall deer fences, miles of which at a cost of thousands of pounds his father, the famous shot, erected to prevent his deer getting into neighbouring forests which his money could not purchase. The neighbouring lairds would not sell their lands to Winans; and hence the fences.

After lunch we did the remaining seven miles to Inver-

cannich at an easy pace and reached Glenaffric Hotel, the last house of entertainment till you reach the West Coast—well pleased with our route, the distance being about eighteen miles.

The road from Struy to Invercannich runs along Strath Glass, an open strath, and the scenery though not grand is very pretty. The hotel is at the junction of the Cannich and the Glass, and many beautiful walks may be had from it.

It is a most comfortable abode, and Mr. Alex. Falconer, mine host, is most obliging. His mother, still a hale old lady, who takes a very kindly interest in the comfort of her guests, had Nethy Bridge Hotel when the railway was being made, and she can tell of curious shifts to which drenched climbers on the Cairngorms were sometimes put. When the party was large, and the stock of trousers in the hotel exhausted, some were forced to wear petticoats at dinner while their own nether garments were dried. Perhaps some of our older club members may have been thus indebted to Mrs. Falconer.

The place can even boast of a golf course, but we should not advise our friends from Balgownie to go there expecting a course like that at home. It is more the paradise of the fisher and the lover of beautiful scenery.

The story goes that when the Chisholms (this is their country) met here at kirk or market, especially on high days, rather more "refreshment" was taken than was good for some, and in a fight on one occasion a luckless carl was thrown into the river and drowned, and that this so preyed on the mind of The Chisholm that on his deathbed he expressed a wish that there were no licences on his lands. His widow carried out his wish, and now the Inn is a temperance one, and the nearest licensed grocer is at Beauly.

Our route next day meant a walk of about thirty-two miles, and as we were out for pleasure and one of us had been doing a lot for several days, we resolved to drive the first twelve miles and a half to Affric Lodge. Accordingly off we started in a trap next morning about 8 o'clock. The

sky was rather overcast and rain seemed not far off—for had we not started on a rainy St. Swithin's Day?—but that was on the east coast, and we were bound for the west, so we hoped that the good Saint would keep his rain in the east. He did, bless him!

The road runs along the river Glass, fringed with graceful silver birches for about two and a quarter miles to Fasna-kyle Bridge. There it branches, the left hand road going across the river and up three and a half miles to Guisachan. Our road, the right hand one, wound up through the Chisholm Pass, past the Badger Falls (*Eas nan Broc*), and two miles farther on, the Dog Falls to Achagate (five miles), near the lower end of Loch Beinn a'Mheadhoin.

The Chisholm Pass is extremely fine, wooded from river to hill top, very narrow and steep, and in it you rise nearly 400 feet in a mile. Both falls are grand, but the banks are so steep that from the road one cannot see them to advantage. Then along the shores of Loch Beinn a'Mheadhoin, through hanging birch woods that extend half-way up the loch side, we drove the remaining five and a quarter miles to Loch Affric Lodge. Two birds were diving in the loch, which "the bird man" of the party proclaimed great northern divers.

In the woods we startled a sleepy owl which blinked at us as we passed. We also saw huge fungi growing on the trunks of the trees, some over a foot across. The public road ends at the top of Loch Beinn a'Mheadhoin and from there to Affric Lodge is a private road. The view as we came in sight of Affric Lodge and Loch Affric was extremely fine. The western hills now began to show their peaks, and the loch lay before us partly wooded at the water edge, and very beautiful. Loch Affric derives its name from the Gaelic word *Abhriach*, which means the greyish water.

The real walk through the hills starts at Affric Lodge. To an ardent cyclist the first day's tramp may seem wasted time, but this cannot be said of the glorious hill walk to follow which is mostly unfit for cycling. Cyclists have done it, (See *C.C.J.*, vol. v., p. 24) and as far as Alltbeath

parts can, with care, be ridden, but from Camban to Glen Lichd I should think the man would oftener carry the cycle than the cycle the man.

I will try to describe the way so that one cannot go wrong, and if it prove tedious it is due to my desire to help fellow-hillmen on what they will find a charming tramp. It may be useful to start by giving distances and the approximate times taken, walking easily, with occasional intervals for rest and refreshment.

From Affric Lodge to Alltbeath (Birch Burn)—sometimes spelt Aultbeath or Aultbea—8 miles, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours; from Alltbeath to Camban, 3 miles, about $1\frac{1}{4}$ hours; from Camban to where the path after descending Allt Granda crosses by a bridge the head waters of the Croe, near the keeper's house at the top of Glen Lichd, 4 miles, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours. From this keeper's house to Croe Bridge, at the head of Loch Duich, 4 miles, about $1\frac{1}{4}$ hours. From Croe Bridge to Dornie is 7 miles, and as it is an up and down road with one rise of 600 feet it would take at least other two hours at the end of a day.

Now for our walk.

Leaving Glen Affric Lodge about 10 a.m. we took the path along the north side of Loch Affric. This path starting from the lodge gate and running along the deer fence close on the left hand, is a good well-kept bridle path about three feet wide. Loch Affric is between 700 and 800 feet above sea level, and the path rises rapidly up the slope of Sgurr na Lapaich till it reaches 1,100 feet. The morning had up till now been rather dull, but as we mounted up we saw that, far in front of us, the sun was shining brilliantly on the hills in the west, although we were still in shadow; and this promise of good weather we realised as we found when we got through Scotland that the ladies had already enjoyed the glorious sunshine, in which we all revelled for a week afterwards.

Some two miles along our path a well-made track turns off sharply to the right, up the Allt Coire Leachavic, leading in some six miles to the top of Mam Sodhail (3,862 feet), from which a splendid view is got across Scotland from the east

to the west coast. We had not time, however, for the hill-top this trip.

Our path then dropped downwards, skirting Loch Coulavie to the 900 feet level, and there, almost at right angles, it joins the path which runs along the south side of Loch Affric. This path on the south side, which also starts from Affric Lodge, is very pretty but has many ups and downs, and is not so good as the north one. About half a mile before it joins the north path it passes a keeper's house at Athnamulloch, or as it is sometimes spelt Annamulloch, in the Affric deer forest. Athnamulloch or Athnamuileach means the Ford of the Mull men. A battle was fought here with a party of raiders from Mull, and many of them were drowned. In front of Athnamulloch is the hill Dur Carnoch, on the map called Carn a Choire Chairbh, (2,827 feet), and not far from its base a huge spring of deliciously cold water comes gushing out of the mountain side. So large is it that from the first it forms a good sized burn, and be the season wet or dry, summer or winter, the spring remains of a uniform strength. It is a very interesting phenomenon, for the hill is high and its sides and summit rocky, and there is no loch or any sign of water other than this spring.

Having joined this south side path we turn sharply to the right, and the united path then runs along the river Affric to Alltbeath. All around is beautiful waving green grass, which extends up to the top of some of the surrounding hills. We rounded the shoulder of the hill and came in sight of Alltbeath, a short mile in front of us, and as it was now between 12 and 1 o'clock and we had breakfasted before 8 we thought it time to take off our knapsacks and attend to the inner man. So by a pretty little stream flowing from the hill on our right we lunched near a party of natives who were resting from their road repairing, and from them we got particulars about the hills in sight. From here we got a magnificent view of Beinn Fhada and of the corries and precipices on its northern side. The day was glorious with brilliant sunshine, and the effect of the sun lighting up the peaks, and casting dark shadows on the corries, was superb.

From Alltbeath our route lay past Camban, over the south shoulder of Beinn Fhada, and there was no mistaking the direction for there in front of us, perched high up on the southern slope of Beinn Fhada, lay the solitary keeper's hut of Camban. The path crosses the Allt Beithe Garbh, and about half a mile past Alltbeath and before crossing the Allt Grianain an alternative route to the west coast is offered by the Bhealaich round the north side of Beinn Fhada. This path keeps up the north-east side of the Allt Grianain burn. As the ground here is grassy, one may readily miss the spot where the path strikes off, but if one keeps this burn on the left hand there should be no difficulty. A little farther to the north of this pass are the famous Falls of Glomach, but I think the best way to reach them is by going up Loch Long from Dornie. The scenery on the north side of Beinn Fhada, although fine, is not to be compared with that on the south side at Allt Granda.

Where our path crossed the Grianain burn a track turns off to the left to Glen Clunie; the ground is flat and boggy, but with the Camban hut in front there is no difficulty in knowing how to go straight ahead. After Camban, however, one has to be very careful, for the proper path, good up till now, becomes very indistinct. At a distance of about three quarters of a mile beyond Camban it breaks into two. The left hand path is good but it goes across the burn Fionn and then over a col to Glen Clunie. The right hand path is the proper one to take, but it is hardly a path. The ground is rough and stony, it is most difficult to see the track, and one is almost certain to follow the better, which if your objective is Loch Duich, is wrong. If you keep in mind, however, that you must not descend, and cross the burn Fionn on the left hand which is flowing eastwards, but must hold on to the right, climbing well up the hillside, there is no fear. You must keep on well up the slope on the right for at least another half mile till you see the Allt a Ghlas Choire burn on your left hand flowing down towards the west.

The part from Camban, till well down the Allt Granda,



Photo by

William Garden.

SGURR A CISTE DUBH AND SGURR OURAN.

is the only part on the tramp where you have to keep a sharp look-out, and with care it is not difficult to keep the track, but were you careless you might be landed miles out of the way or even in danger.

From Camban to the Watershed is about a mile and a quarter, and for another mile you still keep on, high up the steep side of Beinn Fhada at an average level of from 1,000 to 1,200 feet with occasional ups and downs, with the main stream on the left in the hollow below, and small burns breaking across the path from the slopes on the right. It is absolutely essential to keep to the right of the main stream in descending Allt Granda as the left side is dangerous. There is no danger if you keep the track on the right bank along the hillside, but if you quitted it or attempted an independent route on the left side you would soon land among precipitous rocks.

Then the descent down Allt Granda began, and we dropped in little over a mile about 1,000 feet. The scene is one of striking grandeur, the gorge is narrow, sheer rocks towering above and dropping from one's foot. At one place the path has been carefully built up to pass a dangerous corner, precipitous both above and below. With care however there is no difficulty in following the safe track.

All along the shoulder of Beinn Fhada, we had before us the glorious panorama of the Five Sisters of Kintail, Sgurr Fhuaran, (3,505 ft.) the chief, and magnificent mountains they are.

Soon we dropped down to the 200 feet level into Glen Lichd, and crossed the head waters of the Croe by the wire suspension bridge beside the keeper's house. Then we sped merrily along the south bank of the river by a winding, yet good path, though in places it is somewhat soft and boggy, and in wet weather we should imagine, anything but good going. From the conformation of the ground it is evident that this also is an old lake bottom. Then on we went without any special incident to Croe Bridge, which we reached about 5 p.m. We all agreed that it was one of the finest tramps any of us had ever had

in Scotland, and we can heartily recommend it to fellow hillmen.

The ladies of the party were to have driven to meet us at Croe Bridge, but after waiting for half-an-hour or so without any sign of them, we started off down the north side of Loch Duich, and met them about a couple of miles along the road.

Our walking was not yet over, for the hills on this road are steep and long, and we had all to turn out several times and tramp. Loch Duich is most picturesque, and the views from the road on the north side charming, and when we finally turned the corner of the hill high above Dornie, and looked down on the ruined Castle of Eilean Donan, the ancient fortress of the Mackenzies of Kintail, and out on the Kyle of Loch Alsh, with the mountains of Skye framed as in a picture and rosy in the evening light, we thought nothing on earth could be more beautiful. Then down to Dornie and over the ferry, a hundred yards or so, to Airdferry Hotel, where awaited us a most hospitable welcome, and a splendid dinner, to which we four tramps did ample justice.

So ended a glorious and most interesting and enjoyable journey across Scotland.

Our reunited party, now eight in number, spent the next week at Airdferry Hotel, and a more comfortable place it would be hard to find. Mine host, Mr. Cameron and his good wife, do all in their power to make the stay of their guests pleasant. In this they were most successful, and the bill at the end—a somewhat important matter at Highland hotels in the season—was most moderate. The only thing that struck us in the expenses line was the quantity of whisky a Highland boatman requires to support him when taken away for a day. Certainly our Southern heads, and possibly also our Aberdonian heads, would be hard put to it to stand what these boatmen can.

The old inn at Dornie was burnt down some years ago and never rebuilt, so Aird Ferry Hotel is the only hostel between Invercannich and Balmacarra. Besides being a most comfortable house to stay at, it is most picturesquely

situated. It stands on a promontory, and from the door one looks up Loch Duich, up Loch Long—the little Loch Long—both surrounded by magnificent hills, and down Kyle of Loch Alsh with the Cuillin of Skye in the distance. We spent a delightful week at Aird Ferry Hotel in glorious weather.

To fellow members of the Cairngorm Club I confidently say, follow our footsteps and do this tramp, and you will not be disappointed.