

Photo by

SLAB-TOP CHIMNEY, SOUTER HEAD.
ILLUSTRATING BACK AND KNEE CLIMBING.

S. Mutton.

SOME KINCARDINESHIRE COAST CLIMBS.

BY JAMES McCoss.

IN his article on "Rock Climbing near Aberdeen" (*C.C.J.*, Vol vi, p. 250) Mr. Howard G. Drummond opened a new field of exploration for the climbers of Aberdeen.

The surf-bound cliffs of our rugged coast-line appeal to all of us, and taking up Mr. Drummond's theme I venture to add a few notes on some climbs which can easily be reached in a short day from the club's headquarters. The climbs are all on sound rock and are free from debris; they give firm holds and make ideal climbing both in summer and in mid-winter. There is a charm too about the coast 'twixt Findon and Nigg, with its thundering waves and beetling cliffs, that fascinates the climber and non-climber alike. What could be more exhilarating than a walk along the cliffs in a fresh wind or more real than the strenuous joy of the climber as he struggles from the shingle to the grassy headland, battling with some forbidding buttress or squeezing up some unscaled chimney? Then there are the views of sea and sky where the blue water and the clear sky lose each other in the hazy distance of the horizon. One wonders that such a fine practice ground has been so little explored.

After crossing a small heathery moor below the farm of Cairnrobin, about a mile and a half south of Cove, a large deep bay with a waterfall is readily found. Just to the south of this bay are two gullies, divided by a small headland. In the south gully three face climbs start. The first and easiest is close to the sea, and can be climbed without difficulty. The second starts above a pool of water, and has a variation on either side, providing a pleasant climb. The third, which we will call the "ledge climb," begins with two singular ledges. To reach the first, one has to stretch, and give the body a slight swing, then a pull over the edge. Above the second shelf the climb continues in an upward

slant to the right, and finishes on some smaller ledges. In the north gully are climbs of a rather more interesting nature, which will well repay a visit. They comprise a slanting crack, and two trap dyke chimneys. The crack necessitates one squirming on one's stomach all the way, till a cave is reached, and a ledge is traversed to the end of the headland. The chimney close by, in the corner of the gully, is very difficult, and has never been climbed except with the assistance of a fixed rope from above. It is unsuitable for backing up, and overhangs at the foot, requiring good balance and a strenuous pull, but becomes easier when a ledge is reached half-way up. The other climb merits the name "waterpipe chimney," as to some degree it resembles in appearance the first pitch of the famous gully on Sgurr na Fheadain, in the Cuillin. It gives back and foot work till it slightly widens out, and overhangs a little forcing one on the left wall. The second pitch starts in a small rocky gully on the face, and the route is up the left side, finishing over a grassy topped buttress. After rain one has to climb through quantities of dripping water. A good V-shaped chimney is to be found on the headland, just on the north of the large bay mentioned. It requires some pressure of the body, as the holds are far apart. Northward still is a bay with a fine-looking sharp edged pinnacle; on its south, a gully with excellent rock running steeply up from the water, is to be found. It carries five climbs, and is approached by a traverse on sea level, which, by the way, can only be made at low water but at high tide the gully can be reached by climbing up a little, and descending vertically into it by a tricky crack. The last man can be safe-guarded halfway down by a good belay. As the corner is rounded one is struck by the proportions the rock seems to attain. Close at hand is a good slanting back and knee chimney, that finishes with a traverse to the left, to reach the top of the crags. This chimney is hidden and can only be seen when one is under it. To the left are two climbs, a rather difficult black crack, and an arête to straddle

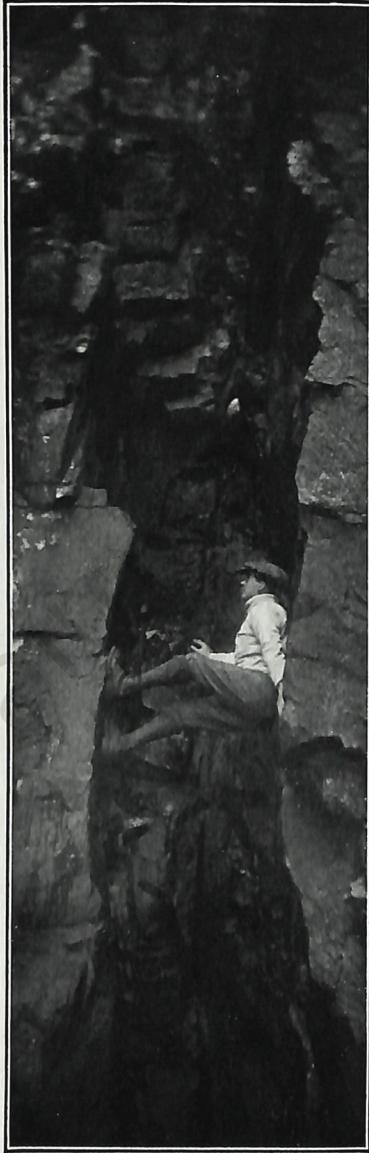


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WATERPIPE CHIMNEY CLIMB (FIRST PITCH), CAIRNROBIN.

ILLUSTRATING BACK AND FOOT CLIMBING.

up at a steep angle. To reach the other two climbs one has to get into the gully by the south side. An easy crack is noticed, and to the right a face climb starts, that can be finished with a rather exposed though easy traverse to the right.

A visit to Souter Head would stimulate the enthusiasm of many. One chimney there, not yet mentioned, is well worthy of notice, and might be classed as difficult. It starts on the south side of a small deep gully, and gives good back and knee practice till it gives out, and finishes on a steep slab. This chimney, one will find, requires just a little confidence to lead up.

The above is by no means all the climbing obtainable, as a great many gullies have never been explored yet, from a climbing point of view. One can find climbing of all grades of difficulty here, and the novice, who has discretion, may learn something of rock work, which will stand him in good stead when some steep place is met with on a rock mountain. All that is lacking is great height and continued length of climb.