

BEINN MUICH DHUI, VIA GLEN DERRY.

BY ROBERT ANDERSON.

It rained every day except one during a week spent at Little Inverey last August. That, to be sure, was no uncommon experience, for the generality of visitors to Upper Deeside the whole summer through complained of wet, or else of cold, sullen skies and an almost total absence of sunshine. The season was abnormal—there is no more to be said about it; and it was particularly unpropitious for long-distance walking excursions. Fortunately, the days were not wholly bad. If it rained in the forenoon it would be dry—or tolerably dry—in the afternoon, and *vice versa*, and, indifferent to dirty roads or an occasional shower, one, some time in the day, could don a mackintosh and sally forth. In this way, we were able to show a stranger to the region the more easily accessible “sights”—the Linn of Dee, the Falls of Lui, the Colonel’s Bed, and the Falls of Corrymulzie, these last containing a much larger volume of water than on some recent occasions on which we have visited them. Whether our stranger friend’s appetite had been whetted by these trials of his pedestrian powers, or whether he had learned that it was “the proper thing” to “do” Beinn Muich Dhui, anyhow he became insistent upon being conducted to the top of the mountain. The writer, who has ascended the formidable Ben more times than he can remember, and has now stiffer muscles and carries more adipose tissue than was wont to be the case, did not view the proposal with over-much favour—rather poured cold water on it by suggesting the probability of a douche of that element from above. But the mutual friend who completed our trio, notwithstanding the tolerably fair acquaintance with the mountain he also possesses, proved as enthusiastic as the novice. So, the majority prevailing, as use and wont is, the walk was resolved upon, and early one morning the

three of us set out. The walk really proved to be without incident. We had, by exceedingly good fortune, struck the only wholly dry day of our week. We duly got to the top, saw next to nothing, and came back. "Story! God bless you! I have none to tell, sir," to quote Canning's Needy Knife Grinder. But as the common, and—as my more adventurous rock-climbing friends will probably add—commonplace route to Beinn Muich Dhui by way of Glen Derry has seldom been detailed in the pages of the *C. C. J.*, an account of it rather than of our walk over it, may be acceptable, *faute de mieux*.

Of all the routes to Beinn Muich Dhui, that by Glen Derry is unquestionably the easiest; moreover, it has the advantage of a distinct track all the way to the top. It has the disadvantage, though, of being very long, and the walk through the Glen itself is apt to prove monotonous, especially on the return journey, when the zest of the enterprise has about vanished, and the distances seem greater than they did earlier in the day. This Glen Derry route naturally divides itself into several stages. The first consists of the "driving road" to Derry Lodge, which proves a good walking road as well. Crossing the Dee at the Linn, we follow the road on the north side eastward to near the bridge of Lui, and then take the road on the right bank of the stream, pursuing it till we cross the Lui at the Black Bridge. (Those in "the know" may cut something off this triangular walk by taking a path through the wood just where the south road, after crossing the Linn bridge, joins the north road, this path forming in fact the base of the triangle). From the Black Bridge there is a steady walk of about two miles through Glen Lui, the road gradually ascending till Derry Lodge is reached, and the scenery becoming wilder, bare moorland heights succeeding the woodlands that line the Lui in its lower course. The Lodge is situated amid a plantation of firs, and we have to abandon the road for a path (to our left), which skirts the plantation and leads us down to the junction of the Luibeg Burn and the Derry Burn, the confluence of these two streams constituting the Lui Water. Rounding

the mouth of Glen Luibeg, we cross the Derry by a little wooden footbridge, and enter on our second stage. The path strikes across a broad meadow plentifully dotted with trees, and then pursues a rather devious course, conforming more or less to the windings of the Derry as it wends its rugged way along the base of a wooded hill; and here we have a bit of genuinely fine scenery, an attractive oasis in comparison with the desolateness of the glen on either side. We are momentarily deflected from the stream, the path making a detour across a small height, and then, descending, we cross the Derry by another wooden bridge. Glen Derry now opens up before us—a long, narrow valley, treeless save for a few solitary pines, aged, weather-beaten, and mostly withered, the outmost one known as the Sentinel of Derry, the valley being bounded on each hand by a succession of mountain ridges with sloping sides. Here we enter on a third and very conspicuous stage of the route. The path, now become much rougher, runs first along the east side of the glen (our right hand side), then crosses the valley through long grass—a temporary relief from the stony ground we have been traversing—and gradually approaches the Derry Burn on the west side, becoming increasingly rougher as it does so. As we near the opening of Corrie Etchachan the path forks—the branch on the right becoming the Learg an Laoigh, and leading across the col in front of the Avon, and, beyond that, to Nethy Bridge, the branch on the left crossing the Derry and leading up Corrie Etchachan and on to Ben Muich Dhui.

The ascent of Corrie Etchachan now confronts us—a stiff climb up the ravine between Beinn Mheadhoin and Cairngorm of Derry, an elevation of over 1000 feet from the Derry being attained in a distance of about a mile-and-a-half. We suspect that the arduous nature of this climb and the concentration of effort required render most people while making it rather indifferent to their grand surroundings, but the precipitous face of Beinn Mheadhoin, the weathering of the crags on our left hand, and the dashing descent of the

stream from the loch above cannot fail to arrest attention and extort admiration.

“Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty.”

By the time the top of the corrie is reached—and novices may bear in mind the old saying, “It’s dogged as does it”—a rest is well-earned and may otherwise be recommended, if only for the view of Loch Etchachan at our feet, and the more distant view to Cairngorm across the gorge in which Loch Avon lies (but here invisible). We have now reached the penultimate stage of our journey. The path strikes off in a south-westerly direction, running in a switchback kind of fashion—now up, now down—along the mountain side above Loch Etchachan, and then beside a stream that feeds the loch. Not far from the gathering waters of this stream the path rises to the ridge and bends round it, and we have a fine view into the Coire an Sput Dheirg below. Turning the corner, we come to “the last lap.” The path stretches clearly before us up and over the broad shoulder of Beinn Muich Dhui in a very easy slope, leading to an extensive plateau literally “paved” with boulders and large stones, and ending at the cairn on the summit, a few yards above the ruins of the kitchen used by the Royal Engineers when conducting the Ordnance survey. This plateau we found curiously flecked with patches of fresh snow, looking for all the world like the white caps on waves when a storm is rising—an indication, of course, that rain in the valleys signified snow on the mountains. The cairn, too, was encrusted with snow and ice; it was bitterly cold; a heavy mist shrouded everything around, out of which the corries of Braeriach and the peaks of Cairntoul occasionally peered; and in these unpropitious circumstances half-an-hour at the summit, devoted to luncheon, contented us.

Of the descent, which was made by the same route, there is nothing whatever to say. We by no means made it leisurely, for the dubious weather conditions rendered any loitering on the mountain, or “daundering” along the

path inadvisable, and though we took a few more rests than on the way up, we found that we maintained very much the same walking pace all along—a walking pace that we shall modestly claim to have been fairly good for “old stagers.” Indeed, we came to the conclusion that there is very little difference in the time occupied between going up Beinn Muich Dhui and coming down. The path is so rough, as a rule, and requires such careful walking either way, that not much time is gained in the descent. Even the youngest and most nimble climber would hardly dare to “race down” Corrie Etchachan, and the walk along Glen Derry must occupy much about the same time, whether it be made from its upper end or from its lower end. As a matter of fact, we found that (excluding rests), there was not a half-hour's difference between the time we occupied in going and in returning. The distances may be roughly set down as—Inverey to Linn of Dee, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles; Linn of Dee to Derry Lodge, 4; Glen Derry, $5\frac{1}{2}$; Corrie Etchachan, $1\frac{1}{2}$; Loch Etchachan to summit, 2; total, $14\frac{1}{2}$ miles; total of double journey, 29 miles. What time we actually took need concern no one, and could form little criterion for anybody else. We were not out for “record-making,” but for a day's enjoyment—for the pleasure of the walk and the delight of the companionship. And as we walked down Glen Derry while the shades of eve were falling, our spirits attuned to the spell of the hour and the scene, we had no uncertainty as to our purpose having been fully realised.