

JURA.

BY ALEX. INKSON McCONNOCHE.

THE beauties of the Kyles of Bute could hardly be appreciated from the deck of that good and well known steamer "Iona," for rain overtook us at the Tail of the Bank—Greenock seldom fails one—and when Tarbert was reached, the little open coach journey across Kintyre was made in a deluge, and we were glad to hurry below to the comfort of the saloon of the smaller steamer in waiting for us at West Tarbert. Rather depressing weather thought we for an afternoon on the Paps of Jura, and gradually all hopes of any climbing that day had to be abandoned. As a matter of fact we were still moored to the pier at West Tarbert when we were due in Jura, so that made an end of all worry as to what could be done when we should reach Craighouse. Yet the weather did improve when we left, and the sail down narrow West Loch Tarbert, and along by the north side of Gigha, was unexpectedly pleasant. We dropped the mails for that island not far off shore, and as we steamed rapidly away the "timorous sail" of the post office boat seemed very much at the mercy of the cross currents and winds which in these parts may well be dreaded by strangers.

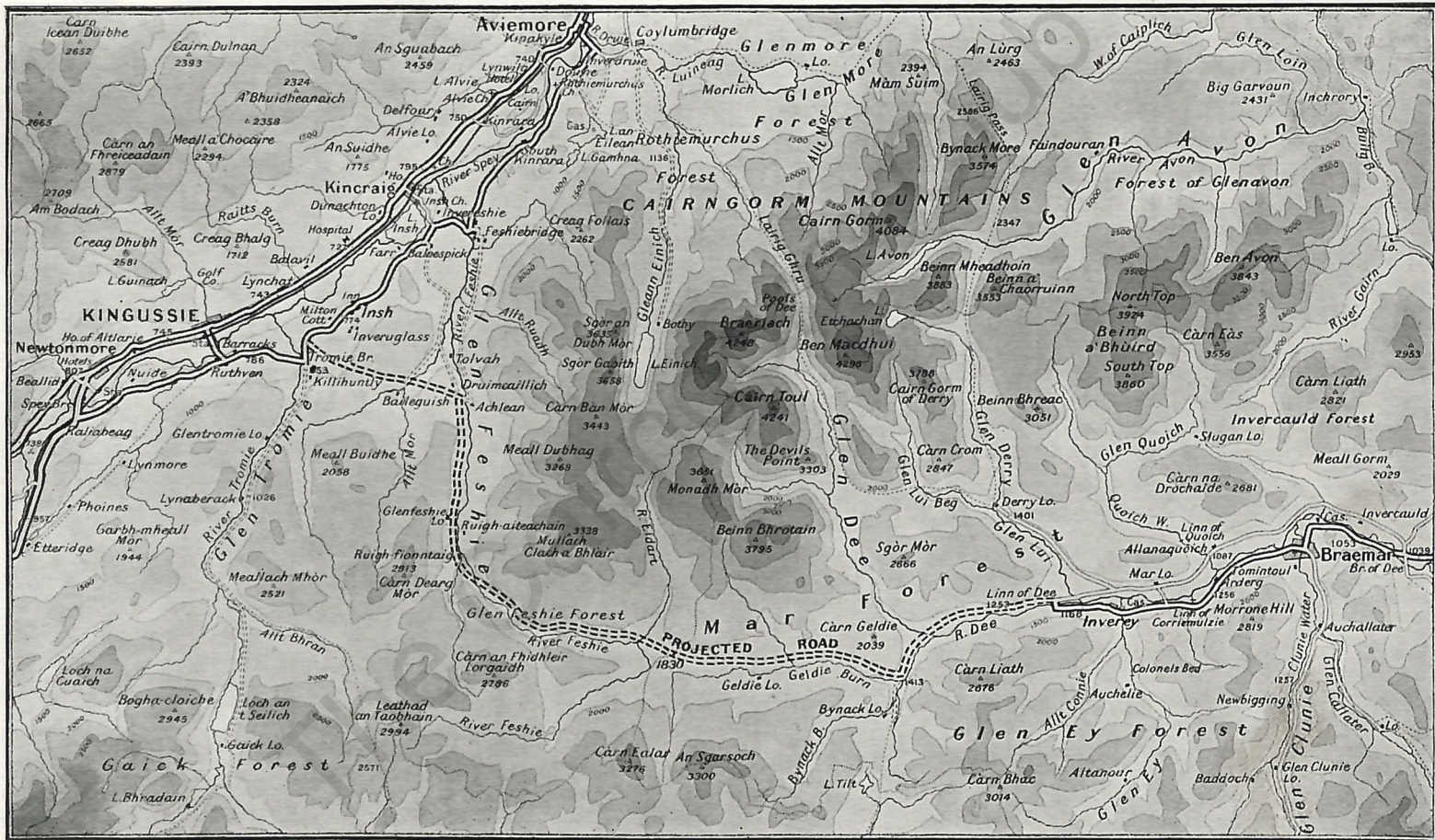
Jura looked very hilly and promising, Islay, save the south-eastern portion, less so, but neither island was a disappointment. The Jura pier is at Craighouse, in the south corner of the roadstead formed by Small Isles. When we came ashore there was no competition for our custom; later we found that the island boasted neither public-house nor policeman—and there were other wants, though the natives seemed happy. The only hotel (temperance) has no sign board, and so at first we passed it by as we explored the one short row of houses which constitutes the village of Craighouse. After dinner we had a remunerative walk with the doctor along the

shore—there is no road otherwise—and admired Nature. Little cultivation is possible on the island, but what a magnificent summer resort it could be made! Arran would have to take second place.

The early morning was not particularly promising, but we risked it and had a certain reward. The Paps of Jura have long held a charm for hillmen, but not always was that long island regarded with much favour by travellers. Thus a military writer of 1647 saw no beauty in mountain landscape: "From Yla we boated over to Jura, a horrid ile, and a habitation fit for deers and wild beasts." Even Dr. Macculloch, so often quoted in mountaineering literature, and better trained to appreciate Highland scenery, did not admire the green slopes and rocky ridges of the island; his criticism is even brutal and ignorant: "I have little to say of it, and much less to say in its praise." Yet in Jura the fuchsia grows like a weed, and often attains the dimensions of a tree; roses bloom as high as the eaves; and the iris blossoms along the coast line. Thankful we are that Grierson's "Rambles" reached a third edition were it only for his "Islay Letters"; he himself had forebodings that his "Wanderings" were to close with his "Fortnight on Deeside." But no! in his own words it "pleased the Great Disposer of events to enable me once more to intrude as a mountain climber." Intrude! He finally gave us 374 pages of "Rambles"; we could well have done with twice as many, and then forgiven him his "Church in the North." Grierson had a different song to sing of the Inner Hebrides.

There is indeed no group of island mountains now better known, or more admired, than the cone-shaped Paps of Jura. They form an outstanding group of three—Beinn an Oir, "the mountain of gold" (2571 feet); Beinn Shiantaidh, "the blessed (or consecrated) mountain" (2477 feet); and Beinn a' Chaolais, "the mountain of the Sound" (2407 feet). They are composed of fine-grained quartzite, and stand in the southern division of the island, draining to the Sound of Jura on the one side, and to the Sound of Islay and Loch Tarbert on the other. There are

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two recognised routes for the ascent, from Craighouse on the east side of the island, and from Feolin Ferry on the west—the latter connecting with Port Askaig in Islay. The Sound between Port Askaig and Feolin is only about three quarters of a mile broad, and at certain times the narrow sea runs like a river in flood. Even in tolerably favourable circumstances the Sound has a somewhat fearful look to the nervous—one frequent traveller never crossed it without a cork jacket.

Gradually as the noted peaks appear on the horizon expectation is raised, and, given a clear day, one is not disappointed. Their individuality is pronounced, and, mountainous as all Jura is, there can be no mistaking the Paps, each with a family resemblance to the other. The two higher lie east and west of each other, while the lowest is northward of the highest, thus forming a triangle, the longest side of which is under two miles in length.

As Beinn Shiantaidh is perhaps the one most conveniently ascended from the bay of Small Isles we made for that peak. Its slopes are pretty much of the same character as those of Beinn a' Chaolais, being much covered with "angular and fragmentary stones, loose and shifty, but with heather and moss-stripes between," and occasional clumps of thrift. Beinn Shiantaidh may be regarded as the most symmetrical peak of the three, having steeper slopes than its neighbours. The road should be left near Corran Bridge, and the broad glen of that stream taken, but nothing is to be gained by keeping it more than a mile and a half. The only "wild beasts" seen will probably be cattle, sheep, and horses grazing in the lower part of the glen; higher up deer in considerable numbers will no doubt be observed. The so-called wild goats of Jura now frequent, as a rule, the rocky coast, and still occasionally yield a valued trophy to the hunter. As the eastern shoulder of Beinn Shiantaidh is slowly surmounted, Loch an t-Siob, "the loch of the wisp," at an altitude of about 550 feet, comes into view—a narrow green-banked, solitary tarn, from which issues the Corran

River. A curious group of seven pools, Lochanan Tana, "the shallow lochans," will be observed on the right; these put behind, the real climb of the peak may be said to commence. Often enough little life may be observed in the ascent—a few rabbits on the shore of the loch, a wandering frog half-way up the hill, and a velvet-antlered stag in search of food and his fellows. Grouse are few, owing to the wetness of the climate and the lack of heather, but likely enough ptarmigan may be seen. The bracken here, as elsewhere in the Highlands, seems to be increasing its hold.

Scree now prevails, and the climber is glad of the relief of an occasional narrow strip of grass as a change from the unstable stones. Even where the stones have been broken small the ascent is none the easier, for one is continually losing ground by involuntarily sliding downwards with the stream of angular pebbles. The last lap is particularly rough, but there is always the consolation that every step tells. The summit ridge is narrow, and the side towards Beinn an Oir is quite as steep as the one just mastered. The cairn, like those on the other paps, is rather considerable; there is no mistaking the summit even in mist.

At the col (*c.* 1600 feet) between Beinn Shiantaidh and Beinn an Oir is Imir an Aonaich, "the furrow of the nose," a suggestive name. There is a small loch and near it a stone hut. A well-built causeway leads towards the cairn of "the mountain of gold"; it was constructed by the men of the Ordnance Survey when Beinn an Oir was one of the points of observation in the great triangulation of the United Kingdom. (See *C.C.J.*, I., 164). On Grierson's visit he found the ground round about strewn with "scraps of old shoes, clothes, bones, bottles, &c., and close to it there is a fine powerful spring, which no doubt was the cause of their preferring this as their lodging place."

Grierson, writing of his journey across Islay from Bridgend to Port Askaig, thus refers to the prospect of the Paps near the latter village: "What principally

engrossed my attention was the view of the splendid mountains of Jura. These were directly in front, and the morning being fine, the view of them was particularly striking." Crossing the sound to Feolin ("The sea gull's") Ferry, where there is only one house, he had the disadvantage of traversing a considerable moorland scored with deep ravines fringed with birch and alder. Once on the shoulder of Beinn a' Chaolais he found the ascent to the great cairn of Beinn an Oir "uniform and very abrupt," loose blocks being so troublesome that much care was required to escape broken bones. Yet here and there he "found blaeberrries, crawberries, junipers, and braelics; in some cases all within a few feet of each other." The big cairn has fallen on evil times since the reverend gentlemen's visit, and must now be described as dilapidated.

The prospect on a clear day from Beinn an Oir is one of the most remarkable from any of the western summits, having of course the additional charm of island and sea when compared with most of even the higher mountains in the centre of Scotland. Long lines of heights almost in every direction, irregularly dominated by clean-cut peaks; the Atlantic, here bounded only by the horizon, there dotted over with islands and islets from Arran to the Long Island, islands and mainland so apparently commingling that one can scarcely tell which is which; numerous distant mountains on the mainland, both north and south—little wonder that the beholder is amazed with the enormous extent as well as the marvellous variety of the prospect. Several noted points in Antrim and Donegal may be seen, distant from 52 to 72 miles; hills in Islay, Tiree, Mull, and South Uist (Beinn Mhor is no less than 106 miles off); Ben Nevis, 73 miles; Ben Lawers, 12; Ben Lomond, 57; Goatfell, 37; and Merrick, 80—and these are merely a few of the best known mountains that crowd around.

We were not yet done with the Paps. The walk to Feolin Ferry the following day, especially the latter half of it, is one not to be missed. We broke it at Jura House,

lingering here and there by the coast as well, for the Sound of Islay has a certain fascination. The view from Jura House is extensive and peculiar. Across the Sound are McArthur's Head and the hills of Islay; to the south-east Kintyre; in the distance Ireland. 'Tis a lonely road all the way and in that is part of its charm. A little cargo steamer thrashing its northward way through the Sound seemed hard put in fighting the current, and we began to have fears that the ferry boat would not cross that evening. After a wait the ferryman decided to make the attempt, though we would have been happier otherwise. A spare oar lay in the boat and on it we kept our eyes, in case of a capsize, but somehow or other we got safely across, after shipping a little water. Port Askaig, a village of about half a dozen houses, was busy, for H.M. ship "Research" lay at anchor on the other side of the Sound, and Jack had an afternoon in Islay. Some had preferred to drive across the island, others remained at the hotel and were noisily happy. At 9.30 a steam launch carried them all off to the "Research." Several days were spent in Islay, their only connection with the present subject being the outstanding prospect of the Paps as we sauntered one morning from Ballygrant to Port Askaig to catch the steamer. We dwelt on the view of them as the steamer held for Craighouse, and when they faded from sight, as we neared Tarbert, we could only look forward to another and a more prolonged visit to Jura. The Paps we now feel certain should be crossed from east to west or *vice versa*.