

## THE CORRYAIRICK AND MINIKAIG PASSES.

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Desert dun  
That heaves and rolls endlessly north away  
By Corryairick and the springs of Spey  
The grand old country of the Chattan Clan.

DURING the lengthening nights of early winter when one's climbing-boots and rucksack are packed away, and when the memory of one's summer holiday is fading rapidly, we have spent many happy evenings with our maps spread out before us on the dining-room table.

The joys of past holidays are recalled and linked together in one's mind with the pleasures of plans yet to be accomplished and peaks yet to be climbed. These fireside mountaineering excursions bring back all the joys, all the clear days and the victorious climbs; the mists have disappeared in the distance, and the days when we were beaten by some snow-capped peak or rocky chimney are forgotten. Not only is the past brought back, but the days which we hope are to come are brought before us—great tours are arranged, and in our imagination we traverse the hills of Scotland from Loch Duich to Loch Muick.

On these fireside excursions there were two passes which in our mind's eye we had crossed and recrossed many times—The Corryairick and the Minikaig. The former runs from Fort Augustus to Laggan Bridge, and the latter from Badenoch to Atholl.

For years these passes had appealed to us for many reasons—their remoteness—their loneliness; but probably more than either, their historical associations drew us towards them with magic attraction, and it was therefore with especial joy that we arranged to meet at Fort Augustus on August 12th (1913).

The sail down Loch Ness on a sunny summer's day



is something to remember ; and to our mind is richer in colour and beauty than a sail on any of the better known lakes of Switzerland. The well-wooded steep banks topped by the heather-clad hills—which fortunately are not disfigured by funicular railways—and the deep cut valleys on both sides excel anything that we have seen elsewhere. The interesting Abbey and Museum at Fort Augustus, and the many walks around, provide ample enjoyment for a stay of a few days ; but the knowledge of Fort Augustus and its beauties possessed by the average tourist is limited to that which can be gleaned while his steamer is negotiating the many locks which bring the divergent levels of Loch Ness and Loch Oich nearer each other.

Whatever views we may have on the subject of early-rising in ordinary daily life, we have no doubt that the practice is very desirable when on a walking tour—it is well to have the burden of the day's work over before the mid-day meal, and the highest point of the day's march conquered by noon.

Fortunately there is a boat which leaves Fort Augustus at 6 a.m., so that the early riser is cultivated by the hotel keepers there more than in many other Highland resorts, and one's request for breakfast at 5.30 a.m. is met with a cheery face, and a substantial feast is prepared by that time.

We had spent the previous afternoon reconnoitring the hillsides around Cullachy House, and we were glad we had done so, as the Corryairick pass, like so many other mountain routes, presents difficulties at the start. As is so often found at the civilized ends of a pass there are numerous paths, each of which looks as likely to lead to the pass as the others, and at the start of a long day it is annoying to be in doubt as to the correct one to take. However in our prospecting of the previous day we selected the path which keeps near the water of the Tarff in preference to the military road higher up the hillside. Our plan was to walk along the Fort William road for about a mile and then take the road that runs east-



ward at right angles to it. This eastward road brings one to the entrance drive to Cullachy House, along which we walked until within sight of the mansion, where we crossed a field between the drive and the river which took us on to our path. This path meanders pleasantly through the woods. Both banks of the river are beautifully wooded, the right-hand side in spruce and larch, the left-hand side in hazel and oak. The walk up the Tarff Valley is delightful; the path gradually rises away from the stream, which has cut itself a deep gorge; and some of the glimpses of the limpid water far down beneath are really exquisite. Apparently there is a path on the right bank also, as we saw some spindle-built bridges crossing the gulleys in a truly thrilling manner.

After about two hours' walking we reached the junction of the main streams forming the River Tarff. Here we crossed the Allt Lagan 'a Bhainne and kept along the right bank, veering slightly eastward so that we might pick up the main military road higher up after it had crossed the Allt Coire Uchdachan. The military road crosses these various streams by substantial stone bridges, most of which are intact, but the bridge at the confluence of the two last-named streams has broken down, and was, we were told, the turning point in the endeavour of a motorist to drive his car from the Spey to Loch Ness by this route. The road itself is magnificently engineered, the gradients being easy, and the surface—although grass-grown—is good. It had been dull all morning, but the rain came on in earnest as we were toiling up the final climb to the summit of the pass, and we were denied the view. Principal Shairp speaks in eulogistic terms of the prospect from the summit of the pass. He says "From its ridge a view of every mountain head from Moray Firth to Peaks of Skye . . . nothing I ever saw like it . . . We may live for years ere we see such another"—this is great praise from such a far-travelled pedestrian. But the view was denied us and



we had to march across the bleak summit level and then descend the well-made zig-zags into the Allt Yairick valley. We cannot recall any place where the effect of the ice age is so manifest as it is in the head waters of this valley—the moraines are defined with a clearness that we have nowhere else observed.

Some three miles farther on we reached Meal Garve and there joined the Spey, which is here little more than a burn. There is a right-of-way from this spot into Glen Roy past Loch Spey, and we should think that a delightful walk could be had by taking this route. We had some refreshment at Mealgarbha and then started our long hard tramp to Newtonmore. From Mealgarbha the road keeps the left bank of the Spey until Garva Bridge is reached; here the valley opens and there is more evidence of human occupation. Near Glenshirra Lodge a path strikes over the hills to Loch Laggan Hotel, and we would recommend this route as the Drumgask Inn, near Laggan Bridge, is now closed, and it is a long tramp to Newtonmore. However, we had to be in Newtonmore that night, so we tramped on. Creag Ruadh—that fine little mountain behind Drumgask with its tower—is a pleasant feature in the landscape. At Dalcholly House we kept the path by the river side, and forded the mighty Spey dry-shod, and so reached Laggan Bridge. The last eight miles on the public road proved the hardest of the day, for though the bridle paths of the hills may be steep and stony, they are not so trying to one's feet as the hard macadam of the roads, and we were glad to reach our resting-place for the night. Our first day's march was over, and after rest and refreshment our minds were filled with Jacobite memories which were intertwined with our day's march.

In the month of August in the year 1745, little more than a week after the standard was raised in Glenfinnan, the army of Prince Charles negotiated this spirit-haunted pass. Retracing our steps to follow the Highlanders, we picture this gathering of the



clans, numbering about 2000, emerging from the woods of Aberchalder, at the head of Loch Oich, and following the military road formed some years earlier. Once more the glamour of the Great Marquis and Viscount Dundee had thrown its spell upon the Highlanders, and their enthusiasm and devoted loyalty for Prince Charles—the “star of their fate”—was boundless. As the ascent is made, the gorge of the Tarff disappears, merging in the slope, and the hillside becomes bare and open, broken by an occasional gully. The going is easier, and one can imagine the camp followers making up on the main body, as the road, after descending to cross to the right hand side of the streams, rises again on the Hill of Corryairick. The Prince's passage of the Col (2519 ft.) was not disputed. Not only was no opposition offered to the reconnoitring party sent by him, but it was joined by the small body of men sent forward from the other side by the Commander-in-Chief of the Government forces in Scotland—General Sir John Cope—to cover his retreat to Inverness by way of Ruthven. Twenty-four hours before Prince Charles reached Garvamore, General Cope, intending to cross the Corryairick to check the rising in the wilds of Lochaber, reached within  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles of the Inn then at that place. Amazed by the rapid and impetuous nature of the Highlanders' advance, he wisely dreaded to enter their mountain fastnesses.

As we have seen, the Pass is very steep on the south side and the road is carried up by a series of over a dozen traverses bearing the name of the Devil's Staircase. To surmount this in the face of an enemy would have been impossible; besides, it had been reported to Sir John that at the Bridge of Snugborough, on the north side of the mountain, he was to be opposed by a body of Highlanders, and attacked by others in the rear. It was a not inconsiderable feat for the Highland army to take eight swivel-guns across such a Pass in a single day, and so sure had the Prince been of an encounter before night that in the morning, when putting on his brogues,



he declared that he would be up with the Government troops before they were unloosed. At Garvamore the Highlanders rested and dined, and Prince Charles proposed the toast of "The health of good Mr. Cope, and may every General in the usurper's army prove himself as much a friend as he has done." The Chiefs held an important Council of War, and it was decided to march south, the passes of Drumochter and Killiecrankie being undefended, and the country left defenceless by General Cope's surprising retreat northwards. Next day the Prince slept in the heather at Dalwhinnie. Such were the beginnings of "the rising"—a memorable and romantic campaign.

With these memories we were lulled into that deep sleep which few but the mountaineer know, and rose next morning refreshed for the work of a new day.

To get on to the right-of-way track for Struan we had to cross over into Glen Tromie, so, starting shortly after six in the morning, we crossed the Spey by the beautiful old bridge which carries the highroad away southward, and when we reached the road which comes from Kingussie on the right bank of the Spey we walked down that road for about a quarter of a mile, crossed the fence, and struck up the hill side by the rough track which leads to the ruin at Lynmore. There is no special feature on this walk, but the view backward to Creag Dhubh is particularly beautiful. The deep sluggish stream just before Lynmore requires care, and would be rather a difficult obstacle were it not for a kindly plank across it. After Lynmore the path is lost for a short distance—it has never been very definite—but on crossing the Allt Ghuibhais it is more distinct, and it is a delightful walk into Glen Tromie, which that day was a blaze of purple.

We had the Tromie as our companion for but a short time. The Minikaig path leaves the Gaick road just before the road crosses the Allt Bhran. The path follows the right bank of the stream and at first is not at all distinct. We were no sooner off the road than a



fine adder crossed our path, but, despite our efforts to kill it, soon disappeared among the long heather. After walking for about half an hour after leaving the road we sighted more wild life in the form of a magnificent eagle high up above the cliffs on our right. The path hugs the stream closely for several miles. The country around is desolate rather than wild. The hills are rounded but there are a few deep cut gullies which add interest to the walk. Mr. Will C. Smith makes a very delightful reference to the Minikaig pass in the classic article which opened the previous volume of our Journal. He quotes from a 17th century manuscript that "Ther is a way from the yate of Blair in Atholl to Ruffen in Badenoch made be David Cuming, Earle of Athoill, for carts to pass with wyne." The route certainly would have been a heavy one for a wine cart. The Earl's engineering ability appears to have been not so good as that of the great General Wade whose road we had crossed but the day before. However, the Earl perhaps foresaw politicians scouring his country-side for small-holdings, and did not wish to make an easy access to the fastnesses of the glens. We were sorry the wine cart business had stopped, as the day was hot and we would have gladly somewhat lightened their burden. The route near the summit—about 2,600 feet—on the north side is fairly steep, but there is a long plateau on the top and a delightful slope to the headwaters of the Caochan Lub, which meanders cheerily through the hills. We lunched by its banks and were refreshed by a rest on the long, green grass. The path climbs up the left bank and then descends steeply to the confluence of the two streams which form the Bruar. Here a fair driving road begins. Shortly before Bruar Lodge is reached the stream has been dammed and a loch is formed, probably to serve the double purpose of sport and power generation. The eight odd miles into Struan seemed long that evening. We were footsore and tired after our long tramp over the hills, but found rest and refreshment in the valley.