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CORRIE BHROCHAIN, BRAERIACH.

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A HIGH-LEVEL ASCENT OF BEN MUICH DHUI.

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THE ordinary ascent of Ben Muich Dhui from Derry Lodge *via* the Glen Derry and Corrie Etchachan path is essentially a low-level route, as out of a total distance, there and back, of fifteen miles the climber is only above the 2,500 feet level for about four miles. As a contrast to this, were the climber to make the ascent by the Carn a'Mhaim ridge and return by that of Cairngorm of Derry he would be above the 2,500 feet level for eight miles out of a total distance of twelve, and such a route may be termed a high-level one. The route described below keeps above the 2,500 feet level for twelve miles (of which eight are above 3,000 feet) out of a total distance of eighteen; but it is something more than a mere ascent of Ben Muich Dhui.

It was schemed out as an item for the Club Meet at Braemar at Easter, 1914, but bad weather prevented it, and a good many other plans, from being accomplished at that time; doubtless much to the disappointment of a certain keeper, who, when the plan was mentioned to him, said he would "like to see the man who did it."

A favourable opportunity occurred in the following August, when Duncan invited me up to Braemar for a week-end; and on Sunday, the 9th, we left that village in a dog-cart about eight o'clock in the morning nominally for the ascent of Ben Muich Dhui. I suggested to Duncan that it would be a good idea to go up from Derry Lodge over Carn a'Mhaim, and continue over Beinn Mheadhoin to the Làirig an Laoigh, as such a route would avoid the too familiar Corrie Etchachan path, and would give us a very fine high level route. He readily agreed, it being a very fine morning; but I did not tell him the

rest of the programme that was in my mind in case he might be discouraged.

In due course we reached Derry Lodge, and, leaving the trap there, we took to the Làirig path. After crossing the Luibeg Burn, we left the path about its highest point, and struck up the south-east slope of Carn a'Mhaim. The 1,400 feet climb up to the summit was soon accounted for, and on the way we crossed the 3,000 feet contour, below which we were not to descend, with the exception of three very slight dips, for the next eleven miles. Carn a'Mhaim is a fine view point for Glen Geusachan and the Devil's Point, and I had some little trouble in persuading Duncan that in a long hill expedition the attainment of a summit must, as a rule, be regarded only as a mere incident in the day's proceedings, and not as a reason for a prolonged halt. From the top of Carn a'Mhaim a fairly narrow ridge, rejoicing in the easily pronounced name of Ceann Crionn Carn a'Mhaim, runs in a north-westerly direction for nearly two miles to where it abuts against the south slope of Ben Muich Dhui. This gave us a most delightful walk, with magnificent views on both sides. On our right there was the rapidly-shallowing Glen Luibeg leading up to the slopes of Ben Muich Dhui, and on our left there was the deep trough of Glen Dee, on the other side of which Cairn Toul and Braeriach towered a thousand feet above us. The route is certainly a very attractive one for the ascent of Ben Muich Dhui, and it has the merit of being fully a mile shorter than the Glen Derry and Corrie Etchachan path. The south-west slopes of Ben Muich Dhui are covered with large scree, but we found the stones to be very firm, and with a strong following south-west wind we were fairly blown up the 1,750 feet that lay between us and the summit cairn.

The attainment of our highest point for the day had, of course, to be treated as something more than a mere incident, and we therefore rested at the cairn for about half an hour, during which we had a light lunch and

a somewhat indifferent view; and satisfied ourselves that no naval engagement was proceeding in the Moray Firth. We now made a bee-line for the top of Beinn Mheadhoin, which looked temptingly near. Our route lay down the rocky north-east slope of Ben Muich Dhui, in the recesses of which there still lay several large masses of snow, which gave this part of the mountain quite an Alpine appearance. The final slope down to the head of Loch Etchachan is pretty steep, and I think that our route to the outlet of the loch must have been considerably longer than the ordinary path, which, however, we were of course out to avoid. We crossed the burn at the outlet from the loch and climbed right up to the top of Beinn Mheadhoin, also climbing the summit tor, which is not difficult. I now suggested to my companion that the shortest way back to Derry Lodge was over the top of Beinn a'Chaorruinn. I do not remember now what were the arguments that I advanced—the principal one was probably the fact that I had never climbed it; but the proposition, as considered on a fine afternoon from a vantage point high up on the east slope of Beinn Mheadhoin, did not appear to be absolutely preposterous, and Duncan gave a verbal undertaking that he would do the trip. In a short time we were down at the pass, and I must admit that the steep west slope of Beinn a'Chaorruinn now looked very repulsive, and it may have been that I regretted having made the proposition, or that Duncan was sorry he had so readily agreed to it. In any case, neither of us said anything—I was, I think, keeping out of earshot by giving him a “good lead”; and we just steadily tackled the business in hand, which was a steep grass and rocky ascent of 1,100 feet to the summit. At the cairn we had our only touch of bad weather during the day, in the form of a cold shower of rain. When this was clearing off we had a remarkably fine view of Ben Muich Dhui, which was seen through a delicate veil of rain reaching across from Beinn Mheadhoin to Cairngorm of Derry. The

top of Beinn a'Chaorruinn is undoubtedly the best view point from which to see Ben Muich Dhui, and possibly the only one from which it can be seen to full advantage.

Having been successful in persuading Duncan that the shortest way from Beinn Mheadhoin to Derry Lodge lay over the top of Beinn a'Chaorruinn, there was now little trouble in getting him to agree that the shortest way from the latter hill to Derry was over the top of Beinn Bhreac ; and, after a short rest, we set out for the top of that somewhat uninteresting hill. Should anyone to desire to study a peat moss in a raw condition, I strongly recommend him to the Moine Bhealaidh, which lies between the two hills, the crossing of which was the one incident—a somewhat big one—in this stage of our journey. We did not find it very terrible, as we had clear dry weather and were able to dodge most of the soft places ; but the pass would be an appalling place to get into in thick slushy weather after a six-inch fall of new snow. The only interesting things about Beinn Bhreac were that it was our last summit and that it was an excellent point from which to view the whole course of our somewhat extensive walk, the seemingly vast extent of which rather impressed us. Leaving our last summit with regret, we ran down the south-west slope into Glen Derry. We soon reached the tree line ; and the final descent through the Scots firs to the Lodge was a fitting ending to what was one of the best big days that we had ever had in the Cairngorms, and we have had many. The total height climbed was about 6,000 feet, and we took about nine hours to the round.

During the foregoing excursion, Duncan told me that the Devil's Point was the only 3,000 feet Cairngorm summit that he had not yet climbed, and we therefore arranged that I would go up to Braemar three weeks later and climb the hill with him. This we duly did ; and in order to neutralise any evil influences that might exist on the Satanic peak, we included the ascent of the Angel's Peak in the day's programme. We began by

climbing Braeriach from the Làirig by the shoulder between Corrie Ruadh and Corrie Bhrochain, which is quite a good route, as it is sufficiently broken up to be interesting and higher up commands very fine views into Braeriach's finest corrie—Corrie Bhrochain. From the summit we walked round the edge of the Garachory to the top of the Angel's Peak, and from thence made our way direct to the Devil's Point. All these hills are well-known, and I only refer to the expedition as an excuse for making a few remarks on the somewhat diverse subjects of boots and devils.

To deal with the less profane subject first. The late Donald Fraser always maintained that the standard mountaineer's hob-nailers were far too heavy for ordinary hill excursions in the Cairngorms, and our experiences on the two excursions described establish his theory. Duncan and I are fairly well matched on a hill walk; and on the Ben Muich Dhui excursion, when we both wore our biggest boots, there was not much between us. On the second expedition, Duncan stole a march on me by putting on a much lighter pair of boots, with the result that he led me easily the whole day—so much so that, when coming across the path from Glen Dee to Derry in the evening, he set up a tremendous pace, and I thought I would never see him again as I laboriously trudged along the path fully quarter a mile behind and quite unable to reduce his lead. The conclusion that we came to, based on the experience of these two walks and of several previous ones, was that, while the "climbing boot" is excellent for rough work and snow climbs (and Alpine work, of course), it is far too heavy for ordinary summer ascents or hill walks on the Cairngorms.

So much for the boots and now for the devils.

The view from the top of the Devil's Point looking down into Glen Dee is very impressive and not suited for giddy people. Seen from near the top, the south-east corner of the hill appears to be fairly broken up, and it is possible that the descent would not be very

difficult; but, of course, appearances from above are deceptive, as one only sees the ledges and does not see the pitches. After we had rested some little time on the top, we decided to descend by the much easier route across the scree slope to the north-west of the summit, and down the path in the corrie to the bothy. The scree slope is quite a simple one and is set at a very moderate angle, but in crossing it each of us in turn stumbled rather badly, and on one occasion I actually fell. I would not like to go as far as to say that I was *tripped up*, but there is no getting over the fact that a moderately-sized stone got between my feet in some mysterious manner, and that I came a cropper in consequence. I did not attach any importance to these incidents at the time, nor afterwards to the fact that, when driving back from Derry Lodge to Braemar in the dog-cart, Duncan, who occupied the back seat, was strangely silent the whole way. It was only at dinner that evening that he told me that, when we were about a mile below Derry Lodge, he had looked up to the hillside on his right, and had seen the Devil about a quarter of a mile away, waving his arms to him! What it was that Duncan actually saw we cannot tell now, although we have both driven over the same road since then and kept our eyes glued to the hillside in hope of seeing His Majesty, but failed to see anything that could even suggest him. Yet Duncan must have seen *something*, as he was so scared that he did not speak for half an hour afterwards, and had not the presence of mind to stop the trap so that the driver and I might see the gentleman for ourselves. It is possible that the wearing of a light pair of boots is not the true explanation of his remarkably speedy retreat from the Devil's Point, and that the real reason is of too awful a nature to be divulged even now!