

## EXCURSIONS AND NOTES.

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THE past winter was noticeable for the severe weather that prevailed in the Aberdeenshire Highlands in common with the Scottish Highlands generally, and especially for the succession of snowstorms, the depth of snow that accumulated, and the long duration of wintry conditions. Not for the last forty years, it is said, has there been such a severe and prolonged snow spell on Upper Deeside; and even as late as the morning of 24th March about 2 inches of snow fell at Braemar, about 1½ inches on the hills round Ballater, and fully one inch at Balmoral and in the Crathie district. For eight miles round Braemar, and for a period of eight weeks, according to one report, snow lay from 12 to 24 inches deep, and during that period the bare ground was not visible. A special correspondent, in an article in the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* of 25th March, wrote:—

“It is quite an Alpine scene which meets the eye of the traveller on a journey from Ballater to Braemar. Lochnagar can no longer justify Byron’s description of ‘dark,’ for even the ‘Black Spout’ is a white one for the nonce, filled in great measure, as it and the other ‘spouts’ are, with very deep wreaths of snow. Yet there remain, in striking contrast to the snow-covered landscape, those ‘steep frowning glories’ of high precipices above the mountain loch, rising sheer up so that there the snowflake cannot repose. But for those cliffs there is scarcely a dark spot to be seen on this mountain or on Ben Muich Dhui or Beinn a’ Bhuird, or any of the giant hills of the neighbourhood. Here, undoubtedly, winter still reigneth over the land. The moors are covered with snow to a depth of several feet. Several of the roads in the district have been blocked for weeks, the snowdrifts in certain places being as deep as from nine to ten feet. A drift was cut on the Ballater to Braemar road at one place, where it was found that a horse’s ears were on a level with the top of the cutting.”

Deer suffered badly from the severe and prolonged snowstorm. Early in the season many of the herds left the higher parts of the mountains to seek shelter lower down, but even there the snow was so deep that they were little better off, and the problem of feeding them became a serious one. Grouse, too, left the higher altitudes and migrated east and south, where they could obtain food and shelter. Not for many seasons have white hares been so plentiful, but rabbits suffered greatly, many being found dead, practically smothered in the snow-drifts.

The conditions for ski-ing were of the most favourable kind. “Magnificent sport” was enjoyed, but the number of those who engaged in this pastime was somewhat limited owing to many devotees being otherwise employed “somewhere in France.”

It is long since pedestrians who walked through Glen Feshie asserted that the track marked on the Ordnance Map as leading from Geldie Lodge to

the Feshie had no real existence—acknowledged, at any rate, their inability to find it (See “Glen Feshie” by **GELDIE-FESHIE** Robert Anderson in *C.C.J.*, 1896; I., 349-50). The **TRACK.** track still seems to remain somewhat mysterious and elusive, for Mr. J. B. Nicol, in his article in our last number, said he failed to discern it. So far as he could discover, he wrote, no road exists, and various tracks he followed landed him in bogs or died out. Mr. John Croll was apparently more successful as a “path-finder.” Writing to the *Free Press* shortly after our January issue appeared, he said—

“It happened that about half-an-hour or so after Mr. Nicol started up the Geldie, I followed; and on arriving at Geldie Lodge I took a look at the ground, and found the bogs such as he describes. Concluding that I had not the length of shank to negotiate bogs with ease and comfort, I took the lie of the hill, and it seemed that along the ridge for about five miles there should be decent walking. I went straight north, and found a well-beaten track, with cairns at regular intervals, all the way to the Feshie.”

The apparent discrepancy between the two “investigators” was explained in a subsequent letter to the *Free Press* by Mr. James A. Parker.

“There should not be the slightest difficulty in walking from Geldie Lodge to the river Eidart” (wrote Mr. Parker) “if one keeps to the high ground on the north side of the glen. Mr. Nicol must, I think, have kept too close to the Geldie. The path mentioned by Mr. Croll is indicated on the one-inch Ordnance map, and a friend and I when going from Braemar to Feshie Bridge last September followed it for about two miles. It is, however, not much better than the moor, and is hardly worth searching for. It commences near the point where the driving road (*sic*) to Geldie Lodge turns down southward toward the lodge. The distance from the beginning of the path to the Eidart is three miles.”

Further testimony as to the actual existence of the track was subsequently given by Mr. John Clarke in an interesting letter recounting his experiences in traversing Glen Feshie. Walking from Kingussie to Braemar in the spring of 1876, he received instructions as to his route from one intimately acquainted with the glen, who warned him particularly about the crossing of the Eidart, the only real difficulty. “The bridge had just been swept away by the winter floods,” he said “the track beyond was lost for a bit, and the course must therefore be laid by a small cairn, the position of which he carefully described.”

“Everything turned out according to programme” (wrote Mr. Clarke). “The Eidart was very low, the day was gorgeous, and the walk one after all these years it is a delight to recall. As a matter of fact, after crossing the Eidart I steered a little to the left, and did not strike the path at all. After rounding the slope which runs down from Monadh Mor I got sight of the road—somewhere near Geldie Lodge, I fancy—and made a bee-line for it over the heather, which was at this portion of the hill quite good walking.”

On a later occasion—about 1895—Mr. Clarke explored the same region from Braemar, cycling as far as the White Bridge.

"I followed" (he wrote) "what by courtesy is termed the driving road up to Geldie Lodge, and then the track, which, as Mr. Croll has said, is here quite distinct. My pencil notes of the excursion say I kept it 'for two miles,' after which I had to diverge towards the left, as my first objective was the southern Meall Tionail abutting on the early course of the Feshie and right over the point of its 'capture' by Speyside. Of the existence of a track there is no doubt. Not, of course, always as well marked as one might desire. Of the lower ground to the left, into which Mr. Nicol seems to have deviated, I can speak feelingly. It is quite the worst walking I know in the whole of the Cairngorms, though the ridge from Mount Battock to Cloch-na-Ben is a close second, the difficulties being, however, of a different kind."

MR. PARKER, in the course of his letter, seized the opportunity to emphasise the suggestion he threw out at the last Annual Meeting of the Club about the need of a bridge over the Eidart. Regarding

FOOTBRIDGE this, there is no room for any difference of opinion. Mr. PARKER wrote:—

THE EIDART. "I am struck with the fact that neither Mr. Nicol nor Mr. Croll refers to the footbridge across the Eidart, and infer from their silence that they both found that river on its good behaviour. The bridge, as I found it last September, consisted of two spans resting on a rather slim-looking pier in the middle of the river. Each span consisted of two thin logs fastened together with cross spars, which acted for steps, the whole being garnished on the up river side by a thin and very flexible fencing wire, which did duty for a handrail. In good weather, when the river is low the crossing of the bridge forms merely a pleasant incident in the day's excursion: but when the weather is very bad, the wind high, and the Eidart in full flood, as my friend and I had it last September, the crossing of the bridge is decidedly sensational and not altogether devoid of danger. Should a party arrive at the river when it is in flood and find that the bridge has been washed away, as is not infrequently the case, they may find it necessary to walk five miles up Glen Eidart before a safe crossing can be found.

"Some years ago the Cairngorm Club erected a very useful footbridge across the Bennie near Coylum Bridge, on the Làirig Pass path, and at the recent annual meeting of the club I suggested that they should now take steps to erect a substantial footbridge across the Eidart on the Glen Feshie path, and I hope that this will be done before a serious accident occurs at the present bridge."

The footbridge here described is evidently the one mentioned in *C.C.J.*, VI., 328. A former experience of Mr. Parker at the Eidart bridge is noted at p. 290 of that volume.

Mr. Parker's suggestion was warmly supported in the following passage in Mr. Clarke's letter:—

"In 1913 I went up Glen Feshie again from the west in order to re-examine its possibilities as a route for a trunk road. The bridge which afforded such thrills to Mr. Parker was then new, and a frail enough structure if one imagined it with a raging torrent below; it is fit for summer

use only. There can be no doubt as to the necessity of a substantial and safe bridge at this point of the Eidart, which closely resembles the other point of exit from Upper Deeside at the Junction of the Tarf and Tilt, where the Bedford Memorial Bridge now stands."

BENNACHIE is not classified among the Bens. Yet it has a worthy place of its own. The Nor'-East knows it well. Its Mither Tap is both a landmark and a weather-gauge. From the far horizon the

BENNACHIE. sailors catch it and the fishermen take their bearings :

"Clochnaben and Benachie

Are twa landmarks far oot at sea."

Its noble head one never tires of looking at. The broad base, the long back, dark and pine-clad up to 1300 feet above sea-level, the shapely summit, clear cut against the sky (like a huge Aberdeenshire bullock reposing and holding his head up), all form a picture that wins universal admiration. Bennachie also is the poor man's barometer. When rain approaches he puts on his white nightcap and cloud. If snow threatens, he becomes prophetic and dons his white mantle long before it lies on the laighs of the Garioch. "He's a wise chief, that Bennachie," said a crofter to me; "He aye kens fat's comin.' I lippen mair tae him than tae ony wither-glass. The gless aften chates, but the Mither Tap hisna its marra'; it maks nae mistaks."

The mountain range runs east and west. Its southern sides slope down to Paradise and the lovely Vale of Alford. But it is the northern side, strange to say, that has become the region of poetry and story. The back of the hill is pine-clad at the highest ranges. But below the zone of fir come crofts and small farms innumerable. The poetry of the place is there. Who has not heard the lovely Scottish song?—

Oh ! gin I were where Gadie rins,  
Where Gadie rins, where Gadie rins,  
Oh ! gin I were where Gadie rins  
At the back o' Bennachie !  
Aince mair to hear the wild bird's sang,  
To wander birks and braes amang,  
Midst friends and favourites left sae lang,  
At the back o' Bennachie.

The height of Bennachie is said to be 1889 feet. Every child born in 1889 was told he was just as old as the mountain was high. One day an inspector was visiting the public schools in the Garioch and asked a boy, who had answered well, how old he was. "I'm juist as aul' as Bennachie" was the reply. Much astonished, the Government officer said—"You must be very ancient, my little man." The teacher appeased the examiner by stating that he had always tried to utilise local facts of all kinds to assist the pupils' recollection of dates.—"The Nor'-East in the War Time," by Rev. W. S. Bruce, Banff, in the *Scotsman*, 8 January.

[It is ungracious, perhaps, to spoil a good story, but none of the four principal tops of Bennachie attains a height of 1,889 feet. The highest, Oxen Craig, is only 1,733 feet; the Mither Tap, 1,698 feet.—EDITOR.]

THE *Sphere* of 22 January gave an account of a picturesque adventure by motor-car—the ascent of Mount Glorious (2,400 feet high) by Lieutenant W. T. Forrest, R.F.A., in a Napier motor-car. Mount Glorious is the highest peak in the D'Aguiar range, which lies about twenty miles north of Brisbane. “Hitherto” (said the account) “this peak has been ascended only on foot, it having always been deemed impossible for any vehicle on wheels to make the ascent to the summit. No road or track exists. The view from the highest point is unsurpassed throughout the whole of Australia. Lieutenant Forrest undertook the trip partly with a view to proving that it would be possible to construct a road which would enable cars to make the ascent, and as a result of the success of his efforts this will now be taken in hand and a new tract of country will be opened up. Among the exciting incidents of the climb was a fall into a ‘wash-out’ caused by heavy rains descending from the mountain. This was 6 ft. deep and over 8 feet wide (V-shape), and Lieutenant Forrest believes that no other car but an extra-strong Colonial Napier could have withstood the strain put upon the vehicle by this sudden drop. The Napier climbed out from the crevice under its own power. The most dangerous spot of all was near the summit. Here the gradient was extreme and the track very rough. To the rear of the car was a sheer drop of 80 ft., so that if any mishap had occurred and the car started running backward a disaster would have happened. The descent of the mountain was undertaken in the dark with the aid of powerful headlights. A most uncanny element was supplied by the weird shadows reflected by bush fires. The total time occupied on the ascent and descent was  $3\frac{1}{2}$  hours. The journey necessitated the fording of three rivers, and at one part Lieutenant Forrest had to rush through a bush fire.”

THE *Times* of 22 March recorded the death, in her 80th year, of Miss Catherine Martha Gardner, who was well known as an Alpine climber. She climbed Mont Blanc in 1886, and since then had made the ascent of every peak of consequence in the neighbourhood of Saas and Zermatt. On one occasion, on the Matterhorn, she was delayed for many hours by a violent storm. She also made a remarkable descent of the Pique d'Arolla, and finally ascended the Lyskman, in spite of its reputation for fatal accidents.

SIR OWEN SEAMAN'S versifying fertility and versatility were very effectively displayed in a recent poem in *Punch*, “The Kaiser on Kilimanjaro,” *a propos* of the story that on the delimitation of British KILIMANJARO. and German East Africa, the mountain of Kilimanjaro (19,000 feet), situated in a district recently captured from the Germans by the British forces, was generously conceded to the Germans at the special desire of the Kaiser (at the time only Prince

