

CORRESPONDENCE.

THE SGARSOCH MARKET.



*Photo. by*

*W. Barzlay.*

TO THE EDITOR, "CAIRNGORM CLUB JOURNAL."

SIR,—It is now over a dozen years since I visited An Sgarsoch, so I have little to add to what has been said, but I enclose a photograph of the cairn which may be of some interest.

Our route was from Blair Athol by Glen Tilt and the Kites' Cairn (Carn Chlamhain) (3159 feet), thence across the valley of the Tarf to the base of the mountain; and the most lasting impression of our visit, in spite of the wintry state of the weather—inconstant snow showers all day in mid-June—was the interminable peat bogs we had to traverse between Kites' Cairn and Sgarsoch. Indeed, if it had not been a particularly

dry summer previously, I question very much if we should have reached Blair the same day.

Mr. McConnochie mentions the old drove road shown on Knox's map of the Basin of the Tay (1836), which ran from Glen Tilt by the west shoulder of Sgarsoch to Braemar. Well, I was in Glen Tilt the other day, and I regret to say that it is now obliterated—at least, I could find no indication of it, though I ascended the slopes of Conalich on the right bank of the Allt Chrochaidh, and also went to the summit of An Sligearnach (2577 feet). A faint stalker's track zig-zags up the face of this hill, but the old drove road is marked as starting about half a mile farther down the glen on the other side of the Allt Chrochaidh (Allt Crochie on Knox's Map).

The walking was too heavy, all the bogs being full, or I should have continued my tramp to Sgarsoch.

What I should like to know is why this track should deviate from the well-known path by the Bynack to cross practically the summit of Sgarsoch, and then return to the parent path in Glen Tilt. Surely there must have been some reason—some very good reason—for this, as both roads are marked on the map.

I am just afraid I shall not have another opportunity of visiting that district for some time, but the photograph of the cairn will show that there has been "a considerable gathering of stones."—I am, etc.,

WILLIAM BARCLAY.

"SUNNYSIDE," MURRAY ROAD,  
SCONE, PERTH, 9th August, 1916.

SIR,—Mr. W. M. Alexander's communication in the January issue regarding the supposed Fair on Sgarsoch was of much general interest. It has been usefully supplemented by two other correspondents,\* and I now desire to add a few words; pressure of work has prevented me from doing so earlier.

\* [Mr. Clarke was shown Mr. Barclay's letter.—EDITOR].

I visited Sgarsoch more than a score of years ago, and subsequently sought information regarding its tradition from a retired keeper at Braemar—one of the many Mackintoshes of the district. My conclusions go generally to confirm those stated by your other correspondents. My visit was part of a more extended excursion, which included cycle from Braemar to the White Bridge, the Glen Feshie route past the Geldie Lodge, the dreary region of the head waters of the Geldie and Feshie, then in succession Meall Tionail (southern), Cairn Eelar and An Sgarsoch, finishing with the ridge between the Geldie and Bynack (Cnapan Garbh) to the White Bridge, and "so home and to bed," as Pepys would say.

Recollections of such an ancient date may be somewhat blurred, but they are fortunately supplemented by special notes and even a rough sketch of the top of Sgarsoch. All my experience corroborates Mr. Alexander's observations. He has so fully described the scene and the views that it is unnecessary for me to say anything of them. The one feature which strongly impressed itself and stands out clearly is that the top of the mountain was not as Nature had left it. It everywhere showed traces of human action, of arrangements designed to serve some purpose. A kind of road had been constructed or cleared. The stones were tilted for shelter, or laid flat as seats. A little heap marked a spring or drinking-place, and a horizontal line at one side of the hill seemed to suggest a row of feeding-places for cattle or horses. The whole mountain top was covered with grass, which had been extensively invaded by moss.

Standing on this outlier, high (3,300 feet), not very difficult of access, and not very open to attack or surprise, one could well imagine its choice as a site for a fair. It is situated at the junction of Deeside with Glen Tilt as well as with the two great Speyside roads, Glen Feshie and the Lairig Dhru: the Lairig an Laigh is also adjacent and would be tapped by it. The persistent

tradition of the district is that the Sgarsoch was the site of an old Fair. Its situation strongly confirms the tradition. The condition of the top as I saw it suggested very distinctly its employment for some human purpose : it is difficult to see what other than a cattle and sheep mart this could have been. To us living in settled times—if we cannot quite appropriately add, peaceful—it may seem strange that such an elevation should have been sought. A reason has already been suggested, and there are many indications elsewhere that our ancestors were wont to lift up both eyes and feet to the hills.

Mr. Alexander's suggestion is worth following up. A party of at least three or four should visit the place, photograph all the more important points, and endeavour to clear up the question of the market, so far as that is now possible. Time is steadily obliterating roads and other memorials, so that action should not be delayed.—I am, etc.,

JOHN CLARKE.

7 CHANONRY,  
OLD ABERDEEN, 28th August, 1916.