

MONADH MOR AND BEN BHROTAIN.

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THERE can be few better ways of spending ten days' leave in these times than in going to the peace of the hills. There no rumours of war reach one, and the quiet is undisturbed by the discords of mankind. The conclusion of my leave was spent on the hills of the Western Cairngorms. Coming from Central Ross-shire, where we had been sojourning with stalkers, my friend and I rejoined at the Station Hotel, Aviemore. I had never, in an experience of some years, seen the Cairngorms in June look better. Let it be remembered that I have been a member of the Cairngorm Club for more than twenty-one years. The mountains must have had 1,000 to 1,500 feet of snow on them, which shone in the bright June sunlight against the background of a blue sky. So far, I had been on the hills for about a week and had not seen rain or mist. It seemed hard to believe that the hills were so far away from Aviemore, they looked so near and tempting. The clearness of the air enabled the details of the mountain structure to be seen, making them appear to be far nearer than they really were. The view stirred all the desires of the mountain lover, but the attainment was impossible. Men, horses, or motor cars were unobtainable; the war had removed them. Without them a long day amidst those beautiful hills was impossible. Then came a telegram saying that a petrol-census form was attainable at any Post Office. Aviemore had no forms, and gave no hopes that Boat of Garten or any stations north of Aviemore had them. But they thought that Kingussie, south of Aviemore, was sure to have them. So there was a hurried journey to Kingussie. No forms were found there; but there was consolation, a motor car was procurable.

Accordingly, meeting my companion on my return to Aviemore, we moved next day to Kingussie, groaned and perspired over the local Ben More, and started by car from the hotel at 8 a.m. next morning. There is a by-road over the low hills from Kingussie to Achlean in Glen Feshie. This is gained by following the road past the station and the Ruthven Barracks to the Bridge of Tromie, and then taking the first turning, a steep loose road, on the right. For some miles we journeyed over this track, until a good mile from Achlean, where the river, Allt Mor, had irretrievably broken the track for motor cars. Here the walking began and soon brought us to the river Feshie. The river was high and, as one of us walked across the deeper parts, the pressure of the water was great. This forder emptied his boots *after* crossing. The other took off his stockings and replaced his boots *before* crossing, to discover a bridge when he was half-way across, to which he pusillanimously retired. Rejoining, we followed a track leading to a patch of snow on Carn Ban. This snow patch is constant enough to merit description; it is like a Prussian eagle with the tail and the lower part of the right wing broken. The track led to this snow-patch. Travelling along its upper border we quickly gained the summit plateau of Carn Ban, 3,443 feet.

The plateau of the Western Cairngorms was before us, and consisted of patches of earth in mounds, patches of water in and out of lochans or burns, and snow. Neither of us was familiar with the spot, and, not unnaturally, we decided that the most marked feature in this plateau was the top recognised above Loch Cnapan and made for it. The bluff forming this "top" was a terminal rise and cliff on a ridge descending from the 4,149 Cairn of Braeriach. It lies nearer to Loch Eunach than to Loch Cnapan. Quickly we discovered our mistake and wandered over the plateau south of the burn, Allt Sgairnich, finally finding Loch Cnapan and the top above it, 3,009 feet. The district south of the

burn, Allt Sgairnich, certainly has an equal claim to recognition, and I would suggest that it has a top about 3,015 feet high, called Moine Mhor, a name near it on the map. The more often that different points are marked, named, and scheduled, the better is the region mapped and the greater the credit to the Club which works in that region. From Loch Cnapan, after wading through the Allt Linneach, a course was made for Monadh Mor and the northerly point on the map marked 3,326 attained. This point is only a top when seen from below, and from it a gently-inclined broad ridge leads in about one mile to the true top, 3,651 feet. There is a cairn on this second top and none on the first. From the summit, made up of granite-gravel and flat granite blocks, the mountain ridge descends and rises in a mile to the height of 3,575 feet to a true top, so separated by dip and distance as to be distinct and individual on the mountain massif from the 3,651 foot peak. From here the ridge first descends gently and then more steeply to the saddle between Monadh Mor and Ben Bhrotain, about 3,000 feet high on the maps but about 3,100 in reality. From there to the top of Ben Bhrotain keep to the ridge, and do not, like one of us, be tempted off on to the western slopes of the mountain by a nice grassy traverse. It is a snare and a delusion, landing the mountaineer on slopes covered with unstable blocks of granite scree which have to be ascended. One of us followed the right path; the other was tempted and succumbed, with the result that the former waited for ten minutes at the cairn, 3,795 feet high, shouted, ran down to the saddle and re-ascended before the other appeared on the summit plateau.

Throughout the day the big hills—Cairntoul, Sgor an Lochan Uaine, and Braeriach—had been clearing themselves of mist. Ben Muich Dhui, the highest, was not unnaturally the last to do this; now it had the grace to show itself clear and very snowy for upwards of 1,500 feet from the summit. Ben Bhrotain has a great cairn

on its summit, 3,795 feet, and also on the col between it and Monadh Mor. Retracing our steps to the saddle, we re-ascended Monadh Mor, passing near its cairn, and descended to its outlying peak, Leachd Riach, which is given the height of approximately 3,250 feet. We made it about 3,235 feet high. Descending to the north of it, we found the Allt Linneach—through which we had had to wade earlier in the day, a mile and a bit higher in its course—a white impassable torrent with no bridge to be seen. A nice plight at about 5 p.m. after walking pretty continuously since 8.30 or 9 a.m. It seemed folly to risk a life or a limb, or both, in this stream. We were on the wrong side of the river for any track. When in such circumstances, the right thing to do is for the party to sit down and have food. We did this and then wandered through miles of bog down the wrong side of the Eidart (not Eindart).

About three miles down the river the Garbh-Allt joins the Eidart, and a little farther the track crosses the river. It was in such spate, however, that we could not attempt to cross, and we were considerably annoyed at the sight of a well-made track on the other side. After another two miles odd we gained the promised land of Glen Feshie, again finding ourselves on the wrong side of the river and a well-made track on the other side. We could have gained this track but foolishly (though now I think wisely) we did not do so, but crossed the Feshie and proceeded down the "wrong" side of the Glen. At first all was open and easy, then it got darker, the ground rougher and more broken, and the Glen less wide. Our pace became slower and slower as the Glen became narrower and the light less. The sides soon became steep with lowering hills on either hand. The slopes being well washed out by the winter floods, it was necessary to cross much unstable scree. Here I think the darkness helped us. It was curious to see a stone move, descend, disappear, and then, after an interval of silence, came the "plop" of its entering the

river. We may have crossed these places better at night than we should have done in broad daylight. Then we met trees which brought more slippery wetness and darkness, especially as the trees became more numerous and formed woods. Here we plainly discussed the coldness of the night wind up Glen Feshie, the difficulties of proceeding, the advisability of getting out of the wind and waiting for light, the desirability of retaining the last sandwich for breakfast, and, lastly, the feelings of the driver of the car waiting for us at Glen Feshie Lodge. The last consideration made us "powler" on. At length we spied a bridge with a good appearance but with the end on our side rotten and unrepaired. Then I was glad that we had journeyed down the wrong side of the river. Otherwise we might have crossed this bridge in the dark, to find it good at first with the last few feet highly dangerous.

On these occasions, when we see little, and that imperfectly, and do not know the district, there is a Providence which helps us. In an open grassy place we found a track; this led to a better made track and finally to Glen Feshie Lodge, where we arrived about 1 a.m. No car was there awaiting us. An omniscient keeper had sent the car away about 10 p.m. and gone to bed, perchance to sleep and perchance to dream, leaving all windows dark. Perhaps he had rheumatism, and I hope so for his interference with my orders to the driver of the car to wait until I came. But alas! the driver was young, the stalker was a man of years and position, and it was not known to either that my companion and I were in the habit of keeping our word. Such was our reward for coming through the darker and narrow part of the glen. With true thrift the car was taken home and charged for in the bill. The pros and cons of the position apart, here were we at Glen Feshie Lodge at 1.30 a.m. and we had to get to Kingussie. We looked for the car, found its tracks, and walked to Kingussie, not admiring the dawn and accompanied by

rain showers. At Kingussie we arrived about 5 a.m. and were welcomed with tea and bed.

To the east of Diollaid Coire Eindart, 3,184 feet, and about half a mile from it, there is a top quite separate and distinct whose name the Rev. Ronald Burn says is Cluas na Chrosgaidh Creige, and height 3,079 feet. This is a wonderful district for geographical points, called tops.

1.—The ridge descending south-west from the 4,149 cairn of Braeriach ends in a well-marked bluff, which, in the nomenclature of the district, might be called the top over Loch Eunach.

2.—The south-west ridge, Sgor an Lochan Uaine, ends in a top over Suarach (Stuirteag).

3.—The south-west ridge from Cairntoul ends in a top, the Aonach Bhiudhe of Cairntoul.

It is noteworthy that these three contiguous big hills each have a southwest ridge which ends in a "top," the top above Loch Eunach, the top above Loch Suarach, and Aonach Bhiudhe.

4.—Monadh Mor has a southern top, 3,575 feet high.

5.—Ben Bhrotain has an eastern shoulder, about 3,600 feet high.

6.—West of Meall Dhubh a Achaidh is a top, Moine Mhor (?), about 3,015 feet high.

7.—Half a mile east of Diollaid Coire Eindart is Cluas na Chrosgaidh Creige, 3,079 feet high.

All these I submit to the consideration of the powers that be.

July, 1916.