

SUMMER DAYS ON THE MOUNTAINS.

BY WILLIAM BARCLAY.

The Perthshire hills are bonnie, Schiehallion's steep and hie.

I.—BEN UDLAMAN AND ITS NEIGHBOURS.

I was in hopes that the thunderstorm which passed over Perthshire on the 12th of June would clear the air and drive away the thick haze that had lain over the hills for weeks, nor was I disappointed, for during the whole of next day the barometer was rising and by evening the Grampians all stood out sharp and clear. So as the morrow gave such promise of a fine day, I made up my mind for a trip to some of the Drumochter hills. The train service to Dalnaspidal and Dalwhinnie is very poor, and practically makes a one-day excursion to these hills impossible, so I had perforce to make other arrangements—a combination of train and cycle. Thus it was that, on the morning of 14th June, I alighted from the Highland mail train at Blair Atholl, and at once started on the 16½ miles ride up to Drumochter. It is a heavy uphill pull all the way, and the surface of the road was execrable, torn into deep ruts and covered with loose stones; but it was a lovely morning and I enjoyed the run immensely, though it entailed careful riding. Dalnaspidal was reached at 10.15, and here I left my cycle. I proposed spending the day on the hills to the west of the pass—twixt Loch Ericht and the railway line—starting at the outlying Geal-chàrn and following the main ridge over the summits of Marcaonach, Ben Udlaman, Sgairneach Mòr, and perhaps the Sow of Atholl if time permitted, and so back to Dalnaspidal.

Excepting Geal-chàrn, which lies to the north-west, these Drumochter hills are gathered round the deep and narrow Coire Domhain. The lesser heights of the Sow of Athole and the Boar of Badenoch form the eastern outliers of the group, and rise just to the west of the

railway line, the former by Dalnaspidal station and the Boar at the county march above the summit of the pass. Yet some people seem to have a notion that they stand one on either side of the line,* and I have heard such remarks when passing in the train. Even Bartholomew's reduced O.S. map places the Sow where Marcaonach should be. With the exception of the Sow of Atholl (or Meall an Dobhrachan, as it is called on the 6-inch O.S. map), which slopes steeply to east and west, and An Torc (or the Boar of Badenoch), which rises at a sharp angle on the east, these hills present great rounded contours, approached by gentle slopes covered with mountain berries, grass and short heather, and though the summit of Ben Udlaman is a bit stony, those of Marcaonach and Sgairneach Mòr are so wide and smooth that one could drive all over them.

Having stabled my steed, I proceeded on foot for three miles or until I was within sight of Drumochter Lodge. Here I left the road, crossed the railway line and the Allt an Tuire, and then the long ridge coming down from Marcaonach, and dropped down to the stream between this spur and Geal-chàrn. Four small cairns are visible on the crest of this latter hill, though the actual summit cairn is not seen from the road, as it lies about half a mile farther west. A shooters' path runs up the north side of the glen, but, as it was of no use to me, I simply crossed and struck up the blaeberry slopes, and was soon on the ridge by the four small cairns. Ten minutes more sufficed for the walk along the gentle rise to the summit (3,005 feet). Noon.

Geal-chàrn is undoubtedly the best view point for the Ben Alder group of mountains, and I descended the western slope for some distance, so as to get a more comprehensive view of Loch Ericht. This loch is generally described as dismal, dreary, desolate, etc., such descriptions reiterating the words of Christopher North written a hundred years ago. Such is not my experience, and certainly on the present occasion on this gorgeous summer's day no one could associate Loch Ericht with

*"Scottish Pictures," by Samuel G. Green, D.D.

gloom—far from it. There it lay at my feet in its entire length, sparkling in the sunshine, the thin line of yellow shingle delineating its outline as faithfully and as sharply as in a map. Directly opposite, though away down nearly 2000 feet below me, lay Loch Ericht Lodge, from which another series of golden threads radiated over the moorland—and very useful lines of communication these are to the climber when he has designs on any of the distant peaks of this forest. Behind all this towered the great mass of mountains of which Ben Alder is the chief, with their corries and glens, ridges and lochans and snow patches. I was loth to leave such an enchanting scene, but time was short, so crossing over the summit I descended to the dip (2426 feet) between this hill and Marcaonach, and, passing to the left of a large stone man, rapidly ascended this easy slope, and was soon on the broad back of Bruach nan Iomairean (3175 feet)—a shoulder of the mountain. A walk eastward brought me to the summit (3185 feet) and in a few minutes more to the small cairn, which is not on the highest point but a short distance down the east slope. I was now directly above the Boar of Badenoch and at one end of the wide ridge which runs in the shape of the letter U round Coire Domhain. Ben Udlaman, the highest point of the ridge, and of the group, the cairn of which stood up boldly against the sky two miles away in the south-west, was my next point of attack. A fence runs west to the dip (2750 feet) and up the slope of Udlaman, passing along with one or two bends over the summit, and down the south ridge to Càrn Beag an Laoigh—in fact, following the Perth-Inverness county march.

There is so little of a dip and the walking is so easy that it took me only 40 minutes to pass from one top to the other, but I did not follow the boundary. The cairn which is to the west of the fence, is a large structure quite 10 feet high, and, while I was sitting beside it having my "piece," I could see away down Coire Domhain a Highland Railway train puffing with its load up towards the summit of the line. A haze had

come over the more distant mountains by now, but quite a lot of "old familiar faces" were still in view. Next to the Ben Alder family, Schichallion was the most dominant peak in sight all day. Then Ben Lawers and the Tarmachan groups showed up well, as did the great bunch of hills farther west at the head of Glen Lyon. Farragon, Ben Vrackie, Beinn a Ghlo, and the Cairngorms were all prominent, while from Geal-chàrn, the little Loch na Cuaich with its Meall above was a conspicuous object.

From the summit I followed the county boundary south to Carn Beag an Laoigh (2739 feet), which is only a rocky shoulder with a small cairn, and there I was nearly on the top of a fox before we noticed one another. Then I dropped down to the bealach (2600 feet), which is boggy, turned eastward and climbed up the long, smooth and gradual slopes of Sgairneach Mòr to the flat ridge, and so on to the summit (3160) with its small cairn.

I did not stop here, but continued in an easterly direction down the edge of Coire Cragach towards the Sow of Athole, and soon got on to a rough track which I followed to the dip, and then on to the southern slopes of the hill. Here I quitted the path and bearing to the left through deep heather, soon dropped down towards Dalnaspidal station, crossing the boggy bit on two small bridges. At 3.55 I picked up my cycle, and spun down to Blair Atholl, which I reached in good time for a cup of tea before my train arrived.

The whole of this ground is under sheep, yet I noticed great numbers of deer; every snow patch had its quota, and the fine little glen behind the Sow was full of them.

II.—CARN MAIRG.

On 8th July, one of the hottest days of the month, I paid a visit to that little-known and seldom visited group of hills lying to the north of Glen Lyon, known collectively on the maps as Carn Maing.

From the approach to the bridge at Aberfeldy three of the tops can be seen, their clear-cut profile towering over the intervening slopes. Visitors to Schichallion are familiar with the bunch of hills lying to the south, and just across the Gleann Mor, but few there are who make any closer acquaintance. Of course, Carn Maigr is not such a shapely, such an outstanding mountain, nor has it the same scientific or historical associations as Schichallion; neither is it so get-at-able, and that no doubt accounts for the fact that where one person climbs Carn Maigr, a score will ascend its more popular neighbour.

Starting in Beinn Dearg just above Fortingal and ending at Carn Gorm five miles away, the group flanks Glen Lyon on the north, and presents the following summits:—

Beinn Dearg (2000 feet contour).	Meall a Bharr (3250 feet).
Creag Mhor (3200 feet).	Meall Garbh (3250 feet).
Meall Liath (3261 feet).	An Sgor (3002 feet).
Carn Maigr (3419 feet).	Carn Gorm (3370 feet).

I had cycled up from Aberfeldy, so it was about 10 o'clock when I left the clean and tidy hamlet of Fortingal, with its ancient yew tree and neat thatched cottages that remind one far more of rural England than highland Scotland, and made my way westward towards the pass. Just at the bend of the road where the familiar view up the glen is obtained, I climbed the fence and tackled the steeply-rising slopes to the north between Beinn Dearg and Creag Mhor. The lower stretches are wooded, and I was grateful for the shade, so I mounted steadily upward, passed the deer fence, and slanting up to the right was soon on my first summit—Beinn Dearg and the end of the ridge which I hoped to follow all the way round to Carn Gorm.

From this top, a broad ridge which drops steeply to Glen Lyon, more gradual to the north into Munlinn Glen, runs westward for over two miles and rises into the two summits of Creag Mhor. So I proceeded along this peaty ridge and soon rose another 500 feet to a shoulder

of the crag, which is marked with a single upright stone and boasts two stone shelters. From here the whole of the Cairngorms were visible, from the Sgorans to Beinn à Bhuird and Ben Avon; Braeriach and Ben Muich Dhui streaked with snow. In the north-west now rose a green little conical top, half a mile away and separated by a slight hollow. The passage from the one to the other took me a quarter of an hour only, and the dip, like every other encountered during the day, was peaty. While the flanks of this east top of Creag Mhor were grassy and had an abundant crop of cloudberry and blaeberry, the summit was stony and crowned with a cairn.

The titular peak of the group now appeared in sight, lying a mile distant in the north-west, its square stony summit rising boldly across Glen Munlinn in striking contrast to the smoothly-contoured Meall Liath, its neighbour on the east. The stony ridge of Schichallion now shut out Sgoran Dubh from view.

It was another half mile due west, with a dip of about a hundred feet between, to the rocky top marking the highest point of Creag Mhor (3200 feet). No Cairn. From here every summit of the group is visible. My course was now northward, so I rapidly dropped down the 450 feet to the head of the Munlinn Glen, where the col is marked by a cairn. The usual peat bogs were encountered here, but, fortunately, thanks to the warm weather, they were dry and powdery. I now rose over easy slopes to the dip between Carn Maigr and Meall Liath; then I turned east to the small cairn on the latter top (3261 feet). This is a great rounded hill, with gently-sloping grass-covered sides. Loch Rannoch now appeared in view, and in the far north-west Ben Nevis was noticed. Retracing my steps to the col, another ten minutes found me on the top of Carn Maigr (3,419 feet). 1.5. The name is very appropriate, for it is nothing but a gigantic heap of stones.

It was a lovely day, warm certainly, and the flies were a bit of a nuisance, but then one does not mind these

trifles when one is able to sit on such a vantage point as this, and see for 50 miles in all directions, with not a particle of haze or mist, except in the extreme distance.

Just across the glen to the north Schichallion presented a sorry picture from this point ; all its comeliness had gone, and it appeared only as a long stony ridge slightly higher at the western end. I had neither the time nor the inclination, and perhaps not the ability, to identify all the mountains within range. It was sufficient enjoyment to sit feasting on the sight of them at will, first in one direction, then in another ; and the best part of two hours was thus spent lazily on the summit.

From Carn Mairg a long rocky shoulder juts out to the north-west, and from this a deer fence runs westward along the crest of the ridge to Meall Garbh. When I had gone about half a mile along this ridge, I descended a little on the south side towards Coire Eachainn, and there, by a nice little spring, sat down and had lunch, at the same time bestowing my benediction on the man who looks after wells on these hills and keeps them clean and tidy. The great peaty coire below me was alive with deer, a kestrel was stalking not far off, and a couple of golden plovers kept hovering around, while numberless sea-gulls were circling about overhead, and a solitary eagle passed rapidly northward.

Ascending again to the ridge, I followed the deer fence westward to where it bends sharply to the north to Meall a Bharr (3250 feet) with its two cairns, then west again past a slight dip and up over rougher ground to the summit of Meall Garbh (3250 feet). I again found two cairns here, the one by the fence being the march between the sporting proprietors.

It was now 4 o'clock, and Carn Gorm still seemed a long way off, with a small top—An Sgor—intervening, but as I had been blest with such a fine day, it seemed a pity not to complete the circuit, more especially as this is the most shapely peak of the bunch ; so, casting appointments to the wind, I resumed my westward march. Crossing a slight dip, I rose to a shoulder of

Meall Garbh ; then followed a greater dip—450 feet—to the col between this hill and Carn Gorm, which landed me at the base of the little top of An Sgor—a sort of protuberance of Carn Gorm. From here I had a grand view into the eastern corrie of this mountain, and I found it swarming with deer.

Ascending by the edge of this hollow, I soon was on the top of An Sgor (3002 feet) ; another slight depression faced me, and, beyond, a rise of 600 feet to the summit of Carn Gorm (3370) Cairn. 5 p.m., or one hour from Meall Garbh.

The nearer view to the west was now greatly extended, and I could look up Glen Lyon to where the loch lay deep between the mountains, to the conical Stuchd an Lochain, and the flat and massive Beinn Heasgarnich, backed by innumerable giants, the mere sight of which brought back pleasant recollections of bygone days, days of sunshine and days of storm, when I wandered oft-times alone among their rugged summits. At my feet on the north, almost the whole of Loch Rannoch was in view, but by far the grandest sight was quite close at hand, just across the glen to the south where the massive ridges and deep corries of the Ben Lawers range formed a most inspiring spectacle.

I descended to the road in Glen Lyon at Invervar, and wended my way down towards Fortingal, secure in the possession of another day of glorious memory.

III.—BEINN TULACHAN AND CRUACH ARDRAN.

My next trip was towards the end of July, and it was on a rather threatening morning that I paid a visit to the Braes of Balquhidder. From the station of that name I cycled up to the Kirkton, and on past Lochs Voil and Doine to Inver Lochlaraig. Leaving my bicycle at the farmhouse, I immediately “took to the hill.” The slopes of Beinn Tulachan rise directly from the roadside, and I was soon “peching” my way up through the bracken and rushes with which this hillside

is covered for quite a thousand feet or more. The ever-increasing vista southward offered ample excuse for frequent halts, many old friends popping up their heads, while just across the glen Stob a Choin (2839 feet) looked particularly imposing, and well merited inclusion into the select brotherhood of the 3000.

As I neared the crest I discovered that the mist had possession of all the higher peaks; Ben More and Am Binnein, Beinn a Chroin, and An Caisteal near at hand all had their caps on. The last part of the slope was very steep, but I walked along to the rocky knob, with its cairn (3099 feet) in sunshine, and had just one passing glimpse of the bold peak of Cruach Ardran to the north, before the mist again enveloped it. However, I dropped down to the short connecting ridge, and made my way up the shoulder of this hill; then, in driving mist, I swung round eastward to the west top (3429 feet), (small cairn), and thence, in a few minutes, more to the summit (3477 feet) of Cruach Ardran, with its large cairn.

A strong wind was blowing here, and it was bitterly cold, so I descended a bit on the lee side, and in a cleft in the rocks ate my frugal lunch. I hung about the summit for another half-hour in the hope of the mist clearing. Vain hope! All I got was a few fleeting glimpses into Strath Fillan, the houses at Crianlarich, and the white roads radiating from them being the most conspicuous objects. Then I scrambled down to the south-east, and in about 500 feet emerged from the mist. The summit of Beinn Tulachan was now enveloped, and its higher neighbours across the glen—Ben More and Am Binnein—never once showed face; indeed, there was now every indication of the day turning out wet. Descending over damp boggy slopes, I soon joined the Inverlochlarig burn, and followed its prattling course down the glen to the farm, arriving there just $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours after I left it. I had a short rest and a "crack" with the farm folks, during which time I demolished vast quantities of milk, and then started on my 50-mile cycle run home.

IV.—CARN AN RIGH AND GLAS THULACHAN.

I had another fine day earlier in the year to some of the Glenshee hills. Cycling from Blairgowrie up to the Spital, I proceeded (on foot) along Glen Lochsie till near the old lodge; then I climbed up one of the long ridges coming down from Glas Thulachan, and so on to the summit (3445 feet); 2 hours and 5 minutes from the Spital. From here I dropped down to a track I noticed straggling along the side of Mam nan Carn, and followed it to the base of Carn an Righ. By a cool little spring here I lunched while vast herds of deer watched me from the surrounding slopes; then I tackled the short brae, and was soon standing by the two cairns on the summit of the King's Cairn (3377 feet); 1 hour and 2 minutes from Glas Thulachan.

The view of the Cairngorms was splendid, from Ben Avon with its Barns right on to Sgoran Dubh. The Devil's Point stood out darkly at the near end of the Làirig, and the rocky peak of the Lurcher's Rock showed up just as boldly through the pass. Of course, they all carried a great deal of snow. As a matter of fact, it was the dear old Cairngorms that had lured me up here. I had been straining my eyes to see them in the far distance frequently of late, from the vicinity of my home, and I longed for a closer view. I was not disappointed.

The Beinn à Ghlos, of course, were also grand from this point, but Sgarsoch looked flat. A huge fire was raging in the Tarf valley, at the base of the latter. Falar Lodge was at my feet, and the green of its paddocks contrasted strikingly with the surrounding dullness. Just to the north Ben Uarn raised his speckled and stony crown; and, as I had spent an hour here, I was uncertain whether to cross Mam nan Carn (3224 feet) and climb these "Mountains of Hell" or not. But as I was yet a good way from the Spital, and even when I did reach that hostel, would still have 35 miles to cycle home, I thought I had better "ca' canny" and spare myself.

So I descended to the track again, and followed it for about a mile towards Loch nan Eun, disturbing numberless deer. Then I crossed between Glas Thulachan and the point marked 2794 feet on the map, and dropped down to the Allt Easgaidh, which I followed to the Spital. In another hour I mounted my steed, and, turning my back on the hills, proceeded homeward.

The Cairngorm Club