

AN EASTER WEEK-END IN THE WEST.

BY A. M. MACRAE WILLIAMSON.

THE announcement that the Cairngorm Club was to have an Easter Meet at Crianlarich filled us with enthusiasm, which was strengthened considerably by the arrival of the circular giving some of the possibilities of this mountaineering resort. My chum and I therefore made arrangements to join the Meet, at the same time praying for fine weather. It is a curious fact that, though we have made several climbs together, we have never yet had a really fine day. We are now regarded more or less as Jonahs.

We decided to go to the rendezvous by motor cycle. The morning was fine and the glass high and steady when we set off on our 140 odd miles. After a few minor troubles we "got down to 'it,'" and the "bikes" went very well. The road was a bit cut up, but we made very good time to Weem. The road from Weem to Kenmore as it was that day would break the heart of a motor cyclist or a constructor of non-skid tyres. There was several inches of mud covering deep ruts made by lorries engaged in timber haulage. As we had both fixed engine cycles, it required somewhat skilful driving to negotiate parts of the road; fortunately, neither of us really skidded. That road still haunts me; after a run on the "bike" and a heavy supper it comes back in all its frightfulness. The subsequent holiday, however, discounted all the discomfort experienced *en route*.

The run down the south side of Loch Tay was magnificent, and the road from Killin to Crianlarich was so good that we forgot about the scenery, and even policemen were banished from our thoughts.

We arrived at the hotel a little before the advance party of the club, and we all sat down to our first meal there together. After dinner, plans were laid for next day. Mr friend and I were feeling somewhat slack, as we had done nothing since the previous summer, so we decided to try Ben More, and, if we felt like it, go on to Am Binnein. We were cheered by one of the party, who told us Ben More was quite a straightforward hill since the top was always visible.

The day dawned fine, but some of the hills held a little mist. Ben More, we were glad to observe, was clear. We got started about 9.30 a.m. By the time we reached the farm of Ben More the mist had come down, and we resolved to say a few words to the gentleman who averred that the top was always visible. At 2,000 feet we entered the mist, and almost immediately a heavy snowstorm came on, accompanied by a fierce north-east wind. We climbed steadily, and shortly before one o'clock we reached the summit. The mist had got very thick and we could hardly see the cairn even when we were within a few feet of it. We were quite warm, however, and, not carrying any "wetter mantels" or rucksacks, were feeling quite fresh. We decided, therefore, that we might try Am Binnein. A sharp drop brought us to the saddle between the peaks, and after a short halt for food we tackled the climb. The mist prevented us seeing anything of the surrounding country, and, as we were not tempted to stop for long rests, we gained the top at 2.25. It was much colder than on the top of Ben More, and an immediate retreat was made to the saddle and then to the Ben More burn. The hotel was reached shortly after five o'clock, the two miles of road being covered at a speed of five miles per hour. The rest of the party came back a little later from Cruach Ardrain. After dinner there was a large addition to the party, among the new arrivals being the president. Plans were laid for the morrow's climb, and Ben Lui (Beinn Laoigh) was fixed on as the peak for the whole party.

The members were taken in relays to Tyndrum, and from there a start was made. As we proceeded up the valley we were rewarded with glimpses of the peak, but it was never really free from mist. We took lunch at the foot of the snowfield, which stretched up into the mist. At first we kicked steps in this snow, but at 2,700 feet the ropes were put on. This was a new experience for my chum and myself, neither of us having been on snow before. We divided into three parties, each party taking a separate gully. The angle of the snow at the top was 66° . This was not inconvenient to stand on if big steps were cut, but it was considerably inconvenient to the second and third men, as all the snow and ice cut from the steps fell in fine showers on them, and every time they lifted up their voices in complaint a mouthful of snow cut them short. I took good care to lead at this point. The 1,100 feet of step-cutting occupied just over two hours, the summit being reached shortly after three o'clock. We were able to get some fine glissading in the descent, and some of the really energetic people went up again for the glissade. The long tramp back from the mountain to Tyndrum was very monotonous. My chum and I, not being bound by trains or the local motor, were able to get back first, and so had the pick of the baths.

Sunday was to be a quiet day, but, inspired by the fineness of the morning, we set off with most of the members for Cruach Ardrain. There was nothing of any importance in the climb, except that we very nearly broke our record since the day was almost clear—in fact, at times we had quite extensive views. We again had good glissading, and some amusing photographs were secured of typical attitudes. The climb was a trying one, as the day was hot and stuffy. Cruach Ardrain is a fine-looking peak, but as a climb we found it disappointing. There was very little snow and what there was was soft.

Monday saw the departure of the most of the members, only we two and Mr Watt remaining. We went to Bridge of Orchy by the morning train with the

intention of putting in an easy day on Ben Douran. The sky was almost cloudless when we arrived, and we decided it would be a shame to waste the day on one hill. Accordingly, we struck up to Ben Dothaidh. All the way up we got magnificent views to the west and north-west—ridge upon ridge of dark mountains capped with snow. The day was hot and we took frequent rests. The top was reached about half-past twelve. The view was still good, although the mist was closing down and Ben Douran was now invisible. We spent some time wandering about the top looking into the magnificent corries on the north and north-east. These showed snowfields almost equal to Ben Lui, capped by enormous cornices. After taking a photograph or two we made for Ben Douran. We dropped into the col and climbed up the other side. The snow was soft, the mist was down, and slight sleet was falling—not altogether cheerful. The summit of Ben Douran is a very commanding position; the only regret we had was that we couldn't see into the great corrie on the east—it must be really magnificent. After a short stop we retraced our steps to the col and thence to Bridge of Orchy.

Our week-end was nearly over and we decided to finish it in style. Next day we set off on our cycles for Fort William, with the intention of climbing Ben Cruachan on the way. We had an excellent run to Bridge of Awe, except for a very sharp hail storm at the entrance to the Pass of Brander. Ben Cruachan on the Bridge of Awe side is very steep, and the day was very warm. We had very good views to the south and west, Mull especially showing up well. The top was shrouded in mist, but just as we got up it lifted and we had really a fine view—undoubtedly, the finest we have ever had together. The ascent occupied about $2\frac{3}{4}$ hours and the descent $1\frac{3}{4}$. The remainder of the day was spent in getting to Fort William *via* Connel Ferry and Ballachulish. We reached our destination at eight o'clock. We stayed at the Alexandra Hotel, and there

found several members of the Scottish Mountaineering Club who had had their Easter meet there.

Our objective for the next day was Ben Nevis by the ordinary route, but the morning was wet and this, coupled with the fact that our boots were hurting the backs of our ankles, seemed to predict a day of rest. However, the rain cleared about eleven, and having found another madman to join us, we set off for the top. Until the half-way hut was reached we had magnificent views in every direction that was not shut off by the Ben itself. After that the mist came down. We entered the snow line about 2,500 feet, and the rest of the way was rendered stiff by about a foot of fresh snow lying on the top of the other older snow. We reached the top without incident in $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours. Our companion then suggested that we should go back *via* the Carn More Dearg ridge and the tops of Carn More Dearg. We agreed and at once set off. The ridge was a sensational affair that day. A very fierce gale was blowing across it, and we were often reduced to hands and knees. We got over, however, and traversed the top of Carn More Dearg. We then cut down into the valley on our left and followed it to the road, along which we plodded until Fort William was reached.

This was the end of our climbing for that holiday, and a great holiday it had been. For six days continuously had we been climbing, and we felt very fit. Our one regret was that we had no time to do more.

Next morning we set off on our 182-mile journey to Aberdeen. The first 52 miles to Drumnadrochit were over appalling roads; in several instances, bridges had been washed away, and we had to drive through the burns. The remainder of the journey, however, was on first-class roads, and, except for a short stop in Elgin for petrol, was conducted non-stop, at an average speed somewhat in excess of the statutory allowance. We got to Aberdeen at 7 o'clock well pleased with our holiday. We have now got two things to look forward to—(1) a holiday equally good, and (2) a climb free from mist.