

## MOTORING AND CAMPING IN THE HIGHLANDS.

BY DAVID P. LEVACK.

THREE of us set out last August with one idea in all our minds—to get as far from civilization as possible. Scotland is a busy place in summer, and, except in the far north or west, it is difficult to avoid aristocratic touring-cars, offensive charabancs, and crowded hotels. Even in the more remote parts of the country, where roads may be compared to the bed of a burn, motors are met with in ever-increasing numbers. In the Isle of Skye, where we eventually arrived, the number of cars—especially of Fords—was quite extraordinary. The seeker after temporary solitude need not altogether despair, however. Let him take a tent and one or two cheerful friends—preferably two—and disappear with them for a while into some of the wilder western glens, and he will find solitude enough to last him—till the next time! There is no finer country than Scotland, no better holiday than one spent in its highlands, and no better way of spending that holiday than in a tent. Firm in this conviction, the three of us set out from Aberdeen at 1.45 p.m. on Saturday, August 14th.

It may be as well at the outset to describe our outfit. We had a two-seater car—a 12 h.p. Rover—and on this our outfit was packed. I cannot refrain here from pointing out to prospective campers the value of system in camping. There is nothing so irritating as the loss of a much-prized frying-pan through careless packing, or the feverish hunt for kippers bought for supper which cannot be found when supper is preparing, or A's wrath on discovering that B has pitched the camp lantern on to his (A's) kit, and that paraffin does not sweeten a toothbrush or improve a blanket. Let A, B, and C each

look after a particular bit of the camp and its duties, and all will be well. We had a system. Previous experience had taught us many things. A tidy camp is a haven of rest; a dirty one a sort of miniature purgatory. No one likes fish-bones in his tea; therefore let the cook religiously burn all fish-bones. Finally, the trail of a good camping party is marked by the black rings of their camp fires, not by bully-beef tins, eggshells, and bits of paper.

Each of us took a definite amount of kit—small, but containing a complete change in case of a soaking. We each had one ground sheet, blanket, and sleeping-bag, and a kit-bag—I had a rucksac instead—in which these were stowed. We had thus three bundles containing each one's entire outfit. Our larder consisted of a big box fitted on the back of the car, and in it we kept all our food, our one pot, frying-pan, and kettle, and sundry odds and ends. We did not carry a stove, but cooked everything over fires of wood or peat, as circumstances determined. Besides all these things, we had a huge tarpaulin to cover the car at night, and two flags on four-foot sticks—to create an impression *en route!*—together with sundry maps and a waterproof each, which we stowed in the hood of the car. The tent was a small affair, erected on a cross pole between two uprights and suitably guyed. It was almost four feet high, and the floor space was exactly seven feet by seven. It was packed, with pegs, poles, and a mallet, in the back of the car.

I need not descant on the run to Inverness along the north road by Huntly, Keith and Elgin. It was not marked by anything exciting, except—after we had left Elgin—passing an extraordinary number of push-cyclists returning from a fair at Nairn. They were usually on the wrong side of the road, and were inclined to bandy words of a highly flavoured nature did we but so much as mention it to them. John Barleycorn was very much in evidence, with his boisterous humour, quick temper, and frequently wobbly front wheel. We reached

Inverness in the early evening—about 6.30 p.m.—and in the last rays of the setting sun we ran on to Beauly. It was too late to pitch the tent and cook food, and, moreover, we wished to be off early next day. Beauly Hotel was packed, and we rushed on to Muir of Ord. Here we put up at a weird little place, the only redeeming feature of which was the enormous ham-and-eggs tea with which we were provided—about 9.30 p.m.

Next morning (Sunday 15th) it was raining; “but,” we said, “as it cannot rain for ever, it must clear up.” Leaving Muir of Ord, we ran up Strath Conon, joining the Highland line from Dingwall to Kyle of Lochalsh at Loch Garve. The weather cleared slightly and blinks of sunshine made the scenery gorgeous. Purple heather above bands of silver-birch trees, fading into the blue-grey of the loch below, with here and there dark belts of firs, made a brilliant picture. The winding road brought ever-changing forms of hills, loch, and wood, and with the recent rain every leaf twinkled like a heliograph in the passing sunshine. We had lunch at Garve Inn, and then ran on. The scenery now assumed a wilder aspect. The road rose up and up, and bare hillside replaced heather and birch tree, while a roaring torrent, brown and foam-flecked, rushed down the glen of tussocky grass to the quiet loch with its wooded shores. The rain now came down in torrents, but we were fairly comfortable in the car with the hood up, and smoked, and sang, and argued while the car bumped along the indescribable road.

At Achnasheen we tried to get butter, eggs, and milk, but it was with great difficulty that we persuaded an old “wife” in the hotel to give us a pint of milk—she absolutely refused payment, however. We managed to get half-a-dozen eggs and some butter from a very decent keeper and his wife a little way on the road. We then ran over the watershed which here divides the West from the East, and our road became steadily worse. The rain came down “in buckets.” The road dropped down into Strath Carron, and a few trees showed on the

misty hillsides, with an occasional keeper's house to break the solitude. At Auchnashellach we entered wooded country again and shortly reached the head of Loch Dougal. The loch lies in a deep glen and is wholly surrounded by woods. The spot was an ideal one for a camp, so we determined to camp there.

Our "system" now came into play. While one unpacked the car, another built a fire, and the third got wood, water, and the eatables. The rain had stopped, but with everything soaking wet, it was difficult to start a fire. However, with the aid of half a fire-lighter and some half-dry whins, we soon had quite a cheerful blaze. It was now about 6 p.m., and we "tea-ed" off porridge, ham and eggs, and bread and butter and syrup. We proved to the hilt the truth of the old adage that hunger is the best sauce. By the time that tea was ready the tent was up, kits stowed inside, and all made snug. This last duty was always left to the owner of the tent. He liked it "on the square," and if any one else pitched it, it was always squint—so he said. As a matter of fact, after one or two days' practice, we all became pretty expert at pitching it rapidly. I must not forget to mention that we "did things in style," and had electric light in the tent! A fifty-yard rubber cable, with an inspection lamp from the car, lit up the tent like daylight, and saved no end of bother with matches and candles; and as the car lights were never used, the accumulators were not run down to any great extent.

After our somewhat mixed meal, we turned in, and, curiously enough, "slept like logs," in spite of the fact that it was our first night in camp. It rained during the night, but the tent is famed for its water-resisting powers—in fact, I believe that on a previous expedition it kept out a three days' deluge somewhere north of Loch Maree, during which time the occupants "lay in bed," so to speak, getting up only for meals.

Next day (Monday, 16th), we were up at 8 a.m., having slept a round of the clock practically. We had a swim in the loch and breakfasted, then struck camp and

packed up, and then ran down Strath Carron to the head of Loch Carron. The weather kept fair for some time. The strath is very beautiful. The loch sweeps up from the Atlantic and reaches far inland. Steep hills surround it on all sides, and at the head lies the little station of Strathcarron. The railway to Kyle takes the south shore, while the road takes the north; we followed the road, of course. The weather again broke, and we continued in heavy rain to Strome Ferry. Here the road ends and a ferry-boat carries traffic across the mouth of Loch Carron to Strome Ferry Station. The tide was low and a strong wind blew up the loch, bringing in a fairly heavy swell from the sea. The descent to the jetty, on to which the road abuts at right angles, looked alarmingly steep. The ferry-boat was a large flat-bottomed scow, with a couple of planks laid across, on to which we had to run the car. The owner of the car had the wind up; it increased to a gale when the ferryman coolly informed us that, quite recently, a Daimler touring-car had gone over the end of the jetty into fifteen feet of water at low tide. But he assured us that everything would be safe for us; and, with a drag rope on behind, we carefully let the car down the jetty and on to the scow. We now proceeded to row across the loch with huge fifteen-foot oars. This occupied us half-an-hour, and, with the choppy sea, was mildly exciting. The pier at the south side was not so steep, and, with a tremendous rush, the car hopped off the scow, ran up the pier, and gained the road beside the station. We paid fifteen shillings to our Highland optimist, the ferryman, and thanked our stars we were not at the bottom of the loch.

We resumed our journey to Kyle of Lochalsh, running through a perfect sample of wild West coast scenery. Huge cliffs fell away on our right, and below us the Kyle Railway—a triumph of railway construction—wound in and out, now piercing the rocky headlands in a dozen tunnels and deep cuttings, and then banked up on rubble blasted from the cliff-faces. The road itself

wound in and out of woods, then crossed bare pasture-land and passed a number of little crofts, and anon threaded little valleys, filled, curiously enough, with white rhododendron bushes. The village of Plockton lay on our right, on its little promontory of rock, as we left the coast and struck inland. Bare moor and endless bogs now rolled past, and the heavens again opened; and in a perfectly awful downpour of rain and a blustering wind we arrived at Kyle of Lochalsh. It was absolutely impossible to camp in that mess, so we put up at the Station Hotel.

Next morning (Tuesday, 17th) broke with an absolutely cloudless sky and a calm sea, and we determined to cross at once to Kyleakin, in Skye. On examining the car, however, we found one of the front wheels decidedly wobbly, and on taking it off discovered the roller bearing in minute fragments. After telegraphing to Inverness for roller bearings, we put the wheel on and ran slowly down to the pier, and then ran the car on to the ferry and were towed across the strait to Kyleakin. We ran about a mile up the Broadford road and camped beside a burn and a wood. We soon discovered that insect life in Skye is particularly hardy and vigorous. The midge, that ubiquitous tormentor of peaceful holiday-makers, appears to have reached his fullest development in the Isle of Mist. The Skye midge must wear a gas mask, for the fumes of our plug tobacco worried him not. We found out, however, that his one particular poison is "peat reek," and from that time on we burned peats furiously in our camp fires—removing them surreptitiously from the nearest peat-stack—and in this way we "gassed" innumerable midges with the callous indifference of Huns.

We spent two nights in this camp, waiting patiently for the spare bearing from Inverness. It duly arrived and was quickly fitted, and on the morning of Thursday, 19th, we were up early, struck camp, and ran on to Broadford. The road is really not bad—perhaps a

trifle loose; and the gradients, if rather hair-raising, are not astonishing—for Skye. The scenery was typically Highland. Not a tree for miles; here and there a miserable turf “hoosie,” with peat reek pouring from a hole in the roof and from every chink in the walls; shrill-voiced children shouting in Gaelic and waving as we passed. The interminable bog, dotted all over with peat-stacks, lay shimmering in the sun. Broadford—the Manchester of Skye—was very quiet as we drove through. It is a long, straggling village with clusters of stone houses, a fine bay, and a very good hotel. We did not stop, but ran on to Sligachan. We were now approaching the back of the Red Coolin Hills. Huge steep mountain-faces, seamed with dry water-courses, and towering, red in the sun, rose on our left hand. The road climbed up, turning and twisting over rough moor and peat bog, while here and there, by the sides of sea lochs, we saw little fishing villages with an occasional church or good-sized shooting-lodge. Herds of West Highland cattle gazed dreamily at us as we passed, while the road stretched on and on with its continuous line of telegraph poles, carrying a single wire—all that communicates with Portree and the north of the island.

We ran down sharply to Loch Sligachan and turned west, following its south shore to Sligachan Inn at its head. Sligachan has long been famous as a climbers' rendezvous, and as we rounded the end of Glamaig, the last of the Red Coolins, the little hotel lay in front. The Black Coolin Hills now towered above us, in sharp silhouette against the blue sky. Prominent among them Sgurr nan Gillean rose up, a sharp pinnacle, while to its right the Bhasteir Corrie and Am Basteir (the Executioner), with its extraordinary tooth, could be seen in detail through our field-glasses. We left the car at the inn, and I took my two friends over the bog to the Bhasteir Gorge at the foot of Sgurr nan Gillean, a distance of two miles and a half as the crow flies, but a weary tramp over awful ground, full of holes and pools of water. We lunched at the Gorge and took some

photographs. The weather was perfect. Away to the south-east the huge mass of Blaven, perhaps the finest peak of the Black Coolin, stood out in sharp relief. Eastward, the Red Coolin lay bathed in sunshine, their green sides scarred with red gashes of dry water-courses. Returning to Sligachan, we ran on to Portree and then out the Dunvegan road a little way, and decided to camp in a wood beside a burn, just off the road.

We left next day (Friday, 20th) about noon, ran right back to Kyleakin, and crossed to Kyle of Lochalsh on the mainland. Then we turned the car south to Balmacara, running through beautifully-wooded country at the side of Loch Alsh and so on to Dornie ferry at the end of Loch Long. Here we found we had to wait four hours for the tide before we could get across a neck of water over which one might have thrown a stone. It was about 8 p.m. before we got across. We then ran along the side of Loch Duich. The road rises from sea-level to 500 feet in about three miles, and in the evening light the scene was splendid. Far below, the loch lay like a sheet of steel, while on the opposite side the twinkling lights of a little village sent spears of radiance across the water. Everything assumed a uniform tint of grey, and the background was a flaming red sky with the sun just dipping into the west. We camped in the dark, beside a bridge over a rushing stream, and turned in at 9.30 p.m.

We were up early next morning (Saturday, 21st), and spread all our bedding on the parapets of the bridge to air. We had just done this when a huge touring-car came up the hill and stopped. The whole party on board, ladies included, descended, and proceeded to inspect our camp, while we frantically dived into jackets and thrust various articles which were not for the gaze of ladies out of sight. The porridge was pronounced "O. K.," the bacon and eggs considered done to a turn; and the party moved on to their shooting-lodge while we breakfasted and then packed up.

At the head of Loch Duich we crossed to the west

side, and, just for amusement, ran up an old road called Mam Rattachan, which crosses to the coast from that point. It rises 1,200 feet in two miles and a half, and has four hair-pin bends on it in succession. The surface is a beautiful carpet of turf, for the road is no longer used and is falling into disrepair. From the summit of the road the view was magnificent. Skye lay away to the north, black against the bright horizon, while immediately below us a wide glen stretched to the sea. The heather had given place to tufted grass, and not a tree was in sight. A dilapidated Cyclists' Touring Club signboard assured us that the hill was dangerous for cyclists. But for that we might have been in an unknown country, so remote did we seem from any evidence of man.

We dipped down again to lower levels, and, turning south, ran up Glen Clunie to Clunie Bridge, beside an old General Wade road, visible here and there with its queer bridges and almost straight course through the glen. At Clunie Bridge we turned to our right and crossed into Glen Loyne, perhaps one of the most desolate of Highland glens, with a loch at the bottom, but not a house or a tree for miles. The road here became very stony and rough, and the car got rather shaken up, in spite of slow running and careful steering. We had dinner here and then ran on to Tomdown, a village at the head of Glen Garry. The scenery now became more civilized, trees and fences making a welcome break in the landscape. We ran past a number of fellows on a tramping tour—very evidently French students—who talked volubly as they walked and stared curiously as we passed, our two flags waving behind. Loch Garry was absolutely still, and reflected its wooded sides like a mirror. Glen Garry joins the Caledonian Canal at Loch Oich, and we turned south-west towards Fort William. We crossed the Canal between Loch Oich and Loch Lochy, finding the road alongside the latter atrocious, it having been washed out in many places by flooded burns. About six miles from Fort

William we crossed into Glen Spean and ran up to Roy Bridge. Ben Nevis, to the west, looked resplendent, being absolutely clear. The Spean runs for miles in a bed of solid rock, dashing through narrow gorges into black pools, or whirling into huge pot-holes scooped out by the action of ice and water. We passed through Spean Bridge—which was full of summer visitors—and again began to climb up, leaving the river behind. We parted from the West Highland Railway at Tulloch Station, and crossed a vast expanse of dreary moorland towards Speyside. Loch Laggan lay on our right, cold and grey in the evening light, its severe outline broken by the magnificent but lonely pile of Ardverikie House. From the head of Loch Laggan, we struck across country to Dalwhinnie. The moorland road is almost straight; not a tree is to be seen for miles, while huge stacks of peat loomed up, in the fading daylight, like distorted buildings or Pictish towers. The lights of Dalwhinnie were welcome in this tremendous waste, and we stopped and put up at the hotel, nearly frozen by our long run from Loch Duich.

The last day of our outing had now arrived (Sunday, 22nd). We left Dalwhinnie about 9 a.m., and ran down alongside the Garry to Blair Atholl. We stopped at the Pass of Killiecrankie and spent an hour there admiring the scenery. From Killiecrankie we ran down to Pitlochry, and, leaving the line of the Highland Railway, struck to our left across to Kirkmichael and so into Glenshee. It was a perfect day and picnic parties were numerous. The number of cars on the road was enormous; we kept dodging them for the next two hours, right up past the Glenshee Hotel and on to the Devil's Elbow. When we arrived at Braemar, some friends insisted on our having dinner with them at the Fife Arms Hotel; and after a quick run down the Deeside road—at something like a “record” speed, I fancy—we reached Aberdeen about midnight. Thus ended one of the most pleasant holidays it has been my good fortune to enjoy