

A WALK THROUGH THE GARBH CHOIRE.

BY J. A. PARKER.

ONE frequently hears of people walking through the Larig, but never of any one walking through the Garbh Choire although it is often walked round. The following narrative recounts how H. Alexander and the author walked through it in July, 1924, and what befell us on the way :

“ I think that we really ought to get a move on now,” said No. 1.

“ All right then,” replied No. 2 rather drowsily, and the party thereupon “ fell in.”

Or, to be strictly accurate, they tumbled out of a little saloon motor car that had been standing at Derry Lodge since ten p.m. * the previous evening and it was now the cheerful hour of two o'clock on Sunday the 20th July, 1924. And a fine caller morning with the faint northern twilight just strengthening into dawn.

As it was only some six hours since we had finished an excellent dinner at Braemar, early morning tea was voted to be unnecessary, and therefore after locking up the car, we at once shouldered our rucksacks, picked up our ice axes and took the path to the Larig.

“ Ice axes in Scotland in the latter half of July!” the reader doubtless exclaims and we hasten to assure him that it is all right as the so-called summer had been a pretty wintry one and there were still great quantities of old snow in the high corries.

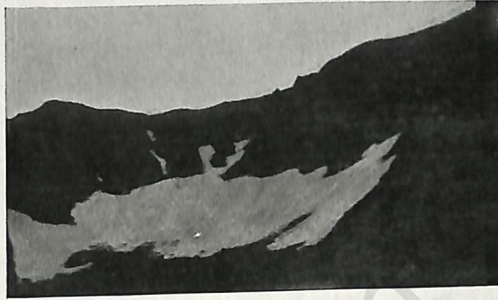
The first part of our walk in the half light of early dawn, with the moon just past the full, was superb and the air had that invigorating quality which is supposed to be peculiar to the Alps ; but which can be had any fine morning in the Cairngorms if one cares to get up early enough. The feeling of remoteness was intense and this was accentuated when on rounding the bend

* All times are G.M.T.

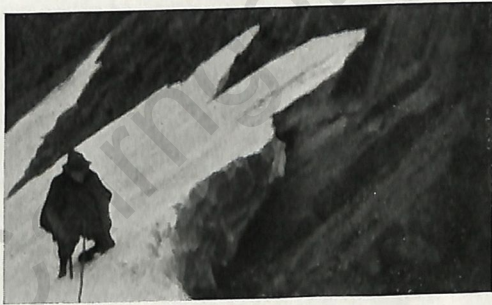
beyond the Lui Beg cottage we came in sight of a camp fire among the trees about half a mile in front. And in ten minutes we were exchanging early morning greetings with three Aberdeen friends who were camping out and had a big fire going to keep themselves warm. They had not had a comfortable saloon motor to sleep in!

The sun was due to rise about a quarter to four, and we were well into Glen Dee before his first rays struck the crest of Braeriach and the peak of Cairntoul. A magnificent sight.

Our first halt was called at a small stream about half a mile short of the meeting of the Dee and the Larig Burn, and, with our cooker, we soon prepared a hot breakfast for which we were now quite ready. This disposed of we crossed the Larig Burn and at once commenced our walk through the Garbh Choire. Keeping on the north side of the Dee we passed Coire Bhrochain and then crossed the Dee just below the entrance to the next corrie at the head of which is the famous waterfall. Leaving this corrie (it is called the Dee corrie) on our right we walked up into the furthest recess of the Garbh Choire which the keeper at Lui Beg told us later was called the Garbh Choire proper. This inner corrie is a very secluded place, a holy of holies, and it is seldom visited. It is girt all round with steep slopes and precipitous rocks and on the occasion of our visit with many big patches of snow, one of which is believed to be permanent. Of these the largest was in the north-west corner of the corrie and it consisted of a big slope of snow probably about 500 feet high set at a steep angle and sending many tongues of snow up into the gullies in the rocks. To the right of the eastmost tongue of snow a momentary bit of mist revealed the existence of two respectable pinnacles and their attractive appearance at once determined us to climb the big snow slope to the foot of the pinnacles and climb them, or, failing that, chance getting up the gully which was certain to run up to the top of the hill behind them.



THE SNOWFIELD IN THE GARBH CHOIRE.



"BERGSCHRUND" IN THE GARBH CHOIRE.

These two photographs, taken with a vest-pocket camera and without sunshine, are reproduced not for pictorial reasons but as indicating the snow conditions in the Garbh Choire on July 20, 1924. In the upper photograph the pinnacles, described in Mr. Parker's article, may be seen appearing as points on the lip of the corrie. They are actually on a ridge projecting into the corrie and the gully climbed runs up behind them. The lower photograph shows the deep gap or "bergschrund" where the snow abutted on the cliffs.—H. A.

The time was about half-past seven, just about the hour that people would be getting their shaving water taken into them in the hotels at Braemar. We found the snow to be in excellent condition and when about half way up it we put on the rope as the angle was rapidly steepening and looked as if it would get steeper still, which it duly did. A wonderful sight was revealed to us when we reached the foot of the rocks at a point some distance to the left of the lower pinnacle. The snow had melted or shrunk away from the rock leaving quite a big bergschrund the bottom of which we could not see. Turning to our right we carefully cut steps along the edge of the schrund, which was a sharp snow arete, towards the gully which we now saw ran up to the left of the pinnaced ridge. To reach the gully we had some rather tricky climbing on steep snow slopes and knife edges interspersed with slabby rocks but in due time we entered the foot of the gully at the top of the snow.

The lower part of the first pinnacle was manifestly impossible and we therefore confined our attention for the moment to the gully. This consisted of sound smooth rock probably about a hundred feet high and just flat enough in places to hold a few stones in a very unstable state. Here an unfortunate difference of opinion took place. The leader, who objects to steep rock gullies ornamented with loose stones, elected to climb up the lower rocks of the first pinnacle on what he euphemistically called good sound rock while his companion stated, also euphemistically, that the gully was a simple walk and promptly proceeded to walk up it. Unfortunately the rope was only forty feet long and a point was of course soon reached when a divided party was no longer possible, and No. 2 therefore had obediently to join his leader on the sound rocks. These "went" with considerable difficulty for about thirty feet, and then said as plainly as possible *passage interdit*. The retreat into the gully was not at all easy, matters being considerably complicated by one of the ice axes dropping into a

crack in the simplest manner possible and then being retrieved with a good bit of trouble.

The exponent of gullies now took the lead and proceeded to show how gullies should be walked up. The only difficulty was near the top where the gully was blocked by a big chock stone of very doubtful stability. The leader swarmed up on its left side hardly daring to look at it and then up some very steep stuff to a good landing from which he pulled up his companion who was now carrying two rucksacks and two ice axes. And in a few minutes the party was on the edge of the west plateau of Braeriach near the south cairn.

We clambered out to the top of the higher pinnacle but from it could not see any easy way of getting on to the top of the lower one, and, as there was no cairn on it, it is evidently unclimbed, and is recommended as worthy of attention.

The weather which thus far had been good, now broke down in the very best style, and rain and sleet came down in torrents as we made our way eastward in dense mist towards the top of Braeriach. Incidentally on the way we picked up a party of two men and two boys, who had come up from Glen Einich and were pleasantly engaged in ascending Braeriach by walking away from it as fast as their legs would take them.

The top of Braeriach was reached about noon in dense mist, and after a very cold collation we found our way down the rocky south east shoulder of the mountain into the Larig. The Larig Burn was crossed a little above the Dee, and about three o'clock we reached our "kitchen." The cooker was got out and in quarter of an hour we revelled in hot afternoon tea.

The trudge down the Larig Path was very splashy, but we made good time and reached Derry Lodge all sound and going strong about half-past five; fifteen and a half hours after we left it in the early hours of the morning. Our little car was waiting for us, and in three quarters of an hour we were back in Braemar, well pleased with our walk through the Garbh Choire.