

THE SHELTER STONE VISITORS' BOOK.

BY JAMES L. DUNCAN.

THE Shelter Stone of Loch Avon is a place probably familiar to most of the readers of this *Journal*. It is certainly well known to all lovers of the Cairngorms, a large number of whom have passed nights, which doubtless they look back on with pleasure, within its walls. Others often make it the goal of a day's tramp, after a visit to Ben Macdhui or Cairngorm. They cannot do better, for it brings them into surroundings of grandeur, unrivalled in this part of Scotland. Whether the sun is shining and the hill tops are mirrored in the blue waters of the Loch, or whether they be swathed in mist and the effect is one of sombre gloom, the scene is always impressive.

It was to obtain a record of those who visited this spot that a party of us left a visitors' book there in August 1924. For protection, we left it inside a tin which had inscribed on it in large letters VISITORS' BOOK. We placed the tin on a conspicuous ledge in the outer passage of the shelter where it could not fail to be seen. Returning a year later, we were very gratified to find the large number of pages which had been filled with names and accounts of experiences. The book itself did not seem to have suffered from damp during the winter. The names and accompanying notes made extremely interesting reading. Perhaps the most interesting thing was that within the year (that is from 14th Aug., 1924, to the same date in 1925), there had been over one hundred and fifty visitors, including two dogs. Many of the visitors were Aberdonians, no

doubt including a considerable number of members of the Cairngorm Club. Others came from more distant places including a party of students from Edinburgh University, who had stayed a night there. One gentleman, from the United States, talked of the shelter as a "cavern." A considerable number of the visitors had stayed overnight, enjoying varied experiences. One of them describes a meal eaten at 2 a.m., consisting of tea which had a funny taste and sandwiches of a paraffin flavour. It is a matter for regret that the *genius loci*, the famous Ferla Mhor, has not thought fit to sign his name, but perhaps he only haunts the higher regions.

During 1924, after the fourteenth of August, there had been twenty-five visitors, the last of them being on the last day of September. Thereafter the Shelter Stone remained unvisited until the following year brought its first visitor on the seventh of June. During the intervening months no one had attempted to make his way over that rough stony country, held fast in the grip of winter. From that date onwards, however, there had been a steady flow of visitors mostly in July and August. The last visitors of all, before our appearance, had assiduously collected a carpet of heather for the inner chamber. They had also left a number of cooking utensils and some cocoa in a tin. Theirs is an example which might well be followed by others.

I think the book may justly claim to have served its purpose of giving an interesting record of those who enjoy the "sweetness of the mountain air." Certainly there is no better exercise than a long day's tramp, while to camp out amid such surroundings has all the spice of adventure and romance.

a. J. Macdonochie gives the dimensions as rough 44 ft in length, 21 ft in breadth & 22 ft in height, which allowing 12 cubic ft. to the ton would make its weight 1700 tons. Dr William Gueloch, who measured it the Stone in Aug. 1924, made its dimensions 43' by 20' by 22' & sample of the stone itself, subsequently examined in London, showed a specific gravity of 2.58, grammes per c.c. which gives 1361 tons as the weight of the block.

From S. H. G. Guide.