

SOME HIGHLAND EXPEDITIONS.

BY REV. A. E. ROBERTSON, S.M.C.

REV. ARCHIBALD E. ROBERTSON, of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, who was the guest of the Cairngorm Club at the annual dinner last November, showed a large number of slides taken during expeditions made the previous year in Breadalbane, Lochaber, Corryarrick and Glenmoriston, and gave a most interesting and racy account of these expeditions.

"In the middle of March," he said, "two lithe and active members of the Ladies' Scottish Climbing Club invited me to join them in a climb on the north-east face of Ben Lui. I had the time of my life, the ladies cheerfully undertaking all the hard work and, of course, climbing fearlessly and well. (When a woman does undertake anything of that sort, as a rule, she is first rate.) We foregathered at Tyndrum, and after a reasonably early start, soon found ourselves at the burnside below Coninish, feasting our eyes on the great, steep snow fields of the north-east corrie of Ben Lui. It was a clear, frosty day, with occasional blizzards of snow. Above Coninish, Ben Lui looms up, a conspicuous invitation to all lovers of the snow." Mr. Robertson described one slide as an example of the poor effect one gets trying to photograph a party on steep snow, the photographer being below and looking up. "It's no use at all," he said. "The snow looks quite flat and the poise of the figures rather silly. A blizzard," he continued, "happened to be on, just as we neared the summit,

blotting everything out. We descended by the north-east ridge, and soon got below the blizzard, obtaining wonderful vistas of the storm-clouds rolling about the Glen Lyon mountains."

A GRIM AND SINISTER PICTURE:

"At Achallader Farm next day," the lecturer proceeded, "we introduced ourselves to Mr. and Mrs. Smith, who were most friendly and kind. Little did they, little did we, think of the tragedy to be enacted on the steep, icy rocks near the summit of Ben Achallader the very next day, when young Mr. Henderson slipped and lost his life. We took the road by the riverside up past Barra-voirich towards Gorton, where I got a fine view of Ben Achallader, the trees of the Crannoch wood filling in the middle distance. Still further on another view of the Ben was obtained, the storm-clouds rolling about, on and off the top, a grim and even sinister picture, though we recked not of that when we saw it."

THE SOLDIERS' TRENCHES.

Following the Easter Meet of the S.M.C. at Fort William, Mr. Robertson walked across the Moor of Rannoch, and he discussed the problem of the so-called Soldiers' Trenches, a series of five clearly marked trenches or ditches, cut across a flat stretch of the Moor, 150 yards long by two yards wide. "What these trenches really were," he said, "I had long puzzled over. But I happened this spring to be reading some of the Forfeited Estates Papers and there I found a reference to what I think is the true solution. Ensign James Small, the Government factor for the forfeited estate of Robertson of Struan which in 1745 embraced all the south side of Loch Rannoch and the Moor of Rannoch up to the county march, reports that he caused five drains to be cut in the 'big moss,' as he calls it, in 1764, with the object of turning the moss into arable land. This was done, largely by Government troops, who were at that time readily available, a captain's command being posted

at Invercomrie, at the west-end of Loch Rannoch. (The shooting lodge there is called 'The Barracks' to this day). These efforts at land reclamation proved useless and there the soldiers' trenches remain, a monument of an abortive experiment. That, I think, is the solution of the mystery of the Soldiers' Trenches.

"The fact is that the Moor in these days of the '45 was a far busier place and a more frequented place than it is to-day. I used to think that the Moor of Rannoch must have been an impassible bog in these far off days, but recent researches in old contemporary reports and documents have shown me that this was not so. There were tracks regularly used from Lochaber across the Moor and through the pass at Gorton (the Caim) to Glen Lyon; to Argyllshire by Gorton and Achallader; to Glencoe across by a ford below Loch Ba; to Mamore by the north side of Cruach and the head of Loch Leven.

"Caterans and raiders, drovers and pack-men, Prince Charlie's men and the Hanoverian troops have all often passed this way in the good, old, bad days of the 18th century.

"Two miles further south, hidden away and out of sight of the railway, is a very lonely and seldom visted loch, Loch Doire an Dollan, on the march between Argyllshire and Perthshire. It must have been an old landmark and rendezvous, for I have found it marked and named on some of the oldest maps (over 200 years old) which we have of the Central Highlands.

"Between Gorton and Achallader there is the Crannoch Wood, one of the finest and largest surviving tracts of the old Caledonian Forest. A wonderful place, full of eerie glamourie, full of eyes within and without! You feel the elves and the fairies and the bogles are shadowing you, and wild things, rare and curious birds and beasts silently watching and looking on. It is a place to spend hours in, and to let the peace and the glamour of it sink into one. To whisk through in the train (as thousands do) is to miss its music, its mystery and its message."

PRINCE CHARLIE'S CAVE

“The middle of May found me on the banks of the Caledonian Canal at Invergloyle House. One of the expeditions we resolved on doing was to go and see the historic, but seldom visited cave in the wild recesses of the Ceannacroe Forest, Glenmoriston, where Prince Charlie spent a week, sheltered and cared for by the seven outlawed men of Glenmoriston, when he was hard beset after Culloden. He would probably have been captured had it not been for the timely shelter of this cave and the protection of these brave and faithful men. £30,000 was the price of his head and a word from them would have got it, but no! They were leal and true to their hunted Prince.

“Making an early start, we motored up past Invergarry and Fort Augustus to Invermoriston, then, turning up Glenmoriston, we sped along to Ceannacroe Lodge, a run of 40 miles. Here we were met by the keeper who was to take us to the cave which lies high up on the east face of Tigh Mor on the Affric march, a walk of some fifteen miles there and back.

“The keeper was a perfectly delicious old bird, and as we walked along I talked to him and he talked to me. I told him stories and he told me stories and I listened with all my ears for his unconscious humour was rich and rare. The miles slipped past easily and quickly. We were going up Coire Doe and the fine north-east Corrie of Carn Gluasaidh and Sgurr nan Conbheran looked tempting to my climbing eyes. Our route lay up the ridge of the Ram, a bulky, outlying peak, and then to the right, down into the corrie where the cave was. High up on the ridge of the Ram, Sgurr nan Conbheran (3634 ft.) was a great sight, carrying a surprising lot of snow, seeing it was now the middle of May. I have often noticed how much more snow the hills carry in late spring, north of the Caledonian Canal. We have now surmounted the Ram and are going along the broad and easy ridge towards the cave. This is Tigh Mor (3,276)

and the cave lies just below this sticking out shoulder, under the rocks. We are now down in the floor of the corrie and the cave is in sight. The height here is about 1,900 ft. The cave is formed by three or four enormous lumps of rock which have fallen down from the cliffs above—rather similar to the Shelter Stone in the Cairngorms, only the cave is bigger and higher inside. You can stand up in it and move about quite well and if, as I doubt not the Glenmoriston men did, all the draughty holes and crevices were stopped up with moss and fog, it would be a very comfortable place indeed. A runnel of clear spring water trickles through inside one corner of the cave—a most convenient arrangement.

A TALE OF MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL.

“The old keeper and I refreshed ourselves at this spring inside the cave, and then he proceeded to give me another tale, this time about Mr. Winston Churchill.

‘We had Mr. Winston Churchill staying at the lodge, one of the guests then, five years ago. He was a very clever gentleman, a grand speaker, but rather heavy on his legs on the high hills. He was very anxious to see the cave and I said I will take him to the cave, and we went just by the same way as Mr. Robertson and the ladies have taken, over the Ram and along the ridge and down into the corrie to the cave, and I had the rifle with me for I hoped the gentleman would be able to get a stag after he had seen the cave. Well, we got to the cave at last and he was ferry, ferry pleased to get there, but he was ferry tired; he was not a ferry good walker, not like Mr. Robertson who, I can see, is well used to the high hills. And he was so tired that he said he was going back down the corrie and not back up to the ridge, but I said that if he went down the corrie he could not get a stag. Owing to the wind he would have to go up to the ridge again, and he said he would not go back up the ridge not for all the stags in Ceannacroe. Well, we had started walking when he began

talking and arguing about going down the corrie, and I just did not say very much but all the time I was just quietly walking up towards the ridge, and he was so busy with his argument he was not noticing where he was going. He was a splendid speaker and he was arguing away and when he was finished with his argument we were almost back again on the ridge itself and I just stopped and I said to him. "Well, Mr. Churchill, just look and see where you are, you are almost on the ridge itself." And oh he was very merry and he just laughed and laughed. And we got a stag that day after all, and he was ferry pleased and I was ferry pleased. Oh, he was a clever speaker, but rather heavy on his legs on the high hills."

GENERAL WADE'S ROADS.

Mr. Robertson went on to describe an expedition over the famous old Corryarrick Road from Laggan to Fort Augustus, and to give a few words of explanation regarding General Wade's roads. "General Wade was born in 1673, and he died in 1748, and his road-making activities were confined to the eleven years from 1725 to 1736. The roads he actually was responsible for were as follows. He first connected up Fort William with Fort Augustus. He then joined up Fort George which was then in Inverness by Strath Errick. His third road ran from Inverness by Carrbridge to the Ruthven Barracks at Kingussie. Then Kingussie was linked up with Dunkeld by a road through Dalwhinnie, Drumochter, Blair Athol and Pitlochry. Then a direct road from Dalnacardoch to Crieff was made by Trinafour, Tummel Bridge, Coshieville, Aberfeldy and the Sma' Glen; and finally the Corryarrick Road from Dalwhinnie by Laggan Bridge and Garvamore over the pass to Fort Augustus. These are the only genuine Wade roads. General Wade gets credit for a great many other roads which he really had nothing to do with—the roads in Aberdeenshire, for example, the Invermoriston road to Loch Duich, the road from Tyn-drum by Glencoe to Fort William. These are old

military roads, but not Wade's roads. They were made after the '45 when there was a great outburst of road-making activity all over the Highlands.

"I feel sure," Mr. Robertson concluded, "that you all agree with me when I say that the hours we spend on the hills are our best hours, our happiest hours, evoking health and fun and laughter, giving us memories that strengthen us and hearten us in the dull routine of life.

Put me where there are hills, said Joe,
And I won't care where the next men go.
Give me mountain and peak and crag,
And I'll say I've the best of the bag."