

THE SCOTTISH "THREES."

BY J. A. PARKER.

ACCORDING to the Scottish Mountaineering Club's official list * there are 276 mountains in Scotland which are 3,000 feet or over in height. In the late spring of 1926 I found myself in the enviable position of having ample leisure, a recently acquired motor-car and the ability (?) to drive it, and thanks to a very successful fortnight at the S.M.C's Easter Meet at Tomdoun and Cluanie, a total of no less than 187 of the three thousand feet mountains already to my credit. It was therefore perfectly obvious that the correct thing to do was to set about the climbing of the remaining eighty-nine peaks as early as possible.

A list of the wanted hills was therefore prepared towards the end of May and it showed that the majority of them were fairly conveniently placed in the vicinity of Killin, Tyndrum, Ballachulish, and Spean Bridge; but that there was a very formidable minority of scattered peaks to the west of the Great Glen ranging from Ben More in Mull to Ben Hope in Sutherland and that many of them, such as A'Mhaighdean, Seana Bhragh, and Meall Buidhe (Loch Nevis) were extremely awkwardly placed even for a man with a motor-car. A careful examination of the list showed, however, that with methodical grouping and a good bit of luck the whole of the eighty-nine might be climbed in fifty-one

* See Munro's Tables in "The Scottish Mountaineering Club Guide," Vol. I., Section A.



June 1926

J. A. Parker

BEN MORE, MULL
(Looking west from the A'Chioch ridge)



September 1925

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SLIEVE LEAGUE, CO. DONEGAL
(Looking east from near the highest point)

working (*i.e.* climbing) days. This being, of course, quite a different thing from consecutive days.

As the result proved the operations extended from the 4th June, 1926, Ben Chonzie, to the 19th July, 1927, Ben Hope, and occupied fifty-six working days. Bad luck was experienced with some of the more optimistic groups on account of bad weather and, of course, climbing was not practicable in many of the districts during the deer stalking and winter seasons.

Now that the work has been accomplished it is interesting to look back on the whole undertaking and recall one's impressions. The first thing that struck me was the tremendous monotony of some of the more uninteresting hills and the second was the great beauty of many of the regions into which the quest led me, districts which are seldom visited other than by sportsmen in search of game if even by them. Fortunately the uninteresting hills were in a very small minority and there were few days if any that could compare as regards sheer unrelieved monotony with the circuit of the five Monadh Liaths from Newtonmore on a dull day with a bitterly cold east wind and no view. But it is more pleasant to think of the good hills of which there were many.

One of the finest of these was undoubtedly Ben More in Mull which was climbed from Salen on the 15th June, 1926. It is a beautiful hill of volcanic origin similar to the Cuillin and has a bold precipitous north face with a rugged *arête*, which called for careful handling by the solitary climber, running down eastwards to its graceful outlier A'Chioch. The view from the summit must be superb on a clear day; but unfortunately the ascent was made on a hazy day and distant view there was none.

Ben Sgrìol, which was climbed from Glenelg on the 21st July, is another fine hill and was interesting on account of its narrow and steep western summit ridge and for the magnificent views that it commanded on account of its isolated position between Skye and the

mountains of Loch Hourn and Loch Duich. Its 3,196 feet drop southwards to the shores of Loch Hourn in rather less than one mile is magnificent and is comparable to—but not so impressive as—the 1,972 feet drop from the summit of Slieve League in Co. Donegal, in less than half a mile to the shores of the Atlantic.

Kinloch Rannoch as a climbing centre, with a car, was a great discovery and the summit views from the hills on the confines of “mountain girdled” Rannoch Moor on peerless days in early spring a revelation. The Ballachulish Hills were done during the Easter Meet of the Scottish Mountaineering Club and their memory is mostly one of arduous days in the worst of weather, with the glorious exception of Ben Starav at the head of Loch Etive. But two of the best of the Ballachulish Hills, Sgor na h-Ulaidh and Beinn Fhionnlaidh, climbed from Glen Coe in the thickest of mists, afforded a most delightful problem in route finding, the tricky descent from the latter mountain under such conditions into the rain drenched upper recesses of Glen Creran being wonderfully impressive.

The Beinn Dearg Group in Ross-shire gave three most interesting days in perfect weather; but with Ladhar Bheinn on the South shore of Loch Hourn I was just a wee bit disappointed, probably because it was climbed by its uninteresting southern slope and perhaps because I was just getting a bit *blasé*—it was the eighty-seventh.

A good hill, Ben Hope, was reserved for the last and it was climbed with R. T. Sellar on the 19th July, 1927. Most unfortunately the weather was very bad, it was the beginning of the summer weather of that year; but the ascent along its narrow north ridge was extremely interesting. View there was none and with just a kind word of congratulation from Sellar and a hasty handshake we ran down the easy south and south-west slopes to the car that was waiting on the roadside.

Most of the ascents had unfortunately to be made alone but out of the fifty-six climbing days the weather



April 1927

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SGURR RUAHD, ACHINASHELLACH
(From its N.W. ridge. Corrie Lair on left)



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COIRE GARBH, BEN ATTOW
(From Sgurr a' Choire Ghairbh looking S.W. through the Hunter's Pass to Sgurr Fhuaran)

on no fewer than forty-seven was excellent and in many cases simply superb. The bulk of the work was done in the months of March, April, May and June, the record month being May, 1927, during which twenty-nine of the hills were climbed and of these thirteen were climbed in seven consecutive days. A result of careful grouping, good staff work, and perfect weather!

Many of the hills were difficult to get at and involved long and laborious days; but on the other hand some of the hills that gave the greatest cause for anxiety in this respect fell with unexpected ease. Of these latter Ladhar Bheinn was a conspicuous example. I went to Mallaig prepared if necessary to charter a special motor-boat or even to sleep out on the mountain as the Hotel(sic) at Inverie was impossible, when to my surprise the peak was done most comfortably between the morning and afternoon runs of the ordinary boat from Mallaig to Inverie for a four shilling return fare and with afternoon tea served up by the crew of the boat on the homeward journey.

The longest day was undoubtedly the one devoted to that most un-get-at-able of all hills, A'Mhaighdean, which was done with Gordon Wilson from Kinlochewe by way of Glen Bianasdail and the east end of Lochan Fada. Being grouped with Sgurr Ban and Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair, its ascent took twelve hours almost continuous going. But it is a fine hill and has a grand western precipice. Another long day was that devoted to Meall Buidhe, Loch Nevis, from Tomdoun via Kinlochquoich through the very wonderful pass of Lochan nam Breac (see photo. *S.M.C.J.*, Vol. VII. p. 313).

Another long day must be mentioned although it was done in April, 1926, viz., Sgurr nan Ceathreamhnan (3,771 feet) which stands on the north side of Glen Affaric fully four miles west of Mam Soul. It is the fourth highest peak west of the Caledonian Canal and is undoubtedly one of the finest mountains in Scotland. Its ascent along with that of its northern outlier Creag

a'Choir'Aird from Cluanie took eleven hours steady going ; but it was worth it.

Some one asks, "Now that you have climbed all the three thousand feet mountains in Scotland which, in your opinion, are the finest?" It is a difficult question to reply to, and I do so with much hesitation because there are many fine peaks and many opinions. East of the Caledonian Canal I would say, not in order of merit, Ben Cruachan, Bidian nam Bian, Ben Lui, Ben Lawers, Ben Nevis, Lochnagar, Cairn Toul, Braeriach, and Ben Macdhui. And west of the canal, Ben More in Mull, The Saddle (Loch Duich), Ben Attow, Sgurr nan Ceathreamhnan, Sgurr Ruadh (Achnashellach), Sgurr na Lapaich in Strathfarrar, Liathach, Beinn Eighe, Slioch, An Teallach, Beinn Dearg (Ross), Ben More Assynt, and all the Black Cuillins, especially Sgurr Alasdair.

And now that the quest is finished I am harassed with the awful thought that for the ascent of perhaps seventy-five per cent. of the hills I had no witness with me and that it is open to any one to challenge the statement, which is hereby confirmed, that I have climbed all the three thousanders. All that I have to show in proof is a carefully compiled list dating from the 19th July, 1883, with the ascent of Ben Lomond, the most southerly 3,000 feet hill in Scotland, and ending curiously enough with Ben Hope in Sutherland, the most northerly, forty-four years later. In view of the recent English Channel swimming dispute, the correct thing is apparently now to go and climb them all over again with press representatives and other responsible witnesses, but this I absolutely refuse to do. I would rather tackle the "Twenty Fives"; but that is another story. Fortunately they have not yet been listed, and probably never will.