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G. Roy Symmers

DUBH LOCH: THE THROUGH ROUTE PITCH.

[This pitch is situated about half-way up the south-east gully.]

AN UNCLIMBED GULLY.

BY G. ROY SYMMERS.

But, courage ! for around that boisterous brook
The mountains have all opened out themselves,
And made a hidden valley of their own.
No habitation can be seen ; but they
Who journey thither find themselves alone
With a few sheep, with rocks and stones, and kites
That overhead are sailing in the sky.

Wordsworth.

ONE morning in the late September of this year, N. Bruce and writer left the Glas-allt Shiel with designs on the south-east gully of the Creag an Dubh Loch. The day was perfect. Scarcely a puff of wind disturbed the polished surface of Loch Muick. From the distance came the sound of tumbling waters ; now whispering, then booming out as the light breeze stiffened slightly. In the background, Broad Cairn proudly reared its shapely cone above the dark and narrow glen.

Who could hurry on such a morning? Every little detail standing out clearly in the bright morning sun caused a sensation of pleasure. Such mornings are few and far between. Little wonder then that we took somewhat more than schedule time to complete the walk up to the Dubh Loch. What a vision of grandeur ! What a heavenly blue, merging to a deep purple where the shadow of the overhanging crags fell upon the surface of the tarn.

Ah ! then, if mine had been the Painter's hand,
To express what then I saw ; and add the gleam,
The light that never was, on sea and land,
The consecration, and the Poet's dream.

Gentle ripples crossed the surface of the loch, lapping noisily against the little boulders strewn around the shore. From each little island rock radiated a series of concentric rings—tiny waves of ever-increasing girth. These, intermingling with other families, formed a beautiful lace-like pattern along the margin of the loch as far as the eye could see.

A rough scramble, first over moraine and bog, then up steep scree slopes, took us from the edge of the loch up to the foot of the gully. The structure of the cleft bore a striking resemblance to Raeburn's Gully on Lochnagar. The bend at the commencement was there; the steeply inclined left and vertical right walls were both there; and jambed in the V shaped section were a series of great boulders forming pitch above pitch. After an ascent of thirty feet on loose scree, the first obstacle was encountered and the rope put on. The back of the gully narrowed down to a width of about two feet. This chimney, some twenty feet in height, although leaning back at a fairly easy angle, was singularly devoid of holds, especially so near its commencement. The pitch was climbed by lying sideways in the stream of water which was hurriedly descending it, and resorting to back and knee methods. After I had restored the circulation in my numbed fingers, my friend neatly climbed the pitch, coming up to where I stood in about half the time which I had taken. From this point for about eighty feet the bed of the gully was steep and extremely rotten. The less said about this section the better, suffice it that several incidents occurred which will long remain imprinted on the writer's memory. At last the cave below the second pitch was gained ! What a relief once more to handle solid, immovable rock ! By the aid of a threaded rope and a steady hand from my companion the



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THE DUBH LOCH IN APRIL.

[The south-east gully is seen running perpendicularly between the two dark cliff masses.]

pitch was climbed in a twinkling. The complete pitch, including some boulders on the right, which had to be climbed before the cave could be reached, was possibly about twenty feet in height. A short stretch of scree brought us up to the next pitch, which took the form of a cave with an immense through-route. No difficulty was met with in surmounting this rather spectacular obstacle, the passage up the back of the huge jambed-block being quite easy. After a short rest, a scramble up to the fourth and final pitch ensued. This was easy, and apart from the fact that several of the big stone masses were slack, scarcely required a thought. The finish up the gully, that is the last 150 feet or so, was distinctly unpleasant. Granite of the consistency of brown sugar was encountered the whole way up. The writer felt very insecure throughout this section, and as the angle of the gully steepened towards the top, it was with feelings of great relief that the summit was gained. Twenty feet from the skyline a number of ledges, which zig-zagged up the left wall, were utilized in preference to the direct finish. We are of the opinion that the direct finish is unjustifiable because the rock is in such a state of disintegration.

How pleasant it was, after two hours of strenuous exertion, to lie above that sheltered cliff and gaze out over the tarn to where a tumultuous waterfall, like some white serpent descending from heaven to earth, tumbled in cataract after cataract into the loch below. But what had happened to our loch ?

The sun is set, the clouds are met,
The luring scowl of heaven
An inky view of vivid blue
To the deep lake has given.

As we watched, dark clouds stealing up from the north warned us that it was time to move on. Accordingly, shouldering our packs we strode off. A visit to the north-west gully was made, where we came to the conclusion that the overhanging top could not be

climbed. A brisk walk took us over to Cairn Bannock, from which a magnificent view was enjoyed. The tramp across grass plateau to Fafernie occupied but a few minutes, then back over undulating tableland to Broad Cairn where we were overtaken by rain.

The descent to the Allt an Dubh Loch was made by way of an open, scree-filled shoot. The top being steep and gravelly it took us rather longer to get down than we had anticipated. On the right wall (descending) of this gully was an exceedingly fine chimney about 200 feet in height. It would certainly make a very fine climb and is well worth a visit. At last the burn was reached and the path regained. We turned for a last look at the loch. Everything was grey: the mighty cliffs gleamed wet, at their base the sullen loch lay unruffled—surely a scene of sinister, forbidding grandeur. That night the snow came.

YOUTH ON THE HILL-TOPS,

Youth, in the wake of many hued romance,
 Gaining the hill-tops with a careless stride,
 Sees yet ahead with visionary glance,
 Fresh heights to scale, and will not be denied.

Taking the path that leads for ever onwards,
 Scaling each unknown peak with joyous zest,
 Breaking a trail where none before have wandered,
 So Youth should stride, that age may fitly rest.

Fleet be our footsteps, sturdy, Lord, our will
 While Youth is ours, while yet the summit gleams;
 That there may be *one* hill-top in our dreams
 Where vision lies, where memories wander still.

H.M.B.