

THE CAIRNGORMS.*

THE S.M.C. GUIDE.

Reviewed by Alexander Inkson McConnochie, F.Z.S.

THIS is a wonderful volume of over 200 pages, with no fewer than fifty-seven panoramas, photogravures, diagrams and map. The illustrations are as good as they are numerous. The book is compiled on a well-defined plan, and has manifestly entailed much research and labour on the part of the author. It was a very happy thought to make the Cairngorms the central figure in the plan while including the hills and mountains of the north-east of Scotland; these are described in regular order according to their position. Paper and printing are both good; altogether the S.M.C. is to be congratulated on this most important addition to their series of Guides, as well as on their selection of such a competent author. I found the work entrancing from the first to the last page. The style of writing will appeal to others than mere hillmen; facts are clothed in language which compels the reader to go on to the last page. Strict accuracy is a matter of the greatest importance in such a work; and, as in duty bound, I looked for errors and omissions but found none. As one of the very few original members of the Cairngorm Club I feel a certain pride in handling this work on the Cairngorms. I may be forgiven for recalling that

* THE CAIRNGORMS, by Mr. Henry Alexander. Published by the Scottish Mountaineering Club, Edinburgh. Paper, 7/6; cloth, 10/-

after breakfast at the Shelter Stone, on the morning after Queen Victoria's Jubilee, six enthusiasts stood by the head of Loch Avon and had the courage to found the Cairngorm Club. I am the only survivor of these daring men, but all of us lived long enough to see the Club pass on from strength to strength.

Writing about mountains is often enough monotonous work, but every reader will find "The Cairngorms" fascinating. Therein the rock-climber is not forgotten, and ski-ers are told where the best sport in Scotland is to be found. No trouble seems to have been spared in bringing together references to all who have contributed in any way by their writings to a knowledge of the huge group of mountains between Spey and Dee as well as of the surrounding minor heights. The author makes no extravagant claims for climbers; sportsmen are allowed to have certain rights. Writing of the ascent of Ben Macdhui it is stated that "in the shooting season it is courteous to avoid the Luibeg"; the same might be said of Glen Geusachan, the sanctuary of Mar forest.

There is just one sentence to which I should take exception; it is the last complete sentence of page 85. That legend was copied into Macdonald's "Place-names of West Aberdeenshire", not to mention other publications. I have the best of reasons for now stating that there is no foundation for the so-called legend.

With regard to the reference to the Shelter Stone at page 126, I may add that the "series of articles, unsigned," was written by me in 1886.

Most of us who have made it their pleasure to explore thoroughly the Cairngorm mountains have ideas on the subject of the grandest scenes among them. Let us take the mountains themselves first; Mr. Alexander says—

Cairn Toul is the finest of the Cairngorm summits. In the view of the range from Braemar it is the most commanding object, and seen nearer at hand from the Lairig path it forms a lovely peak, with

long and very steep ridges running straight up from the Dee and with a tiny hanging corrie nestling just below the summit.

Concerning Braeriach—

If Braeriach be disappointing as a mountain because of the lack of a single well-defined peak such as Cairn Toul possesses, this is compensated for by the remarkable number and variety of its corries. A mere ascent to the highest point is not enough to give an adequate idea of Braeriach ; the mountain is one to be wandered over, and, when so explored on a long summer's day or taken in sections on different excursions, it becomes strangely interesting and impressive.

I quite agree with him.

As for the walk between Ben Macdhui and Cairngorm he writes—

This high-level walk of 4 miles ($1\frac{3}{4}$ to 2 hours) requires comparatively little exertion as the going is good for almost the whole distance, and, though various ups and downs occur, no great loss of height is involved as the route nowhere falls beneath 3600 ft.

The walk from Cairn Toul to Braeriach he describes more eloquently—

The circuit of the Garbh Choire between Cairn Toul and Braeriach, in whichever direction it is done, affords perhaps the grandest high-level walk in the Cairngorms, and exceeds in interest even the corresponding round from Ben Macdhui to Cairngorm. The distance is about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles and the time required is $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 hours, but no one will seek to hurry it, for, if the weather be clear, he will pause often to gaze on the varying views which one after another present themselves, into and across the mighty amphitheatre of which Cairn Toul and Braeriach form the outer points.

No great loss of height is involved in the round, as the route at only one spot falls below the 3750 ft. contour, and it is at or over the 4000-ft. level for $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles. If the walker, instead of cutting across the hollow in which are the Wells of Dee, goes round the watershed over all the 4000-ft. tops of Braeriach, the total distance at or over the 4000-ft. level is $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles, the longest walk at such an elevation to be enjoyed in this country.

Again I quite agree, only I should have liked a little more said on the charms of the stroll across the Feith Buidhe. I am deeply in love with both these high-level walks; certainly the circuit of the Garbh Choire is the grandest mountain walk in Scotland.

Finally, compare the loch scenery; Mr. Alexander writes of Loch Avon—

There is no easy way to Loch Avon or out of it, not even a path or a track, and this loneliness, added to the majesty of the surrounding heights, makes Loch Avon the grandest loch in the Scottish Highlands. Queen Victoria, who visited it on September 28, 1861, wrote: 'Nothing could be grander and wilder; the rocks are so grand and precipitous, and the snow on Ben Macdhui had such a fine effect'. Other descriptions, more eloquent but not a whit truer, might be quoted, but this is unnecessary.

His description of Loch Einich is brief but pointed—
Loch Einich . . . yields to Loch Avon alone in wildness and almost rivals it in sombre majesty.

These words, I venture to think, must have been carefully selected; comparing the one loch with the other the description could not be more accurate.