

BLUE HILL INDICATOR.

THE UNVEILING CEREMONY.

[*Cairngorm Club Journal* Special Report.]

AN interesting ceremony took place at the Blue Hill on Saturday, November 2, 1929, when the indicator provided by Colonel D. B. D. Stewart of Banchory-Devenick was unveiled under the auspices of the Cairngorm Club. A large gathering took part in the proceedings, including a full representation of the Club, members of the general public, and students of Aberdeen University.

Calling upon Mrs. Stewart to perform the unveiling ceremony, Mr. Parker, president of the Cairngorm Club, gave a brief history of the Blue Hill, recalling that Sir David Stewart had built a tower there many years ago. It was about thirteen feet high, and from the top one could see over the trees that clustered around the summit of the Hill. But finally the trees got the better of the tower, and it was impossible latterly to get a view of the surrounding country. In course of time, however, discussions began to take place between the late Dr. Cruickshank and Mr. Copland, first president of the Club, as to what could be seen from the top of the Hill, and it was stated by both of these gentlemen that Morrone, at Braemar, was within view. In the meantime the tower that had been erected by Sir David Stewart had been blown down. Mr. Parker went on to state that in course of time Colonel Stewart took the matter up with the Cairngorm Club, and he decided after some discussion that he would cut down a number of trees. He asked him (Mr. Parker) to meet him and give an indication of the trees that it was thought would be better to be cut. Colonel Stewart emphasised at the very outset that if any trees were to be taken down, a thorough job must be made of it. When the trees were cut down, proceeded Mr. Parker, they found that it would be quite unnecessary to build a cairn,

but the question arose as to what they would do with the stones. So at length they decided to use them to form a mound with a concrete core, on which to place the indicator. And in this, concluded Mr. Parker, we received the greatest help from Mrs. Stewart. Her first duty was to help us in matters of detail, her second, to feed the engineer when he used to go to her house on Sunday afternoons to talk matters over with Colonel Stewart—(laughter)—and now her third duty is to unveil the indicator this afternoon.

Amid applause, Mrs. Stewart ascended the steps on the the cairn, and, unfastening a ribbon of Stewart tartan, drew the covering—a scarf in the Club colours—from the indicator. "I hope it will be a great source of pleasure to mountain lovers," said Mrs. Stewart, in performing the ceremony. There was a strong local tradition, she added, that that Hill was where the sun-worshippers had their habitation many thousands of years ago. That might quite well be true, because from the Hill one could see the sun rise and set.

Mr. William Garden, an ex-president of the Cairngorm Club, proposed a vote of thanks to Mrs. Stewart. They were all very pleased, he said, that Mrs. Stewart had been able to come there that afternoon and unveil the indicator. She had unveiled it with precisely that grace and taste that they would have expected of her—(applause). There is not the slightest doubt, went on Mr. Garden, that with the unveiling of this indicator, one of the finest viewpoints in Kincardineshire has been unfolded, or rather, I should say, resuscitated, because until the tower was blown down, we had a magnificent view from here, seeing by means of that tower over the tops of the trees. The bird's-eye view right up the valley of the Dee, right down to its mouth at the Silver City by the sea is unsurpassed—(applause).

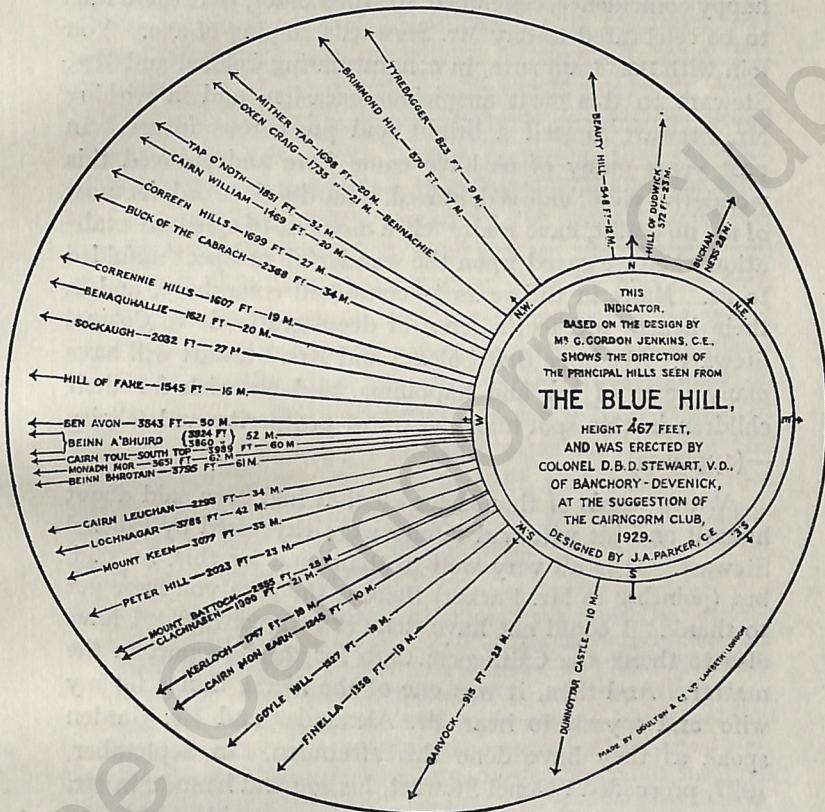
The very pleasant duty has fallen to me, added Mr. Garden, of presenting to Mrs. Stewart, on behalf of the Cairngorm Club, the scarf, bearing the Club's colours, as a memento of the occasion, and also the ribbon of Stewart tartan.

The gifts were handed to Mrs. Stewart amid rousing cheers. In a word, Mrs. Stewart thanked the Club for their

kindness, and assured the members that the gifts would always be a reminder of a very pleasant occasion.

To Mr. Henry Alexander fell the duty of thanking Colonel Stewart for his gift. It was a gift, said Mr. Alexander, that had three aspects. They first acknowledged most gratefully the privilege which they had enjoyed all these years of freely visiting the top of the Blue Hill. They wished to acknowledge very gratefully also the generosity which had led Colonel Stewart to renew that viewpoint, and enhance its interest by providing the indicator. And lastly, they wished to acknowledge the sacrifice he had made in cutting down much valuable timber in order that the view from the Hill might not be impeded. All these things constituted a remarkable gift. It was a gift, he ventured to say, that was peculiarly interesting and significant at that particular time. As they were no doubt aware, there was a strong movement all over the country for the preservation of natural scenery. It was being realized, perhaps as never before, that a population like theirs, so largely composed of town-dwellers, must have something to offer its soul, something by which they could get back into the open air and into touch with the beauties of nature and the joys of the countryside. It had been realised, continued Mr. Alexander, that a beautiful prospect such as they had from the Blue Hill was just as precious a possession as the richest collection of books in a library. And the sympathy and feeling of Colonel Stewart had made it possible for the town-dwellers of Aberdeen to come up there and feast their eyes on the far horizons. In Aberdeen just now they had noise and bustle; even on the roads yonder they were pursued by confusion. But up there, there was peace, and they could rest their hearts with infinite composure, looking at the hills and thinking of the large simplicity of this fair world. There was none who would appreciate the presence of that indicator and the fine view point on the Blue Hill more warmly than the members of the Cairngorm Club, and on their behalf he thanked Colonel Stewart most warmly. There were many kindred societies who would join in these acknowledgments,

and if he ventured to speak for the Town Council of Aberdeen and neighbouring local authorities, they also were very grateful to Colonel Stewart. They were endeavouring just now, continued Mr. Alexander, to preserve other view-points in the neighbourhood of Aberdeen, and it was their



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hope that other proprietors would safeguard various points of natural beauty. It was very encouraging that Colonel Stewart should have given a lead in this matter, a lead which he was convinced was going to have a far-reaching influence and effect. That gift was only one chapter in an interesting and most happy association which had existed between Colonel Stewart's family and the city of Aberdeen.

His great-grandfather was a provost of Aberdeen, his father was a provost of Aberdeen, and only the other day the Town Council had the pleasure of admitting his son, Mr. David Stewart, as a burgess of the City, thus welcoming the fifth generation of the family to civic life—(applause). It is a happy coincidence, concluded Mr. Alexander, that there falls to be celebrated to-day Mr. Stewart's coming-of-age. You join with me, I am sure, in congratulating Colonel and Mrs. Stewart on this most auspicious occasion, and in wishing Mr. Stewart himself a bright and prosperous future. In past years many of us have come here and enjoyed this wonderful view ; enjoyed, indeed, is hardly the word, for most of us, no doubt, have really felt a moment of spiritual exaltation when we gazed upon the wonderful prospect unfolded to us. Many in the years to come will come here, and in their hearts will feel a sense of deep gratitude to Colonel Stewart. We hope that Colonel and Mrs. Stewart will have many years of joy and happiness, and we wish for their children in this spot many years of prosperity and felicity—(applause).

Warm words of thanks for all that had been said about himself and his wife and family were expressed by Colonel Stewart. It is all very well to thank me for this, he said, but (pointing to Mr. Parker) there is the man you have got to thank. I could not have done it without him. I have also to thank the Cairngorm Club for their support in the matter. And then, it was one of the nicest things for my wife and myself to hear Mr. Alexander and Mr. Garden speak as they have done this afternoon. In September, 1927, proceeded Colonel Stewart, his son and he met, in Mr. Nicol's office, Mr. Garden, the then president of the Cairngorm Club. Shortly afterwards, in order that no mistake might be made, he (Colonel Stewart) drew up a minute of what took place. That minute, as Mr. Parker had indicated that day, was to the effect, that if the Cairngorm Club would point out the trees they wished cut, he would do the rest. But there was one proviso, namely, that there must be a distinct understanding that the Hill was open during his pleasure. They would, perhaps, think

that there was not much in that proviso, but if he gave them the history of the cairns, as he was about to do, they would see that it was most necessary. But before dealing with the history of the cairns he wished to refer to something that followed from Mr. Alexander's remarks.

Mr. Alexander and he had had many meetings over town-planning schemes, in which, as they all knew, Mr. Alexander was very interested. He would say to Mr. Alexander as a town councillor, that the body on which he served should at once set about making a proviso that the spot on which they were standing that day should never be built upon—(applause). With regard to the cairns, continued Colonel Stewart, much had been written about them and much had been talked about them, but he had not seen one correct statement of fact yet—(laughter). He would give one bit of advice to anyone who was talking about localities, namely, that the first thing they should do was to come to the proprietors and ask if their statement was correct—(laughter). The first cairn at the Blue Hill was erected by the Sappers in 1817, and reference to a letter written to Sir David Stewart by the late Dr. Cruickshank was made. In that letter, which was dated July 30, 1879, Dr. Cruickshank said:—

Allow me to send you a copy of an outline skerch I made last autumn on the Blue Hill. It is the result of familiarity with the view from the Blue Hill for upwards of 40 years, for I remember being on the top on the Queen's marriage day, and I have visited it at least twice, and sometimes four or five times a year since. On my first visits the larches on the top were only a foot or two high, and thus there was no obstruction to the view in all directions from the base of the cairn. The trees were planted there in 1832. Though their high and exposed situation has greatly retarded their growth, they now much obstruct the view, especially to the N. and N.E., and the roughness of the cairn is only for the nimble and active to ascend.

I have often wished on my visits that the trees obstructing the view should be cut down, or that the cairn should be made of such a height, or of so easy ascent as to obtain the magnificent view with comfort. There are plenty of granite and gneiss surface blocks in the vicinity to increase the diameter and height of the cairn. Concrete might be used to cement the blocks together, and to form steps up to and a seat on the centre of the top.

The concrete would be a sufficient resistance to the destructive tendencies of some people.

The Blue Hill was an important station in the Trigonometrical Survey, when in June, 1817, the Belhelvie 5 miles Base Line of verification was measured, by Ramsden's steel chain, by Captain Colley and a party of the Royal Engineers encamped on Belhelvie Links. The angle made by two lines from the Blue Hill to the Tarbathie and Leyton ends of the Belhelvie Base Line had to be observed by the theodolite, and the three sides of this triangle (of which the angles were at the Blue Hill, Tarbathie, and Leyton) had been previously computed through a system of triangles extending over England and Scotland from Hounslow Heath, near London, where General Roy, in 1784, measured a Base Line, which was the foundation of the triangulation. When the Belhelvie Links Base Line was actually measured by the chain (and it took six weeks to do it, so many precautions to ensure accuracy), it was found that the measured length of this side of the triangle (or 5 miles 100 feet) was only *three inches* less than the computed length founded on the measured base line more than 500 miles distant, and on the measured angles and computed sides of the triangles between Belhelvie and Hounslow Heath.

Thus the Blue Hill has an important history in connection with the application of mathematics to an accurate survey of the country. It also commands the most extensive and finest land and sea views near Aberdeen.

The first cairn, proceeded Colonel Stewart, was in existence up to 1879, when Dr. Cruickshank and Mr. Copland got his grandfather to erect a cairn high enough to look over the trees as they then were. He thought the less said about the second cairn the better. One Fast Day the flag-staff on the top of that cairn was cut down by boys with penknives, and the seats were flattened. That was the end of that cairn. The third cairn was erected by his father, Sir David Stewart, in 1891, following upon newspaper correspondence passing between Mr. Copland and others. Mr. Copland and others wished to erect the cairn on their own responsibility in view of the destruction of this other cairn. Sir David wrote the newspapers that he could not allow that, because the public would claim the right to come to the Hill. He said he would once more erect the cairn, but he would give instructions to his successor (and that was himself) that if it were again destroyed it would not be

re-erected. The cairn fell in 1922. Several letters appeared in the papers, mostly anonymous, some by the late Mr. Robert Clarke, and he was badgered about not answering them. Well, he never answered newspaper correspondence. If the Cairngorm Club or others wished to know the reasons, they could come to him. I took no notice for several years, added Colonel Stewart, and then Mr. Nicol of the Cairngorm Club asked me to meet him and Mr. Garden; that, as I have indicated, was in September, 1927. I told these gentlemen that it was not that I would not erect the cairn, but I was faced with this, that I would be doing what my father said was not to be done. Very nicely, they put it that it was the weather this time—(laughter)—but you here to-day can think what you like; you can think for yourselves if the weather would have such a disastrous effect upon a cairn that was in existence from 1891 to 1922—(laughter). Following this, I thought I could pass over the instructions my father left, hence the cairn of to-day—(applause). I would appeal, as I did to Mr. Nicol and Mr. Garden, to the public to guard the cairn. I am not going to threaten; it would not be really fair to my son to do so; I only make a very strong appeal to the citizens of Aberdeen to regard this as sacred and not let anything be done that would destroy it; and further, I would make an appeal that no litter be left lying about the Blue Hill.

Colonel Stewart then read over the names of the hills that could be seen from the Blue Hill, and concluded by asking the company to accord a vote of thanks to Mr. Parker for presiding.