

RANNOCH MOOR AND CORRYARRICK.

A SEVEN DAYS' TRAMP.

BY MRS. J. A. WILSON.

WE had long wished to see the Moor of Rannoch, and also to cross the Pass of Corryarrick. We decided to try if two mere women could do the round trip in a week from Braemar on foot. We succeeded, with one or two minor lifts, and the following record of our doings may be of interest and, perhaps, tempt some of our members to follow our footsteps.

We did the walk in the month of May, and we need hardly emphasize the fact that May to July is the best season for the purpose, as on one of the days at least—the crossing of the moor is a pretty long one—plenty of daylight is required.

We decided that we would start on a certain Monday morning no matter what the weather was like, and, fortunately, our selected Monday was clear, so that we left Aberdeen with the first train in a hopeful frame of mind. We reached Braemar before noon and left at once on foot for Glen Tilt. The first part of our route through Inverey and past the Linn of Dee was, of course, familiar ground to us, but beyond that everything was new. We were delighted with Glen Tilt, which we found, as it has been described, to be a peaceful green glen with pleasant contours. The Bedford Memorial Bridge was a reminder of the sad tragedy of 1888, when one of two young men who, stripped, essayed to cross the flooded Tarf, was carried away and drowned—a warning that flooded highland streams may be very dangerous and crossing should never be attempted without keeping on one's footgear. To remove one's boots or shoes is simply to increase the risk and discomfort tenfold. Beyond the bridge the path is mostly downhill, a fact that was fully appreciated by us, as this was our first day, and although our first, it was not a short one, as we had covered quite twenty miles before we reached the house of a kindly keeper near Forest Lodge,

whose wife willingly placed her parlour-sofa-bed at our disposal for the night.

Next morning, Tuesday, we got away from our hospitable friends about eight o'clock and made down the glen for Blair Athol, six miles off. On the way there we stopped to speak to a shepherd, and on telling him that we were making for Rannoch for the night, he advised us to cut across the hill beyond Blair Athol by way of Loch Bhaic to the head of Loch Tummel instead of following the high road to Struan and up Glen Erochy. We did so, and were very satisfied with the result of the shepherd's advice. Besides being somewhat shorter it gave us pleasant ground instead of hard roads. We also had the magnificent view of Loch Tummel and the hills beyond it, which we otherwise should have missed had we gone by the Struan route. The Loch Bhaic footpath was struck at the farm of Milton of Invervack, about two miles west of Blair Athol, where there is a bridge across the Garry. The climb up to the loch is about five hundred feet ; but this is not any higher a climb than we should have had on the Glen Erochy road. Kinloch Rannoch was reached in good time. It is a beautiful little village, and we were sorry to think that we were only to spend one night in it. We secured comfortable quarters for the night and were glad of them, as we had logged 23 miles since leaving the keeper's house in Glen Tilt.

Wednesday was our third day and promised well for this our biggest and most venturesome trek—"The dreary Moor of Rannoch." To reach even the edge of it we had first to cover seventeen miles of hard road. We took the south side of Loch Rannoch and were charmed with the walk along the loch side, two miles of it being through the famed Black Wood ; about ten miles followed, with a fine stretch of three miles along the side of the River Gaoire. Then we emerged on to the Moor, a desert—

Yea! a desert wide and wasted,
Washed by rain floods to the bones ;
League on league of heather blasted,
Storm-gashed moss, grey boulder stones.*

*From the "Moor of Rannoch," by Principal Shairp.

Suddenly we came to Rannoch Station and the end of the road. Beyond was another eleven miles of the moor to cross before we could reach Kingshouse. To encourage us slight rain commenced. We asked a native as to the route and if there was a path, and to encourage us still more, he replied, "Path! there's none, and many o' the folk that go on to the moor are never heard o' again!" Well, he has never heard of us again but we got across all right. It was pretty wet, damp overhead and damp underfoot; but we were not down-hearted. We had a compass but did not use it, as our best guide was the magnificent cone of Buchaille Etive, which we saw now and again when the rain and mist cleared. We knew that our course was slightly to the right of it. There is, we believe, a path but we never struck it. The map shows it keeping well on the high ground on the south side of Cruach after passing Loch Laidon. Westward, the moor stretched flat and naked, all untracked and melancholy. Its nearer parts were green with boggy grass, on which the cotton-sedge was strewn like flakes of snow. In the distance its hue was sombre, grey as ashes, and blackened here and there with holes of peat. The end of it was lost in mist, from which jutted the scowling mountains of Glen Coe. God-forgotten, man-forsworn, wild Rannoch, with the birds above it screaming, was to us the eeriest thing we had ever seen. It charmed and it repelled us, and we looked across it with uneasy breast and drank in the spirit of the wilderness, so strange and so forlorn. As we traversed the waste we found that a forest had likely once been there, for its old, red fir-roots and white skeleton-like trunks stuck out from the slime of peat. We reached Kingshouse Inn sometime in the evening, and slept all right, for we had covered at least thirty miles that day.

Thursday, our fourth day, was perfect and was not to be quite so strenuous. Glen Coe is wonderful; it justifies all that has been written or said about it, and the mountains form a great attraction for the mountaineer. Having quite a short day in front of us, we lazed a good bit and enjoyed the glen to the full. One is struck by the fine cone-

shaped hills on the south side, one of which had a scarf of mist round it, which added very much to its apparent height. The great rock rampart of Aonach Eagach on the north side with its apparent hundreds of gullies was wild and majestic, and was the finest thing of the kind we had seen. Then we came to Loch Triochatan at the foot of Aonach Dubh; with Ossian's Cave high up on the rock-face.

At Ballachulish we crossed the ferry and thence we took, we must admit it, a motor bus to Fort William. Here we watched with envy the climbers coming back from a perfect day on Ben Nevis, and we wished we could have stayed an extra day to climb the Ben; but our time-table would not permit. This had been an off-day and we had walked only twelve miles.

Friday, our fifth day, was, however, not going to be anything of the kind. All the same we began it by taking the train to Fort Augustus, where we arrived shortly after eleven o'clock. Rather a late hour at which to start for the Corryarrick Pass: better had we come on the previous afternoon. We had some trouble in hitting the beginning of the Corryarrick road. We were very grateful to a kindly priest, who escorted us on the way and showed us where to cross some fields and find the road. We know now that there is a very pleasant and easily-found approach to the road by going to Cullachy House and then up Tarff side. We struck it all right finally after some trouble, and when found it was quite easy to follow. We stopped on the summit for lunch, and had quite a fair view; but we understand that in clear weather the view is very extensive. The descent from the summit of the road eastwards was far steeper than we could have imagined any road to be, especially a military one. We descended the famous twelve zigzags, now grass-grown. It was all very interesting, and the crossing seemed very short, due probably to the problem of finding the road at the outset, and the interest in following the road itself, and marvelling at the wonderful engineering displayed by General Wade nearly two hundred years ago. The pass is not used now as it once was, though up to comparatively recent times shepherds frequently crossed it,

driving their flocks from the remote north to the southern markets, so that what was once a recognized route has now lapsed into a place of solitude. It is the chief access through the hills from the Caledonian Canal valley between Fort William and Inverness, and is a convenient route between Glenmore and Badenoch. The Corryarrick was used for about a hundred years, but fell into disuse about 1830, from which date it appears to have been entirely neglected. The road drops down to the Spey at Melgrave, from which it is about ten miles of road-walking to Laggan Hotel, via Garve Bridge and Loch Crunachan. The final drop down to Loch Laggan is very fine, and was a revelation to us who had not seen that loch before. The little Inn is delightful, and we were glad to see such pleasant quarters for the night after our walk of twenty miles.

Saturday was our sixth day and was, like Thursday, to be an easy one. We sauntered along the Pattack and Strath Mashie road till a kindly, old-fashioned motor bus overtook us and picked us up. We met the Spey near Laggan Bridge and treated it as an old friend, because we had been almost at its source. We reached Aviemore in the afternoon. I am not going to say how, but we had walked at least twelve miles that day.

Sunday was our seventh day and was devoted to the Lairig, which we voted "beats a'." We had a good day for it, and reached Braemar in good time, having walked 23 miles of the distance.

Next day we returned to Aberdeen, not on foot, and picked up our daily duties again, feeling very much the better of our 140 miles tramp.