

## BEN ALDER.

BY F. A. RITSON.

LEAVING Dalwhinnie at 7.15 on a Sunday morning in June last, the Vice-President (Mr. Wm. Malcolm) and myself were undoubtedly depressed. There were three good reasons for this. Our comrade of many adventures, Mr. A. Taylor, who had travelled from Aberdeen the previous day, was *hors de combat* and could not join us; the weather increased our depression; and the third reason was the uncertainty as to the motor boat which was to take us along Loch Ericht to Ben Alder Lodge. This boat proved unsatisfactory, and after many efforts on the part of our boatman, encouraged by short responses from the engine which never came to anything, our stalwart Vice-President took the oars and rowed across the Loch to the west side, where we left the boat, the stubborn engine, and the exasperated boatman. This nautical experience had taken up a full hour, so we marched off at a brisk pace along the rough road which leads to Ben Alder Lodge. This is a charming walk of about five miles, from the north-east end of Loch Ericht along the wooded loch-side, with trees on the sloping ground right down to the water's edge, and frequent glimpses from the road of the Loch, which is fifteen miles long. The water now covers the lower part of a great number of trees as the result of the raising of the Loch's level in connection with the Grampian Electricity Scheme. At Ben Alder Lodge we had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Mackintosh, the keeper who rescued the two youths on Ben Alder the previous Easter. (It is good to know that his splendid work has been recognised by the Carnegie Hero Fund Trustees.) After this the scenery was different. We now followed the road to Loch Pattack (1,436 feet above sea level) for a short distance and then left it for a grass-covered path on the left-hand side of the road. The ground for a great distance on both sides of the path appeared to be very marshy. We

had left the trees behind, and Loch Ericht was now hid from view. The path became stony and rather monotonous until after a few miles we reached Allt a Chaoil Reidhe, which stream flows into Loch Pattack. The path now led up the stream, and then close to a tributary burn towards Loch a Bhealaich Bheithe, rising gradually until at a little over 2,300 feet we came to within sight of the Loch. The path was left behind here, and crossing the stream we attacked the rapidly-rising slope to the north-east ridge. On attaining this ridge at approximately 2,800 feet we entered the mist which had been hanging over the surrounding hills all day and found the ridge to be very narrow, at parts only a few feet in width. Now came the most strenuous part of the day's outing. The ridge, which ascended by a series of large rocks and boulders, looked almost fearsome in the mist, loose rocks proved troublesome, and we felt at times that a rope might have facilitated our progress. We reached the top plateau after an hour of this work, and, marking the place of our arrival carefully with some large stones, we set forth cautiously in the mist and snow to find the summit. After a while we came to the ruins of a shelter, and not far from here, on rising ground, the cairn marking the summit at 3,757 feet loomed through the mist. The afternoon was now well advanced and the distance we had traversed from the north-east end of Loch Ericht to the summit was approximately twelve miles. Retracing our steps, we descended by the same rocky ridge, for it would have been dangerous to have essayed any other descent in the mist and without knowledge of the mountain. Re-crossing the stream and following the same path back to Ben Alder Lodge, we reached there a little after 7 p.m., to find that the motor boat we had arranged to meet us had returned to its base, and so, although we had tramped and climbed for nineteen miles, we set out to trudge the remaining five miles to the end of the Loch by the same road as we had come. Some two miles along the road, however, we heard the joyous noise of our motor boat engine, and without incident the remainder of the journey to the end of the Loch was completed in the boat. A final walk of one and a half

miles brought us back to the Hotel at 9.15, after an absence of fourteen hours. Although visibility had been bad all day, and there was a drizzling rain in the forenoon which made things uncomfortable, we thoroughly enjoyed the day, and the satisfaction of having bagged another "Munro." Yes, our early morning depression had completely evaporated.