

PHOTOGRAPHIC MOUNTAIN EXPLORATIONS.

BY C. REGINALD WARD.

LIVING in the East Anglian county of Suffolk, my favourite hobby of exploring mountainous country with a camera can be put into operation only at infrequent intervals. Even the Londoner is better situated; but how we of the South envy those fortunates who have half the Highlands accessible to them at week-ends, or who can put in useful work even on Saturday afternoons.

I think all of us at times wonder what it really is that draws us again and again to the higher hilly regions, and this subject is so often referred to in the opening pages of books by climbing authors, that I don't propose to dwell at any length on it. Suffice it to say that for my part I always feel there is something being missed in the hills without a camera and films, and it is the photographic representation of what I have seen, coupled with the desire to be able to look back on records of days away from civilisation, that make climbing for me infinitely more pleasurable.

This is, however, by the way. Our Editor wished to use some photographs I sent him taken at the last Easter meet of the Club, consequently I have been let in for a "peg" on which to hang them. I will, therefore, try and give my ideas on how to combine photography with climbing, and will make no further excuses for the somewhat disjointed matter below.

It is probably partly the superior photographic attractions of the Scottish Highlands, compared with the nearer English and Welsh heights, which have led me more than once to undertake the very considerable journey for so short a period as the Easter holidays. Scotland also attracts me at Easter because of the almost certain accumulations of ice and snow which render all mountains so infinitely more interesting, both from the climbing and photographic

point of view. Anyway, with certain notable exceptions, many Scottish hills are very dull in summer time.

Easter in Scotland generally gives winter conditions on the heights combined with days as long as those in September, and a correspondingly powerful sun. Last Easter at Fortingal was very favourable for photographic records, with plenty of snow and mostly a clear atmosphere with broken clouds.

It is very interesting to observe the different snow conditions which prevail on successive Easters. For instance, in 1929 Easter was very early, in March, and yet in spite of record low temperatures and prolonged frost in England that winter, there was considerably less snow lying in the Highlands than at Easter, 1930, which was in late April. Then, again, take last Easter, this was early in April, and the snow line was considerably lower than in the previous two years, but the accumulations of snow on the tops were not nearly so great in depth as in 1930, in fact I saw few cornices worthy of the name whilst at Fortingal. At Easter, 1930, the cornices in the neighbourhood of Loch Tulla were as big as small bungalows, but with a much higher average snow line. All this helps to maintain that delightful variation of conditions which makes photographic exploration so interesting, as one is able to show quite different prints of similar subjects during succeeding years. I always feel, however, that as opportunities are so few, it is better to try and visit a different district every time.

Just a few words as to apparatus. Personally I always use a simple folding $3\frac{1}{4}$ in. by $2\frac{1}{4}$ in. hand camera, fitted with a good lens; this, in my opinion, is the most suitable for all-round work at higher altitudes. Better photographs can, perhaps, be taken with heavier, bulkier apparatus, but there are certain things to consider which do not enter into the question so much at lower and more accessible altitudes. First we have the possibility of extreme cold and high winds, and then there is the question of delay to other members of the party, if any, and also the time factor. In other words, I use a camera which will take a number of photographs in a short time, in changing atmospheric conditions, and one



Easter, 1931.

THE BEN LAWERS GROUP FROM SCHIEHALLION.

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which will allow me to cover the maximum of ground with the minimum of delay.

I find the best of these small size negatives will produce quite satisfactory enlargements up to 15 by 11 inches. My usual procedure is to have 6-inch enlargements made of all the best material obtained on a particular trip, and then mount up large and small in an album; the result is a fairly complete record of all territory visited.

Passing on to lighting conditions, experience has taught me that most pictures of snow scenes without sunshine are not worth making. If the sun is broken by clouds, so much the better. Snow also immensely increases the amount of light present, and thereby enables shorter exposures and greater definition to be obtained. An exposure meter is at times an almost essential part of one's equipment, and the extra nuisance of having to use it is quite worth while when in doubt as to the value of the light present. I remember once making a lone dash by car in January to the Snowdon Group, as I had always been specially anxious to view them under snow, and conditions were then fairly promising. On that occasion I could not get away from home until quite late on a Friday afternoon, and had to be back by 9 a.m. on the following Monday; this gave me, approximately, one short afternoon and the following day until about 3 p.m. in which to get in one or more climbs, as the distance is over 260 miles each way. I found winter conditions reigning all right, with a snow line down to 1,200 feet, and chose Moel Siabod as a training walk on arrival. The next day was inclined to be "blizzardy," and I tackled the east ridge of Crib Goch, and reached the pinnacles in thick mist and a heavy blizzard. There was no point in stopping up there, so I beat a hasty retreat down towards Llyn Llydaw and was soon rewarded with a clear atmosphere and even sunshine. Here I brought the camera into play and secured quite a number of pictures, but I failed to use an exposure meter and consequently misjudged the light, with the result that all pictures were under-exposed. Crib Goch and Snowdon itself obstinately remained in mist all day, but it was very tantalising to observe that both

peaks of Lliwed on the other arm of the Snowdon horseshoe were in sunshine all the time. Why hadn't I gone there instead of doing the Crib Goch side?

Another reasonably accessible mountain country where lighting conditions are vastly different from Wales in winter or Scotland at Easter, or any other time of the year, is Switzerland. The actinic value of light present in the summer in Switzerland is quite remarkable, particularly above the snow line, and good, sharp, well-exposed photographs can be had with the minimum amount of trouble and calculation. It is also a wonderful country for cloud effects, and it is quite easy to record even the thinnest whiff of cloud in an otherwise clear sky. Whilst on the subject of cloud effects, I must mention that I always use a filter when the cloud formations are worth while recording. If conditions are continuously favourable I keep the filter attached to the lens all day, so that it forms an almost permanent part of the camera, and exposure adjusting for it becomes almost automatic. The actual device I favour is known as a sky filter, and is distinct from the ordinary colour filter in that the top half is yellow glass but the lower portion is colourless. This equalises the great difference of light between the sky and foreground, and I find it much more satisfactory than the colour filter, which usually wants such a large increase in length of exposure and would often call for the use of a tripod, which I won't bother with. It is of course necessary to increase the length of exposure using the sky filter, but not nearly to the same extent.

Just a word about that "golden rule," always laid down for the amateur photographer, that pictures must never be taken with the camera facing the sun. Let me say at once that some of my best pictures of snow scenes have been made with the camera well towards the sun, and in some cases facing right into it. In the latter case, it is of course necessary to shade the lens from the sun's actual rays, but this is easily done with a folded map or other handy object. Sometimes the small shadow from a neighbouring rock can be brought into use. My picture of Lochan na Lairige, reproduced here, was taken straight



Easter, 1931.

LOCHAN NA LAIRIGE.

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into the sun, and also the picture of the Ben Lawers Group.

Going back again to Switzerland, this, to my mind, presents a country *par excellence* for photographic mountain explorations. One is rather apt to get the impression before going there that it is a country in which it is almost impossible to walk a yard near the snow line without a guide. But for those who have not yet been fortunate enough to visit it, I would say that experience of Scottish snow conditions, including fair competence in the gentle art of glissading, will carry one a long way, in more senses than one! I remember one day climbing one of the minor peaks of the Oberland, the Buttlassen, about 10,500 feet. I was alone, and on the way up I passed a party of German men and women who had evidently made the summit and were rather gingerly returning; they must have been nearly half an hour on their way down. Then when within about ten minutes of the top I passed two more people returning. After that I reached the top, took photographs and refreshments, and started on the return trip. Following the ordinary route, it is necessary to make a detour round a certain small subsidiary peak presenting perpendicular sides on all save one. The usual route is on the wrong side, so to speak, of this little peak, but on the way up I had noticed a long ribbon of old snow running right up from the valley to the col between the main peak and its satellite. Further, there was ample evidence that there was no real glacier here. Accordingly, as a storm seemed to be brewing, I resolved to see if this 1,000 feet ribbon of snow would "go," and found it as good as the best that Scotland can produce, much to the surprise of the parties who were well ahead of me on the descent, and whom I left standing on the ordinary way down, some hundreds of feet above me.

Of course indiscriminate glissading must not be indulged in in Switzerland, and unless conditions are known, snow-covered glaciers must be treated with respect. But it is quite remarkable the amount of exploration that can be done alone with camera, ice axe, compass and map, without spending a penny on guides. This remark is not intended

as a dig at the prevailing nationality of the majority of Club members! Guides really are expensive, even for the less important climbs, and if you are in someone else's charge, you cannot always stop and photograph when you want to.

I am afraid that the climber with photographic inclinations will always be something of a nuisance to his companions, unless they also are on the same job, but with the simple equipment I have outlined delays are reduced to a minimum, combined with results worth while.

After all, mountain picture-hunting is something distinct from pure climbing or hill-walking without a camera, but I find one helps the other to a great extent. I am sure, on a long, tiring climb, that the mere possibility of fresh photographs would not in itself drag me to the objective, whereas the joy of achievement, coupled with the pictorial records of it, work well in hand together and keep up flagging spirits to the end.