

TWO CAIRNGORM CLIMBS.

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IT is doubtless true that for the ordinary walker the Cairngorms are not inexhaustible. Yet, in a considerable number of years spent adventuring there, I have always found it possible to visit new spots off the beaten track and to explore distant gullies hitherto unknown. The two climbs described in this article were both new to me this summer. They are possibly familiar to many readers of this *Journal*. But others may not have attempted them, and perhaps what I have to say may tempt them to follow in the footsteps of my fellow-climbers and myself.

The first of these was the ascent of the Devil's Point from Glen Geusachan. This is not a rock climb. The greater part of the south side of the Devil's Point is composed of great slabs of black rock. Whether these can be climbed is a question for experts. The slabs, however, are not continuous. They are broken up by gullies of grass and scree, and it was up one of these gullies that we made our ascent. Although it is not a rock climb in the strict sense, the climb is exceedingly precipitous. It is certainly not to be recommended to the light-headed. Nor for that matter ought it to be attempted by anyone who has not had considerable experience of steep scree slopes.

To climb this gully a party of three of us set out from Braemar one morning last August. We motored to the White Bridge in Glen Dee, from which point the walk began. The day left little to be desired. The delicious freshness of the morning had not yet gone. The tops of the highest Cairngorms, rising proudly ahead of us, were all clear. A light breeze was blowing, and the sun had long since scattered most of the clouds. The Dee rippled along bright and sparkling. If anything it was too warm, and the prospect was that it would become more so as the day advanced. We made our way up the glen along the path on the east side of the river. Always our objective, the Devil's Point, was in

front of us. He stood there, his black slabs glistening in the sunlight, imposing even in the midst of his more mighty neighbours. He offered a challenge which most imperatively called to be accepted.

Rather less than a couple of hours' steady walking took us to Glen Geusachan and the foot of the Devil's Point. All the charms of desolation are here. This is far from the struggles of the distant world of men and towns. Sterling might crash. Governments might come and go (they were doing it at the moment), but here everything remained serene. Cairn Toul overhead breathed a sublime indifference to the affairs of the world. The climb was now in front of us. The gully which we intended to climb is the third of a series of scree gullies which run down the face of the south side of the Devil's Point. It is more marked than the other two and is the obvious route for an ascent on this side. The first part of the climb is mainly over heather and, although steep, presents no difficulties. Farther up the heather disappears and the going is over grass and scree. It is here, once the rocks are reached, that caution is required. Great care has to be taken in reconnoitring for a feasible route between them. It is very easy to get into places where it is impossible to move further forward and where it may also be impossible to move down, as, of course, a descent on ground of this character is always more difficult than an ascent. Caution also requires to be exercised against loosening boulders which may roll down on to lower members of the party. For these reasons it was only possible to proceed slowly and with care.

It was certainly exhilarating making our way up the side of the Devil's Point. Glen Geusachan, which lay sheer below us, gradually receded further and further away. It was at the highest levels that our greatest difficulties were encountered. At places clambering over rocks, trusting as best we could to rather narrow footholds, could not be avoided. We did occasionally get into places where we became stuck and were obliged to beat a retreat. Fortunately we were successful in avoiding places where even to beat a retreat would have been impossible. The whole

climb was most enjoyable and had just sufficient difficulty to give the necessary element of spice. It took us nearly an hour and a half from Glen Geusachan until we emerged on to the top ridge. We struck the ridge on the south-east side of the top, about a hundred feet below it. Our view had hitherto been restricted to the intricacies of the climb and the general view to the south. Once the ridge was reached the whole range of the Cairngorms and the hills beyond lay open before us. The distant hills were rather obscured by heat haze, but closer at hand the cliffs and scree slopes of the Cairngorms stood out clearly, all of them bathed in sunshine.

We were certainly glad to have reached the top. The heat during the latter part of the climb had been intense. Lunch, and particularly the liquid part of it (which consisted of tea, rather strong but otherwise very good!), was exceedingly refreshing. Perched on our top we surveyed the world below us, feeling greatly pleased with the successful outcome of our endeavours. We might well have stayed there for ages watching the changing panorama of the shadows chasing each other over the hill tops. A considerable walk, however, still lay ahead of us. We intended to make the complete circuit of Glen Geusachan, along the side of Cairn Toul and over the tops of Monadh Mhor and Ben Bhrotain. The part of the journey which still remained was a walk over familiar ground. The only novel part had been accomplished with our ascent of the Devil's Point. The rest of the day may, therefore, be passed over rapidly. The walk from the Devil's Point to Monadh Mhor is very attractive. If one wishes to be energetic, it is possible to take in the tops of Cairn Toul and Sgor an Lochain Uaine *en route*. To-day we omitted them from our programme, contenting ourselves with contouring round Cairn Toul at a height of about 3,000 feet. We had no more climbing to do until we came to the comparatively short climb from Loch nan Suirteag to the top of Monadh Mhor. Near the top of Monadh Mhor an eagle swooped down towards Glen Geusachan from its cranny on the side of the mountain. From Monadh Mhor we continued on to Ben Bhrotain, our third

"Munro" for the day. From there we sloped down to Glen Dee, thus completing the circle. Another exciting climb had been added to our list of Cairngorm memories.

The second novel climb (so far as we were concerned) was from the Garbh Coire up to Lochain Uaine, and hence to the summit of Cairn Toul. Once again we motored to our former starting point at the White Bridge, our numbers this time being four. Again it was a morning "with breath all incense and with cheek all bloom." The mountain tops were clear and everything offered the prospect of another glorious day. We set out along the familiar track up Glen Dee to the Larig. Two hours' steady walking brought us to the Larig path, and another hour to the point where it was necessary to diverge from it. We now made our way down to the Dee, which we continued along for some distance up its course to the Garbh Coire. The views to-day were magnificent. The cliffs of Braeriach stood out with scintillating clearness. Every detail of its massive rocky face was in sharpest relief. Over the cliffs the Dee cascaded, a ribbon of pure white. In the other direction, the Larig, with the sun streaming down on it, had lost the sombre gloom which so often invests it. We ate lunch sitting by the edge of the Dee, now gushing down a sparkling and foaming torrent. The air near at hand was dancing above the heather in the peculiar way it does on hot days. It became obvious that we were going to have a very hot couple of hours before we reached the top of Cairn Toul.

Our first objective was Lochain Uaine, the small loch which lies at an altitude of about 3,000 feet, below the surrounding crags of Cairn Toul and Sgor an Lochain Uaine (the Angel's Peak). A small burn flows out of the lochan and forms one of the tributaries of the Dee. One way of reaching Lochain Uaine would have been to have continued up this burn. On account of the cliffs over which the burn falls we decided this was impracticable. Instead, we resolved to climb up the steep scree slope of Cairn Toul till we came to the loch. To this we now directed our energies. The first part of this climb is over heather and then further up



Miss A. M. Pittendrigh.

SGOR AN LOCHAIN UAINE.



Miss Helen Duncan.

THE DEVIL'S POINT FROM GLEN DEE.

across boulders. It is stiff going the whole way, although there are no real difficulties. We reached the loch three quarters of an hour after we had left the Dee. As we had expected, the climb was exceedingly warm and we were very glad to stop and enjoy the prospect from the edge of the loch.

That prospect was magnificent. We had often before seen the loch from the top of Cairn Toul and other points, but this was the first time we had actually stood beside it. Sgor an Lochain Uaine, seen from here, is particularly imposing. It rises sharply from the water's edge to a finely-shaped peak. On the other side stands Cairn Toul, more massive but hardly so impressive. Over the Garbh Coire the cliffs of Braeriach form a glorious panorama. It was a spectacle which one might have gazed upon for hours without becoming weary. Magnificence is piled up on every side, stark and desolate. To utter a sound was perhaps sacrilege. One might as well shout in a cathedral. There is, however, rather a remarkable echo above the loch, and this we now tested. Our cries were flung back to us from the cliffs of the Sgor and the more distant cliffs of Braeriach.

Our next goal was the top of Cairn Toul. The best way to reach the top ridge was, we decided, to strike the lowest point between Cairn Toul and the Sgor. The direct climb up the face of the Sgor certainly appeared attractive, but might, perhaps, have been too difficult. The route we chose is steep, but there are no real difficulties. It is simply a steep scramble over boulders and scree. Once we reached the ridge, a split took place in the camp. Two of the party wished to "bag" an extra peak by going to the top of Sgor an Lochain Uaine. The two more lazy members of the party resolved to climb Cairn Toul and wait there for the other two to come along. It may be remarked that it was the two female members of the party who did the extra climb. The more indolent males preferred to bask in luxurious ease at the top of Cairn Toul till the others arrived. Scotland, from the Pentlands to Caithness, from lower Deeside to the West Coast, lay at our feet. We had ample time to spend in identifying various points and arguing as

to the correctness of our respective identifications. There is, of course, no indicator for the settlement of such disputes.

The next question was as to our route back to the White Bridge. Again we resolved to tempt the unknown. We continued down Cairn Toul to the top of the Corrou Burn, and then, instead of taking the zig-zag path down the burn, we descended by the burn immediately opposite, which flows into Glen Geusachan. This burn flows down beside the steep cliffs of the Devil's Point, but by remaining in the bed of the burn it is quite possible to reach the glen. In places the descent is very precipitous and not free from difficulty. The only way in which we could cross some of the rocks was to "slither" down on our backs. This, however, added another element of excitement to the day. Once we reached Glen Geusachan we made our way out by keeping along the side of the stream. The Geusachan pursues a twisting course, so we simply walked through its various twists, fording it, in all, nearly a dozen times. The walk down Glen Dee to the White Bridge concluded another excellent day.

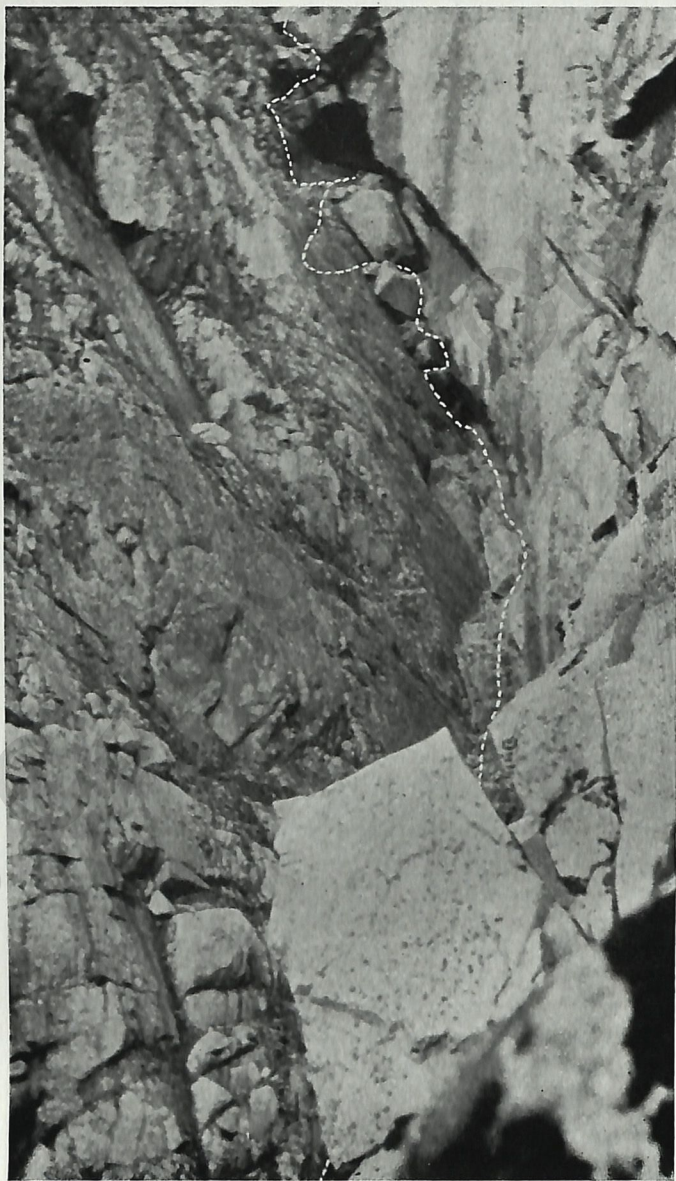
These two days, although they had partly been over familiar country, had yet revealed to us aspects of the Cairngorms previously unknown. But even the familiar country can never be wholly familiar. There are always new lights and new adventures. The feast is never finished. This last evening, as we looked back, the sky was a flaming red. The Cairngorms seemed to be on fire. For an hour this ruddy glow held them. Gradually it faded, and darkness once more took the mountains to itself

Overhang.

Cave.

Start 2nd Pitch.

Start 1st Pitch.



Oct. 4, 1937.

W. A. Ewen.

RAEBURN'S GULLY, LOCHNAGAR: GREAT CAVE SECTION.
Photo from Pinnacle Route.