

## A TRAVERSE OF THE BLACK SPOUT PINNACLE.

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IN 1928 G. R. Symmers and J. Silver made the first ascent of the Black Spout Pinnacle from the base (*C.C.J.*, Vol. XI, p. 313; *S.M.C.J.*, Vol. XVIII, p. 119). The gully by which the ascent was made Symmers refers to as "the Green Gully. . . ." In order to avoid confusion, we refer to this gully leading up to the Pinnacle Gap as Pinnacle Gully No. 1. From the gap a gully descends for about 200 feet to the left-hand branch of the Black Spout—this we call Pinnacle Gully No. 2.

On July 3, 1932, W. Middleton, R. Lees, and the writer ascended Pinnacle Gully No. 1 to the Pinnacle Gap, descended Pinnacle Gully No. 2 to the Spout branch, thereafter ascending No. 2 Gully and descending by No. 1 Gully, thus effecting a complete traverse of the Pinnacle in either direction.

The climb commences near the foot of Raeburn's Gully; it has been admirably described by Symmers, and details are unnecessary. Two slight variations on the original route were made: the first cave was climbed on the right. Starting immediately at the entrance of the cave, the leader climbed the steep right wall on holds that were excellent for some 10 feet. Progress then became difficult; a steep, smooth slab forced us into a traverse, which revealed an easy route. A return to the chimney can then be effected simply.

At the second cave, which Symmers turned by a chimney on the left, our party decided on a direct ascent via the "thro' route." An oblique crack, into which the body can be jammed—not comfortably, be it said—leads to a good standing place about 12–15 feet above the floor. Facing out, the leader then climbed on to the boulders forming the door of the cave. The second man was brought up, and the leader continued the ascent on the right wall for a few feet

to the top of the obstacle. Both variations are mildly difficult.

Below the cave there is a veritable garden of ferns and flowers: they included a large plant, not unlike a dahlia, which the third man referred to on the descent as "the potato patch." Above, the gully opens up and a continuous grass slope leads to the Pinnacle Gap, where we arrived at 2.25 p.m., two hours and twenty-five minutes after the start.

The leader then descended Pinnacle Gully No. 2, leaving both the second and the third man at the gap. The top part of the gully was not promising—we found a profusion of loose blocks, slime, and moss. The first (top) pitch is scarcely worthy of the name, but we note it here as being one of the few stable boulders in the gully. The second pitch was more formidable in appearance and much loose matter lay above it. Some of this was placed out of harm's way, but one or two boulders were, unavoidably, sent down. The pitch took the form of a cave, with a through route, and this at first looked hopeless. A way down the right wall was tried, without success. There was nothing for it but to descend via the through route to the cave—the boulders of which did not look too stable. Indeed, when a heavy boulder fell on them from above the whole structure was seen to quake. Descent was a very simple matter, absurdly so when one reflected on the labour spent in clearing the impossible route on the wall.

No. 2 was called down for some 20 feet to enable the leader to examine the lowest pitch. A good deal of gardening was necessary, and even then the pitch looked impossibly difficult. There was every chance of our being able to "rope down," so the leader returned to the gap and acquainted the others with the situation. We agreed to rope down if the pitch was not otherwise negotiable; the vote in favour of continuing the traverse was unanimous.

No. 3 was sent down into the cave and No. 2 followed, making things as secure as possible below while the leader made the descent. A useful belay was found just above the lowest pitch, to which No. 2 secured himself as No. 3 made

the descent of the lowest pitch ; he had an uncomfortable time, but the second man, with a long reach, succeeding in getting down in very fine style and without assistance. The leader had a strong desire to double the rope over the belay before embarking on this venture ; the report from the party below was not hopeful, there being scarcely standing room below the pitch. The rope would probably have jammed on the belay ; instead it was turned, none too securely, over the chokestone, and the operation was begun. The edge of the main boulder was quite sharp, and descent was at first easy ; steadied by the second man, who had discovered some good holds, the manoeuvre was completed successfully ; it was possible to " stretch " the gully and " back " down. The overhang was very awkward. We then " glissaded " the final 60 feet through slime and moss to the Branch. This done, we considered that one of the main caravan routes had been reached and that a satisfactory traverse had been made. After a few minutes' rest, we commenced the traverse in the other direction.

The initial 60 feet was climbed on the slime that still remained ; a route on the left wall looked feasible, but it was now raining hard and we did not stop to examine it. The first pitch was climbed by backing up underneath the jammed boulder. A hold immediately under the chokestone and a ledge on the wall enables the climber to proceed obliquely up to the left and out under the overhang. An awkward turning movement reduces the feeling of security considerably, but the second man can do something to minimise this fly-on-the-ceiling sensation. The second man is in an extremely poor position, and out-and-out " combined tactics " are scarcely possible. The consequences of a fall, while undoubtedly unpleasant, would probably not be of a very serious nature. (Much depends on how one falls, of course ; all that the writer implies is that the pitch is not of a sensational nature !)

The cave above was a refuge from the rain, and No. 3 had again an unenviable task in getting over the initial difficulty in a downpour. The gap was reached without trouble, and there the order of the going was again changed.

The rain had become less of a deluge, but mist hampered our route-finding. Happily, No. 2 has a prodigious memory for details, and we experienced no real difficulty. (At this time, unknown to us, a party was attempting to return from the Indicator to Altnaguibsaich; they returned, inadvertently, to the summit on two occasions. The moral is obvious!) The through route pitch was turned on the right, and at the lower cave a little exploration was carried out in search of Symmers' chimney. At first this chimney "crevasse" was ruled out as the wrong chimney. After descending it, however, we recalled Symmers' description and were agreed that we had struck his route of ascent. The cave was immediately below and we hastened down to it; the state of our garments demanded haste; I believe a slight drizzle had set in by this time, but we would scarcely have noticed a deluge.

The only pitch between the cave and the starting point takes the form of a narrow crack, close under the Pinnacle Wall. Here one of the party discovered a superfluous hold and for some moments held up the second man, speculating on this phenomenal promiscuity and questioning the uses to which it might be put. It would better adorn the first pitch in No. 2 Gully; but the suggestion of tying a pink ribbon round it was met with the reply that it was worth a place on the Indicator.

The climb was completed in five hours; at 6 p.m. we were at the col, and our bus left Ballater at 8 p.m. We raced down to Altnaguibsaich, which was reached at 6.35 p.m.; at Ballater at 7.5, we had scarcely an hour to remove traces of the day's scrambling.