

A WEEK IN ROSS.

By W. A. EWEN.

FOR many years hopeful souls have been arranging trips to the Western Highlands, making cautious provision for "that rainy day." This Easter we turned westwards in more subtle fashion, provided with literature enough to outlast a fortnight's rain and with the minimum of climbing gear—included on the bare possibility of a fine day. The scheme failed, although, on the ninth day, the monotony of foggy westerlies was relieved by the advent of a foggy nor'-easter! The sun shone, it is true, on the first morning, and Dason, inspired—or disturbed—by the carolling of the matutinal lark, got up soon after six. The sound of frying bacon lured me from my sleeping bag at 6.30 (in round figures). We had pitched the tent near Loch Bhravin, a very suitable starting point for the "Ross-shire Alps." The weather, too, seemed propitious, until Dason announced his intention to climb in shorts. (I noted, however, that he carried several "heavier" garments in his rucksack.) From this time on, our glimpses of sun were few and short-lived.

By 9.45 a.m. we were contouring on the northern slopes of Druim Reidh, making for Sron na Goibhre and a' Chailleach, peaks rather devoid of interest, although occasional outcrops of rock and the lingering snow provided a certain amount of feature. By noon we were on the summit of a' Chailleach, obtaining fine views to north and west before the mists closed over us. Dason modestly retired behind the cairn and appeared later, more decorously draped in winter garb. As this failed to bring back the errant sun, we set a compass course for Sgurr Breac, climbing a fairly obvious ridge from the southern end of the Druim Reidh ridge. In spite of precautions, I was a little previous in announcing the summit, which is marked by a large cairn. This was discovered some fifty yards east of our position. Just beyond the cairn we commenced the descent of the north side of the mountain, which, we knew, was inclined to be precipitous in parts. Fortune and a snow slope provided

an easy route valleywards ; on our right was a fine rock buttress and westwards the ground appeared to be steep. The ascent of Sgurr nan Each and Sgurr nan Clach Gala might well be combined with that of Sgurr Breac, but the ridge drops here to 1,900 feet. We elected to return early to camp in order to visit Ullapool and repair omissions in the food list. Camp was reached at 3 p.m., leaving us ample time to motor to Ullapool.

The second night at Loch Bhraoin was less pleasant, a strong south-west gale keeping us awake for an hour or two, and bringing back memories of a Skye summer when this same tent had shown a marked inclination to make Kyle by the shortest route—over Marseo. It remained, on this occasion, more or less erect, but as Dason remarked, the only suitable tent for the West Coast is one with a “ floor ” sewn in—“ and then you know where you are ” ! We were not up with the lark, the wind-torn clouds over Sgurr Breac indicating a late breakfast. There being no improvement in the conditions, we moved on to Dundonnel, intending to climb An Teallach on the following day. During the evening the clouds dispersed and revealed the mountain ; there was rather more of it than we had expected, but we were slow to learn. Some days later we went to climb the “ grey one ” and found seven. It is time the climbing journals had ceased to practise this Gaelic euphemism on unsuspecting climbers ! Dason intended to devote the evening to a study of Gaelic place names, two of which he had, with some pains, already mastered. To differentiate between a’ Chailleach and An Teallach was, however, beyond the Sassenach ear, and the study ended in his insisting that we should climb something easy—like Lord Berkeley’s Seat !

In unpropitious weather, we set out, for An Teallach along the track from Dundonnel P.O. The summit of Glas Mheall Mhor was reached by a wholly uninteresting scree slope, made less bearable by a moist atmosphere and a chilling wind. Our chief object was to see the cliffs of Toll an Lochan, and it soon became obvious that these were not to be on view. So we decided to leave the southern peaks

for better weather and made our way down, and on the same day, in an endeavour to run out of the wind and cloud area, motored to Kinlochewe. Here the weather frequently showed distinct signs of clearing up, although when the improvement materialised it was impossible for us to say.

An early morning shower of hail, followed by rain, kept us in our sleeping bags on the day set aside for Beinn Eighe. But about noon, in a temporary lull, we set out from Cromasag and struggled through long heather to Sgurr a Conghair. From there the going was much better, and, although some scree is encountered, it is not the unstable variety. From Sgurr an Fhir Duibhe we traversed the Bodaich Dhubh Beinn Eighe to Creag Dubh and descended to Coire Domhain by an easy grass slope about 100 yards south of Creag Dubh summit. This makes a good excursion for a short day, the Sgurr Ban end of the ridge being particularly fine. The Bodach are interesting, but suffer from senile decay; on account of the high wind blowing we put on the rope, both the equilibrium of the climbers and the stability of the Bodach being something in doubt.

Not satisfied with his adventures on the tops, Dason decided to try conclusions with a recalcitrant stove, and proceeded to demonstrate that he could do everything with a Primus except light it. It hissed, spluttered, and expired; it played paraffin on the tent roof; it belched smoke and flame, and I deemed it advisable to leave it to the expert until the pyrotechnic display was over. From the safety of the car I could see Dason perform weird rites at a fountain of paraffin, to the accompaniment of strange gurgling sounds—not made by the Primus!

On the following day the weather made amends and we climbed Ben Alligin from Torridon. We gained nothing by using the path on the east side of the Coire Mhic Nobuil burn, which runs in a gorge and is not easily crossed until one is well off the direct line to Coire an Laoigh. The view from Ben Alligin beggars description; it is disconcertingly wide; the eastern mountains are a tangled recollection but those grey islands on the rim of the sea remain a clear and pleasant memory.

We appear to have missed one very rare item—to wit, the sight of one of the Club's "tigers" cutting seventy-five steps in *blue* ice on Liathach. A subsequent visit to Liathach did not reveal the presence of ice of any colour. Still, there can be little doubt that, if the blue ice was there, there also was this display of icemanship. The theory has been advanced that Mr. Parker's ice axe has peculiar properties akin to the power of Moses' rod—a useful asset in a mild winter! Is it not further rumoured that the ice axe, thrown down by Loch Maree, immediately turned into a salmon?

On April 14 we followed an easy route on the south slopes of Liathach (avoiding all ice slopes, glaciers, bergschrunds and Mr. Parker) and reached the summit ridge near Stuc a' Choire Dhuibh Bhig in an hour. From the eastern summit we traversed the ridge over Spidean a' Choire Leith to the Fasarinen pinnacles, where a descent was made to the road by a so-called easy route, vaguely outlined by the President some time before. Passing successfully through a labyrinth of terraces and rock-falls we arrived at the President's Burn (he said it was his), and shortly afterwards at a waterfall, where Dason sat on a wet slab, enjoyed a free bath, and prospected the route. His sedentary tactics and explosive account robbed this route of some of its charm, and it occurred to me to try another way, which proved easier and drier. A traverse brought us to the "President's Burn," by which we descended to the road. Many feasible routes on this side of the mountain look almost impossible from the road. The descent, in mist, might be something of a problem.

The next day was the worst of the week, and Slioch was scored off the list; but, in spite of bad weather and incomplete excursions, we saw sufficient of the Kinlochewe hills to make plans for further visits. In good weather much more might have been accomplished—with less to look forward to. Like most tours, this ends on a note of bathos; the powers that be demand an "article." But Dason's list of "camp menus" and "five-minute recipes" would have made much more interesting reading!