

KINLOCHEWE AT EASTER.

By A. R. MARTIN, B.Sc., Ph.D.

BEING a novice on his first visit to the West of Scotland, I have been given the job of writing up the Easter Meet at Kinlochewe. The idea is that I may say all sorts of quaint things. What with this and the impressiveness of the mountains, I feel like Gulliver being exhibited to the Brobdingnagians. But Gulliver must perform and not make excuses.

On the Friday parties led by the President and Mr. Parker did Liathach and Slioch. After much whistle-blowing the President got his party packed off in cars along the Torridon road, bound for the foot of Liathach—only half an hour behind time. It must require much patience and occasionally strong lungs to be President. The morning was still and sunny, and the sky so blue that we knew it could not last so divine for long. What a banal word brown is when applied to a heather-clad hill in such a light! It would require a Titian to capture the richness of this colour, which seems so varied that it embraces the whole spectrum, from a warm brick-red to a velvety blue in the shadows.

Liathach rises like a huge wedge driven up through the floor of the glen. I looked round and found my companions apparently unintimidated by its uncompromising aspect, and so I told myself that this heroic looking hill must have an Achilles' heel somewhere, and that the thing to do was to look unconcerned. The road runs along the southern base of the hill, and, therefore, the usual dull trudge up foothills is eliminated. On the other hand, the elevation of the road is only 200 ft., and so there is almost the whole of the 3,456 ft. of the summit to be climbed, and the slope is steep throughout. Liathach consists of a series of horizontal terraces of chocolate-coloured Torridon sandstone of uncanny regularity, capped with quartzite cones. The hard quartzite has protected the softer sandstone from erosion, leaving the mountain as a memorial to a remote geological age.



Easter, 1933.

SGURR BAN OF BEINN EIGHE.

J. McCoss.

Our route lay along a burn, which led us into a hanging corrie between Creag Dhu a Choire Leith and Bidean Toll a Mhuic. At close quarters the terraces did not prove the uniform vertical slabs of rock they appeared to be from the road. They had kindly cracks, and sometimes tamely petered out in grass slopes, thus allowing their flanks to be turned. The ascent of the corrie to the col between the main top and Bidean Toll a Mhuic was over fairly firm scree and boulder. After lunching and looking down the precipitous north face, we reached the highest top (Spidean a Choire Leith) by walking westwards along the ridge.

Although the blue skies of early morning had yielded to a translucent mother of pearl, visibility was good. The hills in this district are narrow ridges, rising sharply from an apparently level plain like a fleet of grim and somewhat disordered battleships from a brown sea. Consequently the æsthetic effect is quite different from that of the massive, remote Cairngorms, which owe their appeal to being such an excellent embodiment of the "thick rotundity o' the earth." Our nearest neighbour was Ben Eighe, whose shape, picked out by a freshly fallen powdering of snow, fully justified its name—file peak. To the west and north was the blue sea, and in the foreground the truly mountainous north face of Mullach an Rathain, verily a realization of the Platonic idea of a mountain. This was my first sight of the west coast of Scotland. Beyond it I beheld Skye, with all the awe that befits a novice who looks on the land of the Black Cuillin. Southwards was a welter of peaks, some of them ghostlike with their caps of whitish quartzite.

The descent began by going westwards to the Fasarinen Pinnacles, the first two of which were climbed by McCoss and Orkney. Thence we descended into Glen Torridon by a route which began with a steep grass slope and which, although it later took us over some rock and heather, miraculously avoided all pitches. When we were walking luxuriously along the level Torridon road we looked back at the vertical walls of sandstone and could not understand how we poor mortals had found a way down. In the numerous remarks to this effect, was there a touch of self-

flattery, an innuendo that we had really conquered those formidable terraces? Was this why the wise Mr. Parker, on seeing me deep in maps telling Mr. Medd about our excursion, said "I don't know what Martin is telling you, but don't you believe it"? Incidentals to the descent were the sight of an eagle and the collection from the road of red pebbles of Torridon sandstone and green ones of chloritic schist.

The next day was wet, really wet. A party did Slioch, but most of us thought hill climbing out of the question and either did some low-level walking or toured round the district by car. I was a member of the last ignoble, but dare I say sensible, group. The shores of Loch Maree were remarkable for the vivid colours given by the rain to the green moss and reddish-brown bracken luxurious beneath the protecting firs. Soon after leaving them we met our first waterfall in Kerrysdale on the way to Gairloch. Waterfalls were to be the dominant impression of the day. The most striking were at Mesach, where a narrow pinnacle rises some 200 ft. from the foot of the falls to a level with the top of the gorge. It bends this way and that with the rhythmic contortions of a Chinese drawing of rocks, to be surmounted finally by two or three small and absolutely vertical pines. The crofts along the coast were melancholy in their setting of mist, sea, and island. It seemed as if by travelling in space we had also travelled in time, and were in some strange other-world, far from modern civilization.

On the Sunday climbing was once more practicable, and two parties under the President and Mr. Parker did Ben Eighe by different routes. The path for Ben Eighe leaves the Loch Maree road only a short distance from the hotel, and leads to the gap between Ruadh Stac Bhig and Meall a Ghiubhais. We (the President's party) followed it as far as a burn and then struck left to a waterfall, thus reaching the slopes of Creag Dubh. Ben Eighe has not the individuality of Liathach, but it has fine quartzite ridges and unstable silvery screes, and offers unlimited scope for hard work. The going on top is almost uniformly bad, since the stones are jagged and plentiful—conditions very different from the



Easter, 1933.

BEINN EIGHE FROM LIATHACH.

A. R. Martin.

In foreground, Bidean Toll a Mhuic and Stuc a Choire Dhuibh Bhig of Liathach.



Easter, 1933.

RUADH STAC BHIG AND MEALL A GHIUBHAIS.

A. R. Martin.

Note the White Quartzite Scree.

flat gravel plateaux of the Cairngorms. The day was still and warm, but broken mist surged over the tops.

After leaving Creag Dubh I decided to follow Roy Symmers and S. C. H. Smith to Ruadh Stac Mor, perhaps rashly, considering the energy and speed of Symmers. We traversed a particularly unstable scree beneath the western cliffs of Sgurr an Fhir Duibhe. The stones are very sharp and of uneven size. Therefore a small slip is apt to start larger stones slipping down more quickly from above, with unpleasant results. On regaining the ridge we had an impressive view of the north face of Sgurr Ban, rising grimly and forbiddingly into the mist. However, its ascent along the ridge was only an uphill walk. For later in the day, after many such uphill walks, I feel that "only" is not *le mot juste*. On the top we met Mr. Parker's party, who had ascended by the col joining the main ridge to Stac Coire an Laoigh. Having arranged with them about motor transport back to the hotel on our descent from the hill, and having solved the problem of how many giraffe's necks it would take to reach to the moon, we proceeded along the ridge first to Spidean Coire nan Clach and then to the mossy plateau below Coinneach Mhor. The magnificent view of the north face of Liathach from this ridge was obscured by mist, but it was fortunately clear on the return journey. Stony ridges are satisfying, but they suffer from two defects; they keep on going up and down and are waterless. A traverse of the earthy eastern slope of Coinneach Mhor led us to the ridge at the foot of Ruadh Stac Mor, the top of which is marked by a large heap of loose, sharp stones, the most convenient and picturesque explanation of which would be that it was dumped there by a devil.

On reaching the top we were rewarded by bright sunshine and the disappearance of the mist. To the south-east the whole precipitous northern face of the Ben Eighe range was open to us. Near at hand to the south were the three majestic sandstone buttresses of the western face of Coinneach Mhor, rising perpendicularly from Coire Mhic Fhearchair, so symmetrical and so regularly decorated by cracks that they resembled the apse of some titanic cathedral.

To the west of these Sail Mor dropped straight into a still, dark green loch. Over the silver sea the hills of Skye looked their famous grape-blue.

We returned to the Torridon road by retracing our steps almost to the top of Spidean Coire nan Clach, traversing the scree to the grassy col leading to Stac Coire an Laoigh, and descending beside the burn which rises there. It was the first we had met, and, after our thirst was slaked, its sweet noise was a delightful accompaniment to the descent. Our times were : left hotel 10 a.m., left Ruadh Stac Mor 4 p.m., reached Torridon road 6 p.m.

This was our last excursion, although we had by no means exhausted the riches of the district. Alligin, on the north shore of Upper Loch Torridon, is said to afford a view from its summit which extends from Ardnamurchan in the south to North Uist in the west, and Cape Wrath in the north. Pleasant days could be spent on the Loch Maree hills, Slioch, Beinn Lair, and Beinn Airidh Charr. Not far away to the north and best reached from Dundonnell are the glories of An Teallach, for useful information on which the reader is referred to an article by Mr. McCoss, which also deals with Liathach and Ben Eighe, in this *Journal*, vol. viii, 1914, page 1.

For the hill walker the Kinlochewe area provides narrow ridges and precipices which make him something more than a mere hiker ; for the mountaineer rock climbs, such as the buttresses of Coire Mhic Fhearchair on Ben Eighe and the northern pinnacles of Liathach, which can satisfy the most expert.

However, we had done enough to return full of the peace, serenity, and strength of the hills.



Easter, 1933.

A. R. Martin.

MULLACH AN RATHAIN OF LIATHACH.

The Eastern End of the Fasarinen Pinnacles on left foreground.