

SCOTTISH YOUTH HOSTELS.

By D. G. MOIR.

IN the course of the two years since its formation, the Scottish Youth Hostels Association has become fairly well known, for the movement has been in some ways remarkable. The hostel idea is usually attributed to Germany, where hostels were in existence in 1911, but it was not until 1930 that an attempt was made to adopt the German scheme in this country. For years before 1930 rambling clubs were becoming increasingly popular. Youth had been showing a desire to get up and see his country, to leave the town for the countryside. The problem of extended exploration was the cost of the night's lodging, and although attempts were made by the Y.M.C.A. and other organizations, both in Scotland and in England, to provide the necessary cheap accommodation, these attempts were on too small a scale to be suited for a national movement. By 1930 the knowledge of German Youth Hostels had spread sufficiently for interested people in this country to realize that the German type of hostel was the right kind of accommodation to provide, and so came into being a Youth Hostels Association in England. Scotland followed in 1931, after deciding that a separate Association would be better than being a mere regional council of the English Association; and about the same time the wave of "Wanderlust" spread to other countries, Youth Hostel Associations being formed in Ireland, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, and France, there being already hostels of the German type in Austria, Switzerland, and Czechoslovakia. The latest country to join the movement is the distant Dominion of New Zealand.

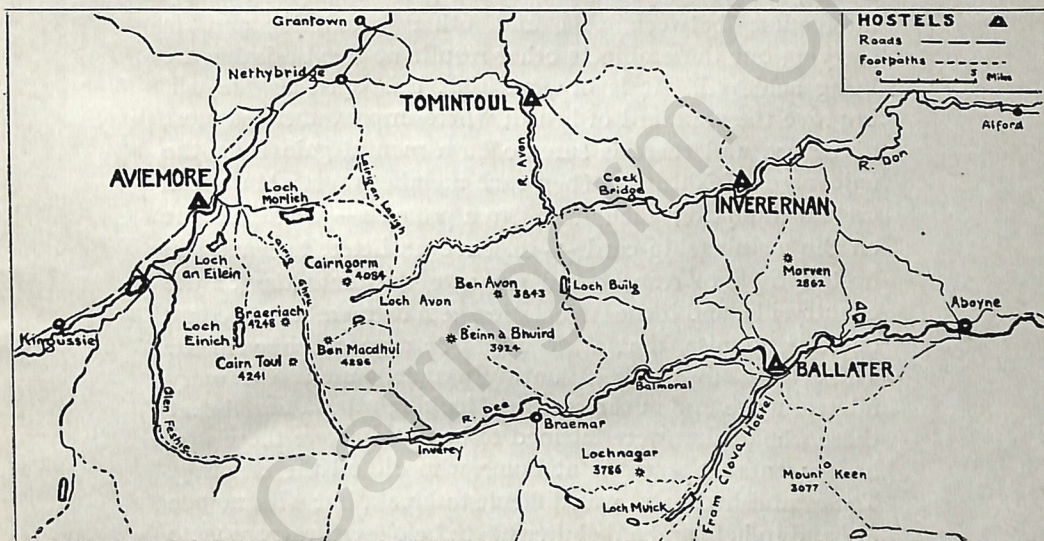
The rapid progress of the hostels in this country is sufficient proof of their popularity. The English Association

has now over 20,000 members ; Scotland's progress in terms of hostels, members, and bookings is:—

		1931	1932
Hostels	9	19
Members	1,165	3,873
Bookings (" Bed-nights ")	..	3,120	22,366

For 1933 Scotland has now 33 hostels open and other two are about to be opened, while the membership already exceeds last year's total. The hostel's success is not merely

SCOTTISH YOUTH HOSTELS ASSOCIATION—CAIRNGORM CHAIN.



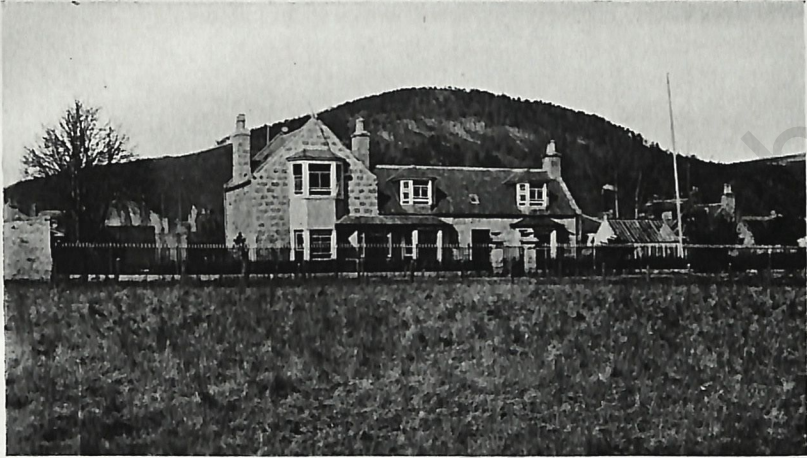
BALLATER	INVERERNAN	TOMINTOUL	AVIEMORE
48 beds.	24 beds.	20 beds.	32 beds.

a question of cheapness ; no doubt the avowed object of the Association is to provide cheap accommodation, but it provides incidental pleasures which count a lot. Apart from the bed, three blankets, and cooking facilities which every hostel provides for the shilling a night, there is, as Sir J. M. Barrie says in his Foreword to the Association's 1933 Handbook, " thrown in gratis all the home talk about what new ground the hiker is to break in the coming summer,

the comparisons of one route with another, the ideal companions, the keeping fit for great tramps, the baths in stream or loch, the mighty appetites that stir the pot, the revelry of a gypsy life, the comradeships formed, which may be the most lasting reward of all."

But the Association does not confine itself to providing pleasure, nor, even in its Constitution, can it limit its activities to the provision of hostels. It is of necessity and of choice co-operating to preserve the beauties of the countryside; to assist young people, particularly those of limited means, to know Scotland better; to improve friendly intercourse between this and other countries; and in carrying out these objects other results no less desirable are being achieved. It is obvious that this open-air life will improve the standard of health where improvement is most necessary, and there is sure to be a mental gain from the enjoyment of Nature. Then each member must act up to a certain standard; each must sign a promise — carried about on the membership card — to leave no litter, to leave the hostels tidy, to respect and preserve the amenities of the countryside, and if the Association gets its members to carry out this promise, that alone would be a good achievement. There have always been untidy people, and it was very interesting to find in the course of looking after a hostel that those who at first were inclined to be untidy were those who had parents or servants at home who did all the cleaning. The established habit was difficult to break, but with no one at hand to help and a definite rule to be obeyed there was no option but to learn to do things themselves. Cooking gave an even more curious sidelight on home training; it was not unusual for girls in their twenties to admit they had never cooked a meal, whilst many more of both sexes were quite unfamiliar with the workings of a kitchen range. Amongst others one found a total ignorance of food values, although one can certainly note a simpler standard of diet, due mainly of course to the desire to limit the pack carried to the real necessities of life. Altogether, here is a training ground for Youth.

The international relationships, which were but barely



BALLATER HOSTEL.



INVERERNAN HOSTEL.

contemplated when the Constitution of the Association was drawn up, have extended widely. The first international meeting of officials of Youth Hostel Associations took place last year in Amsterdam, and now, with but few exceptions, the membership card of one Association admits to the hostels of any other Association. Some hundreds came over last year from the Continent, chiefly from Denmark, Germany, and Holland, to stay in the English and Scottish hostels, and a like or even greater number went to the Continental hostels, a friendly intercourse, with no suggestion of rivalry involved, which should have a great influence for peace.

In establishing its hostels the Scottish Association has had to depend to a large extent on available buildings which could be secured cheaply. This is not as wealthy a country as England, and the money available for hostels has all along been much less than was needed ; nor had we in Scotland, as they had in England, buildings owned by a National Trust which could be given free for the use of the Association. The 33 hostels which have been opened in Scotland are due in part to the kindness of certain landlords, in part to the generosity of a few individuals who donated money, but most of all to the energy and co-operation of the officials and members of the Association who gave their own small subscriptions and donations and collected money in small amounts by all the known expedients of whist drives, dances, lectures, and the rest. Of the 33 hostels only eight are new erections, and as five of these are simply converted huts, only three of the hostels have actually been built by the Association, but despite the financial handicaps, the hostels are all at points where they are really useful. The Border Chain of five hostels, all of them opened in the summer of 1931, is excellently arranged for the exploration of the most picturesque and most romantic Border scenery, and has proved so popular that three more hostels had to be added this year. Next in distance is Edinburgh Hostel, greatly needed for people from other countries as well as for our own young people of other parts of Scotland. The Loch Lomond-Trossachs group of six hostels gives access to the most renowned scenery of Scotland, while the

three hostels of Eastern Perthshire, at Ardtalnaig, Glen Quaich, and Birnam, are convenient for the youth of Dundee and Perth. Next comes a gap, still to be bridged, between Birnam and Clova, the beginning of a chain stretching round the Cairngorms to Aviemore. From here you can join the North-west group at Loch Ossian, Glen Nevis, Fort Augustus, or Drumnadrochit, visit the West Ross-shire hostels at Ratagan, Strome, Achnashellach, Slattadale, Inver Alligin, and Gairloch, before crossing the sea to the Skye hostels of Uig and Glen Brittle. This list shows that it is now possible, with only one or two short lifts, to walk from the Borders to Skye with a hostel convenient for each night.

For the establishment of these hostels District Committees were formed successively in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Dundee, each District having an area attached to the central town, while the rest of Scotland, including all west of the Caledonian Canal, is dealt with by a National Executive Committee. The Aberdeen District comprises Aberdeen, Kincardine, Banff, Moray and Speyside south to Newtonmore, and in this area thoughts turn naturally to the Cairngorms. The difficulty of getting suitable buildings near the Cairngorms has been great, but the present "Cairngorm Chain" of four hostels does give the walker a chance of seeing some of the finest of the scenery. Ballater Hostel proved very popular last year, as well it might, with its comforts of electric light, hot water circulation, and bath. A rented house overlooking the golf course, it provides accommodation for 48. At Inverernan part of the old coach stables was given for the use of the Association, and here there is room for 24, and if the hostel is a simpler type than Ballater, its quiet and pleasant setting has more of the charms of the countryside. In view of the popularity and usefulness of a chain of hostels, the 1933 programme for the Aberdeen Committee was obviously to place hostels to link with Ballater and Inverernan, and as a connection with Speyside seemed most urgent a wooden hostel has been erected at Aviemore with accommodation for 30, while, for the present, part of a house has been rented in the Square at

Tomintoul, and provision made for housing eight of each sex. Aviemore Hostel is the first specially built by the Aberdeen Committee, but their plans for an ideal hostel had to be scrapped in face of costs, and what has been provided is a plain building, made out of an old hut, with the minimum space and minimum requirements of a common room, a warden's room, and three dormitories. It is magnificently situated beside the main road and opposite the Spey bridge, a gap in the trees allowing a grand view of the Lairig Ghru from the hostel doorstep.

Each of the four hostels is in charge of a resident warden, and at each a bed, palliase, and three blankets are provided for the 1/- a night, with a good cooking stove and everything in the way of pots and pans. From the warden's store one can buy most of the provisions for a meal. For administrative purposes it is necessary for all using the hostels to be members of the Association or members of kindred Associations in other countries, but membership is open to all, and the annual subscription is the nominal one of 2/6 under age 25, 5/- for those over 25. The Association is intended primarily for young people, particularly those of limited means, and while the majority of members are in fact under 25, there is no intention at present to restrict the membership or the use of the hostels to young people. On the contrary, older people are meantime encouraged to join and to use the hostels for definite reasons. Even if they do not use the hostels, their subscriptions help in providing new hostels, and, if they are actively interested, their assistance is welcome in the great amount of voluntary work and in dealing with the many problems which are always found in a new organization, while if they do use the hostels they are able to help the wardens, who have still to gain experience, and to make suggestions for the management and improvement of hostels.

As the German Youth Hostel Association has been expanding continuously since its foundation over twenty years ago, there is reason to believe that the movement is a permanent one. The Scottish Association does not want to stand still, and in fact it cannot, for already half the hostels require

enlargement to meet the crowds at holiday periods. Running costs of the hostels can usually be met out of the accommodation charges, and out of the annual subscriptions a small margin is available, after meeting administrative charges, for capital expenditure, but the surplus is too small for much extension of hostels. New hostels are needed to connect the existing chains, *e.g.*, between Clova and Birnam, between Aviemore and the North-west, and between Loch Lomond and Glen Nevis. The fringe only of Argyllshire has been reached; Galloway is untouched, as well as the far North. In this district additions will be needed to the Cairngorm Chain (some members are already finding their way in one day from Ballater to Aviemore, one youth recently taking the bus to Braemar and walking from there to Aviemore over the summits of Ben Macdhui and Cairngorm); and the possibility of a hostel nearer Aberdeen has to be considered. Larger hostels with better facilities will have to be designed, and provision made for groups of young people in charge of a leader to be accommodated. Much has been done in the two years to establish the Association as a recognized feature of national life, but much more has to be done before it can rest on its oars.