



SHADOW BUTTRESS, LOCHNAGAR.

- a..a The Giant's Head Chimney (hidden)
- a..b Polyphemus Gully.
- x..x Difficult section.
- d Douglas-Gibson Gully.

NEW CLIMBS ON LOCHNAGAR.

BY W. A. EWEN.

"CLIMBERS," says the President, "overcome with their exertions, are prone to fall asleep between the difficulties." The criticism might have been more gently expressed and lassitude accounted due to the soporific effect of the "welles" that

Cam renning fro the cliffes adoun
And made a deedly, sleeping soun!

We borrow from Chaucer to explain our phenomenal slowness on the ascent of the Polyphemus Gully, which required three days to complete.

Our first attempt on the gully, which branches off the Giant's Head Chimney, some fifty feet above the screes, was a dismal failure. We started, Symmers and I, very late one afternoon and, after spending several hours on the first 150 feet, descended in as leisurely fashion. "It is high time to go to bed," says Montaigne, "when our legs faile us!" On a later occasion, we descended from the top, on a route mainly between the Giant's Head and Polyphemus, and reached, without real difficulty, the point where our previous exploration had stopped. And having ascertained that a certain tooth of rock, over which the route lies, was more stable than had appeared from below, we commenced our final attempt on September 16, 1933.

The first two pitches of the Giant's Head Chimney are small and overgrown but the next movement, out to the right round an awkward corner, is less easy. Beyond the corner there is a good stance, but thereafter the climbing proves continuously difficult for some 150 feet. Above fairly steep ridged slabs, not overflowing with good holds, the gully narrows and a hitch is obtainable. On the higher and wider part of this pitch it is a matter of some difficulty to effect a lodgement on a platform which protrudes, jetty like, on the left.

The gully now runs into an overhanging crack, above which it changes direction abruptly. A tooth of rock projecting from the left wall is the stepping-stone to higher things. The leader runs out about 90 feet of rope, and as the climbing on the exposed left wall requires delicate balance, the belay is important. This will be found on the right wall but out of reach, so that the rope must be thrown over it. Symmers elected to perform this operation; some considerable time elapsed before we were able to proceed.

A bulge of wall interferes with progress up to the "tooth," but once this is gained (in 10-12 feet) the foothold is adequate. But there are no "jug-handles" for the hands; the feet must do the work. The tooth leans rakishly over space and the operation of stepping on to the ultimate tip may, in the absence of reliable handhold, be best performed quickly. Due care should be observed since, just above, there is a slight overhang with which the leader's head came into violent contact. The tooth is quitted for an unsatisfactory foothold in a gutter on the wall. Above this delicate step the holds improve and a movement to the right, towards the overhanging crack, brings the climber to a chaos of boulders and the comfortable security of a temporary subterranean existence. The gully bed is here very boulder strewn, but a further run of 20 feet leads to a comfortable platform on the left wall.

The angle is now easier and the climbing for some distance uninteresting. But approaching the next pitch, the boulders give way to smooth slabs, masked in the grey slime of rotting granite. The pitch itself houses several wedged blocks, the smallest of which is, by proof of touch, unstable. We looked at the largest one and decided not to put it to the touch. Once again an escape was found on the left wall some 10 feet lower. This upward traverse is only moderately difficult and leads to easy ground on the left of the great pitch, and from here its difficulties can be better appreciated. About 100 feet high, it commences with the loose blocks referred to above and culminates in an overhang. Progress on the left is a fairly simple matter.



WEST BUTTRESS, LOCHNAGAR.

x . . x Gargoyle Chimney. *a* and *b* Alternative starts.

Eventually, a recessed corner under an overhanging gable of rock is reached, and an eight-foot wall to the right of it leads to a large platform above the great pitch. The gully is regained through a tumble of boulders and two further short pitches complete the climb. The final chokestone pitch may be climbed in several ways, but backing up is sheer joy. The walls are made for it.

We would classify the climb, having regard to the fact that the initial section is continuously difficult for some 200 feet, as much more exacting than the standard climbs on Lochnagar.

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On August 6, 1933, G. R. Symmers and the writer followed a new route *via* Gargoyle Chimney, a thin slit of blackness perched mid-way up the so-called Western Buttress of Lochnagar. The chimney is something of an imposter, being less formidable than its appearance suggests. It will be easily recognised by the grotesque "head" near the exit and visible from the corrie. Sculptors with ultra-modern ideas may find inspiration here!

A steep grind over vegetated slopes for some 200 feet (starting by any one of the three initial chimneys: the left-hand one is difficult) is not very satisfactory. The broken band of rock between the two prominent green terraces may be easily passed at the West Gully end. Access to the chimney is over a large slab, above which a small chokestone calls for effort not in proportion to its size. Backing up for 60 feet is an easier and more certain way of attaining the next chokestone than utilising the small and unsatisfactory holds in the bed of the chimney. But the right wall harbours a certain amount of loose stuff and the leader's moral (and sometimes physical) prop and support is in the line of fire.

The second chokestone is passed on the right *via* a shelf on the right wall, and is not particularly difficult. The chimney, until now about three feet wide, begins to funnel out. A recess in the right wall will secure the second man against emergencies. The next pitch is in three sections, the first a very smooth slab of some 20 feet. The slab was

climbed on the left and a traverse made to the right wall, where the holds are still poor. A chimney on the right, which previous examination had suggested as the best route, proved unreliable. A way, however, was found up to the left on large boulders overhanging a cave.

The chimney section (about 150 feet) of the climb finishes here in a large "basin" surrounded by several peculiar rock features, notably the Gargoyle on the right. Lower down, a detached obelisk seems in eminent danger of toppling from its crazy base. But, to continue with the climb, various possibilities for overcoming the slabs are open; perhaps the best route is by the small, central chimney slanting away to the right. The narrow exit from the basin houses a large chokestone, which is passed without great difficulty on the left.

Further examination of the whole buttress between the Spout and the West Gully was undertaken. Apart from the climb described above, there seems to be little of interest here. The lower half is largely vegetation; the upper half appears to be everywhere too difficult. For all that, there is no buttress on Lochnagar finer in appearance than the West.