

## THE CAIRNGORMS REVISITED.

BY "UNST."

I ARRIVED in Braemar on June 23, 1933, after an absence of seven years, to renew my acquaintanceship with the Cairngorm Mountains, which have always been, and will always be, the source of many pleasant memories. The Scottish Highlands, typified *par excellence* in the Central Cairngorms and the Black Cuillin of Skye, have a quiet, hidden beauty of their own, a certain spiritual quality possessed by no other mountains in the world.

I made my first expedition from Braemar on June 24. I was climbing alone, and in spite of the extreme clemency of the weather I carried an ice-axe, which should always, in my opinion, be carried by solitary climbers, and I can think of at least one fatal accident which might have been obviated by its use.

Setting out along Glen Slugain, crossing the Dee by a bridge near a sawmill, both new to me, I walked along the path to Clach a Cleirich, a large stone marking the col between Beinn a' Bhuid and Ben Avon, and ascended the steep rise to Cnap a Cleirich. Once on the plateau the North Top is soon reached, and from there to the South Top is a flat walk. I had rather rushed the climb, and felt somewhat out of condition. Arrived at the North Top, mist fell on the hill, so I took a compass-bearing to the South Top, not wishing to repeat a mistake I had made many years ago, when, undertaking the same expedition one January with Roy Simmers, we became involved in a howling blizzard and missed the South Top completely, eventually descending into Glen Quoich *via* the re-entrant between Carn Fiacloch and the Bruach Mhor. I reached the South Top in due course, and descended to the col between the main *massif* and Carn Fiacloch, enjoying on the way a short glissade on a patch of old snow, which cascaded me out unceremoniously over a miniature *bergschrunn* into a tangle of loose rocks. On the col I met three climbers *en route* for Beinn a' Bhuid, and descended into



Glen Quoich by the path on the west face of Carn Fiaclach, thence into Glen Slugain and home to Braemar, after an excellent day. I was grieved to see Slugain Lodge in such bad repair and disfigured by so many pencilled records made by the ubiquitous tripper. The amount of litter on view was not creditable. I spent a considerable amount of time, especially at the summit cairns, burying traces of recent orgies in the shape of lemonade bottles, tins, and greasy sheets of paper. I put up any number of grouse, and a bumper year seemed indicated. The stags, of which I saw quite a number, were still in velvet, with a lack of good heads.

Next day I made an early start along the same route, with the intention of climbing Ben Avon. I reached the Clach a Cleirich, and advanced some way up the head waters of the Quoich before ascending the shoulder of the hill to the main summit, Leabaidh an Daimh Bhuidhe. The day was clear and cloudless, and I had fine views of the Central Cairngorms, the corries of Beinn a' Bhuid and the Garbh Coire of Ben Avon. I climbed to the cairn on the peculiar castellated top, and rested there for some time, descending by Allt an Eas Mhoir to the upper reaches of the Gairn, and thence to Braemar by the path to the west of Culardoch, which debouches into a respectable road leading to Invercauld House. The weather was intensely hot and dry, and had been for some time. The water in the hill burns was getting low. From the 3,000 contour to the summit I continually disturbed large numbers of ptarmigan. Some were still nesting, but there were numerous large coveys as well.

On the following day I stayed in Braemar, and decided, in view of the perpetually fine weather, to discard the ice-axe and change my climbing boots for shoes.

After a day's rest I made an early start and motored to Derry Lodge. Previously, the road to Derry was open, but now a toll of half-a-crown is levied, I understand for the upkeep of the road. Arrived at Derry Lodge, I left the car in the pines and walked up Glen Luibeg, ascending the Sron Riach at a leisurely pace. Just short of the North Top the mist fell, driven before a half-gale, recalling memories



of a previous expedition in the company of Mr. Parker, who needs no introduction in these pages, and Mr. Sellar, when we climbed Ben Macdhui on New Year's Eve, 1926, in similar but somewhat more severe weather. I reached the North Top eventually, and being deprived of any view made straight for the main summit, after a perfunctory compass reading. I found the indicator in excellent condition, but the mist held, so view there was none. Descending in a north-westerly direction, I passed the source of Allt a Choire Mhoir and walked to the March Burn. Here I was out of the mist, and enjoyed an excellent view of the whole length of the Larig Pass and the country towards Rothiemurchus. There were two people in the Larig, one of whom I met subsequently in the Corrou Bothy. As the descent near the March Burn is steep and tedious, I returned to Allt a Choire Mhoir, and, after a halt for lunch, descended into the Larig, crossed it, and toiled up the shoulder of Braeriach, encountering more mist before ascending very far. I reached the summit, and, walking along the cliffs, descended a little way down a convenient buttress to get out of the mist, and was rewarded by sensational glimpses of Coire Bhrochain and silvery Glen Dee, far below. I re-ascended to the summit plateau, and, skirting the cliffs, emerged into fine weather near the summit of Angel's Peak. From here, and subsequently from the summit of Cairn Toul, the view was magnificent, but from neither peak could it compare with the vista from the Devil's Point, on top of which I stood for a full hour, enjoying the scenery. The summit of the Devil's Point is a sensational situation, from where the eye encounters the far-flung reaches of Glen Dee and Glen Geusachan, with their enclosing hills. Descending to the Corrou Bothy *via* the col between the summit and Cairn Toul, I found the bothy occupied by a solitary inhabitant, who very kindly made me some tea. He was one of the adventurers I had seen in the Larig, and again caught a glimpse of from Angel's Peak as he was descending from Cairn Toul. Like a snail, he carried his entire belongings with him. He was bound for the Shelter Stone next



morning *via* the summit of Ben Macdhui, and the very sight of his pack, including tent, made my shoulders ache.

In the cool of the evening I returned to Derry Lodge, and drove to Braemar, pleasantly tired.

For subsequent expeditions I decided to make Derry Lodge my headquarters, so I stayed there, enjoying the hospitality of some very old friends.

After a day in Braemar (and a lovely morning spent on the shores of the Dubh Lochan of Beinn a' Bhuird, where I met an enthusiastic entomologist, who, having caught the particular bug he desired, was full of good cheer) I motored early one morning to Derry Lodge, and set out for Derry Cairngorm. Derry Cairngorm has always been one of my favourite hills, admirably situated as it is for views of Glen Dee and the corries of the central group. I reached the summit in good time, and skirted the high ground above Loch Etchachan round to the shoulder of Ben Macdhui, overlooking Loch Avon. Here, if anywhere, the scenery is supremely magnificent. The great bulk of Cairngorm, frowning over the distant blue waters of Avon, the magnificent precipices of the Pinnacle Crag and its surrounding cliffs, the high loch of Etchachan, the rising shoulders of Beinn Mheadhoin and the gentle exit of the valley of Avon with its rippling streams, all overlooked by the towering slopes of Ben Macdhui, make one of the finest, if one of the lesser known, mountain views in the world, more generous in scale than the enclosed grandeur of Coruisk, gentler in contour and more alive in beauty than the high Alps, and without the awful desolation of the great Himalayan ranges, where the eye and the mind are lost in incomprehensible immensities of distance.

Lingering over the beauties of the scenery, I ascended leisurely to the summit of Cairngorm, and thence steeply to the eastern shore of Loch Avon, where, to crown the day's enjoyment, I stripped and swam far into the cold, refreshing waters. From here I climbed Beinn Mheadhoin, with its weird summit, descended to the shores of Loch Etchachan, down Coire Etchachan into Glen Derry and home.

Next day was swelteringly hot, and I set out for Monadh



Mor. I ascended first to the col between Cairn Toul and the Devil's Point, in a breathless heat without a puff of wind, and, keeping to the high ground on the southern slopes of Cairn Toul, reached the shores of Loch nan Stuirteag. This little loch is one of the most charming and unfrequented spots in the Cairngorms. From here, in mist, I climbed to the north summit of Monadh Mor, and walked along the summit plateau to the south top. By the time I reached the lip of Coire Cath nam Fionn the weather had cleared, and I reached Beinn Bhrotain in sunshine. Then I went on to Carn Cloich-mhuilinn, a hill I had not previously climbed. The flat, grassy col between Bhrotain and Cloich-mhuilinn was alive with large coveys of ptarmigan. After a short rest on the summit of the latter hill, I descended into Glen Dee by the Allt Garbh, and reached Glen Lui over the shoulder of Creagan nan Gabhar—roughish going.

A heat wave had arrived with a vengeance. My next venture, Beinn Bhreac, Beinn a Chaorruin, A Choinneach and Ben Bynack More, was carried out under a blazing sun. I climbed to the summit of Beinn Bhreac from Glen Derry, and was rewarded by an excellent view down the Dubh Glen. The deer, worried by the heat, had congregated into large herds, which kept to the open grassy flats. On the extensive flat col between Beinn Bhreac and Beinn a Chaorruin I moved a herd of well over a hundred head. From the summit of Beinn a Chaorruin I made for the Dubh Lochan in Glen Derry, and was extremely glad of a long drink. The lochan was very low, and indeed most of the smaller hill burns had dried completely. Crossing the Avon, I climbed up the south shoulder of A Choinneach, over heather and boulders, to the summit. Here again, on the flat between A Choinneach and Bynack More, were innumerable deer, sluggish with the heat. On the summit of Bynack More a welcome breeze sprang up. I spent some time examining the Barns, and then descended into Glen Derry and home.

Next day, the last I was to spend in these delightful surroundings, was hotter than ever. Glen Lui and Glen Dee were alive with campers taking advantage of the fine spell.



I had planned a big day, and set out along Glen Geusachan for Loch nan Stuirteag. The ascent of the upper reaches of Glen Geusachan was very trying, the rough ground and the heat forming an unpleasant combination. Just below the final pull to the loch I roused a very fine solitary stag, the only good head I encountered during my visit. From Loch nan Stuirteag I walked, *via* Loch nan Cnapan, to the cliffs at the head of Loch Einich, moving hundreds of deer on the flat ground. Rounding the buttress of Cairn Toul, which overlooks Loch nan Cnapan, I was suddenly startled by a thin, piercing wail in the neighbourhood of my feet. I had almost stepped on a tiny fawn which was lying in a depression in the ground. It got up, very unsteady on its legs, and made off in a somewhat drunken manner. The ground overlooking the cliffs round Loch Einich is very rough, and I made a wide detour to avoid it, eventually reaching the grassy slopes of Sgor Gaoith. From the summit of Sgor Gaoith I had a magnificent view, and spent some time examining the buttresses leading from Loch Einich to the summit of the cliffs. All these buttresses have, I think I am right in saying, been climbed by my friend Roy Symmers. From Sgor Gaoith I walked to the summit of Sgoran Dubh Mor, and thence to the summit of Carn Ban Mor, Meall Dubhag, round Fionnar Choire and Coire Garbhlach to Mullach Clach a Bhlair and so on to Diollaid Coire Eindart, a pleasant expedition. Then I descended to the River Eidart, and enjoyed a most refreshing dip in a rock pool. To finish up the day I walked to the upper reaches of the Feshie, under the shadow of Meall Tionail and Carn Ealar, returning to the Geldie Burn. It was dark by the time I reached Geldie Lodge, and by the time I reached the White Bridge I was decidedly footsore, which slowed me down considerably. When I reached the Linn of Dee it was dawn, and I reached Derry Lodge at 5 a.m., after twenty-one consecutive hours in the hills. I had covered well over forty miles, and managed to fall asleep without much difficulty. Later in the morning, after an adequate breakfast, I returned to Aberdeen, having spent one of the most enjoyable holidays of my experience.