



LOCHNAGAR FROM INVERCAULD

H. C. Dugan

SHADOW BUTTRESS B: LOCHNAGAR.

BY W. A. EWEN.

SHADOW BUTTRESS B rises between the Giant's Head gullies and the Douglas-Gibson. It merges almost unobtrusively with the left-hand wall of the Douglas Gully, at the mouth of which the climb commences. The wall is steep and unbroken for 300 feet; thereafter the average angle is easier and the climbing less exhilarating. It was first visited by Raeburn, Mackay, and Goggs in 1902, but the route chosen by this party ended at 250 feet in an overhang, which, apparently, could neither be surmounted nor circumvented. It is probable that Raeburn was misled by appearances and made his attempt on the left side of the buttress, where a series of chimneys, on the verge of the Polyphemus Gully, are inviting enough of aspect to lure the climber on.

Our preliminary survey was rather scamped, Symmers having but a few hours at his disposal. Having ascertained only that the upper section would present no great difficulty, Symmers dashed off to keep an appointment in York. Trains, apparently, do not discriminate between railway engineers and ordinary mortals! At a later date the inadequate nature of our examination was brought home to us. Starting up the left-hand side, where the buttress appears least steep, we were welcomed by a wide chimney, apparently innocuous. It was perhaps fortunate that we did not get beyond the gently smiling jaws; having convinced each other that neither of us was feeling particularly well and that both of us were considerably below form, we retired! More is worth a good retreat than a foolish abiding! In the meantime we would cast around for a less innocent looking start and attempt to rejoin our line of chimneys by a traverse back above the initial fraud. Eventually we reached a sort of platform, about 100 feet above the

scree; there moss and loose rock abounded, and a vast amount of original excavation in search of the belay *par excellence* resulted in the discovery of a snail. Truth compels me to admit that our efforts to scale the cliff were meeting with no greater success! We descended in heavy rain and again examined the buttress, paying more attention to the right-hand side. Careful scrutiny showed that the key to the problem was a hanging chimney, which abuts abruptly on the wall of the Douglas. This chimney would take us past the overhang which had stopped Raeburn, and we concluded that our best chance of success lay in forcing a way up the Douglas Wall, in spite of its not very promising appearance.

Some weeks later Symmers (who had spent the interval exercising his adhesive ability on Almscliff and his ingenuity on railway bridges) arrived in Ballater bent on making the ascent of Shadow Buttress B. The attempt was further delayed on account of my being off colour, literally and metaphorically! Fortunately, Symmers was in good enough form to require nothing of his companion, apart from coiling up the rope neatly. So, once again, we stood below Shadow Buttress and worked out a route via a series of ledges and ledglets which, with an occasional hiatus, led to the hanging chimney. The route would be scarcely practicable but for the very useful belays, placed for once exactly where they are most required.

The first is some 80 feet from the scree, and is reached by a conspicuous slab just at the entrance to the Douglas Gully. The slab is climbed on its edge until the holds give out, at which point a traverse across the green chimney on the left brings the first platform within reach. The first belay serves a dual purpose, acting also as foothold for the next movement round an awkward corner to the right. Twenty feet of open chimney follow to the next belay, and here Nature is bountiful; there are two bollards. But what she gives with one hand she takes back with the other. At the lower, there is little to stand on; at the upper, it is possible to stand and even to sit, but after occupying the position for half an hour and trying all the normal postures,

I was unable to decide what one really ought to do here! At this point a long traverse is made to the right, and Symmers, who was exploring it, was, for the most part, out of sight. He was taking a long time and was obviously having difficulty, audible difficulty, but he eventually returned in a most extraordinary hurry. I gathered that he had touched a boulder above the route and had found that it moved: "It's as big as a bell tent," he added. (The boulder is rather smaller than a very small bivvy!) This traverse is certainly the hardest part of the climb, and is most difficult at its farther end.

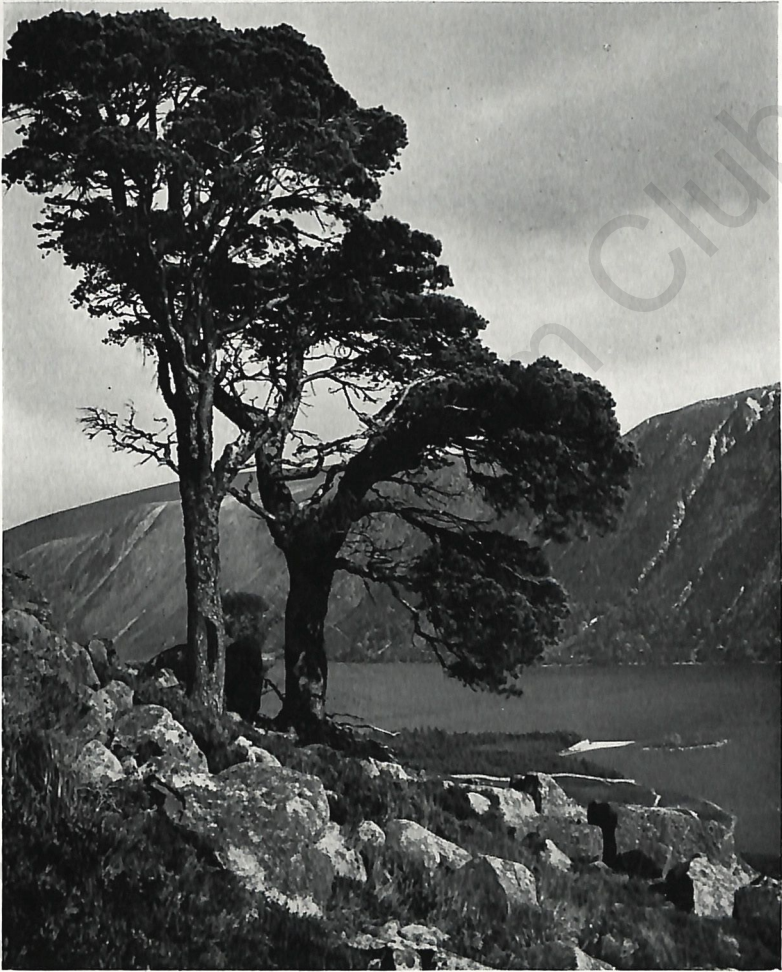
Standing on a small triangular foothold, which projects bracket-like from the wall, it is a very long stretch to the next hold, a step in a short steep chimney quite 6 feet away. An intermediate minute scratch accommodates one nail, but not mine! I am averse to pinning my faith to a nearly vertical wall with one nail. On the step are small but well-chiselled holds—fingertip holds—but sufficient to ensure that the hands will not slip while making what is virtually (saving Symmers' speculative nail support) a swing across. The chimney leads to a very narrow ledge, with a barely satisfactory belay, at which the leader should bring on number two from the second bollard. The leader is not in a position to be of any assistance to the second man; the difficult part of the climb is this horizontal traverse. Symmers looked rather anxious as he explained the exiguity of his perch, and I thought of Mr Finch's theory, "that it is easier for the dog to wag the tail than vice versa," and wondered! A modified form of combined tactics may be necessary to surmount a 10-foot wall with widely spaced holds. The exposure is considerable. But the central one of the three chimneys above is comparatively easy, depending, of course, on the length of limb to be accommodated therein. Symmers felt that there was too much of him and too little of chimney. Two more chimneys follow, side by side, the one on the left hand being probably the easier. We were now at the commencement of the hanging chimney, the key to the ascent. And the issue was still in some doubt, for, although not steep, the chimney looked, and

was, rotten. Much loose material was removed, but its ascent still requires care.

The transition from steep rock wall to broken buttress is abrupt and may be remarked from almost any viewpoint. The real difficulties being past, we rested some considerable time on the second platform and constructed a small cairn. I am doubtful both regarding its utility and its chance of survival; it is a serious business and requires the generalship of an M.Inst.C.E. at least to obtain really classic results! Now, there is one on the western seaboard of Lewis . . . but we should be getting on. The second platform is altogether a delectable spot and commands a fine view of the corrie; and we had the comfortable knowledge that the upper buttress was nowhere very difficult. Indeed, we had, most unfairly, already attacked from the rear, having made two exploratory descents to try to locate Raeburn's overhang. Above the second platform we could, save at an occasional step, move together, and this section occupied very little time.

Bearing to the left, a short, steep crack will be located: several small wedged stones facilitate the ascent and the belay is satisfactory. Broken ground leads to a large pinnacle, backed by a steep wall, which appears to be a formidable obstacle. The weak spot is immediately behind the pinnacle, the neck of which may be reached by either of the flanking chimneys: the route on the left is the more sporting. The summit boulders of the pinnacle and some of the rock in the vicinity should be handled judiciously.

Beyond the pinnacle there is little but easy scrambling until the final steep section is reached. Some interesting corners and chimneys are encountered, none rising to the level of difficult. The final pitch overhangs, but is easily passed on the left. We were greeted at the top by a small party, mostly amateur photographers and cinematographers, who, anxious that the record should be as complete and as inaccurate as possible, prevailed upon us to repeat the ascent of the last 50 feet. Conceiving it our duty to acquiesce, we thereupon performed the first ascent of Shadow B . . . for the fourth time!



LOCH MUICK

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