



A WALK ROUND APPLECROSS.

BY RUTH K. JACKSON.

OF the climbs and walks that I have done, none have given me greater pleasure than my walk round Applecross. In variety and beauty the views were not less wonderful than those from many mountain tops.

To avoid walking on the main road, my friend and I drove from Kinlochewe to the head of Loch Torridon and parked the car, with the consent of a charming old Highlander, at the clachan of Annat, where the public road for vehicles ends. A notice directs one to the right-of-way footpath to Shieldaig. The two of us set forth on this path with light hearts and heavy feet, the heaviness being due to our rucksacks which were loaded with tent, sleeping-bags, ground-sheet, food for three days, a spirit cooker, and other accessories. First through larches and pines, and then through heather, the path led on distinctly. The noise of civilisation rasped on ours ears, however, when two motor cyclists sped past us on their bumpy way. After 4 miles the path, at Balgy, developed into a driving road and carried on as such through Shieldaig, a village which straggles in a delightful manner along the loch of the same name, an inlet of Loch Torridon. At the head of Loch Shieldaig a path branches off to the right. We turned down this path, crossed the river by a footbridge (not marked on

Bartholomew's $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch map), and found ourselves at last on the 4-feet-wide path which is the only means of communication, apart from the sea, between about fifty households and the rest of Scotland. This path is kept in good condition by Ross-shire County Council.

Our way was one of enchanting beauty. On our left, both on heathery moorland and on steep crags, grew graceful birches and sturdy hazels; on our right lay the glistening waters of Loch Torridon, behind which rose majestic hills, crowned seemingly with snow but in reality with the white quartzite characteristic of the district. At the first township, Ardheslaig, we were welcomed by a friendly collie. None of the Applecross dogs seemed suspicious of strangers. Ardheslaig is a typical West Highland township; the scattered black houses remain in use for cattle only, while the people live in modern cottages near which are cultivated patches, where the fishermen-crofters are trying to wrest a living from a thin and unyielding soil. The sheep and cows are athletic because they have to work so hard to find enough of the sparse grass to satisfy their hunger. It was Sunday. Not even a net was hanging out to dry on the frames by the waterside and a weird quiet hung over the little community, where almost everything is forbidden on the Sabbath. Beside the second township, Kenmore, about 16 miles distant from Annat, we pitched our tent for the night. A swift, clear burn, springy turf for a bed, and an air too cold for midges made this one of our best camping sites.

After Kenmore there were no trees. Never have I seen such a wet land. Nothing but bog, grass, rock, and more bog. Bog oozed up from the cloven feet of the cattle who gazed mildly at us. A low-level walk in such a region would be impossible without a good path. In spite of the water, we passed only one group of lochans on the way; they were near the north-west corner of Applecross and are not shown on Bartholomew's $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch map.

Before we had said *au revoir* to Loch Torridon, the island of Rona had appeared, and for 12 long, interesting miles we saw alluring pictures of Rona, Raasay, and the misty

Isle of Skye. The weird bleakness of the mainland, the unexpected appearance of a human habitation, and the mystic beauty of those western islands gave a unique atmosphere to our expedition.

At Cuaig, the only township where the houses are close to the path, a messenger had arrived by motor cycle. Later on, when we saw the hill that he had to negotiate, we felt thankful that we were relying on Shanks's mare. Incidentally, this steep hill, which is about 4 miles from Applecross, is just above a most delightful sandy bay, which would have been ideal for bathing had time and weather permitted. To those who think that we ought to have had time for a bathe, as it is only 16 miles from Kenmore to Applecross, I may say that, as we were carrying a load about three times as great as one carries for a single day's outing, our average speed, excluding halts for meals, was only 2 miles per hour.

We chose an open site near the shore at the north end of Applecross Bay for our camp. After supper a gamekeeper came to ask us if we had not seen the notice, "No camping allowed." We had not, as the notice is at the end of the motoring road, which was beyond our day's march. Fortunately we were allowed to stay, but the authorised camping ground is 2 miles farther on, beyond the village. Before we had settled down for the night a herd of cows came to investigate our tent. We took turns in warding them off, until, having eaten their fill of seaweed, the eleven cows had lain down for the night. Alas, just as we thought our watch had ended, two of the animals rose up and began fighting. Fearing for the safety of our fragile abode, we struck camp at midnight and moved to ground on the other side of a high fence. At 6.15 A.M. our slumbers were rudely awakened by the thudding of many hooves on the ground close to our heads. Another herd of cows making anxious inquiries! One of us paced up and down clutching a stick while the other dressed; then, with furtive glances at our unwelcome visitors, we packed up the tent and our belongings and tramped off to Applecross village. Truly, however, the marvellous sight of the Cuillins in the morning

sunshine made up for the inconvenience of our hasty removal.

By the time we had washed our few breakfast dishes the Post Office had opened. Here we were able to replenish our stores before retracing our steps to the River Applecross. The path, which is on the north side of the river, is of the usual hill type, not well made like the one round the coast which we had been following the two previous days. Before very long we took an hour's rest, partly to supplement our night's disturbed repose but chiefly to let our tent dry, as a wet tent can be twice as heavy to carry as a dry one. When we came to the bothy about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles up the glen we took the path to the right. This was the wrong path, and is not the one marked on the map which is at least $\frac{1}{2}$ mile farther on. The path that we were on could be seen very distinctly on the hill-face. We followed it on to the plateau, where it ended, and then, in order to regain the correct path, we climbed a hill from which we had such a wonderful view of Skye and Loch Torridon that we did not grudge the extra mile. The ground above 500 feet is not excessively boggy, so we regained the path with little difficulty. I call it a path, but, although it was a distinct scratch on the hillside, it is the roughest and stoniest thing that I have ever described as a path. About 2 miles from the keeper's cottage at Inverbain we were able to cease our jumping exercises and swing steadily along. A row of sea-boots stood at the keeper's door; it looked more like a fisherman's cottage. We now retraced our footsteps of the first day for a few miles, pitched our tent on the driest bit of bog—our ground-sheets held out manfully—and then walked back through Shiel-daig to Annat on the fourth day. The little white houses of Alligan and Torridon, beside the deep blue of the loch and the heights of Ben Alligin, Liathach and Beinn Eighe towering magnificently into the sky, made one of those perfect views which will remain in the memory for a lifetime.

During the four days we had walked about 57 miles. As some people would hesitate to carry their house and bed on their backs, I am glad to say that about halfway between Shiel-daig and Applecross by the coast is a place called

Arinacrinachd * (postal address—By Applecross, Strathcarron) where apartments are advertised. I do not know anything about them, but by staying there it would be possible to walk round the path, travelling light. There is an inn at Shildaig and accommodation may be had at Applecross, although the inn there is closed meanwhile. At least one house at Annat takes visitors and Torridon village is not far away. I would not suggest that the walk from Shildaig to Annat should be omitted as the view, going eastwards, is so glorious.

I have written this article in the hope that other members of the Club may be tempted to explore this little-known district. If they wish to enjoy the thrills of the more famous motoring road to Applecross, they could doubtless hire a car from Lochcarron village and miss out the stony path over the hills from Inverbain to Applecross.

* O.S. spelling; also, more commonly Arrin a' Chruinach.

BOGS.

I HAVE been re-reading the "S.M.C. Guide to the Islands" and re-living a most enjoyable holiday spent in Lewis with Symmers and Parker. Parker came to show us what to climb, but not how; later, he wrote against most of the cliffs — "manifestly impossible!" Among the major obstacles must be included the inevitable Lewisian introduction to the day's work, an average of 3 miles of almost impassable peat bog. Our complaints regarding these bogs met nowhere with any sympathy. An eye for country, Parker observed, is not gifted to every Tom, Dick, and Harry. And if Parker proved a broken reed, what shall I say of Morag, the daughter of the house? "Those are fine peat bogs you have here," Symmers began. Morag thought it out slowly in Gaelic and after a long silence came the reply, naïve but devastating, "Oh, but they are not ours."—W. A. E.