

ROSS-SHIRE RIDGE.

By R. L. MITCHELL.

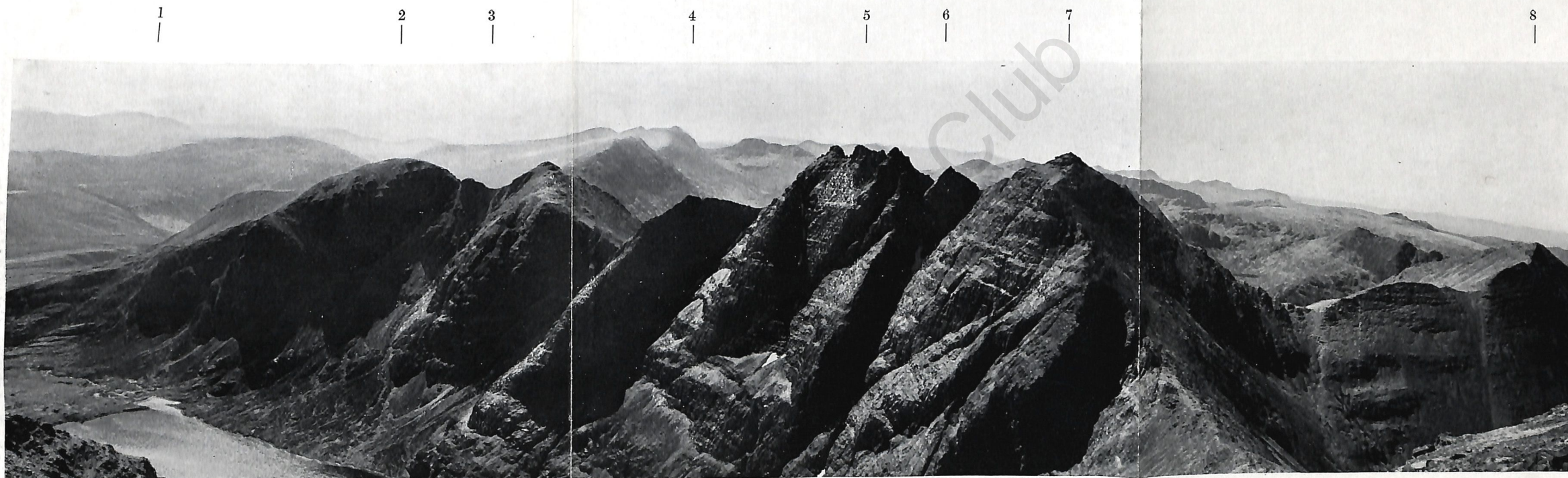
THE doubts of the multitude regarding the sanity of the three who boarded the Inverness bus one afternoon in May, equipped with ice-axes and rucksacks, were turned to certainty when three tickets to Turriff were purchased. Turriff was but the first stage on our journey, however, and less plebeian transport soon carried the augmented party of four to Inverness—stop for high tea—in much the same time as it had taken us to reach Turriff from Aberdeen. Then, enjoying the fine spring evening, we made our leisurely way to Dundonnell on Little Loch Broom, slowing or stopping now and again to admire the views of the unfamiliar peaks as they appeared in turn at each bend in the road.

Soon after our arrival the sun began to sink over the headland at the seaward end of the loch, below a cloudless sky which varied in colour from deep blue to red, and a second high tea was gulped down in order not to miss the sight.

All roads from Dundonnell lead, in the first instance, to An Teallach, and soon after nine next morning we were complaining once again of the weather—no clouds to improve the skies for photographs, and in any case it was far too hot for climbing—as we made our way up the track which leaves the road rather furtively opposite Dundonnell Post Office. This track, according to the 1-inch O.S. map, zigzags up to a height of about 1,300 feet, but can actually be followed right up to the summit plateau, at a height of 2,400 feet, west of the Allt a' Mhuillin. An easy walk then takes one to the col between the unnamed 3,001-foot top and Bidein a' Ghlas Thuill. The first top of the chain, Glas Mheall Mòr, lies less than a mile to the north over easy ground, but as we desired to have time to explore the more interesting part of the ridge it was left out. From the col, with its

extensive view into Coire a' Ghlas Thuill and away to the north-east, a scramble leads to the highest, but one of the less interesting summits of An Teallach. From it the most comprehensive idea of the whole range can be obtained. The accompanying panorama shows the more interesting part of the range. A sharp ridge runs from Bidein eastwards to Glas Mheall Liath, and this is balanced by the ridge from Sgùrr Fiona to Sgùrr Creag an Eich on the other side of the range. Of the series of four corries which these ridges enclose, the largest and most impressive was now right before us. The sun was striking down from the south-west and casting deep shadows into the corrie, the faces of the Corrag Bhuidhe buttress and its neighbours being made the more impressive by their grim blackness. The toothed nature of the ridge produced a pattern of light and shade on the waters of Toll an Lochain, some 1,700 feet below us. Again we sighed at the lack of clouds needed to produce a photograph worthy of the scene. Farther away in the grey haze the rounded tops of the Fannichs and the more inviting outlines of Beinn Dearg both suggested an objective for the morrow. At our backs the deeply indented Atlantic coast-line serpented in and out of the Loch Brooms and southwards towards Loch Torridon, while in the distance we imagined that the hills of Skye and of the Outer Hebrides were visible.

After a leisurely meal we set off down the nail-worn boulders towards Sgùrr Fiona, the shapely conical top which commences the most interesting section of the ridge. Over this whole section it is possible to avoid all difficulties by following the well-marked track of previous climbers, but often the interesting-looking boulders and crags entice one away to the left—the main road always lies to the right-hand side of the ridge. Beyond Sgùrr Fiona, Lord Berkeley's Seat rises sheer—from one side more than sheer—for several hundred feet, and, looking over the steepest edge, produces quite a strange feeling! The four tops of Corrag Bhuidhe provided some interesting scrambling, quite unnecessary but impossible to resist, and the close-up view of a pair of ptarmigan, settled on the main top, which remained there peacefully while we photographed from a range of 10 feet,



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AN TEALLACH FROM BIDEAN A' GHLAS THUILL.

1. Loch Toll an Lochain.
2. Sàil Liath.
3. Cadha Gobhlach.

4. Corrag Bhuidhe Buttress.
5. Corrag Bhuidhe—4 tops.
6. Lord Berkeley's Seat.

7. Sgùrr Fìona.
8. Sgùrr Creag an Eich.

The attempt to produce a real "close-up" was, however, not allowed.

Having strayed too far from the beaten track on the descent from Corrag Bhuidhe to its buttress to the south, we found it advisable to use the rope for safety, and here Malcolm, after having had to return to rescue the too well-belayed rope, hinted that a smaller factor of safety than a permanent grip of the whole mountain might well be permitted. At this point the delay allowed a wider horizon to be scanned, for the last part of the ridge had itself taken all our attention, it had so many features of interest, and we saw to the south-west Loch na Sheallag, some 3 miles long, with, rising steep behind it, the face of Beinn Dearg Mòr, deeply indented by a hanging corrie.

The way now lay, with a voluntary detour to the head of the buttress, over easy ground, until the ridge was left at the second branch of the gully which leads down to the loch, and provides an easy descent. This gully is situated at the col before the last top, Sail Liath, is reached. From the corrie a route was taken over ground which is sometimes bare, level sandstone and sometimes peat-filled depressions, which are decidedly moist, direct to the main road at the second milestone from Dundonnell Hotel. Incidentally, not a drop of water was encountered on the hill all day, and only in the deepest and most sheltered gullies did some sandy snow remain. The gully down which we came was, however, still frozen, and small blocks of ice, up to some inches in size, scattered over the surface, had apparently recently fallen from the cliffs above.

The following day had of necessity to be short, as the return journey to Aberdeen had to be made. Smith and Malcolm, in fact, were satisfied to have a longish lie and to stroll along the lochside for a few miles. Hutcheon and I set off for Beinn Dearg, with strict injunctions to be back in time for lunch, and with the threat that, if we were not, the others would take the next train home without us! Sight of Beinn Dearg showed it to be in mist above 3,000 feet, so it was hurriedly decided to have a look at the Fannichs. The car was left a little beyond the track to Loch a' Bhraoin

and a straight course set for the top of Meall a' Chrasgaidh, which was reached soon after eleven. A rapid conference in the biting wind reached the conclusion that we could go a little farther and still be back in time for lunch. This, incidentally, was the result of several more until about twelve-thirty we found ourselves on the top of Sgùrr Mòr, rucksacks having been parked on Càrn na Criche. As the mist had been threatening all day, map and compass were not left behind even for this short distance. The return to the car was made by means of the track round the face of Meall a' Chrasgaidh and then over very uneven peat hags and recently burned heather. It was reached about 2 P.M., so that the hotel was made by half-past—previously settled as the zero hour.

Among the many impressions left by the trip, two may be set down. First, our great luck in making the long journey with only two days to spare, and in encountering such excellent conditions, especially as so many have made the pilgrimage to An Teallach only to be repulsed by the weather. Second, the impression, previously rather strong, that "Munros" do not really mean much, reinforced by the fact that the long day on An Teallach with quite a lot of climbing, produced but one, while the easy half-day on the Fannichs yielded two. And perhaps a third—were the multitude so very far wrong as far as the ice-axes were concerned ?