

## ON LOCHS AND LOCHANS.

E. W. SMITH.

EXCEPT the joy of a sunny hour on the summit, nothing can give more delight than to laze by the side of one of the many lochs with which the Cairngorms and neighbouring groups abound. Some of these lochs are encountered on climbing days, but others are themselves excellent objectives for an excursion. -

On a holiday in the Aviemore district a year or two ago I made several such excursions. On that side of the hills there is, within easy access and in glorious surroundings, some of the finest loch scenery in Scotland.

To Loch an Eilein is a perfect evening stroll. Leaving the main road at Inverdrue, a road that looks like a carriage drive through birch and juniper leads to the shores of the Loch of the Island, with its ruined keep and memories of the Wolf of Badenoch. Though this loch by its very accessibility loses a lot of its charm, it still maintains that atmosphere of aloofness to an extent enough to draw you when more distant excursions are out of the question, or to round off a day spent on the hills.

Farther afield, passed *en route* for Cairngorm, is Loch Morlich. Here is a Scotch loch which seems to have found its way from Switzerland. In extent it may not compare with Loch Katrine or Loch Lomond, but its setting with a back curtain formed of the corries of Cairngorm, the Lurcher's Crag, and the entrance to the Lairig Ghru, its fringe of pines and birches, its stretches of golden sand, make it a spot to linger long beside. Continuing through Glenmore, past the lodge of the Forestry Commissioners, into the Glen of the Ryvoan, we came to the Green Loch (one of several of that name, but usually called simply the Loch of the Ryvoan). Here, although still at tree-level, something of the air of the higher lochan could be felt; perhaps it is its greenness or

the quiet, for there is no sound of running water, as, like the Pools of Dee, there is no visible outlet, the waters finding their way underground, eventually to add to the volume of Loch Morlich.

Another day we headed for Glen Einich with no other purpose than to visit the loch of that name. Loch Einich too has a magnificent setting. It runs far into the glen that is formed by the giants Braeriach, Càrn Bàn and Sgòran Dubh. A good driving road leads up past two bothies to the shore of the loch. On the right hand, but out of sight from the road, is another loch, shallow, surrounded by reeds and heather, with the astounding name of Mhic Ghille-Chaoile, the loch of the lanky man's son. This we visited on our way home, deciding to return to the glen next day to explore Coire an Lochan.

Loch Coire an Lochan lies high on Braeriach, only some 700 feet from the summit, in a corrie of red granite, most of the boulders covered with blue-green lichen. The corrie is reached by leaving the glen at the lower bothy, and though we turned down the hill from the loch side, it was only to avoid being late for supper that we did not make the top of Braeriach—we had spent too long mooning by the loch.

It was this excursion to Loch Coire an Lochan that made me think of the many possibilities of exploring the lochans of the Cairngorms, and of how much these little lochs add to the attraction of hill-walking.

On a day in March last year we had a fine bag of lochs. Starting from Spittal of Glenmuick, the majesty of Loch Muick was followed—after a trudge up the Mounth road to the shoulder of the Broad Cairn—by a glimpse of Loch Esk nestling in the shelter of Crow Craigies, demanding that that district would one day be explored. After a distant view of Loch Callater from the summit of Cairn Taggart we dropped down into the glen of the Dubh Loch. The going was over peat hags, and we were glad to get down to the path by the loch side. This is another grand scene. The crags of Cairn

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Selo H.P. Film, Zeiss R10 red filter, 1/100 sec., f11, 2 P.M. April. Directly into the sun. Intense silver sheen on iced snow patches.



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BEN MACDHUI AND LOCH ETCHACHAN

*R. L. Mitchell*

Bannoch on the one hand and the Eagles' Rock on the other make a setting which can be grim indeed and justify the name of Black Loch. Returning to Loch Muick we continued down the north side past Glas-allt Shiel, where the loch with its little island looks its loveliest.

Lochnagar is best known as a mountain seen from the comfort of a car on the Deeside road, but the name really belongs to the loch that lies hidden in the heart of the north-east corrie; a loch of many moods. Almost lost at times in a covering of ice and snow in the winter months, or a mirror reflecting the beauties which inspired Byron, to get to know this loch I think it is necessary to have scrambled up over the boulders in the half-light, to pitch a tent on its shores in the darkness, and to waken in the early hours of the morning to find the cliffs lit with the first rays of the sun, the loch still in the shadow of the Meikle Pap, but reflecting clearly the outlines of the ridges and gullies streaked with snow, till that picture is perfectly duplicated on its face.

Ben Macdhui too has its accompanying retinue of lochs and lochans. Loch Avon, filling the floor of the great corrie between Ben Macdhui, Cairngorm, and Beinn Mheadhoin, greeny blue in the sunlight, or awesome in the shadow, or seen framed between the pillars that form the head of the Pinnacle Gully, is yet familiar to most climbers as the setting of the Shelter Stone. The memory of Loch Avon in the starlight of an early morning is one of the clearest recollections of hill scenery that I have. We had settled down to a cold couch in the Shelter Stone on a day in late April. The frost was intense, and about 2 A.M. some kind of "central heating" was clearly indicated. I got up to boil water, and going outside met an almost unbelievable scene—the loch in the starlight with wisps of white vapour rising ghostlike from its face. Needless to say, beautiful though the sight was it was enjoyed alone, and that only during the time it took to get the kettle to boiling-point.

Loch Etchachan, nestling at the foot of the great crags, frozen over for months in the year; Lochan Buidhe, high up on the plateau (3,683 feet), merely a big pool, but welcome as a guide on a misty day; the green lochans of Derry

Cairngorm, and Sròn Riach, are all encountered on the round from Glen Lui to Glen Derry.

Peaceful, sparkling in the sunlight, refreshing to the eye on a hot day, the Lochan Uaine in Glen Lui of summer becomes a fearsome place when encountered on a blowing wintry day, at least so we found it on a New Year meet. We had scrambled across the slopes of Sròn Riach, hoping to find possible a climb to Stob Coire Sputan Dearg, had given up hope of that and decided to go only as far as the little loch. On getting over the lip boulders we found that the wind had changed its sheltered calmness into a whirlpool of blown snow and ice. We regained the comparative calm of the Lui burn with a new interest in this lochan's infinite variety.

Whether it be the Green Loch below Angel's Peak, the Black Lochan in the corrie of Beinn a' Bhùird, or the fine stretch of water that is Loch Builg, beside the gentle slopes of Ben Avon, it is not the wintry lochs that have the attraction. Beautiful though they are in late spring with their miniature icebergs of green and blue and white sailing on a sea of inky black, it is the calm, rippling loch of a summer day that lures me to its side and puts into the mind thoughts of the folly of grinding farther up the rock-strewn slopes when here is all that heart can desire of the peace of the hills.

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“Opposite is the great mountain of Lochnagar, a most renowned and celebrated mountain, not so much for its own sake as for the sake of a poem Lord Byron made upon it.”

—JAMES BROWN in “The New Deeside Guide,” 1866.

“Deeside a small, bleak valley? Whoever heard tell of such nonsense?”

—The same JAMES BROWN in the same book.