THE MOUNTAIN NAMES OF SCOTLAND.

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Who first gave the mountains their names, and when?

With a very few modern exceptions, such as individual peaks in Skye called after the man who was the first to ascend them (Sgùrr Alasdair, for example), we do not know, and no evidence is likely ever to be forthcoming.

Yet the old maps of Scotland and the topographical accounts of the early travellers in the Highlands are a fascinating study. Though we cannot say with certainty when, or even why a name was given, we can note its earliest appearance, the relative frequency of its occurrence in history, and the evolution of its form into that of the present day.

Some names remain practically the same through centuries; some, and these the majority, change according to the laws of phonetics, and some disappear altogether and are replaced by different names.

The earliest recorded Scottish names, as with all place-names, are names of islands, large rivers, estuaries, and territorial or tribal names. The mountain names only begin to creep in later; at first ranges and large groups have names, particular groups come later, and individual peaks last of all. Furthermore, in early times, a name which now applies to a single mountain, applied to the whole group of hills surrounding the mountain, of which it was the highest or most prominent part. Thus in a fourteenth-century map, "Lomond Mons" appears to include everything between Loch Lomond and the Braes of Balquhidder.

The earliest mountain name on record is the famous "Mons Graupius" of Tacitus, in his account of the military operations in Britain of his son-in-law Agricola in the year A.D. 86. Owing to a scribe reading an M for a U, a mistake repeated down the centuries by every historian and topographer of Scotland to the present day, we now speak of the "Grampian" instead of the "Graupian" mountains. Professor Watson derives this name from the Old Welsh word "crup," meaning a "hump" or "haunch," which is descriptive enough of the main range of the Grampians seen from any of the approaches from the South.

From A.D. 86, for well over a thousand years, we have only ten Scottish mountain names recorded, and these are all various designations of the great ridge, or parts of the ridge, of the Grampians and the hills of Argyll, stretching from west to east right across Scotland. For instance, in 695, Adamnan in his "Life of Columba," mentions Columba's missionary journey over the "Britanniæ Dorsum," the Ridge of Britain, and in 1165 in the "Chronicle of the Scots," we have the Gaelic form of this in "Drumalban," which survives as a district name to this day. These names refer to the western end of the great Grampian barrier: the other names in this period refer to the eastern end, to the Lochnagar massif and the hills on the Perth-Aberdeen-Inverness borders, a district which even now is sometimes referred to under its old name of "The Mounth." In the ancient records this name takes several forms—in the twelfth-century "Description of Scotland" it appears as "Mons qui Mound vocatur" (the range which is called Mound); and in the legend of Saint Andrew in 1279 we have the form "moneth." All these forms are derivatives from the Gaelic "monadh," a mountain or heathy expanse. The importance of the Mounth paths from the earliest times as highways from north to south and vice versa is shown by the fact that what is probably the first mention of a particular part of a range is in the so-called Gough map of the year 1340, which shows the "Monthe colli" and the "Month capelle," the Capel Mounth of to-day.

The earliest specific "Ben" in the records is "Crechanben" (Cruachan), which appears in Barbour's "Brus" in or about the year 1375. But one may search in vain the pages of the early historians of Scotland—Fordun, Hardyng, Major, Boece and others—for any reference to the mountains, except once again the Mounth and the Grampians, and the fabled "marble ranges," which were always placed vaguely in the north, in Sutherland, Ross or northern Inverness; and it is not until Dean Munro's famous description of the islands (1549), the first detailed topographical work dealing with any part of Scotland, that we can discover any interest taken in the hills for their own sake. And even here the list is meagre. The Paps of Jura appear clearly enough as "Bencheilis" (Ben a'Chaolais), "Bensenta" (Ben Shiantaidh), and "Benannoyre" (Ben an Oir); but it is not so easy immediately to recognize the Cuillin masquerading in their earliest form as "Guilvelinii." To complete this first list of mountains we have "Gannock" in Skye, which I should tentatively identify with Glamaig, and "Copefaal" in South Harris, in modern dress, Chaipaval.

The maps of this century are still disappointingly poor in detail, and where there is detail it is often more puzzling than revealing. In the map published in 1573 by the geographer, Ortelius is the first of these obscurities, which is impossible to identify in the absence of any tradition. The curious name "Cnock sur Nuz" may mean "the hill on the (river) Ness," *i.e.*, Tomnahurich, but we cannot be sure.

The seventeenth century is the great age of Scottish topography, and the fact that by the end of this century the majority of the familiar Scottish mountains, besides numbers of the less well known, have appeared on maps or in descriptions of the country, is due almost entirely to the labours of one man as surveyor and topographer—Timothy Pont, who not only inspired an interest in the outlines and general features of the country but himself undertook a detailed survey extending throughout the Highlands and Islands, as a result of which Scotland ceased to be a *terra incognita*, as little known as China or Peru, and was instead as well charted as any country in Europe, and better indeed than many.

Pont's life is a romance in itself, and he was quite the most remarkable individual in the whole history of the mapping of Scotland. His survey was carried out at the beginning of the century, and its results published in the fifth volume of Blaeu's monumental atlas in 1654, a work of primary importance to all interested in the early developments of topography. Unlike his predecessors and many even of those who came afterwards, Pont did not neglect the mountains, and many peaks, both well known and obscure, from Ben Nevis downwards make their first appearance on a map. Many hills in the Lowlands and Borders are included, and the total number of Highland hills is about seventy, a few of these being shown more than once on different maps. The greatest detail, as in all succeeding maps down to the period of the Ordnance Survey, is shown in the north-west generally, and particularly in the area of the three glens—Affric, Cannich, and Strathfarrar. As we move south the detail gets more and more meagre, except that there is an outburst of knowledge in the White Mounth area. Pont was evidently not much interested in the Cairngorms, of which he marks only two—" Bin Awin " (Ben Avon), and " M. Biniwroden " (Ben Bhrotain). It is nearly a century later that Cairngorm itself is first marked on a map. In Pont, Lochnagar appears under its old name of " Bin Chichins " (Cichean).

But this great advance in knowledge still leaves much to be desired. An attempt is made to indicate the approximate shape of some of the larger mountain masses, but no heights are given, nothing but the bare name. In the so-called Macfarlane Manuscripts, a collection of topographical notes and papers of varying dates, but belonging mostly to this century, we have the first recorded instance of the height of a Scottish mountain, and appropriately enough, this is " Kairne Gorum," which is stated to be 4 miles high. The anonymous authority was not, however, estimating the height above sea-level: he was thinking of the horizontal distance to the summit from the valley (Glenmore) from which the hill actually rises, and his estimate on these lines is accurate enough.

The first mountain to be measured scientifically was Schichallion in 1777, but long after this the heights of the mountains were reckoned rather by guesswork and local tradition, and it was not until the end of last century that the old dispute between the supporters of Ben Nevis and Ben Macdhui as to which was the highest mountain in Scotland was settled by the Ordnance Surveyors. Before the days of the Ordnance Survey mountains were generally reputed to be much higher than they are in fact, as witness especially Slioch (3,217 feet) and Ben Attow (3,383 feet), both long noted as being over 4,000 feet, the former even being marked so on a post-war railway poster.

After Pont the next great survey was the military one undertaken after the 'Forty-five in connection with General Wade's roads, and this, with negligible corrections and additions, held the field until the first Ordnance Survey. This, of course, definitely established the position, name, and height of every mountain and hill with an accuracy and attention to detail remarkable even in this age of scientific precision.

To sum up and in general we may say that where mountains are marked on the early maps it is usually because they are landmarks, or still more, seamarks—*e.g.*, the Paps of Jura, and this explains why all the very earliest names are in the islands or on the coast of the mainland. And where they are included in written accounts, nine times out of ten they are so included as marking boundaries between one region and another, and not for their own intrinsic interest. In the early chronicles many lochs and rivers are named, but no mountains, only capes, headlands, and cliffs. In both maps and chronicles the great ranges—the Grampians, Lochaber Hills, Lomond Hills—are mentioned, and certain groups of hills in the north and west appear again and again as being supposedly metalliferous or rich in precious stones—*e.g.*, the "Montes Marmorei" or "Montes Alabastri." Travellers right down to the nineteenth century scarcely ever mention the mountains at all, and when they do, with rare exceptions, it is with disgust or horror. When Boswell became enthusiastic over the mountains in Glen Shiel, Dr Johnson quenched his ardour by calling them nothing but "considerable protuberances." It was due to Scott, of course, that the mountains first became interesting in themselves, but even so it was some time before the first book was published devoted entirely to mountain scenery in Scotland. This was J. Hill Burton's study of the Cairngorms, which came out in 1864.

One wonders what the early chroniclers and mapmakers would have said to the vast body of literature that has come into being since that date dealing with this region alone! Yet it is only right that the Cairngorms should have led the way in this respect, since, when all is said and done, they form the most impressive mountain area in all Scotland.

In this brief article I have been able to give only the barest outline and summary of an extensive field of study, and one which can be combined with the equally absorbing question of the meanings of the mountain names, but I hope that enough has been said to indicate the interest of such a study for all those who are lovers of the hills.

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"The Red Spout . . . may be descended by a party; but the Black Spout . . . will only admit of one person at a time, because if there were two, the second man could not avoid inadvertently dislodging stones that must fall upon the first."—A. I. M'Connochie in "Lochnagar," 1891.

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"They were attempting to ascend Raeburn's Gully by way of the Black Spout."—Press Item, 1939.

Inadvertently ?