

## CAIRNMONEARN.

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CAIRNMONEARN is the most easterly of the Grampian summits which can be called a real hill. It is the most easterly summit in the range which rises to over 1,000 feet in height; and it is conspicuous in lower Deeside, and is visible from various points of the higher ground around the town of Aberdeen. Its top can be reached from the Slug road with a trifling expenditure of energy, and commands one of the best general views which is obtainable of the middle section of the Dee valley. Looked at from the valley its top has a somewhat knobby outline, which suggests to one that the Ice Age, which was so careful in smoothing and rounding off the profiles of most of the hills around, did not quite finish the job in this particular instance. Once these things have been said there is not much that is left to add about Cairnmonearn itself.

The name, however, is an interesting one, and it is the name that I propose to discuss. In the first place it may be mentioned that, so far as I can see, only one suggested explanation of the name Cairnmonearn has appeared in print. The name is there given as referring to "*fearna*, of the alder trees, or *nan-earann*, of the divisions of land." These suggestions are of the good old pot-shotting order. They remind us of the sounds which are to be heard often in the countryside when a man is out with a gun; bang-bang go the two barrels; result, nil. Let us go more systematically about it. Cairn-mon-earn has, as it appears, three component words. What are these words? It is now a great many years since I—and no doubt many others also—imagined that there might be something worth while to be dug out of that name, something of the past buried there which it might be possible to discover. Little assistance was to be

got from the old Gaelic speakers at Braemar, even had one sought it when it was still available, for the hill was outside their area. We have to use such data as we can get; and curiously enough these data have been staring one in the face, so to speak, all the time; but it is only quite recently that it has occurred to me to put them together. The result is an explanation of the name Cairnmonearn, which I think is not only a possible but a probable one.

Suppose we stand at a spot which everyone knows, the opening of the Slug road where, coming from the south, the Dee valley suddenly comes into full view. Cairnmonearn is immediately on our right hand. The road to Banchory, the main road, goes down to the left; and down the side of Cairnmonearn goes a much steeper road, which represents the old line of road. The present main Slug road, from Stonehaven to Banchory, dates from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Most of our existing main roads date from that time, which was the era of the making of turnpike roads. At the Slug itself, if you look down into the bottom of the cut between the hills which gives the place its name, you will see some traces of the old track which preceded the present road; and it is this track which on the north side went down to the right. There were several fords across the Dee; and presumably tracks once led to these fords. But it is not clear where the old Slug road had crossed the Sheeoch, the large burn which comes down from Kerloch.

Before it reached the Sheeoch, however, it crossed a smaller stream just at the foot of the hill. The name of this smaller stream might well have been lost and forgotten long ago but for the circumstance that its crossing was sufficiently troublesome to give it a name. That name survives in the name of the adjoining farm, Darnford. It is in this word "Darn" that I think we can find the explanation of Cairnmonearn. All the old crossings of the Grampians were called Mounth roads. Several of them, the Fir Mounth and so on, still are. This particular crossing which we are discussing seems to have been always called the Slug road in modern times, and tradition has no other name to offer for it. My thesis is that the Slug road, not the present road

but its ancient predecessor along the same route, was called the "Darn Mounth," or, at any rate, the Gaelic equivalent of these words.

Of historical facts to support such a thesis there are none. Its demonstration rests entirely upon Gaelic linguistics, into which we may permit ourselves a little excursion. If you take "Darn Mounth" and turn it into Gaelic you reverse the word order and at once get "Monearn." This result is arrived at by following the ordinary processes of the language. In the first place, we take a nominative "Darn" and put it into one of the commonest Gaelic declensions; this gives us a genitive "Dairn." The change here is not, it may be explained, precisely a vowel change, like that in English "man," "men"; it means that the *n* is palatalised, projected to the front of the mouth. In the second place, suppose we want to make a compound word of this "Mounth of Darn," we write "Mon-Dhairn"; the sound of this is the word we require, Monearn. In such a compound word the *d* must drop out in Gaelic speech. You can get plenty of analogies. To take only one example, the "son of Donnchadh" (Duncan) is "Maconnochie"; the *d* has to disappear in speech by the process which the grammars call aspiration, but for which strict phoneticians would use another name. Incidentally, it is this process which is responsible for the number of times that the letter *h* occurs in printed Gaelic.

Returning to the name of the hill, we can set out the three words of Cairn-mon-earn as Hill (of) Mounth (of) Darn. The reasoning seems to the writer to be quite watertight. There remains, however, one more item which anyone interested can take up. Adjoining Cairnmonearn will be seen its northern outlier which on the map is called Mondurnal, or Mondernal on the later maps. This name looks as if it had something to do directly with the Mon-Darn which we have been discussing; but I cannot explain it. Perhaps someone else will be more successful.