

A WAR-TIME WEEK-END.

E. BIRNIE REID.

ON a Friday morning in mid-September a party of three, one of them the newly joined Peter Millar, set off by the Deeside train. The visibility in town at 8 A.M. was not more than a hundred yards, but the wind appeared to be from the east and we were hopeful that, by the time Upper Deeside was reached, the sun would have penetrated. This, however, was not to be, and, after a short halt at Ballater, we set off, but were fortunate in getting a conveyance to Spital of Glenmuick, with the company of two Rover Scouts on their way back to Fifeshire. On arriving there, nothing could be seen of the hills on either side, and the barometer appeared to have fallen since early morning. Our objective was Glen Clova, and, thanks to the assistance of the Postmistress at Milton of Clova, accommodation had been fixed for that night in a shepherd's cottage. The distance to be traversed was not far, and there was a debate whether to follow the road by Loch Muick to the Black Burn, then ascending to the watershed north of Sandy Hillock and descending to Bachnagairn, or the alternative of getting on the heights right away until the descent of Capel Mount by the Capel Burn. We chose the latter route, at the right of way post half a mile on from the Spital. We saw nothing on the heights. The visibility varied from about thirty yards to a hundred yards and the mist was sometimes ordinary, but at other times of a very Scotch and wetting variety. By the time we got to the foot of the Capel Burn it was raining heavily and we decided to turn back and shelter at the shepherd's cottage at Moulzie. The time taken from Spital of Glenmuick was two and a quarter hours, and, after a minor set-back caused by the unexpected appearance of two big black dogs, a shed was found where we had lunch. After about an hour the rain lifted and we continued beyond



UPPER GLEN CLOVA. FROM JOCK'S ROAD

R. L. Mitchell

Braedownie, where it came on heavier than ever, and the only shelter was under a haystack or under some boulders.

When we reached our lodging in the shepherd's cottage we were wet, but our kindly host and hostess soon had a fire and a hot meal going. Then we were introduced to the members of the establishment, including the children, the dogs, the cat, the pig (Isey), and the cow (Molly), not to mention the ducks and hens. Our host had hoped to be on the hills all day gathering the sheep prior to the coming sales, but the weather made this impracticable, as the cloud was down to practically 1,000 feet above sea level. Later in the evening our hostess allowed us to assist in the preparation of a delicious dish of "stovies," the ingredients for which were peas, potatoes, and fat. She would have added onions, but had yielded to her husband's objection, so that we did not enter the debate. Naturally there was a good deal of discussion on the weather, and our host gave the opinion that the only hope of a good day to-morrow would be a thunder-storm to clear the air. This did not seem likely. The pessimism about the weather was increased by our seeing a heron in flight heading slowly down the river towards Kirriemuir. Locally it is considered a good sign if the flight is the other way. However, in the early hours of the morning the whole household was awakened by a roaring of thunder and a flashing of lightning, with a torrential downpour of rain which seemed to last for more than an hour and completely drowned the sound of the perpetually running water outside our bedroom window. Next day at half-past seven there were distinct signs of clearing, although it was still raining, and our host set off with his dogs for the hills. We had a leisurely breakfast, starting with a large plateful of well-made porridge and the old-fashioned bowl of creamy milk.

As we got to the confluence at Braedownie the weather seemed to be improving at every moment, so we started on the right of way outside Acharn and Glendoll Lodge. The right of way is clearly marked at the point of leaving the avenue, and by the map one can see that no crossing should be made of the White Water. With the wood-cutting operations now in force, it is not easy to find the path, and, with the best of

intentions, we found that we were approaching Glendoll Lodge instead of following the right of way, which runs nearer the river. We had, however, a friendly wave from some of the inhabitants of the Lodge, and continued on our way.

The pathway westward along Glen Doll is very pleasant walking, with a magnificent view up Glen Fee, famous for its Alpine plants, and, after the heavy rain of the night before, the river was well-named the White Water, as were the numerous tributaries which were now waterfalls pouring into the valley. At the top of the Glen, about an altitude of 2,500 feet, the path turns left for the use of stalkers, and at this point there is a notice-board indicating the direction of Braemar. From this point for the next two or three miles the path is not easily seen, but there are a reasonable number of cairns marking the line, provided the weather is not too thick. In thick weather one would have to depend a good deal on the compass for getting through the three miles on the plateau. When one thinks of the traffic that there has been over this path, or "Jock's Road," in the old days, one realises how a path soon disappears unless it is in regular use. In fact, in parts one might get the impression that Jock was nothing more than a rabbit nowadays.

After passing Tom Buidhe on the left we came to the fence on the county boundary between Knaps of Fafernne and Tolmount. Here again we lost the path leading into Glen Callater. After a short rest at the head waters in Glen Callater and a meal, the party agreed, as the weather was now good (although the wind was blowing fairly strongly from the north-west) to go and see Loch Kander, then climb out by the steep though easy western end of the corrie on to the shoulder of Càrn an Tuirc. From there we made a more or less straight line over rather rough country to the top of Creag nan Gabhar, and continued down the gradual slope which landed us at Auchallater. The time from Braedownie to Braemar was nearly nine hours, but, of course, it would have been a good deal shorter if we had not tackled Corrie Kander. We were glad to reach our lodgings about half-past seven, and to find that we were not too late for a meal. Fortunately that night coincided with the finish of double summer time,

and, after the unaccustomed length of day from Glen Clova, we were all very glad of the extra hour's rest.

The last day, Sunday, was filled in by a pleasant walk down the river back to Invercauld Bridge. Thence we followed the shooting road on the old right of way to Loch Builg and Tomintoul till we reached Culardoch, finishing at Inver in time for tea, before catching the bus back to Aberdeen.

