

## BEN VORLICH AND STUC A' CHROIN.

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A SPRING Sunday morning saw us setting out from Strathyre. The weather was mild and close in the valley so that walking was warm work and the pace was made very easy to prevent overtiring at the start. Above, the clouds were down to about the 1,400 feet level hiding all hill-tops, and at times a slight drizzle descended and warned us that we need not expect to keep our clothes dry that day.

About three-quarters of a mile before reaching Kings-house Inn we took to the hill-side and at a gradual slant towards the N.E. began to ascend the ridge. When opposite the inn we faced towards the ridge and attacked it in earnest. Very soon patches of snow were reached and the col between Meall nan Uamh and Meall nan Oighreac became visible right in front. We reached this a little south of the lowest point.

Looking backwards, Loch Voil was occasionally seen and also glimpses of the railway arches in front of Glen Ogle, but otherwise very little could be seen as the mist was low in all the valleys and at this time the rain, though slight, descended steadily. After descending a little into Glen Ample, to obtain a view across the valley we stopped to consider the situation.

At the start our intention had been not to fix the programme for the day till we reached this col and obtained a view of the hills on the other side of Glen Ample, as neither of us had been in this direction before. Unfortunately the mist was so low that nothing could be seen of the nature of the summits on the other side of the valley. Under these circumstances we decided to make first for Ben Vorlich, the remainder of the programme being left open.

The problem now was how to reach Ben Vorlich. After consulting the map, we decided to follow the stream which

came down between Creagan nan Gabhar and Creag Dhubh till the corrie was reached and then make for the col between the former hill and Ben Vorlich and straight up the ridge to the summit.

Looking across the valley we could see Glen Ample Lodge and two streams descending close by while a shallow valley, probably containing another stream, could be seen between them. A little difficulty was experienced in deciding for which stream we had to make.

On the one-inch map three streams are shown within a quarter of a mile of Glen Ample Lodge, the third being the one we ought to follow. The half-inch map, however, showed only two streams near the Lodge, the second being the right one. It was finally decided that the small stream shown on the one-inch map was invisible to us, and careful compass readings seemed to verify this, so a descent was made towards the second visible stream to the right of the Lodge.

The river Ample was soon reached and crossed and, keeping to the north bank of the stream, whose volume assured us that we were on the right track, we began to ascend the hill-side. A foot-bridge crosses this stream near its junction with the Ample and a fine waterfall is passed a short distance up the hill-side. This fall had been a prominent object to us while descending into Glen Ample.

The going at first was rather rough and steep, but as we rose higher became much easier and snow was soon reached in large patches. Occasionally the mist drifted aside sufficiently to give glimpses of Creag Dhubh whose snow-covered rocks looked very forbidding.

As the corrie opened out we gradually kept away to the left and by easy inclines reached the Vorlich-Creagan nan Gabhar col. Here we decided to put on warm clothing and to take first lunch, which was taken standing. Occasionally Loch Earn could now be seen, but otherwise there was little to see but snow and mist.

After lunch the ridge was attacked and proved to be a comparatively easy snow-slope. All view was soon shut out and we rose gradually till a deer fence came in sight. This fence, though about six feet high, was in places completely

covered with the snow on the summit ridge. This snow ridge was carefully followed till the cairn (3,224 feet) became visible. The ridge was not very wide and sloped steeply down on either side, and as a high wind was blowing we took the precaution of keeping to windward of the fence wherever it projected from the snow.

While halted in the shelter of the cairn, suddenly the mist blew aside and Loch Earn came in view down below, and on looking round the whole ridge of Stuc a' Chroin became visible for the first time that day; but only for a moment and then nothing but white mist again. But the atmosphere seemed to be growing lighter, and again and again glimpses were obtained of Loch Earn with the sun shining on it, and the next time Stuc a' Chroin was visible my camera was ready and obtained a snap. Our hopes of the mist clearing now became high and we were not to be disappointed. Twenty minutes after reaching the cairn, Stuc a' Chroin was quite clear and the hills visible beyond Loch Earn as far as the base of Lawers.

The summits of Ben Lawers, Ben More, and Stobinian remained in the clouds all day, and often the Ben More group seemed to be having a very black time, but otherwise, and especially to the south, the atmosphere was beautifully clear. From Ben Vorlich the grandest sight was undoubtedly the fine ridge and snow-filled gullies of Stuc a' Chroin.

Now that the hills were clear we decided to follow the ridge to the latter hill and from our point of vantage on Ben Vorlich we carefully considered the work that lay before us.

We could see that there was only one point that might give trouble and that consisted of a steep-looking buttress that rose about 200 to 300 feet to the final summit ridge of the hill. We left the decision as to how best to attack this till a nearer view was obtained.

We now started down the ridge towards Stuc a' Chroin, taking advantage of any snow-slope that might be glissaded. A fence follows this ridge all the way between the summits and would serve as a guide in thick weather.

Arrived at the foot of the steep part we decided that it was not beyond our powers and a rest was taken before we started the climb. The rock proved to be very rotten and

unsafe and most of the ascent was made on snow. This proved to consist of about six inches of soft snow lying on ice and, hence, was very treacherous, and it was soon thought advisable to put on the rope. A slow advance was then made, steps being cut in the ice, but as this was often only of slight thickness and lying on rock, great care had to be taken to prevent a slip. A halt was made half-way up and a rest obtained on a convenient outcrop of rock, while a photo was taken of Ben Vorlich. The remainder of the slope was then safely tackled and the summit ridge reached sooner than we had anticipated. A quarter of a mile walk along the ridge brought us to the cairn (3,189 feet).

Looking back, the view of Ben Vorlich was very fine. The ridge of Stuc a' Chroin also presented a grand sight, the snow being corniced all along the top and descending in a long sweep of pure white to the corrie below. The view to the south and west included the Kilpatrick and Campsie Hills, Stirling Castle, the Wallace Monument, the Ochil Hills, Dunblane, Ben Lomond, etc. The valleys of the Kelty and Dubh Choirein looked very desolate. Beinn Each also presented a fine-looking peak and it was decided to follow the ridge and climb this hill also.

After taking a second lunch on the summit the ridge was followed towards the latter peak. The walking between the two peaks proved to be rather wet, the snow seeming to delight in giving way and letting one's legs down into icy streams below. The rocky lump (2,389 feet) between the two peaks was avoided by keeping close below its east face and striking the ridge again on the other side. The final 200 feet to the summit of Ben Each was steep but presented no difficulties and we were soon enjoying a well-earned rest on the top (2,660 feet). A final look round and then a descent was made in a S.W. direction towards the stream which flows into Loch Lubnaig. This stream was crossed about three-quarters of a mile from the loch and a short cut taken over the shoulder of Meall Mor, the road being joined about a mile south of the head of the loch. A final two and a half mile tramp along the road and the hotel was reached about 7.15 P.M., in time to do justice to a well-earned dinner.