

SOUTER HEAD.

ON the Kincardineshire coast at Souter Head,* about two miles south of the Bay of Nigg, some excellent rock climbing may be had any summer evening or Saturday afternoon. Although Souter Head has been mentioned in previous numbers of the *Journal*, any description of climbs is usually brief and vague. In the following notes an attempt has been made to describe the main climbs in such a way that their position can be easily identified. The climbs do not exceed 60 to 70 feet, but there is a surprising variety both as regards type and degree of difficulty. The rock is excellent, and it is seldom that one comes upon a loose hold. The climbs are described below going from north to south.

AITKEN'S TOWER (A).—This is a small pinnacle north of Souter Head, surrounded by water except at low tide. An ascent by Aitken is described in Vol. XIII, p. 274. By doing a very difficult hand traverse round the south side he managed to ascend the front of the pinnacle. A brief survey last summer in a bathing costume persuaded us that the south side was the most feasible route,† but the cold wind and the absence of a rope prevented a serious attempt at climbing it. Perhaps someone who has had the benefit of an army training in amphibious operations may manage the ascent at high tide.

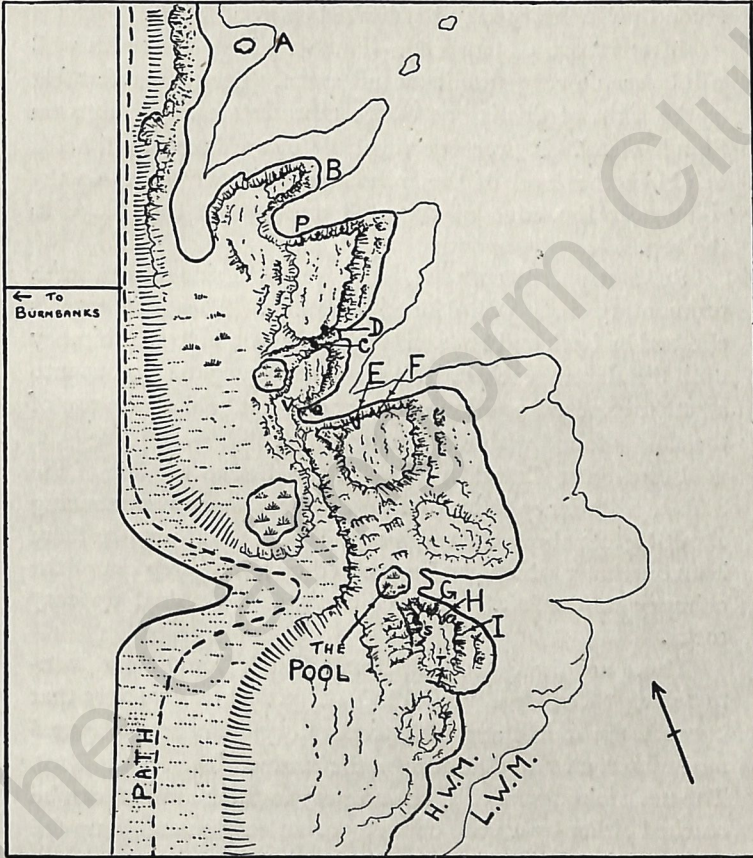
GRASSY PINNACLE (B).—This is the first promontory in the accompanying diagram and is much frequented by sea-gulls. The approach is along a neck of rock to a pitch of 14 feet which is not quite so easy as it looks. A descent can be made from the neck on either side and the pinnacle traversed at sea level without difficulty.‡

* Reached by crossing bridge over railway at Burnbanks and proceeding east through a field.

† Other comments appear later in the article.

‡ There is a possible route (*V.D.*) on the seaward corner of the N. face.

THROUGH ROUTE CHIMNEY (C).—The south side of the second promontory is approached along the edge of a small pool by means of a fine handhold about 7 feet from the ground. Here will be seen a hole in the rock giving access



SKETCH MAP OF SOUTER HEAD

to a V-shaped chimney. Anyone of more than average girth will find this hole difficult to negotiate, and even a reasonably slim person will discover that there is only one position in which his body will pass through. The walls of the chimney are rough with few good holds and the descent is made by

keeping the body wedged in to the narrow part. Although the chimney is short, the ascent is slow and laborious, and anyone who goes down and up without losing any buttons may consider himself lucky.

A few feet out from the chimney the south wall of the second promontory may be climbed on good holds.

MILESTONE CLIMB (D).—Farther* along the south wall will be seen a very prominent milestone. The route a few feet to the right of this is one of the more interesting climbs on Souter Head. It proceeds vertically upwards on small holds to above the level of the milestone and then bears to the right over the edge of the wall and up an easy slope to the top.

SLAB-TOP CHIMNEY (E).—On the north side of the fourth promontory is a well-defined chimney. The first part is climbed by back and knee with the body well in to the chimney until the slab is reached. It is now necessary to step out into a rather exposed position and a good handhold at the top of the slab is found with a feeling of relief.

LONG STEP CHIMNEY (F).—A few feet to the left of the Slab-top Chimney is another and narrower one commencing about 15 feet above the rocks at the foot. Half-way up there is an overhang which can be avoided by a long step out of the chimney to the left.* The climb is then finished up easy rocks.

There are three pools at Souter Head, but the one mentioned as "The Pool" in Vol. XIII, p. 184, is probably that between the fourth and fifth promontory. There are several moderate routes up the rocks on the landward side of the Pool. The neck joining the fifth promontory to the mainland can be reached either by a wide chimney or an easy scramble up the rocks on the right of it.

BIRD'S NEST CRACK (G).—This rises at a moderate angle on the north wall of the fifth promontory a few feet to the left of the Pool. On feeling for a handhold near the top, a climber was startled by a frantic chirping and found he had nearly taken hold of a nest of very young fledglings.

* There is an alternative route on the steep slabs on the right of the overhang.

OVERHANG CRACK (H).—A few feet to the left of the above, a vertical crack rises above a small overhanging slab. After surmounting this overhang with difficulty the climber obtains a firm lodgment in the foot of the crack. For the next few feet there is a great dearth of handholds till the crack slants to the right, when it becomes easier. From the top of the crack a short easy scramble leads to the summit. This climb should be thoroughly investigated with a rope from above before an attempt is made to lead it.

CHIMNEY AND WALL CLIMB (I).—Farther to the left, near the front of the promontory, is a short chimney which looks feasible. A traverse to the left above this takes one to a vertical wall 10 feet high leading to the summit. The wall may be avoided by continuing the traverse round a corner on to easy rocks.

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AITKEN'S TOWER (A).—W. T. Hendry, G. Lumsden (Etchachan Club), and Dr Cruickshank traversed round the north side of the pinnacle on barnacle-covered rock and completed the climb on the seaward side, a scramble of some 25 feet. The ascent, starting by a traverse on the south face, was found to be harder than the previous one. The landward face (*A.P.*) was also climbed, in stocking-soles, and was found very hard, especially at the start.

PARALLEL CRACKS (P).—David Thomas, of Wrexham, first climbed this route solo, in boots. Rubbers are to be preferred. Two parallel cracks on smooth slabby rock set at a steep angle will be found on the face opposite Grassy Pinnacle, providing an exposed climb of about 50 feet.

PUFFIN PERCH (Q).—This lies in the next bay to the south, on the face opposite to the Slab-top Chimney but not so far out. Starting up a slanting crack from the water's edge, a very narrow ledge is reached in about 30 feet. The ledge is traversed to the left for 10 feet, when it peters out. The climb then goes straight up. Dry day climb.

VARIATION EXIT (V).—An interesting variant to the usual route out of this bay will be found at the back of the

bay to the left of the previous climb. It is a short climb on small holds, steep and interesting. Rubbers.

(S) There is a climb on the left wall of the wide chimney leading to the neck joining the fifth promontory to the mainland. A sickle-shaped crack, overhanging in mid-section, leads to the neck. Footholds are exiguous or absent and the climb is hard on the arms—in fact, the hardest climb at Souter Head.

(T) On the south side of this same promontory a good climb starts from a shallow recess, out over the outhang above, and then up a small crack. About 40 feet. This may be done in boots, but as a general rule the face climbs will be found more enjoyable in rubbers.

W. T. H.

