

SOME ARRAN CLIMBS AND RAMBLES.

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A YEAR or two ago five of us (six including the Scottie) paid a visit to Arran. We stayed at the Ingledene Hotel, Sannox, an ideal centre for climbers. The hotel is right on the seashore, commanding glorious views of the Clyde and the distant Highlands, while the mountains rise up immediately behind it. Glen Sannox, one of the loveliest glens in Scotland, opens out close to it and for sheer beauty few places can equal this. The little village contains only a handful of houses, and the wonderful setting of mountains and sea is a glorious reminder of the eternal beauty of the world. Furthermore, Mrs McKinnon understands perfectly the eternal hunger of climbers, and the food at the Ingledene is both excellent and plentiful.

We made a number of interesting expeditions and saw many lovely places. On the day we arrived we went up into Coire na Ciche and explored part of the precipice which rises from the corrie to the ridge of Cioch na h'Oighe, one of the two mountains which guard the entrance to Glen Sannox. The views were fine and we greatly enjoyed ourselves, although some of the rock was bad and there was a great deal of grass and heather on the ledges. The rope was used once or twice, chiefly as a safeguard against rotten rock and vegetation; the standard of climbing was not such as normally to require it.

On the second day we traversed the long, jagged ridge which forms one enclosing arm of the glen, on the side opposite to Cioch na h'Oighe. The first peak ascended was Suidhe Fheargas, an easy though fairly strenuous scramble, followed by the traverse of Ceum na Caillich, the "Witches' Step." This gave us two little climbs, the first being to the summit of Sgurr na Caillich and the second to the gap between it and Caisteal Abhail, the "Stronghold of the Ptarmigan." The descent to this gap led down a series of easy chimneys and short walls, finishing with a steep but not difficult slab

which can be awkward when wet. Caisteal Abhail is not far short of 3,000 feet high and is one of the highest mountains in the island. The whole ridge, from Sgùrr na Caillich onwards, is an interesting scramble; the rock is sound and there is plenty of entertainment for those in search of "problems." Several caves and tunnels provided amusing interludes and in one of these I lost my favourite pipe. The rock scenery is very impressive and the huge towers which abound everywhere have rather the appearance of vast, ruined castles and battlements. The weathering of the granite has broken them up into enormous blocks and flakes of "cyclopean" dimensions, and this type of formation is characteristic of all the Arran ridges.

Our next expedition was to Cir Mhor, a beautifully shaped peak standing like a miniature Matterhorn at the head of Glen Sannox. We climbed it by the Stone Shoot ridge, which starts with a climb on clean rock with some rather dangerous holds, followed by miscellaneous scrambling in the bed of a gully both wet and loose. Our arrival on the small, pointed summit was made with rather unexpected suddenness.

We felt we could not leave without paying a visit to the great mass of rock known as the Rosa Pinnacle. Some good scrambling on this included a descent by a very narrow, steep groove which I discovered and which appeared to be virgin territory judging from the complete absence of nail scratches. We then descended to the pass at the head of Glen Sannox and returned via the summit of Caisteal Abhail. The Sannox face of Cir Mhor is extremely impressive, being about 1,000 feet in height and showing some wonderful slabs and gullies, many unclimbed and a number unclimbable.

After this we spent a day or two walking, apart from some further exploration on Cioch na h'Oighe. The most interesting walk was along the whole ridge of the Goatfell group of hills, from Brodick back to Glen Sannox. It involved the ascent and descent of four separate peaks and many minor towers and pinnacles, the principal tops being Goatfell itself, North Goatfell, Mullach Buidhe and Cioch na h'Oighe. Goatfell is the highest mountain in Arran,

being 2,860 feet high. The view from the top is superb in fine weather; one can see a stupendous array of mountains and islands, including Ben Nevis, the hills of Mull, Jura and Islay, the Lake District, and the mountains of Mourne in Ireland. Close at hand rise the very dramatic little peaks of Arran itself, with the quiet, gently contoured western hills in the background. The gendarmes of the Stachach, Mullach Buidhe, and Cioch na h'Oighe all added interest to the scramble. It was a fine, clear day, with only one jarring note. A large passenger-carrying aeroplane, laden with trans-Atlantic ferry-pilots, had just crashed on North Goatfell and naval ratings were bringing down the twenty-two corpses, which looked very incongruous lying out on the mountainside, each covered with a white canvas sheet. The bits of 'plane had been driven by a strong gale the previous night all over the mountain, a piece of fuselage being found by us at least a mile from the scene of the wreck. Pieces of engine and broken instruments had been thrown hundreds of yards by the explosion which had followed the crash.

Our next climb was the Crack climb on A'Chir. This is reached by the wild, remote Coire Daingean and starts up a steep gully cleaving one of the series of enormous rock-towers of which A'Chir is composed. We thought it the best climb we did in Arran. The crack itself is in three sections and very narrow. It is rather wearing to the skin and to the clothes, since the rock is incredibly rough. It rained hard the whole time and the great gendarmes, wreathed in swirling cloud, looked like immense living monsters. We descended from the summit of A'Chir into Fionn Corrie, where we saw a number of stags in a large herd of deer, and returned over the Saddle to Glen Sannox. We got back to the hotel in one hour forty minutes from the summit of A'Chir, which surprised us, as it appeared to be a long way.

On the following day we climbed Cir Mhor by the Pinnacle Ridge. The views from this ridge were magnificent, all the more so since great puffs of cloud continually surged up from the glen beneath. The ridge, though steep, is very broken up, and the climbing can be made easy or

extremely difficult, at will. The rope was not used at all, since although we kept pretty well to the crest throughout, the pitches were all very short and more in the nature of a series of stiff problems than a continuous climb. With the exception of the bottom pitch, the rock was splendidly clean and firm throughout. We finished up by climbing into a narrow tunnel, emerging finally through the roof. The rest of the climb, to the summit of Cir Mhor, was a fairly stiff scramble on the fine, sound rock of the peak itself. From the cairn we got some lovely views, including an exceptionally beautiful one of Glen Iorsa and the western hills with little flecks of cloud hovering low down over Loch Tanna and the sea. We then again visited the Rosa Pinnacle.

Our next expedition was the traverse of the central group of hills, Beinn Nuis, Beinn Tarsuinn, and A'Chir. This was made in dense cloud throughout, and gave us some good practice in route finding. Once again we were impressed by the immense size of the rock-towers of which Beinn Tarsuinn and A'Chir are composed. One saw them isolated from the rest of the scenery by the mist, and could appreciate their great size better than in fine weather. It was especially awe-inspiring to look down from their tops into the cloud-filled void below, giving an impression of bottomless depth. The huge tower at the end of the Tarsuinn ridge seemed like the end of all things, and for a few minutes we were uncertain whether we were on the right line for the pass below, or not. The pass is named the Bealach an Fir Bogha, which means the Archers' Pass. It was probably a meeting-place for the hunting of deer in the days when these inhabitants of the mountains were stalked with bows and arrows instead of rifles.

The next day we walked up North Glen Sannox, which runs roughly parallel with Glen Sannox itself, and tackled Sgùrr na Caillich from its opposite side. North Glen Sannox is not so impressive as Glen Sannox, but the Garbh Corrie, from which Sgùrr na Caillich rises, is a grand, rugged place. I found what may be a new route up this north-west face of the Witches' Step (the Sassenach version of Ceum na



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ON THE PINNACLE RIDGE, CIR MHOR



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CAISTEAL ABHAIL

Caillich). It involved the ascent of a series of chimneys up to a grass platform, from which a narrow and very exposed, though not difficult traverse of a few yards brings one out about half-way up the ordinary route. The latter was followed by the rest of the party, who found the slab wet and quite difficult.

To stand on the summit of the peak was a feat requiring concentration, as it is extremely small and a series of squalls with heavy rain and hail continually attacked us. This was the last climb for some of the party, who left the following day.

The two of us who remained when the others had returned to England had several more expeditions, all enjoyable, before we too departed for home. I spent an afternoon alone on Cioch na h'Oighe, climbing on the precipice above Coire na Ciche. I reached the summit by the route known as the Fourth Terrace, and descended again to the corrie by the Fifth Terrace. The views were grand, but the climbing was poor and mostly on bad rock. The best rock was found at the tops of both the terraces; the situations were fine, however, and the views wonderful. The Fourth Terrace had one particularly uneasy section, when I found myself climbing an almost vertical wall with few holds of any kind, except loose tufts of heather. When these came away—as they frequently did—their abrupt descent into the corrie several hundred feet below disconcertingly attracted one's attention to the ease with which one could follow them.

Another climb on Cir Mhor, Garrick's climb, was a good deal pleasanter. This is a steep ridge running parallel with the Pinnacle Ridge, but it is much more continuous than the latter and is a better climb. The weather conditions were about the same as they had been when we climbed the Pinnacle Ridge. The finish of Garrick's is dramatic; the ridge runs out to a point and ends suddenly with an overhang. This is avoided by a short descent on the right, and one finds oneself at the point where the Pinnacle Ridge also ends.

This was our last climb, except for the traverse of A'Chir

from the head of Glen Sannox, in very difficult weather conditions, which made this comparatively simple traverse an affair of some difficulty. All the rocks were pouring water and the powerful, incessant squalls nearly tore us from our holds. It was quite the wettest and windiest of the many wet and windy days which we encountered on these hills. The clouds were very low and it was not until we were almost down to the level of Glen Rosa that we emerged from them, on our return.

Apart from mountaineering, we had some most attractive walks and tours of exploration in the island, and were everywhere strongly impressed by its great beauty. Places visited included the "Cock" by the very attractive coast path round the northernmost point of the island; the northern hills with their beautiful sea views and magnificent views of the mountains; Holy Island of the wild goats, Glen Easain Biorach (where I trod on a "viper"), and Glen Iorsa, which are two of the loveliest glens I have ever seen; the old croft road from Lochranza to Sannox; the western hills and Glen Catacol, with their lovely lochs, especially Loch Tanna; and many another remote corrie and hidden lochan in places where the foot of man seldom treads. The island is a paradise of beauty, in colour, form, and sound. The mountains, though not high, are exceedingly fine to look at, and everywhere are to be seen the huge towers and bastions of massive granite blocks and slabs which give these hills their strongly individualistic character. The glens are wild and lovely; the mountains are set well back on either side of them and can be seen in their full height. The sea is nearly always visible, and its close association with the hills makes the whole north of the island a place of rare loveliness and charm. The north-east coastline is a glory of pale green and brilliant red of seaweed-covered sandstone, while owing to the proximity of the Gulf Stream, tropical plants, including palms, grow—and flourish—in the gardens of Corrie and Sannox.

Arran may worthily be ranked with Skye for beauty, as one of the glories of Scotland—perhaps of the world.