

STRATH ARDLE TO SPITTAL OF GLENSHEE.

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DURING the winter months some interesting evenings had been spent in discussing the rights of way in the north-east of Scotland, at the request of the Scottish Rights of Way Society. The rights of way are all old bridle paths or drove roads between public or county council roads. D. G. Moir in his excellent booklet, *Scottish Hill Tracks*, defines a right of way as a route from one public place to another, which has been in use by the public for at least forty years up to some date within the last forty years. A public place may mean another public road, a market place, a village, a church or a churchyard. One of these rights of way is an offshoot of the Cairnwell road between Enochdhu in Strath Ardle and the Spittal of Glenshee. Most of these tracks have a traditional name by which they are still known, and this route is known as the Lairige Bhealaich, after the Lairige burn which runs from the Bhealaich water-shed to the Spittal.

On a fine August morning four of us set off from Braemar by bus to Kirkmichael. For some unknown reason this bus has a habit of not starting until fifteen minutes after the scheduled time and it so happened that, on the day in question, it was a large forty-seater machine. Although not filled to capacity, some difficulty was found in climbing the Cairnwell road to the summit, and, after the boiling water in the radiator had been dealt with, the journey continued and we arrived at Kirkmichael not much more than half an hour behind the scheduled time. From Kirkmichael our route led along the Pitlochry road to the post office and clachan of Enochdhu, which is about 800 feet above sea level. The right of way begins about 100 yards beyond the entrance lodge to Diranean House. At this point there is an old wooden post with a cross arm on which

the writing is now illegible. The start is along a good metalled road which runs almost parallel with the avenue. After passing through the home farm steading at Dirnanear, one arrives at Braegarrie, which had once been a smiling croft. Now the garden is full of nettles, but we found a luxurious growth of honeysuckle in full bloom at the front of the house. The croft is now little more than a sheepfold, and there were signs of recent clipping, including a lame ewe which had been left behind. At Braegarrie the road has ceased and the right of way track is not very easily followed for a bit. To those who are not familiar with the track it is recommended that, on emerging from Braegarrie, they should locate the eminence Elrig (1,900 feet) and head for its southern slopes. Otherwise it is easy to go off the line in the moorland, although there are three or four old posts still standing between Braegarrie and the pass summit (2,100 feet). After our party had left Braegarrie, we saw a herd of Highland cattle and one of these was making bellowing and threatening noises. It was agreed that this must be a bull and he was right on our proposed line of advance. As there were certain signs of panic from the only lady in the party, we decided to make a detour to the right. This took us into some rather marshy land, made interesting by a number of oyster catchers and calling curlews. Our line took us near to a clump of trees at the confluence of two burns, marked on the 1 inch O.S. Map, Sheet 49. We crossed the Allt Dubhagan by a footbridge which turned out to be about half a mile below the line of the right of way. We saw in the distance three workers busily engaged in the damp moorland. We found that they were digging ditches in the peat land to let the water run, or rather re-opening the old ditches which had got overgrown during the war. It was interesting to watch these men wielding the old peat cutting instrument, the flauchterspade, and the graips for removing the peaty soil when cut. After some conversation, we told the men where we were heading for and they pointed out to us a direction post, which we had not seen. The men were all as Highland as the peats they were cutting but did not know the names

of any of the surrounding hills. As we were parting one of them gave us the instruction, "See and no get lost any more." This was accepted cheerfully in the spirit in which it was given. We then proceeded to the post pointed out, and, with the eye, followed the line up the valley of the Allt Doire nan Eun, where the track continues for about 2 miles to the watershed. As the visibility seemed good, we decided to make a round of the heights on the west side of the pass, starting with Elrig, and continuing over Creag Bhreac to Ben Earb (2,619 feet), then by the ridge which leads to the summit of the pass and looks down to Spittal of Glenshee. The hill route was cheered by collecting averins, blaeberrys, and crowberries which were growing in profusion. The heather, too, was a most beautiful sight, and we were fortunate in finding white heather, both the ling and bell type. We found on the heights that while it was cloudy on the north-east, there was a magnificent panorama to south and west, not only the nearby hills of Ben Vrackie, Beinn a' Ghlo, and Glas Tulaichean, but also Ben Lawers and Schiehallion on the south-west and many others.

The line of descent from the summit of the pass to the Spittal of Glenshee is easily followed, although the path is, at times, elusive. The route finishes in a grassy track with one or two gates for the animals and reaches the Cairnwell road at a point just opposite the Spittal of Glenshee Hotel. There is no sign of a post here to indicate the start of the right of way.

In closing, I feel it is of interest to all who love our Scottish countryside to know that the Scottish Rights of Way Society is again becoming a vary active body. They are attending to the re-scheduling of all rights of way, and, in conjunction with local authorities arranging for the re-erection of signposts at all important starting points. These rights of way are well worth exploring and will provide many a happy day for the hill walker.