

AMONG THE ARRAN PEAKS AND RIDGES

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ARRAN has been aptly described as "Scotland in miniature" and indeed it is, for within its 165 square miles is all the beauty of form and colour so typical of the mainland. Nowhere is this more apparent than in its mountains and glens famed far beyond their precincts. The island's compactness is one of its attractions and much can be seen and done during a visit lasting a week or a fortnight. Favoured with fine weather in late spring or high summer a holiday spent in this delectable island will ever remain a memorable experience. When autumn too spreads her tints over hill and glen there is much to charm the eye and mind. Like all small islands Arran has its own individuality, and although the trend of modern times has penetrated into some of its corners enough remains of the Arran of old to put a charm on all who visit it for the first time.

To hill lovers the magnificent grandeur of its peaks and ridges offers an irresistible appeal and awakens the sporting instincts of the rock climber. Seen from the Ayrshire coast on a clear day, the serrated peaks of grey granite reach up to the sky in bewildering array. Often as not, battalions of great white cloud advance over the soaring pinnacles bringing a fine sense of majesty to the scene—it is a challenge to limb and endeavour. Viewed from afar, many of the peaks look forbidding and unclimbable, but on closer acquaintance a somewhat different aspect is appreciated as paths and routes can be followed to the summit of each. There is a strange fascination and wealth of meaning in their names, among them Goatfell (the peak of the wind), Beinn Nuis (the hills of the fawns), Caisteal Abhail (the forked castle) and Ceum na Caillich (the witch's step). The stark setting of the grey precipices is softened by the verdant freshness of Glen Rosa and Glen Sannox, each of whom offers easy access to the towering giants above them. Few, if any, mountain districts in Britain can have two such glens of outstanding beauty and they form an ideal approach to the sterner tasks ahead. Much has been written and said about their respective merits and among the local inhabitants opinion is divided. Artists have added their story in colour, showing the sublime beauty of these areas in all their moods. The glens are divided by a fine ridge known as the Saddle which drops steeply from the north top of Goatfell, and each is dominated at its head by the

bold massive peak of Cir Mhòr. Glen Rosa (its very name is music) is good to look upon throughout its entire length and in its setting has perhaps a little more variety than its rival Glen Sannox. Its outlook towards Brodick with its fine beach and sylvan woods is very attractive. Down through the glen the lovely Rosa stream wends its adventurous way to the shore. Just under two miles from the foot of the glen the fine falls of Garbh Allt race and tumble down a narrow gorge to join the stream far below. Opposite it a long steep ridge culminates in the shapely peak of Goatfell. From the high ground above the falls a path leads to Beinn a' Chliabhain from the summit of which is obtained the finest comprehensive view of the Arran peaks. Looking east the Bay of Brodick and Holy Isle form an integral part of an enchanting panorama which stretches over the Firth of Clyde to the Ayrshire coast and far beyond. From the summit cairn a steep descending path leads eventually to the Bealach an Fhir Bhoga (pass of the bowman) and from here a wonderful view is obtained of A'Chir, the finest rock ridge in Arran. A traverse of this mighty ridge is a difficult proposition and certainly not for beginners, where a slip here, especially in the mist, may result in serious consequences. A path some distance below the summit rocks is, however, much safer for the novice and will lead to other good view points in the vicinity. From the bealach a fairly stiff scramble over a large outcrop of rocks takes one to the top of Beinn Tarsuinn and a grand ridge walk due south from this point terminates at the cairn of Beinn Nuis, quite one of the finest looking peaks in the entire range. The view from the summit cairn of Beinn Nuis is one of the finest seen from a Scottish mountain and embraces a wonderful panorama of mountain, sea and loch. Looking across the narrow Kilbrennan Sound the long arm of Kintyre, with the lonely Sanda Isle near its southerly tip, forms an unforgettable picture. If the day is particularly clear the far off coast of Ireland can be seen. I was fortunate to obtain such a view, nor will I forget the sight of Ailsa Craig rising sheer out of a sparkling sea like some bright jewel. A halo of white cloud round it shared its loneliness to complete a scene that will long haunt the memory. At the head of Glen Rosa the scene is one of mountain grandeur at its finest and looks really like a meeting place of the grandest peaks in Arran all showing their steepest faces to the Glen. Monarch of all is undoubtedly Cir Mhòr with the wonderful Rosa Pinnacle bearing proudly its unique rock formations. Little wonder that it is well known as a Mecca for the rock expert and provides the finest climbs in the whole area. Cir



CIR MHÒR, SOUTH FACE

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Mhòr can be climbed the easy way via the Nuis-Tarsuinn ridge and the path below the formidable A'Chir. The view from its narrow summit is superb, particularly when looking down on Glen Sannox and Glen Rosa. The feeling of height when standing or sitting on this airy pinnacle is breathtaking. A lady with whom I stayed near the foot of Glen Rosa confessed that although she had climbed all the highest mountains in Arran this was the one summit upon which she did not feel too happy. The fantastic drop of the precipices on three sides proved almost too much for her.

Although all the major summits can be ascended from Glen Rosa, it is advisable to spend a few days at Corrie in order to gain easier access to Glen Sannox and its surrounding mountains. Corrie with its whitewashed houses skirting the sea-front and its picturesque cottages spread out so charmingly on the tree-lined hillside above provides a lovely foreground to the Sannox hills. It is an enchanting neighbourhood and a fine starting-off point for Glen Sannox. Cioch na h-Oige on one side of the glen and Suidhe Fhearghas on the other command attention, but both lead to even finer things ahead. From Suidhe Fhearghas a long exhilarating ridge leads to the magnificent Caisteal Abhail (the forked castle). Here is a notable instance of a mountain really looking like its name. Huge bastions of rock, not unlike the turrets of a castle break the continuity of the summit ridge. Before reaching it, a traverse of Ceum na Caillich (the witch's step) has appropriately a little touch of wickedness about it and is not for beginners. From the highest point of Caisteal Abhail the view is tremendous, and in many ways comparable to that of the one from Beinn Nuis. The view to the north of the Kyles of Bute and the Cumraes is exceptionally fine and the full glory of the lands of Cowal and Argyll are revealed at their best, divided as they are by that gem of Scottish lochs—Loch Fyne. The famous mountain ridges of Argyll reach to the far horizon in an overwhelming display of mountain splendour.

No description of the Arran mountains would be complete without Goatfell, not only the highest peak in the island, but also in every way the best-known. Hundreds make their first acquaintance with it every year and for many it is the first and only climb of their visit. Viewed from land or sea it is a handsome looking mountain, monarch of all it surveys, and although an ascent of it is little more than a walk it is nevertheless a memorable one. Few mountains can have such a lovely approach, rising as it does above the sweeping curve of Brodick Bay. The path is perhaps at its finest above the policies of

Brodick Castle, especially in early June when the matchless beauty of the wild rhododendrons in full bloom skirts the path which winds through the woodland. A long slow climb it is to the summit cairn surrounded by its large formations of rock, but once this high viewpoint is attained the climber is well rewarded. An unbelievable panorama meets the eye in every direction as though a giant map was enfolded and placed at one's feet. Rising above loch and sea, glen and village, mountain follows mountain round almost every point in the compass. The Paps of Jura, Ben More in Mull, and from Ben Nevis to the Pentlands the breadth and wonder of the panorama seems never-ending. It is even claimed that on a particularly fine day of visibility Skiddaw in the Lake District can be seen. The Peak of the Wind offers much and it rests in the lap of the gods as to weather and visibility; they alone hold the key to a unique experience.

It is not difficult to understand why mountaineers return to Arran again and again, for the island has a charm of its own and each season brings its own particular appeal. With every visit a new aspect and a new thrill is experienced from the narrow path, the airy pinnacle and the windswept ridge. Here can be found the true peace and grandeur of the everlasting hills.