

## TWENTY-FIVE WAYS OF NOT CLIMBING LOCHNAGAR

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THE crushing responsibilities which beset both President and Meets Secretary on excursions are matched only by the growing familiarity of the scene as the years go by. Golden Square, familiar to the point of boredom, may be enlivened by the boarding of the bus by a member of the wrong club, with consequent eviction, or even by the punctual arrival of a constantly late member.

But when one arrives at the destination and if the destination is Lochnagar and if the day is likely to become wet, one remembers similar days for many years past; similar arrivals; similar routes; one says "Let's try something else." The author of this article has tried something else at least twenty-five times, and passes his information on for the benefit of posterity. Some of the trips are suitable for a short day, and their description may dispel some slanderous suggestions heard from time to time, implying the use of the bus to sleep the day away. All envisage punctual return.

### *Not climbing Lochnagar from Loch Muick*

The circuit of Loch Muick—a beautiful stroll—is hardly adequate for a full day unless it be equally beautiful, and an alternative is to take the steep path which rises beyond the Black Burn and from which one gets an impressive view of the north side of the loch. This path leads one to Bachnagairn in Glen Clova and a return can be made via the Capel Mounth path to Spittal of Glenmuick.

A fuller day is obtained by extending the Loch Muick circuit to include the Dubh Loch, and here again both shores of Loch Muick may be covered. The Allt an Dubh Loch is well worth a visit, and possesses falls and pools which have varying attractions according to weather and temperature. Similar attractions may encourage a visit to the Allt Darrarie, and a search for its source, the Lair of Aldararie overlooking Glen Clova, can be coupled with a return via the Capel Mounth path, or over the fairly level ground to the head of Loch Muick. Other rather similar trips comprise a visit to look down on or descend to Loch Wharral and Loch Brandy, cupped high on the North Wall of Glen Clova, returning by any of a diversity of routes: farther west, Loch Esk, which drains into the South Esk, is reached



by leaving the Bachnagairn path beyond its highest point, and aiming to the south of Craig Gowal, should mist permit.

We must not forget, however, that there are other mountains accessible from Spittal of Glenmuick in addition to Lochnagar, and of these, four provide days of various lengths, depending on the stamina of the travellers or weather conditions. They are Broad Cairn and Cairn Bannoch, an easy pair in kind weather; Tolmount and Carn an-t'Sagairt Mor, possible in such weather, but virtually unreachable if any of the factors which combine to reduce walking speed on the hill come into effect, and the wrath of the Meets Secretary is not to be risked.

Mount Keen is apparently possible from the Linn of Muick, the distance being slightly shorter than from Loch Lee as the crow flies, but as this is not one of the twenty-five ways already traversed it is put into this article as make-weight. The Committee, however, could give due consideration to a future excursion from Loch Lee to the Linn of Muick and Mr Duguid can, in the meantime, perhaps consider how to turn the bus at the latter.

The only Munro on the north side of Loch Muick relevant to this digression is the White Mounth. Although despised by its arrogant neighbour, the White Mounth has four tops—one more than Ben Nevis—and their ascent is an excellent feat, particularly on a misty day, but only if the temptation to take in Lochnagar as well is resisted. The Stuic, however, can be included without loss of prestige. A good way to annoy the Meets Secretary is to descend the Stuic Buttress and go home without telling anybody. Loch Buidhe, one of the six lochs associated with Lochnagar, provides an easier day, and is very suitable when conditions provide a north wind with sunshine, sheltering as it does under the shoulder of the Lochnagar *massif*.

Two minor hills make up the last of the seventeen sensible ways of not climbing Lochnagar from Spittal of Glenmuick; these are Conachraig, 2,827 feet, from the summit of which one gets a view of the top of the corrie of Lochnagar, and Meall Coire na Saobhaidhe, to the north of Cac Carn Beag. In both cases, and in fact in all the instances mentioned, the avoidance of mention of any places which may be passed incidentally to making a normal ascent of Lochnagar is deliberate—balked ascents are not unknown, and one of the truest attributes of a good mountaineer is the ability to decide to turn back if conditions demand it; but, of course, we cannot provide excuses here for the reluctant climber who falls out half-way!



*Not climbing Lochnagar from Ballochbuie*

The privilege which has been extended to the Club in obtaining permission to approach Lochnagar through the Ballochbuie Forest for their winter climbs is greatly valued, and is certainly not to be taken for granted. The Ballochbuie is itself a delightful alternative to any climb, and in a day of snow and sun there are few places more beautiful. The Ballochbuie is a great place to get lost in, but members are recommended to get lost there fairly early in the day, as the emotional stress is then considerably less than when darkness is approaching, particularly if there has been a heavy fall of soft snow.

The alternatives to Lochnagar are fewer on this side, however, and one necessarily excludes Beinn a' Bhùird, itself a major avoidable objective, which can conveniently be climbed on a Ballochbuie trip, but merely because the Invercauld gate is only nine-sixteenths of a mile (as the crow flies) from the Danzig Bridge.

The only Munro accessible under the auspices of this article from the Danzig Bridge is, of course, Carn an-t'Sagairt Mor, colloquially Cairn Taggart. The Feandallacher provides the main route and no difficulty usually presents itself, Cairn Taggart being visible from the main road almost invariably up till the rain starts at about 10 a.m. in winter. Cairn Taggart lies on the path from Glen Callater to Lochnagar, a not too common route nowadays, but one which provides a pleasant walk, although outwith the scope of this article, except as a means of ending up in the wrong valley and being really late! This path commences (or ends) very close behind Loch Callater Lodge and is well marked throughout its length.

Two imposing hills, not Munros, form the dividing wall between Glen Clunie and the Ballochbuie Forest. Creag na Dearcaige lies south of Craig nan Leachda and the ridge provides a pleasant winter walk to the Danzig Bridge with the outward journey through the forest following the Glen Beg Burn. The latter route can be followed to the Sluggan, close to which is Loch Phadruig, associated with Cairn Taggart in the derivation of its name, which refers to a Braemar priest named Patrick. Loch Phadruig has the doubtful honour of not being mentioned in the S.M.C. "Guide to the Cairngorms," presumably due to its lack of association with any hill of importance to the mountaineer.

Loch nan Eun and the Sandy Loch can conveniently be visited via Ballochbuie. These lochans, as they really are, lie in the morning shadow of Lochnagar, and can be covered by alternative outward and



return routes. The Blackshiel Burn, in its upper reaches, affords excellent views of the summit of Lochnagar and lies between Meall an Tionail and Cnapan Nathraichean. The way back by the Allt Lochan nan Eun provides fewer opportunities for getting lost in the Ballochbuie than some others.

On the north side of the main road, we know of three trips which can make an enjoyable day. The first is to visit the Invercauld Arms—known to us best as the Inver; but to avoid this particular trip being too obvious as regards intent, one can go west to what must be a very old road, just opposite the old Bridge of Dee and adjacent to the Invercauld gate. This road branches east, close to this point, and traverses some comparatively unknown country. Middleton of Aberarder is passed, desolate and uninhabited, but one or two occupied farms and crofts come into sight before we reach Inver. Returning to the bus along the main road, one notes the banking of the surface, and has an opportunity of observing the various undertakings en route, which fall principally into the classes of forestry, quarrying, fishing, electricity distribution and telephone communications, all of which can appear in duplicate if conditions are right!

The ascent of Culardoch, which is only 47 feet short of a Munro, can be combined with a walk over the Bealach Dearg, an ancient track and a right of way. The road starts in the vicinity of Invercauld House, and seems to form part of a through route north to Inchrory. A return via the Feardar Burn (and Inver!) provides an interesting round. Instead of over Culardoch, the return can be made by the Gairn, which is ascended as far as its source near Carn Eas, and the Sluggan.

The above list obviously does not cover all the activities of the President and Meets Secretary, whilst attending excursions to Lochnagar. Mention must be made of one occasion, when the route of an overhead line, ultimately to provide for a supply of electricity to the Muir of Inverey, was surveyed. This, interesting in itself, also threw much light on the nature of the country immediately to the west of Braemar, country over which the climber normally passes his eyes in raising them to judge the conditions on the hills.

The writer, reflecting on the derivation of the name Lochnagar, subscribes to its reference to goats. So far as he is concerned they still inhabit the place.