

wonderful views of the Matterhorn, Dent d'Herens, Dent Blanche, and all the Zermatt tops, but an icy wind made lingering out of the question. While the two tigers cramponed up Tête de Chavannes, Sheila and Jean, the novitiates, retraced their steps to the hut, then down the short glacier and long moraine path to Arolla.

Frank and Babs Solari and the Editor now arrived from the Graians—ten hours from Pont to Arolla by taxi, bus, train and bus demonstrating recent changes in road conditions in the high valleys—and joined the others (John had now left) in a wet ascent to the Vignette Hut. Several inches of fresh snow in the evening apparently ruled out anything serious next day, so everyone overslept, including the hut-keeper. But at 5.30 A.M. the sun shone from a crisp, clear sky into the dormitory and the party belatedly set out for the Pigne (3,796 metres). The ladies' rope was courteously allowed to lead up the steepish icy nose which was snow-covered, and where Ginette did a good job in cutting fresh steps up what is usually a well-made staircase. Unfortunately, her feet are more dainty than those of other members of the party, so they had to do some work too, voicing loud complaint in the process. The crevasses on the plateau were all covered, but only one member of the party made any attempt to explore them, and that was a very half-hearted effort.

The view from the top at about 10.30 A.M. was clear and extensive in all directions, with Mont Blanc impressive to the west. Clouds formed again as the main party returned to the hut. Anne and Ginette, followed by two Dutch climbers, descended *via* the Col de Breney to the Glacier de Cheilon, having reluctantly decided that Mont Blanc de Cheilon was not sensible so late in the day, and returned over the Pas de Chèvres. The following day, the last of the Meet, was one of blazing sunshine, and was spent lazing on the lower slopes.

The Meet was a very successful experiment, and gave several members their first Alpine experience. All who were there have memories of good company, good fun, and wonderful days in the mountains. The weather in this rather bad season was relatively kind, with some sun on most days. It is just a pity that more members were not there.

THE SIX TOPS

THE circuit of the six highest Cairngorms appealed to me as one of the finest high-level expeditions in the country which can be completed in a single day. It is an ideal excursion for anyone wishing to spend a long day on the hills with the travelling, of necessity, hard and fast. Interesting information giving the times taken by parties on the traverse, starting at Loch Builg and finishing at Corrour Bothy, appears in *C.C.J.*, Vol. xiii, pp. 98, 191, and I found this useful when planning my own trip. As far as possible I intended linking the best of the published times for the different stages, and hoped to complete the journey in approximately twelve hours, which would allow plenty of time to continue to Derry Lodge for the night. With the Lodge as a haven the round can be abandoned at any stage until one is committed to Braeriach and Cairntoul.

I camped at Loch Builg and set out early on July 31, 1960. There had been heavy rain overnight but after passing through mist on Ben Avon I had a clear sunny day until rain fell as I approached Cairntoul. The traverse, estimated as 28 miles in length with about 9,000 feet of ascent (*C.C.J.*, Vol. xiii, p. 98), certainly requires stamina but is not, I think, so formidable as is generally believed.

My times were:—

Time taken.

Depart Loch Builg	6.15 A.M.	
Arrive Ben Avon	7.50 A.M.	1 hr. 35 min.
„ Beinn a' Bhuidh	8.50 A.M.	1 hr. 0 min.
„ Cairngorm	11.55 A.M.	3 hr. 5 min.
„ Ben Macdhui	1.15 P.M.	1 hr. 20 min.
„ Braeriach	3.10 P.M.	1 hr. 55 min.
„ Cairntoul	4.40 P.M.	1 hr. 30 min.
„ Corrou Bothy	5.25 P.M.	0 hr. 45 min.

TOTAL . 11 hr. 10 min.

A car can be taken to Corndavon Lodge, where a locked gate bars the road to Loch Builg. An attractive return route for the following day is via Clais Fhearnaig, Quoich Water, and the path south of Ben Avon which follows the River Gairn to Loch Builg. This path, which leads off the path which comes up from Gleann an t-Slugain, is not easily spotted but there is a small cairn at the junction.

The highlight of my trip was on Ben Avon. During the ascent the sun appeared and it was wonderfully fresh and clear after the rain. Higher up I ran into mist but the sun shone through intermittently. As I reached the summit ridge with the sun behind me, I was suddenly confronted by a figure—the Brocken Spectre. The shadow was remarkably clear. We waved to one another and then, as my route veered northwards, marched off side by side for perhaps half a minute until the mist thickened and the shadow faded away!

E. F. JOHNSTON.

AN HONORARY MEMBER ON SNOWDON

WHEN a nephew invited me to join a family party for a week's stay in Snowdonia, in September 1960, it did not take me long before accepting, as I had never been in Wales. Although I was close to my eightieth birthday, and it was some years since I had climbed a Munro, there seemed a chance that my legs might still take me to the top of Snowdon. In any case, if they failed, there was a railway. A careful study of the map showed that of some half-dozen routes, the shortest, and that with the least height to climb was the Pyg track from Pen-y-Pass, a distance of about $3\frac{1}{4}$ miles, with an average gradient of about 1 in 7 and a net height of 2,410 feet to climb to the 3,560 feet summit. It looked easy on paper, and only later did I find that the guide book described it as the "most arduous" track.

With my nephew we started from Pen-y-Pass on a beautiful clear morning—I think the only day that week the summit was clear of cloud. For the first half-mile—mainly over grass—there was very little track to be found, then a rough rocky track led steeply upwards to the crest of the ridge below Grib Goch. Here my nephew left to ascend by the narrow ridge of the latter while I contoured along its side into the corrie below Snowdon summit. The "arduous" work was mostly here, as the ridge side rises very steeply and consists of scree and loose rock amongst which I very soon lost the track. More than once I was tempted to turn back, but, when half-way up, the sight of a train puffing along the top of the ridge urged me to plod on. In due course the railway line was reached and, after an easy half-mile, the summit hotel some 100 feet below the summit cairn.

There was time for a cup of tea with my nephew and then he left to descend by the Y. Lliwedd ridge, while I made the remaining ascent to the Cairn. After admiring the excellent view the descent was made by train to Llanberis.

The following day I joined the family party and ascended to a cloud-hidden summit by train—a somewhat tedious journey of three-quarters of an hour. Leaving the others to wait for the return train I walked down the usual tourist route to Llanberis, a rather rough, not very interesting and in places very wet track of about 5 miles. Altogether I found Snowdon a very fine mountain with its narrow ridges enclosing deep corries filled with blue lakes.

W. MALCOLM.

THE SHELTER STONE VISITORS' BOOKS

THE records of visits to the Shelter Stone, as given by the entries in the Visitors' Books covering the period from 1924 to 1954, have been studied by Mr B. H. Humble. He has abstracted details of numbers of visitors each month, and noted how many gave addresses from other parts of Britain and from abroad.

It is recognised that the records are incomplete, as pages have been lost or misplaced, and numerous visitors have been unaware of the existence of a book. It is impossible, too, to distinguish between day and overnight visits. Nevertheless, the total figure of 13,147 visitors in thirty years is impressive.

From 1925 to 1928, the annual total is between 100 and 150, exclusively in June to September. Thereafter, the numbers rise steadily until during the '30s some 500 to 800 visitors per annum are recorded, with a peak of 1,102 in 1933. The season is now March to October with a few visitors in January. Throughout the 1939-45 war, the number averaged about 300, with an exceptional peak of 602 in 1943, when 243 visitors are recorded for August. From 1946 to 1954 the annual numbers are between 400 and 700.

The highest number in any month is 381 in July 1932 (more than in any preceding year!), while in the whole thirty years only 17 people signed the Visitors' Books in February and 52 in November. There have been regular visitors in the summer months from Western European and Commonwealth countries.

The rather tattered Visitors' Books are in the Club Library. It is hoped at a later date to make fuller use of the most interesting figures which Mr Humble has obtained. We appreciate the amount of work which this involved, and are grateful to him for making them available to us.

It is interesting to refer back to an article by James L. Duncan (*C.C.J.*, Vol. xii, p. 212) which recounts the initiation of the Shelter Stone Visitors' Book and discusses the records of the first year, which are in general agreement with Mr Humble's figures.

HILL PATHS

FROM time to time there are suggestions in the press to the effect that hill tracks and routes on the high plateaux should be marked by a system of paint marks similar to that employed in certain continental areas. Where there is any need for such route indication, our hill tracks are generally adequately marked by cairns or stonemen, and the sponsors of the paint scheme appear not to appreciate

the dangers into which it could lead just those novices it is designed to help. Paint marks on boulders become almost invisible in thick mist or at night, and disappear entirely under snow or ice, conditions during which cairns are much more efficient as well as being at all time much more in keeping with the countryside. Most useful of all, of course, are a map, a compass and the ability to use them, and until this is achieved, the inexperienced hill-walker should not venture without expert guidance into situations where difficulty can arise.

The hills are best left undisturbed, as free as possible from all interference, visited only by parties fully competent to do so. If hill paths must be signposted, let it be only at the lowland access point. There is nothing more distasteful than a cast-iron signpost on an open plateau or in a distant valley. Some feel much the same about bridges.

It is gratifying to know that the Badenoch District Council, which has been listing rights-of-way and permitted tracks in its area, does not consider paint-marked paths to be desirable, whilst the Association of Scottish Climbing Clubs also favours cairns. Some education regarding the purpose of these is required, as it is not uncommon to see them being demolished by members of summer parties who, let us hope, fail to appreciate their significance.

THE MORRONE MOUNTAIN INDICATOR

AN indicator identifying the Cairngorm tops has been erected on the lower slopes of Morrone by the Deeside Field Club. This indicator was designed jointly by our Hon. President, Mr Hugh D. Welsh, and Mr J. Fenton Wyness.

THE GARBH COIRE MOR SNOWFIELD

It is seldom that snow does not persist throughout the summer somewhere in the Cairngorms, generally the snowfield in Garbh Core Mor of Braeriach being most persistent, as mentioned by Colonel Baird in the preceding number. This snowfield melted completely in September 1933 (*C.C.J.*, Vol. xiii, p. 253), but there appears to be no other record of its disappearance until September 1959, when its total absence was reported and illustrated by Alex. Tewnion (*Aberdeen Press and Journal*, October 16, 1959).

EASY ACCESS

THE success of organised skiing on Speyside depends on guaranteed access to good snow over a reasonable period between Christmas and Easter. For most of the visiting skiers whom the hotels hope to attract, access implies mechanical transport to the ski slope. After considerable discussion, funds became available in 1958 to meet the costs, some £40,000, of a motor road from Loch Morlich to near Jean's Hut on Cairngorm, at about 2,500 feet in Coire Cas between the Faicail and Sron an Aonaich from which respectively the Coire Cas and the White Lady ski-runs descend. Construction had proceeded far enough during the summer of 1960 for traffic to reach Jean's Hut, although the road was not officially opened, when, on August 4, some hundred yards of the new road and the bridge over the

Allt Mor were swept away by floods. A number of vehicles were marooned for several days and there was considerable confusion among some 40 tourists, unaccustomed to the fury of the elements in the hills, who were temporarily cut off until police, firemen and volunteers facilitated the crossing of the swollen stream. Repairs, estimated to cost as much as £15,000, were in progress when, exactly three weeks later, a further storm resulted in the temporary bridge and roadway being carried away once more.

These happenings were possibly anticipated by those who appreciate the havoc caused regularly by cloud bursts in the hills, although they occurred sooner than most expected, and before the effects of winter on the road could be assessed.

One result of the damage to the road was to delay the construction of the projected chairlift from Jean's Hut to the 3,500 foot level on the upper slopes of Cairngorm. This £30,000 project raises many problems, as, inevitably, inexperienced and ill-equipped tourists will wander over the summit plateau in dubious weather, and may have to make their own way down should storm conditions or mechanical failure preclude operation of the lift, or should poor visibility render the lift difficult to find.

These projects sponsored by the Cairngorm Winter Sports Development Board are therefore regarded with mixed feelings by the climbing community, on whom falls much of the responsibility for search and rescue and who generally prefer the hills as they were, but who realise that they are necessary for the prosperous development of skiing on Speyside. It is good to know that the sponsors appreciate many of the problems which may arise.

The following note, by one of our younger members, clearly illustrates the possibilities of mishap even in summer conditions. The lessons which it teaches are obvious; fortunately his party was physically strong enough to deal with the severity of the storm, which might well have produced freezing conditions.

STORM ON MACDHUI

ONE day in September 1959, at the end of a glorious summer, I experienced, along with several companions, an unpleasant variety of conditions, which, it turned out later, were confined to the Cairngorm mountains. The rest of Scotland basked under cloudless skies, and in fact it was under these skies that we left the Rothiemurchus Forest, bound for Ben Macdhui early one morning.

The party entered the gloom after crossing the lip of Coire Cas, but did not yet experience the fearful wind velocity which was to buffet us later in the day. Through the drifting cloud we looked first down to the green waters of Loch Avon and then to the play of the mists round the Barns of Beinn Mheadhoin. Ben Avon and Beinn a' Bhuird were entirely free from mist. We made a short stop by the burn which tumbles down Coire Domhain, but not for long, as the cold of the ever-increasing wind chilled us, calling for movement.

We made for the Lochan Buidhe, but owing to the mist, which was becoming very thick, we passed between it and the Lairig Ghru. Here for the first time we were caught in the full force of the wind, which in its terrible strength flattened us against the maze of boulders and gave us an uncomfortable suffocated feeling. The many bearings we took to the summit of the hill were useless, for high winds and accurate compass courses do not go together. Many of us found movement

exceedingly difficult, and when we reached the sangars which cluster round the summit, the wind brought rain. From here the top was easily found.

Soon after leaving the summit, we stopped to wait for two of our friends who had lagged behind. We waited in vain, for their forms did not materialise out of the white curtain surrounding us, and so we had to label them lost. Much as the clinging wetness of our clothes and the biting cold contrived to send us to a warm fireside, it was our duty to turn back and look for them. So it was that for the next hour and a half we trod backwards and forwards across the inhospitable Cairngorm plateau, amid the mist, the rain and the wind. Blowing whistles was no good because the wind swept the sound away. We soon found that we ourselves were lost and it was with luck that we stumbled upon the framework of meteorological instruments, the position of which I was fortunate in knowing.

A council of war was held, mouth to ear, and we all decided to hope that our friends would find their own way home. Soon we arrived at a hollow filled by largish pools, obviously part of the burn which we hoped to be the Feith Buidhe. Two climbers struggling with a flapping tent confirmed this, and we ascended the rise towards Cairn Lochan. At this point, by a stroke of luck, our friends were found sitting on a boulder, resting because one was suffering from cramp in his back. We helped him into a warm, dry pullover, and once again got moving.

Great was the relief and joy when we fell out of the mist into Coire an Lochain, and saw at last the longed-for picture of the Rothiemurchus Forest. Once we had reached the Clach Bharraig bridge we were again in the sun, and this, with the long walk home, soon dried out our sodden garments. That night, by the fireside, we could look back and say that perhaps we had enjoyed it after all.

It may be of interest to note that Aberdeen had a very hot day, in fact one of the hottest of the summer. This all shows that the Cairngorms have their own type of weather, a dangerous thing perhaps to those who are not expecting it.

HUGH R. SPENCER.

THE LITTER PROBLEM

At recent meetings of the Association of Scottish Climbing Clubs concern has been expressed regarding the condition of many of the more popular summits and hill tracks. It is seldom that members of climbing clubs are responsible, but they can do much by example and by judicious propaganda, as well as by assisting in cleaning-up operations.

The most objectionable constituents of the mass of litter accumulating at the more frequented spots are the many tin cans and bottles which, unless they are properly dealt with, or, better still, taken away again, become an almost permanent feature of the landscape. Unfortunately, the worst offenders are often groups sponsored by responsible organisations or even by official bodies who should know better. In certain places, for instance where the hill paths meet public roads, the local authorities could help by providing more litter bins and emptying them regularly.