

THE SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY EXCURSION

TWO MEMBERS OF LONG STANDING

THE overnight excursion on June 23-24, 1962, marked the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the foundation of the Club at the Dairy-maid's Field by Loch Avon on June 23, 1887. It was followed by a luncheon at the Fife Arms Hotel, Braemar, at which the future prosperity of the Club was toasted by a large company.

The idea was to walk over Cairngorm, 4,084 feet high at the last count, descend to the Shelter Stone, there to hold a Committee meeting at midnight, commemorating the Founding of the Club, and then to repair to Derry Lodge over Macdhuì, or by way of Coire Etchachan if one boggled at the full combat course. There were 43 starters, many of them members of long standing, in whom hope had triumphed over experience. The hopes were not realised: well could we have done with the hot lunch of soup and boiled beef served on the summit of Cairngorm to the 31 members who attended the first meet in July 1889. Those were the days, when earth was nigher Heaven than now!

It was a popular meet, and various extra bodies, all of whom claimed to have booked but whose names could not be found on the official list, turned up to join the transport at Golden Square. The President has been known to be kind-hearted and on this occasion promised to take them as far as Queen's Cross, where the problem persisted. However, there were some absentees, and so, the problem resolved, the party set off for Glenmore, all in fine fettle, on a sunny summer Saturday. Some anxiety showed itself as we ran into low cloud and rain in the Glens of Foudland: it cleared as we reached Grantown for a successful tea, descended again at Nethy Bridge, and by the time we set out from the Cairngorm car park for the midnight rendezvous at the Shelter Stone we knew the worst—at least we thought we did, which was perhaps fortunate! On a similar occasion in Glencoe, the kind-hearted President had exercised his discretion in favour of the comfort and well-being of the party, but had had some difficulty in living it down. This memory hardened his heart, and he said to himself "This is the 75th Anniversary Meet. To Hell with comfort, they will go and get wet this time!" And they did.

Although George Taylor had averred that he rarely encountered

rain on Speyside, it was evident that, on this occasion, it was raining on both sides of the mountain, with hail and snow higher up and a gale to boot. Consequently, most aimed at reaching the Shelter Stone by the shortest route, by Coire Raibeirt, although one or two missed the way and, at least, may properly claim to have made an excursion. We, too, might have made an excursion but for Martin Nichols, who produced a compass, waved it vaguely in a south-easterly direction, and George said he thought that was about it and nobody could well disagree with a Speyside man, so we came into Coire Raibeirt without benefit of map. There doesn't seem to be much to this business of route-finding when one analyses it.

By the time Cairngorm summit was reached the President knew that all but one responsible party were ahead, and that weather conditions had deteriorated to such an extent that further contact would be unlikely. The story of the night from this point on is thus inevitably a personal one, but since it must be similar in design, if not in detail, to that of other groups, it is perhaps worth recording. It had its moments.

From Cairngorm, Bain, Ewen, Taylor, Nichols and party set off for Coire Raibeirt into the teeth of the blizzard and in gathering gloom, running at times in the hope of getting into at least comparative shelter in the shortest possible time. We sympathised with Martin Nichol's expression of parental anxiety on losing contact with his daughter; rather querulously he added: "She has the sandwiches". The only other memory here is of hurricane, hail, hurry and splash. Down Coire Raibeirt and along the shores of Loch Avon things were quieter, and it was possible to see through the murk that there were still vast quantities of snow in the upper reaches of the Feith Buidhe and Garbh Uisge Beag area. Mentally, but perhaps that was because of weather concussion, it seemed just a step now to the Shelter Stone. Some step!

As the open ground of the Dairymaid's Field was reached we met the full fury of the gale and continued progress became almost impossible. The President was brought to a standstill from time to time and Ewen, with water gushing out through the welts of his boots, kept charging up and down the bank of the rapidly rising Garbh Uisge in the purely academic exercise of searching for stepping stones which had long before been completely submerged.

At the head of Loch Avon the wind blew furiously, great sheets of

spray being lifted off the loch and the swollen Feith Buidhe tumbled as furiously through the snowfields over black rocks. The north face of Macdhuì, magnificent at any time, looked even more impressive in the midnight murk. I waited for Martin Nichols to acquaint him with the fact that wading the Feith Buidhe was inevitable, the Shelter Stone being on that side of the stream, as Euclid would say, remote from our station. Bain hardly glanced at the stream: "Heavens," he said, "my sweet peas will be taking a terrible battering." My recollections really end, Mr Editor, with that shattering *non-sequitur*. I know we waded the Feith Buidhe, that the meeting of Committee was cancelled, that we groped our way in mist and dark to Loch Etchachan and thence, at our best speed, to the Derry, as wet as I have ever been in my clothes. I remember that Bain produced a small Thermos flask, filled, I supposed, with hot coffee, the top of which he filled and handed to me. To my surprise it was the authentic brew of Speyside, which I had never seen carried in a Thermos before; but of course Bain is no ordinary fellow. A few slept for an hour or two before making for the celebrations at the Fife Arms, of which I have no clear recollection. For me the affair will always be associated less with those far events at the Dairymaid's Field than with that near horticultural disaster at Milltimber.

The stretch from here up to the Shelter Stone provided the most exhausting effort of the night, but in due course, spurred on by the thought of sanctuary, food and drink, the rendezvous was reached. There were voices to the left, voices to the right, voices ahead. Every boulder in the area, it seemed, was sheltering someone, but there was no sanctuary. The Shelter Stone was full, very full. The President had intended to hold a Committee Meeting at the Stone, co-opting all those present for the occasion, but he couldn't get inside and the Secretary could not, or was unwilling to be, found. Somewhat later the Secretary was located in the Hutchison Memorial Hut, but it transpired that he had omitted to bring the Minute Book, so the whole idea had to be abandoned.

After a quick sandwich and coffee, off we went again, determined to be done with the affair at the earliest possible moment. As we climbed out of Glen Avon, Peter Howgate and party, out of Derry Lodge, hove in sight. It was difficult to understand why they should be laughing and gay, but that was the memory of the moment.

From this point to Loch Etchachan is a featureless flat at any time,

and there was a fair amount of water en route. Despite the help of a torch, visibility in the intense dark and driving rain was limited and Loch Etchachan was only located with certainty when Ewen went in a little deeper than usual.

As far as could be seen through the steam, the Hutchison Hut was fully occupied, so we pressed on as rapidly as our sodden clothes would allow, reaching the Derry Woods as the first grey light of dawn filtered in. It was just possible to make out a couple of tents in the woods. As we looked one flew away on a wisp of wind. It is regrettable, but we laughed our first laugh for a long time and hurried on regardless. Dry clothes, food and drink, a seat by a roaring fire, and Derry has never been so comfortable.

Sunday was bright again, all were safely back and it was once more a happy party of 60 or so who foregathered at the Fife Arms, where we were glad to greet those who, unable to cross from Glenmore, had come from all around to be with us at lunch.

For this historic outing the former custom of recording the names of those present has been resurrected: it is hoped that the lists are accurate, as the official records are not complete and it will be appreciated from the foregoing that the organisation became somewhat chaotic. Your editor, who was in the wilds of Maryland at the time and unable to make a personal check, has therefore had to rely on the recollections of those whose impressions of the same incidents apparently tend to differ!

The main Shelter Stone group comprised Messrs Bain (2), Baxter, Bothwell, Campbell, Dickson, Ewen, Gammie, Gerstenberg, Grant, Hay, Irvine, McAndrew (2), Macpherson, Moir, Nichols, Page, Quarterman, Smith, Swift, Taylor, Watt (3) and, among the ladies, Adams, Alexander, Arthur, Baxter, Beddard, Cordiner, Dickson, Jenkins, McGregor, McNab, Melvin, Murray, Nichols, Rodger, Stewart, Summer, Thomson and Watt.

The parties reaching the Shelter Stone from Derry Lodge comprised Messrs Anton, Deans, Howgate, Esslemont and 2 guests, Mrs Jessamine, Mrs Howgate and Miss Thomson. Train and McDougall were at Derry, while the Honorary President, H. D. Welsh, and 11 others, Mr and Mrs Murray, Mrs Quarterman, Mrs Taggart, Miss Davidson and Messrs Crawford, Duff, McAllan, Malcolm, Reid and Smith, joined the party for a commemorative lunch at the Fife Arms in Braemar, making a total participation of some 66 members and guests.