

II ROBIN J. GRANT

Nothing disturbed the quiet mountain air as I pulled myself up from the steepest part of the pinnacle on to the flat roof, where the guide was belaying. I climbed past him to meet Ian Stephen, who was waiting for me. We proceeded to the top together, shaking hands cheerfully to congratulate each other on having climbed the Inaccessible Pinnacle of Sgurr Dearg in the Cuillins of Skye – and on having thus climbed all the Munros in Scotland. But was it all worth it?

It is not rare nowadays to hear fellow-mountaineers talking of ‘Munro-baggers’ with a definite note of contempt in their voice. ‘Munro-baggers?’ they say. ‘They climb Scottish hills only in order to clock up another Munro, so that they can boast about how many they have done.’ A mountaineer who goes as far as to collect tops, of course, is an even more despicable creature. To go actually out of your way to bring in all the tops of a mountain such as Ben Avon seems to them quite senseless.

But surely such people are missing the point. What does the average walker know of hills such as Bidean a’Choire Sheasgaich, Lurg Mhór, Ladhar Bheinn, A’Mhaighdean, An Riabhachan, Seana Bhràigh or Beinn Mhór in Mull? Huge tracks of land, notably Knoydart, between Lochs Nevis and Hourn, the area between Loch Maree and An Teallach, the hills at the heads of Loch Monar and Loch Mullardoch, and several other regions, remain virtually unexplored to the walker who is not a Munro-bagger, with the possible exception of the adventurous camper who has the time and equipment to explore the areas just for their own sake. The reason for this, of course, is that not only are these areas very remote and difficult of access, though not to the same extent as they were in Sir Hugh T. Munro’s day, but also the mountains are not well known. Most walkers could place a mountain such as Bidean nam Bian on a map, but probably relatively few could pin-point Lurg Mhór. Poucher’s ‘Scottish Peaks’ describes in great detail routes up famous hills like Ben Cruachan, Beinn Laoigh, Ben Nevis, the Five Sisters of Kintail, Liathach, or Ben Hope, but makes little or no mention of the remote, but in some ways more interesting, mountains in many parts of Scotland.

The second aspect in which the Munro-bagger gains more than the ordinary walker is, I think, in understanding and appreciating the character of a hill, which should surely be a very important factor among mountaineers. To achieve his aim, the Munro-bagger is forced

from time to time to climb in adverse conditions, conditions which might be sufficient to persuade any 'sane' person to stay off the hill-tops. Having motored the breadth of Scotland to climb a particular hill, he will not readily return empty-handed. The mountaineer who goes on a hill in bad weather will certainly have a completely different concept of its character from that of the fair-weather walker. In general, I feel that the former will have more respect for the hill concerned. For example, I climbed An Sgarsoch on a calm, warm, clear summer's day, with the result that it seems to me that it has little or no character, apart perhaps from its remoteness; but I am sure that if I were to re-visit this hill on a cold winter's day when the slopes were caked in ice, I would have more respect for it thereafter. On the other hand, Beinn Mhanach at the head of Loch Lyon I climbed on a misty, snowy day, but probably appreciated the hill more because of it.

Now that I have climbed all the Munros, I do not regret it one bit. Munro-bagging has introduced me to some very fascinating areas of Scotland – particularly Knoydart – and has given me a general concept of the topography of the Scottish mountains, thus enabling me to pick out my favourite areas and re-visit them. I would certainly support this form of mountaineering against anyone ready to condemn it, and I can recommend it to anyone prepared to try it.

III DONALD HAWKSWORTH

My last Munro was Culvain, climbed during a warm June traverse from Loch Arkaig to Loch Eil. There is no doubt of the sense of relief I felt on reaching this Ultima Thule. The daemon had been laid to rest, exorcised from the system! Now I can start to enjoy my climbing again! The question of 'What now?' arose. Some very energetic people have been round them all again – Hamish Brown three times. Then there are the 'Tops', and even the 'Deletions' – unfortunate hills eliminated on the revision of the Tables as being unworthy. No, I thought, I've been fanatical enough in climbing the 277 Munros – the 'Tops' don't interest me, the 'Deletions' even less.

I could, however, see more reason in polishing off the 3,000-foot tops 'Furth of Scotland', especially in view of the fact that I had climbed some of them already. The result of this decision was an unforgettable holiday in Ireland, where, in a week of exhilarating Easter weather, Patrick Scott and I made a whirlwind tour of the Irish 3,000-footers. These fall into four groups – Wicklow, Galtymore, Macgillicuddy's