

A LOCHNAGAR CLIMB

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I had climbed Lochnagar by various routes and the time had come to see the hill from a different perspective. An interest in microlight flying had consumed some of my past enthusiasm for the hills, but certainly not extinguished it. On a calm, sunny summer day - a rare combination of late, I rigged up my microlight and took off from the picturesque grass strip in Premnay heading for Lochnagar. With a patient and stoical passenger to take photographs, we climbed steadily over the Alford area and the relatively friendly green pasture below us for the more forbidding approaches to the foothills beyond Aboyne. At 1500 metres with a bird's eye view of a dull Morven flattened out in it's new perspective, all was calm around us. It is one of the enlightening experiences of life to discover that, contrary to the expectations of a hillwalker or anyone else travelling on foot, the air around us, especially on a fine clear day with pretty white cumulus clouds is constantly on the move, sometimes disturbingly so.

As we passed by Morvich heading for the entrance to Glen Muick the fields started to disappear disconcertingly. One of the dubious pleasures of microlighting using a two-stroke engine is that you fly as if you were back in the 1920's and 30's, carefully ensuring that there is a large field within gliding distance! One of the advantages, or is it a disadvantage of having walked round areas such as Lochnagar, is that you are well aware that the bowling



Lochnagar and its corrie with the Stuic and Loch nan Eun beyond

green texture of a field seen from 1200 metres or more is often an illusion, particularly if you have traipsed over that bowling green in some discomfort in the past. Passing over to the west of the car park at Loch Muick, the elastic delusion which persuades you that you can still glide to a safe landing place finally snaps, and you are aware that from now on the engine had better keep its sweet and constant note. The old story of the ancient aviator, who on being asked what the propeller was for, replied that it was to keep him cool, is quite apt. You certainly feel very warm when it stops.

On the approach to the corrie loch, Lochnagar shows a magnificent vista of grandeur, texture and colour, rich in light and shadow. Enjoyment of the view was instantly curtailed by the sudden sharp buffet of a rotor wind rolling over the top of Cac Carn Mor, causing already tense knuckles to clench harder on the control bar.

Seeing Lochnagar from 1500 metres or so does underscore the effect of countless walkers on the mountain skin. Erosion stands out very sharply. There are scores of people on the hill this glorious day. We do not linger in the area, conscious that any one person's pleasure can intrude into the enjoyment of others. We sweep like a bird totally exposed to the elements, exhilarating in the marvellous view and gradually descending, head back for Loch Kinord and the promise of a cup of hot coffee to thaw out exposed hands in an open cockpit and frozen feet on a hot July day. Why is it that so many pleasures can only be fully enjoyed with a sufficiency of discomfort - followed by a good dram?

