

# The Cairngorm Club Journal



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VOL. XV.

1941.

No. 82.

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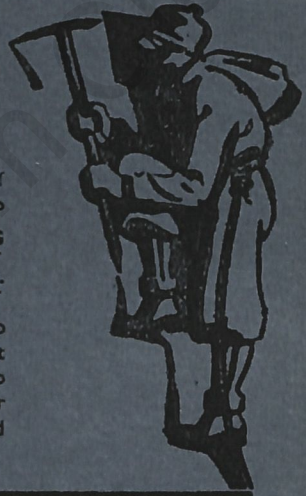
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EDITED BY

WILLIAM A. EWEN.

## CONTENTS.

	PAGE
Symphony, by Hugh D. Welsh - - - - -	149
Cairnmorearn, by William M. Alexander - - - - -	161
Gathering the Forest, by P. A. Spalding - - - - -	164
Days on Devil's Point, by R. O. Mackay and J. B. McDonald -	171
Remembered Scenes, by A. Landsborough Thomson - - - - -	177
Ski Notes, by R. O. Scott - - - - -	186
In Memoriam - - - - -	188
Proceedings of the Club - - - - -	190
Notes - - - - -	193
Reviews - - - - -	195

### Illustrations—

Galenstock (*frontispiece*); Devil's Point; Romsdal Hills from Molde; Over the Hills to Torridon; Weissmies Range from the Fletschhorn.

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*September 1938*

GALENSTOCK

*R. L. Mitchell*

## SYMPHONY.

HUGH D. WELSH.

WHEN war conditions caused me to curtail my summer vacation and abandon a contemplated return visit to the Cuillin I had to content myself with revisiting some well-loved haunts in the Cairngorms. And I comforted myself by dipping into my store of recollections and by comparing the sensations and impressions aroused during wanderings in the Cairngorms and the Cuillin. In the following random notes I have endeavoured to give expression to these thoughts and something of what the hills mean to me. The hills produce indescribable effects on one's mind and spirit, effects that are not fleeting but imperishable.

But before I dip into the treasure-chest of recollections and almost forgotten happenings I would like to record a rather curious experience I had after my return from a stay in Aviemore in August of 1940. With two companions I had put in a long, glorious day on Cairngorm and Ben Macdhui, with a visit to Loch Avon and the Shelter Stone. On both summits we had encountered a gale and bitter cold, with a clammy mist, but at Loch Avon and the Shelter Stone conditions were ideal. Our descent to the loch was by Coire Raibeirt whose ruddy rocks were warm with sunshine and whose stream was lively and sparkling. Loch Avon was intensely blue and scintillating; the heather, a tide of delicate purple, washed over the lower slopes and down to the water edge; the great rock faces soared up into a cloud-flecked blue sky, and the distant rush of the Féith Buidhe and Garbh Uisge filled the corrie with music. Four days after, I attended an organ recital in St Machar Cathedral in Aberdeen. The church was dim and soothing and the music flowed in enfolding melody. After the first two or three bars of Bach's Choral Prelude, "In Thee is Bliss,"



the dim walls of the cathedral seemed to recede and I found myself, with my two companions, back among the softly glowing heather above Loch Avon, in warm sunshine, with a sensation of spaciousness, the loch blue and sparkling, and the soft music of wind and water filling the corrie. When the last notes of the Prelude died away the vision faded and the cathedral walls closed in, and it was a minute or two before I realised where I was. I have still to hear that Prelude!

The Loch Avon corrie is thronged with the ghosts of brave days whose voices echo in the memory and crowd round trying to attract attention, but it is difficult to select, so insistent are they. My first visit to Loch Avon was on a dismal rain-filled day in July 1904. We had come out of the mist-choked Lairig an Laoigh from Derry and floundered through the sodden peat hags and moraines round the base of Beinn Mheadhoin. The sullen water, gloomy and leaden under the low-pressing mist, with nothing but rain-laced, grey vapour hiding unknown country beyond, gave me a feeling of unreality and despair as well as of awe and apprehension. Above the sound of our squelching progress, wet to the skin, there came a whisper of wind and the elusive hush of falling water. There was a sensation of something sinister and oppressive. Now that I have come to know the corrie well, mostly during bad weather, the feeling of sinister oppression is gone. In its place is a curious detachment, expectant, as if my other self were lifted up into the mist seeing the hidden grimness and beauties within it.

Storms in this great corrie are experiences deeply engraved. One July day my brother and I were coming off Cairngorm by Coire Raibeirt, fighting every foot against a ravening gale. We were benumbed and soaked, and crouched for a few minutes in the meagre shelter of a boulder below the crags above the loch. The whole corrie was filled with a grey curtain of lashing rain that drove along on a roaring, bellowing wind. The loch surface was a tempestuous sea of racing, leaping white waves, and we could dimly see them breaking in fury on the sandy shore at the loch outlet. The Féith Buidhe slabs were covered completely with roaring

white water, and the Garbh Uisge was one huge waterfall ; from the crags and precipices, even above the bellow of the gale, came eerie shrieks and a deep booming diapason as the pressure of the wind tore through the gullies and crevices. A feeling of exultation at being privileged to witness such a display, and of awe at the fury and grandeur completely transcended the knowledge that, somehow or other, we had to cross the Féith Buidhe as it raged through Maghan na Banaraich so that we might reach the Shelter Stone! That was a task that occupied us some considerable time!

But when one looks upon Loch Avon gently rippled on a day of sunshine and warm air, framed in a pageant of colour, with a myriad of wind whispers stirring in the grass and heather, one's whole being is filled with that deep contentment which comes with the touch of something well-loved, as if new life is absorbed from the mere sight of it. On such a day, viewed from a high perch on the water-smoothed rock of the Féith Buidhe, this deep blue treasure in its lovely cradle lifts one up into a world of fancy and longing.

Loch Etchachan, under any conditions, is one of the loveliest places in the Cairngorm massif. In wet conditions, such as one gets in the high places, many people might have another opinion, but for some elusive reason this high-lying loch, even in wild weather, when the surroundings are completely hidden by cloud, is fascinating. When I come upon it from the corrie below, or across from Loch Avon, there is a distinct feeling of spaciousness, of freedom, and comfort, and the shores appear to be glowing with soft colour. Many an hour I have spent in the lee of a boulder, thoroughly wet, near the water edge, listening to the slap and rush of the waves beating against the stones, and the faint musical notes drifting down from the rocks above. In spite of the discomfort there is a feeling of being home.

Nights spent under the stars by the shore of this loch were like being in another world, surrounded by invisible presences whose voices whispered comfort and peace. On such nights it seemed a waste of time to be under cover. Moonlight had almost washed out the sparkle of the accumulating stars ;

the water lapped softly, and the flood of night had silenced the wind whispers. There was a peace so soothingly oppressive that it brought tears to the eyes, and we imagined the mountains lived and breathed, and sensed the awe that issues from the great hills.

I have often wondered what are the thoughts of the great company who, on their way through the Lairig, in most cases, wearily skirt the Pools of Dee. During the many times I have sat by their crystal-clear water, on two occasions only has a bright day favoured me. Then the screens glowed with colour and the soft splash of the March Burn was music. A feeling of great contentment lulled me and spoken word seemed desecration. As a contrast, a day of gale, laden with cold rain or sleet, surrounded one with a confused babel of roaring and eerie wailings as mist was rent by the shattered rocks above, but somehow there was a feeling of satisfaction and elation.

Winter days, especially during wild weather, are indelibly engraved in memory. On these ventures one's thoughts are so fully occupied with the work of battling against the elements that sensations are not clearly registered. But even during the stress of effort one can take the time, if so inclined, to look around for something to relieve the strain. I remember once, during a Club excursion in 1936 when the ascent of Lochnagar was attempted from Ballochbuie, having the task of taking down two of the company into the Forest again. It was a day of heavy mist and wind-blown fine snow, and as I mounted up again to rejoin the company, solitary in the blinding obscurity, I had a buoyant feeling of elation, and now and again stood up to watch the fine dry snow being carved by invisible tools into tiny cornices, plumes, and fantastic flowing designs. I had no apprehension at being isolated in that whirling, white, dim world.

One sees rather curious things during a stormy winter day. On the wind-polished snow above the headwaters of the Glas-allt, which flows into Loch Muick, we watched for a few minutes the energetic hurrying of a soft green caterpillar, one of the Tipulids, as it bored into the wind. Near the same spot that day we heard a series of loud claps just

like those given by pigeons when they commence flight, and looking in the direction of the sound saw bearing down upon us a rapidly whirling pillar of snow which enveloped us in a blinding cloud of fine powder. My first impression was one of apprehension that I would be lifted up, and, even though I weigh fifteen stones, there was a distinct suction upwards as the "snow-devil" swept over!

Of the brilliant winter days there is one that will ever keep its radiance. Lochnagar was under deep snow, but the surface was encrusted with what I can only describe as a carpet of frozen feathers. Mist was entered at the Fox's Well, but as the ascent was made by the ice-encrusted boulders at the corrie edge, thin bright lances of sunlight pierced downwards. Gradually the mist sank silently into the corrie, curdling into a pearly rosy grey cloud that lay stretched like a floor from rim to rim of horizon. Slowly and silently through it rose the ice-covered cliffs, brilliantly sunlit, glittering, majestic, beautifully cruel. Above was a cloudless blue sky; a spell had been laid upon the wind so that it slept, and there was a listening silence. All that was seen of the rest of Scotland was the upper half of the Cairngorm massif, glittering white against a blue sky, and the Spectre of the Brocken moved on the cloud floor far below us.

Hours of darkness spent on the summits are moments in life when closeness to Nature makes one introspective, and the hills appear more intimate. It has been my good fortune to spend many nights on the Cairngorm summits with and without the moral support of the shelter of a tent, and the experiences are things to be cherished, even on occasions when weather conditions were by no means comfortable. The airy peak of Lochnagar on a night of wind laden with cold rain or sleet is a place on which few would care to spend the hours of darkness, but to do so is an experience not readily forgotten. The summit rocks appear to offer shelter from the elements, but it is a delusion, for I have never yet had the satisfaction of securing immunity from the demons that whoop and snarl round their smoothed surfaces and search into the nooks we fondly hoped would protect us. A feeling

of isolation and a sensation of airy height always accompany any vigil I have had on this peak in wet, boisterous darkness, and I fancy I hear demoniac laughter and hoarse voices chanting. The curious thing is that the only other tops on which I have experienced these sensations under similar conditions are Ben Avon and Beinn Mheadhoin, where the nights were spent in niches in the summit rocks. On the broader summits the feeling of height is absent and isolation does not appear so complete. To be aloft on Cac Càrn Beag on a calm, mild night of clear, full moon, with a sea of pearly cloud less than a hundred feet below stretching as far as the eye could reach is a privilege not readily forgotten. Such good fortune was given me in June last year. The pearly grey cloud below was gently ruffled and glowed softly in the bright moonlight with blushes of rose, lavender, and pale gold. An elusive whisper of water filtered up from the Sandy Loch corrie, accentuating the silence. Peace and awe enfolded me, and I was very near the boundary of Heaven.

Before I first penetrated into the recesses of the savage Cuillin of Skye and sat up on their shattered peaks and ridges, I had frequently wondered what my reactions would be to such a contrast to the great broad backs of the Cairngorm giants. I have never quite fathomed what prompted me to forsake for a time the familiar granite for the sinister volcanic battlements in Eilean a' Cheo. Perhaps it was because my father had climbed there, or that I was carrying out as a kind of pilgrimage an abandoned plan of two or three years before. Skye is a mystic isle, shrouded with legendary tales of fair women and great heroes, and in such an atmosphere of glamour and romance it is quite likely that one's sensations would be in tune with it. And so I found it.

I well remember the first day I had under the shadow of the Cuillin. It was in August 1935, and I left Sligachan and trudged up the glen and into Harta Coire. From the tawny moors the grim peak of Sgùrr nan Gilleann seemed to leap up into a gently moving grey canopy, and in the glen was the soft sound of water and the plaintive cry of a bird.

Often I halted and looked across the colourful moors and lower slopes to the sweeping ridge, shattered and pinnacled, that culminated in the airy summit. Then, as always since, the Cuillin seemed unreal, faerie, aloof, austere, yet overwhelmingly near. I found myself trying to walk quietly, as if I feared to awake some slumbering demons or spirits. I was humbled by the overpowering loom of forbidding watered rock that had a peculiar velvety appearance and whose colours, so soft and deep and rich, changed imperceptibly from dark grey to plum, then to grey-green and violet-blue.

To really sense the power of the Cuillin one has to be in the closest contact with them, to grasp them in outstretched arms, lean on their riven rock, to be enveloped in their dense mists, and saturated by their clear waters. In blue soft days they are full of peace, but when the Atlantic gales shriek and whoop in the corries and tear across the peaks and ridges the hounds of Cuchuillin seem to be let loose.

So many memorable days have been lived among the rock-encircled corries and on the shattered crests of the Cuillin that I cannot do more than indicate in a very inadequate way their effect upon me. It was a great thrill to scramble up the great expanses of boiler-plates, smoothly flowing and rounded, and come out on the skyline among riven and shattered pinnacles and battlements soaring giddily up from seemingly unclimbable faces. The rock was so black and grim that it gave me a sense of unreality, and in some instances oppression tempered with apprehension. But acquaintance lulled all that to some extent, and even yet when I grasp the roughness and feel the comforting safe grip of boot nails, I am conscious of a sinister brooding that is inexplicable.

Visitors to Skye usually make a pilgrimage to Loch Coruisk, and of course I had to view this gloomy cauldron. My first view of it was one dull, depressing day, with occasional fine drizzle, from high up on Sgùrr na Stri. Frankly, I was disappointed! The water of the loch was dead and leaden, the rock faces surrounding it were of a dull blue-black colour, featureless and uninteresting, and cloud was low.

It was certainly a depressing, gloomy place, a haunt of evil spirits, but I felt cheated. I do not know what I expected to find, but I do know that my watch stopped early in the day and refused to go during the remainder of my stay on the island!

My second visit was made a day or two later. A gale swept down Glen Sligachan carrying with it what appeared to be half the Atlantic, and I well remember how our Hon. President, Dr Collie, who was staying at Sligachan, advised me not to venture as conditions were much too violent. However, youth will have its way, though several times during the fight up Glen Sligachan I thought how foolhardy I was to pit myself against the fury that ravened, snarling and tearing, down the glen. When I got to the crest of Druim Hain the wind pressure was so great that to make any progress I had to crawl on hands and knees till the downward slope commenced. All the way down to the shore of Loch Coruisk by way of Loch a' Choire Riabhaich and the roaring stream running from it I had to fight every foot against wind pressure and lashing rain. But through it all I experienced a sensation of elation and thorough enjoyment, and was astonished when I realised I was endeavouring to raise my voice in the words of the 124th Psalm to the tune "Old 124th"! Coruisk was worth seeing and hearing! What I could see of it was a mass of roaring white waves sweeping in fiendish fury against the rocky shore, the spray being lifted off like clouds of smoke. The rain came in from the Atlantic almost horizontally and had a distinctly salty taste; the surrounding rock faces were completely hidden in a grey, watery curtain, but from them came the wail and shriek of tortured and enraged spirits.

Only once have I been down at Coruisk in sunshine. Descending from the rocks of Sgùrr na Stri with two companions I had the misfortune to twist an ankle rather badly. For a few minutes I was sweating with pain, but while I was wondering how I was to get back to Sligachan I found myself thinking how beautiful and colourful the great corrie was and how fortunate we were to see it under these conditions. The loch was blue and sparkling; the vegetation

was freshly green and touched with gold and russet; the great cliffs soared enticingly, patterned with colour and shadow, up to a serrated edge clear against a washed blue sky. There was peace and a great awe, and we were reluctant to speak lest we be overheard.

Incidentally, I prevented my ankle swelling by keeping on my boot, and returned to Sligachan in sudden mist and rain, by way of Druim nan Ramh and the upper end of Harta Coire.

Days on Druim nan Ramh, that great, massive, ribbed crest towering to the north above Coruisk, are not readily forgotten. My first acquaintance with this magnificent gem was on a day of fitful sunshine through lacy mist lazily trailing caressingly across the watered faces. It was warm and calm, and I had settled myself in a niche on a grassy ledge near the skyline looking down on the rippled water. The air was at rest; a faint whisper of falling water eddied across from Meall na Cuilce and Sgùrr Dubh Beag, whose wet rocks gleamed like silver. The stillness was stifling, and the distant faint croak of a raven emphasised the silence. I felt so insignificant, so unimportant, perched so high up, a speck of dust in the immensity, quite incapable of taking in the magnificence and solemnity of the great, brooding amphitheatre in whose depths ghostly shapes seemed to lurk. The only sign of life was a beautiful brown butterfly, with black-spotted wings aspread, at rest on the warm rock beside me.

Harta Coire, where a bloody fight between Macleods and Macdonalds was waged long long ago, attracted me in a strange way. Many an hour I spent in its echoing recesses, in fair weather and in foul, hoping, perhaps, to hear the clash of arms and shouts of battling clansmen about the Bloody Stone round which the fight was fiercest. Harta Coire curls round the spreading base of Sgùrr na h-Uamha, and at its upper end is barred by a high rock sill above which lies Lota Coire hemmed round by the great walls of Sgùrr Beag, Sgùrr nan Gillean, and Bruach na Frithe. The exit from this corrie is sentinelled by the sinister Bhasteir Tooth, which frowns down from the crest. I had often looked down into Lota, but never passed through it until



one never-to-be-forgotten day when a young lady and I had come up into Harta Coire from Sligachan with the mist close and dense and rain incessant. We were to attempt the passage of Lota Coire to the crest above, and neither of us had any idea of what was before us. All went well till we arrived at the rock sill over which the stream spread itself in white flood. So close and thick was the mist that visibility was restricted to a few feet. We could see no easy way up, so decided to follow the stream as much as possible. The face over which the white water poured was unclimbable, but a way was found up the rock on our right, though at one point we climbed up through the falling water. During the climb my constant thought was the hope that we would not have to come back the same way! With great relief we surmounted the obstacle and stood on the floor of Lota Coire. Around, the dense grey vapour pressed close, rain fell in torrents, and the wind tore at us. From all sides came the sibilant hiss of innumerable streams pouring off the cliffs. We were drenched, and the contents of our rucksacks sodden. Curiously enough, in spite of my anxiety as to what was ahead, my sensations were those of elation and abandon. The remainder of the ascent was easier than expected; in fact there was no difficulty, and when we got under the streaming black rocks of Sgùrr an Fionn Coire the mist rent above us for a few seconds and we got a heartening glimpse of the Bhasteir Tooth, which from that point presented a cheering likeness to the profile of our Hon. President! As we topped the crest it seemed as if the demons of the peaks were enraged at our success, for the gale roared and snarled round us with increased fury, the rain-harried rock rasped, and now and again a fragment from aloft crashed down to the scree below. After the roughness of Lota Coire our descent through Fionn Coire was a pleasure in spite of its wetness, but as we lost height the wind died and the rain ceased, and after crossing the Allt Mòr an Fhionn-choire near the track to Sligachan from Bealach a' Mhaim with the current well over our knees, we looked back in evening sunshine up to where the peaks were enveloped in black cloud with rain showers passing across the lower slopes. The

expedition was one that taxed one's endurance and patience, but it was made all the more enjoyable by the uncomplaining cheerfulness of my companion who now and again broke into song with great vigour! Two or three days later a return visit revealed a perfectly easy route whereby the rock sill was surmounted.

My last climbing day in Skye was a fitting end to a glorious spell among the Cuillin. My companion of the Lota Coire adventure and I had spent a long day in a pageant of colour in Coire na Creiche, exploring among the rocks of Coire Tairneilear and among the Fairy Pools in Allt Coir' a' Mhadaidh. Our day was over, and we were lying in the warm sunshine, among the softly coloured heather and russet grass, gazing up towards the lovely peaks bathed in golden light, the shadows of clouds drifting over them taking on strange shapes and forms. No sound was heard but the soft lisp of water, the whispering of little wandering winds among the grass and heather, and the soft call of a raven. There was a wonder and an unearthly glory about that evening light with the sky radiant with the magic of sapphire, gold, rose, and emerald. I was lost in contemplation, and was brought to earth again by my companion asking what I was whistling. I was not conscious of whistling, but, after adjusting myself to the fact that I was really in Coire na Creiche, said I had not yet given it a name! I had been so played upon by the magic beauty of the treasures around me that chords had been touched and the vibrations were taking form. And so came to life an air we called "Coire na Creiche," and in course of time I put together two verses:—

Oh, Bruach na Frithe looms high o'er the corrie  
All russet and gold in the westering glow.  
The Pools of the Fairies are blue in the sunlight;  
The red of the rowan is mirrored below.  
Coire na Creiche.

The peaks are aflame in the fire of the sunset;  
The shadows are grey in the corries below.  
The song of the waters is hushed into silence;  
The call of the raven comes softly and low.  
Coire na Creiche.

And so with these thoughts I comforted myself when holiday plans were nebulous and fleeting. I could still sense the deep silence of the hills, see the mists lift and drift away, revealing the wonders and glories, and watch the grey spin and scatter of a rain-threaded afterglow. As these thoughts lightened the anxieties of the uncertain days in which we live, the words of an unknown writer often came to me:—

“The freedom of the open air be yours to know and love,  
With friendliness around you and the windy heavens above;  
Not treading easy paving stones for ever and a day,  
But may you have the will to go the rougher, lovelier way.”



## CAIRNMONEARN.

WILLIAM M. ALEXANDER.

CAIRNMONEARN is the most easterly of the Grampian summits which can be called a real hill. It is the most easterly summit in the range which rises to over 1,000 feet in height; and it is conspicuous in lower Deeside, and is visible from various points of the higher ground around the town of Aberdeen. Its top can be reached from the Slug road with a trifling expenditure of energy, and commands one of the best general views which is obtainable of the middle section of the Dee valley. Looked at from the valley its top has a somewhat knobby outline, which suggests to one that the Ice Age, which was so careful in smoothing and rounding off the profiles of most of the hills around, did not quite finish the job in this particular instance. Once these things have been said there is not much that is left to add about Cairnmonearn itself.

The name, however, is an interesting one, and it is the name that I propose to discuss. In the first place it may be mentioned that, so far as I can see, only one suggested explanation of the name Cairnmonearn has appeared in print. The name is there given as referring to "*fearna*, of the alder trees, or *nan-earann*, of the divisions of land." These suggestions are of the good old pot-shotting order. They remind us of the sounds which are to be heard often in the countryside when a man is out with a gun; bang-bang go the two barrels; result, nil. Let us go more systematically about it. Cairn-mon-earn has, as it appears, three component words. What are these words? It is now a great many years since I—and no doubt many others also—imagined that there might be something worth while to be dug out of that name, something of the past buried there which it might be possible to discover. Little assistance was to be

got from the old Gaelic speakers at Braemar, even had one sought it when it was still available, for the hill was outside their area. We have to use such data as we can get; and curiously enough these data have been staring one in the face, so to speak, all the time; but it is only quite recently that it has occurred to me to put them together. The result is an explanation of the name Cairnmonearn, which I think is not only a possible but a probable one.

Suppose we stand at a spot which everyone knows, the opening of the Slug road where, coming from the south, the Dee valley suddenly comes into full view. Cairnmonearn is immediately on our right hand. The road to Banchory, the main road, goes down to the left; and down the side of Cairnmonearn goes a much steeper road, which represents the old line of road. The present main Slug road, from Stonehaven to Banchory, dates from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Most of our existing main roads date from that time, which was the era of the making of turnpike roads. At the Slug itself, if you look down into the bottom of the cut between the hills which gives the place its name, you will see some traces of the old track which preceded the present road; and it is this track which on the north side went down to the right. There were several fords across the Dee; and presumably tracks once led to these fords. But it is not clear where the old Slug road had crossed the Sheeoch, the large burn which comes down from Kerloch.

Before it reached the Sheeoch, however, it crossed a smaller stream just at the foot of the hill. The name of this smaller stream might well have been lost and forgotten long ago but for the circumstance that its crossing was sufficiently troublesome to give it a name. That name survives in the name of the adjoining farm, Darnford. It is in this word "Darn" that I think we can find the explanation of Cairnmonearn. All the old crossings of the Grampians were called Mounth roads. Several of them, the Fir Mounth and so on, still are. This particular crossing which we are discussing seems to have been always called the Slug road in modern times, and tradition has no other name to offer for it. My thesis is that the Slug road, not the present road

but its ancient predecessor along the same route, was called the "Darn Mounth," or, at any rate, the Gaelic equivalent of these words.

Of historical facts to support such a thesis there are none. Its demonstration rests entirely upon Gaelic linguistics, into which we may permit ourselves a little excursion. If you take "Darn Mounth" and turn it into Gaelic you reverse the word order and at once get "Monearn." This result is arrived at by following the ordinary processes of the language. In the first place, we take a nominative "Darn" and put it into one of the commonest Gaelic declensions; this gives us a genitive "Dairn." The change here is not, it may be explained, precisely a vowel change, like that in English "man," "men"; it means that the *n* is palatalised, projected to the front of the mouth. In the second place, suppose we want to make a compound word of this "Mounth of Darn," we write "Mon-Dhairn"; the sound of this is the word we require, Monearn. In such a compound word the *d* must drop out in Gaelic speech. You can get plenty of analogies. To take only one example, the "son of Donnchadh" (Duncan) is "Maconnochie"; the *d* has to disappear in speech by the process which the grammars call aspiration, but for which strict phoneticians would use another name. Incidentally, it is this process which is responsible for the number of times that the letter *h* occurs in printed Gaelic.

Returning to the name of the hill, we can set out the three words of Cairn-mon-earn as Hill (of) Mounth (of) Darn. The reasoning seems to the writer to be quite watertight. There remains, however, one more item which anyone interested can take up. Adjoining Cairnmonearn will be seen its northern outlier which on the map is called Mondurnal, or Mondernal on the later maps. This name looks as if it had something to do directly with the Mon-Darn which we have been discussing; but I cannot explain it. Perhaps someone else will be more successful.

## GATHERING THE FOREST.

P. A. SPALDING.

FOR many of us the war has meant the end of holidays. Particularly for those of us who live in the south, and are accustomed to identify holidays with the Highlands. Naturally we do not complain, although two years without the sight of a mountain or a breath of Highland air, when for twenty years or more we have not once missed the journey to the North, makes the ordinary privations of war seem of little account. But naturally also, since we cannot renew or add to them, we tend to fall back on our existing stock of memories, and with the aid of maps, photographs, old diaries, and notes of expeditions, to re-create the Highland atmosphere. Now, indeed, the virtue of the faithful diarist is rewarded! Not even a detailed set of photographs can recapture the magic of a long day on the hills so well as the notes written down on the spot, especially if the disappointments and moments of disillusion are as exactly recorded as the successes. The days which seemed at the time most arduous and least pleasant, turned by the alchemy of time into "something rich and strange," so often outshine, in length and intensity of memory, days which passed in pure pleasure and without untoward incident.

But it is fatal to trust to memory alone—memory, which tends ultimately to paint its pictures all in glowing or all in sombre colours, losing the light and shade of actual experience. In front of a good fire beside the tent or in the hotel lounge after a long day, I have often cursed the demands of my importunate diary, when all one asks is to be allowed to smoke the pipe of peace; but one knows that six months later the trouble will seem to have been well worth the taking; and at a time like this a diary comes into its own.

What sort of memories are most pleasurable when we have to be satisfied with memories alone? Personally, I find that it is not to the accounts of "epic" days that I turn in the old diaries. Not to the days on which I walked the clock round; trod half a dozen summits in that enchanting wilderness between An Teallach and Loch Maree; or, when still a novice in the art of route-finding, got benighted in the Lairig Ghru, to find myself by morning hopelessly entangled in the mazes of Rothiemurchus. Satisfying as these memories are, there is perhaps a little too much bitter in the bitter-sweetness of recalling them, and it is rather of the more intimate, less adventurous expeditions that I prefer to remind myself now. For instance, the leisurely climb to the shoulders of Ben Wyvis one broiling August day, and the view from the summit ridge of a sea of thick, low cloud, above which appeared the tip of Ben Dearg, a single sharp cone etched against the sky with the precision of a Japanese print, and seeming in its distance and isolation thousands of feet higher than the mere 3,547 of Munro's Tables and common sense. Or else my mind goes back to the very earliest days in the Highlands, to the first expedition of all, at the time a matter for much pride and satisfaction—the ascent of Craig Dhu from Newtonmore! Or again, a walk up Glen Feshie in the early dawn of a day of high summer. On this occasion there were no adventures, no records were attempted, much less broken, but the perfection of the day, the strong sunlight, the freshness of the air, the absolute stillness of the glen, broken only by the soft roaring of the river, the deep harmonizing colours of pine trees, heather, and foxgloves, combined to make up a richness of sensation and atmosphere which had about it something of the quality of great music.

But one expedition many years ago, in which hill climbing played only a secondary part, stands out as though it had happened yesterday. I was staying with a friend, a sheep farmer, in the high, rough country between the upper Spey and Loch Laggan. It was late October, and one evening my host declared for an early bed, since on the next day was to take place that great event in the year of the Highland sheep farmer—gathering the forest—driving the sheep down



from the mountains and high moors before winter sets in, preparatory to their journey to Lowland grazings nearer the coast. The acreage of a Highland sheep farm is often to all intents and purposes limitless. This farmhouse by the Spey commanded, besides its immediate surroundings and the moor east of the Drumlaggan road, which in itself would constitute a large farm in England, an enormous triangular wedge of moor and mountain with Dalwhinnie as its apex, the east shore of Loch Ericht and the main road as far as Dalnaspidal as its sides. Besides the familiar Boar of Badenoch and Sow of Atholl, this huge wilderness contains four not so well-known tops of over 3,000 feet, forming a roughly semicircular group, with its highest point in Ben Udlamain (3,306 feet), which faces Ben Alder across the deep trench of Loch Ericht. To beat this area systematically, beginning from the baseline of the triangle and driving the sheep so that they converged on the apex at Dalwhinnie, would obviously take time and good weather. It meant an early start, for the Highland day in October ends at 5 P.M. or sooner: and absence of mist was essential, since sheep on a hillside are difficult enough to see on a clear day. Unless they move, they are often indistinguishable from the granite boulders that litter the ground.

We were lucky. The air at 4.45 A.M. was claspingly cold when I crawled out of bed and dressed hurriedly by moonlight. At 5 A.M. we were in the car and on our way to Dalwhinnie. The moon was nearly full and still high in the sky, and shining through the frosty air lit up the Spey valley with a green, suffusing radiance. Huddled in the car I watched the contorted windings of the river, which here, although so high and so near its source, flows over a perfectly flat meadowland with sharp bends, "forgetting its bright speed," and looking more like the Ouse or the Isis than the rapid Spey, most dangerous of Highland rivers. The birchwoods by the roadside were a palette of gold, brown, and yellow, with here and there the vivid scarlet of the rowan or the cherry. Presently, after crossing the Truim, we turned south into the main road, and began the gentle 10-mile climb to Dalwhinnie. The main chain of the

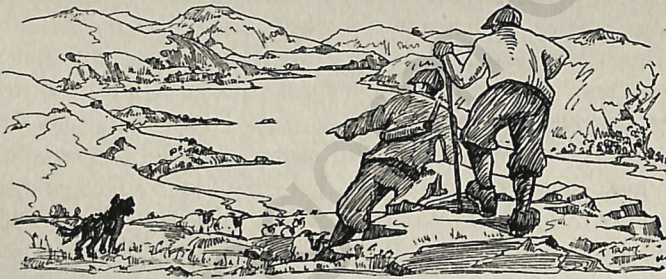
Grampians, the hills of Atholl, came into sight; the view widened, and over the Cairngorms appeared the first light of morning. Unbelievably quickly and yet hardly perceptibly this first glow widened and brightened until by the time the car drew up at the head of Loch Ericht it was almost daylight although not yet 6 o'clock. The moon still shone palely on the flood-water below the dam, where grew, in the days before the Grampian Hydro-electric Scheme, the greenest grass in all Scotland—or England either. We got out of the car and walked stiffly down to the jetty, where quite a crowd was assembled. Close by was moored a large open rowing boat with an outboard motor. Into this we piled, a motley crew. My host and the neighbouring farmer, a dozen shepherds and something like a score of dogs, all in ceaseless movement. As usual there was a stiff breeze blowing up the loch; it was bitterly cold and the boat lay low in the water, affording no protection whatever against the gusts striking straight on to our bows and every minute or so driving an icy wave of spray from end to end of the heavily weighted craft. It was impossible to move, and one got steadily wetter and colder. But all sense of discomfort was lost in the magnificence of the prospect down the long, narrow fjord-like loch. Ericht is indeed one of the most impressive of the Highland lochs and much the largest for its height (1,160 feet) above sea-level. It is over 15 miles long, over 500 feet deep, and nowhere more than a mile or so wide. Over the upper reaches, indeed, its width is never more than half a mile, so that the hills seem to press down upon it and overshadow it. It is a small inland sea, hemmed in by steep cliffs—a vast funnel down which the wind blows from the open moor of Rannoch, so that even on the calmest days the water is stirred. As we rounded the bend past Loch Ericht Lodge the sun topped the lower hills to the east and shone directly on to the red screes of Ben Bheoil, which, from the bed of the loch, completely hides its loftier neighbour, Ben Alder. At 7 A.M., after a sail of some 10 miles, we landed at Coire Bhacaidh, and the day's work began.

There was no mist, the sky was clear, visibility good, and the temperature perfect for a long tramp. The stags were

roaring in the corrie as we set off, each man with his dogs, up the outlying slopes of Ben Udlamain, spreading out fanwise as we went, like a row of beaters, to cover the ground from the lochside to the watershed. It was stiff going, through thigh-deep heather, until we gained the ridge. On ledges on the walls of the corrie, inaccessible even to the dogs, we saw sheep that had run wild, dragging heavy fleeces unclipped for three seasons or more. How they survive the rigours of winter on these high moors one cannot say, but once strayed it is seldom that they are recaptured. There being no fences to prevent them, some sheep wander in the course of a summer into other grazing grounds, but, since they are marked, they are usually caught and sent home. My host informed me that he had had sheep returned to him in this way from as far distant as Gorton on Rannoch Moor. The Ben Udlamain-Geal Charn ridge is a difficult one to follow in bad weather owing to its lack of distinctive features. Even on a clear day such as this care is necessary for an inexperienced party. The older editions of the O.S. 1-inch map are confusing, and at one or two points distinctly inaccurate. On this occasion, however, I was in the fortunate position of being able to forget about route-finding and give my attention wholly to the magnificent views which opened out, particularly to the west. Far below us Loch Pattack lay shining in the sun like a silver plate. South of it, out of an expanse of level moor, rose the mighty bastions of Ben Alder, and beyond an unparalleled array of great peaks, culminating far to the west in Ben Nevis itself. At our feet stretched Loch Ericht, and in the narrow strip of flat birchwood beside the water we could see the steadily growing stream of sheep driven in from the lower slopes of the mountain. From our point of vantage, nearly 2,000 feet above them, they looked like grains of spilt salt shaken together on a green tablecloth. Meanwhile the flock gathered from the upper ridges, with which we were directly concerned, though smaller, was also increasing, and care had to be taken to keep it away from the cliffs. For every mile we walked the dogs must have covered two or three, disappearing into hollows on the hillside or dipping over the

far side of the ridge to head off stragglers and bring in reluctant individuals hiding behind rocks or camouflaged against outcrops of white scree. By the time Fraoch Corrie was reached, two considerable flocks had been gathered. Here, at 11 A.M., we stopped for sandwiches, sitting on stones by the burnside. Then followed another pull from the Marconaich col nearly to the summit cairn of Geal Charn, a rough trek above the cliffs of Creag Dhubh, and a slow descent down the long, swampy nose of Creagan Mòr, the pace getting slower as the flock increased in size. At length, after several checks and a descent into a precipitous gully to rescue a fallen ewe, the two main flocks united in the flat ground at the bottom of the hill, and the many hundreds of sheep were securely penned in the fangs by the lochside. From here they were to be driven to Dalwhinnie the next day and put on the train. It was now 4.30 P.M. and daylight was already fading. In our necessarily zigzag course we had covered quite twice the crow-flight distance from our starting-point. We sat down to an excellent dinner in a cottage belonging to one of the shepherds, and half an hour later were speeding in the car on our way back to the farm. As we had left, so we returned in the dark. In the intervening hours I had seen something of the Highlands with the eyes of those who live and work there. The walking and climbing powers of the Highland shepherd seem inexhaustible. Of course this was an easy day for a shepherd, accustomed as he is to be on the hill at literally any hour in all weathers and at all seasons of the year. But this was my first real acquaintance with him, and perhaps for this reason more than others, the day remains memorable. He is practically the sole survivor of a race whose life if hard and lacking in "amenities" was, nevertheless, to judge from its folklore, poetry, and music, not without values unknown to a commercial age. Strangely enough, the more barren and comfortless the soil, the more it is cherished by its inhabitants. Odysseus prized the rugged Ithaca above all other lands, and love of native soil has nowhere flourished so intensely as in poor, mountainous countries; in ancient (and modern) Greece and in the Highlands of Scotland.

But the history of the Highlands for the last 200 years is one of almost unrelieved gloom. By those at least who look upon the Highlands as something more than a national playground or an object for commercial exploitation it is to be hoped that in the period of reconstruction which must follow this war their interests will not be forgotten.



## DAYS ON DEVIL'S POINT.

R. O. MACKAY AND J. B. McDONALD.

WE arrived at Derry Lodge by car about 10 A.M. on the Sunday, September 17, 1939, intending to spend two days walking amidst the hills, obtaining that solace and renewal of spirit which is, for me at any rate, one of the greatest attractions of our native hills. It being the height of the stalking season, we conferred with Donald McDonald, then keeper at Derry Lodge, as to where we might go without interfering with sport.

Sunday was spent exploring the Robber's Copse, thence over Càrn a' Mhaim, down Sròn Riach, and back to Derry. The weather was ideal, and McDonald obtained many fine shots with his camera. Our day over, we dined in style in the car, but were quite ready for another repast when we visited our kind and hospitable friends at Derry Lodge.

Monday we intended should be a short, easy day, and it was suggested to us, by Donald McDonald, that we should explore a cave on the south-east face of the Devil's Point. The cave, he assured us, could be seen from Glen Geusachan, and suggested we should climb up the gully at the entrance to Glen Geusachan. He had never visited the cave himself.

We reached the Glen half an hour after noon and made for the gully on the south face of the Devil's Point. In order to shorten our journey as much as possible (forgetting that the short cut is not always the quickest way), we proceeded to scramble up the flat slabs of rock which lie in profusion around the base of the Devil's Point, but we had not attained much higher than the 2,000-foot level when it became apparent that we were stuck. Rain was threatening, and McDonald suggested we should give it up as there did not seem to be any further footholds; there had been few

enough for some time before. However, a fissure in the rock some 6 feet above us could just be seen, and I rashly suggested that if we could only get up to that point from our then precarious stand, we could traverse the rock, and thereafter would easily reach the gully. We managed the additional height, and McDonald by quick balancing got safely across the face to a much surer foothold. After I had started to make the traverse, he was very keen (having got safely over himself) to take a film of my effort, and I, having visions of Hollywood fame, paused whilst he prepared his camera. This proved wellnigh disastrous. Handholds were non-existent and footholds not much better. I felt my grip giving and cast my eyes downward for some place to break my fall. As I half-fell, half-slid, I observed a tuft of heather some 15 to 20 feet below and westward. I managed, somehow, to get to that tuft of heather with no more damage than a torn finger and badly bruised elbow. McDonald, unable to assist, continued to work his camera until I made my happy landing, when, so great was his relief to see me come safely to rest, he stopped filming. Our track now lay up the gully which we then proceeded to negotiate. The gradient is very steep and there are few pitches. Indeed, in large measure the underfoot conditions are such that one has to go very carefully on what is little better than slabs—so prominent on Devil's Point—covered with some slight growth. To rest anywhere during the remainder of the climb was wellnigh impossible, and we had to content ourselves with occasional standing pauses in the bed of the stream which gushes down the gully. In one of the halts we did manage to achieve, we chanced to see the remains of an eagle's eyrie on the east side of the gully. Some film shots of this were taken under very difficult conditions and we both resolved to return in the breeding season in the hope that the birds might have taken up house again, and it might be possible to obtain a film.

Towards the top the gully breaks into two separate arms, neither of them too well defined. We took the one on our right. A wall of rock with an opening about 2 feet wide faced us, but with an entrance step of about 5 feet. With



DEVIL'S POINT

*R. L. Mitchell*



McDonald's aid I managed to get over the step and through the opening. He, however, was hampered in that, naturally enough, he did not wish to take off his rucksack with his camera inside and run the risk of involuntarily dropping it into Glen Geusachan below. Having no rope to which his rucksack might be attached, and being unable to get through the opening with it on, he decided to take the left fork and leave me to explore the right. Shortly after McDonald departed I found myself in what might be described as a small amphitheatre with rocky sides. A feasible way up the rock was discovered, and I soon found myself at the top with my difficulties over. McDonald was there to greet me. We had reached the summit shortly after 3 P.M.

“ Who would not roam again your wind-swept corries,  
And breathe anew the strong keen air of dawn.  
Who could forget the aftermath of glory  
Crowning a day of sport . . . at set of sun;  
When memory conjures up your riven summits,  
Your sculptured crags and wildly rushing streams,  
We see ye still. ”

On April 8, 1940, we returned to the gully in the hope that McDonald might have the very good fortune to obtain a film of the eagle's eyrie with occupants. He took the same course over the slabs as on the previous occasion in order to gain entrance to the gully, but I proceeded further up Glen Geusachan. The latter course, if one approaches the gully from its western side, though longer, is easier than the former. There was a good deal of old soft snow in the gully, but we reached the vicinity of the eyrie without incident and actually got to within 20 feet below the nest. We could see no sign of life and decided that whether there was life or not, the further ascent was not a climb for a party of two to make. We were quite willing to believe “ *ars longa, vita brevis* ”—and not put it to the test in pursuit of cinematographic art.

Regretfully turning aside from our objective, we decided to make for the top once more. Care was required on the soft snow, which gave very little footing. Indeed, I personally felt it to be more dangerous than on the previous occasion when we had to contend with the bare rock. We took the

route McDonald had taken on our first visit. He got well ahead of me and on to the summit plateau. From there, in film-director attitude, he hurled down instructions for the completion of the climb whilst he took films of the gully, and I did my best to look like "man attempting the impossible." I complied with his requests until, having reached the summit plateau, he asked me to go down again some distance in order that he might obtain a further shot from a different angle. Not being under contract, and the juice of the orange appealing much more strongly to me at that moment, he had to content himself with filming the disposal of that, alas, now rare fruit. Flaunting the directorial power brought a lucky climax. I had barely finished my gastronomic exercises when we observed three eagles in flight over Glen Geusachan. They soared right over Devil's Point and disappeared into the clouds farther up the Lairig. McDonald quickly switched his camera from the mundane to the sublime and now treasures a beautiful study of poise and grace.

R. O. M.

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On July 19, 1941, I was spending a week-end at Braemar and was fortunate enough to persuade Donald McDonald to act as guide to the cave which he maintained existed on the west face of the Devil's Point. I confess I was rather sceptical of its existence, as R. O. Mackay and I had searched for it on two previous occasions without success.

Five of us set off by car to the White Bridge. The day was glorious as we walked up Glen Dee towards the Lairig Ghru. At the junction of the Lairig and Glen Geusachan we left the path and, crossing the Dee dry-shod on stepping-stones, made our way up Glen Geusachan. Some 300 yards up the glen, beyond the gully climbed on previous visits, we were able to discern about 500 feet below the summit ridge of Devil's Point an indentation on the rock face which might suggest the entrance to a cave.

We surveyed the steep hillside through binoculars, but even with their aid we were unable to see into the cave. Our survey did disclose large slabs of rock, so prominent

a feature on the face of the Devil's Point, which had to be circumvented.

Donald McDonald thought the climb possible, so he, my son Sandy, and I set off in an attempt to reach the cave. The others, having no previous climbing experience, decided it was beyond their powers and resolved to content themselves with the enjoyment of the peaceful glen.

After two hours scrambling and climbing, most of which was fairly easy under the dry conditions, we reached the cave. It measures about 12 feet deep, 6 feet wide, and 7 feet high. It faces due west and has the appearance of having been formed through the rock being split by lightning. Small stalactites pendent from the roof would seem to indicate that the cave had been formed many years ago. The interior is fairly dry, and it would be possible to shelter in it overnight. Not far below there was a strong smell of fox, but we saw no trace of them.

Just as we had finished congratulating each other on the success of our pioneering work, I spotted on a ledge near the back of the cave a small piece of candle. Slightly subdued I reached for the candle and found it resting on a small Oxo tin.

Truth very often being stranger than fiction, it did contain a message! Wrapped in oiled silk was a piece of paper, slightly wet, but bearing the legible inscription, "Affleck C. Gray, Joseph M. McKay, Aberdeen University, 1929."

Unfortunately, we had neither pen nor pencil with which to add our names to that piece of paper left by those real pioneers over twelve years ago. I had my map upon which my name was written, so I tore off the portion and placed it along with the original piece of paper back in the tin.

Looking down upon Glen Geusachan, now losing itself in the lengthening shadows of Monadh Mòr and Beinn Bhrotain, I was tempted to continue the ascent to the summit and come down via the Corrou Bothy. However, we had to rejoin the companions we had left in the Glen, and with Donald McDonald in the lead we made a careful descent without incident in about three-quarters of an hour.

We retraced our steps towards the Dee, and on reaching

the Salmon Pool indulged in the luxury of a refreshing swim. The pool is very deep, and there is excellent diving from a large rock. Eight salmon, hovering motionless with nose upstream, scarcely noticed our noisy splashing, and from the bank Donald McDonald observed the swimmers approaching quite close to them before they flashed away to safety.

J. B. M.



## REMEMBERED SCENES.

A. LANDBOROUGH THOMSON.

WAR has made still more precious one's already treasured memories of mountain days. Many things combine to place the reality out of reach, but there is solace to be found in drawing upon a store of recollections. Only to a limited extent, however, can one hope to share this pleasure except with those who were actual companions. Such memories are personal, or held in common with a few: the pages of the private album must therefore be turned quickly for others.

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A home-made bivouac tent in the mouth of the Lairig Ghru. It was pitched on some sandy ground between the path and the Dee, just opposite the Devil's Point. Many must know the spot, for it made an obvious appeal to anyone coming from the road's end at Derry Lodge under a load of camp equipment and provisions for several days. It was used on more than one occasion by three youths, who found it a good centre for long days on the great hills which enclose the pass. It was there that they had their first intimate experience of the Cairngorms: the mountain birds too were of special interest to all of them.

An incident stands out. The morning mists rose slowly after a rainy night, and the streams hurried in spate. Cloud just capped the Devil's Point, when suddenly from the very summit—or so it seemed—a large boulder broke loose and came crashing down the steep eastern face. As it gathered force with each bound it also brought with it a growing avalanche of rocks and stones. The roar of the bombardment echoed from the hills as the falling rocks emerged more clearly from the mist. The camp was in the line of fire,

but happily out of range. Within a few moments the noise died down as the fall reached easier slopes at the bottom of the face. The smaller stones quickly came to rest, while the larger rocks hurtled for varying distances across the more level ground towards the river. Then all was quiet again but for the sound of running water.

*(This is a long cast back to years before the war of 1914-18, in which two of the companions gave their lives.)*

\* \* \* \* \*

Crossing the Alps into Italy. There was something romantic about this in one's young days when every experience was new. The incident formed part of the round known as the low tour of Mont Blanc, which provided a week of good walking with a brother. From the Rhone Valley one crosses from Switzerland into France by a green pass, the Col de Balme, and so down to Chamounix. Next day takes one round the western end of the great range at a low level; and the next across higher south-western spurs by three stony passes. Then a rough path leads over the Col de la Seigne, on top of which is the frontier sign, and descends into Italy by the Val de l'Allée Blanche—almost blocked by the moraine of the Miage Glacier and with the great southern faces of Mont Blanc and its neighbours towering immediately on the left.

From Courmayeur the most direct return route is over the Col Ferret, but we elected to take the sun-baked road to Aosta, with its immense backward view of Mont Blanc, and thereafter to cross to Switzerland again by the Great St Bernard. We did not stop with the carriage-folk at the hospice on the top, but went down to Bourg St Pierre to arrive after nightfall at the "Inn of the Breakfast of Napoleon the First."

*(This is another early memory from a time when it was possible for pedestrians to cross three frontiers unchallenged.)*

\* \* \* \* \*

The summit of Monte Rosa. Although the altitude is more than 15,000 feet above sea-level, yet on the morning

when two friends sat there in the sun, with their guide and porter, a match could be lit without shielding it from the wind. It was their first great peak, involving a climb which is laborious but not difficult. On the particular occasion it had been more strenuous than usual, by all accounts, because it had been undertaken too soon after bad weather. The new fall made heavy-going on the snowy slopes of the mountain; and during the scramble along the summit ridge—a great precipice on one side and an exceedingly steep slope on the other—it was necessary to push fresh snow from the holds. Half-way along, the guides exchanged yodels with a party attacking the Nordend, a subsidiary summit a mile away: later this party was seen to turn back, defeated by icy conditions on the steep final slope.

The view from the top remains in memory, with all the great mountains of the Pennine Alps standing clearly under a blue sky, and with little puffs of cloud rising below us from the warm valleys of Italy. One recalls especially how oddly stunted the neighbouring Matterhorn looked, seen from a superior height. A short hour and it was necessary to begin the descent, for the bad conditions had made us late. We had left the hut at 1 o'clock in the morning, and the afternoon was far spent before we could unrope.

*(The next summer was that of 1914, and it was seven years before Alpine experience could be renewed.)*

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A high snow-pass at dawn. As a particular instance memory picks out a honeymoon crossing of the Alphubeljoch, from Zermatt to Saas Fee. The night was spent at the little inn high up on the Täschalp, where we watched the last of the light on the sharp pyramid of the Weisshorn until the cold drove us indoors. Our guide had us early on the march, and we followed his lantern with no sound but the crunch of our footsteps and the gently tinkling bells of unseen cattle. Frost held the torrents in silent grip, and only occasionally a distant avalanche would roar for a moment and be still.

After an ascent over moraine, the surface of a glacier showed faintly in the first glimmer of light. The lantern was extinguished and the rope put on before we started across. On the far side a short scramble up a rib of rock took us to a higher and steeper glacier leading directly to the pass. Full dawn came as we breasted the final slope. Behind us a world of mountains shining in the morning sun above a sea of cloud which drowned the valleys. Before us, from the top, the new shapes of other mountains and the snowy glacier leading down towards our still hidden destination.

*(Such incidents are, of course, generic, and often repeated. It chanced, however, that it was sixteen years before we crossed back by another pass over the same ridge and so came again, but now from above, to the little inn on the Täschalp.)*

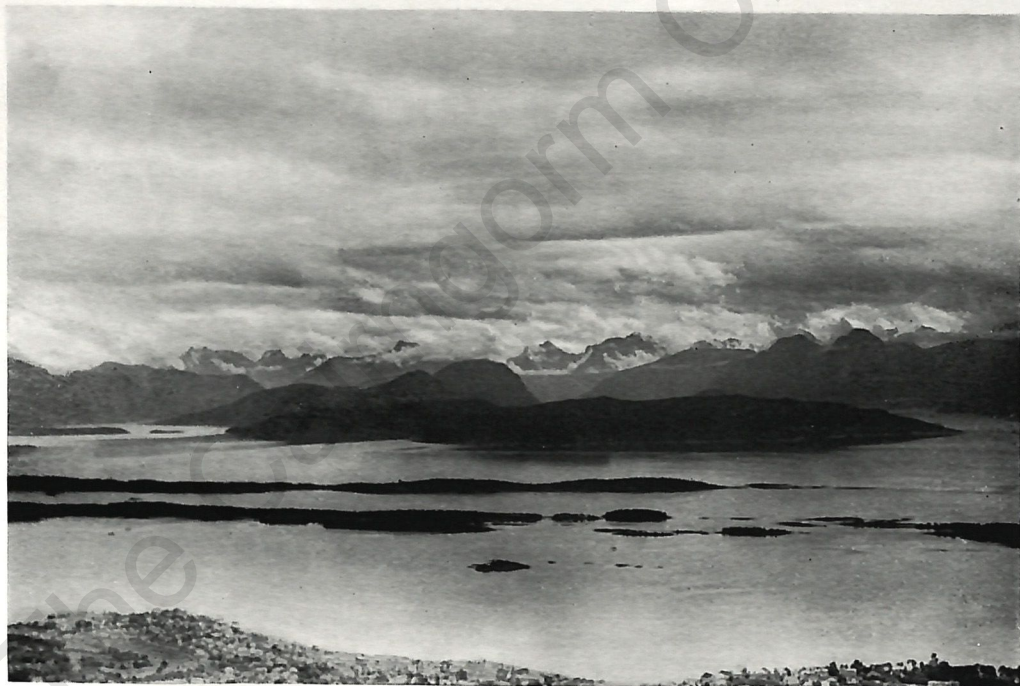
\* \* \* \* \*

Moine Mhor—the Great Moss. It is perhaps paradoxical that a hollow should be so impressive a feature of a mountain range. True, it lies at an altitude of nearly 3,000 feet, but it is surrounded by hills of which some rise more than 1,000 feet higher. It is indeed a strange remote place this wide green basin—feeding-ground of great herds of deer—in the heart of the Cairngorms.

In early days, when we approached the hills from Deeside, it was beyond our usual radius: we looked down into it from Cairn Toul or the slopes of Braeriach, and thought of it as the beginning of a westward land that must some day be explored. It was many years later, during a series of family holidays on Speyside, that we got to know it well. Our line of approach was from lower Glen Feshie and over the shoulder of Càrn Ban, from where we now looked eastwards over the hollow to the higher hills. And sometimes we crossed the Moss from there to one or other of these.

One rather strenuous day five of us spent in ascending Cairn Toul by this route. There are certainly easier ways of reaching that mountain, for the line we followed involved much heavy-going, with many subsidiary hollows and wide stretches of peat bog. We diverged to Braeriach on the way





ROMSDAL HILLS FROM MOLDE

*A. Landsborough Thomson*

back, and there a wet mist descended upon us. The return across the Moss, where in the morning it had been sunny, had then to be made against a fierce wind which lashed us with icy rain, while the limited visibility made it difficult to judge what progress we were making. We were glad at last to reach Càrn Ban and the steep path leading down to the glen, but, despite the discomforts, well pleased with our day.

In some other directions, however, the Moss may be traversed with pleasant ease—for instance, from Càrn Ban to the foot of Monadh Mòr. A walk that we did more than once was from Glen Feshie, over Càrn Ban and across the Moss to the head of the Eidart: thence down the Eidart to its confluence with the Feshie, and round the bend of that river to the starting-point. It is downhill all the way from Càrn Ban: we had the heights in the morning and the glens in the afternoon, with many glorious river pools offering discreet opportunities for a cooling swim. These were happy days, enjoyed in good company.

*(The party is now widely dispersed, the younger members—two nephews and a niece—in the Army.)*

\* \* \* \* \*

The Romsdal hills from Molde. Although from sea-level, this must surely rank as one of the great mountain views of the world. It has in superlative degree the charm of hills seen across water, and the prospect is wider than the angle of vision. No particular features stand out to claim special attention: the impression is rather of a tremendous horizon of endless mountains. In the morning they are shadowy with the sun behind them; the afternoon light picks out detail and lends variety; and as the long Norwegian evening fades they loom solidly as dark blue masses beyond the broad stretch of land-locked fjord.

We came to Molde first after a walking-tour from the Sogne Fjord, through the passes of the Jotunheim to the Geiranger Fjord, and thence by bus and ferry. That evening we found it difficult to leave the pier, which provides a promenade from which the view is uninterrupted. Next

day was spent idly in rowing to a wooded island for a bathe, and from there the panorama was nearer. Another time we arrived by sea from Bergen in heavy rain, and our fellow-passengers continued northwards two hours later, not knowing what they had missed. Happily we were stopping, on our way inland to the Dovrefjeld, and we awoke on the morrow to a brilliant view from our windows. Later we went up the steep hill behind: from its top we had a still wider outlook, with the little town at our feet.

*(To revisit a place once seen under perfect conditions is sometimes to court disappointment, but here the second impression matched the first.)*

\* \* \* \* \*

Over the hills to Torridon. This was the climax of a walking-tour which was accomplished, a few days at a time, in three successive Whitsun holidays. It began at Lochaline on the Sound of Mull, reaching Morar and Mallaig in the first season and Ardelve on Loch Alsh in the second. The route covered the chief part of the much indented west coast of Scotland that is not accessible by continuous roads. Most of the way led by hill-paths, and five sea lochs were crossed by boat.

The plan was nearing fulfilment by the time we reached Applecross in heavy rain, to find that the inn had been closed a week before. A cottage took us in, and next day was as fine as could be wished. The march was a short one, and it was without haste that we turned our backs on the sea, followed the little river upwards for a time, and then breasted a ridge of hill. A small cairn marked the crest of the faint track, and the view from this point is of surpassing merit for so low an elevation. Behind us was the shore we had left, with Skye across the water. Before us lay Loch Torridon, backed by the tremendous walls of Liathach and Ben Eighe.

Later, in the motor boat which had met us, we crossed the loch and passed through the narrows (of which Swinburne sang) into its inner reaches. We sailed over calm water among schools of guillemots and puffins that dived or flew



OVER THE HILLS TO TORRIDON

*A. Landsborough Thomson*

at our too near approach. The great hills were right above us as we made our landing.

*(The whole of the route indicated is for the moment subject to "prohibited area" restrictions, but it may be highly recommended for happier days.)*

\* \* \* \* \*

Breakfast on the Fletschhorn. It was a perfect morning of bright sunshine; the situation was magnificent; and a summit of over 13,000 feet had been reached after some hours of pleasant exercise. Now there was time to eat and drink at leisure, while enjoying a superb view from a sheltered platform facing southwards just below the top. Ours was the only party on the mountain that day—the writer, his niece, and their guides.

In youth one has the thrill of one's own first experience: in middle-age one may recapture something of this when introducing a young companion to the things one has learnt to value. A few mornings earlier we had wakened in the train while passing through the Juras. There was a first glimpse of the clean Swiss landscape—tidy little villages among green hills, with patches of wood and white bands of limestone cliff. Then there were a few hours to spare in Berne, with its arcaded streets and brilliant window-boxes; but the famous distant view of the Alps from the terrace above the Aar was obscured by haze.

So our first sight of the snow peaks was from the railway in the afternoon, when the Jungfrau showed clear above a wooded hill rising from the Lake of Thun. Then a nearer view of the Blumlisalp, when the train stopped at Kandersteg at the end of its steep climb to the mouth of the Lötschberg tunnel. Emerging on the other side of the range, we rattled down the gradient to the floor of the Rhone Valley. The night was spent at Brigue, after dinner out-of-doors in the warm darkness. Short journeys by train and bus next morning, and then a final hour's walk took us to our intended headquarters at Saas Fee. Here we were in the very midst of the great mountains, and after a couple of training walks were ready to go up to a hut for our first expedition.

Now we were at the top, and all the conditions were in favour of a memorable impression. The weather augured well for the rest of our holiday. Close before us was the Laquinhorn; behind it rose the Weissmies, a traverse of which was on the programme for the morrow.

*(This holiday ended with a high-level tour over the snow passes to Zermatt and Arolla, of which an account has previously been given.)*

\* \* \* \* \*

Beyond the Arctic Circle. The Swedish "tourist station" of Abisko lies in almost uninhabited country between the mountains of the Kebnekaise range and the great lake of Torneträsk. There is no road, but it may be reached by rail in a few hours from Narvik, after four days on the Norwegian mailboat northwards from Bergen.

One brings back from Lapland an impression of a summer landscape composed in many shades of blue; a picture in which colour and distance are everything and form counts for little. The many rivers and lakes are bright blue in the warm sunshine, the woods are blue-green, and the hills are dark blue in the distance under a light blue sky. The shapes of the hills are rounded like those of the Scottish Highlands, but there is never the red of heather slopes. There are few conifers too, the woods being mostly of sparse and stunted birch. Above the tree-level, at no great height, there is a thick scrub of juniper and willow bush: above that again, merely reindeer moss. Only the highest tops carry permanent snow or ice.

It was a "lemming year" and that provides our other most notable recollection. These amusing little rodents were in great abundance and very bold. Their fur is fawn and yellow and black in patches: their voice is a lusty squeak. The old ones could often be cornered among the stones or undergrowth, and the youngsters easily handled. Of the great migration which follows the periodical increase in numbers we unfortunately saw nothing.

*(This is a recent memory. Within two years Narvik, and other places on our journey there, had fallen into enemy hands.)*

\* \* \* \* \*



WEISSMIES RANGE FROM THE FLETSCHHORN

*A. Landsborough Thomson*

The southern slopes of Ben More Coigeach, running down steeply to the sea on the north side of Loch Broom. Off-shore lie the Summer Isles, dark jewels on the silver water. It is hard to say whether the view of the mountain from the sea, or that of the islands from the hillside, is the finer. During a family holiday at Ullapool various excursions had been made—by ferry and over the hill to Little Loch Broom; by motor launch to the isles; by car to a beautiful sandy bay from which can be seen the strange shapes of that sequence of isolated hills from Sulven to An Stac.

Three of us, the others being a niece and a nephew, set out to climb Ben More. We never seriously began to do so, for the day was warm, the start was late, and there had been unprofitable dispute over the line of approach. Very happily we turned the expedition into a coastal walk over a shoulder of the mountain. As we walked towards Achiltibuie—the very name is music—a calm sea was before us, with its islands near and far. Birds in flight gave movement to the scene, and there were some small ships like toys upon the water.

We came to a place where we could descend the cliffs to some big flat rocks at the edge of the sea. Our few clothes were soon off, and the soaring gulls might have seen our bodies slipping through the cool clear water. Refreshed by this memorable bathe in perfect surroundings, we ate our lunch on the rocks and rested awhile. Then we retraced our steps to the high road, walking towards the hills now lit by the westerling sun. We felt the glow of physical well-being; we had drunk deeply of the beauty of the world; we were at peace and content.

*(This was in 1939, ten days before the outbreak of the war that still seemed incredible. Next morning came the telegram of recall to London.)*



## SKI NOTES.

THE spring of 1941 being exceptional for the amount and the length of time that skiable snow lay on the Cairngorms and adjacent foothills, it may be interesting to record some of the runs made by myself and other members of the Cairngorm and Etchachan Clubs.

Ski-ing was possible for about five months in 1941. From about New Year's Day onwards there was always sufficient snow, if it was followed inland, to obtain fairly good sport.

In January and February day trips were made to various slopes between Aberdeen and Banchory, the best of these being undoubtedly on the north-east side of Kerloch, on which several fast runs on hard uncrusted snow were obtained. As the snow receded, the slopes above Glenmuick House and the higher reaches of Geallaig above Coilacreich Inn came into favour. The latter, though facing south, held the snow till the end of March. The panorama of the snow-plastered precipices of Lochnagar viewed as one skied between snow-laden pines lent an enchantment almost Alpine to these slopes.

In February and March, although on arriving at Braemar we heard that wonderful runs had been obtained by visitors just a day or two before, luck seemed to run against us, and at week-ends sticky snow and mist were invariably our portion.

On the Saturday of the Easter Meet of the Club at Braemar in 1941 several enthusiasts ascended on ski from the Garbh Allt Falls, via the Feindallacher Burn and the Allt a' Choire Dhuibh to the crest above the Stuic Buttress on Lochnagar. The run down, although interesting, was made on rather sticky snow. On the Sunday, after watching the 9 A.M. bus passing the hotel door in the mistaken impression that there

was a 9.10 A.M. one following, a car was hired which conveyed the ski-ing party to Glenclunie Lodge *en route* for the north slopes of Càrn an Tuirc. These proved to be rather terrifying in steepness at first sight, but under the snow conditions then prevailing some fine but, again, rather sticky runs were obtained.

Càrn an Tuirc was again attacked on the Monday, but this time faster snow and occasional glimpses of the sun made the day much more enjoyable.

The following week-end the Stuic was again climbed, a fresh 6 inches of snow and a sunny day combining to give fast "spring" snow, the snowline having by this time receded to above the Ballochbuie Forest. The next day, the snow being in such excellent condition, a start was made from the road above the Devil's Elbow, and from there onwards ski were used to traverse Meall Odhar, Glas Maol, Cairn of Claise, and Càrn an Tuirc, with a final run right down to Loch Callater on fast "spring" snow most of the way, with only one or two patches of soft blown snow. This was undoubtedly my finest run of the year, although the other member of the party thought that perhaps it was equalled by the descent of Ben Macdhui at the May Holiday. This latter trip, at which I unfortunately was not present, finished the ski-ing season, though until the middle of June there was still sufficient snow on Ben Macdhui to have yielded good running.

To conclude, one of the main reasons why naturally lazy people like myself enjoyed the 1941 season was that very seldom did one get corrugated shoulders from the manual labour of actually carrying the ski.

R. O. S.

## In Memoriam.

GEORGE T. ROBERTSON WATT.

G. T. ROBERTSON WATT, M.B., Ch.B., Surgeon-Lieutenant, R.N.V.R., was reported at the beginning of May to have been lost when the destroyer H.M.S. "Wryneck" was bombed and sunk on April 27, 1941, during the evacuation of the Imperial Forces from Greece. (Survivors who managed to get on to the Carley floats were ruthlessly machine-gunned either on them or in the water.) He was the eldest son of Dr Theodore Watt, Culter House, Milltimber.

Having graduated in medicine in 1936, Dr Watt became assistant to Dr George Mitchell, Inch, and in the following year was appointed one of the Resident Medical Officers, for a year, at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. Subsequently he was Resident Surgeon at Mount Vernon Hospital, Northwood, Middlesex, at the Aberdeen Maternity Hospital, and at Jessop Hospital, Sheffield. In June 1940 he was commissioned as a Surgeon-Lieutenant, R.N.V.R., and shortly afterwards was posted to H.M.S. "Wryneck" in the East Mediterranean.

He started climbing at an early age, having been on Mount Keen and Morven, with his father, before he was nine years old. Thereafter, during successive family holidays at Braemar and on Speyside, he got the opportunity, which he eagerly seized, of becoming acquainted with the Cairngorms and with the other high hills in the area. Much of his climbing was done with a single companion, Mr J. Hector Gray, who accompanied him on several visits to the Western Highlands as well as to the Lake District, and who writes of their last holiday together :—

"Only a few days before the outbreak of war we were lying on the braes above Loch Ewe. The sun was shining, and nothing was there to disturb our peace but the lazy drone of insects, the occasional scream of a gull fishing in the loch, or the steady lap of waters on the shore. But

although our bodies were at rest that August afternoon, our minds were rarely more active—we knew that Britain was on the brink of war, and it was impossible for us not to wonder what was going to happen next.

“ ‘ What is the first thing you will do when the war is over ? ’  
I asked in a cheerful attempt to bridge an awkward gap.

“ ‘ Meet you here, if you like ? ’ was the swift response.”  
Such was his love for the Scottish countryside.

#### CHARLES LUDWIG.

MEMBERS will have heard with regret news of the death of Pilot-Officer Charles Ludwig on active service with the R.A.F.

Charles Ludwig joined the Club in 1924 and did a considerable amount of climbing, although he seldom attended Meets of the Club or even climbed very much with Club members. Much practice, often in unusual places, culminated in the unorthodox ascent of the Mitchell Tower in the dark, accompanied by a skeleton, which continued to leer over Marischal Quadrangle for some days. More orthodox work included ascents of the Mitre Ridge, Beinn a' Bhùird, in September 1933, made without knowledge of the first ascents of July of that year; and of the Douglas-Gibson Gully, Lochnagar, also in September 1933. Although conditions were excellent after an exceptionally dry spell, Ludwig regarded the latter climb as dangerous throughout on account of the unsatisfactory nature of the rock. All who have looked at the exit will agree and admire the tenacity of purpose of the lone climber who achieved the ascent. Subsequently he visited the Dolomites, to which his own great skill on rock naturally attracted him, but on his climbs here he was as reticent as on his exploits at home. So far as is known only two notes, and these brief, found their way to print.

Ludwig graduated M.B., Ch.B., at Aberdeen in 1934 and became, subsequently, lecturer in Physiology at Leeds. Early in 1941 he volunteered for service with the R.A.F. and obtained his commission only a month or two ago. With his passing the Club loses a remarkable cragsman and a man of outstanding ability and character.

## PROCEEDINGS OF THE CLUB.

THE Fifty-third Annual General Meeting of the Club was held in the Caledonian Hotel, Aberdeen, on November 29, 1941, Mr Hugh D. Welsh, President, in the Chair.

Accounts for the year were read and approved.

It was arranged to hold the New Year Meet at the Inver Hotel, Crathie, and a Sub-Committee was appointed to arrange other excursions as and when possible. An informal Social Evening was arranged to be held in the Caledonian Hotel, on Thursday, February 26, 1942, at which coloured Leica slides will be shown. An informal dance will be held in the Caledonian Hotel on Friday, March 20, 1942.

### MEETS AND EXCURSIONS.

Sparsely attended New Year and Easter Meets were held in Braemar, the majority of those attending being quartered at the Fife Arms Hotel. On each occasion the principal excursion was to Ben Macdhui, in conditions which were exhilarating rather than pleasant. At New Year a heavy fall of snow precluded further trips to the high tops, and the ascent of Meall an Tionail became a considerable achievement. At Easter a severe thaw made conditions lower down rather unpleasant, but higher up, on Beinn a' Bhùird, Lochnagar, and the tops east of the Devil's Elbow, the snow was found to be in good condition.

An increase in the popularity of ski-ing in the Cairngorms and Deeside hills may be noted, possibly as a result of the rather heavier snowfalls of the last two years. During the Easter Meet the snow was in good condition above 2,500 feet, and some members report that they were out practically every week-end from New Year until the beginning of May, when good snow was found on Ben Macdhui. (See Ski Notes.)

R. L. M.

R. O. Mackay, with Donald McDonald, climbed Lochnagar from the Ballochbuie on New Year's Day. Snow had fallen during the morning and the going was soft and heavy to the top of the Black Shiel, where they arrived at noon. Thereafter steps had to be cut almost to the summit, which was reached at 1.45 P.M., by which time the weather had cleared and visibility was perfect. They reached Loch Callater Lodge, via the Allt a' Chlaiginn, at 5.20 P.M., encountering on the way a huge herd of deer.

On January 2 Mackay and J. B. McDonald climbed Beinn a' Bhùird by Clais Fhearnaig after a further fall of snow which made the going very heavy and delayed the party's return.

#### DAY EXCURSIONS, 1941.

From time to time it was possible to arrange excursions on a very small scale. The following is a note of these :—

*February 9, Lochnagar.*—Excursion arranged jointly with the Etchachan Club. The ascent was made from the Danzig Bridge. Soft snow made the early part very arduous, and a keen wind with blown snow made the climb from the top of the Black Shiel Burn quite an experience. Only a few of the party went as far as the Summit Cairn.

*March 9, Clochnaben.*—This was reached by service bus to Bridge of Feugh and thence "Shanks Naggie" to the top. It was a very pleasant outing, but the wind on the top did not encourage loitering.

*June 8-9, Lochnagar (overnight excursion).*—Two small parties set out, one from Glen Callater, the other from the Danzig Bridge, both returning by Glen Muick.

*July 5-6, Ben Macdhui (overnight excursion).*—A small party left from Braemar on Saturday evening—had supper at Derry Lodge and reached the Shelter Stone at dusk. The weather was very wet. They found two young Polish soldiers on leave "in possession," but managed to spend a fairly comfortable if sleepless night. The ascent by the Garbh Uisge was made in fine weather until the summit plateau was reached, when more rain was again encountered.

E. W. S.

#### SATURDAY AFTERNOON EXCURSIONS.

We had five very enjoyable Saturday afternoon excursions, the number of those taking part varying from five to nine. In February we went by bus to Cairnwell, a farm on the Stonehaven road, and waded through snow to Boswell's Monument. Those who wore climbing boots found them a great asset, but few of us had thought them necessary for such a lowly ascent. A golden retriever, which came as a "guest," added to our entertainment by his antics in the snow. We came down by Kincausie to the South Deeside Road.

In March a slightly higher elevation was reached by taking the North Deeside bus to Park, crossing the river, walking up the road east of Durris House, and tramping over undulating, heathery ground to

Cairnmorearn. The Slug Road, by which we returned, is a hard road, but it was easy swinging downhill along it.

Another delightful cross-country walk was taken in April, when we set off by bus for Stonehaven and walked by the Slug Road to the Roman camp at Raedykes. From there we journeyed by the route that the Romans followed when they strove to penetrate the north-east of Scotland, save that, instead of following in their steps to Culter, we took a more westerly path which led us to the south Deeside road at Park Bridge Road. An earlier relic than the Roman camp was seen in a Stone Circle, and a much later relic in the ruins of crofts deserted within the last century, while the modern planting of the Forestry Commissioners gladdened the prospect.

The June excursion to the Hill of Fare had to be modified because of transport difficulties, but in July four members walked from Kemnay to Pitcaple by the route which goes over the Mither Tap of Bennachie without unduly inconveniencing other members of the public who were travelling. Two others travelled by morning train to Oyne, covered most of the tops, and returned to Aberdeen by the evening train without contacting the main party.

We have thoroughly appreciated these explorations of country nearer town, and they have widened our horizon for the afternoon walks which many members plan for themselves.

R. K. J.

Indoor Meets were held in the Caledonian Hotel on January 30, February 28, and March 24, 1941. At the first there was a show of lantern slides. A large number of Lochnagar and the Cairngorms, from photographs taken by the late Henry Dugan, whose photographic skill is familiar to members from *Journal* illustrations, was lent by his daughter, Mrs A. H. Sommerville. A selection from the Club's collection was given, and included a number of historic interest recently presented by Mr George McIntyre, a Club member for fifty years.

The February Meet was the occasion of the Club Dance, a feature of the Club's activities which proved enjoyable and popular, though war-time conditions affected the attendance.

At the third gathering J. B. McDonald took a very large company by colour cine-film over the Cairngorms and Lochnagar at all seasons, many new shots being included. Of special interest was a film depicting a deer stalk from the sighting of the stag to the conveyance of the carcass to the larder. The details of the gralloch, an operation a mere name till then to many of the gathering, were very realistic. Of great interest, too, was a series portraying eaglets in their eyrie, a film taken with much labour and patience.

H. D. W.

## NOTES.

A SMALL Sub-Committee has again been appointed to arrange Excursions as and when circumstances permit, during the spring and summer. As it will generally not be possible to give extended notice of these, members who might desire to participate should send in their names to the Hon. Secretary as soon as possible so that they may receive particulars regarding these outings. In order to save unnecessary expense it is not intended to circularise members other than those who submit their names for that purpose. Any further particulars can always be obtained from the Hon. Secretary on application.

Members' subscriptions for the current year are now due, and should be paid as soon as possible. Payment of subscriptions due by members on whole-time service with H.M. Forces is optional for the duration of war.

The following members are serving with H.M. Forces :—

J. E. Bothwell, G. E. Beck-Slinn, J. H. F. Crawford, J. S. Cardno, G. F. Collie,\* I. K. M. Esslemont, R. J. C. Fleming, G. P. Geddes, D.S.O., J. Gove, H. H. I. Glennie, J. Patrick Jeffrey, D. P. Levack,\* J. W. Levack, C. Ludwig,\*\* A. Osborne Lovelock, Garth Lorimer, A. A. Marr, J. G. Mutch, W. J. Middleton,\* G. F. Morrison, R. O. Mackay, I. F. Rose,\* E. B. Reid, R. Reid, G. A. Roberts, J. W. Scrimgeour, W. P. Stewart, D. C. G. Sibley, D. C. Thom, A. M. Thomson, G. T. R. Watt,\*\* R. P. Yunnie.

Members can assist in making the list complete by sending information to the Hon. Secretary.

Before using the Sluga Bothy, members should communicate with Mr G. D. Menzies, Invercauld Estates Office, Ballater. The bothy is, of course, private property, and as a matter of courtesy permission should be obtained for its use. Members climbing on the Coyles of Glen Muick should note that the centre peak is now out of bounds. A large area to the east is fenced and under young forest.

Some time during September 1941 the cairn on Sgòr Gaoith, on the Sgòran Dubh ridge, was removed, stone by stone, by persons unknown, and from marks on the rocks below, evidently used as a source

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\* Prisoner of war.

\*\* Killed on active service.



of amusement. The amount of debris covering the path above the loch was considerable and apparently the result of this useless expenditure of energy. To maturer minds the merits of boulder trundling may be obscure; its demerits are obvious.

The following books have been added to the Library:—

- “Days of Fresh Air.” The Rt. Hon. L. S. Amery.
- “The Mountain Vision.” F. S. Smythe.
- “Oban, Skye, Fort William, and the West Highlands.” Ward Lock & Co.
- “The Highlands of Scotland.” Ward Lock & Co.
- Journals under review.

Recent mountaineering publications include the following:—

- “Helvellyn to Hymalaya.” F. Spencer Chapman. (Chatto & Windus. 18s.)
- “Mountaineering.” T. A. H. Peacocke. (A. & C. Black. 5s.)
- “My Alpine Album.” F. S. Smythe. (A. & C. Black. 12s. 6d.)
- \* “The Mountain Vision.” F. S. Smythe. (Hodder & Stoughton. 18s.)
- “The Adventures of a Mountaineer.” F. S. Smythe. (Dent. 7s. 6d.)
- \* “Norway, the Northern Playground.” W. Cecil Slingsby. (Blackwell. 7s. 6d.)
- \* “Alpine Pilgrimage.” Julius Kugy. (John Murray. 6s.)
- “Five Miles High.” Members of the American Karakorum Expedition. (Robert Hale. 15s.)

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\* In the Club Library.

## REVIEWS.

### **The Alpine Journal, Vol. LII., 1941.**

Although temporarily restricted in size and scope, *The Alpine Journal* continues to provide articles of lasting interest. Accounts of new expeditions are, naturally, notably fewer, but there is an account of the 1939 Polish ascent of Nanda Devi East Peak. Nevertheless, the story of the early attempts on the great Alpine peaks makes an even greater appeal to the reviewer, to whom Professor Graham Brown's history of Mont Blanc has been fascinating. It is brought all too soon to a conclusion in the November number (No. 263). Colonel Strutt records his impressions of some well-known Alpine guides in the May number, while G. A. Hasler recalls a few climbs with Christian Jossi in the November issue. "Rock Climbing in North Wales," by A. D. M. Cox (a sign of the times?), "Tribute to Partnership," by J. R. Jenkins, and "The Road to Roundabout," by J. L. Longland, are the other main articles in a volume which, if dealing chiefly with things past, still achieves variety.

### **Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal, Vol. XXII., Nos. 131, 132 (1941).**

The concluding portion of W. A. Smith's "A Visit to the Cairngorms in 1875" and "Some Climbs in the Clova District," by J. G. Ferguson and G. S. Ritchie, are the articles of most direct interest to Club members. "Electric Storms," by J. H. B. Bell, is of general interest. Three instalments of "Nights Up There" and a "Guide Book" article on "The Lowther Hills," by J. Rooke Corbett, make up the remainder of a journal which is maintaining its standard despite present difficulties.

An article which supplements the S.M.C. Guides to the North and West Highlands appears in the November issue (No. 132) and fills a want evident in several of the guide books. In the guide to the Cairngorms, the many cross-country routes and Mounth roads were fully described, and now A. E. Robertson's "Old Tracks and Coffin Roads and Cross-country Routes in the North-west Highlands" provides valuable information on the rights-of-way in the area around Loch Ewe and Lochaber.

J. H. B. Bell, in "A Ben Nevis Constellation of Climbs," describes a series of new vertical and horizontal traverses and propounds a system of nomenclature which presupposes an elementary knowledge of

astronomy in any climber who desires to follow him. The problem of identification of climbs on the more popular faces becomes more and more insoluble. Two articles bring the series "Nights Up There" to an end, whilst C. R. Steven, in "Since War Began," records climbs snatched during periods of army leave.

R. L. M.

**The Climbers' Club Journal, No. 67, 1941.**

"Ski Tour in the South Tyrol," by J. A. Martinez, covers country which the reviewer has seen only from afar and by a means of which he has no experience—it tempts him to make the acquaintance of both at the earliest opportunity. "A Great Effort," by J. M. Edwards, and "Opportunities," by John Hunt, relate in entirely different vein the tales of uncompleted climbs. The former has a freshness too seldom encountered in climbing journals to-day.

The difficulty of interpreting mountain names seems just as difficult in Wales as it is in Scotland, judging by "Notes on Some Welsh Place Names," by Rudolf Cyriax. The inevitable corruption of native names appears to have occurred, and it is suggested that the Ordnance Survey is not without guilt in this respect.

The widespread membership of the Club provides a long list of names of members on active service, and there is a deplorably long Obituary section.

R. L. M.

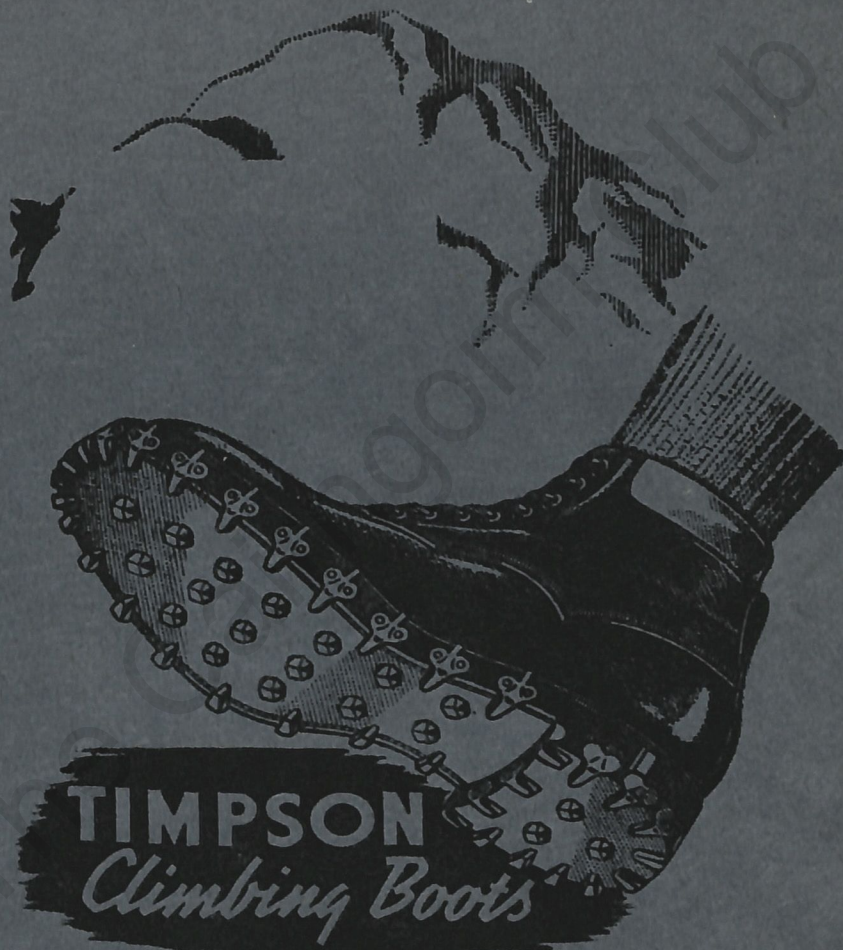
**The West Highlands and the Hebrides.** A Geologist's Guide for Amateurs. Alfred Harker. (Cambridge University Press. 8s. 6d.)

Dr Alfred Harker, who specialised in the complicated geology of the West Highlands and Islands, died in 1939 and left the uncompleted manuscript of this book. Dr J. E. Richey, of H.M. Geological Survey, Edinburgh, with the co-operation of other noted geologists, prepared the manuscript for publication and provided such additions as were necessary to complete it. Dr Richey has done his work well, and this book, presenting as it does an epitome of the West Highland geology and an interpretation of the scenery, should form a useful companion to those with an inquiring spirit whose journeyings take them to the hill country of the West. Specially welcome will be the panoramic sketches and the brief descriptions accompanying them.

H. D. W.

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