

THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS OF SKYE.

BY CLINTON DENT.

IN these days the writer who sets forth the attractions of little frequented mountain districts displays a disinterestedness and a benevolence of disposition so singular as dangerously to resemble excessive good nature. Yet this is what I am bidden to do. To obviate any inconvenient rush to the district which forms the subject of this paper, I may mention at once that nearly every peak seems to have been climbed, and the supply of new faces and variations already shows signs of being exhausted. As another discouragement, which may give pause to the intending visitor, is to be found in the formidable sea voyage which is necessary to get to the spot at all, it seems judicious here to suppress the fact that an alternative route, *viâ* Strome Ferry, with a comparatively brief and smooth stretch of water, is equally open to the tourist. A love of adventure and a hardy disregard for comfort (together with a favourable forecast) induced our party in Whitsuntide 1890 to take the longer sea route from Oban to Portree. Of the *dramatis personæ* I need say little now. They will have their exits and their entrances, and the ups and downs of a brief period of their careers shall be duly set forth as I unfold my tale, for it must be borne in mind that my duty is merely to briefly chronicle our doings in general.

The weather while we were on the steamer was such that the meteorologist who predicted that it would be favourable probably reckoned it as an occasion on which he spoke absolute truth, judged by the weather prophet's standard of veracity. Certainly for a long time all went smoothly, all went well, and all who went were well. We forgathered with the other passengers, of whom there was a goodly muster, scarcely any being bound for Skye. The sound of a preliminary dinner-bell bred distrust and suspicion, however, when it became obvious that the number of travellers exceeded the probable number of seats at table. The second bell in consequence led all who could get a good start to precipitate themselves down to the saloon in a tumultuous and indecorous rush which could hardly have been worse in the height of the season. Presently a sociable fellow-traveller, who adopted a cheery manner and spoke, as people always do on board ship as long as they feel well,

in a much louder tone of voice than was at all necessary, remarked that we were nearing Ardnamurchan Point, and that shortly we should find ourselves on the broad Atlantic Ocean, and feel a nice swell. Having given us this information our informant vanished, and did not reappear, looking rather pale, until we were safely in calm waters again. One member of the party owed his safety to a lady novelist, whose work first shocked and then cast him into a deep slumber, from which he emerged refreshed when the region of the rolling billows was past. A brief moment of anxiety for the temporary health of two or three of our companions was occasioned by the fact that I noticed them, from a little distance, making very curious faces. It transpired, however, that my fears were unfounded, and that they were merely practising Gaelic pronunciation. The spelling of the proper names in this paper is correct, for it has been revised by a competent authority. It is very far from being phonetic, and gives no clue whatever to the right method of pronunciation. Some of the party knew all about it, and posed as expert Gaelic linguists by the simple process of calling the mountains by names to which their written appellations bore no relation whatever.

As we were a properly equipped party for the mountains, it follows that photographers were included among the members of the expedition. Nowadays a rope even is not more essential than a camera. Of one of the artists (as they like to be called) I need only say that his work is well known, and that one of his views forms an admirable illustration to this paper, giving very effectively the rugged outlines of the scree-strewn slopes of the bleak but beautiful Cuchullins. The other artist had all the enthusiasm of a beginner, and I may dismiss his work with very brief criticism. Notwithstanding infinite taking of pains, much calculation of exposures and a frequent use of technical expressions, the ultimate results were more singular than satisfactory. The principal outcome of the developments was a curious picture in which a presidential head was dimly suggested, suspended in mid sky and framed in an appropriate nimbus of cloud, the corporeal part being still more loftily elevated. In another, the flicker of a smile, worn by one of the group at great personal inconvenience owing to sunburn, feebly illuminated a distant hill. These phenomena were ascribed by the experts to an unsuccessful endeavour to take two pictures on one plate, and were dismissed contemptuously as 'doubles.'

In all seriousness the steamer route from Oban to Portree is the approach most strongly to be recommended. The seascapes studded with rocky islands will, in line and colour alike, astonish anyone who does not believe in the infinite variety of the coast scenery of Great Britain. The steamers touch at many places, and variety is thus obtained, if at the expense of progress. At one stopping place a horse was landed by the simple process of dropping the animal into the water. Some boatmen were in readiness to head the beast in the right direction, but it swam the best part of half a mile to shore with astonishing ease and rapidity. We disembarked at Portree, and immediately recognised that we were out-of-season visitors. It is always possible to estimate this by the warmth of your reception at an hotel. With all the ardour of youth we left the town attractions furnished by Portree early the next day, and drove straight to the mountaineering centre of Sligachan. Skye can already boast of a centre; in fact, as mathematically speaking ought to be the case, it has only one. Let it be understood, however, that I do not wish to join in the fray raging round the centres just at present; and desiring to preserve a claim to originality of treatment, I will keep Mr. Conway's name out of the paper. The Corporation of Guides in the person of John Mackenzie, a most excellent fellow, willing, strong, active, and rapidly developing into a good climber, had met us at Portree in a new pair of boots, and seemed as eager as anybody to commence an onslaught at once on the peaks around. Sgurr-nan-Gillean appeared the most obvious expedition for an afternoon's climb, and, as a matter of fact, is almost the only peak which can be ascended from the inn at Sligachan without a tolerably long walk to commence with, and to finish with also. The most amusing route up Sgurr-nan-Gillean is by the north ridge: this is known as the Pinnacle route. No sooner had we approached the first pinnacle than it became obvious to those who were being newly introduced to Skye that Mr. Pilkington's description of the charm of the rock-climbing was in no measure exaggerated.* No doubt it was mountaineering in miniature, for the ridges are but short, and the rock-points not very formidable in height; but each crag here and in the other parts of the range could, with the exercise of the smallest amount of ingenuity or perversity, be made into admirable ground for practice and

* See *Alpine Journal*, vol. xiii. p. 433.

training. To the ardent aspirant for mountaineering honours I may say at once and most emphatically that he cannot do better than learn how to climb rocks in Skye. There is a delightful possibility always, if you do not like any particular passage of rock, of varying the route by a few yards and finding an alternative and easier track. This feature of the mountains was largely taken advantage of on this our first expedition by some members of the party, who assigned the orthodox excuses for their deviations, such as that they were out of training, that they were getting old, that they were married, or that they had had too much lunch. In due course some scrambling brought us to the top of the fourth pinnacle, known as Knight's Peak. Now, in mountain climbing in Skye it is a point of honour always, to as great an extent as may be convenient, to play the game of follow-my-leader. The member who happened to be leading at the moment was a person of energy. He looked over the edge on the west side of the ridge, said there was a nice drop down into the gully, and called to us to come and inspect it. The proposed route was discussed as warmly for a few minutes as if we were on a new peak in a new country, and as if the success or failure of a whole summer tour depended on our decision. Some said the gully would go, while some were doubtful whether they would. The chief organiser was distinctly of the former opinion, on the plausible ground that it had gone already, and that he had on a previous occasion descended it. Finally, after we had worked ourselves into a proper state of excitement and doubt, we descended the gully in question and found, if the whole truth has to be told, that there was no great difficulty in it. We were now at the base of the final point, and a few minutes' climbing landed us on the top of the most shapely of all the Cuchullin Hills, Sgurrnan-Gillean. We descended by the west ridge, and made our way back to Sligachan.

The time that some of the party were able to devote to the mountains was very limited, and it was decreed by the majority that days of fine weather were far too precious to be wasted. Accordingly a great part of the evening was spent in planning ascents and expeditions for those whose stay was short. This is a very delightful exercise and was entered into most heartily, I observed, by those who had arranged for themselves certain off-days. I am bound to say that the council came to a wise decision, for no better expedition could have been devised for anyone who wanted

a rock climb combined with a good general view of the range than the ascent of Blath Bheinn, a point rising prominently on the east side of Glen Sligachan, well away from the main group. Being in submissive mood, I accordingly found myself next day, with Slingsby, Hastings and Woolley, pounding along the long open Glen Sligachan to the massive little peak some nine miles distant as the crow flies. The ordinary route up this mountain is simple enough; but it is needless to say that we were fired by the ambition to do something new, and the most attractive route, of which little was as yet known, appeared to be the north face. We were very soon able to enjoy all the pleasures of being in difficulties. There are many rocky passages on the north-west face which would puzzle even the most active of the young braves. The rope was often required, not only from the point of view of mountaineering propriety, but also from that of sheer necessity. The line of attack led up a narrow gully, in which the rocks were large and smooth. About halfway up the face the party divided, Slingsby and Hastings proceeding along the track which they had been pleased to select, while Woolley and I found an easier ridge a little further west. This expedition led me, during the brief intervals of repose, to contrast mentally the widely dissimilar arts of rock-climbing and snow-craft. The conviction gradually became certain, as I watched the successful gymnastics of my companions, that the latter branch afforded, after all, the most scientific field for the devotee of the pursuit. The rock climber, I thought to myself, if he leads a very active and merry career still can enjoy only a short one; and I resolved to extol henceforth snow-craft as the highest intellectual development of mountaineering. Similar experiences have, I fancy, actuated others in coming to identical conclusions. The difficulties of the rocks may be estimated by the fact that Woolley and I, whose route was not so perfectly simple as to dispense with a good deal of scrambling, were on the top of the mountain a full hour before the others arrived. In fact, for a little time we were anxious about them, largely, it may be, on account of the fact that an essential portion of the luncheon was in their keeping. The day was too fine to show the colours of the distant hills at their best. It would probably be hard to find a better expedition to take, in broken showery weather, when occasional glimpses might be obtained of the distant hills, than this ascent of Blath Bheinn. Unfortunately, in Skye such days appear to be few and far between: when

the weather is good it is very, very clear, and when it is bad it is commonly persistently hopeless. In due course our shouts were answered, and our companions appeared in a high state of delight. They had, it seemed, swarmed up a lovely gully, scrambled up a sweet little pinnacle wholly unconnected with their line of ascent, traversed some delightful slabs, knocked down some perfect rocks on each other's heads, and, in short, found admirable opportunities for performing all the feats that bring comfort to the soul of the ardent rock-climber. Finally, becoming hungry, and being desirous of putting to the test Woolley's singular talent for making attractive drinks out of nothing in particular, they made straight up the last rocks. Unless some primitive Macdonald, pursued by a Macleod who was his physical superior, or some mediæval Macleod endeavouring to flee from the just retribution of an outraged Macdonald, had been forced to go up these rocks, the line of ascent was probably new.

Our appetite for novelty was satiated for the day, and we followed the ordinary route home again.

The chief of the organising department to the expedition had so arranged matters as to provide the greatest possible amount of variety. We had now ascended one peak by a recognised route, and another by a variation. The programme for the next day was to consist of a form of mountaineering which I have heard of more often than I have tried; having criticised it unfavourably, it seemed at least proper to test whether there was really anything in it. We were to undertake a 'ridge-wandering.' The ordinary form of this latest mountaineering innovation, I believe, does not require any particular peak; it is quite sufficient to get on to the selected ridge, and to climb along it, in any direction, for an indefinite time. The desire for orthodoxy led us to select a ridge on which, at any rate, there were some named points.

Starting from Sligachan, we followed the ordinary route leading to Loch Brittle until we reached Coire-na-Creiche; bearing to the right when up the Coire, we made for the depression between Sgurr Mhadaidh and Sgurr Thuilm, and attained the crest at no great distance from the peak of Mhadaidh itself. Here, as we had a long day before us, we judiciously placed a person of not too enterprising temperament in the van, for, as has been already explained, the actual difficulties of the rock-climbing depend very much on where the leader elects to go. Wisdom and courtesy alike indicated

the propriety of asking a senior member to go first. Even early in the day we became conscious that the route we were immediately following was not a novel one. It is still possible on the Cuchullins to estimate the number of previous travellers by the number of loose stones to be found on the route, the latter being in inverse proportion to the former. Without any difficulty we reached the top of Mhadaidh. At this stage, though but the beginning of the day's walk, one of the charms of ridge-wandering became apparent. It consists in this. Just at the moment when an admiration for the surrounding scenery begins to develop; when a concern for the effects that the pace of climbing may possibly have on untrained persons is engendered in those who are thoughtful for the feelings of others; when the climber looks upwards with a somewhat sinking heart and downwards with a contempt for the apparently short distance he has already accomplished; in short, when the mountaineer is getting tired, some top or another is reached. In the Alps, any such point would nowadays be considered a virgin ascent, worthy of being forwarded to the editor under the title of a 'new expedition,' but we gathered in our first ascents with great unconcern. Reaching a summit at all times is considered a highly emotional occasion, and it would seem scarcely possible to add to the pleasure; but mountaineering is so perfect an amusement that no real climax is ever conceivable. The older the mountaineer, the more capable is he of finding new pleasures in his pursuit, and in these wanderings the relief of a brief descent falls always just at the opportune moment. Certainly the seniors seemed to be most attracted by this feature.

From Mhadaidh and from the ridge we were able to look straight down Glac Mhor, over Loch Coruisk, and away over the distant blue of Loch Scavaig. It is such glimpses that yield an attraction to these little Skye peaks which can nowhere else be found; the rugged foreground crags, with the wonderful blues and emeralds of the lochs, with the brilliant soft mists hanging over them, form pictures of which it is not possible to tire. Our next point, Greadaidh, was soon reached; in front of us was Banachdich, and still further south our goal of the day, the famous inaccessible pinnacle of Sgurr Dearg. The third peak was soon added to our list, and from this point, Banachdich, a good view was obtained of the steep ridge hemming in the dark waters of Loch Coruisk on the east. The weather, which was absolutely perfect for the climber, was not the best possible for showing



SGURR ALAISDAIR AND SGURR DEARG.
FROM THE SOUTH EAST

H Woolley phot.

up the colours of the rocks. Not only were the hills we were on obtrusively dry, but the absence of moisture prevented any of the evaporation from the lower slopes which is so necessary to give harmony of colour. The photographers of the party, it is needless to say, were anxious at all times to record their impressions. There is no more useful person in an expedition which includes extremely active climbers than a photographer. Without their intervention, indeed, the halts would have been few and far between, and a disposition to encourage this form of the fine arts, it was gratifying to observe, was very generally shown by some members of the party. From Banachdich excellent scrambling was obtained along the ridge separating it from Dearg. Sgurr Dearg is a rounded mass planned in the most singular style of architecture, but there is no need to describe again the 'inaccessible pinnacle,' as it is called, which forms the culminating point of this mountain. It would be prosaic to compare it to a tooth-comb stuck in the middle of a hair brush for convenience of packing, but it bears a strong resemblance to such an arrangement. The illustration, reproduced from a photograph of Mr. Woolley's, shows the pinnacle on the right of Sgurr Alaisdair. The view was taken from the south side, the reverse of our line of attack. It is a decidedly good scramble up this west side of the pinnacle, with one distinctly bad step. The use of the rope is imperative. We cast lots as to who should have the honour of leading, and the choice fell on Hastings, who went up in a style that made some of us reflect on the number of birthdays we had already experienced. Mackenzie, charged with the cameras and other baggage, skirted round the base of the pinnacle, and watched our gymnastics with a critical eye. The descent on the east side requires some care, for the ridge is marvellously sharp and jagged, but the previous ascents of the brothers Pilkington and others had made matters very much easier, inasmuch as the whole of the place had been swept of loose stones and put into thorough order for the climber. The effects of weathering of rocks could be most admirably studied on Dearg and some of the surrounding pinnacles. The whole process is shown to perfection on a small scale. Standing on these points it seems possible to trace in imagination the shaping and modelling, out of a cubical upheaved mass of rock, of even such an obelisk as the Matterhorn, or the jagged aiguilles of the Mont Blanc district.

In descending, we followed the main ridge for a little distance further south, and then turning to the right down

some screes, landed in Coire Labain. No more perfect expedition, varied and interesting as it was throughout, could have been planned than the one we had concluded. A vote of thanks was carried *nem. con.* to the chief organiser, Charles Pilkington. We were all ready enough to drink to his health, but there was no spring handy, and the water-bottles were drained dry. A supply of fresh-water springs is, however, much needed on the Cuchullin Hills, and a rider was added to this effect. Silver's gourds are essential items of equipment, especially in fine weather, for a good deal of dust is set loose by the dislodgment of loose stones which abound everywhere. A mathematically minded person had indeed relieved our thirst to some extent by an extremely painstaking and accurate division of an orange among the party—even to the apportionment of the pips he seemed scrupulously exact. At the lower part of the Coire the party divided, Walker and Slingsby returning to Sligachan to assure the ladies of the party that the expedition had been achieved without misadventure, while the rest descended to the localised forest and aviary distinguished already in Skye literature as Glen Brittle. Antiquarian research forms no part of the subject of this paper. Many interesting points of history were, however, indicated to me, no doubt extremely authentic and correct; the lapse of time, however, has rather confused my recollections of the details. This is, however, a matter of complete unimportance. It is practically safe in any part of the Cuchullins, if you meet with a striking point of view, a queer-shaped stone or a mountain tarn, to assert, without fear of contradiction, that at some distant period either the clan Macdonald selected the spot for an onslaught on the Macleods, or that the Macleods had rendered the locality for ever famous in history by exterminating in it some section of the Macdonalds. In the wilds of Suanetia in the Caucasus similar internecine warfare was in the old days carried on, the *casus belli* there being almost invariably either cattle or women. These old Celtic tribes, probably, were never at a loss to find some excuse for a fight; but when a motive was needed their hardy morality would appear to have limited the excuse to a desire for their neighbours' cattle. Disregarding possible historical associations, we saw only in Glen Brittle a perfect oasis of flowers and trees, which seemed all the more refreshing after our wanderings during the day. The aviary was well tenanted, but the now classical cuckoo had an engagement elsewhere.

The next morning we were up betimes, for it was the last

day's climbing for some of us, and great things were to be accomplished on the mountains. Our plan was to ascend the highest point of Sgurr Alaisdair by a new route, descending to Loch Coruisk, and so home by Glen Sligachan. The Ordnance map is a little uncertain in the nomenclature of the group of peaks known as Alaisdair, and the name Sgumain is applied to them collectively. Mr. Pilkington's sketch map* gives the proper nomenclature in detail. The highest point of Sgurr Alaisdair, to which that name should alone be applied, is, according to him, the centre of the three peaks on the south-east side of the head of Coire Labain. This point is not on the water-parting at all, but on a narrow ridge branching off in a south-west direction and separating Coire Labain from Coire-na-Ghrunnda. The northern of the three peaks is at the junction of the Alaisdair ridge with the main water-parting, while north-west of this again and between it and Sgurr Dearg is another point to which no name is assigned in the Ordnance map, and which Mr. Pilkington calls Sgurr Mhic Connich. This is placed in the very centre of the amphitheatre forming the head of Coire Labain.

Keeping to the right as we ascended the head of Coire Labain, we made our way up a buttress leading straight up to the southern point of Sgurr Sgumain, and found at once very fine climbing. Turning to the north and keeping always along the ridge, we reached the highest point of Alaisdair. Here at once the topographers fell to a discussion as to whether Dearg or Alaisdair is the higher. This appears to be an unfailing source of difference of opinion in Skye. Still keeping along the ridge in descending, we made for the north-east peak in the hope that we should be able to follow the eastern ridge leading thence towards Sgurr Dubh. This ridge proved, however, impracticable, and we accordingly found it necessary to give up the endeavour to find a way, and retracing our steps to the depression between Sgurr Alaisdair and Sgurr Sgumain we descended into Coire-na-Ghrunnda. Striking upwards we gained the main ridge again and travelled along it to an unnamed point from which the Dubh ridge branches off to the east. Woolley's photograph, now reproduced, was taken from this point. The party now divided, Pilkington and Hastings being desirous of ascertaining whether they could not make an ascent of Sgurr Dubh, while Woolley and I made

* See p. 447.

straight down the valley as we wished to see all we could of Loch Coruisk and Loch Scavaig, and the hour was getting late. A more exasperating valley to travel down is not to be found anywhere. All the loose stones of Skye appear to have been shot here with absolutely no attempt at arrangement. Rapid progress was impossible, and, in fact, at the lower part of the Coire we joined Pilkington and Hastings, who had found time to ascend Sgurr Dubh and descend straight down the face, while we were picking our way over the boulders. A wide sweep round the slopes and down some grass-covered gullies brought us to the seashore, where we revelled for a time by a little spring enjoying the soft fresh air and stimulated by the perfume of some decomposing seaweed. From thence the way lay round Loch Coruisk and over the shoulder of its north side—a good hour's ascent—into Glen Sligachan.

Doubtless by the next day the inventive genius of Pilkington and Woolley could easily have devised fresh climbs, but strong sporting tendencies developed in the party, and a fishing excursion was decided on. A characteristically leaky boat was provided and launched in safety on Loch Sligachan. When the rowers were tired they announced that we had arrived at the best of the fishing ground, and we addressed ourselves to the sport as seriously as though it were a pegged-down fishing match. Of the actual conditions of this form of contest I have no practical experience, but believe it to be the case that the man who catches most fish gets first prize, while the angler who has the smallest basket is allowed by fishermen's etiquette to tell subsequently the most incredible stories. At any rate, these were the conditions more or less faithfully observed. The first prize was awarded to a sportswoman who at one haul jerked up two wriggling little objects said to be codfish, but more resembling in size early April whitebait. It appeared, however, that there was something wrong with the tide, or the wind, or the bait which fully accounted for our partial success. One of the first things to be got up in any place where fishing is the special sport is the list of excuses accepted locally as explaining failure, and I was sorry that I had not made suitable inquiries beforehand. As the boat had not been in use for some time, and after a while showed symptoms of going down, we decided to return before the fishing ground was wholly exhausted. Some of the party, out of concern for the oarsmen, elected to walk, but the ladies with true nautical heroism flatly refused to desert a sinking ship.

As a simple chronicler of the doings of our party it is my privilege to record a singular expedition, in which I took no part. For the notes of this climb I am indebted to Mr. Cecil Slingsby, who, in fact, supplied me with the plain black and white; any colouring that may be detected must be of my addition. The party consisted of Messrs. Geoffrey Hastings, Edward Hopkinson, and Slingsby. The programme which they had evolved was, briefly, to endeavour to force a way through the unpromising gorge which drains Coire Bhasteir on the north side. Sgurr Bhasteir itself, it should be noted, the position of which has been corrected by Mr. Charles Pilkington, is not, as represented in the Ordnance map, situated on the secondary ridge jutting out northwards, but is a point on the main water-parting between Bruach-na-Frithe and Sgurr-nan-Gillean. From the top of the gorge an attempt was to be made on the centre of the five pinnacles of Sgurr-nan-Gillean by the face of the mountain. This was a very pretty programme in itself, and an additional zest was given to the project by the fact that distinguished climbers had tried in vain to ascend the pinnacle by this route. The actual obstruction was a matter of uncertainty. Very soon, however, when the party were well in the gorge, the nature of the difficulty was disclosed, and turned out to be a pool of water some thirty to forty feet in length and twelve feet in width, averaging probably about ten feet in depth. A tarn of this nature forms a very pretty feature in a mountain picture but a somewhat unexpected obstacle to the mountaineer; howbeit, as the party seem to have been going a sort of steeplechase, a water-jump was not much out of place. It is deeply to be regretted that the ubiquitous photographer was not present on the occasion. My information is limited really to the notes supplied, and I can but give the bare facts of the climb; a photographer might have been able to record some of the bare facts much more graphically. On each side of the little tarn the rocks were perpendicular, a term that, in mountaineering literature, signifies anything from difficult to impossible; at any rate, they were sheer enough to be pronounced impracticable. At the head of the pool a little waterfall some twenty feet high completed the picture. A huge rock, which at some time or another had fallen from the side of the mountain, had become wedged in the steep bed of the little stream and other loose stones were piled on the top of it. The big boulder projected about ten feet over the pool. It was necessary, therefore, in the first place,

to get to the head of the pool and, in the second, to turn the boulder. A bold attempt by Hastings to find a way by a little ledge, while still observing the ordinary mountaineering proprieties in the matter of costume, proved fruitless. After some ingenious climbing he was pounded and it seemed possible for a minute or two, to the great delectation of his companions, that, in the words of the Portuguese dialogue book, 'he could not nor to go further neither to put back.' The alternative route back lay through the pool, and those who were in a position of safety watched with interest to see which way might be selected. By means of some ingenious movements, described by the spectators, rather contemptuously, as a wriggle, he succeeded in rejoining his companions without taking an involuntary bath. Meanwhile the others had adopted a costume more suitable for the emergency, and stood, like yellow primroses, on the brim. Then the leader plunged boldly in and swam to the head of the pool. So far the route was simple enough, but a more painful exercise consisted in climbing the rock to the top of the waterfall. The performance is described as having been more instructive from an anatomical point of view than graceful. The rope was now thrown up, and Slingsby and Hopkinson, as true gymnasts, followed. Even now the difficulties were not at an end, for a few feet further up another tarn was found, which, however, it was possible to ford, though the party was waist-deep in the water. From the upper pool to the end of the gorge the obstacles were less, and the party soon emerged into the very head of Coire Bhasteir. It is difficult in these days to discover any novelty, and unwise to claim originality in anything whatever, but I can recall no other recorded occasion on which any party ascended a mountain by water—since the days of Noah. Turning to the left, the climbers now attacked their pinnacle. A steep chimney, on the right-hand side of the face as the pinnacle is seen from the Coire, first attracted the leader's eye. The attempt to get up this was, however, unsuccessful. Descending, therefore, again to the base of the chimney, they traversed to the right, and climbed straight up the face of the pinnacle. The rocks were smooth and very steep, but firm. After about one hundred feet had been ascended, a short broad ledge afforded a moment's rest. Above the ledge again rose a steep chimney some twenty feet high. The rocks here were all loose and the gully was blocked at its upper part by a rounded boss of stone, affording neither hand nor foot

hold. It was not until the leader had trampled one of his companions under foot by standing on his shoulders that he was able to work his way slowly to the top. Some fifty feet higher up the party reached the ridge by which we had made our ascent on the first day. When mountaineers have achieved an expedition of particular difficulty or interest, it is their universal custom to do two things; one, to describe every detail of the expedition in so minute and circumstantial a way that nobody ought to fail to recognise where they went, and nobody, therefore, ought to experience any difficulty in following them. Unless they perform this task to the satisfaction of editors of guide books, they are apt to draw down upon their heads outpourings of wrath, and topographical contempt will be their lot. Secondly, when they have made their route perfectly clear, they are bound to recommend that no one should on any account follow it. This is the method, at any rate, commonly adopted for making a new route popular, and the description furnished to the chronicler observed these conditions.

Other noteworthy excursions by the party were a new ascent of Bidein Druim-nan-Ramh by a route which, it appears to me, as an historian trying to decipher others' notes, must be seen in order to be described, and a traverse of the inaccessible pinnacle by one of the ladies of the party.

A few remarks on the mountain climbing among these Cuchullin Hills may here not be out of place, and I hope that they embody more or less completely the opinions generally held by those who best know the peaks. To every mountain summit there will be found more than one easy route involving little more than an enjoyable scramble, but to every one of the peaks there are many lines of attack which seem promising, but which may lead the inexperienced climber into very formidable difficulties indeed. The rocks vary very much on the ridges; for long stretches they may be found firm, rough, and broken, but in many places they are insecure and dangerous. In any attempt to make a new route up any of the peaks, the utmost precaution should be taken with loose stones. As time goes on and mountaineering in Skye becomes more popular, the faces may be more swept and garnished, and already a great part of the range has been got into proper order. The weathering of the rocks is the chief cause of their extraordinary local variations as regards firmness. The rocks must nowhere be treated with contempt. Attempts to find new routes, to

ascend by untried buttresses and walls, should be considered in detail as carefully as in the Alps, and if any new route is contemplated a rope should invariably be taken. Even a slight deviation from a recognised track may lead the climber to places where a slip might easily be fatal. Solitary climbing is at least as unwise here as in the Alps.

Probably the best time of year to ensure fine weather is that which we selected, and those who can obtain a brief holiday at Whitsuntide, in most years, will be well rewarded by a visit to Skye. The colouring, however, which is so striking a feature of the whole range, will be seen in much better perfection in April, September, or October. The long walk from Sligachan to the base of the majority of the Cuchullins is an undeniable drawback. A party of three or four provided with an alpine tent pitched, say, on the north shore of Loch Coruisk or in the corrie running up from the loch, would find ample occupation for three or four days in climbing the peaks around. There is a good place for camping on the neck of land on the west side between Loch Coruisk and Loch Scavaig. John Mackenzie may be, without hesitation, recommended most strongly as a guide. It would be very easy to mistake the way in misty or bad weather, and his local knowledge would be invaluable. In addition he is a capital climber, takes great interest in all the modern refinements of new routes and variations, and is an excellent companion.

For those who are interested in physical geography, Skye presents a fine field hitherto insufficiently worked. The traces of extinct glaciers are strikingly distinct. Ice-worn rocks and transported boulders exist in profusion. There is a good opportunity for anyone to work out the ancient glacier system of Skye on the same lines as Professor Ramsay adopted in a paper on those of North Wales in the first volume of 'Peaks, Passes and Glaciers.'

It must not be supposed for a moment that the topography given in this paper is in any degree mine: for all the notes relating to this subject I am indebted to Mr. Charles Pilkington, who is an authority on the range; indeed, it is principally due to him that this most picturesque corner of Great Britain has become at all known to mountaineers. We were fortunate indeed in seeing all the sights under his guidance and direction.