

THROUGH GLEN TILT

HELEN HARTLEY

Of recent years, several of our members have experienced the recreation of a winter walk through Glen Tilt and the Lairig Ghru. Doreen Langfield and I decided one day to follow their example, and took the Friday evening train north, alighting at Aviemore at 7.30 a.m. on Saturday morning in bright sunshine. At this early hour the Cairngorms were covered by a blanket of white cloud, moulded to their shape—picturesque, but not promising. Before setting off we ate a hearty breakfast at the Cairngorm Hotel, in the company of continental ski instructors and ski-ing guests, and finally staggered forth carrying tent, ice axe and three days' provisions.

We made our approach to the hills past Loch an Eilein, passing on the way a field of young and very photogenic highland cattle who followed us along the fence and noisily objected to being left. The loch, with its ruined castle on an islet and its setting amidst the old Scots pines of the Rothiemurchus Forest, was looking its best and was the obvious stopping place for a rest and some food. After a while we pursued our way, over the Cairngorm Club footbridge and then following the left bank of the river through the trees and on to the pleasant moorland that leads into the mouth of the Lairig. Though we seemed to gain height imperceptibly, we were soon high above the river and enjoyed wide views north over the forest to the Monadhliath. We had aimed to reach the new bothy for lunch, and eventually found it about a mile short of the summit of the pass, a hundred feet up on the left bank of the river. We were now in cloud, and as the wind was driving spicules of snow at us we were glad of a brew-up and a chance to put on all the extra clothing we had. The hut has a welcoming solidity, with two small rooms, one containing two iron bedsteads and the other a cooking slab. It was built by the Edinburgh University Mountaineering Club. In the hut log was a note that two skiers had spent all the previous Saturday in getting there, through 18 inches of new snow which would have been impassable on foot, so we realised we had chosen the right week-end.

The snow up to the summit of the pass was fairly firm and provided easier going than the rocky summer track. Crossing the pass, we saw ptarmigan in their usual haunt north of the Pools of Dee, and then descended southwards out of the mist and into the late afternoon sunshine of Glen Dee. The Gharbh Choire was outlined against a blue sky and the clouds on the shoulders of Ben Macdhui were flushed by the sunset as we took our last rest by the Tailors' Stones. Lower down the Glen we were pleased to find a new iron footbridge spanning the stream close to the Corrour Bothy, since the

old wire hawser was difficult to cross with a rucksack.

We had hoped next day to climb the narrow arete that leads to the top of the Angels' Peak from Lochan Uaine, and to carry on to Blair Atholl on Monday to catch the evening train. However, on Sunday morning the clouds hung low over the mountains, even hiding the Devil's Point, and there were flurries of rain. In view of this distinct lack of promise on the part of the weather we therefore decided to walk on through Glen Tilt and to camp by Beinn a'Ghlo, which might then be climbed on Monday before striking camp.

We spent a leisurely morning breakfasting and watching the bothy mouse, an attractive, plump, gingery-brown-and-fawn creature who showed a preference for Peppermint Aero and who had attacked our stores during the night, popping up through a hole in the floor near the grate and disposing of his ill-gotten gains in two different caches. Eventually we started out along the River Dee, following it to the White Bridge where it turns east to Braemar. Here we found some charming picnic spots by the deep salmon pools and rocky weirs of the river. Our way then led up the River Geldie, passing a deserted croft which was in a fair state of repair and which was obviously used by climbers. Further on, by the bridge near the junction of the Feshie and the Geldie was another croft, well maintained and locked. We then carried on south to the clump of rugged pine trees that mark Bynack Lodge, a former youth hostel in a very poor state of repair, after which we crossed the Bynack burn quite easily and reached the stretch of flat moorland that forms the watershed.

The Upper Tilt valley is a straight steep-sided trench, with a narrow footpath that extends high above the stream for about two miles as far as the Bedford memorial bridge, where the River Tarf joins the main stream. It was now getting dusk, and we were glad to find the valley opening out. The first possible camping site was about one and a half miles short of Beinn a'Ghlo, but we took it none the less.

Next morning the air was full of wind-driven snow and climbing was obviously an unsuitable occupation, so we settled down in our sleeping bags and put off facing the driving wind for as long as possible. We eventually struck camp about 11 a.m. and found a very good bothy by the bridge to the north-west of Beinn a' Ghlo. All these bothies, of course, make a tent unnecessary except in a real Cairngorm blizzard, but unhappily we were not to know that. However, by now we were nearing the end of our journey. At the next landmark, the old stone bridge above Forest Lodge, some foresters were staying snugly in their caravan. They were brought up

daily by jeep from Blair Atholl but had decided that conditions were too severe for fence mending.

The remainder of Glen Tilt provided a pleasant walk which was enlivened by watching a herd of about one hundred deer grazing on the lower slopes of Beinn a' Ghlo across the river. We lunched by the shepherds' footbridge by a waterfall where we managed to find a sheltered nook among the rocks of the river bed. On reaching Blair Atholl at 5 p.m., we washed, changed and fed at the Tilt Hotel, and finally caught the 8.15 train back home, well pleased.

