

## AN ARRAN HOLIDAY.

By J. A. BEST.

For some years I had promised myself a holiday in Arran, but had always been lured further north, as most of us are, by the attractions of vaster mountain masses or the hope of Alpine conditions.

However, last August, acting on the strict instructions of two or three M.A.M. Members, we restrained ourselves from crossing the Clyde and found ourselves at Ardrossan waiting for the evening steamer to take us the twelve miles across to the Island.

If one is fortunate, as we were, this approach is truly delightful, the whole length of the island being silhouetted against the low sunlight, showing up every tooth and notch of the ridges of which I had lately heard so much, and thoroughly whetting our appetites.

When seen on a map or from the air instead of from the steamer on the Firth of Clyde, the island, which is twenty miles long, has the appearance of a parcel tied in the middle by "The String" as the nine miles east to west road is appropriately called. The southern half of the island is the least interesting, consisting of moorland, hills and glens, the hills rising to close on 1700 ft. but without much rock. It fortunately contains, however, the three "fashionable" watering places which, with the exception of bus trips round the island, appear to supply attractive occupation to almost all the visitors.

The northern end has two mountain masses; the westerly consists chiefly of Ben Bharrain and various Ben Bhreacs, the highest point being 2368 feet, and the easterly, divided from the former by the largest and most desolate glen in the island, Glen Iorsa, consists of some thirteen peaks ranging from 2000 up to the 2866 feet of Goatfell, the highest mountain in the island.

A road runs round the whole island, hugging the coast almost continuously, and on this are situated a few delightful villages, quite unspoilt, as indeed is the whole island; it does not yet possess a picture house! Fortunately, although it is within such easy reach of Glasgow, the magnetic attractions of such places as Dunoon and Rothesay appear almost to empty the boats long before they reach Arran.

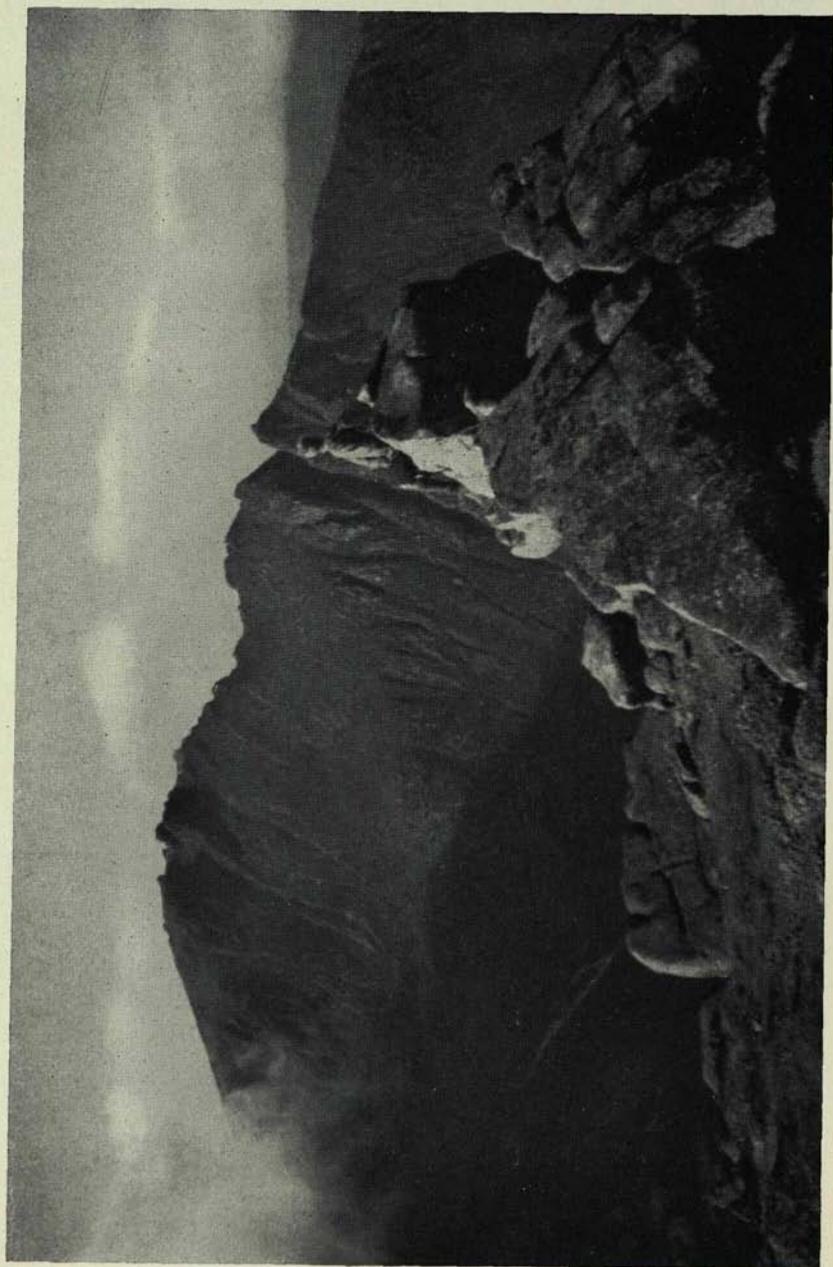
There is much of interest in the island, particularly if one goes back to the Stone and Bronze ages, judging by the number of barrows, cairns and stone circles scattered about; and, to come to more recent times, it was the scene of the episode of Bruce and the spider. However, it is to the geologist that Arran appears to be a real paradise, there being found more varied rock formations there than in any similar area elsewhere in the world.

Not being a geologist, I was chiefly struck by the beautiful red of the sandstone round parts of the coast, and on the big hills by the enormous boiler plate slabs and the very coarse texture of the granite (very bad for the knees!). Another very interesting feature is the raised shore which extends around most of the island. Apparently Arran was elevated a few feet at a comparatively recent geological period, so that the present beach lies at a lower level than the old beach which extends inland to the cliffs which must at one time have been the sea boundary of the island. The old beach provides accommodation for many of the houses around the coast and for a considerable part of the modern coast road.

The Ardrossan boats make straight for Brodick, in the bay formed by the tightening of "The String" on the east, and from here, after having to pay to be allowed to leave the so-called pier, we were herded into a bus, and after six miles of coast road, much of which was beautifully wooded and, with the gorgeous colouring of the rocks in the sea, making a very delightful drive, we were deposited at the nearest of white-washed cottages in Corrie, just 30 yards from the sea and our morning dip.

I must admit that the beauty of the ride was slightly dulled when 9/- was demanded for the bus fares for which I (being Birmingham Corporationally trained) had produced 2/6. This was, however, the only expensive item to be faced, the living being excellent and the cost most reasonable; and, as a matter of fact, we at once hired bicycles, which we found very useful for exploring the island generally, or for using as far as possible when making for the hills.

Goatfell and the big hills rise up from the sea immediately behind Corrie, which is situated between Brodick and the village of Sannox, which two places are connected through the centre of this group of mountains by Glen Rosa and Glen Sannox,



CAISTEAL ABHAIL and the WITCH'S STEP from North Goat Fell.

which meet at the Saddle at 1430 feet. Enclosing these glens are the ridges providing the fine ridge walks, which are the chief feature of these mountains.

Of course it is not suggested that the ridges are of "Skye" standard; in fact, except in a few cases, they can be made into mere walks, but if taken conscientiously, they are very fine indeed and some excellent scrambling is necessary.

The finest hill is Cir Mhor, in the very centre above the Saddle, and three ridges run out from it, each in turn throwing out further ridges, thus making a very nice choice of horse-shoes.

The finest walk is from Glen Rosa to the summit of Ben Nuis (2597), the north face of which consists of 500 feet of slabs and chimneys, one of which, the famous Ben Nuis chimney, has been climbed only once. Following the ridge to Ben Tarsuinn (2706) we get our first "close up" of the remarkably neat and massive piles of granite, which although split and weathered are not tumbled about, but remain piled up almost as if they were gigantic bricks laid by a bricklayer. This formation is found throughout and is most striking.

From Tarsuinn a ridge runs out into Glen Rosa to the summit of Ben a'Chliabhain (pronounced Clèven but commonly called Chilblain) and the main ridge continues to A'Chir (2335) and in the angle so formed and below the A'Chir ridge there are some very fine chimney climbs.

The A'Chir ridge is great fun and affords some excellent scrambling, and has one quite sensational gap at the Mauvais Pas. This brings us to Cir Mhor (2618), and as we approach it we see the Rosa pinnacle—a mass of gigantic slabs rising up and projecting from its side. The top of this can be reached by a chimney from the inside, but I believe that no attempt to lead outside has succeeded.

Cir Mhor is a beautifully shaped hill with a nicely pointed summit which, owing to its central position, gives a wonderful outlook. Below to the east are the Sannox and Rosa Glens and to the west Glen Iorsa. On the face down into Glen Sannox are the best rock climbs in the island, the height from the slabs at the bottom to the summit being 1200 feet.

I did no serious climbing myself, but I understand, and from observation I believe, that there are very varied climbs of all degrees of difficulty.

Away across the Saddle is North Goatfell with Goatfell to the right and Mullach Buidhe and Cioch na h-Oighe on the left. Turning round to the north we have Caisteal Abhail (known as the Castles) with its great heavy towers of granite at the summit, and leading from it, and forming the far wall of Glen Sannox, is the ridge terminating with Suidhe Fhearghas broken midway by the huge V-shaped gash known as the Witch's Step, with a great gully running down the steep hillside into the glen below.

Away at the head of Glen Iorsa is a small loch, Loch na Davie, which is interesting in that it has outflows down the glens both to its north and south. Loch Tanna, about a mile long, is seen to the west below Ben Bharrain, and this is the largest loch, of which there are few in the island.

From here one is almost certain to see a herd of red deer, amongst which there are probably some fine stags. I was told that a pair of eagles were nesting on the slopes of Mullach Buidhe, but as we never saw one during our stay, I am afraid they were not nesting there, but may have been visiting from up north, although I doubt this as there are few grouse and no mountain hares to attract them. There are also no ptarmigan, but as the snow does not lie for long, this is not surprising; also there are no moles or squirrels which seems strange, but there are plenty of flies in August to keep the descendants of the fellow who did his bit with Robert the Bruce working full time.

The next best ridge is the one from the Castles (2817) to Suidhe Fhearghas (2081) for there is some fine scrambling up the great granite masses on the summit of the Castles and also along the ridge to the Witch's Step, the ascent of which requires a rope in any but favourable conditions, and the summit stone is quite an exciting affair, especially to get off. On Suidhe Fhearghas one is just above the measured mile used for their trials by the Clyde built boats, which are frequently to be seen there.

Across the glen is Cioch na h-Oighe (2168), a fine looking hill when seen end-on from Sannox, and sitting here opposite it one wonders how a descent may be made from the summit into Glen Sannox, after doing the ridge connecting it with Mullach Buidhe to the right. It is a shortish ridge, not unlike

Crib Goch in parts, with the south side falling very steeply into the Devil's Punchbowl, on which face there are five diagonal ledges, all climbable but unhealthy looking affairs. If you are lucky you may find an easy descent from the summit.

The remaining ridge is called The Stachach, joining Goatfell (2866) and North Goatfell (2684) which has some grand granite towers, but these unfortunately are easily turned. From North Goatfell one can either go down the narrow bare ridge to the Saddle, or along to Mullach Buidhe (2688), and if the Cioch na h-Oighe ridge has not been done it can be continued from here.

If it is a clear day very fine views are to be had from here. One can see Cumberland, the Isle of Man, Ireland and then Jura, Mull and a sea of western and central mountains as far as Ben Nevis, while nearer are Ben Lomond, the Kyles of Bute, Loch Fyne, Kintyre and Ailsa Craig, to mention a very few of a long list. Nearer still in Lamlash Bay is Holy Island, which rises almost sheer over 1000 feet from the sea, and affords a very pleasant day's scrambling.

In conclusion I must mention the three Corrie Boulders, all near the road-side, which present some most interesting problems and help to keep one's muscles in form without having to go far to do it.