

ACROSS THE ROUGH BOUNDS.

R. ATKINS

Ladhar Bheinn is the least accessible mountain in remote Knoydart, the Rough Bounds; we found that a ferry from Mallaig was the most practical means of approach.

We arrived from Fort William at mid-day and a mere four hours later chugged forth. Leaving Inverie behind we began our long trek, crossing Màm Uidhe, turning eastwards up the Allt Coire Torr an Asgail and arriving in the corrie which forms the Northern Ridge of the mountain late in the evening. An initial reconnaissance without rucksacks did not show any east route, yet we had either to climb out of the corrie or else retrace our fifteen mile walk to Inverie. We began to climb. Two hours of scree slithering, slab climbing and heather scrambling seemed to bring us no nearer to the top. We searched for possible camp sites, but there were none. At last a rib of continuous slabs gave us our first opportunity to develop ant rhythm and we began to gain height. It was then that we saw the Beallach, a deep gash in the S.E. Ridge. We were soon standing on the col, but before moving through the Beallach we glanced westwards and were greeted by that most beautiful and dramatic of spectacles, the Western Isles rising proudly out of a mill-pond Atlantic and tinged with pink by the setting sun. A quarter of an hour later our progress was abruptly terminated by the downwards sweep of the Coire Dhorcail. That viewpoint is probably one of the finest in Scotland. The corrie itself is immense, with 1,000 foot bastion walls of rock at the base of which the Allt Coire Dhorcail begins its crazy seaward journey over smaller cliffs and recent rockfalls or through bog and gorge. Around Loch Hourn rose the Rough Bounds, an endless succession of peaks, their jagged purple outlines piercing a lemon sky. As we gazed from our eyrie their valleys gradually filled with a salmon tinted mist, giving them an almost ethereal beauty. We pitched our tent underneath the summit so as not to miss one single minute of that evening's glory.

We had intended to rely entirely on pemmican, partly to save weight and partly out of morbid curiosity; but the sight of a martian lobster in Mallaig had been too much for us. We ascended Ladhar Bheinn with the monster tied to the top of the rucksack, presumed dead, but which came very much alive just before we reached the col. At midnight we were trying to cook a lobster which resisted all our efforts, crawling out of our pint size mess tin whenever we turned away.

The following day proved ideal for our plans. We idled along the ridges and explored rock climbing possibilities from below, in glorious sunshine. The ridge itself lived up to our expectations, for the rock scenery was magnificent. We descended by the Great Gully and began our search for possible routes up the pronounced buttresses. We were not a strong party for new routes, particularly on such cliffs, for Kinlochhourn is a half-day's journey, nevertheless we were able to make useful notes for a visit we intend to make in Spring of next year.

Next day we left Ladhar Bheinn, descending into the corrie from the S.E. wall. The Drum a Choire Odhair, the N.E. wall would be an alternative but longer route and care must be taken in selecting the site for crossing the burn. The imprudence of this was brought home very surely to us on the journey down the glen. By keeping to the South side of the burn and contouring around Creag Bheithe by a mythical ordnance path, I merely had to drop down the steep hillside to Barrisdale. R.S. continued down to explore the lower course of the Allt Coire Dhorrcail and had considerable difficulty in fording the torrent or climbing out of the steep-sided gorge. He was forced eventually to the lochside and arrived at Barrisdale at 3.0 p.m.

Barrisdale consists of an empty shooting lodge and one presumably empty croft. From here we followed a very pleasant loch side track to Kinlochhourn, where accommodation can be obtained at the farm. The road from Kinlochhourn down past Loch Quoich is not recommended from a motoring point of view, and earlier in the year we were obliged to leave a car ten or twelve miles down the road. At the farm we further broke our pemmican diet by a delicious meal of sea trout. We regretted this as we toiled up Buidhe Bheinn on the North side of Loch Hourn and contoured round into the Allt Coire Mhalagain. It was then ten o'clock, and with three miles to do, the weather broke. We stumbled up the glen towards the Saddle in a raging storm, wearily climbing in and out of black peat hags. At 1.0 a.m. we pitched the tent and crawled into our sleeping bags. We had given up at the 2,200 contour just below the col between Sgurr na Sgine and the Saddle.

The Saddle and the Five Sisters are well-known and no route description is needed. The following night we camped on the slopes of the Sgurr an t Searraich beneath the 'youngest' sister.