

A HIGHLAND WALK

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The original idea for the walk was discussed before the 1959 Whitsun Meet held in Torricon, and the plan was to spend three days during the meet walking between Poolewe and Dundonnell. The first three days of the meet were accompanied by perfect weather, which was taken advantage of to carry out training walks on Beinn Alligin and Beinn Eighe. Certain members of the meet were observed carrying heavily laden rucksacks, and although they were known to be substantial eaters, the loads seemed to be excessive, even by their standards ; in fact the loads consisted mainly of ballast in an attempt to simulate the loads that would have to be carried later in the week.

The eve of departure approached and the members of the party gradually assembled a modest pile of equipment. The total weight was estimated to be slightly in excess of one hundred pounds, of which seventy pounds was accounted for by food. It was agreed that the total weight would have to be cut to about seventy-five pounds, so all non-essentials were dispensed with ; the final count was sixty-five pounds of food and ten pounds of non-essentials.

The party, which comprised Helen Hartley, Stuart Hutchinson and myself, spent some time equalising the loads and although care was taken I want to put on record that there is no foundation in the rumour* that a spring balance was used. We set off by car early in the morning, arriving at Poolewe by seven o'clock. It was decided to drive the car up the track which follows the River Ewe towards Kernsary ; after parking the car near Kernsary and telling the farmer that the car would be left for three days, we set off on the walk.

The first part was along a very indifferent track that led by the side of the Allt Chaol Doire. After four miles the track became more defined and we passed under the fine crags of Beinn Airigh Charr and Meall Mheinneidh ; both these mountains would offer fine rock climbing to anyone prepared to explore them. We crossed the causeway between Fionn Loch and Dubh Loch and arrived at our first destination, Carnmore.

It was known that it was possible to use Carnmore and Shenavall to sleep in. Carnmore is a shooting lodge, fully equipped but very securely bolted and barred. Obviously it was not intended that it should be used as a resting place for wandering climbers. A short distance from the lodge was a derelict barn and upon investigation it was clear that this was the correct accommodation. The condition of the barn was good and the facilities proved adequate.

* See 1959 *M.A.M. Journal*, p. 58—Ed.

A dry stone floor covered with straw was to provide our bed for the night.

After eating a modest lunch we set off to climb A'Mhaighdean, passing by the side of Dubh Loch and Loch Mor. The O.S. map indicated only steep grass slopes, but this turned out to be completely false and in fact the south-west face of A'Mhaighdean is a series of fine rock ridges up to eight hundred feet high. We found a wide gully and worked our way up, using a number of short rock ridges interspersed with steep grass slopes. As we gained height the fine cliffs of the north face of Beinn Lair came into view ; already some very fine long climbs have been made on this face. They are not excessive but are up to a thousand feet in length and are of a true mountaineering standard. All the way up the gully we followed a small stream which only disappeared a few feet from the final ridge. The day was extremely hot and the stream proved welcome to our parched throats.

The summit was soon reached from the ridge, and coupled with the fine weather provided magnificent views. Here again we found inaccuracies in the O.S. map ; in this case the summit height is shown as 2,800 feet, but checked on an altimeter proved to be 3,300 feet. The descent down the north-west ridge was easy but not without hazard, for on two occasions the leading members of the party were chased down the gully by large boulders which were loosened from the rotten sides of the gully. Here again crags replaced grass slopes indicated on the map. Before we returned to Carnmore we had our first sight of the many herds of deer which we were to see in the next few days.

Early the following morning we rose and made a good breakfast. All agreed that they had spent a comfortable night, although Helen complained that throughout the night the local mice had used her sleeping bag as a climbing ground. As we set off up the stalkers' track through the Allt Bruthach nan Easain our pace was slow due to the efforts of the previous day, and the shores of Lochan Feith Mhic-illean provided a perfect resting place after the walk up the path. The path led towards the lower slopes of Beinn Dearg Mhor which we intended to climb. A small cave formed by a fallen boulder provided a secure place to leave our rucksacks at the foot of the start of the climb ; the reason we were worried about the safety of our rucksacks was the presence of a large number of deer which we feared might attempt to eat our food if given half a chance.

The walk up Beinn Dearg proved very pleasant and on reaching the summit we carried out a small civil engineering project to convert some of the old snow into iced drinks which were very welcome in the heat of the day. Here again the views were excellent, with the next

day's objective, An Teallach, immediately to the north. Deep in the valley below on the far side of the Strath na Sealga the derelict farm called Shenavall could be seen. Shenavall must be one of the most remote farms in Scotland, being at least eight miles from the nearest road and it is understandable that it had been abandoned. The river in the valley appeared to be quite low and this was a relief to us as whether we would be able to cross it so far down stream was an unknown factor. We dropped down the steep south side of Beinn Dearg and after collecting our packs set off for Shenavall.

As we approached the valley we came across hundreds of deer which set off at top speed as soon as our scent reached them. The stream was easily forded, although under wetter conditions it would be a formidable obstacle which might mean a detour of eight miles to the bridge at Achneigie. Shenavall proved to be equipped with every comfort, spring beds, a fireplace, and even a dresser. The fabric of the house was in good condition but owing to a broken skylight rain had fallen inside and could mean the start of the decay of the house. This would be a great pity, as Shenavall provides an ideal centre to operate from as it is situated in superb surroundings. After settling in, some members of the party returned to the river and cooled off in one of the many pools whose water afforded pleasant relief after the heat of the day. Later, after an excellent meal, we spent the evening exploring the valley. It is worthy of note that this party definitely marched on its stomach and the food was prepared in grand style by Helen, using a petrol stove and a great deal of ingenuity.

The next day, after a miceless night sleeping on spring beds we were well refreshed and set out at a great rate for An Teallach. The route was to follow a stream behind the farm to the lower slopes of the south-east spur of An Teallach and then contour round to Loch Toll an Lochain, which is situated below the crags of the east face. We again left our loads without bothering to protect them as they were empty of food and of no interest to the local fauna.

We had agreed to meet our rescue party on An Teallach as we were anxious to be the first on top just to show that we were not exhausted. All the way up we kept expecting to see them ahead of us but there was no sign of them anywhere. This surprised us as the ascent of An Teallach was to have been the last climb of the meet. The walk along the ridge must be one of the finest in Scotland, affording as it does such good scrambling coupled with an excellent situation. Here again care had to be exercised with the loose and rotten rock which is encountered on the ridge. Late in the afternoon we walked down, collected our gear and headed for our rendezvous with a car at Dundonnell, still puzzled by the absence of our rescue team. The last part of the walk passed through typical Scottish

woodland scenery in the Allt Gleann Chaorachain.

As we reached the road we soon saw the car and with perfect timing arrived just in time for tea. Apparently the previous evening and in the early morning the weather had been bad in Torridon and the party had delayed its start, arriving at Dundonnell too late to climb An Teallach.

During the three days we walked for the better part of forty miles, climbing at the same time three peaks, and during the whole time had perfect weather, although perhaps a little too hot. Except for ourselves we saw no other human being throughout the walk, which considering the overcrowding that one finds elsewhere was reason enough for making it.

