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## A FORTNIGHT IN SKYE.

By R. E. T.

IT may perhaps be of interest to the readers of the *Climbers' Club Journal* to have some account of a most enjoyable fortnight spent in the Cuchullin Hills, from May 26th to June 10th of the present year. The party consisted of Messrs. C. J. Slade, G. R. Slade, A. T. Fraser, and myself. We made Sligachan Inn our headquarters.

The fact of the ground being new to all of us necessitated our finding our own way, and making our own mistakes, thus rendering the expedition all the more instructive and interesting.

There is something peculiarly fascinating in wondering "Where is it?" and "Will it go?" as opposed to the "This is it:" and "How ought it to be done?" of Cumberland or any other well-known district. The Cuchullins have not been the subject of much climbing literature. There is still ample opportunity for exploration, and many climbs remain unclimbed, simply for lack of climbers. The mountains of Skye may be placed somewhere midway between the hills of Cumberland and the vast ranges of the Alps. Our first view of that beautiful arête of the Sgurr-nan-Gillean—a long black-toothed ridge standing out against the evening sky, its couloirs of snow disappearing below into a thick white band of hanging mist—was one that even in Switzerland would have left a lasting impression.

The chief distinction between the climbing in Cumberland and in Skye is, that whereas in the former district you generally have to hunt for your climb, in the latter every mountain is a true peak, and there is no easy way up—that is to say, not too easy. There being but scanty hotel accommodation in the island, it is desirable, and, in order to reach some parts, almost necessary, to camp out.

Given good weather, nothing could be more pleasant ; but, with bad weather—and, as we discovered, it *can* be bad in Skye—it is correspondingly unpleasant.

We found Mr. Pilkington's map, corrected and enlarged from the Ordnance Survey, exceedingly useful. On May 28th, C. J. Slade led us up the Sgurr-nan-Gillean by the north-east or five pinnacle arête. This is a climb of sustained and varied interest, and it took us five hours from the base of the first pinnacle to the summit. We afterwards found we had started east of the usual route, thereby letting ourselves in for a more difficult piece of work than we encountered during the whole of the remainder of the climb. We descended about half way down the south-west ridge, and thence by a snow couloir which just permitted of a standing glissade. May 29th. Went to camping ground in Harta Corrie, and next morning crossed the Drium-nan-Ramh ridge into Coir-uisg, pitching our camp at the head of Loch Coruisk. Rain began about 2 p.m., forcing us to abandon the camp. Walked back to Sligachan by Camasunerie, getting in about 11 p.m. At 10 a.m., on June 1st, we set out from the hotel in company with Messrs. Wordsworth and Levi, who had kindly volunteered to shew us the way to a certain big gully in the Corrie na Creiche, known as the waterpipe ; by no means a misnomer. This gully leads up to the summit of the peak on the end of the north-west spur, stretching from the three-peaked Bideindruim-nan-Ramh. We started from Sligachan by the path leading to Glen Brittle, striking off to the left after crossing the watershed. This brought us to the foot of our climb at mid-day. Having lunched, shortly after one o'clock we attacked the first pitch, consisting of either a chimney on the left or a nice traverse on the right wall. C. J. Slade and I took the traverse, the rest went up the chimney. We then found ourselves on a loose stony platform, where we roped. A second chimney followed ; short, wet, and quite interesting. Next came what is generally known as the 80 ft. pitch, which had never before been climbed direct. Former parties had evaded the difficulty by traversing out to the right, passing a

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THE FIVE PINNACLE ARETE OF SGURR-NAN-GILLEAN.

From a photo, by G. P. Abraham, Keswick

small mountain ash tree, and cutting into the gully again above the chimney. Our party having congregated well under the overhanging rock to be out of the way of falling stones, the leader started upwards.

The first 40 feet consist of a very wet and perpendicular chimney, in the lower part rather too narrow to chimney with comfort, and the hand and foot holds are chiefly conspicuous by their absence. At the moment when you begin to wonder if your wind will last the struggle, the left hand grasps a welcome ledge, where you can fix yourself with comparative comfort, and give a sigh of relief (?) as you look up and realize that the hardest part is yet to come. The second part consists of an overhanging and very wet chimney, at the top, curving slightly to the right. Like the first part, this is also about 40 feet in height. The final step out on to the scree shoot above is rather sensational. At about 2.30 p.m. we halted for food, continuing about 3.15. The next obstacle was a short, wet chimney, which gave no trouble. This led up to what is known as the "Jammed Stones" pitch, consisting of several huge blocks jammed at varying intervals, one above the other, with very steep beds of fallen rock between. Then came rather an open piece of gully, with loose rock lying at a high angle, to be scrambled over. Above this came a choice of three short, steep chimneys, all rather difficult. We selected the left hand one, and climbed it by throwing the rope over a projection, and coming up with its assistance. Then followed a long series of stone shoots, which required extreme care, as the stones lay at an exceedingly high angle, and fell on the slightest provocation. The next obstacle of note was a long, narrow, and very wet chimney on the left, ending in an awkward traverse out and over to the right. It was nearly midnight when the tail of our party came over this portion, and it was by no means rendered more inviting by the bad light. This being accomplished, all that remained were four short pitches over large jammed rocks, which, however, took us a long time, owing to the darkness and the looseness of the rock. We emerged on the top at about 1 a.m. After a short

rest on the summit, we descended by the arête, returning along the same path by which we had come the previous day, and at 4.45 a.m. we reached the hotel. Our excellent hostess, Mrs. Sharp, had left us a most luxurious supper, to which we did ample justice, and for which we were duly grateful. We had been absent from the hotel about 18½ hours, over twelve of which were spent in the gully. I think the time taken is fully accounted for by the size of our party, and the great care required in passing over loose and rotten stone shoots, lying at very high angles. A good party of three should not take more than five or six hours.

June 3rd being very wet, we spent a quiet day. The buttresses of the stone bridge over the river can be recommended for an off day. June 4th. Still very wet. Some small gullies on the west shore of the loch, about half-an-hour from Sligachan, were explored by a portion of our party. June 5th. Still wet. About 11 a.m., C. J. Slade, G. R. Slade, and I, started for Loch Coruisk to fetch our tents, which we had left there on May 30th. On the Druim-nan-Ramh ridge, I got separated from the others in a dense mist, and later on lost myself. I found my way back to Sligachan about 7.30 p.m. Having dined, I returned as far as Harta Corrie, where I met the other two carrying the baggage. They were exceedingly glad to see me, as they had brought the tents and two rucksacs over from Loch Coruisk, and the packages being soaked through, were about three times their ordinary weight. We got in about 11 p.m.

June 6th. G. R. Slade and I, with Messrs. Wordsworth and Levi, started about mid-day for the gully between the third and fourth pinnacle of Sgurr-nan-Gillean. We reached the snow couloir leading up to our climb at 3.30, and kicked steps up the snow. Levi took the lead for the first pitch, which was easy, consisting of a series of short, open chimneys, and rough scrambles in the gully. We then came to two longer chimneys, deeply cut, and very wet and mossy. The leader, by traversing a little to the right, avoided the first; he then anchored himself in a mossy niche, where the second man

joined him. From this position it was obvious that the second chimney, if taken direct, would be impossible ; so Wordsworth and I traversed out below the two leaders, and ascended an interesting chimney on their right, over several jammed stones, and finally over a traverse, which put me in a position to rope the others up the difficult pitch. This brought us to within about 25 feet of the top of our gully. Here, however, we were forced to turn back, as the only exit we could find was an exposed bit of work over steep rock, which was so rotten that we preferred not to attempt it. We returned down the chimney by our previous route. The inn was reached at 9 p.m.

June 7th. We left the inn at 11 a.m. for the Tooth of Bhasteir. Making straight for Sgurr-nan-Gillean, we passed directly under that peak, traversing to the right and upwards until we struck the ridge below the tooth. Here we lunched. At 3.20, G. R. Slade took the lead and attacked the west face. The climb commenced with a horizontal traverse from the col, of about 40 feet along the west face. Then followed a vertical ascent of about 14 feet to a small recess with sloping floor, affording good holding ground. Up to this point the rock work was easy, but sensational. From the recess, a traverse of about 30 feet followed, past a large perched block, which in turn was succeeded by 20 feet up a nearly vertical face, with hand-holds no more than sufficient, and commencing over a projecting corner. Here good anchorage was reached, and the remainder of the climb consisted of about 25 feet of steep crack, leaning over to the right. Upon getting out on to the top, a scramble of about 50 feet brought us to the highest point on the "Tooth." We came down the south ridge of the "Tooth" into Lota Corrie, and thus into Harta Corrie, and home by Glen Sligachan, reaching the inn at 10 p.m. The ascent of the "Tooth" by the west face is a very sensational piece of work, and was admirably led by G. R. Slade. The descent into Lota Corrie is also interesting, and the view was superb.

June 8th. Leaving the inn at 9.10 a.m., we drove to Brittle House, arriving there at 11.40. At 11.50, we left the farm for

the "Inaccessible Pinnacle" on Sgurr-Dearg. Had lunch by the small loch at the head of Corrie Labain. Struck up the edge of the scree, hitting the ridge to the east of the "Pinnacle." Followed the arête, which we found very rotten and loose, to the west ; traversed to the right hand of the summit of Sgurr-Dearg ; descended a chimney, and rounded a corner to the left,

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### THE BHASTEIR TOOTH.

(North Face.)

From a photograph by G. P. Abraham, Keswick

which brought us on to the col below the east arête of the "Pinnacle." Of the "Inaccessible," I can only say that we found it eminently accessible. Several of us led the west, or difficult side, and C. J. Slade came up the east arête alone,

by which route we all descended. To do it justice, however, I must say that it is a most fascinating piece of rock, the long east arête being particularly attractive, with its razor-like edge and sheer drop on either side. Whilst we were on the summit, and also during the descent, we were lucky enough to see the " Brocken Spectre " several times.

It took us five hours from Brittle House to the summit of the " Pinnacle," and about two hours coming down. We then drove back to Sligachan, getting in about 11 p.m.

I should mention, before closing this article, that for an off day there exist several very interesting little problems in the shape of chimneys, in the " Eagle's Nest Crag," a short hour's walk south-east from Sligachan Inn. There is one in particular whose exit may perhaps remind future climbers of " the camel and the eye of a needle." I must also say that our kind hostess, Mrs. Sharp, and her family, spared no pains to make us comfortable.

