



B. R. Goodfellow.

LOCHS CORUISK AND SCAVAIG FROM CENTRAL PEAK OF BIDEIN.

THE CUILLIN RIDGE.

BY B. R. GOODFELLOW.

July found two disappointed but ever-hopeful climbers waiting at Sligachan for a change in the weather. Every evening a watery sunset gave promise of yet another wet day to follow, till finally, loth to leave Skye with next to nothing accomplished, a start was made on none too promising a morning to attempt the Cuillin Ridge.

The traverse of the whole ridge in the day may sound rather a large undertaking: there was a time when it was thought impossible, but this was shown to be far from true by Shadbolt and McLaren, who did it in less than 17 hours. Somervell's time of 14½ hours established the expedition as one which could be done comfortably within the long hours of daylight of the Scottish summer. Yet these are the only parties recorded as having undertaken this magnificent expedition, and this is not at all as it should be, for surely there is no finer day's mountaineering to be had in the length and breadth of the British Isles. Moreover, having once started on the expedition, one is not committed to carry on to the very end, for if overtaken by bad weather, or approaching darkness, there is any number of easy descents from the ridge.

For a variety of reasons it is preferable to do the traverse from south to north, starting from Glenbrittle. The climbing in this direction is more enjoyable, since the best of the climbs are ascended, and the only really stiff descent, that of the short side of the Tearlach-Dubh gap, can be robbed of its terrors by a simple abseil of about thirty feet. And unless the party has covered the ground before, much time may be lost in finding the tops of Naismyth's route, and of King's Chimney on Mhic Choinnich, both of which are descended when reversing the traverse. These routes, on the other hand, are quite obvious from below. It must be borne in mind that the Bhasteir Tooth will be a formidable obstacle

to one coming from the south, for after thirteen hours of hard going one does not feel quite so confident about a climb so steep and exposed. But the reward is a quick run down to the luxuries of Sligachan instead of the weary two hours over moorland from Garsbheinn to Glenbrittle.

Mist must always be expected, and we were so unlucky as to be in the mist the whole way. The *S.M.C. Guide* is a tower of strength on these occasions. The map provided, and the wonderful detailed information about the features of the ridge along its whole length, proved invaluable in keeping us on the right track. It is advisable to take several bearings on each summit to minimise error due to magnetic rocks. In the mist, too, previous knowledge of the ridge will help, especially in finding the route over the many peaks of Bidein and Mhadaidh, as well as round the head of Coire Lagan. Nail scratches are amazingly abundant on some of the less visited parts of the ridge, and it is a very real help at the end of a long day to see the track clearly marked ahead, when no concentration is required to pick out the line of least resistance. Mist has one advantage, in that it keeps one cool, and solves the drink problem by providing pools of water all along the ridge. The first two parties were seriously troubled by lack of water, and had to go down in search of it. Early in the summer there will be snow, but failing this, the highest spring is said to be in Fionn Coire.

How much to use a rope is a question which depends for its answer on the individual party. We ourselves roped up four times—namely, for the descent of Naismyth's route, the traverse of the Inaccessible Pinnacle, descent of King's Chimney, and for the Tearlach-Dubh gap. Those new to the ridge would be well advised to use the rope for the Gendarme on Sgurr nan Gilleán, and for the traverse of the three peaks of Bidein, as well as the above, while experts familiar with all the climbs would probably consider the use of the rope unnecessary.

It was suggested that we should make a cache of food and water at some point on the ridge about half way, in order to reduce the weight to be carried. This seems very unnecessary, for if one is out for a record time it is not quite playing fair,

whereas if the traverse is treated as an ordinary expedition, it is so much less trouble to deal with the food question as for any other day's climbing. To attempt to set up record times over the ridge is a form of athletic exuberance which will be condemned by all mountaineers. The borderline between fell-walking and scrambling is passed, and the time taken is determined within certain limits solely by the risk one is prepared to run over ground where sure-footedness is essential, and where carelessness might lead to disaster.

A brief account of our times may be of interest. Yates and I started on July 17th last, leaving Sligachan at 6-55 a.m.—about three hours too late! Sgurr nan Gillean summit, 8-50 a.m.; Bidein, 11-30; Sgurr Dearg, 3-2 p.m.; Alasdair, 5-50; Garsbheinn, 9-40; arrived Glenbrittle Post Office 11-47 p.m. Total time, 16 hours 52 minutes. Time over ridge, 12 hours 50 minutes. Halts, and one delay on the ridge totalled about 2 hours. Comparison with the times of Shadbolt and McLaren in 1911 shows little or no difference from peak to peak, so that their times, which are set out in full in the S.M.C. *Guide*, make a good basis for any party who know their speed along any portion of the ridge to forecast their time over the whole. Somervell's times were uniformly about 20 per cent. less. We left the main ridge only to include the highest peak of the Cuillin, and this is well worth while, being reached in 5 minutes from Sgurr Tearlach. The really keen Munro-bagger could include Sgumain and Sgurr-Dubh as well. Blaven is rather out of the question.

There are a few points worth bearing in mind when doing the traverse from the Sligachan end. The quickest way up Sgurr nan Gillean is undoubtedly by the gully between Knight's Peak and the summit; for we reached the top comfortably in three-quarters of an hour from Loch a Bhasteir. All along the ridge, and especially round about Sgurr Dubh na da Bheinn, it pays to handle the rocks with great respect, for they are incredibly sharp—the slip of a hand will mean lacerated finger tips. The southern end of the ridge is long and rather less interesting, the great charm of this part being the views out to sea. So when all is in mist a more enjoyable finish to the expedition would be to come down

from Alasdair over Sgumain, and so directly down to Glenbrittle. Let those who carry straight on in mist be warned not to lose the ridge. We lost thirty-five minutes by a careless compass bearing on Sgurr nan Eag. A splendid 2,000 ft. run down good scree—unbelievable in Skye—makes a fitting finish to the ridge.

With regard to equipment, nothing out of the ordinary is really needed. We found 60 feet of Alpine line suited the two of us perfectly, being light to carry, quick to put on, and readily stuffed into a rucksack when not in use. The usual excellent Sligachan lunches, augmented with boiled eggs and prunes, formed our food supply, while water-bottles, filled high up in the gully on Sgurr nan Gillean, were taken; we were rather optimistic about a cloudless day. A good compass is of course essential: the aneroid as usual raised many caustic comments.

This really is an expedition which every climber who visits Skye should do in part, if not in full, for nowhere in our homeland is there any expedition giving such a delightful combination of ridge-walking, rock-climbing, and superb views of mountain, loch and island-studded seas.

