

THE MOUNTAINS OF SCOTLAND

By James Macnaughton

“The far Cuillin are puttin’ love on me,
As step I wi’ my cromack to the Isles.!”

The Black Cuillin on the Isle of Skye is one of Scotland’s most exciting mountain ranges – isolated, steep, rocky, lashed by the Atlantic gales and their peaks undoubtedly exert a strong pull on those who know them well in all their capricious and dangerous moods as well as on those who are content to view their beautiful contours from a safe distance.



Black Cuillin – Skye.

Scotland’s mountains, in all their differing shapes and heights – 282 of them are over 3,000 ft. above sea level (the so-called Munros) – may be small in comparison to the much more massive Alps, Rockies or Himalayas, but they are considerably more ancient – the pre-Cambrian rocks on Scotland’s west coast are among the oldest in the world – and they have been ground down by the sheer weight

of the ice burying them in the various Ice Ages. Many of them are remote – you can be 10 – 15 miles away from the nearest house – and all of them are subject to quick and unexpected changes of weather from the depressions sweeping in from the Atlantic Ocean to their West. For hill walkers there are thousands of attractive walks; for rock climbers there are many challenging cliffs, which become even more risky when clad in snow and ice during the winter months; for skiers and other winter sports enthusiasts there are several well-developed resorts on the Cairngorms, in Glenshee, in Glen Coe and on Aonach Mor by Ben Nevis; and for nature lovers in general you can spend a life time enjoying the varied fauna and flora they provide.

Ben Lawers, Loch Tay.

Coming from Aberfeldy in central Perthshire, I was born and brought up in the midst of majestic Ben Lawers (3,984 ft.), Schiehallion (3,554 ft.) Farragon (2,559 ft.), Ben More (3,852 ft.) and Stobinian (3,821 ft.) Beinn a Ghlo (3,673 ft.) – more of all of these later – and as a schoolboy I used to cycle to their bases and spend the holiday days exploring and revelling in their wild fastnesses, much to the worry of



my parents, who never knew when I might re-appear (No mobiles in those days!) I was lucky and did not fall or have any serious accidents, but with more mature years learned that one

must always leave a note to explain where one was intending to go on any particular expedition, and, of course, must always be suitably clad and shod, equipped with map and compass, torch, food and drink, and extra clothing.



Arthur's Seat.

Our tour of a selection of my favourite Scottish mountains and hills starts with a very ancient volcanic plug, formed about 340 million years ago which overlooks Scotland's capital city, Edinburgh. Arthur's Seat is only 822 ft. high, but, as Robert

Stevenson wrote: "it is a hill for magnitude, a mountain in virtue of its bold design." Thought to be named after the legendary King Arthur and as a possible location for his fabled city Camelot, it is an easy climb (less than an hour) from Dunsapie Loch in the Queen's Park, and once on the summit, panoramic views of Edinburgh to the West, North to the Firth of Forth and Fife, East as far as the Bass Rock at North Berwick and South over the Pentland Hills. Viewed from the West it looks like a reclining lion, with the precipitous Salisbury Crags forming the haunches.

Hillways, Late Summer on the Pentlands.

While at school in Edinburgh, we used to be sent out into the hills during March; South – the Pentlands – and East – the Lammermuirs – equipped with a map, compass and packed lunch, and told to find our way to certain map references. For the Junior Grind (13-14), this was only around five miles away, for the Middle Grind (15-16 years old) 8 – 10 miles and for the Senior Grind (17-18) around 15 miles. These annual expeditions helped to further my love of Scotland's wild untamed moors and hills and taught us all that they must be respected and not taken lightly.



The new Queensferry Bridge.

Motoring North from Edinburgh on the A9 across the brand new Queensferry Road Bridge, the longest of its cable-stayed type in the world, the Great North Road takes one through Scotland's ancient capital, Perth, and from there the high road A.93 carries on North East past Blairgowrie, surrounded by its raspberry plantations and ever higher into

Glen Shee (The Valley of the fairies). On the left is Ben Gulabin (2,641 ft.), where my first experiences of skiing in Scotland took place in the '50s. before any ski lifts had been erected in any of the skiing areas which are now so well furnished with uphill locomotion. On Ben Gulabin, at the weekends, there was a tractor equipped with an endless rope winch about 100

yards long, to which one could attach a hook with a handle to be pulled up. Primitive, but effective! Around that time some wag in the Scottish Ski Club wrote in its Annual:

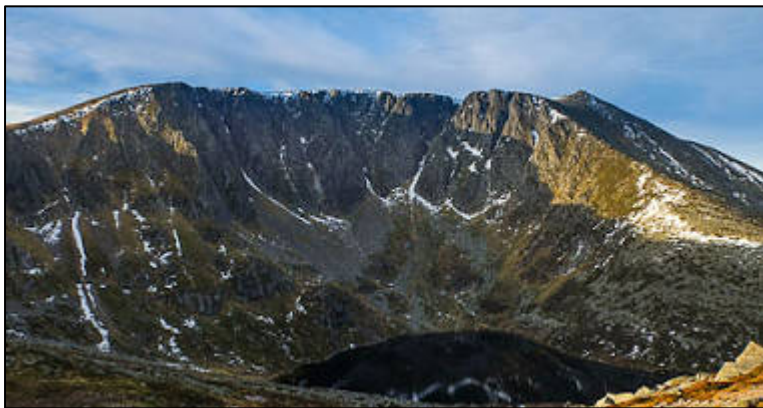
“We ski on snow, we ski on heather,
We ski in every kind of weather,
But when we ski in peat and muddy pools,
We’re bloody fools!”

Glenshee Ski Resort.

On up over the Devil’s Elbow, the famous hairpin-bend now much less tricky to navigate owing to road improvements, and you arrive at the top of the Cairnwell Pass (2,132 ft.) with 40 km of pisted ski runs served by 22 lifts (Poma, T-Bar and Chair). The Cairnwell slopes (up to 3,059 ft.) are to the West and to the East are those up to the summit of Glas Maol (3,504 ft.).



Runs are graded from easy Green up to two most difficult Blacks. Glenshee is Scotland’s largest snow sports resort, and the best skiing is usually during March and April, when the days are longer and the weather less stormy. Sheer bliss!



Lochnagar.

Carrying on up the A.93 past Braemar and on east down the beautiful Dee Valley to Ballater, soaring above the road to the South is the long summit ridge of Lochnagar (3,791 ft.), the only Scottish mountain named after a loch! One midsummer night around 100 of us set off from the car park

in Glen Muick to climb this fabled mountain in the dark (which is not long at that time of year), with the aim of raising money for the Benevolent Society of the Scottish Licensed Trade. We were accompanied by the members of the Deeside Mountain Rescue Team, which was just as well, because many of those on the expedition were far from suitably clad or shod to climb a mountain of this scale. Trainers and shorts and T shirts were fine at the Loch Muick level, but add a couple of thousand feet of vertical height to that and the temperature had dropped considerably, pre-dawn mist had formed and the wind chill factor was biting. Several had to be escorted back down the hill, others had to be wrapped in blankets, and it was a shivering tired group who finally made it to the summit around 2am. There hot soup and sandwiches were provided, which raised everyone’s spirits considerably, helped by a dram or two! and dawn revealed fantastic views in every direction. A very considerable sum was raised for the charity through the sponsorships of all the climbers. However, it was agreed that strict clothing rules would be applied for any future such climbing expeditions, because the Deeside Mountain Rescue Team were most unhappy.

Osprey fishing.

Next. It was time to take the A.939 North West by the small Ski Centre at the Lecht and on through Tomintoul to Grantown-on-Spey and South to Aviemore, passing on the way the Osprey Centre, where those wonderful fishing eagles nest every year at Loch Garten. The challenge of the Cairngorms (Blue Mountains) lies ahead with a group of four big peaks all over 4,000 ft. – Cairngorm (the Blue Mountain) 4,084ft.; Ben Macdui (Hill of the Black Pig – its shape) 4,296 ft. and the second highest in the U.K.; Cairn Toul (4,241 ft.); and Braeriach (the Brindled Grey Mountain) 4,248 ft. One summer’s day our eldest son Patrick and I set off to climb all four peaks in one day, starting at the Ski Car Park in Corrie Cas on Cairngorm. We spent a long and tiring but very exhilarating day hill walking from Cairngorm over to Ben Macdui, which is supposedly haunted by the Big Grey Man of Ben Macdui, who appears looming through the mist. Then down into the Lairig Ghru (The Grim Pass), whose summit is at 2,740 ft. and which leads through to the source of the River Dee in a burn near the Pools of Dee. Then either down Glen Lui to Braemar, or, as I once did with our three boys, on, after a night in Corrou Bothy, to Glen Tilt, the Bynack Bothy and down to Blair Atholl, a total distance of around 40 miles.



Wild flowers on Cairngorm Plateau.

However, with Patrick, he and I climbed up the East side of our next peak, Cairn Toul. Up on these remote summit plateaus it is a completely different world from down in the valleys where other people live and work. On a day of fine weather, which we were lucky enough to enjoy, there is a profound feeling of being totally at one with nature and life’s normal problems simply disappear. The immediate scenery is very bare, away above the tree line in virtually tundra country, and any plants which have established themselves in the poor soils lie as flat as possible on the ground, to prevent being blown away by the high winds. Our Clan Emblem, Trailing Azalea grows up there, along with Gentians and Cloud Berry and a few Cranberries.

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A pair of Ptarmigan.



Trailing Azalea only 4” tall.

A pair of Ptarmigan, the speckled

grouse who turn white in the winter and become virtually invisible on the snowfields, are very tame, and only fly up for a short distance if we get too near. Resting by the summit cairn of Cairn Toul and looking around, it emphasised just how isolated we were, with no human habitations within ten miles in any direction. On then, an easy stroll to our fourth over 4,000

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ft. summit that day – Braeriach (4,252 ft.), the third highest mountain in the British Isles. Down to our right was the North facing corrie – Garbh Coire – in which the snow, blown in by the wind, builds up to amazing depths in the winter blizzards and some of it often lingers right through to the following winter. Away down below to our left are the dark waters of Loch Einich.



Dotterel Plover.

Looking ahead, we saw a family of little Dotterel Plover, parents and three young ones, scurrying across the tundra, stopping from time to time to snatch a beetle or pick up some seeds, when suddenly they completely disappeared. Looking up we saw the scimitar wings of a Peregrine Falcon hovering overhead, and realised that the Dotterel had crouched down motionless, and became totally invisible such is the ingenious camouflage markings of their feathers. Five minutes later, the peregrine having departed, on they trotted once more, but leaving us with the sobering thought that in this merciless mountain environment they risked a violent death every day of their short lives.



Peregrine Falcon striking prey.

The evening saw us back at the Car park, tired but delighted that we had achieved the challenge of the four peaks. Back in Glen More, we took time to visit the Reindeer Centre, where a herd of these enchanting animals has the free run of the lower slopes of the Rothiemurchus Mountains.

Reindeer in Scotland.

On another occasion, climbing with a school friend, we had spent the night at Corrour Bothy – a very basic shelter with an earthen floor to sleep on and an open fire place, but at least after a wash in the burn, we could close the door and be protected from the incessant wind. The burn, which we had had to wade across to get to the bothy, can sometimes be a



formidable obstacle, because, after heavy rain on the mountain tops, it can come down in full spate with foaming peat brown waters and forming an impossible barrier until the water subsides. The water from these burns, flowing over granite is probably the purest drinking water on the planet – sweet and well chilled – heaven!



Devil's Point – Lairig Ghru.

Another reason for checking weather forecasts carefully before venturing into these inaccessible regions. The next morning, we decided to climb the Devil's Point (3,303 ft.) which reared up steeply to the West of the bothy. Once up there, we, perhaps foolishly, instead of registering the rapidly changing weather conditions, carried on up to Cairn Toul, and on the way, the clouds came down,

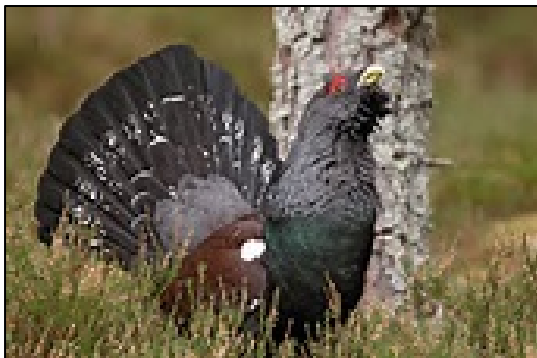
the cold wind gained strength and before we knew what was happening a violent snow shower blotted out our vision in a complete white out. This is one of the most dangerous occurrences up in the hills, because you no longer know what is up, what is down and become completely disorientated. So, we did the wise thing and hunkered down in the lee of a big boulder and waited until the snow stopped. We had our Ordnance Survey 1 inch to one-mile map and our compass with us, so were able to re-orientate our route back down to the bothy, without blundering over any of the nearby dangerous rocky cliffs.

Braeriach.

Scottish mountains are not just there to be admired for their beauty or to be climbed on foot, but several of them, as we saw in Glenshee, have been developed into important winter sports centres, and Cairngorm since 1960 has been transformed into Scotland's second biggest ski resort. Back in the 1950s, before any of this development took place, we used to ski on its slopes the hard way. In other words, any uphill progress was either on foot with skis over one's shoulder or else seal skins could be attached to the skis and one could slither laboriously uphill. The old Kandahar ski bindings allowed the heels of one's boots to flex to make this easier. The best run of the day was always the last one down to the car at Glenmore Lodge.



From 1960, 2 chairlifts and 11 Poma T-Bar ski tows were constructed, and skiers flocked to the slopes from January to March. High winds are often a big problem, causing closure of the chairlifts and making it impossible to walk on the snow in ski boots. In 2001 the chairlifts were replaced by a funicular railway from the car park up Corrie Cas to the Ptarmigan – the big chalet/restaurant – at 3,532 ft. Corrie na Ciste is another corrie furnished with ski tows.



Capercaillie.

If sudden heavy snowfall is accompanied by high winds, conditions on the mountain can become very dangerous. In late November 1971 these ferocious conditions caught out a teacher and five pupils from an Edinburgh school up on the Cairngorm plateau and they all died. This emphasises that Scotland's mountains can never

be taken lightly, and expeditions into their remote corries should never be undertaken in doubtful weather conditions. Given the right weather there is superb snow and ice climbing to be enjoyed.

Crested Tit.

While in the Cairngorms National Park, it is well worth spending some time in the ancient Scots pine forest of Rothiemurchus. Some of the bird species there are unique to that habitat. For example, the charming little crested tits and the Scottish crossbills. The latter are particularly interesting, because their beaks have evolved specially to deal with their main food, the seeds from inside the pine cones. By being crossed over at the tip, it enables the birds to extract the seeds very efficiently. Another fascinating big game bird which you may be lucky enough to see in the forest is the Capercaillie – the cock of the woods – which is larger than a turkey – and can be aggressive in the spring mating season, when it struts through its territory making very strange sounds like corks being extracted from bottles. Sadly, it has never learned that a fence is an obstacle to be avoided, and some are killed each year simply by flying straight into the wires.



Scottish Crossbill.

Back to the wonderful day Patrick and I had spent in the summer climbing the four peaks, we motored in the late evening back South over the famous Drumochter Pass on the A.9, with, at Dalwhinnie, stunning views down long Loch Ericht to the massive bulk of Ben Alder (Hill of Rock and Water (3,766 ft.), one of the most remote peaks in the Highlands, being 19Km. from Dalwhinnie or 15 Km. from Corrou Station if approaching from Rannoch Moor to the South. On its lower slopes, above Loch Ericht, is Bonnie Prince Charlie's Cave, where he hid when on the run after Culloden in 1746. Robert

Louis Stevenson mentions this cave in his novel Kidnapped, when his main characters David Balfour and Allan Breck Stewart hide there, along with the Scottish Chief Cluny Macpherson. In real life Cluny Macpherson did hide there for nine years after the '45, and Bonnie Prince Charlie joined him briefly.

South over Drumochter Pass (1,508 ft.), which can often become blocked by drifting snow in the winter months, and on one famous occasion a group of us were motoring back from a curling match in Aviemore. Progress was only possible by following in the ruts left by the vehicles in front of us. Half way over the pass the radio announced that Drumochter Pass was closed to all vehicles! We made it down to Blair Atholl, but it was a narrow squeak! The hill slopes on the left side of the road through the pass are often filled with hundreds of red deer, searching for food when the high tops are covered in snow.

Beinn a Ghlo.



At Blair Atholl turn left up the narrow Glen Tilt road and after three or four miles one can park before setting off up the twin peaks of Beinn a Ghlo (3,673 ft.) The first of these is Carn Liath (3,201 ft.) and then, after a couple of miles along the easy ridge, the summit of Beinn a Ghlo itself. This is very much in the deer stalking country of the Duke of Atholl's Estates, so should be avoided in the late autumn when the stags are roaring and fighting to control the biggest harems of hinds. One of Scotland's joys is that there is no law of trespass, so one can wander among the hills wherever one wishes, but as indicated, during the stalking season and the grouse shooting season, it is only considerate to avoid the estates concerned. Apart from anything else, rifle bullets are lethal up to several miles from the rifle from which they have been fired. We climbed Beinn a Ghlo in the early spring, when snow was still lying on the tops. High in the sky above us skeins of pink foot and greylag geese were leaving their winter quarters in Scotland for their nesting grounds in Iceland and Novaya Zemla, and their quiet honking as they chattered to one another is to me the essence of the call of the wild.



Queen's View Strath-tummel and Schiehallion.

Next, the A9 takes one through the pass of Killiekrankie, where, in 1689, Bonnie Dundee – Graham of Claverhouse – fought the Govt. troops, and won the battle, although he himself was killed. Turn right over the River Garry along the B.8019 Loch Tummel road to the famous Queen's View, where Queen Victoria stopped to admire the sensational view the birch clad shores of Loch Tummel to the pyramidal summit of Schiehallion (3,554 ft.)- the Fairy Hill of the Caledonians – dominating the skyline to the West. This unique mountain is best climbed from Braes of Foss farm on the little country road between Keltneyburn and Kinloch Rannoch, where there is a car park. My most memorable ascent was straight up the heather clad North face of the Fairy Mountain at night with my girlfriend at the time (my wife Renate) and two of my sisters. To experience the dawn up at the rocky summit cairn, with mist in the valleys below us in the valley of the River Tay, made one reflect on the sheer beauty of God's creations on this planet. It really was food for the soul!

Schiehallion is a particularly interesting mountain, because back in 1774 a scientist called Nevil Maskelyne carried out an experiment at its summit using the deflection of a pendulum caused by the mass of the mountain to indicate the mean density of the earth and therefore its mass or weight. The mountain was bought by the John Muir trust in 1999.



Ben Lawers – Loch Tay and Crannog.

Back to Aberfeldy and then, on another summer's morning the A.827 West to Kenmore at the East end of the 15-mile-long Loch Tay, where the view up the loch towards Ben Lawers (3,984 ft.) took one's breath away. On to the Lawers Hotel to park the car, and

three hours of steady climbing up the South facing grassy slopes of Perthshire's highest mountain, with many rests to admire the ever-expanding views, which culminated in a finish at exactly 4,000 ft., if one climbed the 16-ft. stone cairn at the summit. This is another mountain which we climbed overnight, and that was memorable in that the valleys below were filled with mist, and as the sun rose below us, our shadows were projected into the mist, causing the famous Brocken spectre effect. Very eerie! Lawers is a grassy mountain with Britain's finest selection of alpine plants and flowers in its sheltered nooks and crannies, including blue gentian and berry bearing plants such as Cloud berry and Cranberry. Also, those merciless insect trapping plants Butterwort and Sundew. While at the summit, two wise old ravens flapped slowly by, croaking confidentially to each other, as they quartered the terrain in search of some carrion – a dead mountain hare or the corpse of a red deer. There's not much food available at nearly 4,000 feet above sea level!



Butterwort and Sundew.

Back down on the A.827 West to Killin and then on the A.85 through Glen Dochart with the massive high dome of Ben More (The Big Mountain) (3,852 ft.) lowering above us to the South. This was the first mountain to which we introduced our youngest son, Kai, to hill walking when he was about 10 years old. Along with his brothers Patrick (16) and James (14) and my wife Renate, we set off one summers day up the very steep slopes and it was not long before our youngest began to complain vociferously and to ask what was the point of struggling up this huge mountain on a hot summers day. However, tempted on by judiciously spaced treats of chocolate, he achieved his first high summit, and was overwhelmed by the wonderful views in every direction. He even



agreed to carry on to the second peak of Stobinian (3,821 ft.) across the summit ridge. After that he became a keen hill walker and went on many expeditions with his school mates and one of the teachers, as well as on our own family outings to the hills.

Ben More – Stobinian.

To the West of Ben More the impressively rocky Eastern corrie of Ben Lui (3,708 ft.) crowned

the skyline, a mountain climbed with Patrick and James and described in my article about the River Tay. On West the A.85 descends Glen lochy to our Clan territory on the banks of Loch Awe. The mountain here is Ben Cruachan (Mountain of peaks) 3,694 ft.), the highest point in Argyll and Bute. A huge cavern has been excavated inside the mountain to locate a pumped storage hydro-electric power station. Water flows through the turbines to generate electricity, and then at quieter times when demand for power is lower, this water is pumped back up into the hillside reservoir. Very eco-friendly!



Ben Lui.



Ben Cruachan.

Now we have to retrace our steps – by car – back up Glen Lochy and then North on the A.82 over Rannoch Moor past Beinn Dorain (3,524 ft.) and then, at the Eastern entrance to Glencoe, the rocky cliffs of Buachaille Etive Mhor (The Big Shepherd of Etive) (3,345 ft.) soar up into the sky and provide some of the best rock climbing in Scotland in the summer months and snow and ice climbing in the depths of winter. Down through the narrow glen to

Altnafeadh cottage to park the car, and opposite, across the River Coe, is a very special place, not only for me and my wife Renate, when we climbed there before we got married, but also for famous climbers such as Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tensing, who did some of their pre-Everest training there in 1952-53. The mountain hidden to the South west is Bidean nam Bian (Peak of the Mountains) (3,766 ft.), which my wife had originally seen in a German magazine and had been so impressed by it that she had pinned the picture up in her room in Germany, long before we met, and dreamed that one day she might actually climb it!



Buchaille Etive Mhor.



Once across the River Coe bridge, the path leads through a jumble of massive boulders, the remnants of a long-ago land slip, and then, suddenly, one emerges into the Lost or Hidden valley, a beautiful secluded little alpine valley, up which one climbs steeply to the ridge of Bidean nam Bian via a lower summit called Stob Corrie nam Lochan. Happy days! And a long-held dream come true!

Secret/hidden Valley.

Bidean nam Bian.

The dangers of winter climbing on this mountain are illustrated by a big avalanche in 2013 on 19 January which killed 4 people. Avalanche warnings are issued regularly and **MUST** always be heeded. I did the same climb many years later, after doing it with Renate, with Patrick and James, climbing the mountain in spring from the Glen Etive side to the South. There were still



massive cornices of hard packed snow overhanging like curling waves along the summit ridge, and showing that one must never step too far onto the overhang, in case the cornice gives way and one is left tumbling down the rocky face. Coming back down the South side we all enjoyed speeding down the long runs of scree, like skating!

Aonach Mor



Ben Nevis.

Further North along the A.82 past Ballachulish brings one to Loch Linnhe, the big sea loch, which ends at Fort William, and there, up Glen Nevis, is Britain's biggest mountain, Ben Nevis (Mountain with its head in the clouds) (4,406 ft.) Viewed from the West, it is a somewhat disappointing rounded hump, but move more round to the north east, and the much more majestic cliffs come into view, which provide over 2,000 feet of vertical climbing, with superb snow and ice climbing in the winter. Ben Nevis, which is the collapsed dome of an ancient volcano, is easily climbed on the well-worn path which starts at only around 60 feet above sea level and rises, during a three-hour climb, to the summit at 4,406 feet. This all



seems deceptively easy, but Ben Nevis is a mountain which can be very treacherous at all times of the year. On average 261 Gales in a year, along with 171 inches of rain (London 23 inches) and mist shrouds the summit plateau for 80% of the time in January and February and 55% during May and June. Every year a large number of mountain rescue incidents occur and between 1990 -95 there were 13 fatalities. We were lucky with the weather on the autumn day we climbed the Ben, but the temperature on the summit plateau was only around 2 degrees and the wind chill factor made it seem even less, so it is vital to carry plenty of spare clothing including a woolly hat and gloves. The view from the top makes it all worthwhile, extending as it does for around 120 miles in all directions to include the Torridon Mountains in Sutherland, Lochnagar in Aberdeenshire, the Cairngorms in Inverness-shire, Ben Lomond in Stirlingshire and many others.



Aonach Mhor (4,048 ft.), Ben Nevis's neighbour to the North, has been opened-up for winter sports with a chair lift and several ski tows.

Five Sisters of Kintail.

As the words of the song have it, "It's by Shiel water the track is to the West", so we are now motoring North on the A.82 and then from Invergarry West on

the A.87, which leads through the dramatically steep sided Glen Shiel, with many 3,000 ft. peaks on both sides, culminating on the North side with The Five Sisters of Kintail led by Beinn Fhada (3,385 ft.). Now we carry on "Over the Sea to Skye" on a gracefully curved modern road bridge at Kyle of Lochalsh and stop at the Sligachan Hotel to look South and admire the Black Cuillin, formed of basalt and igneous rock, and rising jagged and threatening, headed by the vertiginous peaks of Sgurr Alasdair (3,257 ft.), which provides some of the most challenging mountaineering in Britain. On their left, lower and more rounded, are the Red Cuillin, formed of red sandstone.



Sgurr Alasdair, Black Cuillin.



Liathach Torridon.

A brief visit to Skye, but more mountains beckon us, so it's on up the A890 along Loch Carron and then the A896 to Torridon, venturing into the ancient North West of Scotland, which is still wild and untamed by the 21st. century. The A.896 passes by the lower slopes of the Torridon Mountains, first Liatach (Peak of the grey Corries) (3,456 ft.), which virtually overhangs the road it is so precipitous and rocky, and then further back from the road, but equally

stunning, Beinn Eighe (3,313 ft.), with its white quartzite summit. These unforgettable mountains are 500 million years old. In the pine woods on the North-East slopes of Beinn Eighe some of Scotland's rarest animals can be spotted, if you are very lucky. Elusive Pine Martens, a member of the weasel family, hunt for mice and red squirrels among the pines and rocks, and are skilled tree climbers. Scottish Wild cats, also very shy and secretive creatures, hunt mostly at night, so are seldom seen.

Now the road leads us to the A.832 West along the beautiful shores of Loch Maree with its clusters of pine clad islands and Slioch (3,217 ft.) glowering down on it near Letterewe. A black dot high above Slioch revealed itself through the lenses of powerful binoculars to be a Golden eagle, its flight feathers spread like fingers, soaring effortlessly up on a warm air thermal, and covering countless miles of territory in its search for a meal.

Slioch Loch Maree.

The A.832 now wriggles its way along the rugged West Coast past the famous Inverewe Gardens and on with little side roads leading to tiny villages with lovely sea-shell beaches like Mellon Udrigle. Further east along Little Loch Broom with possibly my favourite of all the Scottish Mountains, An



Teallach (The Anvil) (3,484 ft.), piercing the heavens on the right with its jaw dropping narrow and rocky summit ridges and corries.



An Teallach.

Renate and I stayed at the Dundonnell Youth hostel at the foot of this mountain when on a cycle tour of the West Highlands back in 1959. We set off early in the morning to tackle An Teallach on a sunny day, but had only climbed for about an hour up its lower slopes,

when, as so often happens on the West Coast, a depression suddenly blew in off the Atlantic and we became shrouded in dense mist. It is very difficult to give up on climbing a mountain to which one had looked forward to conquering for many years, but good sense has to prevail in these circumstances, so we descended slowly back to sea level. We have never managed to go back, so have to be satisfied with pictures of that amazing mountain, but, sadly, there is a dream which has not come true. However, what did make our day on the lower slopes near the road was the sight of a flock of wild mountain goats, with their leader a majestic long haired and long horned billy goat. Again, a sight unchanged for thousands of years, and never to be forgotten!



Wild billy goat.



Our next mountain, seen on the same cycling tour, was approached as we cycled West from Tain and Bonar Bridge up the A.837 through lonely Glen Oykel. As we pushed our bikes up a summit near Ledmore, a strange sugar loaf mountain, capped by a plume of white cloud, and looking like something from Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, suddenly appeared in the West, and quite took our breath away. Sulven (The Pillar) (2,398 ft.) is not very high, but it is still one of the most distinctive mountains in Scotland, and getting to it to climb it from any direction means a long day of around 25 km over rough boggy ground. Like many of the names of places up in the far North West, Sulven is Norse, reflecting the incursions of the Vikings from the 9th. century.

Sulven.

Elphin & Ben More Assynt.

The A.837 passes Ben More Assynt (3,273 ft.), a mountain riddled with an extensive warren of caves and underground passages, because it is made of limestone. Carrying on North up the A.894 and then the A.838 from Laxford Bridge, the landscape is almost moon-like, because the bed-rock breaks through on the surface and everything is very bare and bleak. After Durness, near Scotland's furthest North-West point



at Cape Wrath, the road circumnavigates Loch Eriboll, which Renate and I dubbed "Terrible Eriboll", after nearly getting stuck there in the car in a snowstorm on a winter's day, and were only rescued by a passing snow plough.

Ben Hope.

At the village of Hope, looking South along the waters of Loch Hope, our final mountain rears up from the moorland, named appropriately Ben Hope (3,040 ft.) and "with hope in our hearts", that is as good a place as any to draw our tour of some of my favourite Scottish Mountains to a close. If it

has encouraged you to visit some of these peaks, even if it is only to admire them rather than to climb them, then my purpose in writing has been justified. Good Climbing!