

## The Queen as a Mountaineer.

BY ALEX. INKSON McCONNOCHIE.



From a]

LOCHNAGAR—"THE STEEP, FROWNING GLORIES."

[Photograph.



AMONG the many accomplishments of Her Majesty, and the almost innumerable interesting circumstances of her long life, which the Diamond Jubilee has brought to light, one of no small importance has been overlooked. The public seem to have forgotten that in her younger days the Queen was an enthusiastic mountaineer—that almost fifty years ago the highest and most noted mountains of Scotland were ascended during the annual visits of the Court to Balmoral. Living four months of the year under the shadow of Lochnagar, it is not to be wondered at that the Queen, as well as other members of the Royal Family, became imbued with that love for mountains which, from the middle of the present century, has developed as rapidly as have the most popular sports of the day.

While Lochnagar faces her Majesty's Highland home, and so bulks largely in public estimation, Byron had previously sung:—

England! Thy beauties are tame and domestic  
To one who has roved o'er the mountains afar.  
Oh, for the crags that are wild and majestic!

The steep, frowning glories of dark Lochnagar!  
and paved the way for the world-wide popu-

larity which the monarch of the Deeside mountains has now attained. It must be remembered that, apart from such adventurous fame, Lochnagar is an imposing mountain, of no small altitude, with an exceedingly graceful outline, and an extensive and varied view from the summit.

Her Majesty's first ascent of Lochnagar, as well as her first hill climb, was made on September 8th, 1848, eight days after the Court's first arrival at Balmoral Castle. The ascent of a Scottish mountain is, generally, a simple matter—when the sun shines; in mist, however, it may be quite another affair. Mountains are no respecters of persons, and the Queen's first experience of Lochnagar might well have damped her ardour for hill-climbing. An early start (9.30) was made, the route being through the famed woods of the Ballochbuie. Prince Albert had a passing shot at a stag, but failed to bring him down, though more successful with ptarmigan. Mist had gradually enveloped the upper part of the mountain, and when the top was reached fog drifted in thick clouds, so that nothing could be seen beyond a few yards. In the Queen's words, "It was cold, wet, and cheerless"; then the wind developed





Photo. by]

DUBH LOCH.

[W. A. Hawes.

into a hurricane, and the mist was like rain. A downward start was made; but, alas, the guides failed to recognise certain landmarks, and the Royal party was literally lost on the mountain. As hour after hour passed the anxiety at the Castle increased, the appointed time for return had long elapsed, and the change in the weather had been viewed from below with considerable apprehension. Captain Gordon set out at the head of a search party; but, by-and-by, the situation appeared so serious, that the Prime Minister himself, Lord John Russell, started to find his Royal mistress. Fortunately the mist lifted, and so, after some aimless wanderings, the descent was safely accomplished, Balmoral being reached more than four hours late.

The following year Her Majesty improved her knowledge of the more picturesque portions of Lochnagar, in particular visiting Dubh Loch, "Black Lake," a tarn situated at a height of over 2,000ft. above the sea level. "The

Spectre Stag of Lochnagar," and his stalker Lord Ian, "huntsman keen," simultaneously found a grave in Dubh Loch, but it is more famous from the circumstance that the Duke of Edinburgh shot a stag on Lochnagar which, wounded, swam for safety into this loch. The Duke, being the only swimmer of the party, followed the chase, and administered the *coup de grace* in the water.

In September, 1850, the Queen ascended Beinn a' Bhuid, one of the giants of

the Cairngorm Mountains. Her Majesty's route to Beinn a' Bhuid lay through the Forest of Invercauld—a time-immemorial possession of the Farquharsons. The chronicles of the Farquharsons form the history of Upper Deeside for many centuries; but though that family has an authentic genealogy of over 500 years, tradition must needs go farther back. It attributes the acquisition of Invercauld to a clever ruse. Snow was rapidly melting in the corries of Beinn a' Bhuid, when a wily shepherd from Rothiemurchus, known as Farquhar of the

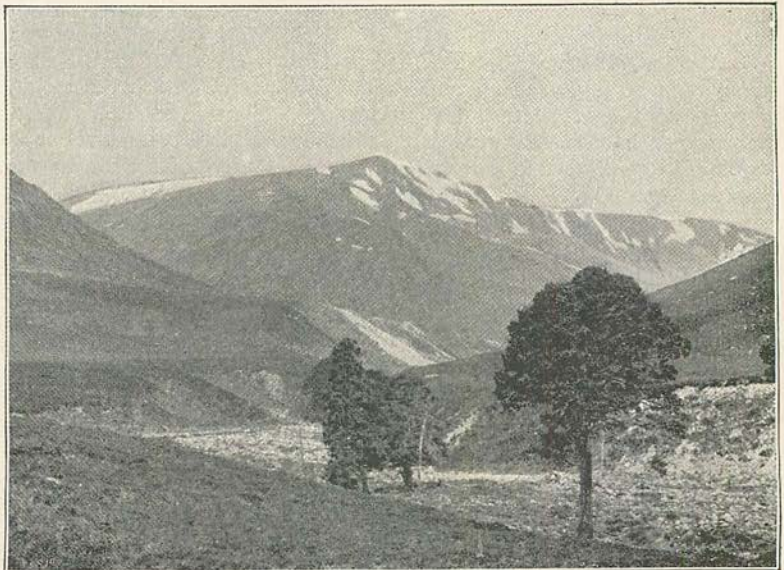


Photo. by]

BEN MUICH DHUI, FROM GLEN LUIBEG.

[Morgan, Aberdeen.



Red Hair, asked permission to pasture his sheep on the banks of the Dee at Invercauld till the snow should disappear. Leave was readily granted, so Farquhar and his flock became permanent residents—on the ground that snow was always to be found in the recesses of the corries of Beinn a' Bhuid! A few years ago the head of the clan was the Queen's neighbour and landlord, a Guardsman known about town as "Piccadilly Jim"—rather a contrast to his traditional ancestor.

Ben Muich Dhui, of



Photo. by]

DERRY LODGE.

[J. McGregor.



Photo. by]

LOCH ETCHACHAN.

[T. W. Binner.

Fife. At the latter lodge ponies, with guides, were in waiting, and the Glen Derry path was selected. This, now known as the Royal route, is longer than that by Glen Luibeg, but is more easily traversed. A halt was made at Loch Etchachan, at a height of over 3,000ft., to enable the party to "scramble," as Her Majesty well expresses it, to a point where a view is obtained of Loch Avon, the grandest and most desolate scene among the mountains. The Queen was also impressed with the peculiar appearance of Beinn Mheadhoin, a mountain nearly 4,000ft. in height, on

which an illustration is given on the previous page, the highest summit of the Cairngorm Mountains, and long believed to be the highest mountain in the British Isles, was climbed by the Queen on 7th October, 1859. It is a long road from Balmoral to Ben Muich Dhui, and the excursion can only be accomplished in one day when weather and other circumstances are favourable. The route is through Castletown of Braemar and past Mar Lodge and Derry Lodge—both belonging to the Duke of

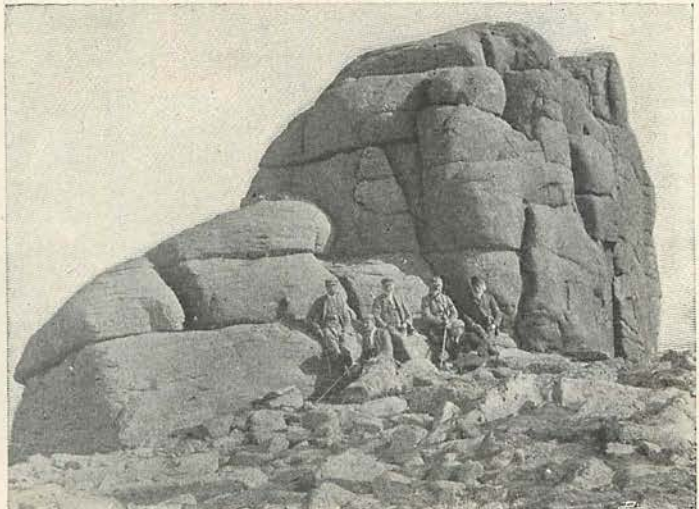


Photo. by]

BEINN MHEADHCIN, THE SUMMIT.

[J. McGregor.





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BEN MUICH DHUI, THE SUMMIT.

[W. E. Carnegie Dickson.

whose shoulder a stand was made. The summit of this "Ben" is remarkable for its huge rocky protuberances, the highest of which is represented in an accompanying illustration. "Queen's weather" awaited the climbers on the top of Ben Muich Dhui, with the result that they were enchanted with the magnificence of the prospect. The Queen writes that "It had a sublime and solemn effect, so

wild, so solitary—no one but ourselves and our little party there. . . . I had a little whisky and water, as the people declared pure water would be too chilling."

Her Majesty was so delighted with the view of Loch Avon, as seen from the neighbourhood of Loch Etchachan, that she made a special "expedition" to it two years later. The weather was not a little rough, but the Queen enjoyed the excursion, writing of the loch, which is at an altitude of about 2,500ft., that "nothing could be grander and wilder—the rocks are so grand and precipitous," an opinion with which all who have seen Loch Avon will readily agree. The head of the loch is particularly remarkable for its cliffs, its waterfalls, and especially for the famous Shelter Stone. The latter is a huge block of granite, weighing about 1,500 tons, which at some remote period fell from a neighbouring crag. The boulder so lies that, creeping under it, protection is afforded to mountaineers—in past times to poachers

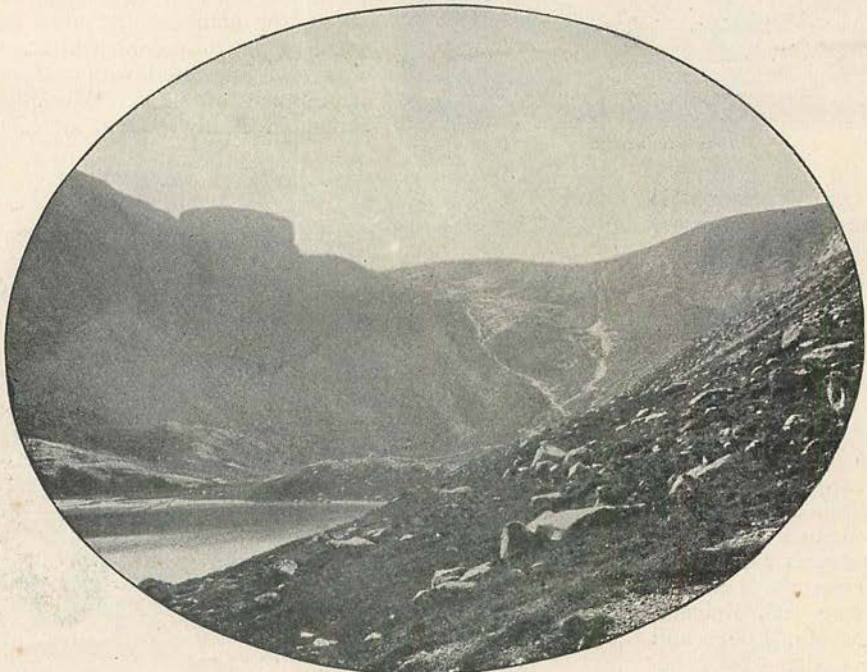


Photo. by]

LOCH AVON, THE UPPER END.

[W. E. Carnegie Dickson.



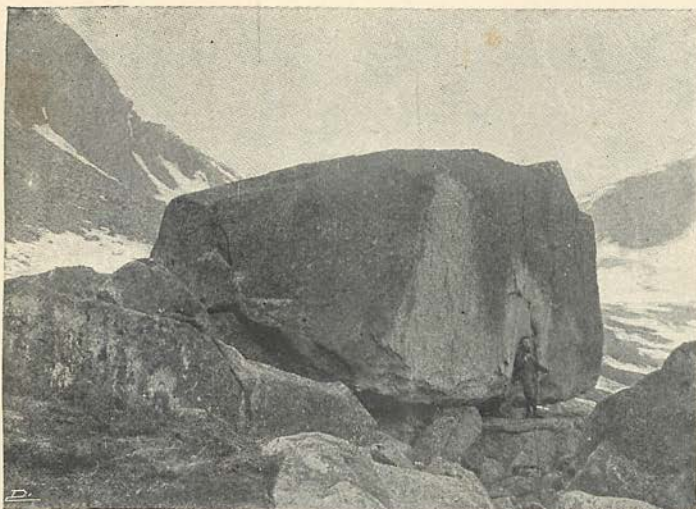


Photo. by]

THE SHELTER STONE.

[A. F. Dugan.

—the accommodation being rough, but storm-proof.

Among the Queen's mountain excursions may be included two "expeditions" through Glen Feshie. The height of this glen, where it was entered, is quite equal to that of an ordinary British mountain, and in certain parts advantage cannot be taken of even hill ponies. The route is westward from the Linn of Dee, and here an incident may be referred to which, if kodaks had then been in existence and propriety had permitted the use of one, would have afforded an exceedingly interesting picture. The Linn of Dee is still beyond reach of tourist four-in-hands, and a quarter of a century ago had not even a tithe of its present popularity, as may be judged from the little incident itself. As we crossed the bridge here we looked over its eastern parapet to admire the wonderful "Linn," when, to our surprise, we saw on the left bank

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the Queen-Empress seated on a rug, which John Brown was adjusting. Her Majesty, who was accompanied by Prince Leopold and Princess Beatrice, with a lady-in-waiting, was sketching the beautiful scene. Two of the notable quartette named are now no more, and the Princess is also a widow.

The great interest of Glen Feshie, apart from its Highland beauties, lies in the fact that here Landseer was the honoured guest of the Duchess of Bedford, the then lessee of the deer forest, and thus acquired his extraordinary knowledge of deer and of Highland scenery so faithfully reproduced in his famous paintings. Part of a fresco by Landseer is preserved in a ruined hut, now inclosed by a wooden building, near Glenfeshie Lodge. It is interesting to read the Queen's delight in visiting "the scene of all Landseer's glory," and her frequently expressed appreciation of mountain scenery.

The last mountain excursion undertaken by the Queen in the company of the Prince Consort was on 16th October, 1861, when the great Clova table-land was visited. This plateau, which lies at a height of about 3,000ft., is on the "march" between the counties of Aberdeen and Forfar, and is so extensive and uniformly flat that a coach-and-four might be driven there for miles. The difficulty, however, is the getting there; the steepness of the ascent, combined with other causes, occasioned several falls to the

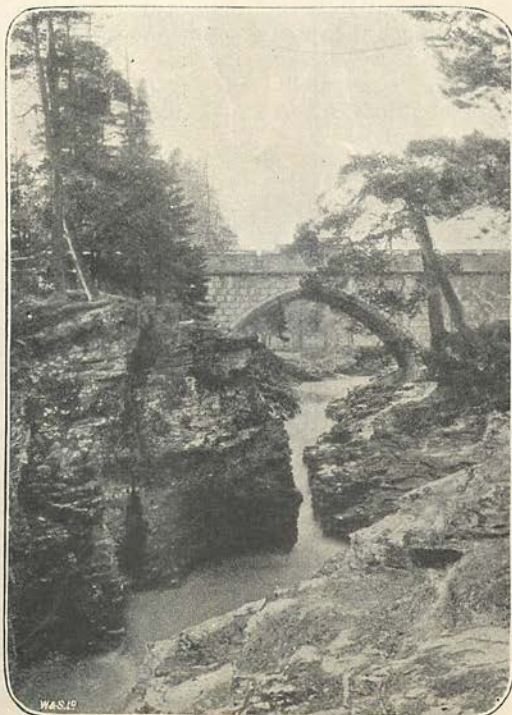


Photo. by]

LINN OF DEE.

[W. A. Hawes.



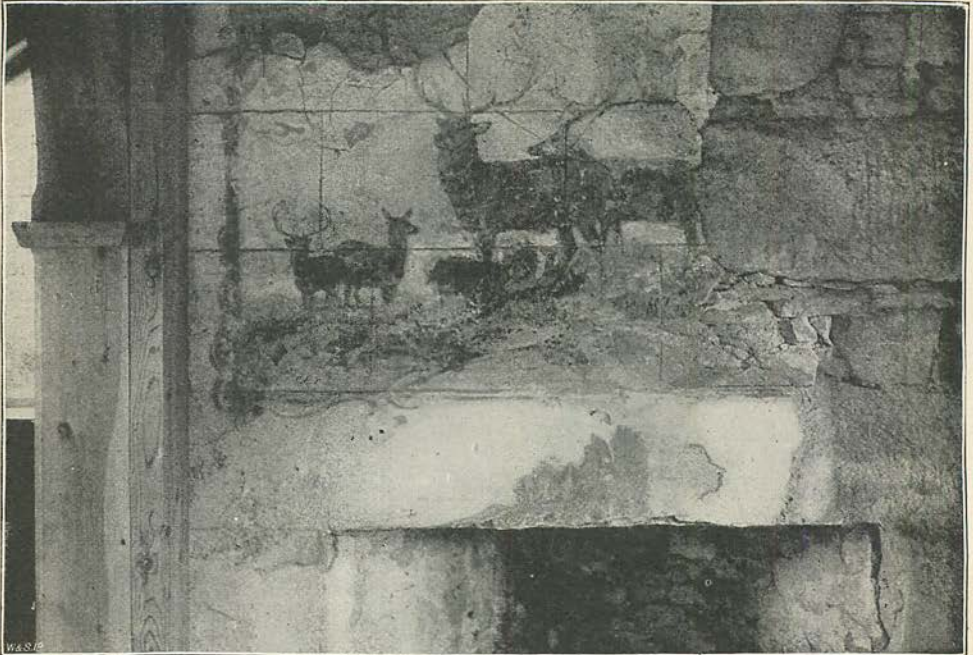


Photo. by]

LANDSEER'S FRESCO.

[R. A. Robertson.

Royal party. The route selected was *viâ* Glen Callater, ponies being in waiting at the loch of that name. The principal summits visited were Cairn na Tuirc and Cairn na Glasha. Human nature is, apparently, much the same in all classes and conditions; the desire to leave one's name behind is generally irresistible. On this occasion Prince Albert wrote on a scrap of paper a note of the Royal lunch on the mountain-top, depositing it in a seltzer-water bottle, which was then stuck in the ground. A rare find awaits someone there! The luncheon itself was commemorated in a well-known drawing by Carl Haag.

Mount Keen is the most easterly mountain in the United Kingdom over 3,000ft. in height, and has been crossed three times by Her Majesty. It is described in "Leaves" as "a curious, conical-shaped hill, with a deep corrie in it. We descended by a very steep but winding path, called the Ladder, very grand and wild." The Royal party were then on a visit to the Earl of Dalhousie at Invermark. The Queen repeated the visit in September, 1865, and this was the last of Her Majesty's mountain excursions. Near the foot

of the Ladder, in Lord Dalhousie's forest, the Queen, on her second visit, found the well, from which she drank in 1861, surmounted by an elegant gothic crown in granite, on which had been cut the following lines:—

Rest, traveller, on this lonely green,  
And drink and pray for Scotland's Queen.



Photo. by]

IN GLEN CALLATER,

[W. G. Mevin.