

mountaineer from membership. Still more do we owe to Capt. J. P. Farrar, who was even more definitely of this opinion. Percy Farrar, although not South African born, loved this country and its mountains and, I may add, its mountaineers whom he knew, and had traversed its great and wide spaces. With his widened vision and his dominant and powerful influence in the councils of the Alpine Club of his period, he sponsored, directly or indirectly, the election of further members from South Africa. Some of his views of those days—then considered almost revolutionary—are in practice today: closer cooperation between clubs and instructional courses for example. We have our instructional courses for the more advanced school of climbers under very competent leaders, and regular club meets for all who wish to acquire a proper knowledge of cragsmanship from the beginning. I am glad to note that A. P. Harper writes that Farrar, Bruce and Mumm in 1926 saw his view on these matters as far as New Zealand was concerned, and I might add as far as South Africa was concerned. I am glad to know that the Qualifications Advisory Committee, supported by certain of the 'Elder Statesmen' of the Club, are continuing the policy of Farrar and his predecessors, and if any representations I may have made have had any influence in this direction, I shall feel very happy about it.

I conclude this article by mentioning that we have Club offices and a large lecture room with a splendid library in the heart of Capetown, open daily, with lectures every Friday evening. All overseas mountaineers are welcomed with open arms and helped, and none with more pleasure than any member of the Alpine Club.

THE CUILLINS UNDER SNOW

BY LORD MALCOLM DOUGLAS-HAMILTON

I HAD always thought that the Cuillins under good winter conditions would provide excellent sport, but it was not until the winter of 1946-47 that I had the opportunity to confirm this. There was much snow on the mountains in December when I made one or two climbs up routes, like the 'Tourists' Route of Sgurr nan Gillean, which, though easy in summer, are good under winter conditions. December being early in the snow season, it was a matter rather of clearing snow away from rock holds than of finding any solid hold in the snow itself.

On January 15 I set out, together with a fairly large party, to climb Sgurr nan Gillean from the Bhasteir Corrie. The snow had packed a good deal more by this time, but it was thawing and one or two of the steps on the final pinnacle were somewhat insecure as there was a danger of the snow sliding. The summit was in mist and there was a biting cold gale; we descended by the 'Tourists' Route.



Photo W. S. Thomson.]

BLAVEN FROM SGURR NAN GILLEAN.

[To face p. 382.]

On the 20th the weather changed, and a hard frost, which lasted for nearly two months, gave most remarkable climbing conditions. This was the time of the great blizzards in the east of Scotland and the south of England, but the west of Scotland was lucky. In Skye there was little fresh snow, but intense frost produced wonderful Alpine conditions in the Cuillins and all the streams froze up. Apart from occasional snow showers, nearly every day for two months was characterised by sunshine.

Donald McIntyre and Bill Thomson arrived in Skye on the 20th, and on the 21st we set out to have a look at conditions. The walk up to the foot of the rocks was very easy since the ground was hard frozen and dry. There was much ice about, and when we were returning from the hills in the dark, this constituted a certain danger and caused us a few falls. We climbed Sgurr a'Bhasteir by a snow gully and the N.E. ridge, and traversed the ridge to the foot of Bhasteir Tooth, glissaded into the Bhasteir Corrie, did another short climb on to Sgurr a'Bhasteir, and finally glissaded down the gully we had climbed up.

This gave us a very good idea of the conditions to expect in other parts. The snow was consistent snow-ice, as hard as I have ever seen it, and about as hard as it could be without ceasing to be snow and becoming ice. Crampons would have been a considerable help, for progress was possible only by continuous step-cutting. The next day we motored to Glenbrittle to have a look at conditions there. We climbed Sgurr nan Gobhar, Sgurr na Banachdich, and traversed along the ridge to Sgurr Dearg. There was far less snow on this end of the ridge, but nevertheless sufficient to make the day interesting. Donald attempted the Inaccessible Pinnacle from the W. end, but gave it up because there was too much ice.

The following day was still fine, and Donald and I set out to have a look at the Pinnacle Ridge. We climbed the first pinnacle by the usual route. Apart from streaks of ice, most of it was normal rock climbing over dry rock, but where one ordinarily walks in summer it was now necessary to cut steps in the hard snow-ice. At the point where the Sligachan Gully joins the route, we roped up and had to cut steps to the top of the pinnacle. Some steps were necessary to get up the second pinnacle, and the third gave a very fine climb, step-cutting the whole way, and full of interest. There was one rather difficult movement near the top which Donald led in good style. From the top we gazed over the abyss and contemplated the remainder of the Pinnacle Ridge. The difficulties looked formidable, and we clearly had not enough time to attempt the normal way. The gap between the third and fourth pinnacles was sheathed in steeply sloping snow-ice and ice. We decided that it would be wisest to retreat the way we had come, skirt the pinnacles, and have a look at the other side of the fourth pinnacle. The normal route from the third pinnacle looked as though it would give a very fine climb but would take a long time. We climbed up the gully between the fourth pinnacle



Photo, W. S. Thomson.]

THE PINNACLE RIDGE, SCURR NAN GILLEAN.

and the little pinnacle between it and the main peak, and there examined the route up the fourth pinnacle. It looked formidable but possible, and we decided to come back the next day and try it, if the weather held. We then climbed the little fifth pinnacle.

The view from the top of this was astonishing and gave an impression of exposure very different from that of summer. A narrow ridge of snow-ice led over the top, and along this we cut steps, arriving at the point where we had commenced the climb on the 19th. Our steps of the 19th were still there and in a far firmer condition than on that day, and it did not take us long to reach the top of Sgurr nan Gillean. Time was short, and we only just got off the Tourists' Route before darkness fell, and had a long trudge back in the dark with some slips and falls on the unseen ice.

The next day we set out through the Bhasteir Corrie and climbed to the col between the little fifth pinnacle and the fourth. Even this position was quite exposed; having with some difficulty persuaded the ice-axe to go in far enough for a belay, one sat astride a knife edge of snow-ice, with footholds cut on either side. Donald then commenced leading up the fourth pinnacle. The route we had originally intended to follow was out to the left and then back to the right. This route was very exposed and very steep, and would have involved cutting steps in the snow-ice all the way, but I think that it would have been easier than the route we actually did.

Donald decided to go straight up the rocks, which from below looked fairly free of snow. This, however, was only an illusion—snow filled all the holds and made the climb very difficult indeed. Donald led straight up for 120 ft.; the climbing was of a very high standard of difficulty. I joined him in one of the most exposed positions I have ever experienced in the Cuillins. Having done this route frequently in summer, it was difficult to believe the complete transformation brought about by the conditions in which we found ourselves. The impression was brought about by the fact that the summer ridges were all levelled out by high-angle glistening snow-ice. If one had slipped off, there would have been absolutely nothing to hinder one's progress to the bottom of the Corrie; such progress would not in any way be slowed up by an occasional glancing blow from sloping ice, or knobs of rock projecting from it here and there. We put the thought of descent as far from our minds as possible, and continued with the climb. Donald was sitting astride the ice ridge, belayed to a projecting bollard of rock. The route led along the ridge with its very pronounced exposure until it joined the main face of the pinnacle where straight-forward step-cutting led to the gap between the twin summits. By the time I had reached this gap, practically the whole length of the 120 ft. rope was out, so I belayed here and Donald reached the summit in a short lead.

The cairn at the summit was only showing above the ice, and the summit itself was an ice knife edge across which we sat. It had been a magnificent climb; quite the best short-length climb I have ever

had in Scotland, but it had taken some considerable time and we realised that we should never have been able to complete the climb from the third pinnacle the previous day, since from that side the pinnacle is longer. The only disadvantage about this climb was that it was in the shade and very cold. We roped down the first pitch and completed the same route over Sgurr nan Gillean that we had done the previous day, arriving back some time after dark.

Unfortunately Donald had to leave the next day. It was a pity that we had not time to complete the whole of the Pinnacle Ridge, including the descent of the W. Ridge, while these conditions lasted. We hope to have the opportunity of doing this another year.

A month later with Willie Wood I again climbed Sgurr nan Gillean, descending by the W. Ridge and Gendarme. The conditions were much the same ; although fresh snow had fallen on the snow-ice, in many places we could still scoop out our old footsteps. The W. Ridge gave a very pleasant snow-ice and rock climb. We negotiated the Gendarme, which was plastered with ice, by Willie Wood's patent method of lassoing it.

Space does not permit a more detailed account of these and other climbs, but I can only say that the Cuillin under such conditions is superb and gives first class Alpine conditions. It is, unfortunately, not possible to guarantee weather and conditions such as we found last winter. If it were, I know that climbers from all over the country would go there as much in winter as they do in summer.