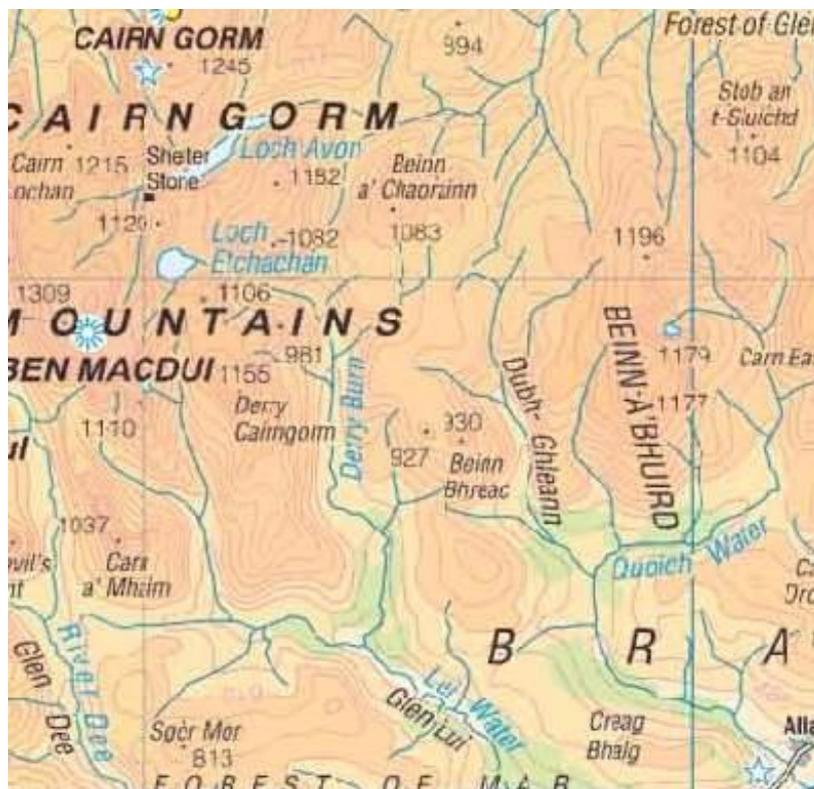


A Cairngorm Diary
24th -29th July, 1932
Written 'en route' by
James Nicoll Kerr Henderson (1908-1989)

Tuesday 26th July, 1932

Wakened at about 7 a.m. and rose about 8 a.m., forestalling the Dundonians for use of the communal table and making a very hearty breakfast of porridge and bacon. However you learn something new every day the Dundee lads had a novel use for loaves of pan-bread - they used them as pillows all night! And for once JJ and JNK had bitten off more than they could chew because when we left at about 11 a.m. we had to leave at least four slices of brown bread and butter behind. Before leaving though, we exchanged photos with the Taysiders, and signed the visitors' book presented by the U.C.D. Cairn Gorm Club. Then it was away and firstly we forded the Dee and approached the slopes of Cairn a Mhaim, a stepping stone to MacDhui.



It was pretty steep going but, just after Jim had found some white heather, we struck a deer path which took us up to the summit in comparative comfort. On again to the second climb, which was again steep and also stony - a sure sign that we were getting high. Ptarmigan were abundant here and JJ had a really fine cross-country race up and down the hill trying to photograph them. I don't know what he'd do without that camera and what endless amusement we cull from it. About 2 p.m. we reached the summit of Ben MacDhui and once more we are provided with an orgy of beauty. In the South-East, another Loch an Uaine (3142 feet). There are four of these 'green' lochs - one on each of Cairn Toul, MacDhui and Cairn Gorm and the last one just about a mile West of Ryvoan Bothy, our home for this evening. North-East of the cairn of MacDhui lay another Loch Etchachan, while to the South-East towered Cairn Gorm (3788 feet).

Although MacDhui was found to be very stony at the top and no gentler than the others, it was very mild when we got there.



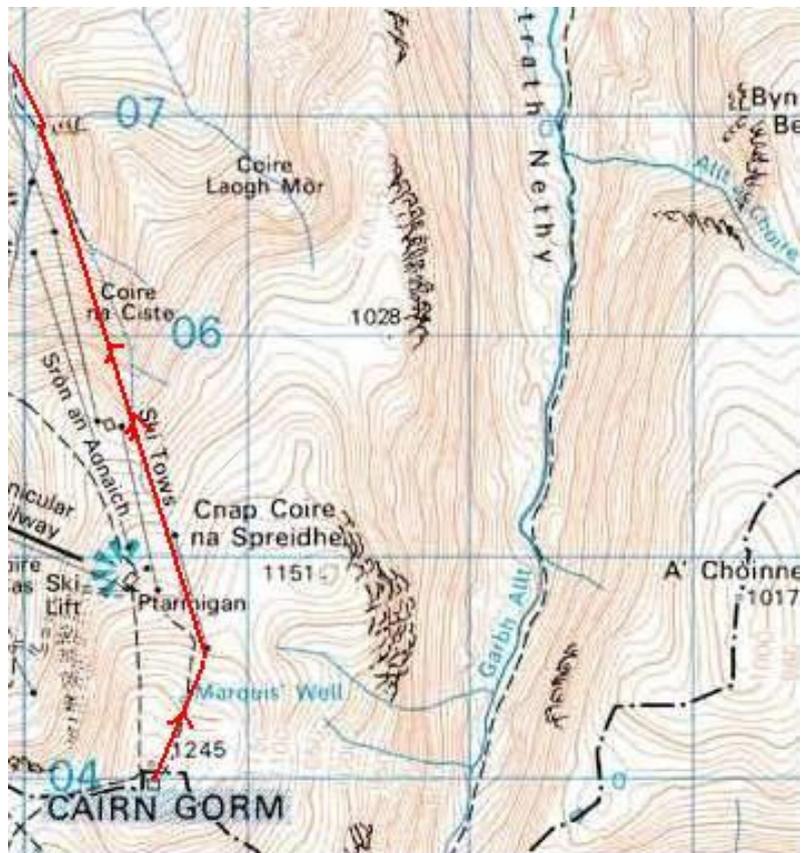
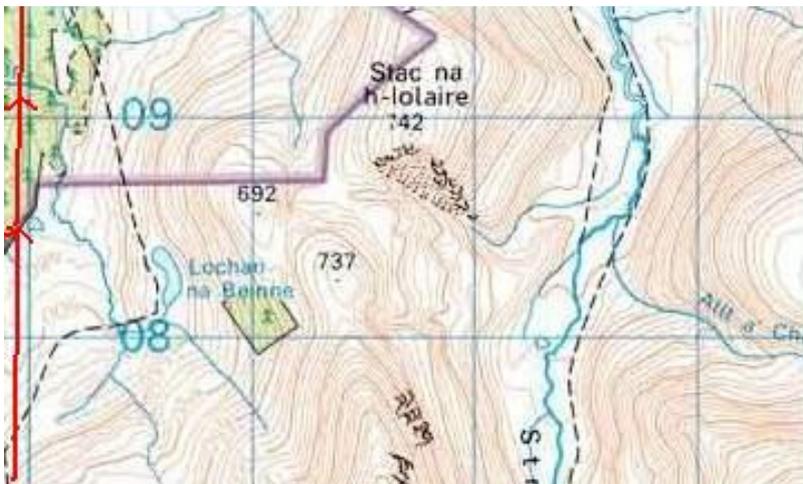
Loch Etchachan from the Summit of MacDhui

Hunger hastened lunch preparation and in a few minutes we had the stove heating the soup to a nice temperature. The tin-opener exposed corn beef and baked beans and having consumed this, we finished off with a dessert of fruit salad and semolina. After lunch was evaluation time for our respective diaries and on exchange reading we agreed that both passed muster. However despite the air being wonderfully mild, the scene pleasant, placid, grand and very congenial to a full stomach, a glance at the heavy clouds gathering, and a hint of thunder, suggested that we must soon be on our way. Not a living soul in sight and we just remarked on how quickly the cold hard world could fall into obscurity and oblivion. Thus philosophising we journey on Northward towards the Shelter Stone at the West end of Loch Avon - but keeping our height. As we circled the ridge we had a lovely view of both lochs, Loch Etchachan and Loch Avon. The latter is a particularly 'bonnie' loch.

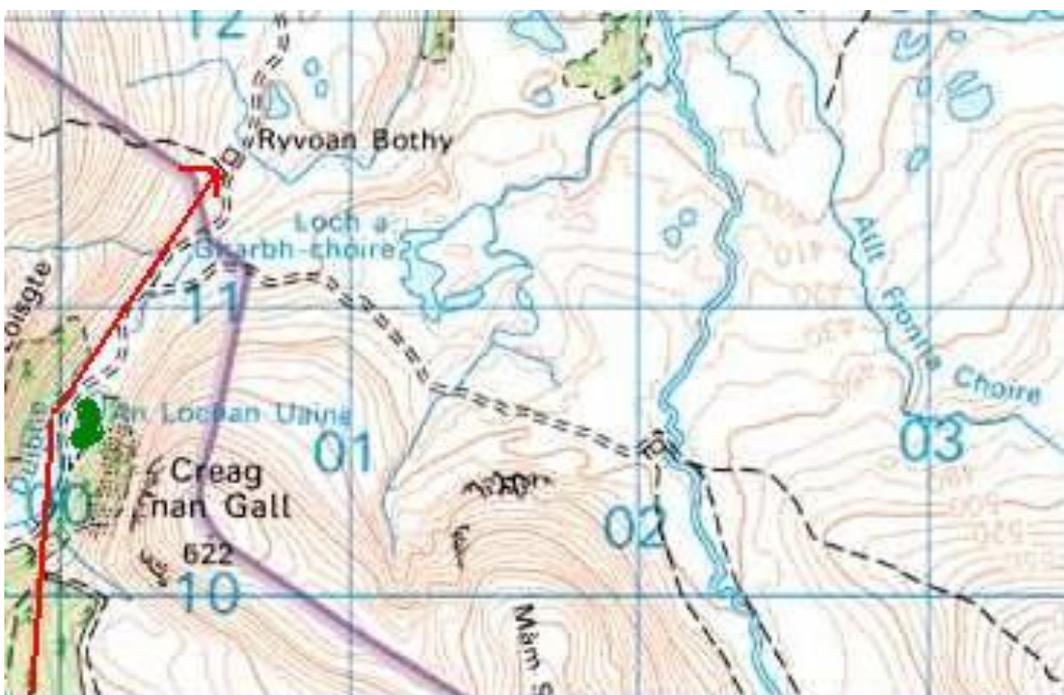


Loch Avon from the Summit of Ben MacDhui

Meanwhile the clouds were descending lower and becoming thicker and Cairn Gorm was just visible amidst overhanging mist. By 5 p.m. the thunder was reverberating through the hills and we were plodding manfully on, up one slope, down the next, towards the summit. The last 1000 feet was a real tough climb in driving rain and clammy mist and, on reaching the top, we had to 'fumble' for the Cairn. However we stumbled on it eventually at about 6 o'clock, duly deposited our boulder and set about what had become a very serious task - to get down from there expeditiously and safely. The driving rain turned to hail - huge lumps - but setting our backs to the Cairn and taking a compass bearing from our map, 1 degree West of North, we struck out hopefully for the valleys below where we trusted that there'd be better visibility and friendlier elements.



Fortunately we had taken an accurate bearing for soon we found a pile of stones (white) at intervals of 20 yards or so to guide us down in the way we should go. So on we stepped and slithered down, past the Marquis' Well, down the Coire na Ciste. But oh! It was miserable going! We were wet through, soaked to the skin as was everything else around us. The heather was knee deep, the gradient steep and tea time was being clearly indicated but impossible to execute. Still, in spite of my own misery, I had time to look for, and find white heather. In due course - it seemed an eternity - the rain ceased and about 8 p.m. - 'Squelch! Squelch! Squelch!' - we reached an 8 foot high fence cutting off the private estate or preserve of Glenmore. Our path lay this way, and, as no one was likely to be about, we climbed the obstacle and approached our first trees since Sunday. It started to rain again, so we rigged up a couple of ground sheets between two trees, and, in spite of wet clothes and terrible flies, had an excellent tea of chicken, ham and tongue and 'Bee-Zee-Bee' bread with butter and jam.



Cheers! It faired again, so, after a smoke, and a consultation over the map, we set off once more 'doon the burn' for 2 miles, climbed the 8 foot fence on the North side of the estate and struck North-East towards Ryvoan Bothy, only two miles away now. I must not forget to thank JJ here for saving me from strangling - if he hadn't rescued me, I'd still be hanging from that 'blessed' fence by my rucksack. Talking of rucksacks, these ones we have are real friends. Everything was bone dry inside them, although every item of clothing we were wearing was soaking. I wondered vaguely what people would think if they could have seen us then or knew of our condition. And yet we were as happy as crickets, though the word 'tired' could not do justice to describing our aching bodies. Indeed this valley lying between Aviemore and Ryvoan, almost East and West, is a lovely sight as was proved as the weather improved into a fine evening.

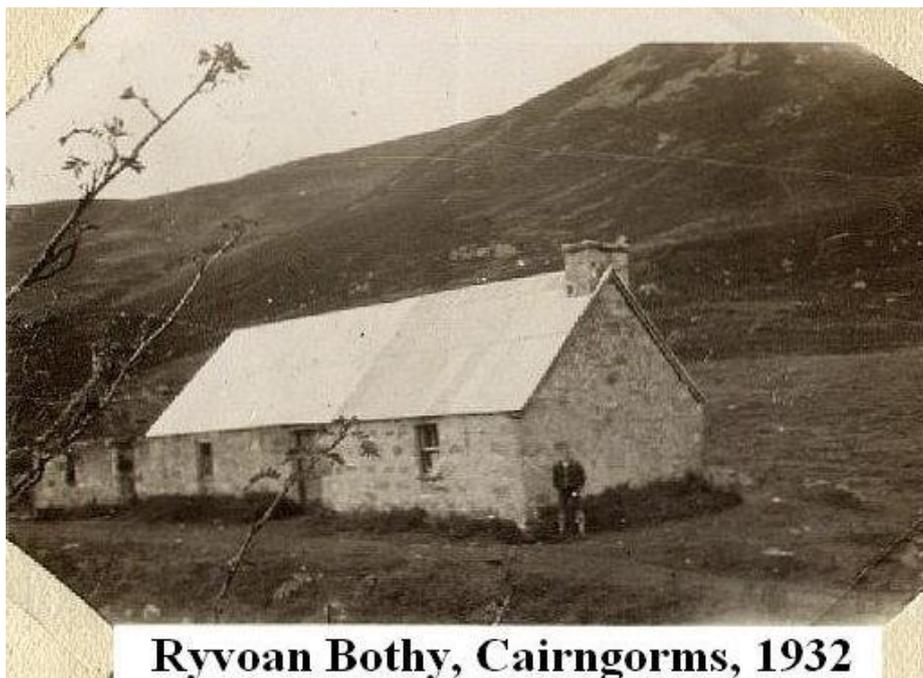


Glen Uaine



**Lochan Uaine near Ryvoan Bothy
'The Green Lochan'**

Nonetheless sighting the bothy at about 10 p.m. was great - never was 'home' in the hills more appreciated!
Better still! Two 'kilties' from Nethy were there with a huge pine fire in the grate to welcome us.



Ryvoan Bothy, Cairngorms, 1932

An immediate dry down, cold wash and change was performed, the wet things hung up to dry, and cocoa and biscuits consumed before settling down, with admirable discipline, I thought, to our daily task - our diaries. It's 11.45 pm. now as I finish off this log for today.

The bothy here is wonderful, relatively speaking. We've had another hard day and trying, but I wouldn't have missed the experiences for all the comforts and luxuries to be had elsewhere. To emphasise the point - we've just seen our first newspaper, 'The Bulletin', since last Saturday - but it holds no interest to us in our present environment and states of mind. Again I repeat, no one can possibly imagine the power, the majesty and natural beauty of the surrounds, the variety of scenery and plant life, and the constant, irresistible and relentless changes brought about by the incessant fluctuations of the elements.

Tomorrow we walk to Aviemore, a mere 10 miles away, for more food and then return here to sleep - an easy day, but, by jove, despite being in the 'pink', we're needing it! Our stores have held out very successfully and everything has worked out according to plan, almost! That's four peaks over 4000 feet now, and on Friday, from Deeside, we mean to do the last two of the big 'six' - Ben an Bhuid and Ben Avon, thence to Ballater and Aberdeen. It's been a dull and overcast night so far, but we hope and pray for a good day tomorrow. Excelsior!