

CHAPTER XIV

LOCHINVER, INVERKIRKAIG AND LOCH FEWIN

LOCHINVER is one of those charming seaside nooks where sea, shore, river and lochs, glens and mountain height combine to make this little village an earthly paradise, as there is no fear of a crowd to vulgarize this splendid holiday retreat. The few who find their way so far have usually "eyes to see," and the faculty of enjoying the wonders outspread before them. The sunsets after a storm are gorgeous beyond a poet's dream, and "the mountain glory is hardly to be apprehended by those who know nothing of the mountain gloom, while the effect of both is aided beyond description by the changing aspects of the sea." This region of the far north-west is beyond the usual tourist haunts, where sport can be enjoyed in almost every glen, loch and stream in this vast solitary country which renders Sutherland perhaps the crowning delight of a sojourn in Scotland.

We resolved to spend an early spring holiday at Inverkirkaig—a delightful little place a few

miles south of Lochinver. The croft we stayed at was situated on the beautiful shores of Loch Kirkaig; an old-fashioned farmhouse overlooking this picturesque loch, and our first smell of the sea acted on us like a tonic. Our host was a kindly, true Highlander, who provided us with every comfort and did his best to make our holiday an exceedingly happy one—which indeed it was.

Prior to visiting this "Eden of the North," we had been fortunate enough to obtain permission to fish a chain of hill lochs in the district, the following being worthy of note:

LOCH RUDHA-NA-BREIGE, situated on the south side of Loch Kirkaig, which drains into the salt water. This loch is connected by burns with LOCH-AN-ARBHAIR (which contains numerous small trout averaging about a quarter of a pound) and LOCH-A-CHOIN (which is famed for its large trout—a dour loch which yields excellent sport if conditions are favourable), and is best fished in a west wind at the north-west end, where big trout are often taken. LOCHAN FADA (the Long Loch), one of a chain of lochs named LOCH-A-CHAPUILL and LOCH-A-GHILLE. All three lochs yield good sport. A west wind is best and ordinary Loch Leven flies are advisable. On dull, wet days larger sizes of flies give best results. Large trout are sometimes taken, but the average size caught is about half a pound. Sea trout seldom enter Loch Fada, unless there is a sufficient head of water to let them up the burn. LOCH LEATHAD-AN-LOCHAIN, a small tarn on the north side of Loch Kirkaig. The fish in this loch are few but heavy and afford excellent sport. Like other lochs in the district this one fishes best in wet weather. Trout over three pounds in weight are not uncommon. LOCH BAD-NA-MUIRICHUN, a delightful little loch about a mile long on the left-hand side of the road leading from Lochinver to Inverkirkaig. The trout are numerous, but of no great size. This loch lies in a hollow surrounded by mountains,

and contains several wooded islands on which Royal Fern grow in profusion. Waters from two smaller lochs to the west drain into it.

During the first week of our holiday we filled many a basket from these lochs, the largest size of brown trout ranging from half a pound to one and three-quarter pounds in weight, being caught in Loch-a-Choin, Loch-a-Chapuill and Loch Rudha-na-Breige, which enabled us to remember our friends in the south with several fair parcels of fish.

When posting trout in hot weather it is a wise precaution to gut them as soon after being caught as possible, wipe their insides with a clean, dry cloth and without peppering or salting them or packing them in grass, reeds, cabbage leaves or moss, etc., sew them up in a canvas bag and attach thereto a label bearing the name and address. Salt, grass, etc., tends to soften and moisten the flesh of the fish, causing them to decay sooner. Dispatched as above, the flesh will keep firm and fresh for a considerable time, and there is less chance of causing offence at their destination if this principle be adopted.

During the second and third week we sought new fishing waters, and were able to experience some delightful days angling on the following lochs in the district, which are well worthy of comment :



LOCH CROCACH

LOCHINVER, INVERKIRKAIG AND LOCH FEWIN

LOCH FEWIN, a very fine loch about five miles from Lochinver. This loch is about two and a half miles long and roughly three-quarters of a mile broad, and is the lowest of a chain of lochs. Immediately above it is Loch Veyatie, then Loch Cama and then Lochs Urigil and Boarlan. All these lochs contain big trout, which afford good sport. Loch Fewin is easily fished from the bank, and baskets of ten to fifteen pounds of beautiful trout, averaging three to the pound, are not uncommon. June and July are the best months, and large fish weighing from six to ten pounds are sometimes caught by trolling. LOCH ASSYNT is not only a lovely sheet of water, but a fine fishing loch, which is situated in the parish of the same name. It is about eight miles long and roughly one broad. The Loanan and Traligill rivers fall into the head of it as well as the Chalda and the Shaig burns. The River Inver flows out of it. This loch contains brown trout and salmo-ferox, the former averaging under one pound and the latter have been taken up to fourteen pounds. Salmon are also caught in it, but rarely sea trout. The best months are from May until September. Bright flies are favourable for trout and phantom minnows for salmo-ferox. The best beat for salmon is off the rocky promontory near Castle Leod. When fly fishing from a boat, best results are to be had by casting in towards the shore, near to the edge of rocks and gravelly bays, while near the mouths of the several feeders of the loch the angler is sure to find a hungry trout on the outlook on favourable days. This loch fishes best in the rain. LOCH BEANNACH is situated about four miles from Lochinver. Small flies are preferable, and June and July are the best months. Trout average four or five to the pound. The scenery is mountainous and majestic, and the view to the seaward is very beautiful. Numerous nameless lochs abound in the vicinity which are all full of trout and are free to the public. LOCH CROCACH lies in the parish of Assynt, roughly three miles from Lochinver on the Stoer Road. It is roughly two miles long by one mile broad. The trout are numerous but small, although occasional big ones are to be had. Small flies are best. Big trout when caught reward the angler, as they are unsurpassed in symmetry. The scenery is wild and mountainous. June and July are the best months. This loch fishes best in rain. There are numerous small lochs in the neighbourhood which hold abundance of small trout. THE MANSE LOCH is situated on the right-hand side of the road from Lochinver to Stoer and contains brown trout and occasionally sea trout, provided there is sufficient water to enable the latter to gain access to the loch. The loch stands

high and the scenery is wild and beautiful. LOCH ROE is greatly frequented by sea trout and is connected with the Black Loch. It is situated about two and a half miles from Lochinver on the Stoer Road and is full of brown trout. LOCH NA BREAC MOR (loch of the big trout) is situated on the Assynt Road about four miles from Lochinver. LOCH NA H-INGHINN (commonly termed "The Maiden"), a convenient loch to fish, being situated by the side of the road leading from Lochinver to Stoer. It contains good-sized trout and fishes best in the rain.

We obtained our heaviest baskets from Lochs Fewin, Assynt and "The Maiden," despite almost impossible fishing conditions—clear blue sky, baking sun and practically no breeze, although on occasions it is but fair to add we did have an occasional dull day, with slight breeze or stormy conditions and drizzling rain, when under such circumstances we effected considerable slaughter.

It is interesting to note that, although frequently salmon are procured in Loch Assynt, it has hardly been known for a sea trout to have been caught in this loch, although they abound in the district and in the River Inver especially, which takes its source at the west end of this loch and which can boast of no considerable obstruction in its course to prevent sea trout from gaining access to Loch Assynt. My own opinion is that sea trout do enter the loch, but make straight for the higher water at the extreme east end, where they enter the streams.

The Lakes of Killarney may be beautiful, but I very much doubt if any of them could surpass

the loveliness of Lochs Beannach and Crocach with their many bewitching wooded islands on which *Osmundia regalis* (Royal Fern) grows in profusion, while mountains of indescribable shape loom up all around. Apart from fishing altogether and from a point of scenic beauty alone, both these lochs are worthy of visiting.

As will be inferred from the foregoing, nearly all the many lochs in the district fish better on rainy days. The flies which we found did best were the worm fly (with red or orange or yellow tip) on the tail, the Peter Ross or Mrs. Ross body (with grouse wing) on the mid, and the Charlie Flemming, Alexandra Glory or Silver Butcher on the bob. In the Lochinver district such a cast never fails to fill a basket during the daytime, and in our experience we caught practically ninety per cent of our trout on the worm fly with the red tip, substituting such flies as the Dark Olive and the Red Ant for the evening.

One delightful spring morning we breakfasted about 6.30 and set off on foot over the hills to fish Loch Fewin, in the company of a local friend named Ronald Mackenzie, who had kindly offered us his services.

The first quarter of a mile or so was along the road by the seaside, and then by the River Kirkaig, tumbling over its rocky bed through scenery comprising water, wood, scars and bens,

so intermingled that it presented a prospect unsurpassed in grandeur which made us feel aglow with the fire of health, all the while "the lark rising to the golden heaven, sweet with the promise of the new day."

The freshness of the morning gave us added energy as we paced along, with rods in hand and rucksacks on our backs, the narrow winding road bordered with silver birch, hazel and pine trees, while the clear pale blue of the spring sky above seemed to blend with the delicate skill of the painter, each little tree helping to add its own particular charm to the magic of the early morning after the heavy rainfall on the previous day.

The almost unforgettable scents of honeysuckle and thyme are in themselves unique, but the perfume of the clover fields by the riverside will live the longest in our quickened senses. "The drenching sweetness that permeates those homely meadows is enough to make even the honeybees drunk on heat and ambrosia—food of the gods."

The peewits and the curlews were calling, causing the great silence of the morning to speak, and with the cool exhilarating breeze came the tang of the moist moorlands kissed by the early sun.

On reaching the wooden bridge which spans the



LOCH ASSYNT

Kirkaig about half a mile from its mouth, we lifted the latch of a little broken-down gate and commenced to follow a rough sheep track up the north side of the river in an easterly direction, all the while the rising sun casting rosy beams across the wooded path, bringing harmonious vegetations into view as the rain-cooled grasses brushed our knees. For us those sunlit lanes will ever remain the pathways of romance. As we continued our journey up the gorge, through which the stream tumbled over its boulder-strewn bed, every now and then we caught picturesque vistas of the sunlit valley which we had left behind us, through which the gleaming waters curved their silvery way towards the sea. The scene was beautified, not only by the singing of the wild birds but by the sunbeams dancing on the clumps of primroses, which decked the banks and cliffs on the river sides. In fact, the ground was in places a carpet of primrose and green and in others carpeted in the mystic blue of the bluebells and the green and brown shades of the mosses—like a fairy scene with the sun scintillating through the branches overhead.

In early spring the young leaves of the birches add fresh beauty to the countryside and the fir trees afford welcome shade from the heat of the sun.

After about half a mile's walk through this

wooded vale, to the passionate crooning of the wood-pigeon and the intermitted twitter of the chaffinch in the branches overhead, we emerged into the open moorland and ascended higher ground—a romantic and practically unfrequented wilderness of bare rock and mountainside—a somewhat toilsome walk amid scenery of Alpine grandeur.

As we continued our upward journey, the course of the Kirkaig grew rougher and wilder beneath a background of massive mountains as the peaks of Stac Polly, Cul Mor and Cul Beag showed “their high upreared and abutting fronts” to the right of us. On our left our view was hidden by the immediate slope of the hillside, along the slope of which our uneven path zigzagged.

The morning was indeed a warm one, as the sun baked down upon us, causing us to perspire freely, but, our thoughts being centred on the prospect of a good day’s sport, we paid little heed to our discomforts and soon the thunderous roar of the Falls of Kirkaig sounded like music in our ears.

The falls are situated roughly about two and three-quarter miles from the sea, the water, which rushes through an almost Alpine ravine, being precipitated down a perpendicular cliff of some ninety feet in height, one of Nature’s most impressive wonders in the district. Here the River

Kirkaig flowing across a fairly high moorland among the mountains, takes a plunge into the narrow gorge below, its banks rising steeply to the heights on either side. A sight which fills one with awe at its beauty and majesty. An almost hidden path winds off the main track, dizzily, along one side of the chasm to a point opposite the pool below which there is a boiling cauldron. In order to fish this pool the angler has to descend an almost vertical cliff—a nasty, gymnastic performance—to reach a ledge of rock facing the very base of the cliff, over which the waters leap and clash on to the rock below, sending up great clouds of spray, and much careful placing of the feet is required in order to scramble down the face of the wall-like slopes to this cleft in the rock opposite the seething furies of this solid mass of falling water. This cleft of rock is roughly five feet above the level of the water when the river is in normal condition. For those who are able to do so, the experience is an unforgettable one, but no one who is affected by heights should attempt it, more especially on account of the wet slime which covers the rocks due to the drifting spray from the falls. Once in position, only the most experienced of anglers can cast a good line into this boiling pot, if "cast" be the correct word to use, as it is practically impossible, owing to the proximity of the rocks

behind, to do otherwise than swing one's line in the direction of this roaring cascade which is audible for miles away on the hillside.

As we stood on the edge of this projecting rock it was indescribably soothing to feel the cool soft spray drifting over us, as if intent on refreshing us for the remainder of our walk to the loch, and for ten full minutes we experienced the delightful process of getting gently wet in clothes that did not matter, all the while the picture being glorified by gorgeously coloured rainbows shimmering all around us.

As there is no available means for the fish to ascend this fall, it is only between this evil-looking pool and the sea that the salmon and sea trout can be caught. There are about two dozen excellent fishing pools between the falls and the sea, but as the three pools immediately below the falls are separated from one another by perpendicular rocks rising sheer out of the water, it costs the fisherman rough work to scramble, often on all fours, from one to the other, and as it is practically impossible for him to follow a hooked fish out of these pools, it is seldom that his skill is crowned with success without an exciting struggle, during which he must hold his prize on a very tight line, which runs every chance of becoming severed on the sharp ledges of the rocks beneath the surface. When the fish are in

LOCHINVER, INVERKIRKAIG AND LOCH FEWIN

the river they can frequently be seen jumping in the fall pool, but it can safely be said that it is just about as difficult to bring down fifty to a hundred brace of grouse on a Highland moor as it is to land a single salmon from the seething peat-brown waters at the base of the fall—but herein lies the true sport of fishing—the joy of overcoming almost impossible odds and in the end being victorious.

Many goodly fish have been taken from this uncanny-looking pool from time to time, and anyone possessing a split cane, double-built grilse rod and a choice of half a dozen standard flies can, with a modicum of common sense and skill, end with flying colours.

Anyone fishing the River Kirkaig for salmon will never go far wrong by affixing to the end of his cast either one or other of the good old-fashioned flies, viz., The Jock Scott or the Thunder and Lightning of medium size, but the rod should be of pleasing action, capable of throwing a good line, and possessing the necessary power for exhausting a fish in the minimum of time.

Should the river be running high, the Golden Sprat will be found the deadliest spinning bait, and if the water is slightly coloured the angler will be well advised to try a fly dressed with white-tipped turkey feather.

It is not surprising that a good many sportsmen,

and especially sportswomen, consider angling for salmon a bore, as their knowledge of salmon fishing and its unique thrills is frequently limited, but I know of no other pool in Scotland which affords a greater thrill than the Fall Pool on the Kirkaig, and it is safe to postulate that should any one of these bored people ever encounter the intense excitement of a battle royal in this boiling pot with a fresh run fish of fifteen to twenty pounds they will certainly find a new pleasure in life.

Not only do some women enjoy the sport of angling, but sometimes they acquire the art in a shorter space of time than the average male. Of course fishing usually requires patience, to say nothing of a good imagination, and, although most ladies possess the latter, one wonders whether they have the former quality, but naturally their sole object is to hook some poor fish at some time or another!

In order to facilitate the landing of fish in this pool, within recent years iron rungs have been affixed down the south side of the projecting slab of rock in ladder formation to the water-level. After a fish has been played, the gillie descends this somewhat primitive staircase in order to bring the gaff or net into operation so soon as the fish is sufficiently spent to be brought alongside, but at best of times it is a somewhat perilous business, especially if the river be in flood, when it is

terrifying to stand on the narrow ledge of rock and gaze on the foaming current.

After visiting the falls, we retraced our footsteps to the main path, along which we proceeded in the direction of Loch Fewin, keeping the river in view on our right. For companionship one can find much interest in the rushing waters as one traverses the banks of a river, which has always a melodious voice of its own, "that tells in varied tones the secrets of the high hills and the corries."

After walking for fully ten minutes, we rounded a bend over a high ridge and beheld in front of us a truly magnificent scene. The view which confronted us from the top of the hill over which the path wound was one of inexplicable grandeur, the earth lying in folds before us with the purple mountains in the background. In front of us, barely a quarter of a mile away, lay Loch Fewin—a gleaming jewel in the morning sunshine—and towering up above it the massive bulk of Suilven, one of the queerest-looking of all mountains in Sutherlandshire. We had viewed its massive height from Loch Kirkaig endways on, when it startled us by the shape of its almost grotesque head, which made us feel it definitely had to be treated with some awe and respect, but now close at hand it resembled some glowering monster, daring us to approach its frowning slopes.

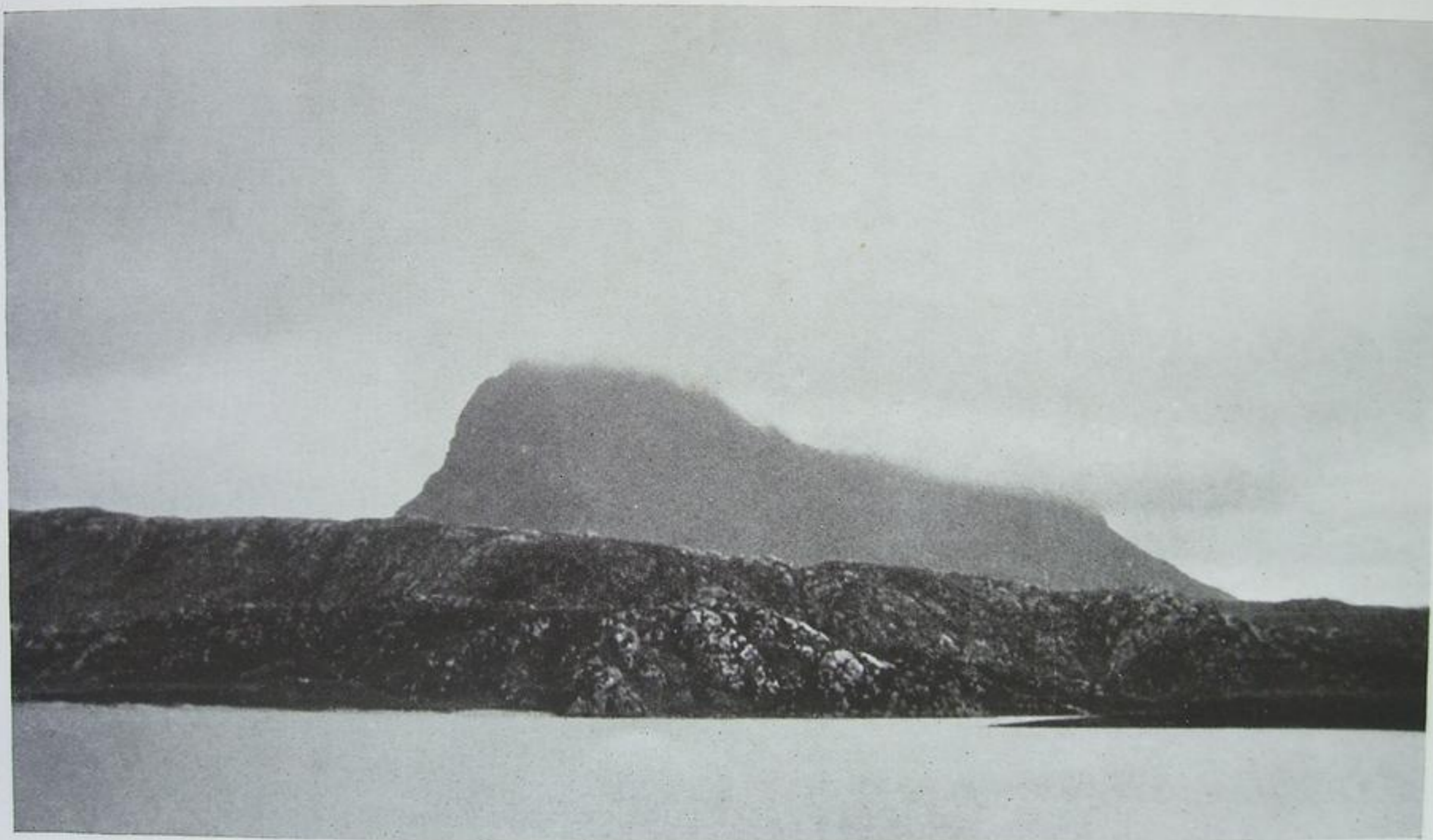
By this time there was a fresh wind blowing,

and as we continued on our way the path led us closer to the river, which at this point takes the form of a series of small tarns, which we decided to fish on our way to the loch.

Having assembled our rods my Edinburgh friend affixed to the end of his line an ordinary Loch Leven cast, consisting of the Grouse and Peter Ross on the tail, Teal and Green on the mid and Kingfisher on the bob, while I selected a cast comprising the worm fly with red tip on the tail, March Brown (female) with quill body on the mid and the Charlie Fleming on the bob. In our experience we had found it always paid to fish not more than three flies on a cast, especially on this kind of water. We fished steadily up-stream, observing an interval of roughly 100 yards between each other, my friend leading, and by the time we had reached the loch we had between us a good basket of some twenty-five selected trout averaging just under half a pound, and the trout bit briskly!

We found the boat anchored ready waiting for us, but owing to the heavy rainfall the previous day it was more than half full of water, which necessitated rigorous bailing. Once this somewhat tedious operation was accomplished and our gear had been placed aboard, we pushed off from the shore on our real day's adventure.

As the breeze was from the west, we decided



LOCH FEWIN AND SUILVEN

LOCHINVER, INVERKIRKAIG AND LOCH FEWIN

to row round the bay and continue our course up against the wind to the west end of the loch, and Ronald Mackenzie, feeling energetic, took the oars. Casting against the wind towards the bank at a point where the river rushes out of the loch, I was fast into a heavy trout with my first cast, and after playing it for fully five minutes landed a fine, plump fish of just under a pound, which gave us the necessary encouragement for our day's outing. Scarcely had I landed this fish when my friend in the bow hooked and netted another trout of slightly less weight, and by the time we had rowed to the end of the bay and reached the end of the loch we had added an additional eleven fish to the basket.

Anchoring our boat in a sheltered place, we landed and after a welcome meal spread ourselves out and lazed luxuriously on a heathery bank, where we were able to enjoy the solitude of the surrounding scenery.

Being curious to test a small loch named Loch Uidh-na-Ceardaich, about a hundred yards to the west of where we had halted, I picked up my rod, changed my cast, and with net in hand trudged over the heather, where I commenced to fish at its eastern end by wading out from the bank and casting over clusters of water-lilies cradled on flat green leaves which fringed the sides, into the depths beyond, every step causing me to sink

deeper and deeper into the mud, the water on occasions soaking me almost up to my waist in its blue ripples—a somewhat disagreeable and risky performance! The water felt deliciously breath-taking at first, then after a minute or so it seemed to grow warm.

To my amazement, with my first cast a fine trout which I struck firmly rose to me just clear of the weeds. My chief difficulty in playing this trout was that he frequently made for the reeds, but I kept a steady strain on him. After playing this fish amongst the reeds for fully a minute, keeping him as near the surface as possible, I suddenly felt the line tighten as I gingerly manœuvred my captive towards terra firma through the water-lilies, and to my surprise discovered a second trout a little less in size had hooked itself to my cast, which made the matter of playing two fish at once in such a treacherous place a most complicated job. I succeeded in tiring out No. 1 fish, which had taken the tail fly, but could not bring him near enough to net owing to the antics of No. 2 trout on the "bob," who was putting up a fierce fight for his freedom, all the while the situation being intensified by the soft mud on the bottom—into which I was steadily sinking—rising to the surface and making the water resemble thick, brown soup! Finally I got the net under fish No. 1

LOCHINVER, INVERKIRKAIG AND LOCH FEWIN

on the tail, and was manœuvring No. 2 fish into line directly above, to enable me to net both fish at once, when my right foot stuck firm in the muddy bottom, causing me to stumble to the side, when, to my dismay, the middle fly hooked itself on to the reeds and the line broke! Where I stood I was over my knees in water fully four feet from the bank. Realizing that I had a good-sized trout wriggling in my net, I took the risk, and with one great swoop over my head flung it out of the folds safely on to the bank. The next difficulty was to discover the whereabouts of fish No. 2 in the now completely dense water. As I stood still looking about me, I noticed a commotion on the surface of the water caused by the movement of some weeds as they splashed to and fro in a series of jerks. Bending down, I felt about and soon detected the gut. Sliding my hand cautiously along what was left of my cast, which was still held to the weeds by the midfly, I gently raised it, and immediately I observed my prize I shot the net under him, freed my cast and victoriously scrambled to the shore. Taking from my pocket a little scales (or spring balance) I weighed both fish, and found the first, which had taken the Cinnamon and Gold, weighed exactly three-quarters of a pound, and the second, which had taken the March Brown, just under half a pound!

Having had quite enough of this loch for one day I returned to our picnic place at Loch Fewin, to find my friend reaching out from the stern of the boat to try to land a bottle, which was bobbing up and down on the surface of the water. After a great effort, which nearly ended in disaster, he secured the bottle (which was empty and corked).

On lifting the bottle into the boat I discovered the game, for attached to it was a piece of line, on the end of which fought a trout of about half a pound. The line fastened to the bottle had a bait-hook attached to it, on which my friend had threaded a couple of large worms. An easy and mechanical method of catching fish by letting them play themselves exhausted below, while the bottle responded above by bouncing up and down on the surface, keeping a steady strain on the hooked fish !!!

After partaking of a final refreshing cup of tea from our thermos flasks, we again changed our casts and pushed off from the shore beneath a blazing sun; below the heather-clad banks the ripples were shimmering on the surface of the water and we were all prepared for great sport. The boat drifted up the north side of Loch Fewin in an easterly direction, to the song of the skylark fluttering high above.

The cast I selected consisted of a Peter Ross

LOCHINVER, INVERKIRKAIG AND LOCH FEWIN

body and grouse wing on the tail, a Teal and Green on the middle and the Kingfisher Butcher on the bob—the ordinary Loch Leven size of single round bend hook.

I have come to the conclusion that in loch fishing a great deal depends upon (1) casting a long and delicate line at rapid intervals, dropping the flies lightly on the water, allowing them to rest on the surface only a very short time, and (2) altering the speed at which the flies should be drawn through the water to suit the circumstances, viz., when there is no ripple and the water is calm it is wise to sink the flies and draw them slowly through the water, never towards the centre of the boat, but out towards each end of it. When there is a moderate breeze let the tail fly sink slightly and let the bob fly tip the surface of the water. In a strong breeze, it is advisable to draw the flies more quickly through the waves, as the fish in such circumstances usually lie nearer the surface. I have usually had better results by drawing the flies through the water more quickly in the afternoon than in the morning. One should never be in too great a hurry to strike a fish; the strike should be operated, if possible, as the trout turns. It is often quite worth while trying a cast under trees on banks which overhang the loch even on calm days, when one's flies should be allowed to sink slightly. Once a trout is hooked

it is a wise principle to bring it to the net as soon as possible.

On bright, sunny days I advocate the use of a tinted pair of sun-goggles, which help to relieve the glare of the water and assist the angler in seeing when to strike a rising fish. On such occasions, when there is normally little or no breeze and the sun is merciless, I recommend casting as far out of the track of the boat as possible, sinking the flies, letting them descend within the observation of the fish, then drawing them back in a series of slow jerks, causing them to resemble the movements of the aquatic insects beneath the surface. The trouble is, however, that many fishermen never know when to "draw the line"! Sitting in a boat all day long, sweltering in the heat, tends to give one that unattractive condition known as "fisherman's seat"!!

If possible, on hot, sunny days never let your gut dry in the sun's rays. Once the gut is wet let it remain so, until the day's fishing is completed. For such occasions, I recommend dyeing the gut a blue-black colour to prevent glitter, or stain the gut dark tea colour. Gently rubbing the gut with rubber or india-rubber will remove its polish or glitter.

We had not drifted long before I observed in one of the delightful little bays the dorsal fin of

LOCHINVER, INVERKIRKAIG AND LOCH FEWIN

a large trout cutting the surface of the water. Casting over the place where I had noticed it, a large and heavy fish took my tail fly underwater and my rod bent with the strain. Down to the depths the fish went with a wild rush, running out yards of line. I checked its rush and the fish, coming to the surface, leapt into the air. I battled with it for fully five minutes, during which time it made several mad rushes in different directions, before I got it within netting range, when my friend skilfully landed it for me—a goodly trout of over two pounds, dark and thick, with bright red spots running down each side of its body.

By the time we had drifted about three-quarters of the way up the loch the wind had increased, and by our joint efforts we had added another sixteen trout to our basket, the largest being just under one pound in weight.

Being desirous of catching a *salmo-ferox*—and we had now reached the deep water at the east end of the loch, which is famed for them—we determined to try our skill at trolling. To my astonishment, Ronald selected a trout of fully half a pound from the basket, to which he inserted the baiting-pin and fixed the treble hooks into its body, pulling the large single hook through the tail.

According to Ronald, the term “*salmo*” means

all fish of the salmon species, whether freshwater or ocean-going. Many tourists refer to what they term "salmon trout," regardless of species, but strictly speaking, all "salmo" are insect feeders and afford fair game for fly anglers.

In my experience of trolling I must confess I had never seen such a large size of trout used for the purpose of natural-bait fishing, but my skilled local authority explained that in Loch Fewin the larger the bait used usually rendered the best results, and that in the evenings he himself had, on occasions, heard the splash of colossal "ferox" near the bank, as if cattle beasts had accidentally tumbled into the loch, and that these heavy fish come into shallow water close into the bank in the evenings to feed principally upon toads and frogs along the shore. In fact, he assured me that on one occasion he actually witnessed a large "ferox" rise right out of the water and seize a water wagtail which had alighted on a small rock by the water's edge.

He twisted a longish lead sinker of approximately half a pound in weight to the line, a short distance from the baited hooks, in order to cause the lure to sink when trolled in deep water. I may add that there is a deep channel at this particular part of the loch.

Once ready, I took the oars and rowed into the centre of the loch, which at this particular

spot was about three hundred yards wide, and narrowing gradually towards its eastern end, terminating in a series of smaller tarns connected to each other by canal-like stretches of water.

As soon as we reached sufficiently deep water, the "ferox" troll was let out, while I continued to row hard, as my other friend fly-fished from the bow of the boat. Letting out a pretty long line, my local companion held firmly to his trolling rod, which he had taken with him specially, and which he assured us had on former occasions accounted for many good fish. It was a somewhat antiquated contraption, tied together in places with pieces of string; but the skilled angler with only a tree branch, a piece of twine and some home-made flies can inveigle the wily trout from their hiding-places, which have been lashed for hours by other expensive outfits which did not even yield a single fish.

I rowed for quite a while towards the head of the loch, covering practically a quarter of a mile without result, and to our dismay found that it would be impossible to continue trolling very much farther on account of a gravelly bank jutting out into the water in front of us at a point of the loch which was nothing more than a narrow channel, when my chum in the bow hooked and successfully landed another nice "brownie" of about half a pound on the worm fly.

By this time we had given up all hopes of catching a "ferox" on the troll, and Ronald was just on the point of winding in his line, when his rod jerked suddenly and his reel screamed to tremendous tune! Turning round in his seat, he raised his rod, which bent and swayed under the strain of a mighty fish, which tugged with almost unbelievable power as the strain was applied to the line. In his skilled hand the rod bent and bent again and again, every now and then the reel screeching out to such an extent that it seemed to vibrate through the timbers of the boat as he braced his knees against the side of his seat. After about three minutes he requested me to take his rod, which I, of course, refused, as I was intent on watching the skill of his many years of experience, but as he insisted, I took it from him as he bent down and lifted up the gaff. The energy displayed by the fish was almost undescrivable, as it pulled and tugged with spasmodic twitchings of the rod against the strain I applied, and the weight on the end of the line was amazing, being, of course, accentuated by the heavy lead sinker. The fish, after boring about at the bottom, next rushed straight down the loch for about fifty yards in the direction from which we had come, and the line kept running off the drum of the reel until I managed to persuade my captive to change his direction, when for some

minutes he moved about as if uncertain where next to make a rush. I applied further strain, and slowly he allowed me to wind him in, and the jerking became less frequent, until, when within a few yards from the oar, he made another violent charge, this time towards the shore, and lashed about on the top of the water a few feet from the bank, giving us a fair idea of his size. However, I got him under control and he moved slowly and steadily backwards and forwards in the varying depths near the shelving bank.

By this time the wind, which had steadily been rising, had increased in velocity to a strong west breeze, which intensified our difficulties as our boat drifted at ever-increasing speed with the waves. Finally, I played the now exhausted fish broad-side on, and I could see by his great yellow shape that he was a tremendously thick trout. I saw the slicing wake of his fin as he cut towards the boat with his great bulk under the surface, and the widespread fins resembled some large underwater bird. Suddenly the fish sliced off to the side and went down again to the depths, making a sweeping turn. It is impossible for me to describe my intense excitement as I realized the strain on the old rod and the power of that mighty rush. Finally, I dominated the situation by bringing the fish alongside as it continued to try

different tactics to escape and frequently rose to the surface to rest during the fight.

Just as the gaff was on the point of being brought into operation, our boat grounded in the shallows off the south-east bank. There was no time to lose, so seizing the opportunity, I got up and stepped carefully over the side of the boat, and with rod still in hand, waded up the bank still playing the fish, all the while enticing it round the stern, when Ronald bent over and skilfully lifted this mass of wriggling energy into the bottom of the boat.

Walking inshore and pulling the bow of the boat up the sandy bank, I assisted both my companions to land, and on weighing the "ferox," which was an ugly dark-coloured fish, found it turned the scales at six pounds—a gleaming, well-proportioned trout, though rather large in the head.

As the time was barely four o'clock, I decided to fish up the Uidh Fhearna Burn, which flows out of Loch Veyatie into Loch Fewin.

Leaving my companions to look after the boat, I substituted a bait cast for my fly one, and after walking for two hundred yards or so, commenced my up-stream manœuvres, wading the stream where necessary, casting with the wind, which was in my favour, although perhaps a trifle stronger than I should have desired.



RIVER KIRKAIG

By this time the sky had become overcast and I could perceive the rain was not far off.

In these days of rapid transit the angler finds it necessary, unless he has the opportunity of fishing well-stocked private waters, to go far afield in search of sport, and the farther he can go from his fellow-anglers the better are his chances of filling the basket.

This particular stream, as a glance at the map will show, is miles off the beaten track and, unlike the public waters near our larger towns, which are frequently over-fished and yield at their best meagre results, adds a sense of the true spirit of adventure to the heart of the keen sportsman. In fact, this particular unfrequented burn, which is situated amongst idyllic surroundings, may easily be termed " virgin water."

For fully half an hour I fished steadily its fascinating pools, nearly every third cast being crowned by another and yet another victory, until I began to tire baiting the hook and, exhausted as the result of the slaughter, to say nothing of the battle with the elements, as the wind had increased to such an intensity that I was hardly able to keep my line on the water, notwithstanding that I had from time to time fixed one small split shot sinker after another to gut, I determined to cease work for the day.

I had just decided to wind in my line when the

wind started to batter the rain all over me, and the sky looked dark and menacing, having the appearance of a threatening storm.

Suddenly, through the strong breeze, I heard the faint shouts of my companions in the distance summoning me to return to the boat with all convenient speed.

On reaching them, I found the scene a very changed one, as great waves were rolling up the loch, driven towards us in the teeth of the ever-increasing gale, while the boat was rocking to and fro as the waves lapped its sides. At the same time I judged by the expression on the faces of my friends that they were somewhat anxious about our return journey back to the anchorage, fully two and three-quarter miles distant, in the bay near the other end of the loch. However, Nature being fortunately resilient, I faced them bravely with the same late afternoon equanimity as they reproached me.

Launching the boat was a much stiffer task than anything we had hitherto experienced that day, and striking out with the oars towards the deeper water clear of the bank, we found our joint energy dissipated by the current at every stroke.

Battling with the wind and rain, in our endeavours to pull our way back against the now strong breeze, was no easy task, and at times we made little or no progress against the waves,

which frequently dashed over the side of the boat, but we took turn about at rowing and bailing.

At one exposed part of the loch we were able to make but slow headway, and the difficulty we experienced was to keep the boat head on to the ever-increasing breeze. In fact, we almost despaired as the wind and lashing rain caught us amidship.

If you ever get into difficulties with a boat on rough water and you find the wind and the tide run so fast that they frustrate all your efforts to battle against them, make a bee-line for the bank and continue on your way by hugging the shore. If even by so doing your journey appears longer, it pays in the end, as you always get to your destination in a far safer and quicker space of time than you would by struggling up the middle of the loch in the teeth of the wind.

On this occasion, we made for the shallower water near the south edge of the loch and by the time we reached it, the gale was blowing so hard and the seas were running so high, that our boat rose and fell, pitched and rolled and tossed about like a toy, and time and distance, like trance, were in our minds obliterated, for the waves were running wilder every moment and the rain drenched us to the skin. As we fought our way the wild scene on either hand seemed an endless

panorama of high, black mountains shrouded in mist, while earlier that day they reflected their delicate hues and threw kaleidoscopic patterns of light along our way in the morning sunshine, and now they lifted their heads above the foaming brown-white waters. The hills around us seemed like an unbroken barrier of frowning giants barring our course through the lashing wind and rain.

At last we moved into the open bay, behind which lay our anchorage, where the River Kirkaig flows out of the loch. Our goal in sight gave us encouragement for the finish of our task ; but the storm still continued, if anything in a far worse degree, growing rougher and wilder as the oars bent and creaked under the strain. It was a desperate struggle, and already it had taken us an hour and a half to reach our present position, and the palms of our hands were blistered with rowing. We could hear, through the whistle of the wind, the waves breaking over the rocks to the left of us and over our bows great seas were dashing, as with all our might we struggled to our destination, and when at last our task had been accomplished and our prow ran up the shingle of the landing-place, it was a great relief to recline on our seats and rest our tired muscles.

All at once we heard a shout, the voice seemed

vaguely familiar. Ronald, however, was too deeply occupied in securing the boat to wonder where he had heard it before, and we were so exhausted that we were dimly conscious that another party had arrived on the scene, as down the jetty walked Ronald's son—a worthy Scot, clad in "The Garb of Old Gaul"—who had, in the company of his sister, brought up the pony to assist us on our weary journey back to Inverkirkaig—a most kindly thought, which we all appreciated to the full, as our basket was a magnificent one.

Once home, after partaking of a refreshingly hot bath, which seemed to revive us and draw the tiredness out of our bones, it was delightful to sit round the warm peat fire in Ronald's snug abode and lounge in the depths of the comfortable old-fashioned arm-chairs and toast our weary limbs before the hearth, with glass in hand, prior to partaking of a sumptuous meal skilfully cooked by our worthy hostess.

I would sooner own that delightful little cottage which nestles snugly on the roadside overlooking the sparkling waters of the bay, and reside and die there, than pass my life in luxury in the city. Of course there is no accounting for tastes, as tastes are formed in odd ways.

Early next morning we saw a herd of over one hundred deer, standing motionless, silhouetted on

IN SCOTLAND WITH A FISHING ROD

a misty hillock behind our croft. The wilds of Sutherland have a wonderfully austere grandeur of their own, which at times is somewhat trying to the nerves, but they have their own individual charm and appeal.

NOTE.—It may interest my readers to know there are few, if any, pike in the waters of Sutherlandshire.

falls by which time we had a heavy basket of good-sized brown and sea trout.

Facing us were dark brown masses of mountains; beyond, unknown territory, which filled us with an almost irresistible desire to cross these mountain barriers and penetrate into their mysteries. Above us hovered an eagle, whose wings seemed scarcely to quiver as it soared overhead and sailed out of sight over the cliffs immediately on our right.

Waterfalls which possess a great reputation are frequently disappointing at first appearance, but the Eas-coul-Aulin Fall (or the Beautiful Fall of Coul), which takes a plunge of nearly 600 feet, is a notable exception, presenting an appearance exceedingly striking—especially after heavy rainfall (as we found it), when the burn is swollen.

[The world's second highest waterfall is said to be the Kaitour Fall, on the Pataro River in British Guiana, which under normal conditions has a drop of some 870 feet—roughly a mere 270 feet higher than the Eas-coul-Aulin Waterfall! The Sutherland Falls, New Zealand, have a total descent of 1,904 feet, and are recognized as the world's highest.]

On reaching the base of the fall, which splits up into a series of cascades, spreading out in fan formation where it encounters an outjutting ledge



LOCH BEANNACH NEAR LOCHINVER

THE EAS-COUL-AULIN WATERFALL

of rock, about quarter-way down the precipice, we found the spray so blinding that we were literally soaked to the skin in about two minutes.

With very great difficulty we climbed—or shall we say scrambled?—almost half-way up the face of the cliff, over which roared the fall, to receive a most staggering impression of movement, height and noise, as we lay along a ledge of projecting rock, over which foamed the intermingled furies of the cataract, to view close at hand what appeared to us to be the mighty force and sound of one hemisphere being translated into another, all the while the thick, damp mist, which rose into the air, chilling us to the bone, as the crashing waters broke and fell.

This fall, which lies embedded in a perfect den of Nature, is flanked with abrupt, bold and rugged sides, which rise so steeply as scarcely to afford a footing. Silhouetted against the grim black rocks, this foaming mountain torrent is savage in the extreme, leaving in the minds of visitors an ineradicable impression of the infinite wonders of Nature, as the waters with one wild leap plunge over the dizzy brink to be churned into spray in the steaming depths below.

This fall, situated at the verge of a desolate upland, which suddenly drops to lower levels, has its source in a series of mountain tarns far from

any highway, and only approachable by rough tracks over lofty hill country.

There is a legend attached to the fall concerning a beautiful young lady, the personification of perfect womanhood, with blue eyes and "golden tresses like a real princess," whose parents had tried to force her to marry a man whose amours she had rejected, having previously pledged herself to another suitor. This suitor she loved with all her heart. Driven almost frantic by her parents continually pressing her to marry the wealthy young man of their choice, she fled for refuge to the mountains. Finally a search-party was organized, headed by the young man she was being forced to marry. This party pursued her to the top of the Leitir Dhubh Ridge, and just as the leader was on the point of clasping her in his arms, rather than yield to his clutches, she flung herself over the fall, to be dashed to pieces on the rocks below, when the waters immediately took the shape of her flowing tresses.

On bright moonlight nights it is said that this mythical damsel can still be seen lying near the base of the fall with her wondrous eyes gazing heavenwards and a sweet smile on her lips as the ever-sounding cataract waves her golden locks in its foaming waters.

The open ear to Nature's music, the open eye to her beauty, the healthy spirit contented with

THE EAS-COUL-AULIN WATERFALL

all her wondrous gifts and God's goodness, make life in such a desolate region a genuine delight, and fills the cup of happiness to overflowing.

Without doubt, the Eas-coul-Aulin Waterfall is one of the finest sights in Sutherlandshire, and one least known to the average tourist.

On our leaving this mountain solitude, the afternoon was drawing to a close, and the fiery autumn sun was sinking slowly to rest, the heavily clouded sky having a dull orange colour as the wind increased from a moan and then to a whistle. In this sheltered glen the burn leapt and tumbled on its rocky path to the sea, the wind tossing the clumps of heather and mosses along its banks, all the while the rain battering against our faces. All around were small waterfalls rushing down the mountains on each side of the valley.

As we reached Loch Beag the waves were beating their thunderous melody on the rocks, and the gulls wheeled o'er the sea, as we clambered into the motor-boat.

On our return to Kylesku the day was done, the sun was setting behind the distant mountains and the darkness commenced to fall. The setting sun dipped its golden rays in the gloom and distant figures appeared to lurk in the twilight. Soon the moon shone out on the now darkening waters, forming a silver path across the bay, and all was quiet, save the barking of a dog, "the whistling

IN SCOTLAND WITH A FISHING ROD

of plovers and the bleating of sheep," and the sighing of the wind as we clambered up the jetty. We had experienced peace in the hills and mountains—a peace never to be forgotten, even in the busy streets of the city.



H. MUIRHEAD.

From a sketch by Hugh Muirhead, Jr.

THE EAS-COUL-AULIN WATERFALL



INVERKIRKAIG BAY



THE FALLS OF KIRKAIG