

CHAPTER XV

THE EAS-COUL-AULIN WATERFALL

The Little Known Wonder of West Sutherlandshire

[Incorporated in this chapter is an article written by the author which recently appeared in the *Weekly Scotsman*, and is included herein by the kind permission of the Editor.]

THE morning was a golden one, with a gentle breeze blowing from the west, as we humped our fishing gear down the uneven cobbles on the jetty at Kylesku Ferry and scrambled into the motor-boat which awaited our arrival alongside.

Although fishing that day was a secondary consideration to our main desire to visit the little known Eas-coul-Aulin Fall, we decided to troll up Loch Glencoul on our way there on the off-chance of hooking a sea trout in the salt water.

We lost no time in starting up the engine, and letting out the lines of our three trolling rods, adopting our usual custom when fishing Loch Ness,

except that we used in this case a slightly smaller size of unweighted "phantom" minnows.

We had scarcely travelled a quarter of a mile up the loch when the "mid" rod screamed out, and after a desperate struggle a beautiful specimen of a fresh-run female sea trout wriggled in the folds of the net, the "Silver and Red" still sticking to her jaw.

There can be no finer situation for an artist in search of Highland scenery of the grandest and wildest description than from a point near the ferryhouse at Kylesku, one of the most secluded spots in Sutherland, which affords excellent brown and sea trout fishing. The inn is beautifully situated on Loch Glendhu, and is surrounded by wild and romantic scenery. An excellent place for those desiring quiet and rest combined with good angling. The loch penetrates deeply into this mountainous region, dividing itself into two branches—Loch Glendhu and Loch Glencoul, about a mile east of the ferry—the former three miles and the latter roughly five miles long. At the head of Loch Glencoul, Loch Shin, whose waters discharge themselves into the Dornoch Firth, is scarcely ten miles distant as the crow flies.

These lochs are surrounded by a ring of towering mountains, commencing on the north with Ben Strome and veering round to Quinag on the south,

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a jewel set in incomparable surroundings, the circle being completed by Ben Leod, the Stack of Glencoul, Ben Uie and Glasven, their declivities ending at the water edge.

Two small rivers, with lochs connected to them, drain into the head of Loch Glendhu, and one small river, which takes its rise in Loch-an-Eircill, falls into the head of Loch Glencoul, while another stream, known as Amhainn an Loch Bhig, falls into the head of Loch Beag at the far end of Loch Glencoul. It is on the last-named stream, about a mile and a half from its estuary, that the big waterfall which we had set out to visit is situated.

The Allt Maldie flows out of Loch Leadvuan into Loch Glendhu. It falls seven hundred feet in the course of about one and a quarter miles and forms a series of singularly beautiful cascades, which prevent access of salmon and sea trout to the higher reaches of the burn or to the loch above. Adjacent to Loch Glendhu and below the falls are some pools which hold sea trout from August till September, but on the whole sport is precarious.

In the early spring and autumn, especially after a fall of rain—not an uncommon occurrence in this district—excellent baskets of not only brown trout but sea trout and grilse may be readily obtained in these streams. Owing to the general

contour of the land, the only feasible way of reaching the Eas-coul-Aulin Waterfall is by boat from Kylesku, and, correspondingly, our only means of reaching this little known wonder of West Sutherlandshire was also by boat.

Although these streams run through the Duke of Sutherland's deer forest, the occasional angler who might decide to wander so far to secure a basket can enjoy his sport undisturbed, as this desolate region is quite shut off from civilization, owing to the peculiar formation of the land which comparatively few people ever dream of visiting. In any event, we afterwards learned that the very occasional angler met in this wild district is treated with the greatest respect by the keepers, who look upon him more as a brave pioneer than a poacher, because of his having ventured so far, unless, of course, a stalk be in progress, and then the fishers' ears may tingle with Gaelic oaths.

One can safely postulate that, even at the height of the tourist season, any angler may cover mile after mile of excellent fishing water in this mountainous "back o' beyond" without even seeing a living soul. In the circumstances, there is no need for the fisherman in these parts to wait with bated breath for a keeper to come up and turn him away, as sooner than challenge the angler the keeper will enquire what he had baited his breath with!

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We had "chugged" our way leisurely for about half an hour up the south side of Loch Glencoul when we caught the first glimpse of our objective, fully three and a half miles distant—a vast body of water, swollen by the recent rain, hurling itself over a cleft of perpendicular rock, the lower portion of which being obscured by a projecting arm of land, which jutted out, hiding our view of the tail-end of the fall.

On approaching the narrows at the junction of Loch Glencoul and Loch Beag another sea trout of nearly two pounds fell to the "deep" off Eilean-an-Tuim on the "Silver and Gold," and by the time we had reached the head of the last-named loch we were able to get some idea of the magnitude of the fall, which takes a plunge over the precipitous slopes of Leitir Dhubh to join the Amhainn an Loch Bhig burn, which, as already explained, enters the head of Loch Beag.

Anchoring our boat at the east end of this loch we proceeded to worm our way up this stream, over very rough ground, and as there was no track through this bog and treacherous boulderland, we were forced to take the path of least resistance, and walk practically in the rocky bed of the burn itself, all the while casting up-stream. By the time we had covered about one mile of water we found ourselves nearing the foot of the

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