

## CIR MHOR, THE ISLAND OF ARRAN

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The ascent of Cir Mhor by the Direct Route, Rosa Pinnacle, is the finest climb on the Island of Arran. No one capable of leading this climb should return to the mainland without having enjoyed it. It is a route of an expeditionary nature ; it is Scottish mountaineering at its best.

Our camp was just beyond Corrie almost at the edge of the sea by the side of a burn running down from Glen Sannox. Here we had the best of both worlds ; the site was splendidly isolated and abounded with bird life. The farthest bank of the burn was fringed with a small fir wood and this provided an adequate windbreak. Looking inland one saw first Cioch Na H-Oighe and then the challenging peak of Cir Mhor ; from there the line of the ridge could be followed through Caisteal Abhail, the Witches' Step, or properly Ceum Na Caillich, and along to Suidhe Fhearghas. Throughout our stay our visitors numbered three only, the most interesting of these being an inquisitive seal who surfaced close into us and by the length of his stay seemed to appreciate listening to the mouth-organ.

We left camp about 10.00 a.m. on the morning of our climb and, crossing the coast-road, made our way into Glen Sannox at the top of which loomed the N.E. face of Cir Mhor. The summer had been wet and the glen was almost entirely bog. The least recalled about the unpleasant trek up it, the better. My companion swore we should return along " the tops " and, later in the day, we did.

Eventually we climbed up to The Saddle (1,413 ft.) under Cir Mhor and looked down into Glen Rosa. We rested awhile and then began to traverse round into the upper corrie. Our progress was soon barred by a huge belt of boiler-plate slabs and so we commenced to work our way downwards and finally reached the boulder-strewn floor of the upper corrie along which we walked towards the start of our climb.

When we were able to look directly upon the Rosa Pinnacle it came fully up to our expectations and after spending a little while admiring the great sweep of slabs and the sharp edge of the crest we decided to eat our lunch before tackling this very formidable looking monster.

We made ourselves comfortable on a boulder giving a direct view of the Rosa Pinnacle and whilst eating took the opportunity to look across at the route we were to climb. The preliminary slabs

appeared easy enough but from there a steep "S" crack ran directly to a sloping ledge and above this we could see the twin cracks which constitute the crux of the climb. This, even from our vantage point, was steep and overhanging. Clearly we were in for a good climb.

The rope was not used on the slabs and we worked our way to a rock crevasse on the right of the climb and then traversed back to the foot of the "S" crack. There we found a comfortable stance and belay. We roped and I prepared to lead.

The first part of the crack provided a sharp edge with which to ascent layback fashion but shortly it became necessary to enter the crack proper. Here the hard work really began. There were no holds and progress depended upon jamming the right arm and fist with the right leg used as best one might in the crack. The left foot had to seek adhesion on the outside wall of the crack. Fortunately the rock on Arran is extremely rough and rubbers can be pressed on to it with good effect. I progressed thus for thirty feet and at this point was glad to find a small spike upon which to arrange a running belay. The spike also provided a resting place and I paused briefly before tackling the last ten feet of the pitch. Going on, the shelf at the top of the crack was reached with the aid of the well-known "thank-God hold" almost at the top. This shelf slopes down and to the left, and the belay on it takes the form of a large, detached block to which I tied myself and called my companion to come on. He did, and expressed the same heartfelt relief as I when he reached the large hold near the top of the pitch.

We were now faced with the crux of the climb. A steep slab went up from the top of the block for about twelve feet and brought one to a vertical wall of the same length containing twin cracks in a rough "Y" shape. The top of the wall overhung.

My second then prepared to lead and was soon at the foot of the wall. Here he found a good thread belay, clipped in his rope and started on the twin cracks. They proved both formidable and strenuous and although he reached the overhang it would not "go"; he therefore carefully descended, leaving the thread belay intact. For my attempt we exchanged rope-ends (we were both using a waist-line and Tarbuck knot) and this gave me the advantage of a running belay above my head. I came to the wall and found it rough but holdless, the twin cracks the only weakness. Jamming was therefore the obvious means of ascent. The cracks would not admit a boot entirely but the arm went in easily—one in each crack—and by jamming the fists and using the edge of the cracks for the boots I worked upwards until it was possible to reach over the top and

discover the cracks continued for a little way beyond and that, unfortunately, the top of the wall sloped outwards. Something of a struggle followed, the entire proceeding being somewhat wearing on the backs of the hands, but eventually I was able to pull myself over, aided in no small degree by the encouraging shouts of my friend below.

I belayed and he came on to join me. As he appeared over the edge of the wall I realised with some remorse that I had allowed him to climb the pitch encumbered by my camera and our pack. These could easily have been pulled up on the rope. However, he appeared not to object, and was busy muttering pleasantries about the magnificence of the climb.

The next pitch was an easy angled slab which brought us to a terrace. Thereafter we each took in coils of rope and traversed across the top of a huge slab into a corner. This was directly beneath the Layback Crack. According to the guide book this stance in the corner is fitted with a "sideway belay." A searching inspection by my friend disclosed nothing of such comfort and as he pronounced the place to be "somewhat roll-offish" he produced his one and only piton and carefully hammered it into a convenient crack. He belayed himself to the piton and indicated that I could proceed. I have always considered that a piton inserted to provide a safe belay is a most sensible arrangement, particularly when it is my turn to lead! On this occasion, however, I felt a certain sense of trespass; after all, this was the finest route on the Island and held high in the esteem of the Scottish Mountaineering Club and here were we, a couple of foreigners, impudently sticking a piton into it.

Nevertheless, we resumed the climb. The first ten feet or so demanded a layback technique and after completing this I was faced with a continuing wall along which ran a curious line of knobs to a corner abutting on to a slab. I gently pulled up on to the knobs and traversed cautiously along until I reached the slab and was then able to climb this to a good stance and belay. I was now well up on the sharp crest of the Rosa Pinnacle and the situation was very fine indeed.

My second removed his piton and joined me. He passed on and climbed round the corner to enter a long slanting chimney. This he climbed for about forty feet before passing from view where the chimney steepened and ended. He called for me to follow and on joining him we found some easy rock leading to the Terrace.

From this terrace under the Upper Pinnacle he climbed first a slab on a corner followed by a chimney to a good stance almost on the sharp crest of the Pinnacle. After this point the climbing is

nowhere above difficult standard but the situation, particularly on the arete, is quite superb. Here one is amply rewarded for the labours of the lower part of the climb. In our case we simply sat and gazed downwards to the upper corrie, appraising the truly magnificent nature of the great sweep of slabs rearing one upon the other up to the sharp crest of the arete upon which we were sitting.

Time demanded our departure, for we had a wearisome journey to make and so we unroped and scrambled from the top of the Rosa Pinnacle to the summit of Cir Mhor. A great wind was rushing up to us from Glen Sannox and we felt a final reward as we stood there. We had climbed to the summit of Cir Mhor by the South Ridge of the Rosa Pinnacle.

A long ridge ran down from Cir Mhor, starting almost due north then turning in a semi-circle to form the end of Glen Sannox, and thence up to Caisteal Abhail. From here at a height of 2,735 feet the ridge runs down to Suidhe Fhearghas and finally to the sea itself.

We marched on, content and well satisfied, and crossed the coast road at about ten-thirty. It was quite dark. Another quarter of a mile and we were within hailing distance of the camp, and soon we were sprawled by the tents drinking hot soup and telling the rest of our party about our climb.

