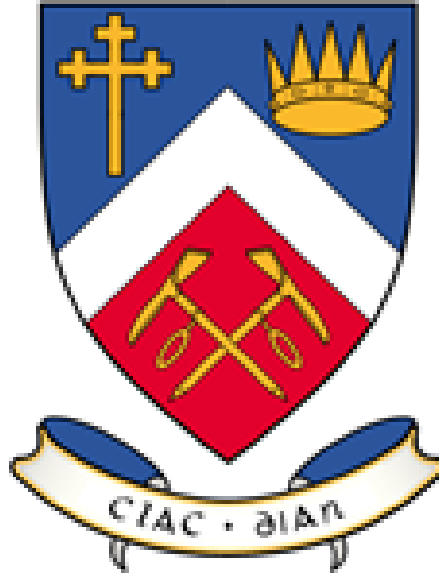


***The Cairngorm Club***



**Centennial Celebration of the  
Inauguration of the Lochnagar  
Mountain Indicator, 12 July 1924**

**13 July 2024**



*Photographs on Lochnagar (© Mike Duguid)*

## **Programme Saturday 13 July 2024**

- 8:00 a.m. Coach leaves St. Margaret's School, Aberdeen\*
- 9:30 a.m. Coach arrives Spittal of Glen Muick
- 9:45 a.m. Pre-ascent briefing in lower car park
- 10:00 a.m. Summit group starts ascent
- 1:00 p.m. Summit group reaches summit
- 1:30 p.m. Short commemorative ceremony
- 5:00 p.m. Summit group returns to Spittal
- 5:30 p.m. Meal\*\* from Sheridan's van, lower Spittal car park (BYOB\*\*\*)
- 6:30 p.m. Meal ends: clear up litter etc.
- 7:00 p.m. Coach departs Spittal
- 9:00 p.m. Coach arrives St. Margaret's School

\* Pick-ups (and evening drop-offs) available on North Deeside Road if pre-arranged

\*\* Standard Option (veg etc. options available if pre-requested): Sausage, Burger, Kebab, Chicken, Green Salad, Coleslaw, Potato Salad, and Roll; plus Traybakes.

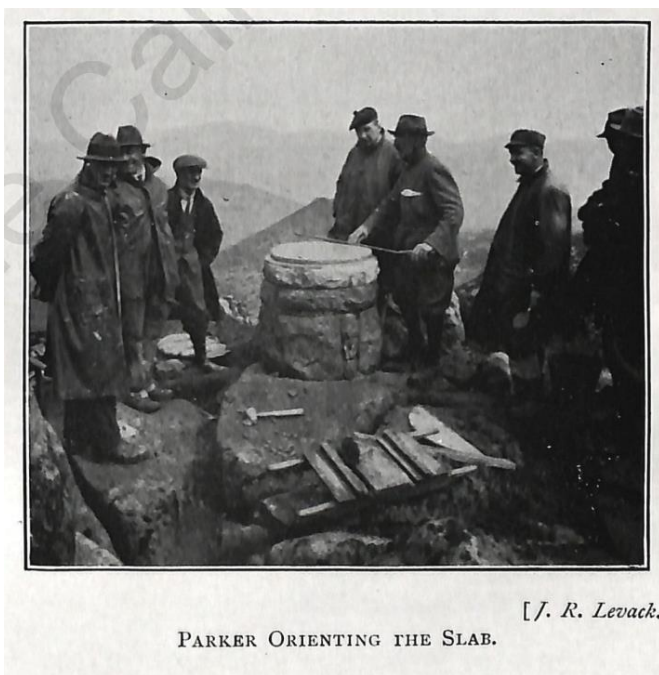
\*\*\* BYOB: bring your own bottle(s)!

## The Lochnagar Indicator: a Centennial Celebration

As related in the *Cairngorm Club Journal*, no. 62 (readable online), the indicator on the summit tor of Lochnagar was erected and inaugurated in July 1924. It was apparently a “diversion” from a longer-standing proposal to erect a similar indicator on Ben Macdhui (which was in fact done in 1925). On a particularly clear day a couple of years previously, its designer, J. A. Parker, had noted down the details of the horizon with compass bearings, and, after careful comparison with maps, he prepared the plan of an indicator. With the project approved by the Club’s then President, Dr J. R. Levack, the Club Committee and the King (Lochnagar lying within the Balmoral Estate), the indicator slab was made at Lambeth by the famous firm of Royal Doulton. This was not done without difficulty for such a large item of glazed stoneware: “no fewer than six attempts had to be made before the perfect slab was successfully produced”! This delayed progress for a year.

After much consideration, the indicator was sited on Cac Carn Beag, the higher of Lochnagar’s two summits, rather than on Cac Carn Mor with its better view to the south, but not so as to overtop the actual summit rock (now with a trig pillar on it). In early July, horses were used to take up sand, cement, capstones, and various tools from Callater, and the indicator pedestal was erected – in cloud and rain – on 5 July by masons of the London and North

Eastern Railway (of which Parker was Chief Engineer). The top course of the pedestal consists of three dressed granite blocks, each weighing 84 lbs., and bound together by iron cramps. The indicator slab itself was brought up from Glas Allt Shiel, most of the way in a salmon bass bag on human backs before handing over to a horse. It was oriented on top of the pedestal, a task which had to be done before the compass-deviating cramps were fixed. In a recess in the centre of the pedestal was deposited a tin canister containing cards with the signatures of all those helping - including "Dobbin" the horse!





[*J. R. Levack.*

HOW THE SLAB WAS CARRIED.



[*J. R. Levack.*

BUILDING THE PEDESTAL.

After a week to allow everything to set, the indicator was unveiled on Saturday 12 July by Major J. D. Ramsay, H.M. Commissioner at Balmoral, with over 140 people, members of the Club and others, attending: so many in fact “that it is perhaps surprising that no one fell and came by an accident”. The weather was bright if a little misty, and stayed dry, at least until a thunderstorm in the early evening, “the worst experienced on upper Deeside for many years”. Mrs Ramsay cut the tartan ribbon which had replaced the protective tarpaulin, and the ceremony concluded with a rendering of “God Save The King”.



*Unveiling Ceremony 12 July 1924: Major Ramsay making speech; Club President Dr J. R. Levack on his left (Press & Journal, 15 July 1924)*

**James A. Parker B.Sc., M.Inst.C.E. (1864-1846)**



JAMES ALEXANDER PARKER  
1864-1946

James Parker was a civil engineer “of quite exceptional accuracy”, who designed and oversaw the 1912-16 reconstruction of Aberdeen Joint Station. He joined the Cairngorm Club in 1907, and was “one of its most energetic and enthusiastic members”, although “he took some knowing”. He served on its Committee, acted as Librarian, and

became its President in 1928-30 and its Honorary President in 1945. He was responsible for the Club footbridge over the Allt na Beinne More in Rothiemurchus (built in 1912 – and still there!), and for the indicators on Lochnagar, Ben Macdhui and the Blue Hill near Aberdeen, the last replacing an earlier tower, and itself now replaced.

Parker was also a member of the Alpine Club and of the Scottish Mountaineering Club (1893-1946; elected President in 1924). He persuaded the Ordnance Survey to produce a coloured and contoured map of the Cairngorms in 1922, and wrote the first SMC *Guide to the Western Highlands* (1931). He had climbed all the Munros in Scotland, and Macgillycuddy's Reeks etc. in Ireland. He also made some fine ascents in the Alps and in the Pyrenees (with a highly informative article on the latter region, then under-explored, in the *Alpine Journal* of 1924), and visited the Japanese Alps and the Canadian Rockies on a world tour.

***Dr John R. Levack M.B., C.M. (1870-1940)***



*Photo by*

*R. M. Morgan Ltd.*

DR. JOHN R. LEVACK,  
PRESIDENT OF THE CLUB, 1918-1925.

John R. Levack, a radiologist, joined the Club in 1905 and was its Chairman (later President) during 1919-1924, when he was responsible for re-inaugurating the annual Club Dinner. He climbed Lochnagar some sixty times. A member of a noted "Club family", he contributed many notes and articles to the Club's Journal, notably on rock and snow climbing on the Deeside hills, and some on Skye, and did much by lectures and photography to encourage mountaineering in the north-east.

## **Lochnagar**

All Club members are – or ought to be – familiar with this hill, but here are a few lesser-known facts:

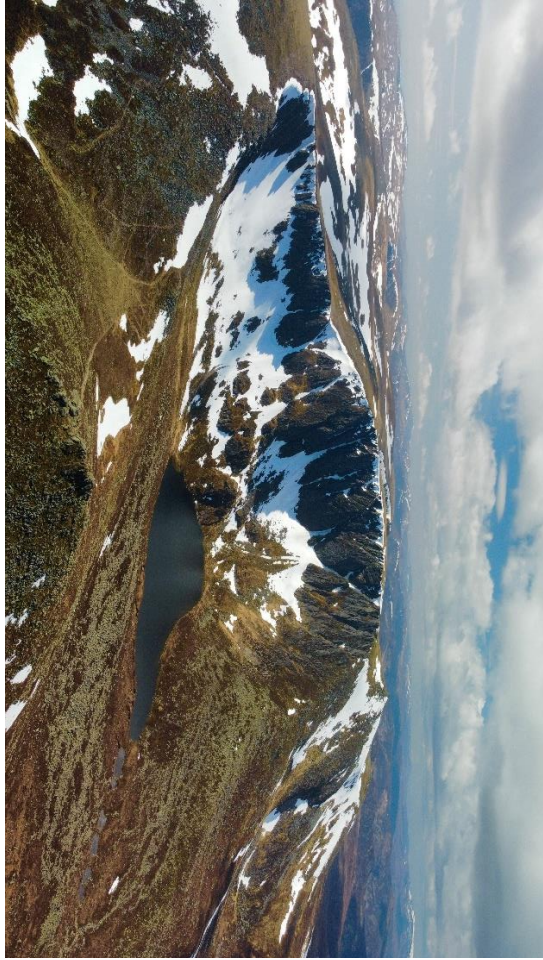
1. Apart from the eponymous loch, and Loch Muick and the Dubh Loch, Lochnagar has 12 other water bodies, if you count the 3 “Pools” below Lochnagar itself, and include Loch Buidhe (yellow), Lochan Dubh (black) and 6 lochans in Coire Lochan nan Eun (birds).
2. About 100m north of the loch, on the rocky slope, there is a howff under a large boulder. From personal overnight experience, it is cold, cramped, and a little damp!
3. The loch has an entire scientific book (*Lochnagar: the Natural History of a Mountain Lake*, ed. Rose, 2007, Springer) devoted to it and its surroundings. Over the last 9000 years, 1.55m of largely organic debris has accumulated in places on the loch-bed, with the sedimentation rate increasing since the nineteenth century, as did acidification until about 2000. Fossil pine stumps about 7000 years old occur near the eastern loch shore, indicating marked changes in the surrounding vegetation. The catchment soils contain a large store of pollutants yet to be carried into the loch. The loch’s trout are scarce, slow-growing and in poor body condition. The only other recorded fish species is the European eel.

4. In 1949, a RNAS Firefly crashed into the upper slopes of Cuidhe Crom, the ridge SW of the main Lochnagar corrie, killing its two occupants. There is a small monument, and some remains (which should not be disturbed).
5. There are 447 mentions of “Lochnagar” in the Club’s *Journal*, including the article “Twenty-Five Ways of Not Climbing Lochnagar”, by L. B. Perkins, in CCJ no. 89, 1954 (available online, from the Club’s website).
6. The UKC website lists 329 climbing routes (mostly winter ones) on Lochnagar, including those in Coire Lochan na Eun and elsewhere (but not those on Creag an Dubh-Loch). The most popular route in the main corrie is Eagle Ridge. “Scotland’s hardest climb” (UKC website) is Bring da Ruckus XII 13 on Shadow Buttress (first ascent by Greg Boswell and Jamie Skelton, January 2023).
7. The Lochnagar Crater is an enormous hole (70 feet deep and 300 feet wide) some 35km north-east of Amiens, created in 1916 by a large mine exploded beneath the German front lines on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the bloodiest day in British military history: see <https://www.lochnagarcrater.org/history>. There is a small RAF MRA memorial near the Visitor Centre at the Spittal of Glen Muick.





*The Indicator, June 2024 (© Ken Thomson)*



*Lochnagar from the Air (© Alex Barbour)*