

A grim, forbidding picture of Loch Hourn, well in keeping with the popular translation of its name, "Loch of Hell." This picture is of its upper reaches, where it is known as Loch Beag; the snow-capped peak in the background is Sgurr a Mhòraire (3365 feet).

The SCOTS MAGAZINE

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1954

ROYAL BOTANIC
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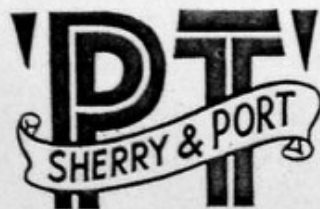


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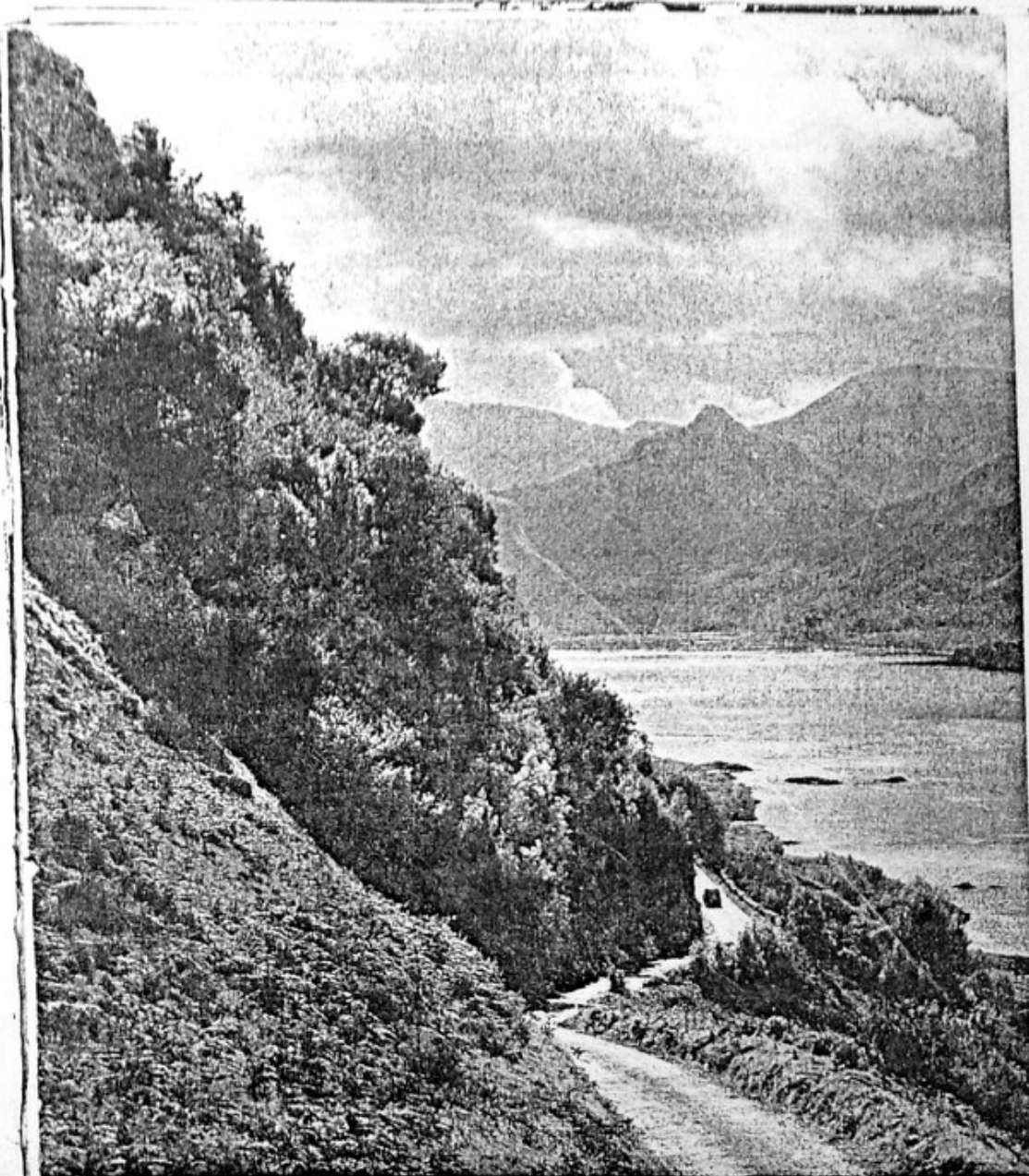


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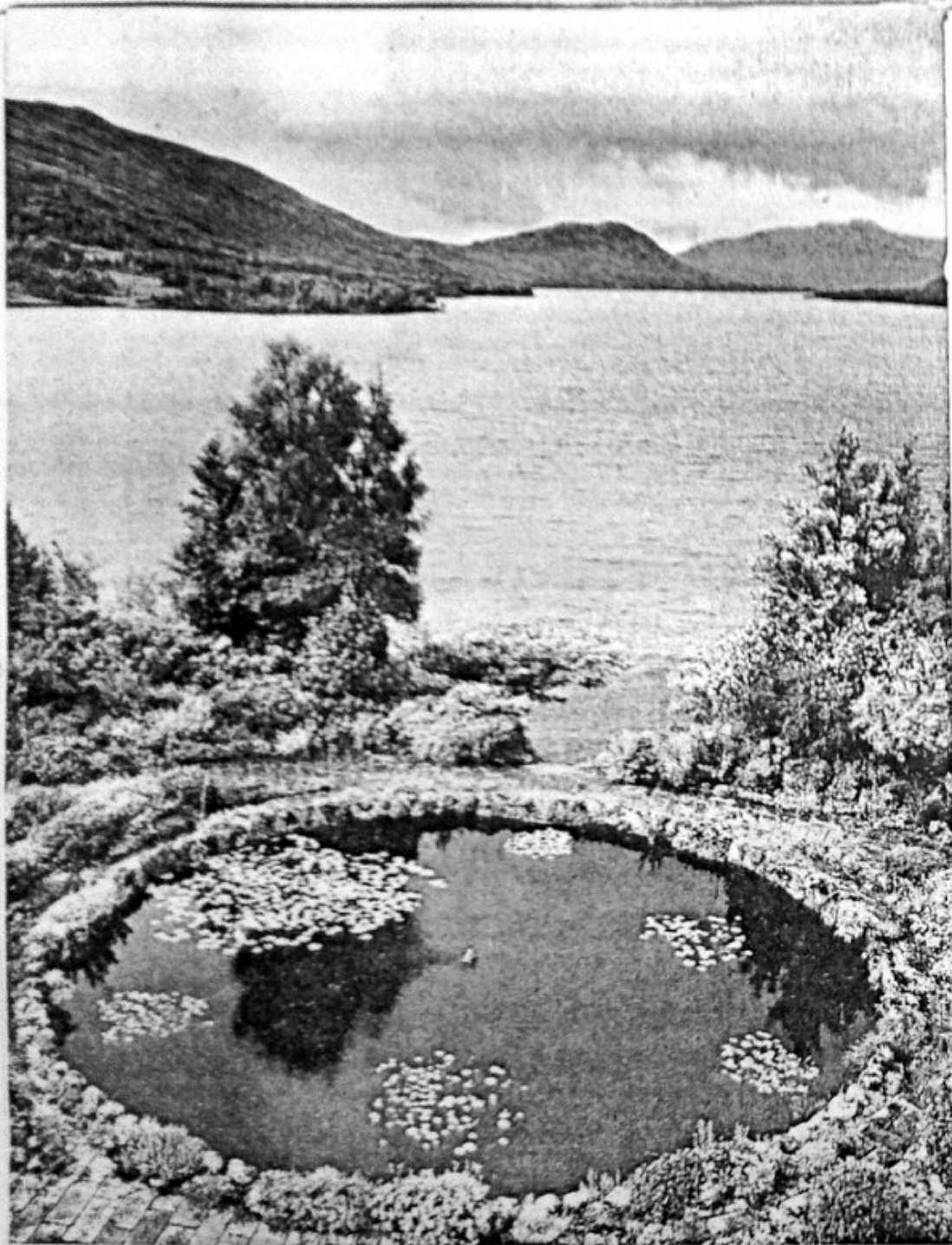
PETER THOMSON - Alexandra Street - PERTH



The steep hillside at Keppoch, on Loch Duich.
In the background can be seen the Kintail hills.

"Photograph by Robert M. Adam . . ."

For many years Mr Adam has been well-known for his photographs of the Scottish scene. This feature, the first part of which appeared last month, presents an account of the man and a selection of his pictures.



Corrour, lying to the north of Rannoch Moor, interests Mr Adam both as a photographer and as a botanist, for the garden there, at a height of over 1250 feet above sea level, is one of the most elevated in the Highlands. This view shows the lily pool, one of the features of the garden, with Loch Ossian in the background.

"A PLANNED campaign" and "a calculated gamble" are two phrases very likely to be heard when Robert M. Adam is discussing photography. Together they reveal a good deal of the way in which he pursues his pictures.

There is, for instance, a view of Loch Alsh, looking towards Skye, where the reflection of the setting sun on the water makes an especially pleasing pattern of light and shade. On only two occasions in the year, however, does the sun set at the one point of the horizon which will give the best effect. Needless to say, it was at just that time that Robert M. Adam took his photograph. If, like Mr Adam, only that standard will satisfy you, it is no use paying some district a spur-of-the-moment visit on the off-chance that a series of breath-taking views will unfold themselves. As he says himself, "You must have a planned campaign."

Sometimes, of course, planning can with certainty only take you so far forward. Then Robert M. Adam has to rely on his other method of approach, this theory of a calculated gamble which can, perhaps, best be illustrated by telling the story of how another of his photographs came to be taken.

For a long time he had been convinced that the hills around Glenfinnan, if only they could be caught under the right winter conditions, could provide a picture more truly Alpine in character than that of any other Scottish peaks. The difficulty was the obvious one of being there when conditions were right.

Then, one February evening, the weather forecast on the wireless seemed to promise the very conditions he wanted. Deciding the chance was worth taking, Mr Adam gathered together his half-plate stand

camera, his tripod, his plates and plenty winter clothing, and caught a train from Edinburgh at half-past three in the morning. Arriving at Glenfinnan station during the forenoon, he was faced with a five-mile trudge through the snow to the spot which he wanted. It was soon obvious, however, that this time his gamble had come off, for conditions overhead and on the hills themselves could not have been better. He took his photographs, walked the five miles back to the station, and by mid-afternoon was on the train to Edinburgh, well pleased with his day's work.

One such double journey in mid-winter would have satisfied most people for long enough, but little more than a week later Robert M. Adam was again travelling on that half-past three in the morning train. This time his objective was Ben Nevis, and once more the mission was a success.

These "calculated gambles" were far from being successful all the time, of course. There was, for example, one miserable day Mr Adam spent approaching Ben Hope on foot. The weather was an atrocious combination of snow, rain and wind, with just an occasional blink of sunshine which seemed to promise an improvement. When he reached the mountain, his fingers were almost too cold to use the camera; and although he waited as long as he dared, he never did get the weather for a satisfactory picture. On another occasion a visit to Galloway coincided with mist and rain, and the disgusted Mr Adam even took a photograph of that, as a record of what he had to put up with. On the whole, however, his willingness to take a chance has been well worth while, bringing him many of his finest pictures.

Every photographer knows that

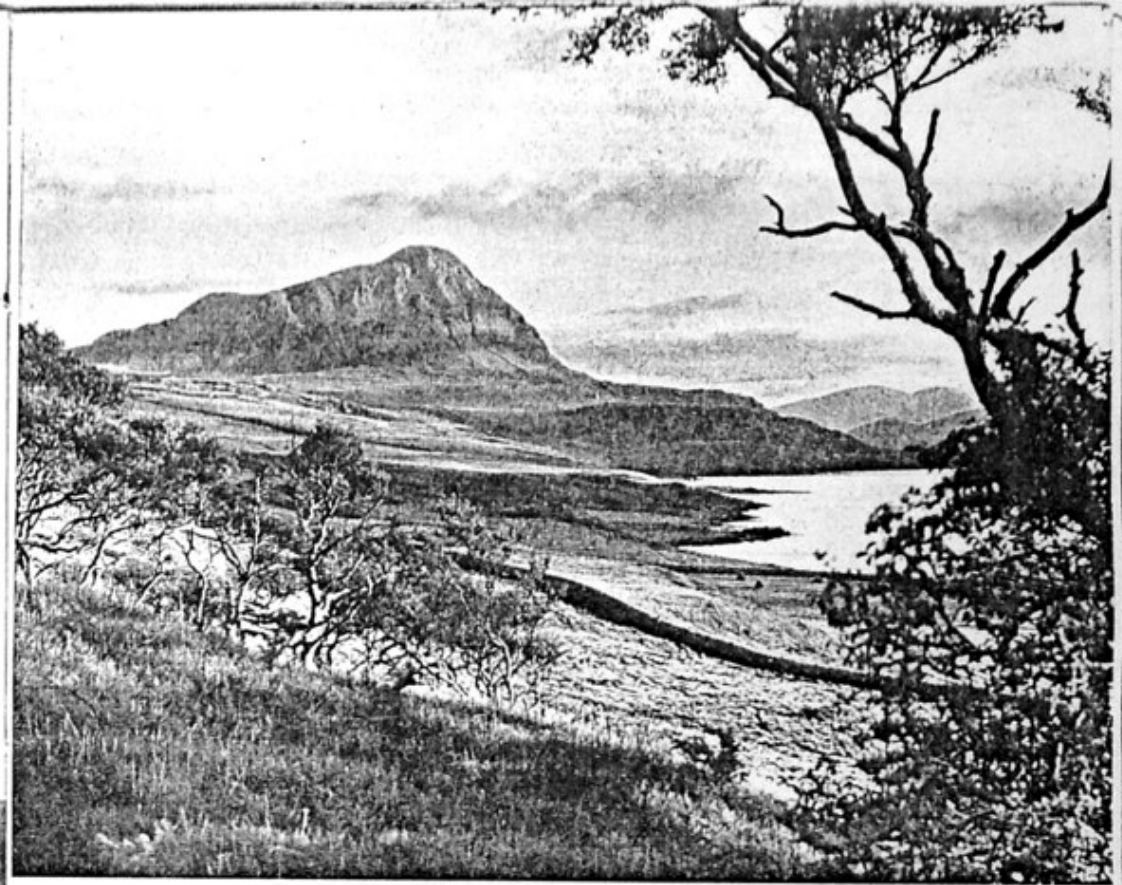
the opportunity for a picture will sometimes present itself suddenly and unexpectedly. Users of miniatures and the like think nothing of taking their camera with them wherever they go, but it is a different story if, like Mr Adam, your camera is a bulky half-plate stand model, complete with tripod. Nevertheless, if there is any likelihood at all of getting a picture, Mr Adam will be pretty sure to have his camera.

Once, this time in his role as a botanist—for, until his retiral five years ago, he was first and foremost a botanist—he and a colleague were exploring the plant life of Glen Isla. It was a dull, wet day, but, in addition

to his botanical equipment, Robert M. Adam still carried his inevitable camera, rather to the amusement of his companion, to whom such enthusiasm was a mystery. The prospect of using it seemed unlikely for long enough, then, around the head of the glen, the clouds seemed to be breaking.

Hastily assembling his camera, trying to lay his kit on the wet ground without spoiling it, attempting with no little difficulty to balance a tripod on the steep slope, he just had things ready before the sun burst through. Later, when he saw the results of his exposure, all the trouble and inconvenience became

Sunset over Loch Alsh, looking towards Skye. Only twice in the year does the sun set at the one point on the horizon to give exactly this effect. Down in the right foreground of the picture can be seen Eilean Donan Castle.



Ben Hope (3040 feet) in the north of Sutherland, with the waters of Loch Hope stretching up to its foothills. A picture taken under vastly different conditions from the occasion related in the article, when Robert M. Adam spent a whole day, with the weather an atrocious combination of snow, rain and wind, trying to get a photograph of the mountain.

well worth while, for he had, in a remarkable photograph, caught the first beams of sunlight as they forced a way through the dark clouds. It is a long time since that incident occurred, but to this very day Mr Adam has to deny accusations that in some way or other he faked the picture. People still find it difficult to believe that a camera could capture such an effect.

Five years ago Robert M. Adam retired from his post at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, and today he is living on Speyside, in

attractive surroundings high above the river, and with a glorious outlook down the Spey valley to the distant Cairngorms.

Removing from Edinburgh to Speyside presented Mr Adam with one of the trickiest problems of his career as a photographer—that of transporting his stock of over 14,000 negatives. For one thing he could not find an insurance company willing to insure them other than for their value as glass, and even then it could only be done on condition that the journey was completed with-





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The first shafts of sunlight breaking through dark storm clouds at the head of Glen Isla. Time and again Mr Adam has had to convince people that he did not fake this picture in some way or other.

in twenty-four hours. He went ahead on this basis, however, arranged for men to be present at Speyside to take care of the unloading, and ensured that the glass negatives, weighing three-quarters of a ton, were as securely packed on the van as possible.

When all was ready, he himself travelled in the van, sitting alongside the driver. Then, a matter of a few miles outside Edinburgh, the van broke down, and several frustrating hours passed before the trouble was put right and they could resume their journey.

Some time later, when they reached Struan, and were approaching the highest part of their journey, they ran into a blizzard which soon prevented their seeing more than a few feet beyond the windscreen. Proceeding at a snail's pace, they made their way gradually northwards, eventually reached their destination, and Robert M. Adam, who must have been almost in despair during the trip, was able to supervise the safe unloading of his precious negatives.

Today Mr Adam remains as active a photographer as ever, although, a little unexpectedly perhaps, the district he chose to live in does not appeal greatly to him in a photographic sense. He considers the lack of any considerable area of water robs the scene of much of the atmospheric quality to be found on the west coast, still, as it always has been, his favourite part of Scotland.

Now in his seventieth year, Robert M. Adam displays an enthusiasm and a youthfulness of outlook which completely belie his age. It is little more than a year ago that he set out on a not inconsiderable journey to find the source of the Findhorn, a trip he

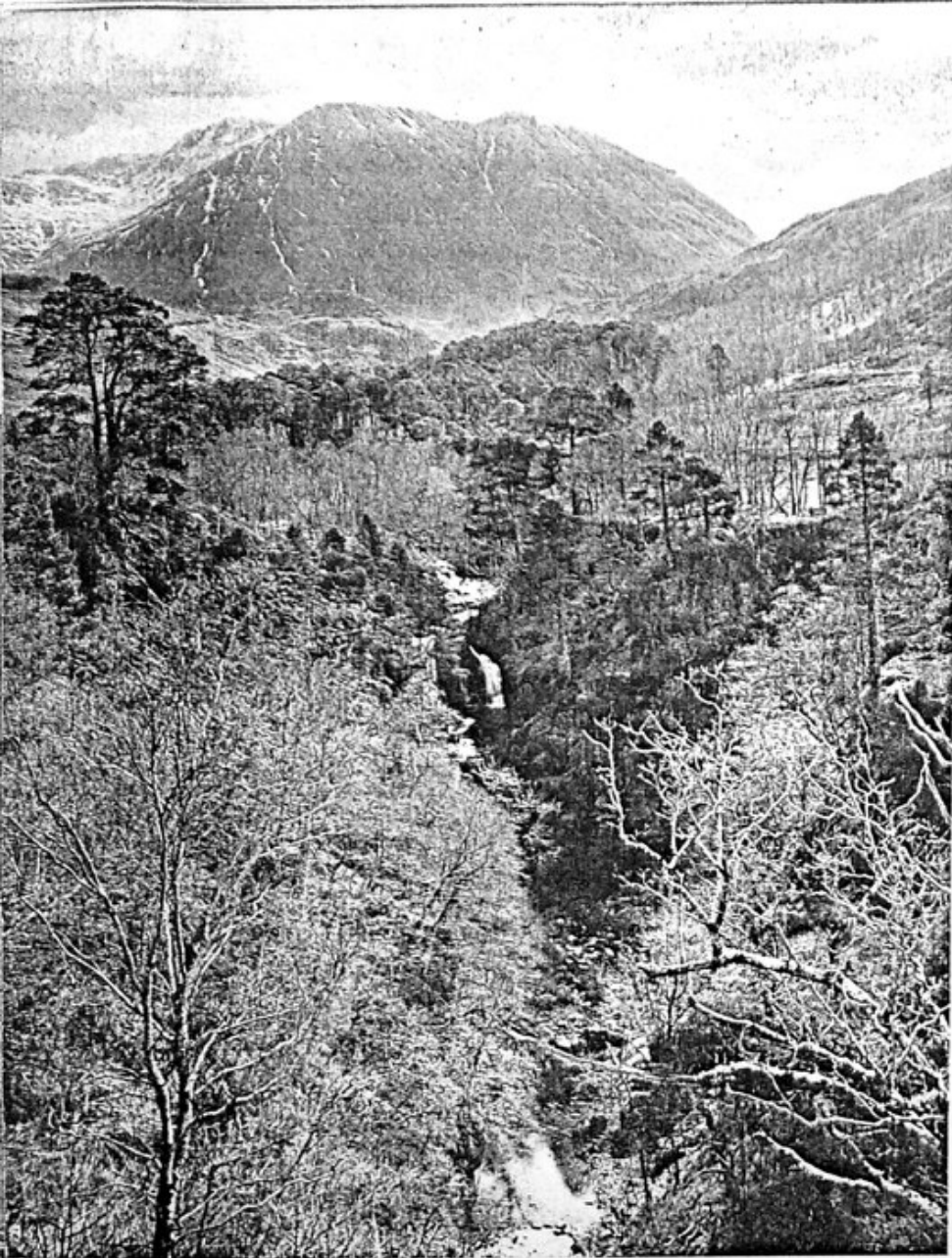
intends to repeat for some shots he did not get the first time. The spring of this year saw him up in Glen Affric, then, not so long afterwards, on a visit to the gardens on Colonsay. In spite of the countless soakings he must have experienced when out after photographs, his health has never let him down. Indeed, his first-ever twinges of rheumatism came shortly after moving to Speyside as a result of too strenuous an afternoon in the garden!

Mr Adam is not the sort of photographer who must acquire all the latest equipment. The camera he uses will very soon be fifty years old, and while he will on occasion use an exposure meter, he would just as soon trust the judgment of his own eyes, with equally accurate results. Colour film he has tried and rejected as being not enough fun; the manufacturer's instructions must be followed so closely that very little is left to the judgment and experiment of the photographer. In any case, he feels that colour film still has some way to go before it can reproduce colours with complete accuracy.

His memory, his modesty and his enthusiasm, these are the three outstanding impressions which one retains of Robert M. Adam today. His memory is such that he can tell you detail upon detail about the taking of a single photograph forty or fifty years ago. His modesty? Well, even now, he still seems mildly surprised that his pictures should have become so highly esteemed throughout the country. As for his enthusiasm, it comes bubbling to the surface incessantly. There must be very few people of his age who are still so actively, so wholeheartedly, so obviously enjoying life to the full.



This view of Loch Shiel, looking from Ben Resipol towards Glenfinnan, ranks among Mr Adam's favourites.



Looking up Glen Carron, in Wester Ross, towards the peaks of Moruisg (3033 feet) and Sgurr na Ceannaichean (2986 feet).

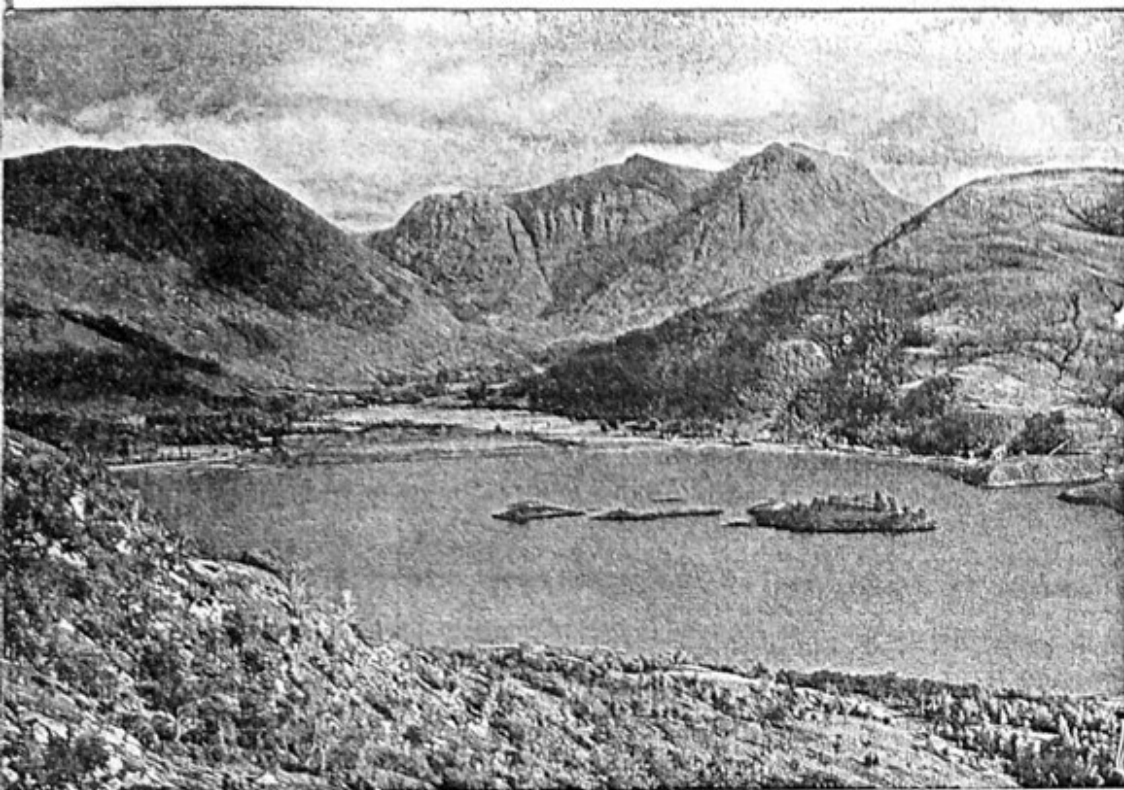
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Although it is of a Scottish scene, this photograph of cowslips by the shores of the Forth in East Lothian was used for one of their posters by the Society for the Preservation of Rural England.

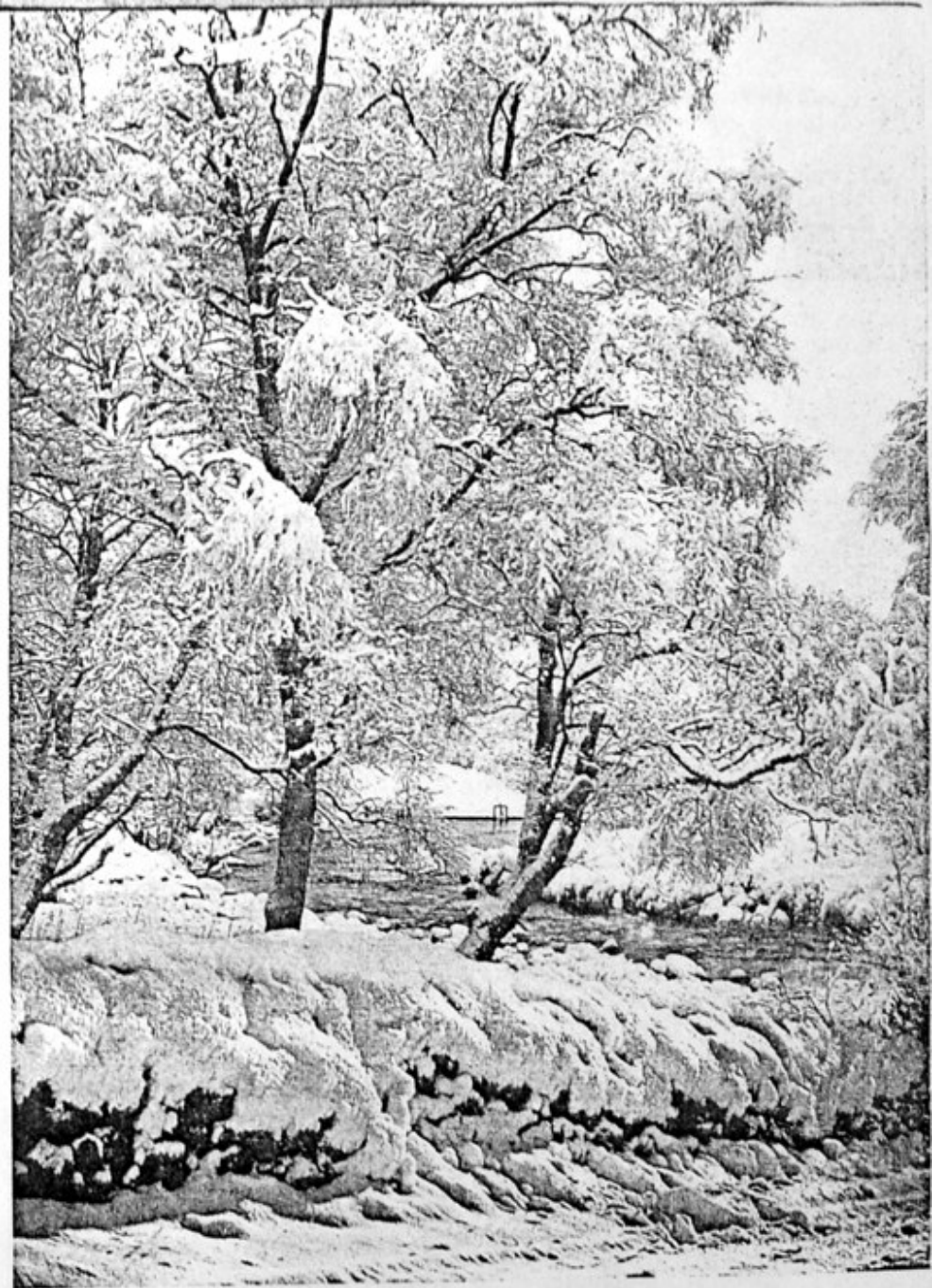
A weather forecast promising the exact conditions he wanted persuaded Robert M. Adam to set out from his Edinburgh home at half-past three one February morning for this photograph of winter over Loch Shiel and the Glenfinnan Hills.





Loch Leven and the Glencoe peaks seen from North Ballachulish. At a pre-war Paris Exhibition a giant enlargement of this photograph was used as a background to one of the Scottish stands.

A woodland path through Rothiemurchus Forest.



A winter scene in Glen Gynack. Mr Adam now lives in Strathspey, and this photograph and the lower one opposite show that he can find attractive subjects on his own doorstep.

A view of part of the well-known gardens at Inverewe, Wester Ross, with Loch Ewe stretching away in the background.



Heavy Atlantic seas breaking against the bleak, rocky shore of Mhanghursta, in West Lewis.

Coire Ba, in the Blackmount Forest, with a distant view of Rannoch Moor.

