

THE SNOWBOUND SAVAGE

A SAGA OF THE FROZEN NORTH

"BACK FROM WHITE HELL" - that was how a national newspaper headlined its story about the experiences of District Officer G. F. SAVAGE, of Dornoch, during the recent snow-storms in Scotland. Now our colleague tells in his own words of his adventures, heading his remarks "The Terrible Tale of the Snowbound Savage".

It all began innocently enough on 11th January (he writes) with a routine journey to Borgie Forest, taking with me Forester A. CRAWFORD to relieve Forester N. PHIPPS, who was going on leave. There was a light covering of snow over the waste of bog and rocky mountains which seem to fill up the middle of Sutherland, but not enough to cause trouble even at the infamous Crask summit, and I casually thought that I might not need my shovel after all.

The next morning there were four or five inches of snow on the car and the surrounding countryside. It was a fine day, though, and with chains it was easy enough to get to the forest office. Then Crawford and I set out in the car for Tongue. In Skerry the first squall hit us, and wind and snow combined, howling round the corner of the hill, stopped the car. (I couldn't see the sides of the road, anyway). We moved on for about an hour and covered some two miles, stopping of necessity a few times to shovel snow, and once to look for the road. About mid-day we hit a drift some three feet deep and, as we started to dig, it really began to snow. We retired to the car and watched. I don't know how any of the snow reached the ground - it all seemed to be moving horizontally.

A figure lurched out of the whiteness ahead and tottered to rest in the lee of the car. It proved to be the County roadman who, before battling on the last half-mile home, babbled of six-foot drifts, and the possibility of death by freezing. We decided to freeze on a full stomach and ate our sandwiches, but an hour later the only change in the weather had been for the worse, and things weren't so funny. We decided to abandon ship, and made for a nearby croft.

This was the home of Mrs. ELIZABETH NEWLANDS, who is the sister of District Officer D. MACKAY (S.E. England). She made us doubly welcome when she learned that I had met her brother a month or two previously at Northerwood. By mid-day on Thursday the 13th the storm had pretty well blown itself out and we emerged to take stock. The car was fairly in the middle of a drift 3 to 4 feet deep and the road was blocked in both directions. An expedition to the Post Office produced the information that the telephone line to Thurso was working occasionally, every village in the North of Sutherland was isolated, and that a 'bus had been lost somewhere on the road between Skerry and Tongue.

The following morning Crawford shouldered his baggage and walked round to Borgie to see what could be done about pay. (Very little, as a matter of fact - the pay cheques took another four days to arrive.) I stayed to dig out the car and help look for sheep. While engaged on the latter operation, I was struck by the similarity of the landscape to that of the moon as imagined by artists looking out of spaceship X-20. There was no sign of animal or human life and almost no colour in the scene, just white snow and black rock under a clear sky, spreading outwards in jagged waves to the fantastic spiky peaks of Ben Loyal in the distant south-west; and over it all a stillness I have never experienced before, no birds, not the faintest whisper of a wind or even a murmur from the sea.

Rescue by Helicopter

I finally got the car out of the drift on the Sunday and pushed it to a clear space at the side of the road. I considered the next move. So far as I knew, all the roads were still blocked but the railway was working from Thurso. I got out my map and calculated the distance - about 38 miles - and decided that I could walk it in about three days, even if the roads weren't clear.

So on Monday I slung my bag on my shoulders, took leave of my hostess and, following the shore most of the way so as to avoid the drifts, walked to Bettyhill. There I heard the story of the stranded dentist, who was roused from his bed in the hotel at 6 a.m. to cope with a waterfall from a burst pipe in the next room. I joined this gentleman in a gallant but unsuccessful attempt to get to Helmsdale by car via Strathnaver, and we returned to Bettyhill somewhat chastened and considerably exhausted by all the digging and pushing.

Next morning, as I was having breakfast, a Naval helicopter descended into the field in front of the hotel. The opportunity was too good to miss and I rushed out to interview the pilot, who agreed to take me to Wick. Now I have flown in aeroplanes without a qualm, but I was quite unprepared for the way in which this thing leapt suddenly into the air and was carried away by the wind. When my stomach caught up with me, I found helicopter travel quite pleasant, and thoroughly enjoyed the forty-minute flight to Wick. At Wick Airport I was taken over by the Press, photographed, and whisked away to recount my experiences, and consume a lunch which was very welcome.

That is the end of the story. I caught the afternoon train from Wick and arrived home at Dornoch just seven and a half days after leaving for an overnight stay at Borgie.

The car, by the way, was salvaged a week later.

WICK TO INDIA FOR WORLD CONGRESS

SOME EXTRACTS FROM A DIARY

THE DIARY kept by the Deputy Director General, SIR HENRY BERESFORD-PEIRSE, of a recent visit to India for the Fourth World Forestry Congress, makes interesting reading. Much of it, of course, deals with

forestry and the Congress proceedings and no doubt detailed reference to these subjects will appear elsewhere than in The Slasher. But readers will be interested in Sir Henry's record of certain "side-lights". With some of the other delegates, he left London Airport on December 1st. "When we came into Jodhpur", he writes, "we could pick out numerous flocks of goats. The fairly new Maharaja's palace of pale pink stone and typical Indian design stood magnificently above the town, and so did the old fort. Customs formalities here, as this is an air frontier post. One of us (Mr. GEORGE BATTERS, Conservator in the office of Director, England) inadvertently took a photograph and was almost arrested - his film was confiscated. We had not realised we were in the middle of an air force station"

"Arrived Dehli and transported to Ambassador Hotel..... a typical luxury 'international' hotel, the newest in the city. Big double bedroom with bathroom, sofa and chairs, air conditioning plant, wireless, telephone, and an enormous refrigerator holding nothing but a bottle of drinking water. Visited Bazaar in Old Dehli - saw wandering through the confusion a long marriage procession, the bridegroom riding a much adorned horse, shaded by embroidered umbrella and supported by friends and a band. He was on his way to 'abduct' his bride from her home and may never have seen her, having been betrothed at the age of three.

Later, on tour in Kashmir. "Hair-raising drive in Land Rovers took us to extreme north west end of the Kashmir plain. Forest guards in khaki uniforms and green turbans posted at every road junction with special Congress notices. Driving technique was to put finger on horn and foot well down on accelerator, scattering pony carts, cattle, chickens, dogs, sheep, men, women and children in all directions. Along roads and some waterways were lines of poplar said to be Lombardy, but not looking typical. Giordano (Italy) says they are not Lombardy, but cannot identify them. Other line planting was with willow for baskets, and some for cricket bats. There were many mulberry trees, bases of the expanding silk industry. Fine deodar forests mixed with some *P. excelsa* and a little ash and walnut. Nuts delicious, but trees of poor form due to lopping of branches for fodder and firewood. A Frenchman has been working here for four years, excavating root cuts, length 4' to 6', of walnut for export for veneers to France - over 300 miles to railhead. Kashmir government stopping his activities at end of the year and propose to set up small veneer factory.

"An interesting feature of exploitation of the 150+ year old Cedar and Pine is that all logging is done by man power alone. Even the hauling of the biggest logs, 30-40 ft., is done by men chanting a kind of working song. Entire lack of mechanisation fully justified by the virtually unlimited cheap labour available.

"On the return journey the snow-covered Himalayas, red in the setting sun, were unforgettable.

"To Yus, about 30 miles south of Shrinager. Much erosion. Over-grazing is number one problem of the forester and is also a national and political problem. At Yus saw mixed forest of *P. excelsa*, *Picea morinda* and *Ab. pindrow*, some fine trees. Forest is mostly over-aged and due for regeneration, but no money is allowed at present, so only felling of very over-mature trees is done. Here, as elsewhere, the Working Plans are in force and the proper treatment understood. I was impressed by the keenness and knowledge of the forest officers, and it was good

to hear spontaneous tribute paid to the men from Britain who had built up the Indian Forest Service.

"Arrived Dehra Dun December 10th for the Congress. Delegates housed in hostels of the Forestry School or Military Academy. The Forestry Institute is a magnificent building said to have cost £1½ million by completion in 1929.

"December 16th. Excursion to Rajaji Reserve for tiger drive. Left in buses, party 90 strong. Drove to south side of Siwalik Hills, where six elephants took the party in relays to platforms in the trees. When all were installed a shot was fired and a great shouting and beating of cans broke out in the distance. Angus (Fiji) and I shared a platform and were lucky enough to see a tiger pass about 15 yards away. We also saw a number of spotted deer. Otherwise there was little wild life. Later we saw where the bait had been tied - the remains of a bullock which a tiger had killed the night before.

"December 22nd. Special train took us to Delhi, taking 11 hours for the 200 mile or so journey."

Sir Henry arrived back in England early on Christmas morning.

THE GREY SQUIRREL CAMPAIGN EXTENSION OF BONUS PERIOD

PAYMENT for grey squirrel tails, which was originally introduced for a two-year period ending in March, will continue for a further year.

The scheme provides for the payment of a shilling a tail and in the 18 months from its inception to September last, the number of grey squirrels killed was more than double that of the previous corresponding period. It is hoped that readers will do all they can to publicise this extension, so that full advantage may be taken of it by those people who are able actively to take part in the campaign.

THE CHRISTMAS RUSH

FORESTER G. W. PARKER, of Chopwell Forest, North East England Conservancy, tells us that he received 361 separate orders for Christmas trees and greenery. How did other Foresters fare?

FORESTER AS BIRD FANCIER

HOW DIVERSE are our pastimes and hobbies! Forester BURNETT PATTERSON, of Garrogo, in the South Scotland Conservancy, is a bird fancier with show successes to his credit. At the Stranraer and District show his two canaries gained for him two first prizes and the cup for the best "Border". His three entries of budgerigars gained two firsts and one second prize. At the Kirkcudbright show the Borders again secured first prizes and two budgerigars gained a second and third prize.

ANSWERS TO ANAGRAMS

ANSWERS to the forest anagrams given in December are:

AND A NEW PUZZLE

TAF FECHLN; ARDGARTAN; CORRIEDOO; SAVENAKE;
COED Y BRENIN; BRIGHTSTONE; GUISLACHAN; SPADEADAM;
LANGDALE; YARDLEY CHASE; MICHELDEVER; FOREST OF DEER.

When a reader sent us along the following (which is probably of American origin) we were told that the narrative conceals anagrams of 37 tree names. We confess that we have only been able to find 36. But try it for yourselves, remembering that in no case do the anagrams overlap.

Among a limited number, cups and trophies prove an especial lure, and these people plan with zeal to gain them. Piously we hope in time that our milers will be able to run ambulances-spry as those vehicles are my scoffing friend - to a close finish. How will this be achieved?

Stunt cheering, expertly led, reveals an ample clue, say Charlestone students, when we want lusty support we'll map out a cheer scheme to be cheered as if for dear life by alumni. Shall we pause to consider this vocal prop? To crib habits is rather cheap. No dear crusaders, we'll wage the athletics war not by lending vocal aid and mollycoddling our men, but by the holy light of mellowed optimism. (We are odd folk).

CRICKET HONOURS

OUR INVITATION to secretaries to tell us how Commission cricket clubs or teams have fared of late has brought forth the following note from Mr. L. A. CHAPLIN, Chief Clerk at York, Headquarters of the North East England Conservancy.

"The Conservancy office," he writes, "strengthened at times by enthusiasts from the Conservancy generally, has played a number of representative games over the past few years. The most notable of these were the matches in 1953 and 1954 against the Northern Timber Merchants' Association. In 1953 the first match was played at Thirsk and was won by the Commission, and after the match Mr. Tom Place, timber merchant of Northallerton, presented a cup for annual competition. In 1954 the match was played at Boroughbridge and resulted in a win for the timber merchants."

"Conservancy teams have played weekend matches at Wynyard and Jervaulx forests. In addition, the Conservancy office has competed in the local Civil Service Evening League, and in 1954 headed the table with an unbeaten record. We won five matches, one being washed out by rain. We look forward to an even better season, when we hope the Place Cup will again be held by the Commission."

DER HIMMEL

AND STILL they come. A reader even goes to Germany for a list of strangely named public houses. These include "Der Himmel", "Das Fegefeuer", and "Die Hohle", meaning in turn Heaven, Purgatory and Hell.

Forester D. E. LITTLE, of Derry Ormond, North Wales, writes in on the subject of "The Runt in Tun", to which we referred last month. "My late grandfather," he says, "used when making cider to open the end of one hogshod or barrel and place therein the runt, that is the small suckling pig. If this were not available, then a large lump of beef meat would be used. The barrel head was then closed and rebanded again, and the cider poured in. This was the 'special' cider for the house and guests. Several barrels of ordinary cider and perry were made for use by farm servants and helpers at harvest times."

THE ROCKING STONE

IN Compartment 21 in Nevis Forest, North Scotland, there is a large, almost egg-shaped "rocking stone". The estimated weight of this stone is three to five tons. Delicately balanced on a raised section of bed rock, it can be rocked without any great effort.

Has any forest or Conservancy a "bigger and better" rocking stone?

Readers may care to tell us of any other unusual stones - not necessarily those that may be moved. We have in mind such oddities as the Toad Rock at Rusthall, near Tunbridge Wells.

TRANSFERS

THE FOLLOWING TRANSFERS have been notified to Headquarters:

District Officers A. S. MacNAIR from Glasgow to Cairnbaan, W(S); G. A. DEY from Drumlithie, E(S), to Cairnbaan. Head Forester G. H. BUTTON from Brandon, E(E), to Swanton, E(E). Foresters J. E. METCALFE from Redesdale, NE(E), to Allerston, NE(E); R. L. BAIRD from Harwood, NE(E), to Skipton, NE(E). Foreman D. W. LAWSON from Benmore, W(S), to Tulliallan, W(S); H. M. JENKINS from Crychan, S(W), to Dovey, N(W); J. S. GELDER from Ardgartan, W(S), to Benmore; J. W. McKEAND from Minard, W(S), to Inverliever, W(S); W. K. L. SEMPLE from Wauchope, S(S), to Dundough, S(S).

Higher Executive Officer W. McMILLAN from Edinburgh to Glasgow. Executive Officer M. A. E. GUBBY from Headquarters to Aberystwyth. Clerical Officer V. C. MANFORD from Shrewsbury to Chester.

DINNER AND DANCE

THE annual dinner and dance arranged by the H.Q. Inforesta Sports and Social Club was held at the Pavilions Arms, London, and was greatly enjoyed. Some 80 guests attended, including the Director General, Mr. A. H. GOSLING, and Mrs. GOSLING; The Deputy Director General, SIR HENRY BERESFORD-PEIRSE, and LADY BERESFORD-PEIRSE; and the Secretary, Mr. H. A. TURNER, and Mrs. TURNER. There was only one toast - that to "The Victorious M.C.C." (England having won the Ashes that day, in Australia). It was proposed by Mr. W. M. CORMACK, as Chairman of the Social Club, who was accompanied by Mrs. CORMACK.

CORRECTION

IN OUR December issue we said the sale of holly in Now Forest brought in an annual return of about £100 to the Commission. We are informed the figure should be £600. We are pleased to hear of this. It is all grist to the mill.

IF YOU DO SOMETHING, SEE SOMETHING, OR HEAR SOMETHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY, TELL YOUR SLASHER CORRESPONDENT. THERE IS A CORRESPONDENT IN EACH DIRECTORATE AND CONSERVANCY OFFICE