

THE SLASHER

Forestry Commission News

No. 96

December, 1955

A SEASONAL NOTE

SKIS, SLEDGES AND REINDEER

At the Glen More National Forest Park, high in the Cairngorm Hills of Inverness-shire, they are getting ready just now for the Christmas Ski Course, run by the Scottish Council for Physical Recreation. For this is one of the few places in Britain where ski-ers can feel really sure of snow every winter - and for most of the spring also. Even last summer's brilliant sunshine failed to melt one snow-field 4,000 feet up on a north-facing crag of Cairn Poul. There is also a Snowy Corrie - Coire an t'Sneachda for those who prefer the Gaelic - to which enthusiasts climb when prospects are not so good lower down - and that is a mere 3,000 feet up! Skis should be made of pliant ash or supple hickory. They are a Norwegian invention and - believe it or not - had never been seen in Switzerland until a party of British sportsmen introduced them only about eighty years back.

The ski-ers, we hope, will reach Glen More Lodge by normal road transport, but Mr. J. Fraser, who recently retired from his post as Forester and is now the Camp Warden, has been marooned by deep snow in previous winters. Sometimes he has even had to bring stores in by sledge! Which reminds us that although we never get enough snow and ice to enable us to get our timber out on sledges - as they do in Scandinavia - we do use this device quite often over steep or boggy ground. In the Dean, horse-drawn sledges were once used for carrying pitwood, while in the Kielder district stocks of plants are sometimes taken over soft ground on a sledge pulled by a tractor. In the Trossachs, where they call a sledge a "slipe" (from the Gaelic slaopaire, a trailer), this handy method has been used to get fence stakes and plants up nearly precipitous slopes.

If sledges should in fact be needed at Glen More this winter, there could be reindeer at hand to draw them (though we doubt whether they would be used for this purpose). High on the Silver Mountain, where the pinewoods meet the heather, there is established the only herd of reindeer in the country. These curious beasts, though once native to Scotland, are of course now all of an imported stock. Mr. Mikel Utsi, aided by the Reindeer Council, has brought them from Lapland to see if they can become naturalised here. The herd has survived three winters, but so far it has not bred at a satisfactory rate.

Also at Glen More there is a Hilloch of the Fairies, and a mysterious Green Lochan, without inlet or outlet, that always holds water of a strange turquoise green. It is not hard to imagine Father Christmas himself arriving at Glen More on skis one snowy Christmas eve, harnessing the reindeer to a sledge, and galloping gaily off with a load of the local Christmas trees to gladden a thousand children.

^{MS} A CHRISTMAS TREE CLAIM

A North Wales correspondent writes to say he noted in "The Slasher" recently that the East England Conservancy was claiming a record by receiving an enquiry for Christmas trees on 2nd February last. "I think we can better that in North Wales", he says. "On 31st December, 1954, we had an order from a firm for 40,000 trees for the present season. We also had three further enquiries in January this year".

It looks like North Wales has it!

Thwarting Christmas Tree Thieves

In the neighbourhood of Sheffield, as elsewhere near large towns, almost any evergreen conifer is fair game for the Christmas tree thief, says District Officer A.J. GRAYSON. One owner who has suffered losses from his Corsican pine plantations has resorted to disbudding and pruning his four to five year old trees - with quite satisfactory results. While not wishing to advocate the extension of the practice, I can vouch for the success of this drastic ruse. In a smoke-laden atmosphere where needles have, in any case, a somewhat reduced useful life, the method of successive and continued disbudding can still allow respectable height growth, at the same time quite destroying any attractiveness the tree may have for decorative purposes.

The Chief Research Officer, Mr. M.V. LAURIE, comments: "As a method of getting knot-free timber there is nothing to recommend such

procedure over ordinary pruning, but as a means of making Christmas trees unattractive it seems to be an excellent idea.

"It would be desirable to leave two or three whorls of branches on the base of each tree to keep it alive and if disbudding were then done for a couple of years 'the poodle' effect should make it unsuitable for a Christmas tree, without materially affecting the increment."

Editor's note: What would the amenity people have to say if the practice became widespread?

~~THE~~ GREY SQUIRREL BONUS DOUBLED AS MANY readers will have noted from the Press, or heard on the radio, the grey squirrel bonus is to be doubled as from 1st January, for a period of one year only. Thus two shillings will be paid for each grey squirrel tail.

This increase has been decided upon because of the recent and quite sensational drop in the number of kills - in the six months ended September last kills were 155,000 fewer than in the corresponding period in 1954. With no reason to believe that there has been any lessening of the drive against the pest, the obvious assumption is that the grey squirrel population has fallen to a very low level. A contributing factor may, of course, have been the poor breeding conditions earlier in the year.

But it seems clear that the time has come when an all-out effort should be made to exterminate the grey squirrel, and any one of us who can help should do so, if it is only by making the bonus scheme better known by word of mouth.

~~THE~~ YOUR CHANCE TO GET INTO PRINT ARTICLES for the 1955 Forestry Commission Journal, which must go to press at the end of January are urgently needed. In particular, we want accounts of "dodges" and gadgets that are saving time and money at only one or two forests - when, in fact, they could and should be used everywhere. Often a paragraph or two will suffice to get the idea across, so don't hesitate to put pen to paper. Articles should be forwarded, through the usual channels, to Mr. H.L. EDLIN, Editor, F.C. Journal, Forestry Commission, 25, Savile Row, London, W.1.

~~THE~~ WHERE THE FLIES GO IN NEAR-WINTER TIME NOT LONG AGO, Victoria House, Aberystwyth, the Welsh Directorate office, was invaded by a swarm of flies. They clustered thickly on the outside walls and quickly found entry through any open windows. Luckily for our Aberystwyth colleagues they concentrated their attack on a department of the Ministry of Agriculture, which occupies part of the ground floor, making work impossible and driving out the occupants of the room.

The Sanitary Inspector was sent for, and it was his opinion that the swarm had been blown in from the sea by a recent gale, and he supplied a highly lethal spray. The flies were well and truly sprayed and the office was soon back to normal again, the very unpleasant visitation being over apart from the amazing number of corpses (of their own kind, luckily!) left behind by the swarm.

As was only to be expected, it was a good opportunity for members of the staff to sing snatches from the popular song "Shut the Door, They're coming through the Window".

~~THE~~ THE LITTLE AUK LAST MONTH a small bird, rather like a penguin, was seen walking around in Wykeham Nursery, North East England Conservancy. It was caught and taken to the forest office and identified as a Little Auk.

RARE BIRD IN A NURSERY This bird is a rare visitor to our coasts and, says Forester W.E. STANLEY, I can only conclude that our particular specimen must have been driven inland by storms at sea. Some attempt was made to feed it and keep it alive, but without success. It has now been sent to a museum in Scarborough, to be stuffed and mounted.

~~THE~~ TREE SPECIES AND SHRUBS WHOSE FOREST, we asked last month, has within it the greatest variety of tree species and shrubs? Forester J.F. CLARK, of Salcey, East England Conservancy, gives us the following list where his forest is concerned. Can you beat it?

Tree Species: Oak - Ash - Beech - Sweet Chestnut - Horse Chestnut - Sycamore - Lime - Elm - Birch - Hornbeam - Alder - Acacia - Mountain Ash - Poplar - Willow - Bird Cherry -

European larch - Scots pine - Norway spruce - Sitka spruce - Douglas fir - Lawson Cypress - Total 22.

Shrubs: Crab apple - Field Maple - Spindle tree - Dogwood - Guelder Rose - Alder Buckthorn - Hazel - Blackthorn - Hawthorn - Elder - Wild Privet - Sallow. Total 12.

THE RIGHT WAY TO GROW CHRYSANTHEMUMS

In answer to a challenge by one of his friends, he entered blooms in local flower shows and his successes have been exceptional, as the following record shows:

1953. Bream Show - 5 entries with 5 prizes - 3 firsts, one second, one third and a silver cup. 1954. Bream - 5 entries with 4 prizes - 3 firsts, one second, a silver cup and a bronze medal; Coleford - 5 entries with 4 prizes - 2 firsts and 2 seconds; Cinderford - 5 entries with 5 prizes - 2 firsts, 2 seconds and 1 third. 1955. Bream - 6 entries with 5 prizes - 3 firsts, 2 seconds, silver cup and Chrysanthemum Society Certificate; Coleford - 7 entries with 6 prizes - 3 firsts, 2 seconds, 1 third and a Bronze medal; Cinderford - 7 entries with 6 prizes - 2 firsts, 2 seconds and 2 thirds.

So, in three years, with 38 entries Mr. MORSE secured 32 awards (15 firsts, 12 seconds, 5 thirds), with three cups, two medals and a certificate. Well done!

IF ITS WOOD -

THERE'S A USE FOR IT

"THE HAPPY MOTORIST" showed us last month that you just can't do without wood. Another reader writes: It is often said - too often perhaps - that some of our native trees have had their day, and that it is no use planting them any longer. Hornbeam is an example - it was once used for ox-yokes but enquiries for this purpose are not exactly brisk today! But timber merchants still buy hornbeam, and enquiries have revealed that it is still wanted for chessmen, draughtsmen and dominoes. Recently one of our staff was asked to play a new table game - patented as recently as 1954 - called "Scrabble". It requires a large number of small wooden counters - light in colour, hard, and smooth to the touch. He got out his lens and found, as he suspected, that only one wood could fill the bill - hornbeam.

THOSE DEAD PIGEONS

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

I'M AFRAID the little story last month of pigeons falling dead at Allerston with burst crops just won't work (writes District Officer W.A. CADMAN from Aberystwyth). It is true that sometimes, when they have eaten a lot of acorns, pigeons may become a little lethargic. It is true, too, that (very rarely) a pigeon may fly into an obstruction and burst its crop. This, of course, does not kill it at once; it has a very slow death from starvation. That is as near as fact can ever come to the fanciful story! As for the eating of Sitka spruce seed, well, pigeons don't eat such seed; anyway, it is not available in July and even if it were, a pigeon's crop would probably hold 3,000 seeds fairly comfortably!

The fact that pigeons carry quite a lot of shot, and may drop dead some distance away from where they were shot at (and when they drop dead, they may burst their crops in falling) gives rise to such stories as the Brodie case.

NEW TIE

WE ARE INFORMED that students at Lynford Hall, the Forester Training School at Thetford Chase in East Anglia, now have their own tie, with re-designed crest.

This tie, we are assured, is of excellent quality and is of immaculate appearance. Available to all ex-Lynfordians, the "old school tie" of Lynford, of much sentimental value, is obtainable at 17s. from the Secretary, Students' Union, Lynford Hall, Mundford, Thetford, Norfolk.

LOST SEAT OF HIS TROUSERS

MORE EMBARRASSING MOMENTS

LATEST contribution to the stories of embarrassing moments reaches us from an Executive Officer in the Shrewsbury Office. "My embarrassment came", he says, "after showing off to friends by jumping over a hurdle fence. In doing this I ripped, on

barbed wire, the seat out of my trousers - part of a new suit. I had no coat with which to cover up the glaring white patch thus revealed, and was faced with the prospect of a three mile walk home along a main road.

"I had no alternative but to call at the nearest house, the home of a person I knew only slightly, and tactfully ask the good lady if she would mind putting some stitches in my trousers seat. Fortunately, she saw the funny side(!), and while I waited in another room, wearing a pair of her old slacks, she made a passable job of repairing the damage. It was all very laughable, of course, but the worst part of the adventure was in summoning up courage to ask a comparative stranger to do what, to her, must have been a unique Good Samaritan act."

PERSONAL

BEST WISHES to Mr. J. STEELE, Chief Clerk at Chester, and Mrs. Steele, on the birth of a son.

And to District Officer J.P. NEWTON, Exeter, and Mrs. Newton, also on the arrival of a son (the second).

FORECASTING THE WEATHER

LAST MONTH'S note on weather forecasting has prompted Executive Officer W.O. WITTERING to write from Edinburgh and quote the following maxim, which is heard in Hertfordshire: "When clouds be flying, cows be dying." "It has always seemed rather ridiculous to me," he writes, "though there may be some rational explanation." Is there?

TRANSFERS

THE FOLLOWING TRANSFERS have been notified to Headquarters:

District Officers G.G. STEWART from Galashiels, S(S), to Research, Edinburgh; D.J. COOPER from Farnham, SE(E), to Sevenoaks, SE(E); N. DANNATT from Farnham to Guildford, SE(E); L.C. TROUPE from Farnham to Guildford; J.A. GOODLET from Glasgow, W(S), to Benmore, W(S); J.P. NEWTON from Christow, SW(E), to Exeter, SW(E).

Foresters J.H. THOMSON from Research, Rashfield-by-Dunoon, to Research, Newton; A. CALDER from Lochard, W(S), to Ardgartan, W(S); S.G. KING from Hevingham, E(E), to Hockham, E(E); H.G. MUGGLETON from Hockham to Swanton, E(E); H.F. PARLETT from Waveney, E(E), to Hevingham; A.R. MAIR from Research, Tulliallan, to Research, Rashfield-by-Dunoon; D.A. MACCASKILL from Ardgartan to Lennox, W(S).

Foremen R.M. URE from Research, Bettws-y-Coed, to Research, Knighton; A. CRAWFORD from Dornoch, N(S), to Oyckell, N(S); A.L. WILSON from Roudham, E(E), to Waveney; G.E. STACEY from Shalfleet, New, to Roe, New; W.P. LEWIS from Charmouth, SW(E), to Poorstock, SW(E). Clerk of Works J.A. COWIE from Slattadale, N(S), to Lael, N(S).

Clerical Officer D.A.A. ISEMONGER from Headquarters to Education, London. Tracer Miss M. KNOWLES from Edinburgh to Chester.

A FURTHER THOUGHT ON
CHRISTMAS TREES

sell an individual tree this season? I sold one on 29th October to a family who wished to have a "Christmas" party with all the trimmings in honour of an aunt due to return to Australia on 31st October.

Sorry, Mr. Parker. But according to our list of claimants, the record is held by Forester A. HUGHES, of Kerry, North Wales, who sold a Christmas tree on 27th May.

INSTRUCTOR'S DISCOMFORTURE

A BLOW TO PRIDE was dealt to Forester Instructor W.F. STODDART, of the Forester Training School, Faskally. "As time went by," he writes, "I became accustomed to my new uniform and, indeed, rather proud of its style - that is, until a week or so ago when my pride suffered a very severe blow. I met an old lady of my acquaintance, whom I had not seen for many years. She greeted me warmly and then, glancing at my velvet collar, queried: 'Och man, are you on the 'buses now?'. I am considering having a special uniform of my own design - made from sackcloth."

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