

The first snow came after Christmas. It did not manage to wreck the Hogmanay gatherings and First Footing parties however. People trudged through the snow on foot for miles to call on each other. Mountains of black bun and shortbread were consumed along with endless cups of black tea. Alcohol was so scarce that only a favoured few got a thimbleful to drink to the New Year when it came. Invariably these gatherings developed into all night sessions with at least one fiddle and an accordion striking up a reel or two, recitations, songs and stories. There always seemed to be one old man who sang endless ballads about happenings of old, often rather near the bone. One I remember was concerned with the Ball of Kirriemuir.

The storm piled snow on snow for what seemed weeks in the New Year. The stalker's telephone went dead, lessons went by the board. Digging paths to the coal house, the hen house and the goat shed was the first duty after breakfast. The drive was totally blocked by huge drifts and so was the main road to the outside world. No post by van ^{so} ~~or~~ no milk or rations from Tarveside could reach us. Hens and goats were on iron rations and consequently yielded very little to add to our hoard of emergency supplies. We had managed to lay in a sack of oatmeal and one of flour, potatoes and root vegetables and apples were safely stored in sacks, boxes of sand and on trays. Strings of onions were hanging from hooks. Our larder was fairly bristling with supplies even some jam and of course, our hoard

of holy honey liberated from the church rafters, a source of great satisfaction and pride. However four adults and four children eat a great deal, especially in cold weather. After a couple of weeks we began to miss fresh milk, proper bread and butter.

The stalker who called every day on skis, produced a spare pair for me and together we set off for Taryside to collect our rations on a brilliant morning. The Glen looked breathtaking in the sunshine but totally changed. There was no sign of the road and even the river was obliterated by drifts. Familiar landmarks, walls and trees were ironed out, even the telephone wires were buried in places. We followed them where we could, taking care not to cross the river and lose our direction on the wrong side of it.

We got a great welcome in the village and some ^{hot soup} from the post mistress. Going back, each with a load of bread and rations, post and papers for croft and gardener, keeper, stalker, Alec and ourselves on our backs, was rather more difficult. We had our tracks to follow but a nasty wind in our faces and fine drifting snow pricking like needles. It was great to get back home.

The storm lasted for six weeks. Tremendous winds rose and swept the snow off the hills and the high ground into the valley in new drifts. The crofter turned out his cattle to

find what they could to eat on the bare high patches. We made several more trips to Tarveside for food rations. On one of my journeys back from the croft, having delivered the family's share and collected two dozen eggs in exchange, I was chased by the small black bull. As I was carefully manoeuvring my skis on the now treacherous surface, he came thundering across the ice close behind me. I went into total panic and tore down the steep hill regardless and landed at the bottom, miles from my normal route. In the still air, I heard a great roar of laughter echoing across the Glen from where the keeper had witnessed the whole scene. ~~From~~ where I stood panting, I noticed a curious black object under my ski. Scraping away at the snow I realised that I was standing on the roof of the crofter's car abandoned near the road at the beginning of the storm. I got my bearings and struggled home with my precious burden miraculously in tact.

We had long given up any attempt to clear our drive, the drifts grew higher night after night, a great herd of deer came down from the heights at night, looking for shelter round the house, nibbling the bark off the trees. The keeper put out food for them daily, the goats which had been reduced to eating the Christmas tree thankfully joined in. Gradually the days grew longer, the wind dropped and one beautiful morning Betty came screaming downstairs, "The Germans have come." Sure enough, across the river under the old Scots pines we could see strange white figures moving along the white fence.

Betty was unable to direct her mind to anything further and stood gazing across the river for the rest of the morning with undivided concentration. She spotted what looked like the immovable figure of a guard, focused entirely on herself. Before the phone went dead we had heard rumours of German landings on Scottish beaches but really we were totally cut off from the world in all directions.

By lunchtime a couple of young men in white ski gear arrived at the door. The spokesman in heavily accented English asked if he could have help for one of his party who had fallen off the wire bridge into the ice bound river and was badly in need of a hot bath and somewhere to dry clothes. Following a hunch I answered him in Swiss German and sure enough he turned out to be a Swiss army officer come to the aid of the new Commandoes. His job was to teach a selected group of people the skills of survival and travel among mountains in winter on iron rations, no fires allowed. They had been dropped by parachute several days earlier. One of the group had experienced a phobic fear of crossing the river and promptly fallen in. Wires bridges are very common in Glenesk, they are made of two strong wires, one about 8 feet above the water and the other about 5 feet above that, secured round trees on either side. You simply stand on the lower wire, hold on to the higher one and shuffle across the river, hoping and praying that a) both the wires will hold and b) that you can