Dalrulzion Hotel

When it comes to private feuds, however, there is another story to tell. There seem to have been constant friction and quarrels (especially with the Spaldings who held the land between Dalrulzion and Kirkmichael) both for personal and material reasons.

In 1602, the biggest of the cateran raids on Glenshee and Glenisla, ending with the Battle of the Cairnwell, brought disaster to Dalrulzion. The raiders from Glengarry (Gregours and Chattans) were two hundred strong, and they stole no less than 2,700 cattle and 100 horses from the glens. When they were eventually caught up with and defeated, they slaughtered most of the cattle from sheer spite. Dalrulzion had grazings in Glenbeg as well as on his own estate, and he was one of the main victims who claimed retribution before the Privy Council. Nothing came of the claims, however, except that the Marquis of Huntly was declared an outlaw—a rather technical and capricious sanction in the Scotland of that time.

With the building of the military road, conditions generally became more peaceful. The Rattrays continued to live at Dalrulzion until the last descendant, an elderly spinster, died near the end of the 19th century. A Mr Thorneycroft then purchased the house and modernised it. When exactly the present structure was built is difficult to say, but when built it was apparently fairly typical of the early Scottish mansions. It is now run as a licensed Hotel.

Cairnwell Chairlift

Ski-ing

IN recent years, Glenshee has been built up to provide excellent winter sporting and the basis of to-day's success and enjoyment for skiers of all ages goes back to 1936, when the Dundee Ski Club was formed. Before that, a weekend turnout of a dozen skiers was a good one and if we are to believe the old hands, the slopes were almost vertical and the patterns in the snow were simple—that of two rails wide apart ending in the heather.

In the early days, the Club assets were small huts holding about ten people sited on Ben Gulabin and on Glas Maol, but the mechanics were always experimenting with portable tows from about 1949 onwards. A larger hut and efficient rope tow followed in 1954 and 1956 at Ben Gulabin—a useful place to remember if road conditions at the Devil's Elbow are bad. About two miles after the Spittal Hotel is an iron bridge and striking up to the left from this bridge, one will reach the commodious hut in about thirty minutes. The hut nestles between Ben Gulabin and Creag-an-bheithe (pronounced 'Craiganvay'), also known as Ski Tow Hill.

The next lift to be built in Glenshee was also by the Club in 1958 as part of a five year plan. It is an overhead cable T-bar on Meall Odhar (3,019 feet), reached by a fifteen minute walk eastwards from the first car park in Aberdeenshire over the Devil's Elbow. The season on this sunny slope is usually from Christmas till the end of March, and thereafter, one may continue over Meall Odhar to Glas Maol (3,502 feet), which can nearly always guarantee good sport of the foot slogging variety until the middle of May.

The first real commercial development took place in Glenshee when the Spittal Hotel was burnt down and a new Company was formed to build what is a most exciting Scandinavian building, which opened in Christmas of 1959.

The next step was the erection of the Glenshee Chairlift on the Cairnwell Mountain. This has been built to the successful design of a Scots engineer and is similar to the Chairlift in Glencoe. The attractive bottom station, car park and cafe are sited at the roadside, half a mile over the Devil's Elbow into Aberdeenshire. The fixed single chairs travel from the engine house base to almost the summit of the Cairnwell at 3,059 feet, a rise of almost 1,000 feet. Snow fencing and bulldozing on the mountain ensures continuity of the snow for the downhill runs, which are varied in standard to suit all skiers.

Dundee Ski Club Meall Odhar Tow

Cairnwell Chairlift

Ski racing has always formed a strong part in the activities of Dundee Ski Club and the many races they organise throughout the season for all types of skiers may have something to do with their success in the Tennant Trophy, usually held in Glenshee at the end of February, beginning of March. This provides a most interesting spectacle for everyone, being an inter-city or inter-district team race, run as a knockout competition. Dundee have won this nine times between 1951 and 1964.

Instruction in Glenshee is also well organised by the Glenshee International Ski School, whose staff of competent instructors operate from their headquarters at Cairdsport in Glenshee. Classes are small, and this is assuredly the happiest way of learning to enjoy this sport. An excellent range of equipment can be hired from Cairdsport as well as at the Spittal Hotel and they have on sale all the necessary equipment, clothing, and the small things which may be forgotten when packing for a holiday in Glenshee. The Cairdsport chalet shop is between the Spittal Hotel and Dalmunzie Hotel gates.

For the 1964 season, the Chairlift Company added to their facilities by building a T-bar for skiers on the east side of the road opposite the Chairlift, with the bottom terminal a few yards from the road. The six pylon lift gives a vertical rise of 350 feet, 550 yards long and opens up sunny and gentle slopes, suited to novices and intermediates. The Chairlift is an official mountain rescue post, and ski-ing accidents occur in Glenshee just like anywhere else. First aid facilities are organised at weekends and on public holidays by Rover Scouts.

The first ski slope in Scotland with man-made snow opened in December 1963 in the grounds of Dalmunzie Hotel. This skis no differently from real stuff and is made by pumping water and air under pressure through snow guns specially imported from America. The slope is open to the public for daily or hourly rates, and with an excellent record for freezing temperatures, this will offer an earlier start and a later finish to the season without walking to a distant Ben. The slope is 750 feet long by 300 feet wide, rising 80 feet and is served by a rope tow. It is due for extension for the 1965 season.

Heavy Snowfall at the Chairlift creates problems

Further developments will come to Glenshee, although it is not certain what shape they will take. Heaven forbid that the Devil's Elbow be removed, but if it were manicured, it would provide the snow clearing authorities with less of a problem. Another pipe dream is the construction of a road from a point about two miles north of the Devil's Elbow leading up to the centre gulley of Glas Maol, which is a favourite spring haunt of Glenshee skiers.

GLENSHEE CHAIRLIFT

Glenshee Ski School Instructors

The various types of accommodation available for skiers are detailed elsewhere in this book, but accommodation is assured to suit every pocket. New Year and Easter are usually booked up many months in advance.

The nearest rail head to Glenshee is Coupar Angus, 22 miles from the Spittal of Glenshee, and transport can be arranged by contacting the Hotels in advance.

The Hotels in the district, which all differ in character, offer a programme of apres ski activities such as small dances, big dances, pop dancing and highland dance lessons. This way, the skiers meet more people and have more fun.

As a development industry, it is remarkable to note that ski-ing is responsible for the additional employment of over 70 people in the district and has been responsible for the capital investment of approximately £100,000 and has brought the annual turnover of Hotels, Chairlifts, etc., including summer season, to a conservative estimate of £150,000. In the days of bringing new industries to Scotland, it is remarkable to note that this considerable industry does not always get the credit it deserves.

R.J.B.

* * *

"Mair freens an' less need o' them!"

* * *

Golf

THERE are several first-class golf courses within twenty-six miles of the Spittal of Glenshee, including Rosemount (the famous Blairgowrie course), Braemar, Pitlochry and Alyth.

Dalmunzie Hotel has its own sporting 6-hole course, and an indoor golf school. Guests at other hotels can play on the six-hole course by arrangement. (Length 1,400 yards).

Certain world-famous courses—St Andrews, Carnoustie, Gleneagles—are all within range for a day's golfing. Prices are generally much below those south of the border.

Pony Trekking

I NEVER met a youngster yet who didn't love ponies, and to go pony-trekking over the hills is the last word in youthful adventure.

Bonnie Glenshee, with its drove-roads and hill tracks, is ideal for this novel way of exploring Highland country, and the hotels cater for those who wish to take part.

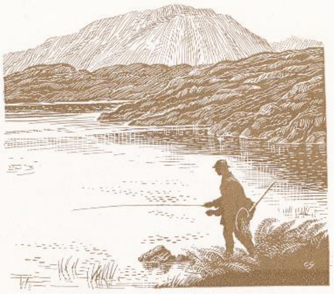
At the Spittal of Glenshee Hotel, for instance, weekly courses suitable for beginners start in April, under the charge of a qualified Pony Master.

The treks are made according to the ability and experience of the riders, and of course according to the weather.

Trekking with the Drumore Hotel ponies, the Drumore district, between Blacklunans and Bridge of Brewlands, has some excellent pony-trekking country, and the old tracks that cross the rolling uplands of the Forest of Alyth have an irresistible appeal.

It is worth noting that the hotels can offer young people bunk type accommodation at reduced rates.

Hill ponies are sturdy, friendly and co-operative. They are wise in their ways, and extremely surefooted. There is no doubt that they enjoy a trek over the hills as much as those who ride them!



Angling

MANY an angler has learnt the art of casting a fly and "swimming a worm on a Glenshee burn! And, in doing so, he may well have come under the spell of running waters, for these hill burns are completely fascinating, leading the fisherman on and on from pool to pool into the very heart of the hills.

Glenshee has many hill waters of this sort, full of lively, speckled brown-trout—small usually, with an occasional "monster" of half a pound.

The Shee itself ("the onrushing river") is a lovely stream, honey-coloured in its deeps, birch-green in its shallows, and has at times produced some notable fish.

There are also several attractive lochs. Drumore Hotel has a nice one right on its doorstep—Loch Drumore, "loch of the big ridge"—and there is another lochan two miles away near Bridge of Brewlands.

For the more energetic angler Loch Shechernich, "the errant or off-course loch," will certainly appeal. It can be approached by Glen Bainie on the Glenisla side (this involves a stiff climb over the hilltop march between Perthshire and Angus) or from Inveredrie in Glenshee.

Loch Mharaich—another hill loch—can be reached in a mile or so from Craigton, a mile south of Dalrulzion Hotel. The hill track passes through a cluster of ancient cairns and hut-circles.

Continued on page 44

Loch nan Eun, ("loch of the birds"), lies west of the Cairnwell—high set and remote, but the long trek to its lonely shores can be eased considerably by making use of the Cairnwell Chair-lift.

Salmon-fishing on the Royal Dee can be arranged per Spittal of Glenshee Hotel, the price of permit depending on the time of year.

Other rivers, such as the Tay (of which the Shee is a tributary stream), the Isla, the Ardle, etc. are within easy motoring distance. The Isla holds salmon, trout, grayling and pike. A drive to Pitlochry to see the famous Salmon-ladder, and the man-created Loch Faskally is rewarding.

The Dee and the Tay are, of course, world famous as salmon rivers. The record rod-caught salmon for this country was taken in the Tay (by a lady angler—Miss G. W. Ballantyne) and weighed 64 lbs.

Shooting

THE Twelfth! No other date in the sportsman's calendar can conjure up such magic, for August 12th means the start of the shooting season on the Scottish moors, and anyone who has spent a crisp early-autumn day on the hills with dog and gun knows its infinite charm.

Sportsmen come to these Perthshire hills and glens from all corners of the earth. Good sport is assured, and varying conditions bring into play every shot the sportsman has in his bag. A mid-day halt is called for lunch among the purple heather—a delightful interlude, this—and one returns at sunset to take the comforts of a hot bath, a good dinner and cheerful company.

The season opens with grouse, and the fashion of "driving" still prevails. But the older method of working with dogs had much to commend it, and is still practised to some extent.

Some say that "dogging" needs more skill. But to bring down a grouse when the birds go whirring away over the moor with that unforgettable "bek-abek-abek" call, or when they come rocketting over the butts at 60 m.p.h.—well, it takes good shooting either way, and much ammunition is often spent by inexperienced "guns" while the grouse fly on unscathed. As a keeper once said to me after counting the rather meagre results of a morning's driving—"A helluva lot o' barking for a' the woo' !"

The dogs used in "walking up" the grouse are usually pointers or setters. They find game by scent, and are worked against or across the wind. It is a joy to see well-trained dogs at their work. They revel in the sport as much as their handlers and the guns. They are trained, from the age of eight weeks, in obedience to command, quartering in front of the handler, staunch to point and dropping to shot.

Grouse are sensitive to weather changes. In stormy weather they shelter on the lee side of the slopes, and on hot sunny days they often take cover in bracken. Wind direction is all-important and constantly under the keeper's scrutiny. The beats are planned accordingly, and the whole moor covered systematically.

Grouse driving.

Grouse driving also calls for judgment on the keeper's part. With the aid of a line of beaters it is his job to drive the birds over the butts, where the guns are hidden. These butts, spaced out on a hill-slope, are positioned according to the lie of the land and the general flight of the birds.

At a given signal, the beaters (perhaps a score), start a flag-waving walk of a mile or more towards the butts. As the birds rise they break away from the beaters and fly towards the waiting guns, bearing down on the butts with the speed of wind.

Blackgame and ptarmigan are associated with the shooting of red grouse, but have very different characteristics. Blackgame are not shot until they have assumed full plumage in September. They are difficult to drive, but very fast on the wing.

Ptarmigan shooting means mountaineering and a very strenuous day, for the white grouse of the hilltops keeps to the lee-side of the rockier hills and ridges, and when disturbed they fly from one top to another. Easy going for the ptarmigan, but not for those who follow them, however fascinating the chase!

Capercaillie are the biggest of the grouse birds, and a cock capercaillie crashing out through the branches of a firwood seems almost like a turkey for size. Actually, a cock-caper may weigh as much as ten pounds, but it should be added that some of those tough ancient warriors of the pinewoods are better stuffed by a taxidermist than stuffed, roasted and served up for dinner!

A stalker once told me a way of dealing with an old cock capercaillie. According to his recipe it was best to start by burying the bird in the ground for a fortnight. "Yes, and after that?" I asked him. "Well, after that," he said, thoughtfully, "it's better to forget whaur you buried him."

In Highland shooting the "bag" is often a mixed one—grouse and various—and sometimes there are nearly as many various as grouse, with snipe, duck, woodcock and woodpigeons entering into it.

Snipe-shooting over the bogs and hill-mosses is a fascinating sport. The birds' reaction to "dogging" varies from day to day, almost from hour to hour. One day they will lie close, and rise from under the pointers' noses. On other days they will be up and away in wisps as soon as the guns put a foot on the moor. The zig-zagging flight of a rising snipe calls for quick action on the part of the gun. I have seen a Highland sportsman fire twice and then fling his glengarry after one of these elusive birds of the moss!

Deerstalking

DEERSTALKING is the crowning glory of the shooting season. To many people, it seems extraordinary that shooting-tenants are prepared to pay high prices for suffering discomforts that most mortals would prefer to avoid. Yet, to the ardent deerstalker, there is no other sport comparable to this one. And there is certainly no other place in the world where you can stalk in the Highland style. Proof of its fascination lies in the fact that tenants of Scottish deer-forests come back year after year.

Unlike grouse-shooting with its social side, stalking is a somewhat solitary sport, and taking part for the first time you find there is an established and traditional procedure.

The stalker leads the way; you follow; and a ghillie and a garron or pony brings up the rear. At some suitable point a halt is made to spy out the land. Through a powerful "glass" the slopes and corries are carefully scrutinised. This may take a long time, and you may see nothing but hinds, and you may see nothing but scenery. But at last the stalker will spot a stag worth going after—a well-built beast with a fine wild head of antlers, an eight-pointer perhaps, possibly (if you are very lucky) a "Royal." "Stag ahead!" he will whisper, and the real stalk will now begin, with the ghillie and pony left behind.

You stumble your way over rank heather, slither over rock and scree, wade through burns, and crawl through bogs and peat-hags. And always, of course, you must keep on the windward side of the herd and the stag you are after.

This is by no means easy, for the winds of the hills and corries are extremely fickle, and liable to change direction without warning. Stalkers say you can deceive a stag by its eye, but never by its nose, and it is a fact that a red deer can detect a human being a mile away. A swing of the wind, one whiff, and up go the heads of the herd! Next moment they are all on the move, a forest of antlers going over the skyline.

With care, patience and luck, however, you may "get into" the stag you have marked down. Crouching behind a screen of rock, the stalker gives you an estimate of the range, deftly withdraws the rifle from its canvas cover, hands it to you, and indicates the best firing-point. It is an exciting moment, and you are lucky if you are not suffering badly from "stag fever."

"Take your time, sir" whispers the stalker. "Wait till he turns broadside on." You wipe the drizzle of misty rain off your eyelashes, smear the midges off your brow and take careful aim. At last, crack goes the rifle, and all going well, you have grassed your first stag.

The ghillie is signalled (probably by a wisp of smoke from a small fire of grass), and after the gralloch, or gutting, of the stag, it is ready for loading on the garron. This loading on the pony is an art in itself.

Glenshee's hotels cater very reasonably for the sportsman who wishes to take part in this supreme sport. Dalmunzie, for instance, has excellent deer-ground, 6,500 acres available on contract, set high among the incomparable hills of upper Glenshee and Glenlochsie, and arrangements are made for those who have the urge to go stalking the wild red deer on the high ground.

Mountain Flowers

Tiny flowers of haugh and corrie
that merely creep, fragile and delicate,
whose life is but a day . . . . .

TO many of those who visit the Highlands, finding an unusual wild flower of the hills is just as thrilling as seeing a golden eagle, or hearing the wild-sweet mountain song of the snow-bunting.

It is worth noting, however, that mountain flowers are by no means uniformly distributed throughout the Highlands.

Some parts, such as the hills and corries centred on Glenshee, have a wealth of mountain plants. Elsewhere the vegetation is often sparse even in the corries, and almost non-existent on the exposed ridges and plateaux.

Soil and climate, as well as altitude and exposure, are important in the nature and distribution of mountain species. Some plants, like the Cushion Pink (which forms of itself a compact "cushion" of growth) or the Saxifrages (which surround themselves with a whorl of leaves) are well adapted to endure exposure to sun and wind. But most plants need shade from the burning sun of the hilltops and shelter from the mallet of the gale.

So it is that most mountain plants are found in the corries, ravines and crevices, where snow may well linger into the long days of midsummer.

The slopes of the Grampians and the Cairngorms carry a fair number of what are generally called "alpines," and some of these mountain gems are "treasure" worth searching for.

The Cairngorms (within easy reach, north of Glenshee) form by far the biggest area of Scottish mountain country above 4,000 feet, and in these hills there is not only altitude but a near-Arctic climate, with great winds and intense frosts. Snowfields lie far into late summer, and sometimes the whole year round.

Well over 200 species of flowering plants have been found in this massive range upwards of 2,000 feet. Of these 47 are of an Arctic-Alpine character, 15 are of the Arctic or sub-Arctic element, and one only is classified as Alpine.

It is obvious then—and will be intriguing even to climbers and ramblers who are not serious botanists—that the flowers of this region have affinities with those of the Arctic Circle, rather than with those of the Alps.

It is worth noting, too, that of the eight flowering plants recorded near the summit-cairn of Ben Muicdhui (second only to Ben Nevis in altitude) seven are of Arctic character.

But interesting though the Cairngorms are botanically, it has to be remembered that their constituent rock is mainly granite, which decomposes into a poor, acid soil, giving a vegetation which tends to the moorland type.

Eastwards of Glenshee lie those deeply-corried hills that rise along the marches between Aberdeenshire and Angus. And here Highland schists begin to replace the granite and form the major part of the visible rock, while deer-grass largely takes the place of heather.

Such rocks nourish a rich and luxuriant flora, and in consequence the hills extending from the Cairnwell road by way of Glas Maol, the head of Glenisla, Glen Doll and Glen Clova are botanically of very great interest. Nor are the hills and corries to the west of the Cairnwell very far behind. Indeed, all this is "classic ground," rendered so by the researches of the stalwart pioneers of mountain botany away back in the 18th century, and many present-day botanists visit these hills almost as if they were visiting a shrine. Visitors to Glenshee have therefore an excellent chance of coming upon many interesting and rare flowers. Even in the glen itself and on the lower slopes are to be found Alpine Lady's Mantle, Sundew, Butterwort, varieties of Orchid, Bog-myrtle, Bog-cotton, Wood Crane's-bill, Yellow Mountain Violet, Alpine Meadow-rue and many others. Ferns, too—Glenshee is particularly rich in varieties of these, and the banks of every burn is starred with those tiny flowers of the moors that merely creep, fragile and delicate, whose life is but a day.

There is, of course, more chance of finding a really rare plant in the remote parts of the mountains. Even when their "station" is known, these rarities often need patient and persistent searching before they are discovered. I have occasionally found, too, that some of these rarer gems of the hills have a tendency to grow in craggy places, and have a better head for heights than I have! Often the rarest flowers of all grow in situations difficult for ordinary bipeds to reach. I am thinking of the small Alpine Gentian, which grows on steep rocks in Caenlochan (at the head of Glenisla) and which once inspired a notable Professor of Botany to note in his diary: "The sparkling of this most rare and lovely gem among the sparse mountain herbage cured me of hunger and thirst, and made me forget that I was gathering it at the risk of my neck!"

Even without rock-climbing, however, several rare Arctic grasses can be found in the high corries—also the Alpine Speedwell, the Blue Sow-thistle, Brook Saxifrage and Alpine Cudweed.

In summer, Trailing Azalea colours with a flush of red whole tracts of the high tops. By contrast, the Red Alpine Campion grows on only one hill—the bare wind-swept summit of Little Culrannoch, just beyond the head of Glenisla.

Here is a list of mountain flowers worth searching for in the hills around Glenshee. But please, climbers and ramblers, never uproot a rare floral find. Unfortunately, careless and selfish collectors have from time to time gravely thinned the ranks of our native mountain plants, and deer and sheep have likewise taken more than their fair share.

It is difficult to do much about the habits of grazing animals, but I would give this advice to those who happen upon an unusual plant: admire it, take a photograph or make a sketch; take a flower and a leaf if you must, but do not tear the plant up by the roots. Leave it for others to find and enjoy.

Some of the rarer plants: Alpine forms of Bartsia, Vetch, Flea-bane; the Foxtail, Catstail and Meadow Grasses; Woodsia Fern, Bladder Fern, rare Sedges; Mountain Aven, Water Lobelia, Snowy Gentian. A rare Lichen, the Snowy Cetraria, grows only above 3,000 feet.

Wildlife

VISITORS to Glenshee will naturally be most interested in those birds and beasts which one regards as belonging particularly to the Scottish Highlands.

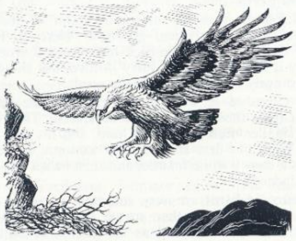
England, and the Lowlands generally, have several species of birds which we in the Highlands never see. But because of our great uninhabited tracts of hill-forest certain animals and birds have been able to find a living here, though crowded out of existence in the more populous parts of the country.

Glenshee and its surrounding hills possess all the wild animals known in England and several more besides. And no doubt these are the wild creatures which the visitor will look out for, and hope to see.

Let me start with the golden eagle. These powerful birds are not quite so rare as many people suppose, but naturally they are much less likely to be seen by roadfarers than by those who take to the hill-paths and visit the more remote corries and lochans.

To watch an eagle wheeling and soaring in the sky is a sight to remember. If the bird is in hunting mood, sweeping along the flank of a hill at terrific speed, you will see the hares flee in terror and packs of grouse rise in a panic before him. Even deer will herd together at the sight of an eagle.

Many mountain corries have eagles' eyries, but as a pair of golden eagles lay claim to sixteen or twenty square miles of hunting "territory," the chances are that only



one eyrie in a district will be occupied for nesting in a season. Incidentally, it takes a keen eye to spot a golden eagle leaving the rocks of a corrie. Very often it has been the bird's shadow moving over the rocks that I have noticed first, rather than the bird itself.

Only two birds seem to be unafraid of the eagle—the raven and that freebooter of the skies, the peregrine-falcon.

I have seen a peregrine stoop repeatedly at an eagle until the great bird soared away over the skyline. As for the raven—this bird of sable plumage is an accomplished aerial acrobat, and when attacked by an eagle in mid-air simply turns upside down and presents his adversary with a very formidable beak!

Of Glenshee's game-birds, the capercaillie is the biggest and perhaps the most interesting. For size, the cock-caper is rather like a small turkey, but the hen is considerably smaller, and so dissimilar that she hardly looks as if she belonged to the same family.

Capercaillies are birds of the pine forests, and despite their size, are not easily seen among the trees. A sudden explosion in the fir boughs, and away he goes crashing through the branches with the speed of an express train!

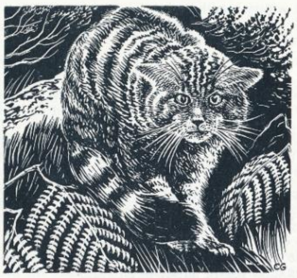
The "love song" of the caper is a remarkable performance—a curious liquid sound ("klik-klek, klik-klek, klik-klek") followed by a loud pop. A stalker told me it always reminded him of whisky being poured out of a bottle!

The blackcock and greyhen, other grouse-birds of the glen, favour a moorland type of country with belts of timber. The cock, with his forked tail, is a very handsome fellow. Incidentally, this forked tail is often seen on Highland glengarries.

Blackgame have an interesting habit of meeting at their "leks" or tournament grounds. Here, in the half-light of dawn or dusk, the cock-birds hold tourney. Presumably it is an affair of rivalry in love, but the greyhens seem strangely indifferent as to the result!

In Glenshee it will be noticed that the hares are different from those of the Lowland shires. The Highland hare is smaller than the brown hare, and his coat is blue-grey. With the first snowfalls of autumn, however, he assumes a snowy white mantle, and then he's a fine-looking animal indeed!

Mountain hares are very common on some parts of the Grampians, but rather scarce in others. In spring, when they go quite as mad as the brown hares, they will



frequent one glen and avoid another—this for reasons best know to themselves. Unlike the brown hare, they will (when danger threatens) often take cover under rocks or peat-hags.

Although under constant persecution the wildcat survives, and still frequents parts of Glenshee. The rockier face of Mount Blair and the crags at the head of Glenisla—these are natural sanctuaries. The true wildcat is not merely a domestic cat gone feral, although the latter does admittedly take on some of the colouring and features of a wildcat once it severs its connection with man and takes to the wilds.

The true wildcat is, however, much more powerfully built. The tom is over forty inches in length and his tail is short, black-ringed and blunt at the tip. For his size he is as fierce as any of the tiger tribe. His attack is a whirlwind of spitting teeth and threshing claws.

Gamekeepers have told me of trying to rear a wildcat kitten, but without success. In the wilds or in captivity this animal curses man to its last breath (not without cause!) and avoids him like the plague. Only when cornered will a wildcat attack a man, and in these circumstances will fight with an indomitable spirit and ferocity.

Now, the red deer. Summer visitors have little chance of seeing deer, as the herds move to the higher corries and hilltop mosses during the summer months, and even wild, wet weather is unlikely to bring them down before autumn.

In hard wintry weather they are down too often for the farmers' liking, and a big herd can devastate acres of turnips between dusk and dawn.

The red deer stag is at his best in September. In October comes the time of "the roaring," when many a corrie rings and echoes to the throaty bellowing of stags right through the rutting season. Stags cast their antlers in spring, and then proceed to grow a new set. The cast antlers are occasionally found lying in the heather, but more often the hinds find them and nibble away at them until they are all gone!

Roe deer are common in Glenshee, and attractive little creatures they are. Mainly they keep to woodlands, but are also fond of marshy ground, and frequently venture into the open parts of the glen. Short upright horns are a notable characteristic of the roebuck and another notable feature is their sharp, terrier-like bark.

Hill-climbers should keep a look-out for the snow-bunting, the ptarmigan and that plump, painted little plover-bird, the dotterel. These are birds of the high-tops, unlikely to nest below 2,500 feet. The ring-ousel, or mountain-blackbird, frequents the lower slopes of rock and heather, while that bird of plaintive note, the golden-plover, prefers the windswept moor.

Visiting Loch nan Eun, "Loch of the Birds," I once found blackheaded gulls nesting there. But their numbers seem to vary greatly from year to year, and some seasons they never come at all. High-set lochans like this, frequently still ice-bound in April, are bound to lose their customers at times! Nevertheless, such lochans are worth visiting, as there is a fair chance of seeing the redthroated diver, the widgeon or the merganser.

Down in the lower glen, many songsters make the hills and woods of Glenshee their summer home. In May and June the cuckoo calls from the braes, and there is always a thrush pealing out its clear and immaculate notes from the treetops.

Pied and grey wagtails frolic by the burns, and the dipper bobs on a mossy stone. From the moors comes that most thrilling of all wild bird calls—the long sustained trill of the curlew or whaup. Even more characteristic of Glenshee is the "bek-abek-abek" call of the red grouse, a bird as truly Scottish as the purple heather.

* * *

A' that's said in the kitchen shudna be tauld in the ha'.

The Tinkers

AS wild birds return to Glenshee in spring, so do the "tinks" on their traditional route to Deeside and the north.

With a "cairty" and a "pownie" to carry the heavier part of their gear, they seldom linger. For a night they will perhaps pitch their hooped tents alongside a birchwood or on the edge of the moor, but morning will see them roaded again, and on their way—a swarthy, picturesque crew, carrying their bundles and very likely a curly-headed "wean" peeping out of a tartan shawl.

A curious people, the tinks. They were originally workers in tin, making and mending pots and pans. Now they move about, gaining a livelihood as best they can—the men piping, or making baskets and heather "reenges" (pot scrubbers), the women selling sprigs of white heather or paper flowers, or peddling smallware acquired who knows where or how !

In summer many of them move southwards again, and find work for a time at the berry-picking down by Blairgowrie. And a tinker family with a few nimble youngsters can make quite a bit of cash in the raspberry fields. But the money soon goes, somehow, and they will move on again.

The Reeds, the Whites, the Powers, the Burkes, the McLarens—quite a "clan" history could be written about them, their wanderings and traditional camping-places on old tracks and "commonty" ground.

Probably the predominating tinker clan was the McLaren (or McLaurin) and at one time there were some very handsome women members of this tribe—striking, tall, blackhaired "queens," mindful of George Borrow's Isopel Berners in *Lavengro* and *A Romany Rye*.

They begged, but never stole, and were treated in kindly fashion by the folk of the glen. Occasionally, a tinker wife would be allowed to bath her infant in a tub of warm water in a farm kitchen.

Members of this McLaren clan are said to come of ancient stock. I have heard them claim that they came over to Scotland from Ireland with King Fergus I, when he brought the Stone of Destiny to Scotland, and settled in Tiree.

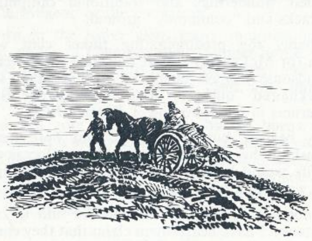
Though it is hard to believe, tinkers get on quite well with the police. If there is any damage done in a district —to trees, to poultry, to property—you can depend on "thae tinks" coming under suspicion. But in fact they are seldom the real culprits. A bit of poaching for the pot, yes, but mainly they keep on the right side of the law. Anyway, the unsurpassed ability to supply a name but never an address gets many a tink out of a scrape.

Farmers hate tinks for the mess they leave. So do gamekeepers, for their presence usually means a loss of game.

"It's a queer thing," said one keeper to me, "if you or I went down by the wood there, every pheasant would be off like a shot. But when the tinks go by wi' their shalts and their cairties the same pheasants hardly bother to move out of the way!"

In these circumstances, a "lurcher" let loose at the right moment is fairly sure to nab his quarry.

Many tinker women have a way with them in fortune-telling, and have a fascinating knowledge of old sayings and songs, handed down from generation to generation. Many of the men are skillful bagpipe players with a repertoire of old tunes almost forgotten. A notable piper, for instance, was Peter MacLaurin. No fair or feeing-market was complete without him and his pipes, and he was something of an authority on old bagpipe music. He was still travelling the roads at eighty-five years when he took his final journey over the hills and far away!



It's aye "Hing in" wi' the Tinker's Road
Fur the far side o' the hill.—(*Marion Angus*).

Farming

OUR first traces of farming, in all Scotland as well as in Glenshee, come via archaeology, and from discoveries of querns and charred oats it can be inferred that some corn was grown even in prehistoric times.

Nevertheless, there were little signs of tillage in Scotland when the Romans came, and in the early centuries the inhabitants seemed to have lived on their cattle and their hunting.

It is in the 6th century, after the coming of St. Columba to Iona and the colonisation of Western Scotland by the Irish Scots that we get our first evidence of cultivation with a plough. Thereafter, a system of tillage and the growing of grain begins to take the place of the pastoral pursuits of those who estimated their wealth by cattle and not by land.

Glenshee's first ploughs had no doubt been primitive hand-ploughs and "scratch-ploughs" drawn by two oxen. The true plough with its wheel, broad-bladed share, coulter and mouldboard came later. In the Middle Ages not much ploughing was actually done, for the glen was still very much a tract of barren hills and bog. The lower slopes gave the best chance of cultivation at that time.

However, the influence of the monks of Coupar Abbey began to have some effect, and there was a gradual improvement in the agriculture and forestry of Glenshee and its neighbouring glens. Planting, peat-digging, draining—all these were undertaken with new improved methods. Much of the glen's marshland was reclaimed, lime was applied, land enclosed, and in time good pastures as well as good crops began to be produced.

The wilder country of upper Glenshee presented its own problems. At present the arable land there is just as high as arable land can be in Scotland's climate. But a few centuries ago there were other hazards. For instance, the losses of young stock to wolves and foxes were very heavy. It was necessary to keep "a couple of good hounds and a couple of sleuth hounds for fox and wolf, ready at all times . . ." Human cattle-raiders, too, were all too prevalent, and in this type of rugged country a whole herd could be whisked away into another glen and never seen again.

There were men, however, determined on clearing fresh holdings and following these up with the plough, and

by their initiative these farmers acquired a sturdy and commendable spirit of self-help and husbandry. Before long the earlier farmers of these wild areas, whose only idea was to keep a few cattle on the rough hill pastures, had been quite superceded.

In Glenshee, though the hills and streams are immemorial, it takes a seeing eye to perceive the past in the present as far as farming is concerned. Evidence of a lived-in past is not obvious. Certainly Glenshee's place-names are old, and ancient charters and rent rolls show that the names of farms, etc., as far back as they can be traced, are very much as they are now.

On the other hand the placing of the farmhouses and the portions of land under crops may well have changed. As I have said, the floor of the glen was at first mostly bog, only fit for growing a little coarse natural hay. At that time, farms were mainly sited higher up the hill slopes, and here and there you can still see, running along above the present line of cultivation, the old "dyke-head" that divided the cropping-land from the hill pastures.

At that time, too, some oats were grown, but little else, and the usual cold spring weather often delayed sowing. Potatoes were introduced into the Highlands in 1743, and root-crops not until the latter half of the 18th century.

To appreciate the part these root-crops played it is necessary to remember that in olden times most of the live-stock had to be slaughtered each autumn, as only the bare minimum of animals could be kept alive in winter. The marts (those animals killed off at Martinmas) were salted down for winter use.

Here and there in the Highland glens you can see a succession of farmhouses, built lower and lower down the slope. Often a group of trees marking a garden is all that remains of a former habitation. The planting of elm-trees was particularly encouraged at one time, as the wood was especially suitable for the making of implements and carts.

The old-type farm consisted of a cluster of cottages, and in these "bailes" or townships the individual shares of the land were divided into many portions scattered over the farm, while the jobs were interwoven and shared. All took part in such tasks as ploughing, draining, shearing, herding and reaping. There are gladsome tales of women singing in unison as they reaped, of neighbourly gatherings, and of a clannishness that had more than the mere neighbourliness of less closely bound communities.

Visitors to Glenshee may come upon one of these former townships, with a rickle of grey stones marking the foundation of each cottage, and sometimes it is possible still to discern vestiges of cultivation and green patches still showing vividly against the encroaching heather.

"And the heather creep, creepin'
Ower the bonny dryin'-green."

In these early cottages the roof-tree was laid along the top of drystone walls about four feet high. The roof was made of poles with a layer of sods neatly pegged together above them, and then thatch. Periodically, the roof was torn off and scattered as manure in the fields. Periodically, too, the winter winds did it without charge! The hearth was in the middle of the earthen floor, and the smoke found its way out (eventually!) by a hole in the roof.

Later, cottages with masonry walls took the place of these early ones, with chimneys built into the gables at either end. Ruined remains of these can still be seen, and it is possible sometimes to discover who lived there. One cottage may have been occupied by a weaver, another by a cooper, a saddler or a tailor. For, with improving conditions, farming folk now began to employ local craftsmen, and little local industries sprang up. Later, of course, these were ousted, when machine-made goods and better means of communication again changed conditions in the glen. But at that time the tailor, for instance, used to visit the various clachans, and there he was included as a member of the household while he made any garments needed, thus saving the family long journeys for measuring and fitting, at a time when travelling was not easy.

In Glenshee, over two centuries ago, it was the custom for the women and children to go for a month or so in summer to the high moorland pastures where the cattle grazed. They lived in shielings there, with the simplest of furnishings carried uphill by pony. They used fresh heather for a mattress—the heather being dried and laid with the flower uppermost, making a wholesome and comfortable bed.

Their main diet was oatmeal and ewes' milk. Tea was unknown, and they drank whey, produced in the cheese-making, or water from some nearby spring. Sheep-clipping was done at these shielings. The men caught and bound the sheep, then laid them before the women who sheared off the heavy fleeces. Incidentally, some of these old shielings can still be seen today.

Here and there in Glenshee (as for instance over by Mount Blair's lower slopes) you may also notice stoutly built stone kilns. These were much used in the 19th century for burning limestone, then in demand as a fertiliser of the soil. The limestone was quarried on the Cairnwell, where it was found in large quantities. Indeed Glenshee was surveyed for a light-railway between Blairgowrie and Braemar, and it was estimated that the transference of the limestone would prove a valuable source of revenue. Queen Victoria was unfavourable towards the idea, however, as she preferred Balmoral and Deeside in its pleasant isolation, and the idea was dropped.

Mechanisation was merely delayed however, and it has come to Glenshee in other ways—on the roads, on the ski-ing slopes and, of course, on the farms.

In recent times giant strides have been made in the spread of mechanisation in agriculture and in scientific research affecting the special problems of hill and sheep farming.

The tractor-plough, the combine-harvester and many other mechanical implements have "arrived" in the glen as well as in the strath. Tools like the bulldozer and the gyro-tiller enable wasteland and even woodland to be cleared and prepared for cultivation literally in a matter of hours.

Cultivating, harrowing, rolling, sowing—all these have been speeded up, and even if the Glenshee weather remains much the same as it always was, there is no doubt that the present-day farmer is determined to farm his holding as efficiently as possible, and so improve its fertility and production in every way possible.

Highland Games

HIGHLAND games and contests can be traced back to the ninth century when Kenneth MacAlpine became King of the Picts and the Scots. But even as late as the 18th century these gatherings were small informal affairs.

In fact, after the disasters of the 1745 Rebellion and the defeat of Prince Charles Edward at Culloden it looked as if these meetings of the clansmen were finished for ever. The Government was determined to destroy once and for all the power of the Highland clans. By the Disarming Act of 1747 judicial rights of the chieftains were abolished, the bearing of arms and the wearing of tartan forbidden, and the bagpipes declared an instrument of war!

Thereafter Highland gatherings had to go "underground," and nearly a hundred years passed before the kilts and the banners appeared again, and the contests were held in accordance with custom.

In 1832 a Royal Highland Society was formed in Braemar, and it daringly held a gathering in the autumn of that year. It proved a popular revival, and sixteen years later no less a personage than Queen Victoria attended the gathering at Braemar. So all was forgiven, and by this gracious act Her Majesty not only set the seal of success on this Deeside venture, but restored the Highland Games to its place of honour in Scottish tradition.

No doubt Highland Games developed in a natural way, and the passing of years has altered them very little. Nowadays there may be more preparation and organisation in connection with a gathering, but the friendly rivalry in the traditional events goes on in much the same way as formerly.

Tossing the Caber, the most spectacular feat of the "heavy" events, was probably evolved by woodsmen tossing the trees they had felled. Throwing the hammer probably originated outside the smithy door, where highlanders whiled away the time by throwing the blacksmith's forehammer as they waited for their horses to be shod. Putting the stone started with men taking rounded "water bools" from the river-bed and competing to see who could putt them farthest. Footracing, vaulting, leaping, dancing—all these came into the athletic picture in the same sort of way. The highlanders were accustomed to energetic pursuits, and they took a pride in their physical prowess.

Nowadays, Highland Gatherings mean different things to different people. The Braemar Royal Highland Gathering means to many (including hundreds of visitors from overseas) a Royal occasion and a day of colourful Scottish pageantry, lavish in its crowds, its music, its competitors and its setting. Glenisla Highland Gathering, on the other hand, is small and intimate by comparison. Yet it is charming in its own way, and delightful in its setting by river and crag.

To other people—exponents and followers of the Highland pipe-music tradition—a Highland Gathering is a pipe-music festival, and to others again it means a meeting of the land's most accomplished Highland dancers. And this is as it should be, for one of the original objects of the Braemar Royal Highland Society was the preservation of the music, games and dress of the Highlanders of Scotland. Indeed, with thoughts of interpreting these ideals in as practical a way as possible, the Society later started its own school of piping and dancing.

But lastly, perhaps (though not least) the Highland Gathering is the "jousting-haugh" or field of contest for those kilted stalwarts who practice the ancient traditions of Highland sport—caber-tossing, hammer-throwing, wrestling, jumping and the like. And it is difficult to say who enjoy this more, the participants or the spectators!

A special word on Tossing the Caber. This is undoubtedly one of Scotland's oldest athletic events, and is always a great attraction. In fact, it is something of a revelation to overseas visitors when they discover that these big Scotsmen are determined to toss a huge tree trunk into the air!

Usually the caber is from 15 to 19 feet long, and may be 10 inches in diameter at the thick end, tapering to 5 inches at the thin end. In the open caber competition at Braemar a special prize is offered to the competitor making the best toss of the Society's caber, which is 19 ft 3 ins long and weighs 120 lbs.

In caber tossing the competitor tries to make a perfect toss by turning the caber over from the spot where he is standing. This is a very difficult feat, and calls for judgment and balance. The contest is judged on the best three tosses. The perfect toss is known as the "twelve o'clock toss," and requires great skill as well as great strength.

For visitors to Glenshee the following list of Highland Gatherings and dates will be useful:—

Strathardle Highland Gathering — 4th Saturday in August.
Braemar Gathering — 1st Thursday in September.
Pitlochry Highland Games — 2nd Saturday in September.
Glenisla Games — Friday nearest to 20th August.