

## SKI NOTES, 1941-42.

THE 1941-42 ski season was one of the best for many years, with skiable snow on Deeside from January 18 until the first Saturday in May. But, alas, few people had the time to take advantage of it. As often happens the season opened late. I have skied on Craiglich as early as October 30, but last season I took my ski to Inver at New Year and did not use them—no snow. In January and February a number of Service men, British and others, had some good skiing both from Ballater and Braemar. It was not until Easter, however, that I was again able to take my ski up Deeside when I went to Braemar for the best part of a week. There was by that time no snow in the village. The first day we attempted Ben Macdhui; the Sròn Riach was well covered and, with skins, we made good progress although there was a stiff breeze blowing and clouds were gathering. By the time that we got to the top of the Sròn the mist was so thick that there was little point in going farther, since skiing in mist is very little fun. The first part of the run down was difficult, with many wind ridges and visibility very bad. Farther down we got on to the eastern side of the ridge where the conditions were excellent and we had a good run to the burn.

Next day we tried Lochnagar, but again we were defeated by mist. We climbed to the back of the Stuic Buttress and took the run down the burn, *i.e.*, north-west. By this time it was raining or snowing alternately and the run was far below its best. As we returned, however, the weather improved and we had many fast and amusing runs down the burn where the snow was excellent spring snow, which always flatters one's skiing. Our next objective was Càrn an Tuirc, but here it was no better—mist and rain. Once more, when we got lower, it cleared and we climbed in clear weather to the western shoulder of Sròn na Gaoithe and were rewarded by a magnificent run to the burn. I had a day off when it rained, then once more to Càrn an Tuirc, which, in good conditions, gives one of the best runs in the district. On this occasion we were accompanied by a member of the Polish Forces. The mist was even worse than before, although the snow was good. We lost our Polish friend in the mist, and when we found him he had lost a ski! Fortunately, there was a large island in the snow on to which the ski had run. As Sròn na Gaoithe was again clear we negotiated a snow-bridge and climbed up a snow-covered burn. Suddenly my companion disappeared—all but her head. Fortunately, there was little water in the burn and no harm was done. The running on the way down was very good and fast.

Another day of rain followed, and then, after a morning of mist and rain, a beautiful blue sky and bright sun—the day I had been waiting for! But now it was too late to get to any of the continuous snow-fields, so after studying the apparently small snow patches on Morrone I carried my ski up to a snowfield just above the 2,500 contour to the north-west

of the summit. After a few runs here I had a most entertaining run down, the best of the week. There was perfect spring snow, and frequently the run was so narrow that there was scarcely room to turn. I was able to ski within 100 yards of the road at Tomintoul, and for the whole distance I had to cross not more than a total of 200 yards of heather. So ended my season for 1941-42. But had I been more energetic I could have had some perfect running on the first Saturday in May when I walked over Ben Macdhuì and Cairngorm of Derry in perfect weather—bright sunshine and blue sky—but I did not have my ski with me. From the summit of Macdhuì down to the point where one strikes off for Cairngorm of Derry was a continuous snow-field, and by carrying one's ski for about a quarter of a mile one could get on to a continuous snow-field on the north-west of Derry Cairngorm where one could have skied about a quarter of the way down. But ski-ing in Scotland is full of "might-have-beens," and that is part of its attraction. Fortune favours the brave.

H. J. B.

The unusually heavy fall of snow early in 1942 provided much better sport than usual on the lower hills near Aberdeen, and several week-ends were spent during February and March on the slopes of Cairn William on Donside. One week-end in February a fresh fall lying on already compact and deep snow supplied first-rate conditions, especially where, on the south and west sides, a brilliant sun had consolidated it on to the foundation.

At the Joint Meet of the Cairngorm and Etchachan Clubs at the Inver Hotel on March 1 six members, mainly of the latter Club, climbed on ski from within a hundred yards of the hotel to the top of Culardoch. The lower slopes had a covering of fresh snow on a hard under-surface, and the ascent was achieved with comparatively little effort by the use of sealskins. The summit plateau was found to be windswept, hard and polished, and on the descent those with ski fitted with metal edges had the advantage. As we were sitting at lunch in the brilliant sunshine admiring the view of the snow-covered precipices of Lochnagar to the south, it was suddenly noticed that a halo round the sun could be seen through snow-glasses, but that when these were removed the phenomenon was not nearly so marked. Once observed it was seen to persist for over two hours.

The best ski-ing of the season was undoubtedly in April when W. Lawson, R. O. Scott, and W. Bennet (J.M.C.S.) spent a week at Lui Beg, others joining them at the week-ends.

On Sunday, April 12, Ben Macdhuì was climbed in mist via the Luibeg Burn to the path above Loch Etchachan and thence to the top, as unfortunately the snow on the Sròn Riach was too patchy. The run down was slow at first, but improved as more crystalline snow was reached on the lower slopes. A hard frost overnight and a clear sky made the running much faster on the Monday, one party climbing Derry Cairngorm, and others traversing Ben Macdhuì to Cairn Lochan.



SKI LANDSCAPE

*F. W. Morgan*

The rest of the week was perfect ski-ing weather, with frosty nights, a blazing sun by day, and practically no wind, the only fault being the rapidity with which the snow-line receded. We must have appeared strange objects clad only in snow-glasses, trousers and boots, with liberal applications of glacier cream to prevent the uncomfortable effects of excess sun. In a climate such as ours it is seldom that I have experienced such marvellous conditions holding so long during early spring at this altitude.

Tuesday night was spent at Corrou Bothy, and the following day the cliff edge from Devil's Point to Cairn Toul and Angel's Peak was traversed, with finally a very fast run down from the latter to the head of Glen Geusachan. Unfortunately, there was no snow in the glen itself and the ski had to be carried back to Corrou and from there, after tea, to Derry Lodge.

After an off-day good runs on the north-west slopes of Derry Cairngorm were made on Friday. The texture of the snow on the steeper parts near the top was rather peculiar as, although it was all homogeneous and crystalline, the sun had apparently softened the upper surface so much that, when turning, the ski tended to make the soft surface layer slip over the crystalline snow beneath.

Ben Macdhui was again ascended on Saturday and Sunday by the Luibeg Burn, the snow from the cairn down to Loch Etchachan in the bed of the stream north of the path being perfect crystalline spring snow and probably the fastest of the week. The rest of the descent was made as before by the Luibeg Burn.

Although the snow was disappearing rapidly several enthusiastic members took ski to Derry Lodge at the May holiday week-end and were repaid by fast conditions from the summit plateau of Ben Macdhui to Loch Etchachan.

Though the snow did not lie so long on the Cairngorms as in 1941, it provided on the whole better ski-ing than last season, and it is to be hoped that there will be sufficient snow in 1943 to enable us to enjoy to the full this exhilarating sport, and to justify us in considering that our journey is really necessary.

R. O. S.

A generous covering of snow on the ground and the brilliant light of a full moon on a night in April 1942 induced a party of us to attempt Lochnagar on ski. We left Braemar at 1 A.M. and cycled to the Suspension Bridge. We had intended to ski through the Ballochbuie forest, but on reaching there we found the snow on the track iron-hard, which rendered ski-ing without skins impossible, so we walked through the forest till we came to the valley above the tree-line. There we found the snow much more suitable, and adjusting our ski we slid smoothly onwards to Lochnagar.

The full moon lit up the snow-covered mountain, which sparkled myriad-pointed from myriads of snow-crystals. In its bright light the icy slopes gleamed coldly and the forms of the party were boldly

silhouetted on the unbroken snow. There was no whisper of wind; it was breathlessly beautiful.

We made straight for the western corrie, crossing the Sandy Loch. On reaching the corrie we stopped and planted our ski and ski-sticks. Grasping our ice-axes we began the slow, steep climb to the summit plateau. Frequently we paused, panting for breath, glad to stop and admire the moon now sinking westwards behind thin streaks of purple cloud. The precipices of An Stuc gleamed dim and white against a golden purple haze. As we pushed upwards again, feet plunging into snow (how smooth and effortless by comparison the movement on ski), the eastern sky began to grow paler.

The summit of Lochnagar was reached at dawn. Summit boulders, so familiar in summer weather, were now unrecognisable; the indicator hidden; never was so much snow here, nor such beauty of wind-sculptured snow-flowers. And those immense cliffs at the Eastern Corrie! Nearly a thousand feet of sheer rock, covered in every inch with snow or ice; curling cornices; icicles draped in flowers of snow; the whole corrie glistening in the pale dawn light.

Exhilarated by all this beauty, and with excited thoughts of the views awaiting us when the sun rose red to transform by its colour the whole of that corrie, we did not stop, but went admiringly round the summit plateau to the Meikle Pap. While we breakfasted here a cold north wind blew powdered snow into every crevice of our clothing, and the sun, somewhat colourless, rose hesitatingly above gathering clouds.

More cloud drove down from the north. In the brief half-hour of sunlight we traversed the foot of the corrie to the Black Spout. Familiar slopes of immense tumbled boulders were replaced by a uniform whiteness; until we reached the shelter of the gully bottom the snow was blown mercilessly into our faces; great precipices towered gleaming-white and terrible above us; it was exhilarating and the beauty of it all defies description.

Low cloud capping the mountain cheated us of the warm sunshine that should have been ours in that sheltered gully. The photographer too was cheated of that light which would have turned snow-crystal and icicle and climbing companions, precipice, mountain, and sky into vivid and colourful pictures.

We conquered the Black Spout to find ourselves in thick cloud with visibility at 10 yards. Fifteen minutes brought us upon our upward tracks; a rapid glissade replaced the toilsome ascent of the earlier hours; we tore downhill out of the cloud, straight towards our ski. The remaining 5 miles were mostly gentle downhill gliding—a pleasant contrast to the weary trudge of a day's end on foot.

After twelve memorable hours on the hill we re-entered Braemar.

MARY FARQUHARSON.