

THE LIFE PRESERVERS' SOCIETY.

II. Glen Tanar to Ballogie by the Fir Mounth Path.

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THE party assembled at Aberdeen on a perfect spring morning in 1934 and got away, shortly after 9 o'clock, in most comfortable cars. Our immediate destination, by way of Aboyne, was the Braeloine Bridge in Glen Tanar, from which we would cross the hills by the Fir Mounth path to Glencat and Ballogie, where we would rejoin the cars.

I was in the leading car—a rather luxurious one—and owing to the comfort of a back corner seat and to the monotony of the threadbare discussion about the West Kirk that was started by two of my companions, I fell sound asleep shortly after leaving Aberdeen.

I must have slept soundly for some considerable time and was suddenly awakened by someone shouting "CONFOUND IT, WE ARE ON THE WRONG ROAD, AND THAT IS ALFORD IN FRONT AND NOT ABOYNE!" And, sure enough, it was Alford and I was at once blamed for the mistake, as I was in the leading car and, as pilot, should have kept the driver right. It was my duty to do so and it was no excuse to plead that I had been mesmerised by the West Kirk discussion. Anyway, here we were within a mile of Alford and the weather had changed for the worst—in fact, almost for the very worst. Instead of the bright sunny morning that we had had at Aberdeen it was now a cold, raw morning with rain and a strong south-east wind. The problem now was whether to drive south across country to Aboyne or tell the drivers to take the cars to Lumphanan and wait there for us while we walked across country to that village. As the weather was not good enough for the Fir Mounth path we decided to walk to Lumphanan and started at once.

We left the main road at a point about one mile east of Alford, turned south and, after walking for about a quarter of a mile, noticed the gloomy-looking Balfuig Castle on our right. It seemed to be an object worthy of our inspection and it might give us shelter from the storm, so we made for it with all speed. The castle turned out to be used as a hostel for hens, living and dead. We examined the interior of the castle and the hens in great detail, thereby putting off the moment when we would require to face the storm.

But we could not spend the whole day there and we reluctantly left the hens' hostel, faced due south, and at once encountered the first barbed-wire fence. After crossing it we soon reached a decayed mansion-house, called Little Endovie, beyond which rose the forbidding slopes of a hill called the Strone. To reach it we had to cross several of the barbed-wire abominations which seemed to be a speciality of the local farmers. While surmounting the Strone our party showed signs of disintegration, as visibility was bad, some going to the right, which was wrong, and others to the left, which was just as bad, quite irrespective of the compass bearing. By good staff work, that is by sheer luck, we all met again on the farther side of the hill, where it at once became evident that no one had any clear idea as to where we actually were. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that everyone knew exactly where *he* was ; but that no two opinions were the same ! In the valley on our right there was a good road which looked as if it might lead to an inn, called Muggarthaugh, and we made for it (the road, *not* the inn) at once, or at least as fast as the intervening barbed-wire fences would permit. Overcoming these without any damage, we reached the road, which we were told was a bit of the old drove road leading from Fochabers to Brechin.

Two cowardly suggestions were now made. The first was that we should take shelter at the inn and send an S O S to the cars at Lumphanan telling them to come to the inn and pick us up there. The second, failing acceptance of the first, was that we should abandon the cross-country barbed-wire business and simply take the good road from Muggarthaugh to Lumphanan by Craigievar and Crossroads. Both of these

two suggestions were at once turned down with the contempt that they deserved and the party, before Muggarthaugh would have been reached, turned left by the road leading to Little Lynturk. The total distance covered to date was three statute miles plus eight barbed-wire fences, an average of 2.67 per route mile.

Before actually reaching Little Lynturk we decided that we had had enough of roads, so we left the road and made south across fields to a wood on the north side of a hill, 909 feet high, which might give us some slight shelter from the storm. Being uphill, it meant several rests; but time saw us through and on passing the summit of the hill we saw a dreary scene to the south. In front there was a range of bleak snow-clad hills, the upper slopes of which were hidden by driving mist. But in the immediate foreground there was a desolate farm steading which we made for at once, as it promised shelter. To reach it we had, of course, to cross many barbed-wire fences of most intricate design, and finally found our way blocked by a ploughed field sodden with melting snow. It was very soft indeed, but several of the party boldly stepped across and into the softest part. The farm was appropriately called Claymill and thoroughly merited that name. We were kindly invited into the kitchen and in it, in the local dialect, "ate our pieces." We were a bit hungry as we had by now walked $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles, which showed that we had been going hard. The kitchen was warm and clean—at least the floor had been clean until we brought into it a large part of the ploughed field. We tarried in the farm for a long time and would have willingly waited longer; but we had to get on, as time was passing.

We still had the chance of turning right and joining the good Craigievar road; but no, as our braver members insisted that an equally good road led from Tillyfour almost direct to Lumphanan, and it would perhaps give us further valuable experience in crossing barbed-wire fences. So we made for Tillyfour and its "direct road." The barbed-wire fences were there right enough, and plenty of them; but the road, when reached, was found to be mostly impracticable on account of soft snow and pools of water, and we had to take

to the fields and the fences. We were now at a height of about 800 feet and almost up to the snow-line on the western slopes of the hill called (if you can pronounce it) Benaquhallie.

However, after several miles of roughish work we reached the back entrance to Tullochvenus and shortly afterwards the Tarland road. Our troubles now seemed to be over, as all that we had to do was to turn to the right and pick up the straight road leading south over the hills, past Glenshalg, to Lumphanan, which we did. Unfortunately, this straight old road was a complete fraud. The only decent bit was uphill, and when we reached the summit the road was filled right across from side to side with snow-slush a foot in depth, as was proved by some of the party. The downhill part was in a shocking condition, badly broken up with ruts and overrun in many places with water and mud. It was most uncomfortable and apparently never-ending. Trudging down it and feeling that we would never reach Lumphanan, we suddenly turned a corner and there, just in front, were the two motor-cars waiting for us. We tumbled into them, snuggled into comfortable corner seats, shouted "Torphins" to the drivers, and I almost instantly fell sound asleep!

And I was almost as suddenly awakened by someone shaking me and shouting in my ear "WAKE UP, OLD MAN, WE ARE AT THE BRAELOINE BRIDGE," and, sure enough, we were and the whole affair had been a mighty bad barbed-wire dream. It was a perfect morning and not yet 10 o'clock. We left the cars, crossed the Braeloine Bridge and hit the Fir Mounth path. This we followed for slightly over a mile, to where it dipped down to cross the Burn of Skinna, and from there we struck up the hills which we crossed to the north of the Hill of Duchery, and then picked up the path leading down Glen Cat to Ballogie, where we found the two cars waiting for us. Thence to Torphins for tea, and home to Aberdeen. It had been a delightful walk with no barbed-wire fences to cross!

The above "dream" is an accurate description of a walk from Alford to Lumphanan made by the L.P.S. on another occasion.