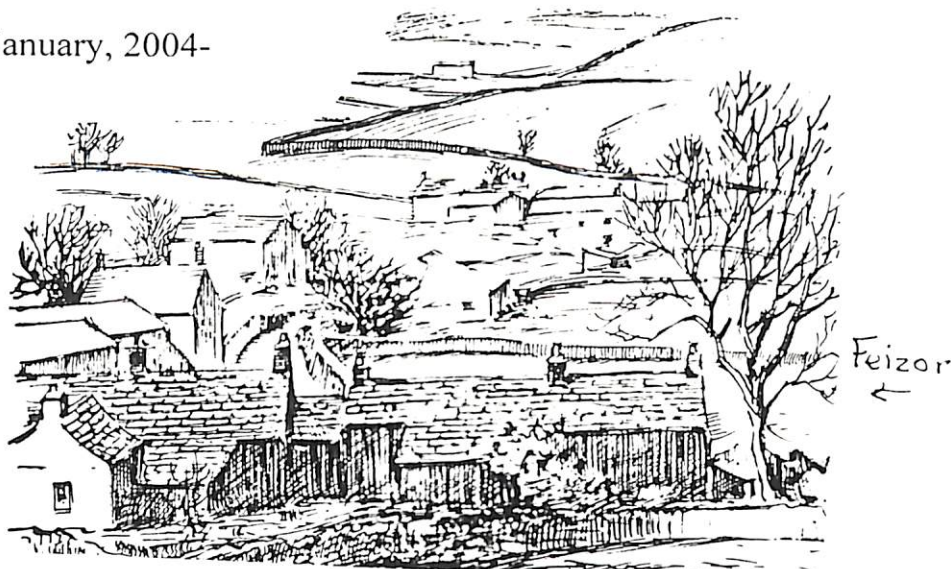


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## SNOWTIME AND SMEARSETT

29 January, 2004-



*The Snowtimers:* David, Cyril (wearing bright blue gaiters), Bill. Not forgetting Popsie, the dog, who spent most of the time finding, carrying and retrieving sticks.

*Weather:* Bright and sunny. Lying snow was crunchy underfoot and knee-high drifts were to be found along the wallsides. Worsening conditions in the afternoon but, mercifully, only a few drops of rain.

We set off from David's house on foot and moved gingerly down the road in Meadow Rise – a road which in places had affinities with a glacier. After a short distance on the Stackhouse road, we turned into the lane leading to Giggleswick Scar. Popsie retrieved a stick she had left behind during a walk last evening when, said David, there were two roe deer in the field adjacent to the wood. The lane was plated with packed snow. A great tit went into its springtime aria – a sound akin to that made by a rusty saw.

As we left the cover of the wood, we had the blinding experience of being on a snowfield in full sunlight. We opted for "sudden death" and went directly up the slope, under the steady gaze of sheep that stood on the skyline, with light visible between their bodies and the ground. Glancing dalewards, we then turned towards Penyghent which, coated with snow, looked like an iced cake.

Huge vehicles were working at the bottom of the huge limestone quarry. David mentioned the profusion of flowers to be seen along the rim of the quarry in spring. As he led us to the Cairn, Bill whistled some strains by Elgar who, as a young man, visited his friend Dr Buck at Giggleswick. He was later to write to Buck's daughter of the fun they had "hunting cats on the scars". Imprinted on the crisp snow were the footprints of rabbit and, perhaps, roe deer.

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It was <sup>doubtless</sup> from the area of the cairn that Elgar had his first clear view of the Lake District, which he visited periodically in later life. The skyline was crowned by some of the Pennine giants – Ingleborough, Whernside, Penyghent, Fountains Fell. David, looking towards Lakeland, picked out in a light mist the form of Great End and a connecting ridge. We descended an ankle-wrenching slope to the main path. ~~It was quite warm.~~ Asked if he was reminded of his visits to Switzerland, Cyril said that there he walked in snowy places in shirt sleeves.

We had two <sup>stiles</sup> ~~slides~~ – and attendant drifts - to negotiate. A signpost indicated we had travelled “1 1/2m”. For a time we followed a line of footprints which, if they were made by wellies, as we supposed, indicated that a farmer might be on his rounds. ~~We~~ <sup>were</sup> now on a path across a vast pasture. The limestone was completely covered by snow, which had swirled, then settled in saucer-like dewponds.

David asked if we would like to go on to the Smearsett ridge as opposed to taking the usual footpath between Feizor and Knight Stainforth. We began the slow descent to Feizor, under the unblinking stare of a host of sheep, brought down from higher ground ahead of the snow, and now dining on hay. So we came to Feizor, which was devoid of humans but had a full complement of dogs which maintained a round of barking. As we turned out of Feizor, towards Oxenber, we passed Jack's Cottage. David recalled when, visiting Feizor, he saw a notice relating to the recent death of a dog and listing other dogs in what ~~we~~ <sup>now</sup> thought of as “the hamlet of barking dogs.”

The road lay along the side of Oxenber Wood. We saw a gateway with the impression <sup>in snow</sup> not only of the wheels of a Land Rover but its sump. As we turned for the climb to the Smearsett ridge, a pheasant rose noisily from behind a wall. We presumed it was owned by our good friend Pat MacEvoy. The path we now followed rose through a boulderscape, with diminutive thorn trees (doubtless cropped by sheep). We were heading for a small ash tree on the horizon. David was confident that beyond was a stile that ~~would~~ give us access to the walk across the top of the limestone scar. Beyond the tree was indeed a stile; and beyond the stile a mini-drift of snow.

The first of the cairns was on Potts Scar, which was now being strummed by a chilly breeze. The windbreak we might have used was crumbly. On the way to Smearsett, David found the footprints of what he presumed was a stoat – most certainly a light animal, for its feet had merely brushed the snow and had not sunk in appreciatively. The stoat's slot marks ended where the snow was deeply imprinted by the feet of a rabbit.

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We butted behind a wall. Our rubber mats rested on snow, which was spattered with rabbit droppings. A census revealed that Cyril's sandwiches were of Edam cheese, David was crunching potato crisps and nutritional bars and Bill had sandwiches of tuna and mayonnaise. Popsie hoovered up the food scraps and also ate the dog biscuits supplied by David. A raven that glided backwards and forwards over Smearsett proper was a plaything of the wind.

Resuming our walk, we saw the Celtic wall in a large pasture at much lower level. Smearsett, at 1,200 ft (or thereabouts) was <sup>now</sup> a draught ridge, from which (said David) there is the finest panoramic view in all England. Indeed. Apart from the peaks already mentioned we saw Attermire down the dale and, far to the west, Pendle Hill, now being <sup>over-FUN</sup> strummed by low cloud. The descent from Smearsett was exciting. We moved crabwise, on a steep slope, in deep snow, backed by a sky as blue as that on a picture postcard. We watched a goods train passing on the Settle-Carlisle line.

More stiles, more drifts, more sheep, patronising stacks formed of bales of hay, and then we were on the homeward stretch, along a track that began at Knight Stainforth and, at one point, passed in a narrow, wall-flanged gap where snow was piled up to a considerable depth. We had our last supping-up near a dewpond in which the snow and ice were stained brown from local deposits of clay.

The last stretch was the same as the first, thus neatly completing a circle, with Popsie still playing games with sticks, and lowering clouds threatening <sup>ed</sup> rain or hail. The distance covered was around eight and a-half miles.



An early rambler,