

NATURE DIARY

*Wild and lonely windswept spaces
Where the whaups and peewits cry,
Cry above the old sea places
'Neath the deserts of the sky.*

BLEAK IT may be in November, but Buddon Ness is never without its fascination—even when the lovely grass of Parnassus flowers and the autumn gentians have faded. The coppices of sea-buckthorn still hold their haze of orange-hued “whisky berries”, and first catkins on the willows and alders proclaim that all the coming year lies ready.

The two lighthouses and the keeper's house have been vandalised, but are still a part of our historic heritage.

“The High” and “The Low”—they were not the original “Lights of Tay”, even if they have stood for 127 years. There were beacons (coal-fired) at Buddon Ness as early as 1685.

The beacons were later replaced by a stone-built tower when George, 3rd Earl of Panmure, feued a portion of ground to the Seamen's Fraternity of Dundee, for which he charged a nominal ground annual of five shillings.

Two boundary stones marking this ground are still to be seen, carrying the letters SF for Seamen's Fraternity and M for Maule.

The 17th century tower was superseded in 1866 by the two lighthouses standing today, but the lower part of the tower is still attached to the keeper's house and was used for many years as a storeroom.

Lined up, the two lighthouses gave a leading light into the shipping channel of

the Firth. The fickle nature of the sandbanks had, however, not been accounted for. The line of the channel soon changed and the “lead in” was dangerously faulty.

An extraordinary plan was then decided upon—to move the Low Lighthouse holus-bolus to a new position!

And it was done, carefully and calmly, by engineers from Dundee harbour. The lighthouse was packed up, set on rollers well lubricated with tallow, soap and black lead, and then inched along to its new site.

But sad to tell, it was all in vain. The sandbanks and the shipping channel moved again. The lighthouses were taken out of commission, and their role taken over by the Abertay lightship.

Then, in more recent times, the lightship was itself replaced by a buoy.

A long history from beacon to buoy!



COLIN GIBSON

CORNER

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NOBODY could call them mountains, for the highest top is only 90 feet. Yet every eminence on Barry Links has its traditional name. There is Hog's Back, the Green Braes, St Helena, Spion Kop, the Pinnacle, North Hill, the Lighthouse Bluff.

All this is Army ground, and classed as a Danger Area. But Buddon Ness has always had an element of danger. Many a ship has foundered or been stranded at the Gaa, the Norse-named entrance to the Firth of Tay, and the loss of the Broughty Ferry lifeboat crew is fresh enough in our memories.

Danger, too, has always lain on the landward side. On John Adair's map of Angus, dated 1793, he wrote across the Sandy Downs, "The Sandhills of Barry are perfectly barren, and in high winds it is dangerous to be near them." With a gale blowing, and every dune belching sand like a volcano, it is well to heed the warning.

Nevertheless thousands of inhabitants

(in the way of flora and fauna) find life less perilous in the midst of the shot and shell of this battle training area than in the ordinary countryside.

Roe deer, otter, stoat and other mammals find shelter in the woods and thickets of sea-buckthorn, and many butterflies and moths flourish in territory free from the use of pesticides.

Wild birds are remarkably tolerant of whizzing bullets and exploding shells. Nesting goes on virtually undisturbed by military manoeuvres. Flowers grow unmolested in their natural habitats, whether salt-marsh, dunes, woodland or moor.

One of the smallest (and most dedicated) of Government Departments is the Defence Ministry's Conservation Section. Meetings are held at Buddon Camp from time to time to discuss any significant change in flora or fauna, and to tackle any problem.

Buddon Ness has a climate of its own, with cold winds springing up in the tumult of tides at the bar of the Tay, and frequent haar. Because of this, the plant-life (and bird-life too) have a curious affinity with hill tops far inland and countries far north.

Three years ago (it was then a closely guarded secret) two longtailed skuas spent the summer on the moors, and almost certainly nested unsuccessfully. But these birds of the Arctic held their territory, dive-bombing all intruders. Graceful and buoyant, they were fascinating to watch.

The Commandant (a keen observer of wildlife) got some good photographs, and I myself painted them in flight. I gave this picture to the Commandant, and it now hangs in the Officers' Mess. "Prince Charles had a good look at it, last time he was here," the Commandant told me.



COLIN GIBSON

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