

WHETHER THE WEATHER



I am writing this on Monday and the weather is totally different to the Monday two weeks ago when we had SNOW! Sid, the youngest dog had never seen it before and didn't know what to make of it. Pip loved it, rolled in it and ate it while Bud ignored it completely.

In 1963 when we lived in Kent there was a lot of snow which wasn't cleared from the country roads until snow blowers were brought in; these blew the snow over the hedges out of the way. Some of the fields were on very high ground and Dave had sheep grazing on them so as they couldn't get to the grass he had to carry hay and silage to them every day; silage is virtually pickled grass! The grass is cut with a tractor mounted implement that blows it into a trailer then it is offloaded into a 'silage clamp'. It is packed as tight as possible, has treacle added then sealed and left to ferment, giving off the most awful smell unless you are a sheep, when the sheep need it, it is forked into silage racks. That particular season, eventually the ewes couldn't reach the grass and it just kept snowing. They were heavy in lamb; the danger being that in addition to a good diet they needed exercise or else they could develop pregnancy toxemia which can be fatal. The tractor driver who also drove the crawler tractor was sent to clear paths through the snow for the sheep using the bulldozer blade. Tommy was a big man and nothing was too hard for him to do. He had to drive the crawler in a spiral on the fields starting on the outside and radiating inwards to the centre. The logic behind this is that the sheep would walk along the cleared snow, then turn round and walk back again! He was working in one field which was on the side of a hill, when he suddenly found the crawler slipping sideways with the caterpillar tracks acting like a toboggan. He was petrified! Then suddenly, the vehicle stopped - by two strand of barbed wire above a chalk pit. Tommy somehow got down from the tractor, no cabs in those days, looking as white as the chalk. The last heavy snow here was about eight years ago at the beginning of January; I had Philip and Andrea two of the grandchildren staying; Peter and Brenda and their three came from Aldershot and we decided to go sledging. We still had the sledge that David's father had made for him when he was a boy. We decided to go along to the middle water meadow where there's a steep slope taking with us some plastic sacks as well as the sledge. There were other families along there and we all had a marvellous time, one of the images I have was of eleven year old Philip hurtling down the slope on his front on a sack with three year old Michael sitting on his back!

There was an ice storm about thirty years ago when Dave was working for Mr. Trewby. The sheep at that time were mainly kept in fields by three strand electric fencing which was moved as necessary. Freezing rain, completely unexpected, fell coating the wires with ice, the weight of which caused the fencing to collapse, and the sheep to escape. The sheep, being sheep, not only became muddled up but wandered off as well. Keep watching the weather forecasts!

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