

The mechanics and the drivers moved to a place that was free of sand and dust some 2 km from Baller, where they could overhaul the motors more conveniently. The ground near their camp was level and hard; and they dug a rectangular pit in which they could easily get at the cars from underneath.

It grew colder as the New Year approached. On the night of December 30th the temperature was -30.7° C. (-23.25° F). On New Year's Eve, dried poplar trunks were dragged together and piled up in a high pyramid, to which were added dry boughs, twigs and rubbish. Just before twelve o'clock we filed out, each man carrying a candle. The stroke of twelve was announced by a gun-shot, whereupon we all advanced to the bonfire and lit it with the flames of the burning candles. Then we sat down round the blinding fire, which illuminated the leafless poplars close by. Whole clusters of sparks sprang into the night sky; and the glowing embers crackled and spat till they fell to the ground one by one, producing new comet's tails of sparks. The temperature was -20° C.; but we could have roasted ourselves if we had liked.

The thick undergrowth of tamarisks on the other bank of the Oboin-gol swarmed with pheasants. The followers of Buddha do not kill birds. The pheasants, though otherwise rather stupid, know that they are immune; and so they came right up to our tents. But these particular birds made a mistake. Our guns were no Buddhists, and during our stay on the Oboin-gol we had pheasant nearly every meal. However, I forbade shooting in the neighbourhood of the camp, for I myself could sit for hours watching the beautiful, dignified birds as they strutted towards the kitchen on the edge of the river-bank. There, in the bed of the river, a well was dug, around which fragments of ice always lay strewn. The well was the first objective of each pheasant patrol.

New Year's Day passed peacefully and quietly. There was not a breath of air. The sky arched its blue dome over the silent wood. 1934, a year of uncertainty, had begun. What would the coming days bring us? We knew nothing about the situation in Sinkiang. News items which had appeared in the Peking papers were only rumours, and not consistent. No caravans, no travellers or messengers from the mysterious great province passed by the Edsen-gol. And if we had got reliable news from Sinkiang, should we have turned back? Certainly not. We had undertaken a task; and we were determined to ride out all possible storms.

PETROL SUPPLY.

Our mechanics reckoned up our supply of petrol, consisting of 263 five-gallon and 38 thirty-gallon drums. There were 27 gallons more in the tanks of the five cars. We had consumed 760 gallons and calculated that we should require 450 gal-