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PROGRESS REPORT

OF

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FOREST ADMINISTRATION

IN THE

PROVINCE OF ASSAM

FOR THE YEAR

1929-30.



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3.—PROTECTION OF FORESTS.

(a) General Protection—(Form No. 13).

19. The total number of new cases during the year was 1,714 against 1,799 in the preceding year. Of 337 cases taken into court, convictions were obtained in 205 cases, 22 resulted in acquittal and the balance, *viz.*, 110 cases remained pending at the close of the year. The percentage of acquittals to the number of cases tried was 11 against 10 in the previous year.

20. The question of game preservation in Assam is one that deserves to be taken up again (it might prove finally) in view of the pace at which the Unclassed State Forests are disappearing before advancing settlement, and of the failure of many Divisional Forest Officers to recognize their responsibilities in this matter as regards their own reserves. The public, commencing with the Forest Department, needs educating up to the fact that wild animals and the study of their habits are sources of great interest and delight to men of real culture throughout the civilized world, and that it is our duty to preserve them in reasonable numbers and in places, such as the interior of reserves, where they can do no harm to any one.

There are now only 2 sanctuaries in Assam, Kaziranga in Sibsagar and the Monas Sanctuary, made up of the two former contiguous sanctuaries on each side of the Monas. These are destined to become famous places in the course of time, provided adequate protection can be afforded to the animals they shelter. Kaziranga remains fairly free from poachers, but the reverse is the case on the Monas, which is infested by bands of Cacharis armed with unlicensed guns for the destruction of rhino and, so they aver, of any human who dares to interfere with them.

Rhino horns have always been valuable in India because of some supposed aphrodisiacal virtue but apparently still more so in China, the demand for which market has caused the extermination of *Rhinoceros sondaicus* in Burma except for a few individual specimens closely guarded by the Forest Department. China is undoubtedly after our rhino too (*Rhinoceros indicus*), with the consequence that a rhino horn is now worth more than a good pair of elephant tusks.

When, as mentioned in last year's Annual Report, fines of only Rs. 20 and 25 are inflicted for killing these creatures, we can hardly congratulate ourselves that we are doing all that is possible to discourage poaching.

(b) Protection from fire—(Forms Nos. 14 and 15).

21. Fifteen acres of plantation were burnt in Sylhet by a fire of unknown origin and 33 acres in Goalpara. Only 6 out of 5,625 acres were burnt in Kamrup, where protection work has reached a high standard of efficiency. The protected areas contain highly inflammable thatch intersected by a network of village paths. One hundred ten acres out of 9,146 in Periodic Block No. V. in Goalpara were accidentally burnt.

Controlled early burning is practised in the *Sál* forests of Kamrup and Goalpara where necessary.

The fire protection started in the Khalingduar Reserve in Darrang was unsuccessful.

(c) Protection from cattle—(Form No. 16).

22. Damage by cattle is not serious in Assam.

(d) Protection against injuries from natural causes.

23. Climber cutting is well in hand generally in the *Sál* forests. Goalpara had been falling behind, but considerable lee-way was made up this year by cutting the creepers over 27,723 acres, a very satisfactory piece of work. In addition 4,800 acres were freed from creepers during tree marking operations.

Evergreen undergrowth was felled over 1,810 acres in favour of natural regeneration and in this area too the creepers were dealt with.

Climbers were cut over 9,222 acres in the Eastern Circle against 2,500 acres last year.

5. The Conservator is able to report useful progress in silviculture. In particular Mr. Milroy who has devoted much study to the subject, is to be congratulated on the success of the efforts which have been made to ascertain the conditions favourable to the natural regeneration of *sál*.

6. His Excellency in Council agrees with the Conservator that fines of Rs. 20 are quite inadequate in the rare cases where it is found possible to obtain convictions for killing rhino or elephants in the game sanctuaries. Owing to the remoteness of these sanctuaries it is difficult to obtain witnesses other than the forest subordinates whose evidence some magistrates are inclined to regard as biased and unreliable. The question whether cases in connection with game preservation should be tried only by District or Special Magistrates will be examined.

His Excellency has read with regret and surprise the Conservator's remark that the Manas game sanctuary "is infested by bands of Cacharis armed with unlicensed guns for the destruction of rhino and, so they aver, of any human who dares to interfere with them". No official report about these armed bands of Cacharis has yet been received by Government from either the Conservator or the Commissioner, but if the local officers accept the Conservator's statement as correct and if it is known in what villages these Cacharis live, it ought to be possible to deal with them. The matter is one which requires immediate attention.

7. Altogether 243 elephants were captured in the elephant mahals excluding 56 caught in the Siems' territories in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills where Government receive only half the royalty. Including Rs. 20,000 outstanding royalties of the previous year the total receipts of Government from the elephant mahals were a little over 1½ lakhs.

8. During the year the work of creosoting soft wood species was started by the Assam-Bengal Railway in their new plant at Naharkatia and although the work was not in full swing till July 1929, 220,000 sleepers were treated. The establishment of this plant promises to be equally valuable to the Railway and to the Forest Department, and it is unfortunate, though no doubt inevitable, that the Railway Board has found it necessary for financial reasons to limit the outturn.

The Governor in Council hopes that the discussions with the Assam Railways and Trading Company regarding arrangements for marketing suitably treated Assam timber will bear fruit. It ought not to be necessary, as it unfortunately is at present to use imported timber for the doors and windows of all Government buildings.

9. The Goalpara tramway was extended by two miles in order to serve a more remote part of the forest. Important work was also done in the renewal of bridges with steel in the place of wooden beams, in the re-alignment of one section, and in the replacement of rolling stock. Although closed for three months for repairs the tramway was able to carry all the timber offered. Including outstanding dues of Rs. 57,821 the earnings of the tramway during the year were Rs. 1,49,169 against expenditure on revenue account of Rs. 1,54,774. The large amount of outstanding bills, and also a drop in the total amount of timber carried by the tramway, are attributed to the bad state of the timber market. The clearance of the Garufela river by contractors and its use for floating timber was however partly responsible for the volume of timber carried. The excess of expenditure over earnings is not discussed in the report, but appears to have been due to the extensive repairs found necessary by the recently appointed Forest Engineer. The tramway has now been constituted a separate range directly under the Forest Engineer. Difficulty has been experienced in obtaining an accountant to maintain at Kachugaon the contemplated commercial accounts for the tramway and the forests served by it; but it is hoped that the difficulty has been solved by locating the accountant at Shillong.

10. Orders were issued in 1928 that the Conservator should obtain from the Deputy Commissioners reports on the working of the village forests and incorporate them in his annual report, so that the Governor in Council may be able to see to what extent these areas are of benefit to the people and in what way their management can be improved. In his present report the Conservator has not mentioned what views district officers have expressed on these village forests, but merely gives figures showing that the village forests have decreased by 831 acres. He also criticises the term "village forest" without giving his reasons.

11. Owing to dullness of the lac market there was a slight decrease in the export of lac, royalty of Rs. 2,50,391 on 50,797 maunds being collected against Rs. 2,62,662 on 52,478 maunds in the previous year. The decrease in the export of lac from the Siems' territories in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills was more marked, only 920 maunds

(royalty Rs. 4,604) being exported against 7,334 maunds yielding Rs. 18,376 as royalty. Proposals for improving the marketing facilities of the Mikir lac cultivators are under the consideration of Government.

12. The results of the cinchona experiment in Sibsagar division are reported to be promising, and the Divisional Forest Officer who visited the place reports that it may be found suitable for quinine cultivation.

13. In Cachar and Sylhet where the floods of June 1929 caused much damage to existing roads and bridges, considerable expenditure was necessary on special repairs in both these divisions as well as in Nowgong a large amount of timber, bamboos, reeds, thatching-grass were given free to the villagers affected by the floods, while free grazing was also allowed inside the reserves.

14. Owing to the shortage of officers partly caused by officers taking leave preparatory to premature retirement, the post of Silviculturist has been vacant since the close of the year and is likely to remain so for some time. Mr. Cavendish, Conservator, Eastern Circle, retired shortly after the end of the year being relieved by Mr. Owden.

The thanks of Government are due to both the Conservators for their efficient administration and also to Mr. Milroy for his interesting report. His Excellency in Council has noted the names of the officers mentioned in the report for good work, especially that of Mr. Bor. The latter in addition to being responsible for two working plans is reported by the Conservator to have reorganised most successfully the whole administration of the very important Goalpara division.

By order of the Government of Assam,

W. A. COSGRAVE,

1st November 1930.

Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam.