



Progress Report of Forest  
Administration in the  
Province of Assam  
for the year  
1936-37

SHILLONG

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38. The casualties for the year were as follows:—

*Retired on pension*—One guard.

*On invalid pension*—One guard.

*Resigned*—One Range clerk, two Foresters (one on probation) and six guards.

*Died*—One Forester and five guards.

*Dismissed*—Three Foresters, five guards, two peons, one Range clerk, two *mahouts* and four grass-cutters.

*Reduced in rank*—One Deputy Conservator of Forests, one Deputy Ranger and two Foresters.

*Suspended*—One Forester.

*Services dispensed with*—Four Forester probationers and seven guards.

The list this year is large, reflecting the necessity for keeping only efficient and reliable men for the increased and more responsible work under Working Plans and extended plantation operations.

89. Complaints of shortage of Divisional clerical staff have been received from several Divisions. Audit has no doubt increased work but efforts are being made to simplify office procedure.

90. During the past year the compensatory allowance drawn by Imperial and Provincial officers was withdrawn by the orders of Local Government and instead special pay for service in unhealthy localities has been given to officers in the Kochugaon and Haltugaon Divisions. The case of officers in other unhealthy Divisions is under the consideration of Government.

91. In the Haltugaon Division, Kuklung, Panbari and Bijni were notified as Revenue Stations.

92. During the year the subject of office work in large Ranges has been examined. Several such Ranges need whole-time Range Clerks. At present clerks are engaged in temporary establishment; some time elapses before they are of any real value and by the time that they have gained sufficient experience they are dissatisfied with a fixed pay and limited prospects and seek appointment elsewhere.

Government are being approached to create a new junior cadre in the ministerial establishment for Range Clerks who will then be permanent and be gradually absorbed by promotion in the upper grade of Divisional cadres.

93. In the Sylhet Division complaints have been received regarding the illegal activities of certain subjects of Tripura State in respect of *jhuming* in Reserves and holding up of contractors' logs. There is also a protracted boundary dispute. The question of the advisability of imposing an import duty on Tripura forest produce is now under the consideration of Government.

94. Divisional Forest Officers of Darrang, Nowgong, Kamrup and the Garo Hills report a good deal of illness amongst their staff during the year.

95. Divisional offices were inspected as usual by the Conservator and Range and Beat offices by Divisional Forest Officers.

96. Relations between the Revenue and Forest Officials continued to be good.

## OBITUARY

A. J. W. MILROY

97. By the death of A. J. W. Milroy, Conservator of Forests, Assam, on the 26th September 1936, was removed from our midst not only a man who had the cause of game preservation in India very close to his heart, but also one who introduced a new method of elephant hunting which revolutionised that art as practised in Assam.

Milroy's activities for the cause of Game Preservation in India are well known and he wrote much on the subject, but what is far better, he also translated his words into deeds. It is safe to say that no one knew the Kamrup or Kaziranga Game Sanctuaries as he did and it is also safe to say that no one will ever know them so well. During the activities of the far flung poaching organisation, financed by wealthy traders, which nearly wiped out the rhinoceros in these two sanctuaries in 1930. Milroy was indefatigable in launching a counteroffensive which finally broke up the organisation and landed many of its members in jail. It is entirely due to him that we can now say that for the present these two sanctuaries are safe.

During his time as Conservator in Assam, a third Game Sanctuary has been added to the list. He was also instrumental in creating recently a buffalo sanctuary and it is hoped that his name will be perpetuated by having this sanctuary called after him.

It is not generally realised that modern methods of elephant hunting in Assam and the immense pecuniary gain the Assam Government has derived from this type of forest produce are due to this man who, by force of argument and personality, persuaded Government to allow him to try out his method which he had himself evolved due to his unique knowledge of that animal.

Prior to 1920, the hunting of elephants in Assam was in the hands of Assamese and Kampti Mahaldars, who paid a royalty to Government on each elephant caught. In these days it is difficult to realise, that the methods of only 16 years ago, involving the most unheard of cruelty to the animals, were ever tolerated for a moment. It is only charitable to think that the Government of those days did not know or did not realise that such cruelty existed.

A sketch of the methods of a native mahaldar, no matter how harrowing it may be to the feelings of those who love animals, must be given if the amazing transformation to modern methods is to be fully understood.

The method of catching elephants in Assam by which the herd is driven from a salt-lick to a stockade built nearby, or along one of their own paths into a stockade built astride it, is well known and Milroy himself wrote an illuminating article in the Bombay Natural History Society's *Journal* describing it.

In the old days it was thought by the native mahaldars that it was impossible to take *koonkies* into a stockade until the wild elephants had been weakened by hunger and thirst. Hence it was the practice to leave the herd in the stockade for any thing up to a fortnight or even three weeks before any attempt was made to remove them. The condition of the animals after the lapse of such a period was beyond belief and cannot be imagined by anyone who has never seen it.

The interior of the stockade would be littered with the carcasses of the calves killed by hunger, thirst or gored by maddened tuskers; the tails of the rest would have been bitten off. The picture of those left with sides fallen in, heads down and mouths open with blackened tongue protruding and covered with filth and blood would be a sight never to be forgotten.

Such was the condition of the stockade when the doors were opened and the sleek well-fed *koonkies* marched in and the captives were noosed. The wild elephants would be too exhausted to give any trouble in the stockade, but when dragged out the sight of the open jungle all around and perhaps some glimmerings of their life ahead would urge some of the stronger to make one last effort for freedom. Any attempt of this kind was promptly dealt with by the *phandies*, who slashed open the skin at the back of the neck where the noose fitted and rubbed some sand into the wound.

The tottering beasts were then dragged to the depôt leaving a few more dead from exhaustion on the road.

Arrived at the depôt the elephants were tied up fore and aft and the training proceeded on the principle that the more an elephant is hurt the sooner it learns obedience; hence spears were freely used. As may be imagined, the mahaldar did not engage any Veterinary Surgeon to look after the captures with the result that all abrasions went septic and the most appalling wounds, maggot infested, were a common-place.

Casualties during training were very high; as high as 48 per cent. and for the whole catch might amount to as much as 80 per cent.

Such was the condition of elephant hunting in Assam when Milroy started his agitation after the War for more humane methods in hunting and training. He argued that a noble animal like the elephant would respond to kindness and humane treatment like every other animal, and that the methods hitherto in force could not be tolerated by any civilised Government.

He started on a small scale, and having become convinced of the truth of his arguments he obtained the permission of Government to conduct extensive hunting operations in the North Cachar Hills in 1920-22.

By his operations in the North Cachar Hills, Milroy at once revolutionised elephant hunting in Assam. In the two years, training casualties were reduced to 1 per cent. and the total casualties to not more than 3 per cent.

How did this come about? In the first place must come the man himself. Milroy possessed the most wonderful personality and charm of manner. He spoke Assamese—particularly the Kamrup dialect, extraordinarily well. His knowledge of elephants and of jungle life generally was such that few Europeans acquire and anything that 'Milily Sahib' said would be sure to be favourably, if critically, considered around the camp fires in the training depôts.

Naturally when he said that no wild elephants were to be left in a stockade more than 72 hours the wails of lamentation rose to heaven. Further when he said that no spears were to be taken into the stockade the *phandies* broke down weeping and said 'we are already dead'.

It was characteristic of the man that he rode a *koonkie* into the stockade that housed his first catch. What must have been his pride as he saw all the elephants taken out without a scratch.

In the depôt it was the same thing. A trained Veterinary Surgeon was always present and wounds were properly treated twice a day: no spears were allowed and anyone who used one got a lambasting with the handle thereof.

By the time the operations were over Milroy's method was a proved success and that success has been repeated over and over again in subsequent mahals. This method is now accepted as the only method to be followed in Assam and woe betide the Assamese mahaldar whose casualties exceed the prescribed minimum.

Among other benefits his method proved that elephants could be trained in a very short time: that cruelty was not at all necessary in training; that casualties in the training depôt could be reduced to almost negligible proportions; and that an elephant trained by a mixture of firmness and kindness was in every way superior to a broken-spirited animal trained according to the formal brutal methods.

When elephant hunting, Milroy was indefatigable. He drove with the drivers or acted as doorkeeper at the stockade, or as one of the stops and often bestrode an elephant as a *phandie* in training. In fact he knew the business from A to Z. He refused to accept defeat and on one occasion he drove a herd for seven miles only to see it break through the wings and escape. Most men would have been content to call it a day but not Milroy. He roused the disheartened drivers and conducted them off by a short cut to the place where his knowledge of the country led him to believe the elephants were making for. He headed the elephants and drove them back and succeeded in capturing the whole herd.

Like all animal lovers, Milroy himself shot very little. He was, however, most generous to junior officers and most of those in the Forest Service in Assam have to thank him for their first tiger.

A man of most singular charm with a great sense of humour he is sadly missed by his numerous European and Indian friends.

## CHAPTER VIII

## GENERAL

98. Attention is invited to the observations in this Chapter of last year's Report regarding *jhuming* and the consequent denudation and deforestation in the Hills. The Divisional Forest Officer, Nowgong, made extensive tours in the North Cachar Hills and a report was submitted to Government with proposals for certain reservations. As, however, those proposals were not supported by the Sub-Divisional Officer concerned no further action has been possible. The matter has been placed before Government.

99. In 1930 the Notification cancelling the Lushai Hills Inner Line brought the Lushai Hills Reserved Forests outside the Assam Forest Regulation. The Superintendent, Lushai Hills, is examining the question of reserving areas on river banks in lieu of the old Reserves. This will undoubtedly assist in flood water control and is a step in the right direction and the support of the Superintendent is much appreciated.

100. The year's 50,000 Metre Gauge sleeper contract was completed. This contract was taken up by the Forest Utilisation Officer to assist local Assamese contractors. As however a number of these contractors failed to deliver the goods their contracts had to be completed by outside contractors.

101. The Deputy Director of Agriculture, Live Stock, Assam, continued to direct the breeding of cattle by graziers who are living as forest villagers in the Aie Reserve and assisted in grazing schemes in the Laokhowa and Kaziranga Reserves. The assistance and advice of this officer has been most useful to the Department.

102. The collection of "Awil" on behalf of *Nokmas* in the Garo Hills continues to make excessive and expensive work for the Divisional Forest Officer. Range clerks have been appointed and a wage bill of Rs. 1,080 will be necessary to account for the numerous petty transactions varying from 3 pies upwards, involving an amount of about Rs. 1,600 per year.

103. A good many audit objections arise in connection with forest village accounting. Standard forms are now being prepared for introduction on the 1st April 1938. Demand arrears in some Divisions have accumulated, due to Divisional Forest Officers putting out work on contract to outsiders instead of utilising the labour available in their villages. In some cases due to the distance of the locality this is unavoidable but it is by no means always the case.

104. In the Sylhet Division existing Ranges were redistributed to accord with Civil Subdivisions, a change which it is hoped will result in greater efficiency.

105. The Anti-malarial work at Kachugaon and Haltugaon continued; leprosy treatment, initiated by the Divisional Forest Officer a few years ago, has resulted in the treatment of 216 cases this year. Small grants were received by the Divisional Forest Officer from the Assam Leprosy Committee. This centre will probably be now taken over by the Public Health Department.

## CHAPTER IX

## THE PRESERVATION OF WILD LIFE AND ELEPHANT CONTROL

## I.—THE PRESERVATION OF WILD LIFE

106. Little can be added to the full report of 1935-36.

107. The Sanctuaries are well looked after by the staff in charge and poaching has been greatly reduced.

Several visitors to the Sanctuaries have recorded their appreciation of the help of officers of the department in enabling them to see and photograph wild animals in their natural habitat and it is hoped that the numbers of such visitors will increase.

108. The objects of the formation of a reserve in North Lakhimpur for the preservation of wild buffalo and improvement of the half wild stock have been fully explained in paragraph 110 of last year's report. Considerable opposition, as was anticipated, has been experienced with regard to settlement of foreigners in the locality and the attitude which has been taken up that the claims of such settlers *vis-a-vis* the preservation of the wild buffalo are of equal importance, typifies the difficulties which the Department has to face in a matter of this kind. If the scheme matures it is proposed to name this Reserve in memory of the late Mr. A. J. W. Milroy, Conservator of Forests.

109. New shooting and fishing Rules were issued by Government for Reserved Forests which will come into force on the 1st June 1937. The forests have been divided into Class I and Class II Shooting Blocks with a scale of fees and limits to the number of animals which may be shot.

110. The Acts and Rules which control shooting in other areas outside Reserved Forests require bringing into line with those of Reserved Forests and this matter is now being taken up by Local Government.

111. Control of the sale of the flesh, skins and horns of wild animals without restriction and also of wild animals themselves requires legislation.

112. A scheme for the appointment of Honorary Forest Officers received the sanction of Government during the year 1936.