

PROGRESS REPORT
 OF
FOREST ADMINISTRATION
 IN THE
PROVINCE OF ASSAM
 FOR THE YEAR
1930-31.

CHAPTER I.

CONSTITUTION OF STATE FORESTS.

1.—ALTERATION IN AREA—(FORM No. 7).

(i) Reserved Forests.

The total area of reserved forests at the beginning of the year under report was 6,148 square miles.

The following areas were added during the year :—

Doboka Reserve (Nowgong) ... ..	...	...	2 square miles.
Burhi Dehing Reserve, North Block (Lakhimpur) ...	...	...	2 „ „
„ „ „ South „ ( „ ) ...	...	...	3 „ „

The following areas were disforested for cultivation during the year :—

Kukuramara Reserve (Sadiya) ... ..	...	...	1 square mile.
Saikhoas „ ( „ ) ... ..	...	...	1 „ „

These changes resulted in an increase of 5 square miles ; the total area of Reserves at the end of the year under report stood at 6,153 square miles.

(ii) Village Forests.

2. In Sibsagar 179 acres and in Kamrup 36 acres of village forests were added during the year:

A separate report is being submitted to Government on this subject.

(iii) Unclassed State Forests:

3. The area of Unclassed State Forests at the close of the year was, according to the figures supplied by the Deputy Commissioners, 14,829 square miles, as compared with 14,920 square miles at the commencement, or a decrease of 91 square miles. Alterations were due to reservation and leasing out of land for cultivation.

It is hoped that from now onwards we will be spared the cost of heavy repairs after the renovating which the Forest Engineer has given the line.

14. Sixteen miles of cart roads were constructed during the year at a cost of Rs. 1,675. The repairs and maintenance of the existing cart roads and paths cost Rs. 2,792.

Darrang.

The roads in the Balipara reserve were maintained by the Political Officer, the Forest Department contributing 4,781 c.ft. of *sāl* and other timber free of royalty for the renewal and construction of some bridges on these roads.

Rupees 3,402 was spent on the construction of 12 miles of cart roads and Rs. 3,565 for maintenance of and repairs to the existing cart roads and paths and Local Board roads as well.

Nowgong.

Rupees 999 was spent for making Dilli cart road 1 mile 19 chains in length with 4 wooden bridges and Rs. 1,285 for bridges over Kasomari-Harupani road. A further sum of Rs. 1,079 had to be spent for acquisition of land measuring 12 *bighas* 2 *kathas* and 16 *lochas* for Suffry-Harisatra road. The total expenditure on new works was Rs. 3,363. Maintenance and repairs to the existing roads and paths cost Rs. 5,336.

Sibsagar.

Seventeen miles of new roads were constructed during the year including survey of 8 miles in extension of Pengaree road at a total cost of Rs. 10,106.

Lakhimpur.

The cost of repairs to the existing roads and paths amounted to Rs. 5,084.

One mile of new road in the Poba Reserve was constructed at a cost of Rs. 698.

Sadiya.

maintenance and repairs to the existing roads and paths cost Rs. 610.

(b) Buildings.

15. The total expenditure on new buildings amounted to Rs. 48,222 of which Rs. 21,397 was spent in the Western Circle and Rs. 26,825 in the Eastern Circle. The expenditure on houses for the subordinate establishment amounted to Rs. 36,512 against Rs. 50,280 in the previous year.

(c) Miscellaneous Works.

16. The programme of well construction for supply of good drinking water to the subordinates stationed in unhealthy places was continued. Rs. 11,364 was spent on sinking 27 wells and making water pipe connection during the year.

The expenditure on the sanitary scheme at Kochugaon during the year was Rs. 3,465 recurring. The funds were provided by the Public Health Department. The Director of Public Health visited the place in February 1931 in order to see the anti-malaria work there. In his opinion the work carried out during the year was satisfactory, but he considered that a detailed malaria survey by the Assistant Director should be held during the rains.

The total expenditure on all miscellaneous works including repairs of compounds, fencing, etc., was Rs. 32,079 against Rs. 29,655 in the previous year.

3.—PROTECTION OF FORESTS.

(a) General Protection—(Form No. 13).

17. The total number of new cases was 2,077 against 1,714 in the preceding year. Of 426 cases taken into Court, convictions were obtained in 252 cases, 45 resulted in acquittals and the balance, *viz.*, 129 cases remained pending at the close of the year. The percentage of acquittals to the number of cases tried was 15 against 11 in the previous year.

18. The question of poaching was taken up seriously, and in addition to special legislation a detachment of Assam Rifles under a British Officer was sent to spend some 6 weeks in North Kamrup, while an anti-poaching campaign was successfully conducted in Goalpara by Mr. M. C. Jacob, Assistant Conservator of Forests, who entered upon his duties enthusiastically.

The Cacharis and Meches, naturally enough, buried their unlicensed guns and remained peacefully at home during the occupation of their district by the Assam Rifles, but the visit of the latter had an excellent effect in giving the quietus to any vague ideas about local Home Rule, while the Forest subordinates now know that, should the poachers resort again to threats of violence, the Rifles will speedily return.

There is so much money in the business, however, and the organization at the back of the poachers is so clever that it is impossible to stop all killing of rhino and tuskers, but it can be kept within reasonable limits at any rate.

19. It is interesting to record that there appear to be snags connected with the trade, for at one time the local Marwaris were lamenting that the Cacharis had palmed off on them bamboo roots, blackened and faked to look like rhino horns, and then when they had learnt to distinguish a bamboo root from a rhino horn the Cacharis went one better and sold them faked pieces of buffalo horn; it is not known if any "acid test" has yet been devised.

A rhino horn is now worth about half its weight in pure gold in the open market, but the value of ivory has decreased very greatly.

20. The one-horned Indicus is the Rhinoceros found in the Assam Valley but the smaller two-horned Sumatrensis is also killed in the Surma Valley, where there is an organization for financing Lushai poachers. Special steps have been taken with the help of the Commissioner, Surma Valley and Hill Division and the Superintendent, Lushai Hills, to try and afford protection to the few specimens left in the Hati-Thal in Cachar.

It is impossible to hope or believe that wild animals can exist for all time outside the reserve forests, and this is all the more reason for the Forest Department providing an asylum in the areas under its control.

21. An additional, and very cogent, reason for suppressing poaching is that it was found in Goalpara that the poachers objected to the fire-protection, which was introduced during the year in connection with the raising of new crops of *sal* and match woods. They burnt out one area and all the saplings it contained, and did their best to set fire to other areas.

22. As proper fire control is now the basis of our silviculture in all except the moist evergreen forests, early or late burning in some cases, rigid fire protection in others—it follows that our efforts at raising new forests are likely to be imperilled by this unforeseen danger.

One match in the dry season lit by a disgruntled poacher and every pice spent on an area up to date has to be written off, and work started afresh from the very beginning.

The problem is going to be a perplexing one for a few years owing to the poachers having had the run of the reserves for so long.

23. Forest subordinates in Goalpara have been fired at on several occasions each year for some years past and have been afraid to report these occurrences, but there was no case this year, thanks to the threatening proximity of Assam Rifles, and owing to the obvious fact that all the higher forest officers were out looking for trouble.

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

24. Twenty-five acres were maliciously burnt in Kamrup out of 5,830 acres attempted to be protected; failures in protection from fire occurred in the case of 82 acres in Goalpara and 18 acres in Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

Controlled burning to save the cost of fire protection is a feature in Kamrup and Goalpara.

Out of 856 acres attempted to be protected in Darrang, 620 acres were burnt and 236 acres were actually protected during the year.

4. At the beginning of the year a Resolution was issued on the report of the Forest Enquiry Committee. The Governor in Council accepted most of the Committee's proposals and orders had already been issued to give effect to such of the accepted recommendation as did not involve any legislation, while others were included in an amending Bill which has since been passed by the Legislative Council. Many of the measures taken were intended to remove possible causes of friction between the Department and the people, and it is hoped that they will achieve their end.

5. After the close of the year the Conservator, after consulting district officers, submitted a separate report on the village forests of the province. These forests are not being managed in accordance with the rules and do not fulfil the purposes for which they were constituted, and the Government are now considering in what form, if any, the reservation of these areas should be maintained.

6. The Commissioner of the Assam Valley submitted a report on the vexed question of the rights of nokmas over forest produce in the unclassed State forests or waste lands in the Garo Hills. Final orders will not issue until the Revenue Member has visited the area and studied on the spot the several questions involved and their implications.

7. Active measures were taken during the year to deal with the Cachari poachers who had been destroying rhino and other fauna in the reserved forests and game sanctuaries. The prices obtained for rhino hides and horns are so high that the penalties hitherto in force were too low to be effective. The Forest Regulation and the rules, therefore, have now been amended and more deterrent penalties imposed for the killing of rhino in the reserved and unclassed State forests. Secondly to make control on the spot more effective, a detachment of the Assam Rifles spent six weeks in the affected areas in North Kamrup and the Forest Department have organized patrolling parties for those areas and also for the eastern and western ranges of the Goalpara Division, where also poachers had been very active.

8. The Goalpara tramway, which was extended by two miles so as to reach more distant parts of the forest, showed a deficit during the year due to the dullness of the timber market and the consequent drop in the quantity of timber carried. The total earnings of the tramway amounted to Rs. 58,146 against an expenditure on revenue account of Rs. 93,595. A heavy flood and an earthquake did severe damage which necessitated extensive repairs. Now that the line has been renovated by the Forest Engineer, there should be a considerable saving in the cost of repairs in future years.

9. The Assam-Bengal Railway treated 2,70,000 soft wood sleepers in their creosoting plant at Naharkatia, as compared with 2,20,000 in the preceding year. It is hoped that the Railway will agree to the treatment also of timber for building in order to stimulate the trade for Assam timber. Despite the trade depression the Assam Railways and Trading Company and the Assam Saw Mills and Timber Company extracted more timber for their mills than in 1929-30.

10. There was a slight increase in the quantity of lac exported which rose from 50,797 to 52,472 maunds but owing to a fall in the market price on which the royalty is fixed the royalty amounted only to Rs. 1,37,628 as compared with Rs. 2,50,391. There was a recovery in the import of lac from Siems' territories in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills which rose again to 6,023 maunds with a royalty of Rs. 17,637.

11. His Excellency in Council is indebted to both Conservators, Mr. Milroy and Mr. Owden, for their efficient administration in a disheartening year and he also thanks Mr. Milroy for his detailed and interesting report. The names of the officers who have been recommended for good work have been noted by the Government.

By order of the Government of Assam,

G. E. SOAMES,

Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam.