

SPEYBOUTH FOREST

Forester's Annual Report 1960

A. General Review of Operations

302 acres were planted and 250 acres were beaten-up. 234 acres were thinned for a production of 81,300 cu.ft. In addition to this some 35 acres of repetitive blown areas were clear felled and produced 57,500 cu.ft. Clearing of scrub produced 1,500 cu.ft., making a total production of 140,000 cu.ft. for the year.

S.P. in the Hampshire plantation, previously dying at the rate of 6 trees per acre per annum, has now reduced this rate to about 1 tree per acre per annum.

Slow recovery of close grown S.P. following delayed thinnings is very apparent.

Of new drains 1,257 chains were opened, mainly in peat. This was less than I anticipated but all the essential work is done. Again, in drain repair we did less than estimated for and the drains remain to be done, insufficient labour due to other demands being the cause of the hold-up. Nevertheless, 1,370 chains of drain were maintained.

We weeded 420 acres, and left some large areas untouched pending spraying by helicopter with Brushwood Killer in October.

37 acres were high pruned, where possible to 22 feet, and all in S.P. This is a job which is far behind, and much needs to be done now. In an effort to cut estimates for F.Y. 61 to the requested amount the 100 acres proposed for that year have had to be drastically reduced.

72 chains of new fences have been erected and 257 chains repaired. Our fencing programme largely consists of boundaries between Crown Lands and agricultural land, and the Forestry Commission, which are our entire responsibility.

Tests were done with "Spontox" on scrub and gorse on prep. ground areas. Conclusions cannot yet be drawn.

The weather was very dry up to early July, and thereafter very wet. Some S.P. showed very poor growth for this season.

B. The Year's Work

1. Finance

At the end of the year we have £5,400 still unspent but we have loans of labour to other forests totaling £4,000.

Planting and manuring were overspent by £104; 25 acres were planted in excess of the programme.

Beating up was overspent by £468. 49,000 extra plants were planted, and in this additional work a large amount of turfing was necessary.

Weeding was underspent by £1,900. This is due to a large number of whin areas being left for spraying by helicopter. The dry Spring gave us a late start on weeding.

Fire protection was overspent by £752; the very dry spell in Spring and early Summer was the reason for this.

The opening of new drains was underspent by £430. This job

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B. The Year's Work1. Finance

At the end of the year we have £3,400 still unspent but we have loans of labour to other forests totalling £4,000.

Planting and manuring were overspent by £104; 23 acres were planted in excess of the programme.

Beating up was overspent by £468. 49,000 extra plants were planted, and in this additional work a large amount of turfing was necessary.

Weeding was underspent by £1,900. This is due to a large number of whin areas being left for spraying by helicopter. The dry Spring gave us a late start on weeding.

Fire protection was overspent by £762; the very dry spell in Spring and early Summer was the reason for this.

The opening of new drains was underspent by £430. This job is largely completed, and has turned out to be simpler than was thought.

The repair of drains was underspent by £242; this leaves

quite a lot of work to be done, shortage of labour being the main cause.

2. Organisation, Staff, Labour and Training

Local supervision consists of one Head Forester, and one Forester, with three gangers on general forest work and one ganger in charge of the protection team. One further ganger is largely employed on marking and measuring of thinnings, felling etc. Supervision is adequate at present.

Forest workers are employed thro' ughout the year and these include Clerkess, District Clerkess and District Office cleaner. In addition 30 salmon fishermen are employed (ex Crown Lands) from September to February. For F.Y. 51 the fishermen will be largely employed in Aultmore Forest via the SuspenseAccount route.

Piecwork would improve costs, but to apply it some of the existing labour force would require to be declared redundant.

3. Development of Techniques

Spraying with "Spontox" in place of weeding was tried out, and with the addition of T.V.C. some prep. ground areas were treated. There is nothing firm to report.

5. Seed Collection and Nurseries

There was no local seed collection.

100 bushels of cones were extracted in intermittent lots, which made the year's work rather costly.

6. Plantations

(i) Establishment

There are 5,860 acres which could be classed as established on areas planted since 1946; a further 540 acres are in some form of check. 1,080 acres are under thinning, and we have approximately 100 acres of mature woods. There are 2,640 acres of 5 years old and under.

(ii) Ma intenance

This is largely a case of weeding, with gorse being the worst offender. We are catching up on fences between Crown Lands and Forestry Commission land which are our responsibility. The upkeep of drains is carried out following thinnings and storms. Areas have been found where the original draining has proved inadequate, and supplementary draining is now estimated for.

(iii) Improvement

64 acres on Cairnry acquired woodlands have been ploughed in preparation for replanting next year; this will be a high beating-up cost. There are areas of varying sizes throughout the forest which are understocked. The Conservator recently agreed that no action be taken until the position has time to clarify itself.

(iv) Protection

(a) Fire Protection

22,746 were spent on fire protection, most of it prior to July, when the rainy weather started. This seems very high, and I feel that we should look very closely at the standby arrangements laid down in the Fire Plan, with a view to modification.

(8) Other Protection

This is carried out by the trapping team, which is also the most efficient fire-fighting team, and the saving here of \$1,165 is due to the team being used in extreme danger conditions for fire protection work. A further, but unwelcome, saving was made when one of our trappers, who took ill last October, died. The following vermin were destroyed:-

337 rabbits
155 brown hares
33 white hares
9 roe deer
8 foxes
13 fox cubs
174 pigeons

7. Production

(1) Preparation and Extraction

Clear felling is a modest operation in this forest, and consists largely of tidying up scattered blown areas, and the production of a small amount of fencing material for Conservancy use. 234 acres were thinned, mostly by the Standing Sale method, and partly on the Long Term sale basis. There is no sawmill in this forest, and felling and crosscutting costs are rather higher than normal due to the scattered nature of much of the blown timber. Straightforward felling costs 34d. per cu.ft., whereas felling of blown scattered trees costs 5d. per cu.ft. In extraction, the scattered timber costs 34d. to get out, the straightforward extraction costing only 14d. per cu.ft.

(11) Sale of Produce - Markets and Prices

Most of the sales of timber here are standing sales, and since the Tariff method of measurement has been accepted there cannot be a better way to sell timber; because every time we put axe to tree, and add our overheads, we have lost money.

Generally speaking prices are reasonable. An exception was when we sold some very poor stuff (blown trees) along with some very good, when the price received tended to be low. These categories will be kept distinctly separate in future.

New outlets? - somewhere along the line there should be a pretty good revenue from salvage paper!

9. Mechanical Equipment

I have a Fordson Major tractor here and seen quite unable to get hydraulic equipment for it. The provision of a "lift" and plough would allow us to do our fire traces cheaply and efficiently and would reduce the cost of extraction of timber when the need arises. The Hi-ab hoist is used regularly in timber loading, shifting culvert pipes and loading barrels of fuel. The brush saw, not yet properly tested, looks like saving money. The 30-hp power saw has been in regular use. I sometimes wonder how we managed 30 years ago without all these aids, and few, if any, roads.

Maintenance of vehicles and equipment is kept to a strict schedule with periodic checks made by the mobile mechanic, who is most efficient.

The repair workshops at Blackhall are only involved when spares and replacements are required, or when major breakdowns take place. Spares and replacements are readily available, delay being an unusual feature.

11. Working Plans

Re-surveying of the forest and compartment boundaries is going ahead. When this is completed the division of compartments into stands, and their classification, will be started.

The new compartment records are almost completed, all the relevant data having been recorded. Changes will require to be made where boundaries need altering, but these will be in the minority.

14. Sociological Aspects

This forest pays out weekly in wages about £320 for 7 months of the year, and about £500 weekly for the remaining 5 months of the year. This money plays a significant part in the economy of the village. In addition Messrs. Hiddoch's employ about 70 people at their Mosstodloch mills, and Messrs. Jones' employ about 20 local people in timber work. No-one would claim that the Forestry Commission woods are providing all the timber that these firms are working, but nevertheless forestry and timber work are providing work for from 130 to 150 people all the year round. This is between a quarter and a fifth of the working population of the village and the surrounding area.

Relationships between farming and forestry are cordial but business-like. If a farmer borrows labour from us, he tells us that we are robbing him of his hard-earned pennies, and we have the job of explaining a charge which we did not fix. On the other hand, if we hire a tractor from a farmer, he charges us the highest rate he can get away with. There are, of course, exceptions.

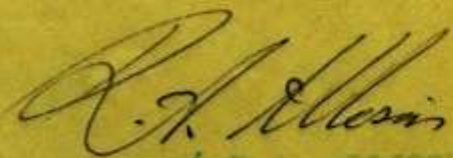
The Commission staff are recognised as people who work at "The Forestry", and are thought to be rather lucky because for a large part of the year they can get another job on a Saturday and earn an extra shilling or two. Those who are on Fire Duty, of course, are luckiest, unless there is a football match on.

15. Forest Influences

These are not yet significant.

16. Amenity and Access to the Countryside

Amenities are protected and wherever possible they are added to. Access, on foot, is free over the whole forest, and the people of Pochavers take full advantage of it.



(R.A. ALLISON)

Head Forester.

17-10-60