



The SLASHER

FORESTRY
COMMISSION
News & Views

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INFORMATION
OFFICER



SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY ISSUE



D. Archibald
Slasher



75 YEARS IN THE MAKING





Ploughing team in Speymouth Forest

The bedrock of forestry policy in the 1920s was the need to rebuild and maintain a strategic timber reserve. Stocks were so depleted by the demands of the First World War — especially trench warfare — that the new Commission was given a good deal of freedom to acquire and plant land.

The country was split into ten Divisions with 29 Divisional and District Officers and 110 Foresters and Foremen. Finance and administration were concentrated in London and Edinburgh, with 59 staff.

Financial stringency was imposed from the beginning because of high post-war inflation, but agriculture was depressed and the Commission was able to buy land cheaply. By September 1929 around 600 000 acres were managed in 152 forests, and more than 138 000 acres had been planted. In the private sector 54 000 acres had been planted with Commission grants.

Public concern regarding blanket conifers led to the first amenity planting: it became standard practice to plant hardwoods alongside roads, and where possible straight edges were avoided.

DID YOU KNOW...

1920

Research and development branches were concentrating on improving conifer growth rates in different parts of the country.

In 1920 41 students were attending Forester Training Schools in England, Scotland and Ireland.

1921

The Commission's first planting in North Wales took place in Gwydr Forest, on land leased from well-known landowner Lord Ancaster.

1925

The Commission lost 80 acres of newly planted trees in its first bad fire, at Beddgelert in North Wales.

Office-based staff were obliged to wear white collars and black or pinstripe suits, with grey flannel trousers permitted only on Saturday mornings. Heads of Department in the old Office of Works wore top hats.

The 1920s

1920

The Commission establishes policies on finance, land, private forestry and forestry education. Contacts are set up with forestry universities.

In July the Commissioners organise the first British Empire Forestry Conference, later the Commonwealth Forestry Conference, in London. This has continued every five or six years to the present day.

'Geddes Axe': in an immediate threat, the Geddes Committee recommends scrapping afforestation. The Government rejects the Report but imposes strict economies.

1921

In March the Treasury withdraws the Commission's authority to acquire land, but this is soon lifted. In October 25 000 acres are acquired in line with Government policy to reduce rural unemployment.

1922

On 1 April responsibility for Irish forestry passes to the Provisional Government of the Irish Free State.

1924

The Forestry (Transfer of Woods) Act 1923 comes into force, giving responsibility for most Crown Woods, including the Dean and the New Forest, to the Commission. This adds 120 000 acres to our estates.

A foresters' holdings programme is created. This allows foresters to divide their time between forestry and farming, according to season, and reduces the economic difficulties of employing workers full time.

1926

A woodland survey highlights the sorry state of privately owned woods.

1927

The Forestry Act 1927 recognises the need for public access to forests, and introduces regulations to cover this.

1928

Results of first systematic Census of British Woodlands are published.

EARLY DAYS

MEMORIES OF 1927

'There was a depression on at the time and you had no need to have a 'good' job to be regarded as an important chap — you were a big cheese if you had any kind of job at all.

Forest workers had a rough time. For a start, when you turned up in the morning you were never certain you would be permitted to work. If it was raining you were told to stand by until 11 am. If it was still wet at lunchtime that was that, and home you went, without pay. There was no dole or unemployment pay for agricultural workers. The adult wage was, I believe, 30s per week and the only deduction was 9d per week for National Health.

The working week of fifty-something hours was six days. Saturday counted as a full day and I have a few memories of piecework rates. Hard lining out was 1s per 1000. Oak stakes were 3d each and this included felling, cleaving and pointing. Bracken weeding was 5s per acre and we reckoned to do an acre a day. I have memories, too, of turf draining by hand at 1s per chain.

Agriculture was in the doldrums and all my colleagues were former farm workers. Some strange characters come to mind: gamekeepers, mole catchers and ploughmen, whose dinner consisted of a square wad of cheese pressed into a hole in the centre of a cottage loaf. Thermos flasks were unheard of: you drank cold tea from a bottle and some brought their food to work in a large red handkerchief. I have been sowing seed in a nursery beside a man wearing bowler hat and leggings.

Young lads like myself always had hopes of getting to Forestry School though the number of openings was far fewer than the number of candidates. To make the grade you had to work very hard, keep your mouth shut and make sure you were in the Foresters' good books. Senior Foresters were idols. A Grade I Forester on a salary of £150 a year was to me in the Cabinet Minister class. There were, I believe, only five Head Foresters in the whole of the British Isles.

In 1927 we sowed the notorious 27/31 Ident of Corsican pine. Later known as Ursuline pine, they showed great promise in the seedbeds as 1+0 and eventually developed into a shrub a few feet high with the habit of a pineapple top.

Seedbeds were covered with mineral soil. No one had heard of grit. You made up the seedbed by raking off the hard clay lumps and knobs and having trodden them to a powder in the alleyways, used it to cover the seeds. If the soil had a tendency to cake, a sharp shower of rain would convert your beautiful beds into a concrete waste.'

Jack Jennings, Chief Forester at Crychan Forest, in Slasher 1971



Four men on a cross-cut saw to fell an Oak in the Forest of Dean

RECESSION AND THE BUILD-UP TO WAR

1931

A severe national financial crisis leads to cutbacks. Expenditure is limited, but the Commission retains the right to direct the money as the Commissioners think best. It is to be many years before private planting recovers, but our own estates make steady progress.

1935

The first National Forest Park is announced at Argyll, incorporating the forests of Benmore, Glenbranter, Glenfinnoch and Ardgarten. It opens in 1936.

1936

The Commission begins to open up tracts of land and forest for recreation.

Land acquisition and planting go steadily ahead despite preparations for war. The Government announces an expanded planting programme, and afforestation schemes are drawn up in four Special Areas — South Wales, Durham, Tyneside and West Cumberland — where unemployment is particularly high.

1939

By 1939 the Commission has established around 25 000 acres of broadleaves. Annual production is up to 100 000 cubic metres.

War is declared on 3 September. Normal forestry work goes on.

The 1935–36 season saw the founding of Kielder Hearts Football Club, with a dozen or so playing members. They paid their own expenses, which were heavy because of the travelling involved. In 1936–37 and 1938–39 Kielder Hearts were runners up in the North Tyne League.



Dean Forestry School Football Team 1936-1937

The early thirties were dominated by a recession that bit worldwide: the later years by a slow but steady build-up to war.

Agriculture was still in deep depression, and with few private landowners having money to invest in forestry there was comparatively little private planting. But the Commission's estates continued to increase, reaching 909 000 acres by 1934. Of these 316 000 were under plantation. The main market for timber was as pit props, with fast-developing heavy industries almost completely dependent on coal. This emphasis was to be maintained throughout the war years.

In 1937 the Commission began working with the Board of Trade to draw up detailed plans for fellings in the event of war. To maintain a home timber supply, three categories were identified: woods which could be felled immediately (mature stands); woods which could be felled if necessary (slightly younger or slightly older trees); and woods to be felled only in extreme need. The Home Grown Timber Advisory Committee was established in 1939 as part of these preparations. On the day war broke out, the Commission was divided in two: the Forest Management Department, to carry on its normal activities, and the Timber Supply Department, to deal with war demands. The Commission remained in charge of the home timber supply until 1941, when the responsibility was given to the Timber Production Department of the Ministry of Supply.

DID YOU KNOW...

1931

Headquarters moved from Grosvenor Gardens to 9 Savile Row, London.

1935

A probationer District Officer's salary was £250 a year. Many had to save up to afford the new Forestry Commission tie!

Awareness of public reactions started early. During the thirties the Commission worked closely with the Councils for the Protection of Rural England and Rural Wales to protect areas of the Lake District and Snowdonia from insensitive planting.



Visiting HQ in the 1930s

RESEARCH

Research was confined almost exclusively to species selection, establishment and nursery work, with experiments in peatland research in northern Scotland. Records show that £3 7s 6d covered the cost of planting one experiment in 1930, including draining, turfing, hauling 500 plants to the site by horse, planting and applying phosphate.



London office staff, 1933

EARLY DAYS AT HAFREN

'The land which was to become Hafren Forest was acquired in 1937. Before planting the forest comprised separately owned farms and sheepwalks, and mining of lead, tin and copper had been important in the past. The first planting comprised 164 acres of spruce and pine. By 1962 (Hafren's 25th anniversary) it had grown to 8600 acres of plantations, most between 800 and 1700 feet. Rainfall could be up to 100 inches a year.

Up to 1940 you could not drive a car from Nant felin to Llwyn-y-gog, except during the months of May and June when it was sometimes possible, with the help of a spade and a little luck, to traverse the bog below Cwm Biga. At that time there were 29 gates between Old Hall and Machynlleth.'

W A Cadman, Deputy Surveyor, New Forest, in 1962

The 1940s

BRITAIN AT WAR AND THE POST-WAR YEARS

As for so many things, the Second World War and its aftermath had a major impact on forestry in Britain.

During the War Commission forests produced more than 51 million cubic feet of wood. Even so, 90 per cent of timber used in the war effort came from private estates, supplying pit props for mines producing the coal on which so many of the armaments and other industries depended.

Because they were more mature the Forest of Dean and the New Forest bore the brunt of wartime felling, with almost all conifers aged 20–35 in the New Forest cut. In all, 29 530 acres of Commission forest were clearfelled between 1940 and 1946, with 53 000

acres heavily thinned. The number of people employed rose from 14 000 in August 1939 to 44 300 in February 1941 — including several thousand members of the Women's Timber Corps, affectionately christened 'the Lumberjills'.



But it wasn't all felling. Over 100 000 acres were planted during the war years, and 133 000 acres acquired for forestry. Licences for timber felling were introduced during the War and retained afterwards as a conservation measure.

Once the War was over restoring the forest estate became a priority for the Commission, and there was a marked increase in the acquisition of felled or derelict woodlands. Many of these were planted with broadleaves, especially in south east England. But forestry was repeatedly to clash with agriculture interests as the need to produce home grown food increased, and planting was gradually moved out to land which was unsuitable for other crops.

The forties saw the beginning of the expansion of the Commission's research work, which in the next few years was to grow out of all recognition. The Engineering Branch was founded virtually from scratch, under Chief Engineer Major-General H P W Hutson, with the twin function of building forest roads and maintaining machinery.

1940

Despite the War, planting grants remain at £2 per acre for conifers, £4 per acre for oak or ash, £3 for beech, sycamore or chestnut and £2 for other approved broadleaves.

1943

White Paper 'Post-War Forest Policy' proposes five million acres of commercial timber production in Britain, with two million acres in existing forests and three million acres to be afforested. Most of this will be the Commission's responsibility, with private owners encouraged to replant.



One of the first home-made fire engines at Rendlesham Forest, c. 1941

1945

Forestry Act 1945 places the Commission under direct Ministerial control, reflecting the perceived importance of forestry, but taking away Commissioners' independence. The reconstituted Commission meets for the first time on 15 August.

The posts of Director General and Deputy Director General are created, plus those of a Director in charge of Research, Education and Publications, a Controller of Finance and an Information Officer. Directors of Forestry are appointed and 11 Conservancies set up. Sir Roy Robinson is appointed first DG.



Forest fires caused by enemy action were a particular problem in the south

FIRST EVER SLASHER

1946

Forest Workers Training Scheme begins and receives a rush of applicants following demobilisation. From 1946 to 1948, 161 men will graduate from forestry schools.



1947

The Dedication Scheme comes into effect, requiring private landowners to dedicate their land to forestry in perpetuity. The Scheme heralds an unprecedented expansion of private forestry: by September 1949, 13 273 acres had been dedicated and Plans of Operation were being drawn up on another 230 000 acres.

Census of Woodlands begins, completed in 1949. It shows the total area of woodland to be 3.64 million acres, or 6.5 per cent of Britain's land surface.

1948

In January the first issue of Slasher is produced from Savile Row, London.

The Commission's flag, dark brown and green and lettered in gold, is approved by the King. First 'broken' by Chairman Lord Robinson at Northerwood House in March.

At the end of June, A H Gosling takes over from W L Taylor as first full-time DG.

By 1948 five Forester Training Schools have opened: Parkend and Lynford in England, Gwydr in Wales and Benmore and Glentress in Scotland.

'In producing this monthly newsletter our aims are simple. We want it to become a personal link between individuals who serve the Commission, no matter where they are stationed. We also want to forge a closer link between those individuals and Headquarters — still regarded by some as an intangible administrative machine; yet like the piano player we're doing our best, so you can't very well shoot us. And if you knew us better you'd know that we are, after all, human. We want always to give as much news as possible from the field. Please let us hear from you!'

January 1948

'The choice [of name] was made because it was necessary to decide on something symbolic of those concerned with forestry, and the slasher has for long been regarded as an insignia of office among those who serve the Commission...It is invariably carried by all our woodsmen when in the plantations.'

February 1948



*Extraction of fu
thinnings from
in Rendlesham:
Chairman Sir R
Robinson is second
from right*

A FORESTER IN THE FORTIES

'During the winter it is quite usual to be 'snowed up' for several days at a time, and then practically all travel is on foot. At present (early January) we are experiencing a period of severe frost, which is disrupting practically all outdoor work, for all the roads leading to Borgie are ice-bound.

Social life at Borgie is noticeable by its almost complete absence. It is common for residents to walk or cycle five miles or more to the nearest centre of social activity — the Village Hall. Here, the programme in the main is one of whist drives and an occasional dance. During the summer, however, life becomes quite 'gay', for our football season is at its height; it is quite usual for the local team and supporters to travel upwards of 50 miles by open lorry — the only transport — to play opposing teams in hotly-contested cup-ties.

Shopping is one of the biggest problems, for the nearest shopping centre is 40 miles distant, and groceries are delivered only once a month. Quite often it is nearing midnight when the van arrives, making its presence known by a hooting of horn and the grinding of brakes.

Regardless of difficulties, work in the Forest and the Nursery goes on steadily. At present the main problem is ploughing by tractor; as the nearest maintenance engineer is almost 100 miles away and the nearest public telephone four miles distant, a silent prayer is repeatedly offered that no serious breakdown may occur, so a reasonable programme may be completed.'

**Forester W H Mackay of Borgie,
Caithness, February 1948.
Borgie was then the Commission's
northernmost estate**

1949

Results of the 1947-49 census lead to Government impatience with private landowners. A subsidy of 3d per cubic foot is introduced for thinnings and planting grants are increased from £10 to £12 per acre. Maintenance grants go up from 3s 4d to 4s per acre. Compulsory purchase is threatened where woodland is not adequately managed.

By 1949 it is apparent that the 1400 or so foresters' holdings can't meet labour needs, and a major house building programme is launched. Forest Villages become part of the forestry scene.

IMPACT OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

'Holding a Christmas tree in one hand and a slasher in the other, Forester E J Davies (the Dean) made a pre-Christmas bow on the television screen. It came about as a result of publicity given to stealing Christmas trees, for the BBC felt that they, too, might help spotlight the offence. Like so many of us, Forester Davies was obviously new to the mysteries of television, but he acquitted himself well in telling of some of his past experiences in guarding Christmas trees, and of his present job.'

January 1948

DID YOU KNOW...

Originally Foremen, Foresters and Forest Workers had to share copies of *Slasher* because of paper shortages after the War.

1948

After a heavy snowfall in Galloway in the winter of '48, Foreman R C Calder donned skis to make sure the squads had their wages on time! Surely, a case of 'the Show — or is it the snow? — must go on!'

Jean Philip, a Clerical Officer in the Accounts Section of the Aberdeen Office, became the Commission's first female Junior Forester in August 1948 after achieving 83 per cent in her RSFS exams — which included felling a 14ft Scots pine.

How many Conservancies employ a Cup Final referee? In June 1948 the North (Scotland) Office's Alex MacKenzie (T/C II) controlled a thrilling Cup Final for the Scottish Shinty Association in Inverness. The attendance was 7000 — a record for a Camanachd Cup Final.

Members of HQ staff were regularly called to take part in identification parades at Savile Row Police Station, just a few yards away — once a Commission staff member was even picked out as the criminal! Fortunately the police knew he was innocent ...

Furthest view from a forest was agreed to be that from Haggis Hill, Changue Forest, Ayrshire, from which on a clear day can be seen the Mountains of Mourne in Ireland, Black Combe near Barrow in Furness, and the mountains of Argyll.

1949

1949 was a record year for forest fires in the New Forest — 67 dangerous or potentially dangerous fires were reported between 1 March and 31 August.

Commission staff in the forties reported a range of interesting and unusual hobbies: from Josef Kaminski, a Polish worker at Braydon Forest, who grew his own tobacco, through tapestry (J Q Williamson, Chief Education Officer) and gliding (M V Laurie, Chief Research Officer) to the anonymous staff member who boosted his wages as a professional mourner, paid to attend funerals throughout North Scotland complete with dark suit, hat and black-bordered handkerchief.

FIRST FOUR TENANTS WELCOMED AT AE VILLAGE

'Tenants received a personal welcome from Director Scotland Sir Henry Beresford-Peirse as they moved into the first houses to be completed. Each comprises a living room and scullery, three bedrooms and a bathroom, and a shed for cycles. When the village is complete it will include some 80 houses, church, school, shops, post office and even a village 'pub'.

'What is seen today,' said the Director, 'is the reversal of the trend for people to leave the land — the bringing back of people into the rural areas in ever-increasing numbers, the provision of houses in lovely surroundings, and an assurance of employment for so long as a man is able to work.'

Slasher, 1949

The first tenants were: Mr and Mrs W Coupland and their children, aged 7, 2 and six months; Mr and Mrs G McArthur and their 10-month-old child; Mr and Mrs W J Fletcher and their 18-month-old child; and Mr and Mrs John White. Ae's first baby, Joseph Peter Fletcher, arrived in January 1950

ELEPHANTS IN THE FOREST

'In 1941 there was a fall of oak in Salcey Forest, East England Conservancy. A story appeared in the local Press of a travelling show being disbanded and two elephants having to be destroyed. We found them in a sorry condition, but offered their owner a job and soon had them picketed out on one of the forest rides.

The older elephant, Molly, had done timber work in India and could pull a two-ton log with ease. If the butt caught on a stump she lifted it clear with her trunk, and when she got to the ride she knelt to push them into a neat pile.

The pair worked hard but they couldn't be hurried and time-keeping just didn't interest them. Feeding presented no difficulties during the summer months and they got all their food from the forest.

One morning, despite the shortage of newsprint and the War, the two leapt to fame in a national newspaper, and they were offered a new and permanent home at Chester Zoo.'

Divisional Officer J S R Chard, in September 1955



WEEKLY SCOTSMAN.

EDINBURGH

Forester and family at Glenbranter Forest Village

FIRST TREE CUT AT KIELDER IN 1948

In 1925 the first land acquisition was made in the Kielder area at Smales, and in 1926 the first planting on peat areas was carried out. During the next four to five years the possibilities of extensive afforestation were fully appreciated as a result of experiment, trial and error: result, Kielder became the biggest state forest in Britain. The first tree was harvested by Lord Robinson, the Chairman, who as Mr Robinson had been present 22 years earlier to see the first Kielder tree planted.

The 1950s

THE FOREST REVOLUTION



Nursery workers at Ledmore take a break

1950

Work begins on eight new forest villages in the Borders.

Forestry Act 1951

To maintain reserves, the Act prohibits felling growing trees without a licence and for the first time the Commission may insist on replanting.

1952

Lord Robinson, Secretary to the Acland Committee and Chairman of the Commission from 1932, dies.

Death of His Majesty King George VI.

1953

Coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. In Wales a new road, serving Coed Morgannwg, is named Ffordd y Frenhines or The Queen's Way.

Buriton Forest in Hampshire becomes Queen Elizabeth Forest, and Scotland decides to name its new Forest Park near Aberfoyle after the new Queen.

1954

Largest planting grant to date made for 11 071 acres. A cheque for £14 981 was paid to the Pale Estate in Merioneth, owned by the Duke of Westminster.



1955

The Commission of Enquiry into Crofting Conditions in the Highlands of Scotland declares forestry an important source of employment in remote areas and creating jobs in these areas becomes part of forestry policy. In December the Welsh Agricultural Land Sub-Commission reports that planned afforestation could benefit areas in Cardiganshire, Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire.

1956

On 8 May Her Majesty the Queen unveils a stone at Eggesford Forest, Devon to commemorate planting of the Commission's one millionth acre.

In July the 12th Congress of the International Union of Forest Research Organisations is held at Oxford, attended by 250 delegates from 40 countries.

In the 1950s British forestry's boom years began.

The 50s, 60s and 70s saw dramatic surges in output and income, with the forest estate nearly doubling to 1.6 million hectares as mechanisation increased and investment in forestry soared. Timber found a ready market in Britain's new and established wood using industries.

In 1950 the Commission employed 13 220 people in total. Annual removals had reached 325 000 cubic metres and income from produce exceeded £1 million. During the decade planting averaged 24 500 acres per year and nearly 40 000 acres of broadleaves were established, particularly in south east England. These were mainly oak and beech. Sales of timber rose from less than £500 000 to well over £2 million a year. Harvesting and marketing became an important part of the Commission's work. By the end of the decade private landowners were finally warming to the Dedication Scheme, and nearly 600 000 acres had been dedicated.

Forestry gradually moved to the uplands and marginal land, with good agricultural land no longer available in any quantity.



1958

In July the Minister of Agriculture announces the introduction of 10-year planting programmes. It is decided to pay special attention to areas of Scotland and Wales.

1957

The Zuckerman Report on Forestry, Agriculture and Marginal Land agrees that forestry could raise the productivity of hill land, highlighting the need to restore a balance between forestry and agriculture.

In accepting the Report, the Government tacitly acknowledges that maintaining timber as a strategic reserve is no longer necessary.

Lynford School closes in August, having trained some 500 students.

SLASHER IN THE FIFTIES

INCREASING MECHANISATION

In 1950 powered ropeway extraction tests took place at Thornthwaite in North West England. The cable, of three-quarter inch diameter, transported three tons an hour at heights of up to 20 feet over any gradient. It could be dismantled and re-erected in two days, and was able to extract wood uphill as well as down. In 1952 the Swiss-made 'Lasso' cableway was tested in Scotland. Timber could be hooked on and unloaded at any point without stopping the operation, and it moved up to 1500 hoppus feet of timber per day.

Timber was extracted by helicopter for the first time in 1956 at Glenduror, near Fort William, in a trial arranged by Machinery Research Officer Col R G Shaw. The time taken for loading, flying, delivering and flying back was reduced to 5 minutes 37 seconds, and in his report Col Shaw points out how effective this was. But he adds 'it is certain that while helicopters are convenient they will not be an economic proposition until their operating costs are reduced far below the present figure.'

In 1954 aerial spraying was tried for the first time at Cannock Chase, near Stafford, and Culbin, on the Moray Firth, in a battle against the Pine looper moth. The operation was described as 'remarkably effective' and in 1959 the first aerial applications of fertiliser were made at Wilsey Down Forest in South West England.



Mr Morris and Mr Warburton model the new Forester's uniform, 1954

A SPORTING BUNCH

The Welsh were well to the fore in sports in the fifties, with Wales' hockey international W A Lindsay-Smith selected for the Helsinki Olympic Games. Pat Price, an 18-year-old clerk from Draethen, South Wales Conservancy, took a prize at the Horse of the Year show at Harringay in 1956; and Ganger G Morris of St Gwynno became regular lock forward with Newport Rugby Club. Workers at Slebech Forest in South Wales formed a cricket club known as the 'Woodpeckers', skippered by lorry driver Telford Court, which won a local trophy, the Bush Cup, in 1957 and 1958.

Meanwhile South Scotland Conservancy was running its own football league playing for the Mackay Cup, donated by the League's President, Head Forester W H Mackay of Fleet Forest. In 1956 the Cup went to Kirroughtree after a 5-1 victory over Glentworth in a sea of mud; in '57 Laurieston Forest beat Balloch, again by 5-1, to take the Mackay Cup, and by beating the Fleet Forest team on aggregate, also won the League Shield, gift of Conservator J A B Macdonald, Mr Donald and Mr T Farmer.

In England, the North West Conservancy Office cricket team won the Stuart Shield, awarded by the local Civil Service Sports Association, twice in four years, and in 1957 Kielder Hearts football team won the North Tyne League championship. Messenger A H Spooner, from Chester, won the C J F Owen Championship cup for bowls.



Archie Mackenzie delivers firewood by Crossley Truck to the FC Hostel at Cannich, 1955.

DID YOU KNOW...

1950

In July timber from Monmouth, prepared at the Commission's sawmill at Tintern, was used in a new table for the Speaker in the House of Commons.

At the Festival of Britain a 70 foot larch was provided by the Commission as a flagpole. A number of tree plantings commemorated the Festival.

1951

The biggest worker in the Commission was the 'Inverliever Giant', Forest Worker B T Crowe of West Scotland, towering at seven feet tall. The oldest worker was Forest Worker Archie Menzies of Loch Ard Forest, who started with the Commission in 1929 aged 62, and was still doing a full day's work aged 84.

1953

Ann Brooks became the first woman in the Commission to reach the rank of Senior Executive Officer. She later became the first woman in the Commission to be appointed an MBE.

Walt Disney's *Rob Roy*, starring Richard Todd and Glynis Johns, was shot in Loch Ard Forest.

A fort and period cottages were built, and a full-blown clan battle was staged on Corriegrennan hill.

The Commission declared war against the grey squirrel, announcing a cash payment of one shilling per tail for all would-be squirrel hunters.

1954

Forester G W Parker of Chopwell Forest broke a record — he received 361 separate orders for Christmas trees and greenery.

1959

The Commission's Donald Campbell, aged 17, was among the first young people invited to Buckingham Palace to receive the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award.

Research work moved from the old house at Alice Holt to a new extension, built at a cost of £134 000. The first damage was caused almost immediately when a Forester walked through a plate glass window thinking it was a door.



Ploughing at Kielder, 1958

1958

The first exhibition of forest machinery to be held by the Commission took place in 1958 at Blackbushe Aerodrome, on the edge of Bramhill Forest. More than 70 exhibitors took part.

1955

The first Forest Queen was crowned in July: Agnes Horton, of Ae.

DECADE OF ACHIEVEMENT



The 1960s were years of consolidation and confident expansion.

A mechanical revolution took place. Technical progress allowed planting on previously unplanted land, as at Culbin. The axe and cross-cut saw disappeared, replaced by the lightweight chainsaw. Stables became workshops as the use of horses declined. Timber production rose from 20.1 million hoppus feet in 1960 to 36.5 million hoppus feet (equivalent to 1.8 million tonnes) per year by the end of the decade and increasingly forestry was regarded as a business. The private forestry sector was buoyant too: by 1969 it was carrying out 40 per cent of total planting, and close to one million acres had been dedicated. With a guaranteed timber supply massive investments took place in the timber-using industries and new markets opened up. Coal mining now used only a third of the Commission's output, but growth in forestry and its related industries still created thousands of new jobs.

An awareness of public access and recreation needs grew, along with landscape and conservation considerations. Dame Sylvia Crowe was appointed as the Commission's first Landscape Consultant, and the public were given a 'right to roam' in Commission forests. A seventh National Forest Park had been established by the end of the decade.

1960

The Commission plants 13 167 acres in Wales: a new Welsh record!

David Marshall Lodge, the Commission's largest visitor facility to date, opens at Aberfoyle. A gift of the Carnegie Trust, it is named after a former Trust Chairman.

1961

A forestry project at Lake Vyrnwy in Wales, begun jointly by Liverpool Corporation and the Commission in 1924, makes a profit for the first time.

1963

The Home Grown Timber Advisory Committee is reconstituted with an independent Chairman. Commission officials still attend Committee meetings.

1964

The Commission's first Wildlife Officer takes up his post.



selecting Christmas trees, 1969



1969 — GOLDEN JUBILEE YEAR

More than 32 000 people visited the biggest forest exhibition ever at the Bush Estate, near Edinburgh, where the sun shone non-stop. The number of visitors and the response from press and trade journals earned the exhibition the distinction of being the most economical public relations exercise of its size and quality ever staged by a Government Department.

Among the highlights were a visit by HRH Princess Alexandra on the second day. The Commission's own short wave radio transmitting station, run from Bush by Ralph Hodgson from the New Forest, Alan Lightly from Bristol and Bill Lindsay-Smith from Oswestry, contacted 230 stations worldwide over the three days — even HMS Endurance, cruising in the Arctic Circle, was contacted and sent congratulations.

In South Wales, jubilee celebrations concentrated on a six-day exhibition at Margam Forest, near Port Talbot. The total attendance was around 12 000 people, including guests at a celebratory lunch and a tree planting ceremony in Coed Morgannwg. The Prince of Wales visited special forestry exhibits at the Royal Welsh Show in July.

North East England Conservancy held a Schoolchildrens' Essay Competition, based around a visit to Dalby Forest, with more than 150 children from Yorkshire and Teesside taking part. The '50 years of Forestry' theme continued at the Royal Show, where a simulated forest walk through a maze made from conifer tops, put together by East England Conservancy staff, won the Silver Gilt Medal.

In Bedgebury Forest the 'Spring Wood' was renamed 'the Churchill Wood' in memory of Sir Winston Churchill and for the Jubilee. In Cornwall, celebrations went on for a whole week. On 23 June the opening of the Plym Forest Trail was followed later in the day by a venison sausage barbecue for staff of Bodmin and Wilsey Down, their families and the general public in Cardinham Woods. Bodmin Town Band and Folk and Harmony Singers provided music, with sideshows, a bar and ice-cream parlour. Nine hundred people came along and £30 was given to local charities. Conducted tours of other local forests took place all week.

Profits from a Jubilee recipe book went to the Forestry Commission Benevolent Fund, and a souvenir Jubilee tie was on sale priced 12s 6d. An illustrated history of the first 50 years was issued titled *Timber! Your Growing Investment!*

The year ended with a tree planting ceremony at the same place, on the same date, as the first Commission planting in Eggesford.

When the oil tanker the *Torrey Canyon* ran aground on the Scillies, causing a major environmental disaster, the Commission lent tractors to draw supplies of detergent to the beaches and portable sprays, normally used for fire control. Our machines worked for 284 hours, spraying beaches with concentrated detergent then turning and mixing the treated sand.

April 1967

'Planting season 61 brought the number of acres planted in Argyll to 100 000. The benefits have included employment, with 95 industrial workers in 1930 rising to more than 900 today; the wage bill has risen from £7000 to £480 000 a year. Over 300 miles of forest road have been built: 550 houses erected since 1945; and social and community services for forest workers have been provided. By 1980 production is likely to exceed 200 000 tons annually.'

June 1961

'Land which cost the Commission just £1 has been planted. The 43-acre Aberbargoed colliery tip, a local eyesore for half a century, was bought from the National Coal Board and planted with larch and pine, in co-operation with county and local councils.'

April 1960

In June 1963 12 MPs from both main parties descended on Scottish forests and were shown a comprehensive cross-section of our work. Writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, Jasper More (Cons, Ludlow) said: 'The Forestry Commission is one of the success stories of modern Britain ... The return on the money (spent by the Commission) is now beginning to be visible. On the one hand the life of the Highlands has in a large degree been regenerated; on the other, the nation has been provided with a massive timber reserve.'

The Commissioners during their visit to Wales in 1969



1965

Benmore Forester Training School closes.

On 1 July a formal reconstitution takes place, with the Director General appointed the first full-time Commissioner. He is joined by three further full-time Commissioners in charge of Admin and Finance, Forest and Estate Management and Harvesting and Marketing (as the Acland Committee originally recommended). National Directorates are abolished but Senior Officers are appointed for Scotland and Wales. Chairman Lord Waldegrave is succeeded by Leslie Jenkins.

1966

Headquarters is divided among offices in London, Basingstoke and Edinburgh.

The terms Forest Enterprise and Forestry Authority are used for the first time to distinguish between the Commission's functions as a Government Department and as a trading body managing publicly owned forests.

Future planting programmes are increased again, aiming for 50 000 acres per year by 1976.

1967

The Forestry Act 1967 consolidates all Acts from 1919 to 1963. This, with some amendments, still regulates forestry.

1969

The Commission's 50th anniversary

Commissioners decide forester training belongs in the public education system and Gwydr closes in June. In December Cumberland and Westmorland College of Agriculture and Forestry is chosen as a forestry education centre.

An estimated 15 million visits are made by the public to Commission forests.

DID YOU KNOW...

1961

Joydens Wood, West Kent District of South East England, had the distinction of being the forest unit nearest to Central London — just 13 miles from Charing Cross.

1964

Holmsley Camp Site opened in the New Forest. Providing accommodation for 300 campers, it cost £16 000 to build.

1965

A hoard of Roman coins discovered by Islwyn Jones and David Samuel in Cao Forest, Carmarthenshire in 1965 depicted 17 different Roman emperors.

The first load of timber destined for the new Fort William pulp and paper mill was signed out of Inchnacardoch Forest by Sir John Stirling of Fairburn.

1966

Glasgow poet Charles Senior worked as Forest Clerk at Culloiden Forest. His *Selected Poems* were published and his work appeared at home and in America.

Two rare European bison, a gift to the Commission from the Polish Ministry of Forestry, produced a daughter, Anita, in London Zoo.

1967

The Commission's first integrated pulp and board mill — Thames Board Mills' Workington plant — was officially opened in 1967 by Prime Minister Harold Wilson.

Ffani Lloyd was the oldest working horse in the Commission at 35. Owned by Idwal Lewis, she had worked in Dovey Forest, North Wales, since 1937.

1968

East England set a record for total produce receipts in any one Conservancy in December by exceeding £100 000.

The BBC chose Erme estuary on the South Devon coast and its surrounding Commission woodlands for filming the serial *Treasure Island*.

'Two of our Head Foresters, Mr A Rose of Ledmore, East Scotland, and G A Sharp, of North East England, have each been awarded £300 by a Committee on Awards to Inventors for the development of their respective lining out ploughs, the Ledmore and the York. These are tractor mounted machines for transplanting purposes. Mr Rose had previously received £25 for his machine through the Commission's suggestions scheme.'

March 1966

BEATING THE PANEL

Forester R T Wheeler, seed collection instructor, beat the panel when he appeared on the BBC *What's my line?* programme. The panel was quickly defeated, giving time for a brief account of the use of a tree bicycle and to display a small potted Norway spruce as an example of an end product of seed collection.

January 1962

WEATHER STRIKES AGAIN

'Incredibly heavy rainfalls and storms hit Wales in December 1964. Assuming a fairly uniform distribution, as indicated by scattered rain gauges, a staggering 19 130 000 tons of rainwater fell on Dovey Forest over 48 hours. There was extensive flooding in the Conway and Mawddach Valleys, and Lake Vyrnwy rose seven feet in a single night. But elsewhere, water shortages were almost so severe as to constitute a drought — in Bristol only 3.17 inches of rain fell in three months, considerably less than on one day in Wales!'

February 1965

'A fire in Drybrook, The Dean, was reported and first to arrive on the scene was the land rover fire party from the Parkend School, including overseas students. A local went up to the first man out of the land rover and asked 'Where are you from?' 'Nigeria,' replied the student. 'Well, blow me down,' said the local, 'you've beaten the Coleford Fire Brigade.'

July 1966



AS OTHERS SEE US!

Quote from a South Wales newspaper report under the heading 'Stolen Car Trail in Prisoner Hunt'. 'He was badly in need of a shave and looked rough,' she said. 'I thought he was a Forester, but now I am convinced it was the escaped prisoner.'

February 1967

THAT SPORTING LIFE

Benmore could boast in 1968 when John Lamont became British singles bowling champion, defeating the Irish champion 21–10 at Bourneville, Birmingham. In Wales E E John, Leading Civil Engineering Assistant at Gwydr Forest, was touch-judge at Cardiff Arms Park for the Wales v New Zealand international in November 1967.

North East England claimed a county cricketer in 1962 when Miss B E Eddon, Forest Clerk at Cropton Beat, Allerston Forest, was selected for Yorkshire ladies; and at 18, motorcyclist Malcolm Rathmell from Knaresborough Forest in North East England was acclaimed as one of the top trials riders in the country.

Within the Commission, staff at Clipstone, Sherwood Forest, formed the Commission's first archery club in 1961 to keep Robin Hood's bow skills alive; and in 1967 Betty Landimore of Savile Row won the Civil Service ladies' singles table tennis championship for the fourth time.

Pastimes from M J Holmes' philuminism (match book collecting) to Morley Penistan's water divining were recorded, along with the escapades of Mortimer Forest's David Watts, a specialist in free fall parachuting. In 1968 Carol Justice, Clerical Officer at York, took the lead in a £5500 production of *Calamity Jane* in the 950-seat Theatre Royal and R G Sanzen-Baker, Deputy Surveyor at the Dean, was awarded the highest honour of the scouting world — the Silver Wolf.

At Grizedale a 'deerskin industry' was in operation, run by ladies of the forest community, whose moccasins, purses and other deerskin goods were being sold all over the world — including Australia and the USA.

Awareness of recreation needs grew gradually. Wyre Forest was formally declared open to the public in 1960; and Forest Trails (distinct from a Nature Trail) opened in Oversley Wood, North West England Conservancy and Quantock Forest in 1965 and 1966.

In 1969 guests and members of the press joined discussions on afforestation plans for the most recent substantial area of land acquired by the Commission — the Newton House Estate in Yorkshire, containing one of Whitby's best known beauty spots. Of 3200 acres taken over, 600 were retained as farmland and 500 as unplanted heather moor.

The 1970s

CONSERVATION AND AMENITY TAKE PRIDE OF PLACE

1970

Sales total more than £5.5 million for 1.5 million cubic metres of timber.

Recreation booms: 15 million day visits and one million camper nights are recorded. Seven Forest Parks offer a total of 600 000 acres of woodland, and nine managed camping and caravan sites have 3300 pitches. Forest trails, picnic sites and car parks are being provided in busy areas.

In December the Commissioners welcome a forestry review to examine return on public money.

1971

The Commission adopts metric measurement: the cubic metre replaces the hoppus foot and the acre becomes the hectare.

1972

A high point in private planting is reached with 24 000 hectares (59 000 acres) grant aided. But this was soon to drop — by 1977 just over 9000 hectares receive grants.

The forestry review concludes state forests are uneconomic — an unexpected result for the Commissioners. The Government demands a reduced combined planting programme and sets a target rate of return of 3 per cent.

1974

New Headquarters completed at Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh. In 1975 the opening speeches are relayed to staff by closed circuit television.

In September Britain hosts the Commonwealth Forestry Conference for the first time since 1947.

1979

The Commission celebrates its Diamond Jubilee. A number of Royal visits are made to forests throughout the year.

Private planting begins to recover: 10 800 hectares are planted with grant aid. The total area within Basis III Dedication is around 80 000 hectares.



*Head Forester Eric Brown and walkers on the Tal-y-bont Forest Trail, 1974.
(photograph courtesy of the Western Mail)*

1977

Small Woods Planting Scheme and higher grants are introduced to boost private planting.

The Centre for Agricultural Strategy at Reading University begins the study 'A Forestry Strategy for the UK'. Published in 1980, the Report calls for recognition of the economic importance of forestry.



*Growing trees in Japanese paper pots for motorway planting.
Alice Holt, 1978.*

1976

In May a viewpoint and picnic site at New Fancy View, Forest of Dean, is opened to commemorate the planting of 2 million acres in Britain.

From the 1970s, conservation and amenity issues became more central in the Commission's planning and forestry policy.

Emphasis was increasingly given to maintaining woodland character, recognising the importance of broadleaves. Following the advice of Dame Sylvia Crowe, landscaping began to be considered on a far wider scale, resulting in woods which were aesthetically pleasing as well as productive. Forests were identified as important wildlife reserves, and conservation became a special responsibility of Commission staff.

Facilities for recreation developed steadily, especially after a consultants' report highlighted the suitability of many sites for holiday accommodation. A Forest Cabins Branch was formed and new cabins built.

Changes were also taking place in training, with Faskally and Parkend Schools closing. Northerwood House ceased to be used as a Training Centre in 1971. A two-year New Entrant Training Scheme was launched in 1970 and a new Management Training Centre opened in the Forest of Dean in 1973.

In 1970 a severe outbreak of Dutch Elm Disease hit the south of England, and the disease, believed to have arrived on Rock Elm logs from Canada, ran out of control for much of the decade. Despite orders restricting wood movement, some 30 per cent of the elm population in central and southern England was affected by 1975. Much research was carried out but no cure found, and in the end the disease had to be left to run its course.

In the private sector the Dedication, Approved Woodlands and Small Woods schemes were closed and a new Dedication Scheme (Basis III) introduced which included provisions on public access.

NRS OPENED

The Northern Research Station at Bush near Edinburgh was opened in May 1970 by the Rt Hon William Ross, Secretary of State for Scotland. Despite delays in moving staff from Sighthill, everything was fully operational by the big day. The youngest research worker at NRS, 19-year-old Hamish Howell of Edinburgh, prepared the birch tree planted by the Secretary of State and supervised the planting.

SILVER JUBILEE

A number of special events celebrated the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977.

The Jubilee Oak, raised within Snowdonia, was planted in Gwydr Forest on behalf of the Royal Forestry Society. A Jubilee Walk opened at Dunkeld Forest, Perth and a Jubilee plantation at a popular viewpoint in Kielder, soon to overlook Kielder Water. A silver spade used by the Queen in 1957 was used once more to plant 25 silver birches in the Forest of Dean.

STRIPTease!

According to the *Western Mail* in 1970, forest trails in North Wales hit a snag — tourists refused to leave their cars, even for a half-mile walk through the forest. A Welsh University Forestry Professor offered an answer — a striptease show at the end of the trail!

Apparently it worked in Denmark ...

In September 1973 the Queen Mother visited David Marshall Lodge at Aberfoyle to mark the planting of the millionth acre in Scotland. It was a big day for 7-year-old Jan Baird, daughter of Forester John Baird of Achray, who presented the bouquet. After unveiling an inscribed boulder the Queen Mother was taken on an aerial tour of the forest and visited the home of Lodge Warden, Bill Ross and his wife.



North Wales Conservancy is credited with the first forest trail for the handicapped in 1976 — Garth Falls Walk, near Betws-y-Coed. The idea was Recreation Forester Donald Shaw's; he realised handicapped or elderly visitors stayed in their cars while the rest of the family enjoyed a forest walk.

The New Forest received its nine millionth camper: Denis Bidmade, who with his wife became a guest for the weekend at the Hollands Wood site.

'See Your Forests Week' in May 1978 encouraged members of the public to visit their forests and promoted the recreation and education possibilities.

AWARDS

The Commission hit an award-winning streak in the seventies: its research work, buildings, forestry practices and visitor facilities all attracted far more awards than there is room to list here. Obviously we were getting very many things right!



The Hydrostatic Forest Tractor had an inside turning radius of 44 inches and remote-controlled winches.

One major award came from the Royal Agricultural Society for our Hydrostatic Forest Tractor, developed at Alice Holt by Mechanical Engineer Roddie Ross. The tractor was judged most outstanding machine at the 1974 Royal Show and received the Burke Perpetual Challenge Trophy — an occasional award last presented in 1972.

Finlay Macrae, District Officer at Dingwall, received an award from the Society of American Travel Writers for his work in conserving the Caledonian Pinewoods of Glen Affric: one of the very few occasions the Award has been made to a non-American. And the 1971 Edward John Memorial Cup, awarded for the best trade exhibit at the Vale of Glamorgan show, went to Chief Forester Fred Slatter of Tair Onen and his team.

MORE ATTRACTIONS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Our commitment to recreation and public amenities grew, with an astonishing range of facilities opened.

New attractions included a Wild Goat Park and the Galloway Deer Museum in South West Scotland; a 4500-acre Country Park in Hampshire, combining the local Council's Butser Hill and the Commission's Queen Elizabeth Forest; and new information centres at Garwnant, Hamsterley, Rothbury and Whinlatter. An £85 000 pavilion and visitor centre opened at Westonbirt, and a Forest Classroom, offering information and study facilities, at Ae. Forest Drives opened at Cwmbran, Kielder and Achray, and a forest museum and tearoom at Kielder Castle.

A magnificent silver Bentley became the first car along Achray Forest Drive when actor Andrew Keir cut the silver ribbon in 1970.



SPORT AND HOBBIES

Sporting competitions within the Commission seemed to have less of a priority during the seventies, or if they took place *Slasher* wasn't notified! But there were still plenty of active individuals on our staff.

David Whitney, Clerical Officer at Aberystwyth and a regular member of the Aberystwyth Town football team, was selected to play for Wales against England in 1971. Sheila Horsburgh, 20-year-old typist in Peebles District Office, became the first woman in Scotland to qualify as a judo referee, able to officiate at national competitions. In 1970 the Rangers of South West England Conservancy held a rifle competition organised by Head

Ranger Richard Prior, in which Jock Coburn of Poorstock came out the winner after a shoot-off with Aubrey Neale of the Dean.

Elsewhere Commission staff were involved in a range of activities, from Hampshire District Office Clerk Leila Moore, whose Crufts champion Kaytop Marshall was chosen by the Queen to sire a litter of corgis; to Forest Craftsman John Smith of York, whose prize dahlias won him 24 trophies in his best showing season ever. In Glasgow, tractor driver Hugh King of West Scotland Conservancy finished third in the national Red Hackle elbow wrestling finals in 1973.

MEDIA ATTENTION

Many projects received media coverage and we began to adopt a higher public profile. In 1971 the Commission helped with the BBC programmes *Deeper in the Mire*, filmed at Rothbury Forest, and *You Can't See the Wood*, in Thetford Chase, presented by David Bellamy.

The film *Woodland Harvest*, made in 1977 for the Commission by British Transport Films, won a bronze medal at the 20th International Film and TV Festival in New York. It was accepted for general release accompanying Burt Lancaster's *Twilight's Last Gleaming*.

Perhaps most unusual was a 1974 Japanese Broadcasting Corporation film of Margam and Ebbw Forests in South Wales, shown on Japanese TV in a programme describing Wales and Welsh life. Those involved had the chance to see the film — complete with Japanese commentary — but sadly, in Cardiff, not Tokyo!



FIRE!

The 1976 drought caused the worst fire situation since the war.

Superhuman efforts saved millions of trees but between April and September 1560 fires still destroyed over 4870 acres (1970 ha), valued at about £1 million.

Water shortages added to the problem and in some areas the fire service asked us to close our forests to the public. Fortunately there was no loss of human life but many homes were evacuated. In the New Forest patients were moved when fire came dangerously close to a hospital, and another fire was brought under control just 20 yards from an Army petrol store. Fire fighters in North York Moors only just escaped before flames engulfed their engine when a fire suddenly changed direction. Scotland suffered least with fewer drought areas, but in Wales fires burned non-stop for 10 days in August.

Autumn 1976

DID YOU KNOW...

1970

East England Conservancy became the first to exceed £1 million in a year from timber sales — £1 017 286 to be precise. And Thetford felled over a million hoppus feet of timber in one quarter — the first time such a figure was recorded.

The Countryside Theatre at Grizedale opened at Easter with two folk concerts and a lecture on 'Wildlife in North America'. The Theatre's scoop in 1976 was hosting the British premiere of Chris Bonnington's illustrated lecture on the successful ascent of Everest's south west face.

Tom Rickerby, of Thornthwaite's Road Squad, was one of the first patients in Britain to receive a new kidney in a four-hour operation.

Tom's illness had forced him to give up road-building — but 1972 reports said he was back at his old job.

1971

Commission staff won both Novices and Masters events in the national Chain Saw Competition at the Great Yorkshire Show. James Potts (Wark Forest) won the Masters, M Truran (Cropton Forest) the Novices.

Mr H Williamson, Plant Operator at Hamsterley, became North Midlands Champion by cutting three chains of open ditch, using a McConnell ditching bucket on a Massey Ferguson 175 tractor.

1972

To commemorate its 25th Anniversary Alice Holt held two open days. More than 3000 people came along.

Ganger J H Boyle of Glentress, South Scotland became the first to complete 50 years' service. He was presented with 50 gladioli bulbs.

1973

'Plant a Tree in 73' — first day covers, issued on 28 February, caused a flurry of excitement among stamp-collectors with the 9p first-class stamp bearing a classic Oak *Quercus robur*.

1974

A new sawmill opened at Kilmallie near Fort William, handling a total of 50 000 cubic metres of sawlogs from Commission plantations annually.

1976

Fiona Fenton became the Commission's first woman Forester in July.

1977

Artists were in residence at Grizedale for the first time. David Nash and Richard Harris spent six months creating informal pieces of sculpture for the forest.

1978

Ganger Ian Lang of South Kintyre Forest was the one member of Campbeltown Pipe Band not to be heard on Paul McCartney's 1978 hit 'Mull of Kintyre'. But Ian, the Band's pipe major (who marches with the mace), appears in the videos and led the band on Mike Yarwood's Christmas Show.

Pensions were computerised for the first time in April.

Ian MacIver, District Officer at Stirling, received the Commission's highest award to date under the Staff Suggestion Scheme — £800 — by reducing mail despatches to two or three days a week. By separating 'urgent' from 'non-urgent' mail, Ian saved the Commission over £10 000 a year.

WILDLIFE AND CONSERVATION

A number of projects got under way. As a result of the BBC *Nationwide* programme and a WWF Sponsorship Scheme, 3500 bat boxes were put up in Thetford, Cannock Chase, Kielder, Bramshill, Wareham and Ardross Forests.

In 1971 the Commission was involved in a polecat survival scheme, with several pairs of polecats, bred at Riber Castle Wildlife Park in Derbyshire, released in Grizedale Forest. Does anyone know if they survived?

Porcupines were thriving in Devon in 1979, having been spotted first in Staffordshire in 1972. They had damaged bark at the base of a few trees. Are they still there?

The 1980s

CHANGE AND CHALLENGE

The 1980s were years of change and challenge.

In the early 80s recession hit timber users, and pulp mills at Fort William, Ellesmere Port and Bristol closed. The Commission began to develop export markets, and soon 500 000 tonnes of timber a year were being shipped — much to Scandinavia.

In Scotland, the search for new investment began with the formation of the Scottish Forest Products Development Group in 1983. This had spin-off benefits elsewhere, and within five years forest resources had attracted new investments worth over £600 million. New ventures started and in 1987 the Finnish Kymmene Corporation decided to build an integrated pulp and paper mill at Irvine with Commission forests in west Scotland meeting half its requirements. Commercial forestry strengthened: in 1979–80 the Commission sold 1.4 million cubic metres of timber earning £34 million, which rose by 1989–90 to 3.5 million cubic metres, valued at more than £77 million.

Environmental issues came to the fore, with the Commission's management policies, and particularly forestry's apparent lack of environmental awareness, receiving heavy criticism. As problems were addressed, and the Commission became adept at putting across its message, a number of critics became more supportive.

The other main feature of the decade was the steady increase in Government cutbacks, with fewer public funds available. New planting was cut and investment in recreation ceased. Gradually the Commission began to acquire a higher political profile. By the end of the decade messages from the Government were mixed: on the one hand expressing support and encouragement, on the other restricting forestry operations.

1980

By March the Commission employs 8129 people.

Government launches a review of the Commission's role to reduce its call on public funds. Legislation introducing woodland disposals as part of forestry policy is opposed vigorously in the House of Lords, but is eventually included in the Forestry Act 1981. The bulk of future afforestation is to be undertaken by the private sector.

1981

Basis III Dedication and the Small Woods Schemes are replaced by the Forestry Grant Scheme, which proves popular.

The Wildlife & Countryside Act stimulates environmental debate and increases protection for certain sites.

1984

Due to difficulties in meeting disposals targets the Commission is asked instead to improve its efficiency and commercial effectiveness.

A consultative paper, 'Broadleaves in Britain', launches one of the most important initiatives in the 80s. It becomes part of policy to manage broadleaved woods for multi-purpose objectives, which leads to the introduction of the Broadleaved Woodland Grant Scheme.

1985

The Wildlife & Countryside (Amendment) Act obliges the Commission to balance planting, production and timber supply with conservation of features of special interest.

AWARDS

Wales scored a remarkable hat-trick in the eighties when Snowdonia Forest Park camping ground at Beddgelert won the coveted AA Campsite of the Year Award in 1980, 1982 and 1988. The 10-acre campsite, opened in the late 1930s, was recording 80 000 camping nights each year by 1980. North of the Border David Marshall Lodge was named AA National Picnic Site of the Year.



Number 1: the Beddgelert Campsite

1987

EC Directive requires an Environmental Assessment of initial afforestation where this might lead to adverse ecological changes.

1988

A comprehensive Woodland Grant Scheme is introduced, but Nigel Lawson's Budget tax changes take away a key stimulus for private planting.

Nicholas Ridley, Secretary of State for the Environment and John MacGregor, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announce the need to conserve habitats in the English uplands, which affects approval for conifer-planting.

The Farm Woodlands Scheme is set up to reduce production and agricultural surpluses, and to contribute to farm income and rural employment.

In 1988–89 private planting reaches a peak of 29 942 hectares. Over the decade, private planting exceeds 182 000 hectares.

1989

By March Commission properties to the value of more than £123 million have been sold.

In July the Community Forest Initiative is launched to restore the urban fringe and green belt, provide jobs and create more mixed woodland. The first three Forests are planted at South Staffordshire (Forest of Mercia), South Tyne and Wear (Great North Forest) and East London (Thames Chase Forest).

THE BIG STORM

The October '87 gales led to a mammoth clean-up operation in the south of England. Some 50 million trees blew down, with more timber destroyed than in any other single storm this century. Weald and Suffolk Forest Districts both lost the equivalent of a ten years' felling programme; Bedgebury lost three times its annual cut. The vast majority of blown timber was salvaged and marketed.

The House of Commons commended the Commission for its clearance work and provided special supplements to assist restocking. An advisory Windblow Task Force of Alasdair Taylor (HQ), Laura Caless (Forest Survey Branch), Ellen Hilliard (Admin Assistant), Valerie Shipp (Northants Forest District), Jim Dewar (Forest Survey Branch) and Rod Stern (Conservation Officer East England) answered more than 1000 queries before winding up in 1988.



By the 1990s the Commission was committed to multi-purpose forestry. Today the demands of commercial production, recreation and conservation are carefully balanced, and not only in

Enterprise woods: Centre of Excellence awards for private owners encourage multi-purpose management, and the Woodland Grant Scheme offers bigger grants if public access is a key objective.

Because we see the forest as an environmental resource and manage it as a whole, post-War forests are being carefully restructured as they reach maturity — particularly through the development of the Forest Design Plans. Broadleaf planting and long-term management are encouraged by grant-aiding. Restoring native woodland in areas like Glen Affric and Sherwood Forest has been widely welcomed, and these initiatives will have a major impact on the countryside.

Environmental concerns are well to the fore and forest officers work closely with conservation groups. Wildlife projects underway include help for threatened species such as the red squirrel and nightjar. Now more than ever, we consult widely before decisions affecting woodlands are taken. Formally and informally specialist bodies, local groups and the general public offer advice and opinions on our work, and private owners are encouraged to obtain advice and approval before making key decisions. Ventures such as the Valleys Forest Initiative in Wales have brought local people a new sense of ownership of their woods.

Our experience is in demand worldwide, and visits from forestry organisations overseas continue to increase. Our Research Division offers its services on a contract basis, and Education and Recreation Rangers meet visitors' particular needs. We manage a wide range of recreation and tourist facilities, from deer stalking to rallying, and oversee historic sites including barrows, forts and medieval villages.

If the early Commissioners saw our forests today, what would they think? They could probably still suggest plenty of improvements. But there's no doubt about our achievements. In our first 75 years the Commission has arrested the wholesale decline of Britain's woodland, and begun to reverse it. Against a shifting social and political background, we have shown ourselves a flexible and adaptable organisation. The woods being planted and managed today will show the evidence well into the next century. Let's look forward to our centenary!

TODAY...

The home market for timber is mainly paper and paperboard, construction timber and wood panels.

The Commission's estate totals 1 127 000 hectares, of which 875 000 are wooded. It represents about 40 per cent of Britain's forest area. But the UK still has the lowest proportion of forest cover in Europe apart from Ireland, and a large timber import bill.

In 1993 more than 4.1 million cubic metres of timber came from Commission woods, with an income exceeding £73 million. Investment is increasingly covered by expanding timber sales, but our planting programme is still declining: from 4081 hectares in 1990 to 2356 hectares in 1993.

Our forests receive more than 50 million day visits each year. We have 17 National Forest Parks, covering 300 000 hectares, and manage 29 camping and caravan sites; 174 forest cabins and holiday houses; 30 visitor centres; and 17 Forest Shops.

We employ just over 4300 people.

Forestry policy, established in 1991, currently has two aims: the sustainable management of existing woods and forests, and the steady expansion of tree cover.

Annual production is set to rise from four million cubic metres in 1993 to over six million by 2010.



*Off with the old,
on with the new...
the Commission's
old seal is replaced
by the new crest,
1994*

THE COMMONS STATEMENT 19 JULY 1994

Secretary for State for Scotland Ian Lang announced that:
Forestry Commission woodlands will remain in the public sector;
Forest Enterprise will be put on a more business-like footing as a Next Steps Agency headed by a Chief Executive;
Access arrangements are to be expanded and strengthened;
New planting incentives will encourage private sector planting of productive conifer forests.

Reactions to the Statement and comments on the proposals will be carried in the next issue of Slasher.



FORESTRY REVIEW GROUP

On 30 March 1993 the Secretary of State for Scotland, Ian Lang, announced a review of both the effectiveness of forestry investment incentives and the ownership and management of Forestry Commission woodlands. While the result has been a year of uncertainty for Commission staff, we've been able to take heart from the almost universal support our work has received — sometimes from organisations that have been our bitterest critics in the past.

Privatisation rumours brought an immediate reaction from conservationists, with organisations such as the Councils for the Protection of Rural England and Rural Wales speaking in favour of the Commission almost immediately. Local groups also expressed concern and in April 1993 the RSPB, backed by 850 000 members, joined the Commission's defence. David Bellamy threatened to chain himself to the gates of Buckingham Palace if privatisation went ahead. 'Our national forests are a key resource for conservation and amenity — a green relief valve without equal,' he said in November.

Public access was an issue from the beginning. The Ramblers' Association announced a campaign in April and more than 10 000 walkers turned out at 100 sites in September to protest against the threat to access.

Even the private forestry sector largely backed the status quo. In July Timber Growers UK told the Government 'there is no need to privatise the Forestry Commission'. The Duke of Buccleuch, the country's largest private landowner, said 'It would be crazy to dismantle or dismember [the Forestry Commission] at such a time. Unless we succeed in this task our children and grandchildren will have every reason to reproach us'.

The wood processing industries were equally opposed. BSW Chairman Sandy Brownlie joined Toby Beadle of Caledonian Paper in questioning if supplies could be met by any other organisation. 'Such guarantees as we need are not available from the private sector,' said Toby Beadle.

Opposition parties joined in with Labour, Liberal Democrat, Scottish Nationalist and Green Party reactions fuelled by speculation on job losses, particularly in Scotland and Wales.

When the Review Group reported to Ministers in March 1994, it had been bombarded with more than 3000 letters and received representations from 300 interest groups concerned about everything from rights of access to conservation.