

C. & D.

Some Extracts from an Address delivered to The Aberdeen
University Forestry Society in January 1930.

My first visit to Morayshire was made last Easter when I spent three weeks at the Forestry Commission area of Roseisle. Later, in the summer, Mr. Ritchie and I spent some 6 weeks at Monaughty Forest, near Elgin. It was during these two short visits that the following views and impressions were collected.

The first area, that of Roseisle, consists of some agricultural land/

land which has fallen out of cultivation, some grassy moorland, a stretch of sand-dunes along the coast south of Burghead, partly fixed, and partly shifting, and some existing plantations; these being of Scots Pine about thirty years old. The grassy moorland which I have mentioned had been afforested at one time the trees being felled during the war.

The work at Roseisle when I was there consisted of planting, fencing and ditching.

Planting. Scots Pine, Corsican Pine, Jap. Larch and Pinus Ponderosa were the main species planted while strips of beech and maple were also planted along the rides to serve as fire lines. Most of the plants came from Seaton nursery and, as it was towards the end of the season were a pretty dud lot, especially the Scots Pine.

On arrival the roots of the plants were dipped in water and the plants "scheuched" in a convenient spot.

The planting was all notch planting in "screefs" and was done with the ordinary spade. It was fairly easy work as the ground was sandy and free from stones, the screefing being the most difficult, especially when the ground was mossy. My own opinion was that this screefing was to a large extent unnecessary, and, to a certain extent detrimental for it was a common enough thing for the plant to get covered inadvertently by a neighbour's careless screefing, or again crows were in the habit of turning over the thin sods in their search for grubs, and, what was easier than to turn them over on to the plants? Again moles found in the screef patches an easy spot to come to the surface and make their molehills, thus burying the young plants.

Screefing with the plough was also tried in some of the old fields the only difficulty being the tendency of the furrow to fall back on top of the plants if it was not quite severed from the other turf. By using the plough a lot of valuable time was saved.

In planting, the foreman set the pace being followed by the men. Some of the men had been in the Commission's service for the last eight or ten years while the other were, like myself, quite new to the job. Each one of the squad had an old army pack, adapted for/

x I have since learned that it was essential in order to properly aerate the roots of the plants.

for the purpose, slung round his waist and replenished with plants from time to time by the "loon" attached to the squad. The "loon" in addition to keeping the men supplied with plants from the "scheuch" had to keep a note of the number of bundles of one hundred each which he gave out. He did this by keeping the strings or willows with which they were tied.

Ditching. The planting programme being finished I got a turn at ditching, clearing old ditches of the accumulated growth of rushes, grass, etc. Two men were employed on the job, one to remove the top layer and the other the lower, and to bottom the drain seeing that the level was right for the run-off. Two men were expected to knock out forty yards a day, quite an easy job in the soft ground.

Fencing. Fencing was the next job I was put to. I should mention that all the ground we had been planting had been cleared of rabbits and fenced previous to my arrival. Owing, however, to some sixty acres extra being added to the planting programme we had to shift one of the fences bodily and put it up in a new place in order to take in the extra acreage. We also commenced the march fence.

First digging 4ft. holes for the 7ft. 6in. strainers, then putting on the single wire rolled off the cwt. coils, each coil containing about 400 yds. of wire. Next followed the driving of the light fir and larch posts at 12 ft. intervals, the digging of the trench for the wire netting to the outside of the fence and the putting up and joining of the 50 yds. rolls of netting wire and the filling in of the trench. All the fences in Roseisle were of this light construction, the posts being cut from the existing plantations, peeled, charred in a fire, and then tarred.

The march fence at its Western extremity runs into the sea through the sand dunes.

Sand Fixation. Efforts to fix these dunes have so far been in the hands of the L.M.S. Railway whose branch line to Burghead and Hopeman runs through them. The railway company built sheds to drive the sand over the line but they are not much good. They have also planted marram grass and erected fences of rushes and broom with slightly better results. In the future the Commission and the L.M.S. are going to collaborate in the work of fixation.

Probably/

Probably the greatest Sand area administered by the commission is that of the Culbin Sands on the other side of the Findhorn. I visited them while at Burghead and on my way passed through the estate of Bingeness which is a good example of the afforesting of sand dunes. The plantations of Scots Pine and Corsican Pine are especially worthy of note considering that they are growing on pure sand.

The greatest damage the plantations on the estate have to face is from the drifting sand itself. On the W. side of the estate, where it marches with the Culbins, the sand has been piled high in shifting dunes which advance steadily, burying, first for only a few feet then up and up until they cover them, trees of some twenty years old. It is curious to see the tops of trees sticking up above the sand, some still green, some dead.

In another place the sand has been blown away from the roots of the trees and these are visible stretching their long length, some to three to four times the height of the tree. It is curious also to see what has happened to the march fence, a wire one with patent iron standards. At one place buried beneath many feet of sand then leaping across a gap, the standards slung along it, while the sand has blown away from them. It shows as perhaps nothing else could the unstable nature of these dunes.

The measures taken to fix these dunes consist of planting marram grass, - taking it from where it is thick and dibbling it in where it is non-existent. When the dunes are sufficiently fixed conifers are planted. This has only been moderately successful and various other ideas have been tried out from time to time. Of these I might mention broadcast sowing of pine. I don't think it did any good, and a German idea, Stakes were driven in in squares, these were filled with rubbish and trees planted on the rubbish. This last was too expensive.

Besides the actual dunes the Commission have a large area behind the dunes which they have planted very successfully. Pinus Contorta, Scots Pine and both European and Jap larch are all doing well. This hinterland, as I may call it is rather susceptible to fires, the last one doing some £1000 damage.

Fires/

Fires. Measures taken to prevent and extinguish fires on Commission areas are the patrolling of the areas on Sundays during the dry season by members of the squad complete with official armlet, and the provision and dispersion about the areas of a number of brooms. These brooms are some 10ft. to 12ft. long, usually of birch the head perhaps being forked and carrying wire netting.

A precautionary measure suggested at the Culbins was the ploughing up of both sides of a ride and the firing of the centre strip. An example of a ploughed firebreak is to be found on the Innes House estate some thirty miles away, where one of the plantations adjoins the railway line. It is interesting to note that this firebreak did not stop a fire which did some considerable damage there just after I left Morayshire.

The Innes House estate, where Mr. Ross I believe gained some practical experience of Forestry is equipped with an up-to-date saw-mill and - a rare thing on estates in the North - a creosoting plant. This consists of a large tank, heated from below while the pine posts and creosote bubble away inside. I am afraid I cannot tell you anything of the plantations at Innes House but there is a most excellent nursery there.

Monaughty - Summer of 1929.

My next few impressions of forestry in the county were gathered when at Monaughty in company with Mr. Ritchie. We put in some six weeks work there last summer.

The area of Monaughty consists of the Hill of Heldon and is for the most part heather covered with, however, patches of grass mingled with hummocks of a particularly vile and tough moss. The squad called it "Planters Joy" (*Polytrichum Communis*). We had to cut through some of it later when it came to ditching.

The area had been afforested for the most part at one time, the trees, mostly larch, being felled during the war. A remarkable feature was the number of naturally regenerated larch. The best of these were fine and clean although closely grown but most of the smaller ones, especially in damp spots were pumped with heart-rot. It was amongst these larch that work began. A fire of last Easter had burnt a big "skelp" of the hill going through the larches. Our job/

job was to cut out the dead and badly scorched larches, cut down the scrub and clear the ground for planting.

Clearing Burnt Areas.

The large stuff we felled with axe and saw, the small scrub being torn out by the roots or hacked down with a cleaver. The larger stuff was snedded and stacked in four sizes - stack props, posts, sheep stakes and droppers.

The slash, comprising the scrub and sneddings was afterwards gathered into heaps and burned.

In connection with the felling what struck me most was the neglect of tools and their consequent bluntness. A sharpening stone was provided but was used but infrequently while the saws were rarely filed up. The reason for this may well have been that the younger members of the squad were very keen workers and averse to spending time sharpening tools.

In connection with the gathering of the slash into heaps to be burned a rather slow system prevailed. Instead of keeping line, each man making frequent small heaps and thus working over the area systematically; no order was kept, large heaps to which all contributed entailing more carrying being the rule. In all its aspects this was a filthy job owing to the charred and brooky bark of the trees, and a spell of ditching came as a pleasant change.

Hill Ditching.

The ditches ran straight up the hill face draining damp spots and were rather more difficult to clear than the Roseisle ditches, owing to the accumulation of branches, etc., which had fallen into them since the woods were felled during the war. We cut the sides of the drain with a big spade, forked out the "divots" cleared the debris and bottomed the ditch with the ordinary spade. The side drains were easier, many of them being dry and requiring only a scrape with the spade. In addition to this, heather and rushes had sometimes to be cut with the hook and tree roots with the mattock.

While at Monaughty we also did some work at the march fence, a far more solid affair than that at Roseisle for it had to keep out sheep and cattle and therefore was five wired, two barb and three plain/

plain, while the posts were good larch posts set only 9 ft. apart. This march fence ran along the top of an old "fell" dyke, covered with whins. These had to be cut down and the ground levelled before the actual work of putting up the fence commenced.

Logie and Relugas.

All in all our work at Monaughty was interesting though apt to be a bit monotonous at times. Hence we were glad to avail ourselves of the opportunity to visit neighbouring estates. Our first excursion was to the estates of Logie and Relugas on the Findhorn, the property of the Grants.

At Logie House we saw the trees, sitka spruces, planted by Dawess and Ramsay MacDonald. Both were looking fine and healthy. Ramsay's being perhaps the healthier of the two. There was very little else to see on the estates owing to the best of their timber being felled during the war.

Darnaway.

We also visited the estate of Darnaway, the property of the Earl of Moray. It is I suppose the show place for forestry in the North and is well worth a visit if any of you happen to be in the vicinity. The estate is managed primarily for Forestry, the forester having his own gamekeeper while the estate is equipped with an excellent saw-mill and well-kept nurseries. The whole of the woods are run on an eighty year rotation, 62 acre plots being felled annually. One interesting feature of the estate is the well-stocked forestry museum containing specimens of timbers, pests, and other exhibits relative to Forestry.

Other places of interest in the vicinity which I visited were Watson's Saw-mill at Elgin, and the Gordon Castle Estate near Fochabers, although Mr. Ritchie and I missed the official visit of the Moray and Nairn Forestry Society to it.

The predominant impression left by my two visits was the amount of afforestation necessary to replace the woods felled during the war and the vigour with which this task was being attacked. This vigour is largely due to the efforts of the Forestry Commission and the progressive policy of the neighbouring estates.

A very flourishing Society, "The Moray and Nairn Forestry Society" organises/

organises excursions and holds meetings which are well patronised while I believe Evening Classes in Forestry have been started in the district.

I hope that I have been able to give you some indication of what the conditions are in Morayshire and that some of you may think of putting in your own practical work there. I do not think you could choose a better county for the purpose.

J. G. Haydon.