

Former Roadsman Turns Heritage Detective

By Will Jones

I have always been interested in archaeology and history, and when I took early retirement in 2002 after 40-odd years in the FC's North Wales Roads Department, I was able to devote my future to digging into our colourful past.

I spent the first year on oral history, recording the reminiscences and collecting photographs of people who were involved in some way with the early days of the



Forestry Commission. The FC, with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, was behind this project. A few examples of the recordings were a man who had to plough an artillery range in an armour-plated cab - he was awarded the BEM (British Empire Medal) for his efforts.

Another was a lady who told me that as a child she knew the location of a Roman grave. We went to investigate and found it to be a few thousand years older, in fact, a Bronze Age grave. Another story was of the FC ploughman whose plough kept popping out of the ground. He went to investigate and found that the point of the plough had gone into the hole of a maze (a stone axe). All these recordings are held at the Museum of Welsh Life at St Fagan's, Cardiff, and a set is held locally at Trawsfynydd, Gwynedd.

This started me off on doing some real archaeology, because all the previous

AGM 2006

Twenty members gathered at the Three Salmons Hotel, Usk, South Wales, and completed an extensive agenda, which included five group motions, within three hours.

It was agreed that we should continue to press by every means possible for a satisfactory conclusion to the lack of information about lost members.

We agreed that the group organising each AGM should provide the secretarial support needed just for that meeting. Normal treasurer and secretarial work would be undertaken by the Management Committee. We also agreed to speed up information between groups and members by collecting e-mail addresses throughout the FCA, and also to explore the possibility of a website.

The big and welcome surprise of the afternoon came in the appearance of a volunteer for treasurer: David Parnell from Peninsula was accepted with relief. We still required a secretary. The post would involve much less work with the use of electronic mail. Would somebody please volunteer? Bart Venner and Warwick Payne were re-elected as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively.

Dinner on Tuesday was a great success, with 40 members and spouses enjoying melon, Welsh lamb and profiteroles.

The tour on Wednesday was designed to show the affinity between trees and industry. We started at the Forest Drive in

Cwmcarn where, in travelling by coach near the highest point at 300 metres, we were enveloped in wet fog! We stopped to discuss Welsh yew bow making with a Welsh bowman and marksman. We saw a member of the forest staff go under the roadway using a specially designed underpass for mountain bikers. At the end of the morning we arrived at Cwm Celyn, a community woodland joint project between Forestry Commission Wales and the local authority. Car parks, ponds and woodland walks had been created to encourage local people to be aware of the value of their environment.

We then had a fabulous lunch put on by the Cwm Celyn Rugby Club in its clubhouse, a splendid Victorian pile that used to be the mine manager's house.

While we were inside the wet fog changed to heavy rain, which persisted for the rest of the day and evening.

Our afternoon was dampened, but not dimmed, with a visit to the Blaenavon Iron Mine Museum. Two men whose working life had been spent in the iron and steel industry gave us a tour.

We returned to Usk and said our farewells to those heading home and sloshing through roads covered in standing water.

The whole two-day break was enjoyed by all, and our thanks must go to David and Chris Hughes and Peter Walker for organising the hotels and timetables, and to Commission staff Antony Wallis and Mark Langley for arranging the coach tour and impressive lunch.

archaeology I had done was industrial. In January 2003 I started excavating a post-medieval manor house, which after some digging, turned out to be medieval. There is also reputed to be a Roman Road (Sarn Helen) going through the site. The house is attributed to Maredudd ab Ieuan, according to his great-grandson, Sir John Wynn, who, in the 17th century wrote the 'History of the Gwydir Family'. Maredudd was the founder of the mighty Wynn dynasty of North Wales. Another noted person to live in the house was Angharad James. She was there at the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century. Her talent for learning was known near and far. She was also a poet and a musician, educated in many languages and was acquainted with the law of the land.

Over the past three years we have excavated about 30,000 shards of pottery,

some slipware dating back to the 17th century, and about 250 clay pipes.

Anyone who has an interest in archaeology and would like to try it out, send me an e-mail at wtj831509@aol.com or call 01766 831509.

WELCOME TO RETIREMENT

James Dutson	Bury St. Edmunds
Don Lindsay	Cupar
Philip Evans	Ipswich
Emyr Roberts	Fairbourne
William Dodds	Newton Stewart
Marek Melges	Mansfield
Anne Craig	Edinburgh
Ian Miller	Edinburgh
Mrs. J Parry	Edinburgh
Bob Selmes	Edinburgh
John Williams	Haslemere
James Mancor	Welwyn Garden City
<i>(This is the last list - ever)</i>	

Mount Hua, China

By Martin Fletcher

Since retirement I have been registered with British Executive Service Overseas, and my first assignment last November was to the Sacred Mount Hua in Shaanxi Province. My client, Huashan Tourism Development Corporation, required help to solve several forestry problems they were encountering, as well as developing a strategy for their Pine Protection Forest at 6,700 feet.

The beautiful Mount Hua range covers 150 square kilometres, and it has about one million visitors per annum. The principle conifers are Chinese pine (*Pinus tabulaeformis*) and Armand's Pine (*Pinus armandii*). There is also some *Picea wilsonii* and *Brachytyla*, and a very few *Pinus bungeana*. On the lower slopes Chinese juniper (*Juniperus chinensis*) flourishes. The rock formations are white granite and rise very steeply above the Yellow River and plains below. The mountain range is 500 miles west of Shanghai and 700 miles south of Beijing, near the ancient city of Xian in Shaanxi Province.

The lack of pine regeneration, as well as lightning damage and landslides, are worrying Huashan Tourism, which has the concession to run the facilities. These problems occur on the 30ha Main Peak area, where I spent four days (plus three very chilly nights) at between 5,000 and 6,500 feet. Here the granite rock falls away 2000

feet on all sides, but for a ridge, one and a half metres wide, which has steps cut into the granite for access.

Accommodation was provided for the rest of my three-week stay in one of the company's "four-star" hotels in Huashan. Here I am the only European in a rural Chinese town of 10,000 people. Being of their height I could walk about fairly incognito, observing their way of life. Traffic of bikes, small three-wheelers, pickups, buses and lorries was incessant, with the latter blowing their horns. Many people are involved in cooking food and selling it at roadside, and several markets flourish every day. Porters with shoulder loads of 16 - 20 kilograms start the 6km 5,000ft climb, past the hotel, with provisions for the cafes and rest houses every morning, as all the goods are carried up. Tourists go up most of the way to the mountain peaks by coach and cable car.

Huashan housing is partly single-storey homes or flats, of which I have been inside two, and these are spacious and pleasant. It was essential to master the use of chopsticks to survive 70 consecutive Chinese meals whilst in Huashan!

With a company car and driver, I was fortunate enough to visit Xian and the Terracotta Warriors museum, both nearby, and also visit the Forbidden City and Summer Palace in Beijing.

The whole trip was been a tremendous experience with my time given free and flights and expenses all paid.

RED SQUIRRELS IN ANOTHER ROLE...

During the Middle Ages, sumptuary laws governed the way people dressed and defined social status. Wearing silk, satin, cloth of gold or silver, lace and taffeta was the prerogative of knights and their ladies and all who ranked above them. Those who violated these laws could be fined or imprisoned or, in the case of the lower classes, put to death.

Amongst the furs restricted to the nobility were ermine, lettsie, the white winter pelage of stoats and weasels, and vair. Vair was the name for red squirrel skins. If you were a very noble lady, you had slippers of vair.

The story of Cinderella was published in France in 1697 and in the original, Prince Charming knew the mysterious girl at the ball was of equal rank because the slipper she left behind was made of vair. In a later translation into English, vair was misinterpreted as verre. Thereafter Cinderella's red squirrel skin slipper became glass.

Remember the Civils?

Here is a bit for retired civil engineers. It's by Alan Drake of Forest Civil Engineering (FCE), and was published in its newsletter. It's about the use of lime mortar in stone structures.

Whenever we think about re-pointing our house, cement mortar comes to mind, because it was used to build the house, and what else is there? However if we live in a traditional masonry building, or have to repair a traditional structure, cement mortar could do more harm than good. We should think of using the original material – lime mortar. This has been in use since Roman times, and the production of lime was a major industry during the 18th & 19th centuries.

Unlike cement mortar, lime mortar will allow the transmission of moisture. A masonry structure absorbs moisture, but if the mortar is impermeable, water cannot escape other than through the stones. This will lead to frost damage around the edge and face of the stones. Cement mortar is a rigid material and will crack and fall out if there is any relative movement or settlement of adjacent stones. There will always be some movement in an arch, and the softer lime mortar will tolerate this without cracking.

The use of lime mortar is a specialist process and the Scottish Lime Centre (SLC) offers a consultancy service to advise on the identification and specifications of the most appropriate lime mixes. The SLC will be advising FCE when an old stone arch is re-pointed at Ardentinn in Cowal.

Volunteering for the RNIB

The RNIB is always looking for volunteers to help with the partially sighted or blind. These are just a few of the areas which will appeal to readers.

- **Volunteer driver:** Drivers take other volunteers with sight loss to carry out their activities, or blind people to social and practical activities.
- **Volunteer support worker:** These also support other volunteers with sight loss to carry out their roles, e.g. reading correspondence, photocopying, addressing envelopes, etc.
- **Talking book and computer volunteer:** Volunteers give technological support to the blind at their homes. They assist with Talking Book players, computer equipment (which includes Internet access), installing software, printer operation and support with consumer electronics.

Full training is given to all volunteers, so why not do something about it now? You can obtain more details about all forms of volunteering by calling **0845 604 2341** or e-mailing **volunteering@rnib.org.uk**

Calling Steam Buffs

Head for Scotland this year to see the restoration of the historic Balloch Steam Slipway on Loch Lomond. This is being carried out in conjunction with the restoration of the paddle steamer, Maid of the Loch. Until restoration is complete, the Maid operates in a static role as a café and bar, restaurant and function suite.

The Loch Lomond Steamship Co. has secured loans to rebuild the steam slipway complex to full working order. This is the last major obstacle in the way of restoration of the Maid to full steam operation. The slip will be opened soon, and it was hoped to haul the Maid out for hull examination and repairs by Easter 2006.

The slipway had been abandoned and was completely overgrown. When the undergrowth had been removed, work began on the structure itself. The track, cradle and wheels were either repaired or replaced. The steam winch house was rebuilt and forms part of a visitor centre. An inspection of the 100-year-old steam engine revealed no serious problems, and it is being dismantled, restored and rebuilt.

If you want to know more, or better still, support the project, visit **www.maidoftheloch.co.uk**. Best of all, visit the site itself this year. You can also incorporate a trip on the paddle steamer, Waverley, which does regular runs on the Clyde.

100 Years of John Jackson

By Bill Sutherland

In February I had the great pleasure to join about 80 of John Jackson's friends and relatives to celebrate his 100th birthday at a lunch at the Royal Marine Hotel, near Dunoon.

It was a memorable occasion with pipes, fiddlers and dancing, speeches, songs, toasts and poems. Inevitably, few of his contemporaries were there, but the old Benmore FS days were recalled by one-time instructor Eric Crofts, and his association with Benmore Estate was remembered by David Younger.

However, I have to go a long way back to remember my first meeting with John. In 1957 I was transferred to South Cowal FD as District Officer. I occupied a tiny back room in Benmore House, then the FTS. I soon realised I had moved into a unique forestry community. This was best appreciated at its annual Cowal Forest Dance. 150 or so attended from all corners of Cowal – forest workers, contractors, horsemen, timber hauliers, winch operators, saw millers, timber merchants, smallholders and all the forest staff – all with wives or sweethearts! Right in the heart was John, the centre of this vibrant community.

John was brought up in the Borders, the son of a hill farmer. He went to Novar Forest before winning the School prize at Benmore under Harry Watson in 1931. He went on to serve in Glentress, Kirroughtree, Strathyre, Glenbranter, Ardgarten, and finally Benmore, where he remained in charge until he retired in 1970. He was the ever present centre of the forest, not just from 7am to 5pm, but for his whole life. He knew the forest intimately. During John's time a squad of about 40 were employed, but numbers swelled to more than 80 at peak weeding time. This included local ladies who did the nursery weeding wearing Ascot-style hats with nylon tights pulled over as veils for midge protection.

When a new community hall was needed, John led the fund-raising campaign until the Uig hall became a reality. When bees swarmed, John recaptured them. When a ganger suffered a severed thumb from a winch cable, the authorities suggested his negligence was a contributory factor. I shall never forget the furore he raised, waving his famous stick and demanding that compensation be paid. He got his way: it was! Soon after I arrived at Benmore, I remember John telling me about the holder of Bernice who, on Fridays, would walk to the loch side, strip, tie his clothes on his head, swim across, dry and dress, and walk over the hill to Ardentinn to meet his sweetheart. After completing his tryst he would return the same way. Such was a man's ardour in those days!

After his retirement he became an ardent bridge player, winning the club prize on a number of occasions. He had learnt his skills in Strathyre while doing his training in the 1930s. He was still playing on his 99th birthday. At the lunch, the Depute Lord Lieutenant of Argyll presented messages from the Lord Lieutenant and the Queen. There were innumerable other messages and cards, including one from the Director-General of the Commission.

John was and still is an outstanding forester, a very special person and a great friend. A true man of Cowal.

Tom Takes Stick

Tom Carter started as a forest worker at Thetford. After leaving Forestry School at Lynford and Benmore in 1951, he went to North Wales and remained there until he retired in 1985. He decided that Llanrwst would be the place for him, close to his last posting at Gwydir. It was such a delightful area. He now takes up the story.

"I often wondered what I would be doing in retirement, until in the spring of 1986, I was walking in the forest on a warm day on rough ground, when I felt I could do with a walking stick. I came across an oak tree stump, which had coppiced with a growth of potential sticks. I selected a thumb-stick of my size, and discovered how difficult it was to cut with my old-pocket knife. Reaching home, I was surprised how helpful and comfortable it was. As they say, 'the rest is history'. My collection is now over 100. I decided to do my own thing. Not being DIY minded, I chose to use 'nature's handiwork'. Most species can produce interesting sticks of new and novel designs. Consequently, discovering a rare specimen of such examples gave me much pleasure, often in unexpected places and species.

The actual harvesting is best done between November and February. Native species are endless e.g. Hazel, Blackthorn, Holly, Cherry, Crab Apple, Birch, Willow, Ivy, Privet, Rhododendron, Yew. The length of a stick is determined by its quality of growth. I never reduce the height of a good stick. Seasoning, which takes 1-2 years, is essential before preparing. I only debark if the bark is damaged. Most species are given a final finishing with a good gloss yacht varnish, which is their only decoration.

I have also looked into their history. For centuries, man used staves as a stick for many purposes, e.g. a defensive weapon, also to carry his belongings. In Tudor times, the staff became a symbol of authenticity and of rank. Henry VIII listed his most treasured possession as being 'six walking staves'. Elizabeth I invested her councillors with 'staves mounted with gold and precious stones'."

Stick making has given me so much enjoyment – try it. Perhaps you have?

OBITUARIES

Inga, **TOM COULSON's** wife, told me that he died two years ago aged 79. She said that they had first met in 1946 when he was studying for a forestry degree at Aberdeen University. Her brother John, a lecturer in the Physics Department, and Tom were standing warming themselves with their backs to a roaring fire in her mother's house.

During the War, Tom served in the Scots Guards, and had been very badly wounded at Anzio, in Italy, in January 1944. Left for dead on the battlefield, he managed to crawl into an abandoned German trench under cover of darkness. It was bitterly cold, but Tom found a large bag containing woollen socks, which he managed to stuff inside his battledress tunic and to make a kind of nest within the trench.

Next morning the Germans returned to the trench and, finding Tom alive, took him to a field hospital, where a German surgeon performed a major operation. When he came to, the Surgeon said to Tom, "Those socks you had were German socks, each pair with a name tape. Did you take them from German soldiers you had killed as some sort of trophy?" In fact the bag of socks had been returned to the German unit by their field laundry just before they were over-run by the invading force.

Tom was imprisoned in Koenigstein, a German POW camp near Dresden. Toward the end of the war he escaped, only to fall into the hands of the Russian forces, who by then were advancing rapidly westwards. He again escaped, and eventually joined up with the American forces advancing towards Berlin.

After graduating Tom joined the Forestry Commission as a District Forest Officer with a spell in the relatively new Work Study Division. On retirement from the Commission he set up a management company with two other foresters in Vermont, USA. A few years later Tom left the Company to work for the World Bank, specializing in Rainforest Management.

Educated in Scotland, from the early age of 6 he was fascinated by the stamps on letters which arrived from Sarawak from various relations who worked for the Raj. Eventually he built up an important collection, known by the Sarawak Philatelic Society as the Tom Coulson Sarawak Collection. In retirement he paid several visits to the country.

Tom, a colourful character who did not suffer fools gladly, was a generous host and a loyal friend, and was always ready to help anyone whom he considered had been unjustly treated or had suffered misfortune.

Gwyn Francis and George Holmes remembered **DALLAS MITHEN**, who died in February. He had distinguished career as a senior public servant in the Forestry Commission, notably as a Forestry Commissioner. He was a strong and charismatic personality, with lots of ideas and a very down-to-Earth and efficient approach to getting things done. He was quite brilliant with people, and was universally liked and respected for his personal warmth and unfailing good humour. These qualities made him a natural and highly effective team leader, so that his colleagues relished working with him as well as being motivated by his professionalism and resolve. His was a potent combination of strength of character and personal charm, which achieved results throughout his great and varied career in many parts of Britain over 35 years.

Dallas was born in India on 5 November 1923. He was brought up in Kent and attended Maidstone Grammar School. After graduating in forestry at Bangor, he joined the Commission in 1950. In the early part of his career he served in Kent and then in East England. Indeed it was here that Dallas showed his ability to tackle difficult issues and to push for necessary and often unpopular changes.

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OBITUARIES

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At that time he worked alongside David Johnston, both of them Assistant Conservators and both of them like-minded innovators. Their Conservator at the time, George Backhouse, referred to the pair of them in these terms: "With these two I live in exciting times; it is rather like working with two young lions on a chain."

In 1968 he became Deputy Surveyor of the New Forest and Conservator for South East England. This was a time of considerable turmoil in the New Forest because of the mounting tension between the demands of the public, the Commoners with their grazing rights, timber production, hunting traditions and conservation. Here he did a great deal to reconcile the problems of the day and to arrive at lasting agreements. It was not without some bruised feelings, because many unpalatable decisions had to be made. Nevertheless he was highly regarded and greatly respected by the New Forest community.

About this time Dallas became very involved in representing the staff of the Commission as Chairman of the staff side and a member of the Council of the Institute of Professional Civil Servants. These were roles in which he excelled and to which he brought his strong sense of justice and fairness. He was a powerful advocate for the staff, both collectively and individually. He always had compassion and understanding for those facing problems or tragedy in their lives. Indeed, he himself was no stranger to tragedy.

In 1971 he went to Glasgow as Senior Officer for Scotland and Conservator West Scotland. It was soon after the 1970 European Year of Conservation, and the influence and impact of conservation issues were becoming centre stage. At the time many saw this as a conflict between conservation on the one hand and forestry and farming on the other. Dallas never saw it that way, and one of his great contributions was to encourage and foster trust and openness with the conservation bodies in Scotland. Such was his impact among countryside bodies in Scotland that he received an honour which no other forester had ever gained: he received a formal tribute and an Award from the President and Council of the Black Face Sheep Breeders' Society.

In 1975 he became Director, Forest Management Division, at the Headquarters of the Forestry Commission in Edinburgh. In the following year he was appointed a Forestry Commissioner responsible for four Divisions - Harvesting and Marketing, Research, Estates and Engineering.

Dallas had the gift of being able to inspire people, and the ability to bring together those of different disciplines and different views so that they worked effectively as a team. His years as a Commissioner were very eventful. He was called upon to deal with matters and to determine policies, which had a profound effect on forestry in this country. Among them, major storm damage to forests, introduced and invasive insect pests, major innovations in harvesting systems and, last but by no means least, significant changes in many Government policies.

At one stage the economic circumstances were such that, within the space of less than 12 months, almost all the pulp mills in the UK were forced to close permanently. This had a catastrophic effect on the timber market. Dallas was at his best when dealing with such difficult situations; he was clear thinking and decisive. Soon new timber markets were found in Scandinavia and new investment was being sought. He was responsible for attracting the major investment which United Paper, a Finnish company, finally made at Shotton in North Wales and which led to other investments, in Scotland and

elsewhere, and a resurgence of the industry.

He was made a CB in 1983. In his retirement his skills as a chairman and his ability to involve people were put to good use. First as Vice-President from 1982 to 1984, and then as President, of the Institute of Chartered Foresters from 1984 to 1986, he made a significant contribution to formulating the laws, byelaws and regulations for the grant of the Institute's Royal Charter. For 10 years he chaired the Forestry Training Council and was a trustee of the Central Scotland Woodland Trust.

Dallas was a devoted family man. His grandchildren were a source of great joy to him, and he took great pleasure in their company. He was a man much loved by his family. A man who was a loyal friend and a trusted colleague. A man who, throughout his life, held the respect and the affection of all of those who were privileged to know him. He is survived by his wife Avril, his daughter Jane and son Chris.

LESLIE CHAPLIN died in February. His son told me that he started with the Commission in Hawkhurst, Kent, and then moved on to Conservancy Offices at Cambridge and York. His final posting was as A & FO in the Conservancy office at Chester, from where he retired in 1982.

Les Howe has written in about **GEORGE COTTON**, who died in April. He joined the Commission after the War at Dartmoor Forest, where he married and began family life. He was transferred to Wareham in 1950, subsequently becoming ganger, and stayed there until retirement. He was a quiet and reserved man who took great pleasure in his garden. He was very particular about the timing of his plantings, especially in his vegetable patch. In the War he served in the Burma campaign, and the British Legion was present at his funeral.

ALAN RAY has passed away so very quickly, says Ron Marrie, and so very unexpectedly. We will all miss his very cheery personality and happy demeanour.

I first met him in the middle of 1960, when I moved from the Valleys of Wales to the N(S) conservancy. I was posted to Fort William with the redoubtable Fin Macrae, while up the road at Fort Augustus worked Johnny Drummond and Alan Ray. Now these were not quite the bad old days of forestry, but the Dos, as they were then known, had to hang together against a fairly draconian regime. In consequence we got to know each other pretty well. I was transferred to Fort Augustus and shared an office with Alan for several very pleasant years, as well as living in Auchterawe, less than 100 yards from where Alan and Marjorie dwelt. This made us neighbours as well as colleagues and excellent neighbours they were, with their three fine sons, Charles, Stephen and Anthony.

Alan was very good at badminton and played for the village team. We had many a laugh in spite of the hard work we had to put in, and shared many a journey up the Great Glen to meetings in Church Street, Inverness. The journeys were never long and were always happy with Alan's good humour and sense of fun to the fore. He took part in village activities such as the drama club, and was popular wherever he went.

He hailed from Wem in Shropshire, of course, and was greatly tickled by the Doric used by John Drummond, who clung hard to his vocal roots. The last time I spoke to Alan I reminded him of Johnny's phone conversation "...there has been a heavy fa' and the sna ploods are oot".

Although we both moved on to opposite ends of the country, we kept well in touch and visited each other whenever we could. It was grand to get the

two whole families united around a dinner table several years later, listening to the lads and the things they had got up to in the good old days at the Fort. He became a pillar of the church when in Bristol, and did huge works in renovations etc for the church, where he was a very valued member for many years.

When he retired to Rugby, he kept very busy indeed with his son's engineering business, where his great manual dexterity was put to good use. He was always handy with his hands, and his houses showed this wherever he went. His dear wife, Marjory, answered the phone when I called to tell Alan of Alistair Scott's passing, with the very sad news that Alan was in hospital and not likely to come out. He was struck down with terrifying speed and did not suffer long.

I shall remember him for his sunny disposition and his love of laughter and fun. I always looked forward to our meetings, which were too infrequent and too short, and I shall miss him badly. "One of the old brigade and one of the best."

Roger Busby also recalls him. He had been a DO in the New from 1977, and tutored a young DO II named Tim Rollinson. (Heard that name before?). He came to the South West. England Conservancy in 1985 on operations, and was a pillar of strength in his liaison with District Foresters and with running timber auctions. He was one of those foresters whose knowledge and negotiation skills made him invaluable as a staff officer and whose good humour made him invaluable as a colleague.

Obituaries for **Tony Joslin** and **Eric Hale** will appear in the next issue.

Correction In the last issue I included an obituary for Jim Collin. This should have been Jim Colling, who was the HF at Torrachilty. I regret the error. ED

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