

RADIO AND CONTROL OF FOREST FIRES

Readers of The Slasher may have seen references in the Press to an experiment which took place in May at Bramshill Forest, during which Windsor carriers, equipped with radio, were used to fight a "forest" fire. The fire, of course, was one of brushwood and was lit specially for the purpose of the exercise. Its location was in a clearing and every possible precaution was taken against its spreading to the nearby plantations. So far as the Commission is concerned the event made history, for it was the first time any full-scale operation of this kind had taken place. The procedure was as follows: the four Windsors, each with auxiliary water tanks holding a total of 250 gallons, were manned by Commission employees and placed in distant and strategic parts of the forest, each being given a special designation -- that is "Windsor White", "Windsor Red", and so on. A radio control point was established at the scene of the potential fire and, at a given time (unknown to the Windsor crews) the fire was touched off. Out from the control point went the call for help and, within a few minutes, the Windsors were emerging with almost Wellisian effect out of the clouds of billowing smoke. The portable pumps were already throbbing and in little more time than it takes to write this sentence streams of water were being played into the heart of the fire. To reinforce the Windsors a mobile dam unit was also called to the scene by radio.

The experiment certainly confirmed that as a means of introducing the utmost speed into the fighting of forest fires, the use of radio-cum-Windsors and other vehicles has no equal. But whether this method of fire-fighting will be widely adopted remains to be seen, for there are a number of considerations to be taken into account. One, of course, is expense, and another is the matter of obtaining clearance from Tele-communications section of the G.P.O. to utilise a frequency band.

Readers may be interested to know that the possibilities of using aircraft in forest fire-fighting are being investigated. In England liaison is proceeding with the R.A.F., and it is possible that one or two exercises may take place in the near future. Who knows? Perhaps one of these days we shall see our entire forest area patrolled by helicopter.

CATCHING UP

By April 30th there were welcome signs that the planting target figures for the current Forest Year might be attained. The programme laid down for the season covered 36,022 acres and the area actually planted by the date in question was 31,533 acres. Figures for each country, with the targets in brackets, were: England 13,347 acres (14,522); Scotland, 16,000 acres (13,814); and Wales 5,500 acres (4,372). In England 10,333 acres had been beaten up, figures for similar operations in Scotland and Wales being 8,164 and 5,029 acres respectively. Good progress in lining out was also recorded, the target figure (in thousands) being 142,118 and that actually achieved 125,683.

The latest records again emphasise the importance of the economical utilisation of produce, for they show that in the first six months of the Forest Year 2,162,256 cubic feet of material had been invoiced, including 308,892 cubic feet of round mining timber. Those who recall an earlier paragraph in The Slasher about utilisation will see there has been a steep rise in the overall figure (do not costs also rise!) compared with that for the first four months of the year -- an increase, in fact, of 744,103 cubic feet. All this goes towards making the perfect answer to the critics who speak of our inanimate rows of regimented conifers and who are loth to believe that the Commission can make, and is making, an important contribution towards alleviating the timber shortage.

CUP FINAL REFEREE

How many Conservancy Offices have on their staff a Cup Final referee? The North (Scotland) office provided, in the person of Alex MacKenzie (T/C II), the referee for the Scottish Cup Final of the Shinty Association, played this year in Inverness.

This sport has been described as a masculine form of hockey, but very few Shinty enthusiasts would agree that there are grounds for comparison. The pitch used is 170 by 80 yards, players number 12 in each team and are "armed" with a club or caman which, pre-war, was made of hickory. Today it is usually of ash. There are no prohibitions against raising the club above shoulder level or hitting with one side only, and although play can at times be robust, last season was notable for the absence of unpleasant incidents.

Alex MacKenzie controlled a thrilling final with distinction. The attendance was 7,000, a record for a Camanachd Cup Final. If that doesn't sound a lot of people we would remind readers that the 7,000 were Highlanders almost to a man. The cup was presented to the winning side (Newtonmore) by a Highland Laird bearing a name wellknown to us foresters, none other than the distinguished ex-Commando leader, Lord Lovat.

DISCOURSE ON FLAG POLES

According to a newspaper report, an 82 ft. Douglas fir is being sent from a port in British Columbia to this country, for use as a flag-pole at the Tower of London. It appears its despatch follows a casual remark by a Tower official to a prominent Canadian businessman, to the effect that the Tower needed a new pole. Modestly, and stifling an obvious desire to ask if such a long journey is really necessary, we would point out that a 100 ft. pole of the same species, grown in the New Forest, is now being prepared for erection at Northerwood House.

WELSH OFFICE STAFFS VISIT A FOREST

More and more often these days are the non-technical members of the various office staffs going down into the forest, to see for themselves what is being done and why. There is news from Wales of the office staffs of the Welsh Directorate and North Wales Conservancy paying their first instructional visit, and in this connection they are indebted to both the Director and Conservator -- the first facilitating, and the second for arranging, the event. But let our Aberystwyth correspondent tell the story in his own words:

"The two contingents met in the delightful Corris Valley on a sunny Saturday morning last month. Spirits ran high, as well they might, for conifer-clad slopes, rippling streams and a blue sky provided a charming environment. The party, numbering 50, was met by District Officer BUTLER and Foresters FRASER and GRIFFITHS. Leaving the road it proceeded leisurely, for the day was hot, up a steep unfinished road through P.30 Douglas plantations where thinning was in progress. Considerable interest was aroused by an overhead wire ropeway on which poles chained in bundles crossed a deep valley to a dump on the far side. The party ultimately reached the dump by a more tortuous route.

"Getting back to the road higher up the valley, the party saw the poles being crosscut by Portasaw into pitwood, and then inspected the nearby small transplant nursery. Conservator F.C. BEST and Divisional Officer W.A. CADMAN maintained an interesting running commentary on the various operations which were seen. The four new Swedish houses, by the way, evoked considerable interest and not a little envy.

"Later the party made for Esgairgeiliog Camp, where a picnic lunch was taken on the lawn. Like lions refreshed the party, or most of it, then negotiated a steep road and clambered up a still steeper bank to the foot of another gravity wire ropeway. It was noted that the rope kept the pole-butts well off the ground during their 150 yard journey, while the top foliage, which was left on the stems, acted as a brake.

"Back in the coaches the party set off for Abergynolwyn, passing the beautiful Talyllyn Lake with its inviting waters and skirting the rugged grandeur of Cader Idris (2,927 ft.). The fact that at 3 p.m. on a Saturday afternoon there were workers in the 11-acre nursery anxious to demonstrate wheeled hoes and roto-tillers was typical of the kindly thoughtfulness which was encountered everywhere. After an excellent tea, generously provided by the Director at the Braich Goch Hotel, the two contingents went their respective ways with mutual expressions of goodwill".

RECENT TRANSFERS

The following transfers have become effective and are as notified to Headquarters up to May 19th. -

District Officer T.H. WOOLRIDGE moves from Durris (East, Scotland) to Aberdeen; District Officer H.A. MAXWELL leaves Aberdeen for Banchoory (East, Scotland); District Officer G. FORREST departs from Inverness to the Office of Director, Scotland, at Edinburgh. In England, District Officer B.C. SELBY moves from Chester (North West Conservancy) to York (North East Conservancy); District Officer F.G. GOOD is posted to Bristol (South West Conservancy) from the New Forest. To revert to Scotland, Foreman G.A. GOODLET (South Conservancy) goes from Wauchope to Bennan, and Foreman J.P. McCORRIE leaves Benmore (West Conservancy) for Glenbranter. Clerk of Works A.A. WARD goes from Monaughty (East Conservancy) to Darnock (North Conservancy). In Wales, Conservancy Engineer W.F.G. WEBB is transferred from Shrewsbury (North Conservancy) to Cardiff (South Conservancy), while Assistant Engineer L.B. GLADWELL departs from Dolgelly (North Conservancy) for Shrewsbury.

NOW THERE ARE THREE

On May 20th. to Jean, wife of FRANK J. BROWN, of the Director's Office, England, a daughter (sister for Roger and Peter). Congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. BROWN. Incidentally, this is the only birth announcement to reach The Slasher in the last month. Is the Stork on strike, or is it just that readers are bashful? Please don't be shy; we want to hear the good news, too!

THE WORK THEY DO (No.5)

Visitors to 25, Savile Row, will find, tucked away in a far corner of Room 104, an unobtrusive section engaged in preparing the accounts of the Commission which have eventually to be submitted to Parliament. The section is under the supervision of M.P. SHAPCOTT, ably assisted by A. BEEDLE and Miss K. FOWLER. The work of preparing the Appropriation Account involves the summarising of all the cash accounts received monthly from Directorate and Conservancy offices and combining them with the cash account for Headquarters itself, a copy of the final summary going to the Comptroller and Auditor General, who is Parliament's representative. The section is also responsible for preparing the Annual Trading Account and the Financial Tables included in the Annual Report, which involves,

Among other things, assembling and summarising all transfer invoices. Unlike some other sections at Headquarters, it has little direct contact with outside staff, but it is the clearing house for the Headquarters Current Account, through which pass all cash charges and credits between the various offices of the Department and to which come all Forms A.112. The Chairman, Lord Robinson, as Accounting Officer of the Department, is personally responsible for the account which Parliament requires. It is mainly through Accounts Section of the Finance Branch that he discharges the duties placed upon him.

At Aberystwyth The Acquisition Section in the Head Office of the Welsh Directorate is in the charge of E.H. BRADFORD (H.E.O.) and is the special responsibility of Miss J. HORSHAM (E.O.), who is assisted by R.H. FISHER (C.O.) and by the part-time services of the Drawing Office (V.H. WILLIAMS and F. BRYAN). The Section owns to what until now has been a secret. It is constantly tormented by a vision of a horde of Foresters and workmen waiting, wistfully and motionless, for the message "COMPLETED AT LAST". When the message is issued the Section fondly imagines the horde galvanised into frenzied action, with plantations shooting up like mushrooms around them.

Small wonder, then, that with this pathetic vision ever before them the Section frantically pursues the elusive "Completion Day", and imperious calls for action go out daily by letter and 'phone.

Acquisition work outdoors and in is a never-ending cycle. Even while the approvals from one Commissioners' meeting are being cleared, the Section is hastily collecting a batch of Acquisition Officers' Reports for the next National Committee meeting. If only, sigh those concerned, monthly pay days would come round as quickly as do the latter meetings!

UNUSUAL CAUSE OF FIRE

"Two women were seen burning on this area, but they vanished as soon as our men appeared." So runs the official report of a fire in North Wales. What queer effects high altitude may have on "fire-happy" foresters! To continue in lighter vein. Here is an extract from a report received at one of the Directorates (with actual names omitted, for obvious reasons): I visited X and examined some photographs, together with Mr. Y and Mr. Z, from your office". Both gentlemen, it is understood, were found to be fit and were passed A.1.

Forester G.A. SHARP (Kershope) has sent along a newspaper cutting which tells of a fence, 2,023 miles long, having been erected in Australia as a defence against rabbits. There is a report, states Forester SHARP, that with a new Australian patent in wire strainers, one man put up so much of the fence in one day that it took him three days to return for his jacket.

FOREST CAMEOS

"APETHORPE", writes District Officer R. CARNELL, "is part of what used to be the Great Rockingham Forest, which stretched from Stamford to Kettering (about 20 miles) in the county of Northants. High up in the steeples of the churches in this district are small apertures wherein, in olden days, lamps were placed to guide the traveller on his way. Most of the Apethorpe area is hardwood of approximately 30 feet high, although last week I measured a Douglas fir and found it to be 60 feet tall. The oak is notoriously slow-growing and upon enquiry as to when it really started to increase in size the Forester replied that this had never been very noticeable. (Probably like the moustache of a newly promoted District Officer, these oaks just grow on us, so to speak).

We are getting away well with the thinnings, measurement being taken when the contractor has felled; no worries here, therefore, of felling, extraction to rides, conversion, haulage to station -- just all profit, or is it? Anyway, the system works, and the powers that be give it their blessing.

"The soil is one of the stickiest, heaviest clays I have ever known and deep cracks and fissures appear in dry weather. (I nearly lost my slasher in one in September last year). Blackthorn is abundant on the area and we believe we all qualify for the 'Industrial Ten'.

"Various methods of regeneration have been tried -- acorns, seedlings, and transplants, and all three with nurses. The best method? Frankly, we do not know, but if you're ever this way do pay us a visit, for we are very anxious to have fresh ideas about our problems. To what your appetite, for some reason or other the conifer nurses of S.P., N.S. and E.L. are beginning to die at 30 feet."

SOCIAL LIFE AT BRISTOL

Much talk went on recently about the possibilities of establishing a social club in the South Western Conservancy office at Bristol. Considerable progress is now reported and by the time this paragraph appears it is likely that the project will have gone still further ahead. Under the able chairmanship of F.A.A. ALDERTON, to whom a great deal is owed for his untiring work and interest, and backed by Secretary G.D.C. TULMAN, a tennis club has been formed and this meets each Tuesday. Nearly half the staff has enrolled and a permanent hard court has been secured in the Avon Gorge. At first the surrounding precipitous rock-face distracts attention from the play, but surely few courts can have a more majestic setting. The court, with others, lies between the side of the Gorge and the River Avon, down which Cabot sailed so many years ago, and high in the distance is the Clifton Suspension bridge, so familiar on post-card views and to Londoners once at Camp House. The location is certainly one where the worries of the day may be forgotten and a closer sense of comradeship developed.

It is hoped that darts and table tennis will play a considerable part in the Club's programme. Several good players were once in the renowned Camp House team.

MORE ABOUT THE CHIEF CLERKS' COURSE

Chief Clerks and others from all nineteen of the Commission's offices spent a busy but pleasant few days at Northwood House in April. The course was concerned with Organisation and Method and included talks by W.A.R. WEBSTER (Treasury O and M Division) and H.C. HEPBURN (Treasury Training and Education Division). Controller of Finance V. BATES and Deputy Secretary E.C. SHANKS organised the course, the former dealing with Accounting, Costing and Auditing and the latter Organisation (O and M Report No.1), followed by Clerical Methods and Control. It was the first time in the history of the Commission that all the Chief Clerks had been brought together and though each talk was followed by a discussion, unofficial groups often formed to carry debate late into the night.

The excursion to the forest was most welcome. For many it was their first visit to the New Forest and all were immensely interested in the various features shown, which included natural regeneration of oak and Scots pine and some fine stands of Scots pine and Douglas fir.

The DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL (Mr. A.H. GOSLING) and the SECRETARY (Mr. F.W. HAMILTON) attended for the summing up which followed the conclusion of the various sessions, the assessment being ably carried out by F.C. HANDFORD (Chief Clerk, Edinburgh).

In addition to those already mentioned the following were present: E.S.J. HINDS, M.E.W. MACKENZIE, C.R.C. PINK, A.D. PALMER, E. HEWITT, L.A. CHAPLIN, G.H. CLARK, H.W. GULLIVER, G.F. TAYLOR, R.P. COOTE, T.W. MORRIS, M. NICOLSON, J.P. LENMAN, T.H. McGEORGE, T. FARMER, W. MAYHEW, W. EVANS, E.C. HARPER, J.G.S. GILLINGHAM, J.R. FERENS, M.P. SHAPCOTT, J.J.V. SUMMERS and B.R. DAVIES (part-time).

CAN YOU BEAT IT?

This small feature in a recent issue of The Slasher has called forth one or two replies. T. A. ROBBIE, Education Officer, Glentworth, challenges the statement that Fiunary, Argyll, is farthest from the railway. Forester DRYSDALE, he says, can go by road to Corran Ferry and then get the train at Ballachulish. He does not need to go to Fort William, 45 miles away from Fiunary. Mr. ROBBIE wins. He points out that Fiunary was in his district until February, 1946.

Forester G.C. HART states that a few seed of Acer Platanoides were sown in Hemsted Nursery; germination was fair, but one tree excelled and in the first year reached 2ft. 1in. In the second year it put on 5ft. 1 1/2 ins., and in the third year 4ft., so that this maple now stands 11 ft. 2 ins. The butt diameter is three inches. Anyone interested, and who may be visiting Hemsted, will find the tree now planted 15 yards outside the nursery, on the right hand side of the Mile Drive.

NEW DIRECTOR GENERAL

At the time, so to speak, of going to press it is announced that Mr. W.L. TAYLOR will at the end of June relinquish the appointment of Director General of the Commission. He is to be succeeded by Mr. A.H. GOSLING, who is at present Deputy Director General. Mr. W.H. GUILLEBAUD, the Commission's Director of Research and Education, will succeed Mr. GOSLING as Deputy Director General; in turn Mr. JAMES MacDONALD, Conservator on the staff of the Director of Forestry for Scotland, will become Director of Research and Education.

Mr. TAYLOR will continue to serve as a Forestry Commissioner and for the present will devote the whole of his time to the work of the Commission. He joined the Commission at its inception in 1919 and has served in various capacities in the field, as Assistant Commissioner for England and Wales, and finally as Director General. He was appointed a Forestry Commissioner in 1938.

Mr. GOSLING has served successively as a forester, District Officer, Divisional Officer and Assistant Commissioner for Scotland and, before his appointment in May last year as Deputy Director General, was Director of Forestry for Scotland. Mr. GUILLEBAUD joined the Forestry Branch of the Board of Agriculture in 1914, and entered the service of the Commission in 1919 as Research Officer. He was subsequently appointed a Divisional Officer and later served as Chief Research Officer.

Mr. JAMES MacDONALD joined the Commission in 1924 and for a number of years was engaged on research work, at one time having his headquarters at the Imperial Forestry Institute, Oxford, and participating in the work of the Institute. Later he held the rank of Divisional Officer in East Anglia and in Scotland.