

FOREST FIRES: FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Let us face facts. Incredible though it may seem, in 1948 nearly thirty fires were caused by Commission employees, involving a loss of more than \$20,000 -- nearly half the total loss for the year. Not all the fires, of course, were due to carelessness -- to err in judgement is human. Some were the result of controlled burning getting out of hand and to the subsequent breaking away of fires believed to be extinguished, or under control. These cases give very serious food for thought, and so does the fact that smoking at unauthorised times and in the wrong places was among the causes.

This state of affairs is all the more regrettable because, to a very large extent, the remedy is so obviously in our own hands. While not regarding The Slasher as a medium for sermonising or for recrimination, we must nevertheless appeal to all to do everything possible to see that there is a different story to be told at the close of 1949.

"DON'T TAKE A CHANCE!"

Capt. Mark Hewitson, M.P., National Industrial Officer, General and Municipal Workers Union, writing on forest fires in the current issue of the Union's Journal, says:

"Normally no-one has a more jealous concern for the wellbeing of the forest than the forest worker himself; but, I am informed, there have been a number of instances where Commission employees have started fires, and 1948 was a black year. I know full well that sometimes these have been accidental, or have resulted from circumstances beyond the control of the person or persons concerned. But unfortunately this is by no means always the case, and if among my readers there are any forest workers who were guilty of the slightest relaxation in vigilance I do appeal to them never again to 'take a chance'. There is not the slightest point in the Forestry Commission appealing to the public for co-operation and the inculcation of a protective forest sense, if there is to be carelessness in its own ranks."

GIFT FROM NAZI GENERAL

Most of us have souvenirs of one kind or another, but ex-Lieutenant T.H. BASHALL, a forest worker at Lyminge (South East, England) can surely claim to have one of the most unusual of mementos. For weeks on end Mr. Bashall was bodyguard to Field-Marshal Kesselring, Commander-in-Chief of the German forces in Italy, who in Venice in 1947 was placed on trial for war crimes. At the end of the trial, Kesselring presented Mr. Bashall with a sketch book containing hundreds of paintings and impressions of Italian towns and countryside. In it, the Field-Marshal had written: "With best wishes and many thanks for your kindly attitude towards me". "I was with the Field-Marshal every hour of the day," says Mr. Bashall, "and at night I slept in an adjoining cell. I ate with him, and took exercise with him; and when he went to shave I handed him his razor and took it away again when he had finished. Throughout the whole of the time I was with him he acted as a perfect gentleman."

The death sentence on the Field-Marshal was later commuted to life imprisonment.

Mr. Bashall was demobilised in February last year and recently married

ex-Wren Cynthia Gleffe-Thomas at Warbleton, Sussex.

ESTABLISHMENT OF INDUSTRIAL STAFF

In the October issue of The Slasher we recorded that the first of the nominations for the establishment of industrial staff had been submitted to the Civil Service Commission. We are now able to report receipt of the first batch of names of those in respect of whom Certificates of Qualification have been issued.

All industrial workers who become established will be notified in due course through the usual channels. The issues of certificates are not following the order of nominations, so that although Ganger F.C. SLY, of Eggesford, headed the list of nominations, Ganger C. GILES heads the list of certificated industrial employees. As the latter works at Herodsfoot, the South West (England) Conservancy again (fortuitously) holds pride of place.

FOREST CAMEOS -- KERSHOPE

"Here at Kershope, just in England and only separated from the wild Gaels by the width of a burn, we are represented on most forestry maps," writes Forester G.A. SHARP, as a rather insignificant black blob of 12,000 acres pushed into the background by the big and neighbouring Keilder.

"We do not boast of our rainfall of 60 inches per annum, but we are proud of our '15-feet deep' peat bogs! So far no tractors or jeeps have been permanently lost, for we have always managed to salvage our vehicles, even though it sometimes takes a week. In this we are unlike the Americans, who built the great highway in Alaska and used their buried tractors as better track grip for those operating above.

"Where fires are concerned we have not made head-line news, but we do spend quite a considerable amount on protection. The Molinia, or blue moor grass as it is known, can very easily burn at such speed that a running man is hard put to it to keep pace.

"Before being acquired by the Commission in 1929, this one almost treeless expanse supported but one sheep to every two and a half acres, and it was possible to walk for many miles without seeing a house, or fellow being. Now things have changed, and houses built by the Department alone number fifty-three. To date 7,000 of the 12,000 acres have been planted with Norway and Sitka spruce and, with the exception of the war years, the annual planting programme has averaged 600 acres. Still dotted about the forest are the old grouse-shooting butts, which are banks of peat cast up to mask the guns."

Footnote by District Officer E.E.DIXON: "Forester Sharp, in endeavouring to condense into a short article what might well fill a book, does not do himself justice or tell the full tale. He does not say that he spends the midnight hour with his friend the blacksmith, devising weird and wonderful machines for forest use. He omits to mention the herd of wild goats which, headed by an old billy with 4ft. horns, made him beat all records for long-distance fell racing, and he does not record that on his forest is a monument to a man shot by another for being obstinate -- a lesson to all Foresters. Furthermore, his reference to the wild Gaels is most inappropriate, for at Hogmanay the whole of Kershope turns Scots and enjoys it."

This is where we leave Forester Sharp and District Officer Dixon to continue the discussion between themselves.

HEARING ABOUT US We are always glad to receive news of instances where employees show interest not only in their individual jobs, but in the wider issue of the Commission's policy and programme. Recently a meeting of employees (and tenants, too!) of Hamsterley and Arkengarthdale forests (North East, England) was held at the Grove, Hamsterley, to hear District Officer M.F. ADAMS give a talk on "The purpose and policy of State forestry". This was followed by a showing of the film "The New Crop". About 70 people were present, the gathering being presided over by Head Forester C. McNAB, who "started" Hamsterley Forest some 23 years ago. Forester T. BEWICK, who is now in charge of Hamsterley, and Forest Worker W. STOREY voiced the thanks of the meeting, and in turn District Officer Adams thanked Mr. LEWIN for granting facilities at The Grove.

The suggestion that such a meeting be held came from forest workers -- "which," says our correspondent, "is evidence that workers and their families regard forestry as being more than just their bread and butter."

Incidentally, the staff of the North East, England, Conservancy Office also had the opportunity recently to see "The New Crop", together with "Trees that reach to the sky", a "short" about lumbering in Canada. The show was given in the office by a Central Office of Information mobile unit. "The New Crop" was made during the war and its commentary is somewhat dated as the result; nevertheless, it is still "seeable". It deals with afforestation in Britain and runs for about 20 minutes.

FEATHERED FRIEND : FEATHERED FIEND Head Forester W. TRIBE, of Cannock Chase (North West, England) has had trouble with an owl which he had for long regarded as a friend of the family. The bird, which had a wingspan of nearly three feet, had for several years nested near Mr. Tribe's house. A few weeks ago, however, it suddenly developed vicious tendencies and made a series of attacks on a member of Mr. Tribe's family and on a Foreman and Forester. Just what was the reason for the change in temperament no-one knows, but it has been suggested that (a) the owl became jealous of a pig purchased by Mr. Tribe and (b) it was annoyed because it was disturbed while hunting for rats.

Just before Christmas a friend of Mr. Tribe alighted from a bus and was somewhat amazed when the owl settled on his shoulder. On Boxing Day it startled Miss Tribe, the Head Forester's daughter, by beating its wings on her bedroom window; a few days later it became even more aggressive, and attacked Foreman W.H. Flint as he left the Forestry Commission's local office, knocking off his hat and clawing him viciously in the face. The same evening Mr. A.R. Tribe, son of the Head Forester, was also badly scratched on the face. Sequel to all this was that Mr. Tribe, senr., had no alternative but to shoot the bird as it perched in a tree.

The foregoing reminds the Editor of the case of another winged fury, of which he has personal knowledge. In this particular instance a huge bird terrorised the countryside in the south of England, killing and mutilating sheep on farms over a wide area. Its career ended when it attacked a man and a horse, for it was then killed by blows from a stake; it was literally touch and go whether the bird or the man won the battle. What sort of bird was this? Its wing-span was more than three feet, and it had an ugly, hooked bill. A Sea-eagle? An Osprey? We wonder, by the way, if there are other cases on record among foresters where birds have attacked human beings.

CHANGING THEIR BEAT by 22nd January:

The following transfers had been reported to Headquarters

Head Forester H.C.YOUNG, from Tair Onen, S(W), to New Forest; Forester ANGUS MACKAY, Glenfinart, W(S) to Ardgarten, W(S); Forester D.MACDONALD, Culloden, N(S), to Inchmarcardoch, N(S); Forester F.C.WATTS, Bedgebury, SE(E), to Bramshill, SE(E); Forester P.P.AWBERRY, Alice Holt, to Bedgebury; Forester E.FAIRMAN, Quantocks, SW(E) to Wyre, SW(E); Forester P.C.RICHMOND, Bedgebury, to Alice Holt; Forester G.A.JENKINSON, Bruton, SW(E), to Quantocks; Forester J.B.HENDRY, Midmar, E(S), to Drumtochty, E(S); Forester G.INNES, Auchernach, E(S), to Midmar; Forester C.M.DUNBAR, R. and E., to Carron Valley, W(S); Forester C.M.WHITE, Tentsmuir, E(S), to Rannoch, E(S); Foreman J.R.C.BASHALL, Chiddingfold, SE(E) to Challock, SE(E); Foreman A.LINKIN, Challock, to Goodwood Charlton, SE(E); Foreman W.A.LOCKHART, Culbin, E(S), to South Laggan, N(S); Foreman M.H.COBBSON, Caie, S(W), to Halfway, S(W); Foreman W.R.SINCLAIR, Alltcailleach, E(S), to Newton Nursery, E(S); Miss C.S.CAMPBELL (Clerical Officer) from Inverness to Glasgow.

RESEARCH ENGINEER'S DEPARTURE Lt.-Col.T. ("Tommy") KNEALE has resigned his appointment as Research Engineer and has joined the Colonial Development Corporation.

MORE REVELRY A New Year dinner and dance was held by the staff of the South West England Conservancy. Unfortunately the Conservator, Mr. A.H.POPERT, was prevented from attending through illness, but the company welcomed Mrs.Popert and Dr. John Popert, together with Mr. WAY, Land Commissioner for the South West. A survey during the "Conga" found District Officer G.F.BALLANCE swinging away behind District Officer J.B.STOCKS, with Divisional Officer Stileman and Mrs.Stileman not so far off. Mr. G.TAYLOR (Chief Clerk) and Mrs. Taylor joined in and enjoyed the revels and also met old friends. Incidentally, Miss BRACEY, an associate of Camp House, wishes to be remembered to former colleagues now in London. The Bristol event as a whole was organised by Miss JEFFERIES and Mr. CARTER.

At York the North East England Conservancy office staff held a dinner and party, at which District Officer SELBY was an able M.C. During the evening Divisional Officer W.J.J. PORTLOCK distributed gifts from the Christmas tree. Miss PRATT proved that the staff has a Vera Lynn in its midst, while another highlight of the programme was the turn "The Conservancy Windblows". In this Conservator G.J.L.PATTERS (melodian), SFO W.J.FORSYTH (tin whistle) and Accounts Officer J.C.BLOTT were alternately conducted and accompanied by the "drums" of the Master of Ceremonies.

There was a "Glasgow belongs to me spirit" about the West (Scotland) Conservancy staff dance held at the Grand Hotel, Glasgow, recently. The company included some of the Foresters, together with District Officers and representatives from the Engineer Branch. The duties of M.C. were undertaken by W.STEWART, whose theme was "on with the dance, let joy be unconfined". The scene was picturesque and colourful, and some of the males wore the kilt. Included in the programme were some Scottish country dances, performed to the accompaniment of bagpipes played by District Officer MICHAEL LONG. Several novelty items were introduced, one of the prizes being (believe it or not) a half bottle of Scotch. The eightsome reel was also a great success, and the Committee which organised the evening's programme well merited the congratulations which came their way.

THE WORK THEY DO (No.8) It is not surprising that with an annual rent roll of £56,000, and a total letting area of some 104,000 acres, that the Estate Section in the Office of Director, England, has plenty to do. The number of lettings at the moment is just under 4,000 and many of these are responsible at times for furrowed brows, bearing in mind the spate of legislation which has so drastically changed the "law of the land".

The Conservator in charge is Mr. S.W.EDWARDS, who is assisted by HEO L.G.BARTER, who is also secretary of the Land Agents Sub-Committee. Miss J.GEEKIE (HCO), assisted by Miss BULLIVANT (CO), deals with estate management matters, such as re-letting of cottages, farms (on which are owned 8,294 sheep), sportings (which bring in quite a lot of money), and even quarries, together with the resumption of land for planting and so on.

HCO F.J.BROWN, of the Crown Lands section, helps in estate management where the old Crown Lands are concerned, and deals with transfers of agricultural land to the Ministry of Agriculture.

EO G.H.BOWERS, assisted by TC R.C.BINGHAM, in the main looks after new housing matters and also the maintenance, and the repair of and improvements to, existing properties. A great deal of time has been spent on paper work and in the field in an effort to bring about the erection of the much-needed new houses, and so far the Directorate and the Ministry of Works have managed to build 115 houses, a further 106 being in course of erection. More repairs and improvements are becoming possible with the easing of restrictions on materials, but it has to be remembered that during the war years little could be done, so that there are considerable arrears.

EO K.D.WOODFIELD has, as one of his tasks, the unenviable job of clearing up after Service occupations of land, while among other responsibilities are negotiation of way-leaves for electricity lines, water pipes, etc., with which it seems all and sundry are forever desirous of crossing Commission land. There are also annual rental returns to be examined. In the foregoing tasks Mr. Woodfield has the part-time help of Miss Bullivant and R.C.Bingham.

THOSE UNUSUAL HOBBIES

On the subject of unusual hobbies, Head Forester G.W.HOLLIS (Arundel, South East, England) asks if he is alone among Foresters in being a devotee of campanology or, as he puts it, the science of church bell-ringing. He has personally yet to meet another Forester who shares his enthusiasm. For our part we are equally unaware of any other persons on the Commission staff, Foresters or otherwise, who enjoy this form of recreation. Readers, however, may have something to say in the matter.

RARE BIRDS

Apropos the paragraph in last month's issue about rare wild animals and birds, and the "mystery" bird seen at Glentool, District Officer K.A.H.CASSELLS writes: "I was much interested in the unidentified pheasant-like bird. Pheasants are notorious for the ease with which the more nearly related species hybridize both in captivity and under natural conditions, the ordinary game pheasant (Phasianus) being a classic example since it is the result of hybridization between at least three species. Similarly hybrids within the genus Chrysolophus (which includes only two species, the Golden and Lady Amherst's Pheasant) are common.

"While hybridisation between Phasianus and Chrysolophus has been known to occur, the two geni are sufficiently far apart for such hybrids to be very unusual and most unlikely to occur under anything approaching natural conditions. An alternative to the theory that the unidentified bird was a hybrid is that it was a young cock Golden Pheasant in the process of moulting from its first plumage into its adult dress. I would be inclined to think the latter the more likely. When doing an acquisitions survey in January, 1947, I saw a cock Golden Pheasant near Glenrazie Wood, which is about four miles south from the March of Glentool National Forest Park. This shows that Golden Pheasants have been liberated in that district".

Our correspondent who reported seeing the "mystery" bird comments: "My identification of the strange bird as a hybrid between Common and Golden Pheasants rests on its resemblance to a known specimen preserved in the Carlisle Museum. I agree that Mr.Cassel's theory of its being a young cock Golden Pheasant undergoing its first moult is another possible explanation.. Golden Pheasants, quite wild, occur also at Thetford Chase and in the woods to the south of the New Forest."

A further interesting communication on rare birds has been received from Forester N.R.HEPBURN (Dallas, East, Scotland). His remarks will appear next month.

RETIREMENT OF MR. W.E.LEWIN

Mr. WALTER LEWIN, who served the Commission for many years, and who until recently was a Clerical Officer at Bristol in the South West, England, Conservancy office, has retired. To mark the occasion he was presented by the Conservator, Mr. Popert, with a cheque, this parting gift being subscribed to by many old friends and colleagues throughout the country. Visiting Headquarters, Mr. Lewin said farewell to friends during a specially arranged but informal social gathering.

LAST LOOK ROUND

Betrothal is announced of Miss CHARLOTTE DEA and Mr. T.A.ARMSTRONG, both of the Edinburgh office Forester B.R.G. HAMMOND, Collingbourne (South West, England) has become engaged to Miss J.L. VINSON, his forest clerk Miss M.H. HEDGES, shorthand typist, SE England Conservancy Office, Woking, has become Mrs. PAGE Congratulations also to Land Agent K.R.SNOOK, of the same Conservancy, and Mrs. Snook, on the birth of a son More felicitations to District Officer R.MacDONALD, Gwydyr Forester Training School, and Mrs. MacDonald, who now have a son and heir (Neil) Members of the Headquarters staff, with friends, visited Alice Holt last month to attend a social and dance. Others present included representatives from the Conservancy office at Woking. Visitors were welcomed by Mr. E.C. HARPER In response to many requests, the Headquarters Table Tennis Club organised another successful dance for the staffs of HQ and Office of Director, England. Miss JESSIE MOSS made the arrangements and MAURICE GUBBY was M.C. Howler from official correspondence : "The saws are no use whatsoever, being almost completely useless" And another example of unconscious humour: "What is required is thigh boots. It is requested that six pairs of Wellington's thigh boots, size 9, be ordered Finally, congratulations to Forester G. HOLTER, of Friston, (South East, England) on completing P 49 planting in 1948. He finished the planting of 306,000 beech and Scots pine on 28th December.

That's all for the present.