

CAUSES OF FOREST FIRES

£1,150,000 SPENT ON
PROTECTION IN 20 YEARS

SOME INTERESTING FACTS have come to light as the result of an investigation which Headquarters has carried out into the causes of fires in State forests. The officer responsible for the survey, which covers 20 years and is probably more exhaustive than any previous report of its kind, is Mr. HALDANE CHARTERS, of the Finance Branch. To him must go much credit for producing a really business-like and painstaking document, and one which contains a wealth of detail. For example, he shows that nearly 75 per cent. of the 13,000 fires which were reported as causing, or threatening to cause, damage in the Commission's woodlands occurred between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. - a fact which may not surprise those of our readers who are actively concerned with forest operations, but may interest others. About 50 per cent. of the fires occurred between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m., the peak being at 3 p.m. Outbreaks were most frequent (65 per cent.) in the months of March, April and May; the "fire season" starts a little earlier in Scotland and Wales than in England, but lasts longest in England.

In the period reviewed (1929-48) the planted area burnt was over 30,000 acres, and the estimated financial loss was more than £550,000. During the 20 years it was necessary to spend more than £1,150,000 on protection.

As is only to be expected, the survey has emphasised that the general public, mainly through carelessness with cigarette ends, matches, pipe tobacco and picnic fires, has been responsible for many fires and for a big proportion of the total loss.

The public is known to have started some 1,500 fires, involving a loss of 5,250 acres of trees and a financial loss of about £90,000, while there is little doubt that of a further 1,600 fires which are classified as having originated on adjoining land, and which caused a loss amounting to £150,000, most were due to thoughtlessness on the part of visitors to the countryside. The origin of nearly 1,900 fires, which caused a loss of more than £111,000, is unknown, but it is reasonable to assume that members of the public were largely responsible for these outbreaks.

Eighty-eight fires caused damage in excess of £1,000, and of these 24 occurred outside the "fire season"; 35 were at units where fires were infrequent and 12, although at units where fires were numerous, were the first outbreaks of the year.

With regret we have also to place on record the fact that a not inconsiderable number of fires was caused by the Commission's own employees, for example by allowing ride burning to get out of hand. We renew our appeal for watchfulness and caution at all times.

Sparks from railway engines were a major cause of fires.

* * SCIURUS CAROLINENSIS

AND SOMETHING ABOUT
SCIURUS VULGARIS

THE LIBRARIAN at the Forest Research Station at Alice Holt (Mr. G.D. KITCHINGMAN) has produced a bibliography on our old "friend" the squirrel - the common Red Squirrel (*Sciurus Vulgaris*) and the American Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus Carolinensis*). "I make no apology for attempting this," says Mr. Kitchingman; he proceeds in praiseworthy fashion to give no fewer than 36 useful references. The standard book on the subject, he says, is "The Grey Squirrel", by A.D. MIDDLETON (Sidgwick and Jackson, 1931).

"A good deal of information about the habits of squirrels and the means of destroying them appears from time to time in the correspondence columns of the Press," goes on Mr. Kitchingman. "Since we started collecting Press cuttings about squirrels we have gathered that the best shooting team (our technical readers will need little reminding) is two guns with a dog trained to flush and drive the squirrel up a tree. If the two guns then take up positions on opposite sides of the tree and start moving slowly round, the gun which is not being watched by the squirrel will usually get a shot."

A bit rough on the squirrel, perhaps, but the pest must be put down.

It would appear from the Press cuttings that there is no incentive to farmers and other countrymen to destroy squirrels, for they will not spend cartridges at 5d. each to kill an animal of no apparent use. They will not eat grey squirrel, although in America they are considered a delicacy; Professor Hawley, of Yale University, says the meat tastes something like chicken, and a squirrel stew is not a dish to be despised.

F.HOWARD LANCUM, in his "Wild Animals and the Land" (Crosby Lockwood, 1947), says:
"Many people have asked me if it is true that the grey squirrel is good to eat and, if so, how to cook it. It is true, and as to cooking it, here's how:

"First (Mrs. Beeton would have said had she known the animal) catch your squirrel. Skin it and clean it as you would a rabbit, and soak it in water over-night. Then chop it into pieces of convenient size. Melt some margarine or dripping in a stewpan, dip the pieces of squirrel in flour and fry until the flour is well browned. Then add a pint of stock, one large onion and a little parsley, season with salt and pepper, stir the whole until it boils, and simmer for two hours. I do not expect that there will ever be a queue for grey squirell, but having tried it twice I can honestly say that I found it quite good".

Now what we want to know is whether any of our readers have tasted grey squirrel and, if so, whether their recipes for cooking differ from that of Mr. Lancum.

* * THE LATE DIVISIONAL OFFICER W. FORSYTH

"INGENIOUS IN WORK AND RECREATION"

THE DEATH OF DIVISIONAL OFFICER W.FORSYTH, which was briefly reported in the last issue of The Slasher, has caused widespread regret. There is no doubt that the Commission has lost not only an efficient officer, but one of its brightest characters, for "Willie" Forsyth was ingenious and original in both work and recreation. Not everyone knows, for example, that he once became a tramp in order to see something of the seamy side of life, and while living among the "knights of the road" he sold newspapers in Scarborough. He had also "hitch-hiked" about the Continent and it is a pity that he did not record some of his experiences, for they would have made most interesting reading.

A former colleague writes: "Forsyth's death only three weeks before his 40th birthday has deprived the Commission of one of its most capable officers, and has created a feeling of great loss among his many friends. He was always an enthusiast for anything he took up, and in his early days at Edinburgh University he threw himself whole-heartedly into the Scout movement and for some time ran a Troop in one of the poorer parts of the City. He was fond of young people and had a way with him which quickly won their confidence.

"Fortunate is the man who is blessed with a sense of humour. Forsyth was doubly blessed, for he had an infectious laugh which soon had others laughing with him.

"He had done a considerable amount of work on fire protection and was of the opinion that the Commission should have an officer who would concentrate on this subject. He was, however, so much a forester that he always prayed that he would not end up in such a job himself."

* * DEATH OF CLERK OF WORKS

PASSING OF MR. W.C.WILLIAMS,
N.E. ENGLAND

IT IS WITH GREAT REGRET that we have to announce the death recently of MR W.C.WILLIAMS, Clerk of Works in the North East England Conservancy. Mr. Williams had been with the Department since November, 1947,

having previously been employed by the Air Ministry. On joining the Commission he took charge of road-work in the main in the North Riding of Yorkshire. He had been ill for some months and underwent two major operations before he passed away in the York County Hospital. He leaves a widow and a young daughter.

* * WILD LIFE AT TENTSMUIR

FORESTER BITTEN BY HERON

IT IS NOT GENERALLY KNOWN that Tentsmuir Forest, East Scotland, is of great interest to naturalists. While its name describes the moorland conditions found locally, the ecology is

enriched by the estuaries and seashore which gird the forest. Forester D.B.CRAWFORD tells us that the bird list is well over 100, and some 200 plants have been recorded.

One local naturalist has visited Tentsmuir almost weekly for more than 30 years. Material for nature illustrations for many publications, some of them of a national character, is obtained at Tentsmuir, and most of the trees featured in a forest tree series in The Bulletin were sketched there. Interest in wild life, says Forester Crawford, is not restricted to the visitors. The rare little orchid the "Coral Root" has just been added to the forest office collection of specimens, and study of bird life has resulted in a Head Forester being bitten by a young heron! This amazing incident occurred during an attempt to induce a nest of young herons to pose for a photograph, and it is regretted locally that the actual bite was not photographically captured for posterity - unfortunately the photographer, who was perched in a nearby tree, was somewhat overcome and nearly left his abode in a most undignified fashion.

South Wales.

THE FOLLOWING PROBLEMS have been sent along by Forest Clerk G.C.COOK, of Brecon Forest,

1. Can you plant 10 trees in 5 rows, placing 4 trees in each row?
2. A mile of wire exactly encloses a 40-acre field. What area will two miles of wire enclose?

Answers in next month's issue.

If readers have any similar problems we shall be glad to hear of them.

* * STORM DAMAGE IN A WELSH FOREST

35-FT.HIGH TREES UPROOTED

T. MORRIS) confined its deluge to a small area of a Sitka Spruce plantation which was formed in 1931 at an elevation of some 900 feet, the trees therein being about 15 ft. high. Within the area, which covered about 100 square yards, trees and the soil beneath to a depth of two feet were "torn out" as by a giant claw and hurled downhill, cutting a "swathe" 10 yards wide and nearly 200 yards long through other plantations. Part of a plantation of 19-years old Japanese larch, containing trees 30 - 35 feet high with butts of 6 inches, was uprooted and the trees, broken and splintered and stripped of their bark, were swept into a stream at the base of the hill. The soil was in many places eroded to a depth of 3 ft. and a good deal of it was carried via the aforementioned stream into the Port Talbot reservoir.

"The remarkable thing about the occurrence", writes Forester Morris, "is the confined area of damage and the straight course of the uprooted trees. One would have thought that the water would have spread and dispersed over a wide area, but within two yards of each side of the ripped-out 'path', the needle-covered floor of the forest was not even disturbed. Had there been the slightest sign of scorching on any of the trees I would have suspected the fall of a meteorite.

"The stream feeding the reservoir has been the scene of much activity, with Forestry Commission men working side by side with men from Port Talbot Council, all helping to clear debris and building a series of weirs in order to prevent pollution of the water."

* * PRESENTATION TO A FORESTER

FORESTER W. COTTENHAM has been presented with a handsome oak and silver clock by the staff of Apethorpe Forest, East England, to mark the occasion of his retirement. Unfortunately Mr. Cottenham has had to cease work through ill-health; his departure has occasioned much regret, for he was extremely popular with both senior officers and those who served under him. It is hoped that his health will improve and that he will be able to enjoy a happy retirement.

* * WELL-KEPT GARDENS AT SANTON DOWNHAM

HORTICULTURAL SKILL IN A FOREST VILLAGE

past the blue-print stage.

ONE HEARS OF PROPOSALS for the erection of new forest villages in the north, but deep in the heart of Thetford Forest, East England, the forest village of Santon Downham has long been

The Tenants' Association of this village recently organised a garden competition and invited State Forests Officer G.F.BALLANCE to act as judge. The invitation was accepted with a light heart and a Saturday afternoon was chosen for the task, but it was a tired and footsore S.F.O. who sought his bed that night. There are 40 new houses and nearly 30 older cottages in the village, strung out through the precincts of the old, now demolished, Downham Hall, and many miles had to be walked in visiting and re-visiting and checking and re-checking points. The standard of horticulture was extremely high, especially when one remembers that most gardens have been cultivated for only 18 months or less, and the judge might still be in the vicinity today, but for the timely support of Nursery Officer PATERSON.

By dusk the prize-winners were finally selected: New houses, 1st. Lorry Driver BERT THOMAS; 2nd. Mechanic W. CLEAVER; 3rd. Forest Worker E. MATTHEWS; 4th. Forester A.BIRKITT. Old houses, 1st. Keeper A.E.ADAMS; 2nd. Forest Worker S. MARSH; 3rd. Retired Forest Worker R. TURNER.

S.F.O. Ballance had the further pleasant duty of presenting the prizes, the ceremony taking place during a social and dance held some time later. Forest Worker S. RAWLINGS,

Secretary of the Tenants' Association, and Despatch Rider W.A.HARPER, the Chairman, introduced Mr. Ballance to a gathering of over 100 people. In complimenting the winners Mr. Ballance paid tribute to their efforts in producing such excellent horticultural results in so short a time.

The social, by the way, was under the auspices of the Santon Downham branch of St. John's Ambulance, which is comprised of Forestry Commission employees.

* * TRANSFERS AND NEW ARRIVALS

DISTRICT OFFICER R.CARNELL from Rushden, E.(F) to Bristol, S.W.(E). Foresters W.J.WATT from Clashindarroch E.(S), to Glendoll, E.(S); G.W.CLAYDON from Coed-y-Brenin, N.(W), to Glanllyn, N.(W); J.W.MIDDLETON from Smales (Kielder), N.E.(E), to Ferndown, New; R. MACDONALD from Ferndown to Smales; V. MITCHELL from Pelena, S.(W), to Coed-y-Rhaiadr, S.(W). Foremen R. SCHOFIELD from Margam, S.(W), to Fineshades, E.(E); R.S.LEWIS from St. Asaph, N.(W), to Myherin, N.(W); J.R.C.DASHALL from Challock S.E.(E), to Orleston, S.E.(E); S.J.LAW from Slindon (Goodwood), S.E.(E), to Andover, S.E.(E); A.G.FYMAN from Andover to Lyminge, S.E.(E); H.O.ARMSTRONG from Wauchope, S.(S), to Mabie, S.(S); R.M.EDWARD from Mabie to Wauchope; R.O.L.THOMAS from Brynmawr, N.(W), to Kerry, N.(W); R.J.REID from Research, Dean, to Research, West Norwood.

Newcomers to the Department are: Foreman N.E.MACINTYRE, to S.W.(E); Asst.Engineer J.H.WATTERS to Director, Wales; Executive Officer C.V.SIMPSON to N.W.(E); Clerical Officers J.M. FULLER to E.(E); J. DOLBY to Finance, H.Q.; J.V.McINTYRE to E.(E); J.FYFE to Finance, H.Q.; A.TOBIN to S.W.(E); E.J.CARTER to E.(E); R.F.BEAGLEY to Establishment, H.Q.; J.E.CARTER to S.E.(E); Mrs. R.E.HOFER to Establishment, H.Q.; and Mrs. K.M.MEYERSON to E.(E).

** AROUND AND ABOUT

CRICKET. A match was played recently at Challock South East England, between the village and a Forestry Commission team. In the first innings the Commission team were all out for 48, the villagers replying with 56 all out; there was a different story in the next innings when the Commission scored 74 for 4 declared and the opposition were all out for 14. (The collapse, we hear, is still a major point of discussion in the "locals"). Considering only 16 men are employed at Challock Forest it was a great achievement to field a side capable of such a creditable performance.

The Alice Holt Club has played a number of matches. In a recent match against New Forest there was a remarkable happening - a bowler on each side took 4 wickets with 4 consecutive balls. For such a feat to be performed once in a match is rare, but twice.....!

The Cambridge Office has formed a useful cricket team. There is strength on the batting side, with J.B.SELL, J. ALLEN and D. MORLEY outstanding. A Civil Service Hostel team has twice been handsomely beaten.

* * ROMANCES

CONGRATULATIONS to Miss EDNA PARRATT, shorthand typist at Alice Holt, and JOHN JEFFERS, Forester at Alice Holt, on their engagement; to Clerical Officer Miss Leslie Firth, late of the Cambridge Office, who has married Mr. Jack VARRIE, of Dumfries, Miss MARY LONGLEY, also of the Cambridge Office, was bridesmaid. Earlier, on behalf of the Conservancy Office staff, Mr. G.H.CLARK had presented the bride with a dinner service and fireside companion set and wished her luck; she is to join the staff of the Dumfries Office, South Scotland.

Congratulations, also, to Executive Officer W. ETTLES, of Inverness Office, North Scotland, who has received a presentation from colleagues to mark the occasion of his marriage.

Our best wishes, too, to Forester H. LAMBIE and Mrs. Lambie, of Port Clair, North Scotland, on the birth of a son.

* * BENMORE DINNER AND DANCE

WE HAVE HEARD from Mr. J.R.MAXTONE, who hopes to organise a re-union dinner and dance for former students of Benmore Forester Training School, that the finalised date for the event is Friday, 28th. September, 1951. Mr. Maxtone will be grateful if all interested in attending will as a preliminary measure send him a line before the end of October. He points out that ex-students eligible to attend are those who were at the school between August, 1942, and July, 1944.

* * SEEING FOR THEMSELVES

MEMBERS OF THE HEADQUARTERS STAFF visited Budgebury Forest, South East England, on 5th. September to see for themselves something of the Commission's operations in the field. Another visit for others of the staff takes place towards the end of the month. Fuller report later.

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AND CONSERVANCY OFFICE
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