

RUSSIAN ADVENTURE

"A MAGNIFICENT RECEPTION"

RECENTLY a Forestry Commission party visited Russia and now we have some impressions of the event, contributed by Mr. J. Q. WILLIAMSON, Conservator, South Wales.

Destination Moscow - that is all we knew of our programme before we left London Airport, writes Mr. Williamson, but before we returned ten days later we had taken in Leningrad, Kiev, Kharkhov and the Caucasus, making the total distance travelled nearly 6,000 miles. There are over two and a half thousand million acres of woods in the U.S.S.R. and we felt as though we had flown over most of them by the time we touched down at London Airport!

Our reception was magnificent and we seemed to be greeted with flowers and vodka whenever we met up with the forest staff of the various regions.

Research institutes, forestry schools, arboreta sample plots and virgin forests were all taken in our stride and no doubt these will all be dealt with in an official report of our visit. In this brief note, however, I would like to touch more on general impressions, and these were many and varied. The whole country seems one vast paradox - one moment we would be admiring some impressive building such as Moscow University, a sports stadium, the Bolshoi Theatre or the Miners' Sanatorium on the Black Sea and the next we would be appalled by the low living standards of the people - poor wooden shacks in every village, women with yokes carrying water in pails, women working pneumatic drills in the streets, the frightful price of clothing and every day necessities of life. And yet, through it all, we gained the impression of a happy and contented people who are convinced that their way of life is a good one and is getting better and better. There was quite obviously a large range in earning capacity and the University Professor seemed to be as much as ten times better off than the average worker, and this large variation was taken for granted.

Foresters, I think, are pretty well the same the whole world over, and our conversation was very much shop, shop, shop, and politics, I am glad to say, just did not enter into it. We were even blissfully ignorant of Nina and the five hats! A few days in a country does not make you an expert on its internal affairs but apparently we were allowed to wander off wherever we liked in the evenings and on our last day in Moscow two cars were put at our disposal to sightsee as we saw fit. As a keen photographer, my Leica was constantly cocked, and on only two occasions was I stopped - once in a Cathedral in the Kremlin where Russians were also not allowed to take photographs and once in a plane, but on both occasions the refusal was put very politely and there was no seizing of the film or fuss of any kind.

Forestry text books were handed out to us at many places during the tour and these will be a valuable addition to the Alice Holt library and other forest libraries in this country - it is hoped that they will provide a fuller picture of forestry techniques and policy than we were able to obtain in such a short time. The two most impressive sights from the forestry point of view were the immense shelterbelts stretching endlessly over the Steppes (the details of their establishment were explained fully to us) and the transition from the hardwood forests to the wonderful mixed forests of natural Caucasian Fir (*Abies Nordmanniana*) and Oriental Spruce stretching up to the glaciers.

I cannot finish this note without mentioning a few highlights - watching the changing of the guard at midnight in the Red Square outside the Lenin-Stalin Mausoleum; inspecting a stand of excellent S.P. 120 feet in height by the light of headlamps, with a forest guard protecting us with a rifle from the wolves which were howling in the background; eating slabs of buckwheat, honey and grapes, washed down with champagne in a forester's house in the heart of a forest near Kiev, and the fun the Russians had in filling our pockets with apples and pears and sticky honey! Our dip in the Black Sea (what a misnomer for a brilliant blue and friendly ocean); the bubbling enthusiasm of Professor Timoviev to whom in his own words "trees were poetry and everything else prose"; Dr. Hummel's speech in Russian at a reception in Kharkov; the singing of a Mass in a Cathedral into which we wandered when having an hour to spare; and finally the sight of London Town as we flew along the Thames. How we metaphorically as well as literally came down to earth when we had to look after our baggage for ourselves!

There is no doubt in my mind that the visit was of great value, most certainly personally, but also from the Commission's point of view, because of the valuable contacts we made and the promises which were given to exchange literature and seed in the future.

I only hope that many more of our staff will eventually visit the U.S.S.R. as our forestry friendship strengthens and develops.

ARRIVAL OF THE BISON

PLANE JOURNEY FROM CRACOW

THE "reception committee" which awaited the arrival from Poland of the pair of European bison comprised Mr. JAMES MACDONALD, Director of Research and Education, the Information Officer and Mr. OLIVER JONES, Curator of Mammals at the London Zoo. Although visibility was not all that might have been desired, the temporarily converted Polish airliner - a Dakota - which was carrying the animals touched down at London Airport before time, after the long journey from Cracow.

There were some anxious moments while the bison were being unloaded on to a lorry from the Zoo, for although only a year old each animal, with crate, weighed about a ton and required a great deal of manoeuvring. One of the bison objected quite violently and the thudding of hooves on the wooden crate made onlookers wonder whether they would be treated to the sight of the reception committee being hotly pursued along the tarmac by the angry animal. However, all went well and it was not long before the journey to the Zoo commenced.

It will be recalled that these bison, which are quite rare, are a gift to the United Kingdom from the Polish Government, the offer having been made during the recent Congress of the International Union of Forest Research Organisations. They are male and female, but breeding is unlikely to take place for another three years or so. They are to undergo a 28-day quarantine period at London Zoo, after which they will be on show to the public for some time before being transferred to Whipsnade. Following quarantine, an official handing over ceremony may take place at Regents Park and it may be necessary to bestow names upon the animals. Any suggestions?

CHIEF RESEARCH OFFICER'S

ENGAGEMENT

CONGRATULATIONS to Mr. MALCOLM V. LAURIE, the Chief Research Officer, who has become engaged to be married. The bride-to-be is Miss M. C. (KITTY) JACKSON, whom Mr. Laurie first met some 22 years ago in India, when he was in the Indian Forest Service. Miss Jackson is the daughter of a Farnham resident and, like Mr. Laurie, is a keen glider pilot - so (to quote Mr. Laurie) "marriage will not mean an end to flying!" It is expected that the wedding will take place towards the end of this month.

BADGER BAITING IN A BARREL

LAST MONTH'S note about the badger pit in the Chilterns has prompted Forester J. F. CLARK, of Salcey Forest, East England Conservancy, to write to us on the subject of baiting. It seems, he says, that the form of badger baiting in the West country was different to that described in The Slasher. Apparently a large barrel was laid down in the farmyard with the end against the wall and bricks were placed at each side to prevent it rolling.

The badger was put in the barrel and then betting took place as to which dog would kill it. Lots were drawn by the owners of the dogs, which were six in number, to determine the order in which they were to attack the badger. As a general rule the first three or four dogs hadn't a chance of killing and were often terribly mutilated and sometimes had to be destroyed. Several badgers were caught for one Sunday morning's "sport".

THE FOX'S MENU

WHAT does the fox eat, now that myxomatosis has largely killed off the rabbit population? There has been much speculation on the subject and Forester R. J. JENNINGS tells us of an interesting experience. In 1954, he writes, while spending a few days with my very old friend and tutor Head Forester Tribe (since retired) at Cannock Chase we dug out a litter of fox cubs. The earth was only 200 yards from the village of Slitting Mill and only 40 yards from the main road. I give below a list of what was in the earth, in addition to the four cubs.

Remains of two cats; one peewit; one magpie; three crows; one bantam cock; two pheasants; one hare; two moles; two hens; four rats; one blackbird; one jay; one rabbit; a number of damson stones; and three half loaves of bread.

Rabbits were never plentiful in the district in recent years but foxes have always lived there and looked healthy; there are not many sheep in the area. So this is a good example of how foxes get their living when circumstances compel them to go scavenging. You may wonder how a jay and magpie came to be captured; the local pigeon club had been out and Mr. Tribe considers that the birds may have been brought down by the guns.

KEEPER FOR 40 YEARS

MR. JOHN WILSON has retired after more than 40 years as Gamekeeper at Knapdale. He served the Poltalloch Estate until Knapdale was purchased by the Commission in 1931, which means

that he was with us for a quarter of a century. Mr. Wilson was a well known personality in the area, having also been postmaster for the district for 37 years.

We wish him a happy retirement.

MEM

SEEING FOR THEMSELVES

TWENTY members of the Staff of Director, England, paid an educational visit to Bramshill Forest, in the South East England Conservancy, where they were joined by representatives of the Legal Branch of the Agricultural Ministry.

During a well planned tour of the forest, under the guidance of Divisional Officer E. E. DIXON, the party was shown various kinds of forest work, including thinning and conversion, ride cutting by brushcutter, rack cutting and high pruning and a demonstration of a mechanical saw. Visits were also paid to an area of reserved timber which was recently acquired, a burnt area and two nurseries. To add to the interest of the tour a forest quiz had been devised by the Conservancy staff; this proved both amusing and educational.

MEM

ROOF TORN OFF BUNGALOW

WHEN a freak storm struck Cairnbaan Camp in the West Conservancy, Scotland, the roof of a bungalow owned by a firm of builders was torn off and, with clothing and a perambulator, was carried for several hundred yards.

Trees were blown down and branches ripped off by the wind, which was of hurricane force and cut a swathe of about 20 yards wide across the countryside. Several other buildings at the camp partly collapsed when their walls were pulled out by the ensuing vacuum; Commission employees and others were inside at the time but, fortunately, there appears to have been no injury.

MEM

FAREWELL TO DELAMERE

PRESENTATIONS were made to Head Forester G.W. JONES and Mrs. JONES, on the occasion of the former's retirement after 30 years in charge at Delamere Forest, North West England Conservancy. It will be recalled that not long ago Mr. Jones received the B.E.M. awarded to him for meritorious service.

The ceremony took place at Linnere, where the forest staff had assembled to wish the couple well. Two members of the staff, each with long service, made the presentations; Ganger LEWIS presented Mr. Jones with a shooting stick and pipe and Mrs. BROCKES presented Mrs. Jones with a handbag. Numerous friends in other parts of the Conservancy were represented by the Conservator, Mr. J. S. R. CHARD, and Executive Officer Mr. J. E. WATTS. In thanking the local staff for their past co-operation, Mr. Jones said he was sure that the same loyalty would be shown to his successor, Forester T. L. JENKINS, who was also present.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones, as previously reported, are to spend their retirement in the Forest of Dean.

MEM

THE BUSY BEE

CLERK OF WORKS Mr. L. D. BOUNDY, of Exeter, wonders whether any reader can give him a reason for the following. In August, he writes, I noticed a honey bee burrowing in the earth of a 7-inch flower pot in which had been planted some small cactus plants. After making a hole, the bee lined the sides with leaves and petals from a geranium; making an inspection some hours later, I found that the entrance to the hole had been neatly sealed with another leaf. At the same time another bee (or it could have been the same bee) began burrowing on the opposite side of the pot, but did not complete the operation. Mr. Boundy adds that the pot is in his greenhouse and he is reluctant to disturb the soil in order to find out what, if anything, is sealed in.

MEM

AWARD FOR GALLANTRY

A CERTIFICATE awarded by the local Chief Constable has been presented to Mr. WILLIAM CARROLL, a Forest Worker employed at Cannock Chase, who was instrumental in securing the arrest of an armed youth who was later convicted of murdering his parents. Mr. Carroll was in the fire tower at the time; the youth climbed the tower and fired the gun he was carrying, but Mr. Carroll persuaded him to drop the weapon and held him in the tower until the arrival of the police. The certificate was handed to Mr. Carroll by the Conservator, Mr. J. S. R. CHARD.

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HELP WANTED

ASSISTANT FORESTER R. S. HODGSON, of Ringwood, in the New Forest Division, writes: "May I draw attention through your columns to a survey which the Botanical Society of the British Isles are conducting throughout Britain? From the information gathered by volunteers it is hoped to publish a book of maps in four or five years time, showing the distribution of every one of our wild flowering plants and ferns. Assistance is especially required in Cumberland, Northumberland and much of Scotland, and if anyone in those areas feels that he or she can find time to help I am sure it will be appreciated by the Society.

"Expert knowledge of plants is by no means essential. It is, in fact, the distribution of the more common flowers which needs checking most, and if you come across a difficult one an expert is available to help you. Full details of the scheme and a supply of record cards can be obtained from B.S.B.I. Distribution Maps Scheme, 1, Brookside, Cambridge."

HH

THE LONG JOURNEY

A LONG journey lies ahead for a young man who has just left the Lynford Hall Forester Training School. He is Mr. A. J. APPLETON, of Middlesborough, who used to work at Cleveland Forest, in the North East Conservancy Office; he has been engaged for forestry work by the New Zealand Government and is making the journey on a small motor cycle, travelling across Europe and Asia to India, sailing to Australia and crossing that Continent on the motor cycle, and sailing on to New Zealand, where he is due to commence work in January next.

Bravery on the part of a first-year student at Lynford Hall, Mr. KENNETH MILLS, is also reported. It appears that while on holiday in Germany with other students he dived fully clothed into the river at Frankfurt and rescued a drowning man. Mr. Mills is well known in the Mundford district; it is understood that he is acting Scoutmaster of a local troop, a member of the choir at St. Leonard's Church and is also a bellringer.

HH

PERSONAL

THE MARRIAGE is reported of District Officer R. G. M. SEMPLE, South West England Conservancy, and Miss DOREEN JUNE HARPER, of Singleton, and we offer the couple our congratulations. These go, too, to Mr. A. CAMPBELL, Clerical Officer in the Edinburgh office, who has also married; to District Officer IAN MACNEILL, West Scotland Conservancy, and Mrs. MACNEILL, on the birth of a daughter; to District Officer D. COTTER-CRAIG, North Scotland Conservancy, and Mrs. COTTER-CRAIG, on the birth of a daughter; to Mr. F. HENDERSON, Executive Officer, Inverness, and Mrs. HENDERSON, on the arrival of a son; and to Mr. J. G. PRITCHARD, Clerical Officer at Chester, and Mrs. PRITCHARD, also on the birth of a son (Mrs. Pritchard, as Miss Pollock, was formerly employed in the Conservancy office).

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ANCIENT TREE AT ALICE HOLT

FEW visitors to Alice Holt Lodge will have failed to speculate as to the age of the ancient oak which is to be seen on the lawn outside the front entrance. With this in mind we asked one or two colleagues for their opinions, bearing in mind that one officer had already said the tree might be 800 years old. Alas, little indeed seems to be known about the tree or its age, but one further estimate of the latter is 550 years.

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TRANSFERS

THE FOLLOWING TRANSFERS have been notified to Headquarters:

Foresters J. A. HENDRIE from Kesteven, E(E), to Roudham, E(E); R. B. HARDY from Burwell, E(E), to Kesteven; A. C. PYWELL from Roudham to Burwell. Assistant Foresters W. T. GRIFFITHS from Mynydd Ddu, S(W), to Chepstow, S(W); G. V. BURT from Cilgwyn, S(W), to Monmouth, S(W); E. J. W. WAITE from St. Asaph, N(W), to Dorry Ormond, N(W); D. A. MACDOUGALL from Clunes, N(S), to Glenhurich, N(S); T. NELSON from Elibank, S(S), to Glengap, S(S). Assistant Engineer R. W. P. YATES from Montgomery, N(W), to Cemmaes, N(W). Executive Officer J. D. TRIST from Headquarters to Director, England. Clerical Officers A. J. WILL from Edinburgh to Dumfries; Miss N. STILLWELL from Chester to Lyndhurst.

IF YOU DO SOMETHING, SEE SOMETHING, OR HEAR SOMETHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY, TELL YOUR SLASHER CORRESPONDENT. THERE IS A CORRESPONDENT IN EACH DIRECTORATE AND CONSERVANCY OFFICE