

Introduction

The two previous instalments of the *History of the Uganda Forest Department* traced its progress from its establishment in 1898 as half of the new Scientific & Forestry Department, with an expatriate staff of one and a half officers, in a Protectorate only reluctantly adopted by the British Government a few years before. During its first 30 years no clear forest policy was formulated and the poorly staffed and funded department concerned itself mainly with harvesting forest produce, concentrating on wild rubber collection, the pit-sawing of mahogany (*Khaya* and *Entandrophragma spp.*) in the Budongo Forest and of mvule (*Chlorophora* = *Milicia excelsa*) from the savanna and farmlands of Busoga, and the milling of podo (*Podocarpus spp.*) from the swamp forests of south Masaka, partly to meet the needs of the first world war. A start was also made on establishing fuel and pole plantations. However, adverse external reports by Troup and Nicholson drew attention to the failure to declare and demarcate existing natural forests as reserves and to prepare working plans, and the most active and enterprising officer, Dawe, resigned in frustration.

A new phase opened in 1929 with the appointment of Brasnett as Conservator, with new and vigorous colleagues, notably Eggeling. A Forest Policy received formal government approval; forest reservation was pressed ahead reaching a total of 6,317 sq miles (16,360 sq km, 7.9% of the land and swamp area of Uganda, i.e. excluding lakes) by 1950, including both major productive forests and some large protective mountain forests; working plans were prepared for some of the major forests; botanical and ecological studies were made in the natural forests and trials were made of techniques for their regeneration; and 20,000 acres (8,000 ha) of fuel and pole plantations were established. The second world war caused a temporary setback but by 1950 the stage was set for further development.

The relatively short period of the next 15 years proved to be the most active in both the Protectorate's and the Department's histories. At its start, while it was recognised that the country would progress to independence in due course, the official view was that this would take several decades at least, yet in fact it took only a dozen years, and was achieved quite peacefully. Although relationships with Buganda, the largest native kingdom and the most developed province, were upset by disputes with its government and ruler, the Kabaka, and the eventual exile of the latter, there was a progressive development of other local governments and transfer of powers to them.

By now Uganda was a prosperous country based on exports of the three Cs – cotton, coffee

and copper, supplemented by tea and sugar. Substantial funds were accumulated in the cotton cess fund which were then available to promote other development such as education and health; Makerere College (now University) and Mulago Hospital were leading institutions in Africa. Such changes naturally had important repercussions on the policy and work of the Forest Department, primarily in the funding of an expanding programme of work, the transfer of responsibilities to local governments and the training of African staff.

Most of the existing natural forests had now been reserved or were on private property in Buganda, but most remained undemarcated, little known and not covered by working plans, though it was clear that further forest resources would be needed. Swabey, the new Conservator of Forests (CF), spurred his staff ahead with all these activities, and by the end of the period most of these deficiencies had been remedied. Unlike many development projects, however, these were kept under strict financial control by a closely monitored standard costings system. Local governments were persuaded to agree to the reservation of numerous minor forests as Local Forest Reserves (LFRs). As each district achieved its set target it was declared to have an Adequate Forest Estate (AFE) which entitled it to manage and draw revenue from unreserved public land as well as from LFRs.

Dawkins, Forest Ecologist, contributed intensive studies of the ecology of the natural forests, especially the relationship between harvesting management and regeneration success, and established standard methods of assessing and tending natural regeneration and its increment, with emphasis on the use of arboricides to kill weed species. Numerous trials of replanting harvested forest with mahoganies and other desirable species had often met with little success, either due to damage by elephants or to inadequate canopy opening. Dawkins concluded that natural regeneration was the best option and that a monocyclic system of harvesting was required to avoid excessive damage to the regeneration. In parallel with this he developed efficient enumeration (inventory) techniques for assessing forest stocking and permissible yields on a sustained yield basis. This work was complemented by the development of a skilled map section making use of the countrywide air photography and accurate mapping done by the Directorate of Overseas surveys in the 1950s, so that it was possible to map and define the different forest types in each major forest and their potential yield. For long-term management a vital system of continuous forest inventory was developed.

On these foundations it was possible to expand timber production from natural forests but it soon became clear that these would not meet the anticipated needs of the country. A detailed country-wide census sponsored by FAO of the use of timber and other wood confirmed this, and a programme was started for the establishment of extensive plantations of pine and cypress, mainly on grassy hills in the western highlands, so that by the end of the period these comprised 11,320 acres (4,580 ha). The harvesting of these was delayed by the troubled Amin and Obote periods, but these plantations have provided and still provide a very valuable source of timber since then, when demand has been much greater than could be satisfied by the natural forests.

An earlier attempt to provide supplies of high quality saw-timber was based on the premise that mvule, which flourished in the savanna of Busoga and occasionally further north, could be established in the somewhat drier lateritic savannas of Lango and Acholi districts. After

an encouraging start, the attacks of the mvule gall-fly, the disappearance of cheap labour and the failure of the trees to make continuing height growth led eventually to the closure of these projects.

Fuel and pole plantations were expanded, partly to meet increased industrial demands such as fuel for brick-burning, tobacco-curing and tea-drying, and poles for transmission lines following the construction of the Owen Falls dam on the Nile. Domestic demand too continued to grow, driven by the demands of a rising population and rising standards of living and housing.

The training of African staff was a priority and the Forest School at Nyabyeya was repeatedly expanded for the training of foresters and rangers, while professional training was given at universities abroad. Research was conducted into problems of many kinds, from seed provenance, nursery practice and thinning schedules to pathology and entomology. The better utilisation of lesser known timbers was a constant preoccupation, to try to widen the number of species taken in harvesting natural forest, and considerable success was achieved, the number of species commonly taken rising from 35 to 50–60 over the period.

To conclude, the period covered here was marked by great development and expansion of all aspects of the Department's work from reservation of an adequate forest estate, silviculture, management and research to training of staff; in at least some aspects of these the Department was among the leaders in Commonwealth countries. Uganda achieved independence in 1962 and most of the expatriate staff retired soon after and were gradually replaced by Ugandan professional staff as they completed their training. So 1965, when a Ugandan officer took charge of the Department, was the end of an era. Without doubt, expatriate officers who served in Uganda look back nostalgically and with pride to a happy sojourn in 'the Pearl of Africa' and with affection for its friendly people.