

6 Communications and Buildings

Roads

A number of public transport developments were announced which affected the Department. The western extension of the railway was to pass through a number of forests in West Mengo and would radically facilitate timber exploitation further west. A district road alignment in the Luhiza–Kayonza–Kanungu area was to cross the Impenetrable Forest in two places. New roads in Mbale District improved access to the Mt Elgon and West Bugwe forests.

In 1951 there was an urgent need for construction of further departmental access roads in areas under concentrated regeneration – this applied particularly in the case of short-term fuel and pole crops where such roads became immediately revenue-producing. But over the next two years the programme of extending motor roads in plantation areas was limited by the availability of labour. This was particularly so at Mafuga where the inadequate labour supply persisted until 1957.

Another factor which restricted the road-making programme was the inadequate Departmental fleet of vehicles (Table 16) and it was not until new lorries and County Crawler tractors with ancillary equipment were obtained that the situation improved. In 1957 one of these tractors with a dozer blade built nine miles of new road 11 ft (3.30m) wide and reopened four miles of old road during the last eight months of the year. This was as cheap and a good deal quicker than building by hand. About the same time, a welcome addition to the vehicle fleet were five Land Rovers which were mostly engaged on the servicing of staff and labour engaged on boundary demarcation, enumeration surveys and TSI.

The programme of extending roads or Land Rover tracks into reserves was pursued energetically between 1956 and 1963/64 in order to keep up with new planting in softwood areas and treatment of TSI areas. In that period more than 400 miles (640 km) of new roads including 100 miles (160 km) of LR tracks were built. By 1959/60 new road construction was well up to the planting and high forest tending programmes. In Karamoja LR tracks were made to give access to the Ilipath cedar forest on Mt. Moroto and to a group of reserves in Dodoth. The following year the track on Mt Moroto was continued 14 miles (22 km) to the plateau at about 8,000 ft (2,440 m).

In 1956, a major road project was begun when a contract was placed for the construction

of some 15 miles (24 km) of road in the extremely difficult topography around Mafuga. Unfortunately, the contract had to be cancelled the following year for non-performance and as no replacement was available, the road programme fell seriously behind. When road making was resumed by Departmental labour, great difficulty was met due to the rocky nature of the ground and much blasting had to be done. As a result, costs went up astronomically to over £1,000 per mile (£620 per km).

A new National Parks road to the Murchison Falls provided better access to the remote Kyabatwa reserve in Bunyoro. Roads were pushed through the Budongo and Kibale Forests.

As softwood plantations expanded, it was necessary to accelerate the rate of road building in the interests of fire control. Roads were made into Kyehara and Kikumiro in 1958–59 using a County Crawler, which was also used for a road into Kanyawara/Namasika from the Bigodi road.

In Busoga, much time and effort was expended by the South Busoga enumeration team in maintaining the Ikulwe–Kityerera road which proved of great value in giving access to the southern portion of the reserve.

The bridge on the approach road to Use over the river Ora (under construction since 1954) was opened to traffic at the end of 1955 – a major construction with reinforced concrete abutments and 30 ft (9 m) span steel girders with temporary wooden decking (Plate 8). Lack of skilled staff along with delays and losses in cement deliveries (by rail, lorry and steamer) almost doubled the estimated cost of the bridge. In 1958, the Uganda Mountain Club built a 50 ft (15 m) suspension bridge over the Mubuku river in the Ruwenzori CFR and re-aligned and cleared the worst section of the path along the Bujuku valley as part of a scheme to improve communication on the mountains. A somewhat novel departure in Uganda forestry was the construction of a landing strip near the Lendu plantations in which the Department joined with the Administration. This was done partly for security reasons and partly to make the plantations more accessible to visitors.

The Department co-operated with the Ankole NG in repairing and reconstructing the Nyakafunjo-Bugamba road, the Department providing a light bulldozer. Approximately 7 miles (11 km) of the road were rebuilt of which 2 miles (3 km) passed through the S Ankole softwoods scheme.

The loan of a D6 from the Department of Agriculture enabled good progress to be made in 1961/62 with the elephant defence road round the softwood trial plots in the Nyamasika grassland of Kibale Forest. A vertical cut of 7 ft (2 m) was made on one side which, it was hoped, would keep out the elephants. The cost was about £200 per mile (£124 per km) which was a great deal less than the ditch tried previously and would be supportable on a plantation scale. The road was completed the following year but had not proved its efficacy.

In 1961/62 the prolonged heavy rains resulted in a great increase in road maintenance work. New extraction roads were constructed by the licensees in Budongo and Kasala Forests in 1963/64 in accordance with the conditions of their licences.

Vehicles

(Table 16)

At the beginning of the period (1951) the Department had a most inadequate fleet of only three lorries whose performance was far from satisfactory. Over the next 3–4 years, there was little improvement in the situation when the vehicles seemed to spend the bulk of their time under repair. Some relief was obtained by the purchase of two Land Rovers but lorry maintenance continued to give a disproportionate amount of trouble.

In 1955 there was a welcome addition of one truck, two tractors and three Land Rovers to the fleet. The Land Rovers were largely engaged on the servicing of staff and labour engaged on boundary demarcation, enumeration surveys and timber stand improvement. Their use made possible some important works which otherwise would have been long delayed. The improvement continued in the following year with the acquisition of four more wheeled tractors and one crawler along with ancillary equipment such as grass-mowers, grading blade, ploughs and harrows etc. A log trailer was acquired at the end of the year for the extraction and transport of logs for the timber-testing programme. A 200-gallon (900-litre) tanker trailer for use with Land Rovers for the transport of arboricide mixtures into the forest was also a welcome addition.

By 1959/60 the amount of use which the Land Rovers had to bear was reflected in the writing off of three vehicles and the knowledge that several more were coming to the end of their economic life. Only one replacement was expected. In the following year, the situation was improved by the addition of two 5-ton trucks, two Land Rovers and a tipping trailer in place of one truck (written off) and two LRs awaiting writing off. In 1961/62 three Land Rovers, one wheeled tractor and tank trailer were obtained but they only replaced the three Land Rovers and one wheeled tractor which was written off. At the end of the year, the main components of the fleet were 10 Land Rovers, 8 trucks, 10 tractors and 11 trailers and the total mileage run was 207,400 miles (334,000 km). It was increasingly felt that it was uneconomic to try to prolong the life of old vehicles.

Buildings

The original building programme at the Forest School was completed in 1951 with the result that the School was now suitably housed, both practically and aesthetically. New office accommodation was built at Arua and Head Office and the DFO Mbale moved into more commodious offices in the new government office block. Construction of the new workshops and ancillary buildings at Nakawa for the Forest Engineer proceeded throughout the year.

Rangers' houses were built in Busoga, Mbale, Buganda and Kigezi. Labour lines were built at Kigezi and Bunyoro. In the following year the Departmental team did a good year's work in Buganda with the building of houses for African field staff, labourers' quarters and stores. A new forest village was built at Lendu and new labour lines begun at Budongo.

A number of movable aluminium (Uniport) houses were in use during the year and proved to be of great value. Further supplies were obtained in 1953 and 1954. They saved an enormous amount of time and expense when temporary accommodation was required in remote areas.

The PFO/WP was fervent in his campaign to house subordinate staff and labour and in collaboration with the Forest Engineer, produced an acceptable design for a prefabricated wooden frame house with expanded metal and cement filling. In 1955, five junior staff quarters of this design were erected in the WP but although of excellent standard, prefabrication was only partial and it was very expensive in time and labour to complete building on site when craftsmen and supervision were both absent. A number of semi-experimental designs were tried out in the field and the Forest Engineer completed eight pre-fabricated four-roomed quarters for Rangers and one unit suitable for labour. These were of sectional design using treated timber covered with expanded metal, leaving only the concrete work to be completed on site.

The programme of construction and maintenance of housing for subordinate staff and labour continued for the next ten years. A new forest village was completed at Sonso (Budongo). As projects expanded, or new projects were initiated, more buildings were required for the new staff and to re-house those previously in temporary accommodation. In an attempt to solve the problem of buildings being needed in small numbers in difficult areas, a contract was signed for the erection of 12 wooden pre-fabricated housing units for field staff and labour at Entebbe, Mpanga, Jubiya, Kapkwata, Kirala and Sebutole. These were made in three-foot pressure-impregnated panel units by a sawmilling company and were delivered and erected by the company in any part of the country which could be reached by a five-ton lorry. These buildings were a success though certain improvements in design were necessary later. A rest house was built at Nakawa for the user of rangers, guards, drivers etc attending courses.

In the process of devolution of responsibilities to ALGs, a number of buildings were transferred to the Kabaka's Government and the Busoga ALG.

The programme of improvement of rural staff quarters continued and thirty 1,000 gallon (4,500 litre) water tanks were purchased in 1956. In the following two years, 11 and 10 staff houses, and 14 and 20 sets of labour quarters were built respectively, but despite the progress made there was still much building to be done before the junior field staff and labour in remote areas were adequately housed. The programme for housing subordinate staff continued until 1965, but on a reduced scale.

The buildings at the Forest School became a heavy burden, not only on account of the new buildings necessitated by the expansion decided in 1957 but also in regard to maintenance of the existing buildings and services such as electricity and water supply. There were at this time, more than 60 buildings of various kinds at the School, some of them very old and needing much upkeep. The School water supply was a cause of anxiety during the year because of a declining yield from the main bore-hole, defective distribution piping and a main storage which was liable to fail at any time. All these defects, however, were rectified in the following year. It was a great relief to the teaching staff and also to Head Office to have the School buildings and water supply completed after three years' work which had been bedevilled by repeated delays and which had been a heavy burden on staff who had carried out all the work except electricity work.

A laboratory and insectary for the Forest Entomologist was completed in 1958 giving this officer very adequate work facilities.