

## BOOK REVIEWS

*FORESTRY IN THE ENGLISH LANDSCAPE*, by Roger Miles.  
1967, Faber and Faber, London. 303 pp. Price in U.K. £5 5s.

If you wish to have a synopsis of this book, you could do no better than to read Victor Bonham-Carter's excellent and lucid Introduction, and then Miles' "Summing up and Looking Ahead" from pages 233 to 242. This is an obliging innovation which could well be copied by other authors writing on technical subjects. Another helpful feature is the plethora of references at the end—no less than three sections comprising notes on individual chapters, a bibliography and a full index.

There are several minor aggravations in this book, which should be brushed aside at this stage. Some of the writing tends to be repetitive and clumsy; a few of the photographic prints are of poor muzzy quality, and this should not happen in an expensive publication—I think the author was more concerned with illustrating what he was talking about, and this he does well; most of the plans are wretchedly small, with microscopic print; and there is an annoying tendency to advertise the paramount importance of landscape architects. Having said that, let me hasten to add that this is an important book written by a most competent field man clearly dedicated to his chosen profession, not lacking in a wide range of knowledge, and having catholic learning and interests. In addition, he can be accounted a true pioneer.

The book is divided into three major Parts. Part I is historical, and Parts II and III deal with the practical aspects of a survey of Exmoor National Park. The purpose of the first chapter is to show why the English landscape is like it is. It came into being in the eighteenth century through sound silvicultural practices and the taste of the great Whig aristocrats and landowners of the time, aided by such competent technicians as John Lancelot "Capability" Brown. Even the devastation of two world wars and the despoliation wrought by disinheritance taxation has not entirely obliterated the lovely pattern established in that hey-day of aristocratic culture.

The author has perhaps painted too rosy a picture of those settled and prosperous times. The enclosures certainly established a landscape of unrivalled beauty, but it also led to the dispossession of the commoners, whose descendants became the impoverished rural workers of a later age. Nor has Roger Miles given enough thought to the pattern of the countryside before the enclosures, for it was upon that pattern that the great landlords had to build. It reflected the age-old attempt of the countryman to come to terms with nature—to try to get nature working with him. It was the untold toil of generations that tamed the rivers, setting their banks about with willows. It was the levy of house bote and fire bote that eroded the forests—eventually leaving the spinneys and coppices in those most inhospitable corners that now look so rightly placed in the landscape.

The eighteenth century landowners were truly rural, like the mass of the population; they even spoke in the local dialects. In Chapter 2, the author describes how they became, along with the mass of

the people, generally urbanized while forestry was displaced by game management. Not less important was the advent of the steel-hulled ship (for previously forestry had been concerned more with naval supplies than with any other product, and silviculture had been adapted to this end). And, coupled with the development of the ghastly nineteenth century urban sprawl, was the almost insatiable demand for softwoods rather than the traditional oak. Apart from a few enthusiasts, regarded by their peers as rather cranky, the practice of forestry almost withered away in the immense upheaval and population explosion of the Industrial Revolution.

Even so, well before the end of the century, the tide turned. There was a slow build-up in public pressure to preserve the countryside, to save the commons from enclosure, to maintain the ancient rights of way. Then was the advent of the National Trust whose object was to preserve places of historic interest or natural beauty.

Chapters 3 and 4 bring us up to the present. In them are described the origin and history of the Forestry Commission and National Parks, and a reviving forestry profession, leading on to the present tremendous pressure on land, and the growth of the idea of multiple use and countryside planning. The rather indeterminate and unpursued question of National Forest Parks is worth noting. So also is the retreat of the Forestry Commission from the Lake District—hounded out by an aroused public conscience. Then, after 1946, came a spate of legislation and the often rather ludicrous application of this (for example the indiscriminate imposition of Tree Preservation Orders) by misinformed functionaries, and the growth of "consultation". The map on page 128 is worth studying with care to see where all this upsurge of official activity is leading. In this connection, it is of interest to observe that, in the notes to the chapters, no less than 99 references out of a total of 211 are to official publications of one sort or another.

These two chapters are of particular significance as they indicate what might well happen in New Zealand in the not too distant future: the battle of economic man, planting new forests painstakingly to catch up with the *laissez faire* of the past; while sentimental and impracticable preservationists try to conserve everything in sight—even if it is only a moribund caricature of a once thriving and viable managed forest.

I can do no better than to quote Victor Bonham-Carter. "Two parties assembled, massed on either side of a gulf, which so widened and deepened that the idea of 'trees for use' came to be regarded as incompatible with the idea of 'trees for beauty'. It was a case, roughly speaking, of Government foresters, supported by a growing number of private landowners and commercial syndicates, versus a mixed company of naturalists and country lovers (townsmen and countrymen alike), who sought to protect the traditional appearance of the landscape. Both had the backing of Acts of Parliament and powerful organisations, so that disagreements—based on rigidly opposed concepts—became habitual, and hardened into inevitability".

The Forestry Act was on one side, and on the other a plethora of Acts, regulations, orders, local by-laws and the like. There was the Forestry Commission, the Timber Growers' Organisation and

the powerful timber interests in one camp; and, in the other, official bodies like the Nature Conservancy and the National Parks Commission, and private organizations like the Council for the Preservation of Rural England. Not committed to either side were a few forestry societies and some sections of the Country Land-owners' Association, but these seem to have carried little weight. And curiously, the battle has not been so much over forestry as such, but over the use of conifers in forestry. Roger Miles thinks this is because the English are unaccustomed to coniferous woods, but this is not strictly true. On the old glacial terraces of southern England and on the Breckland sands, Scots pine has been a familiar and well-liked feature of the landscape for more than a century. Exotic conifers have been imported and widely planted for at least 150 years and are not objects of execration. And over much of Britain, larch woods are commonly to be seen. The real objection seems to be the imposition of an alien pattern on the landscape—a pattern of straight lines. For the old pattern of land use is a natural growth. Streams and ridges are property boundaries. Roads follow the easier grades and are graciously curvaceous. Spinneys are to be found in little uncultivable gullies or odd unused corners. Even houses and villages are well-sited in seemingly "natural" alliance with the features of the landscape. But rectangular compartments marching over hill and dale without thought to the shape of the country strike a jarring note, and it is fortunate that they are not practical either from the logging point of view, and have come to be discarded.

Part II is mainly concerned with the afforestation survey of Exmoor. The object of the survey was to "find land which is not only suitable for afforestation with coniferous trees, but can be so planted without detriment to landscape and other land uses". This is a tall order, and this section is of particular interest in that it shows how to go about this exacting task. It should be studied with care by all those with an interest in public recreation and amenity. Among other things, it attempts (with some success) to define the principles of landscape design under the headings—Unity; Scale, proportion and space; Colour, texture and light; Time; and Style. These are illustrated with paintings designed to show the results of various landscape treatments—an effective method developed by the author. Part III records a second survey, dealing with the management of existing woodlands.

Finally, I can do no better than to quote the final sentence of the Summary. "The whole process of survey, analysis and deduction enables positive recommendations to be made upon the place of modern forestry in either the creation, maintenance or the improvement of landscape. In view of the increasing demand for recreation everywhere, including the enjoyment of visual amenity, good forest design should not be confined to those parts of the country which happen to have survived in an attractive form. It should also become part of an overall rural policy, directed as much to the conservation of the well-loved remains of an older environment". In a word, Roger Miles is advocating the alliance of use and beauty.

We might well ask what there is in this for New Zealand. The demand in England is for "wild" land, but even the National Parks are in the main private land and any work must be carried

out with the active participation of the landowners. How fortunate we are in New Zealand that our National Parks are unalienated. How long will this position continue, for it is clear that they are certainly not inviolate?

We are less fortunate in our domestic settled areas. The first landowners in this country were heirs to the gentry of eighteenth century England and the first thing they did was to establish parks. However, they were quickly followed by the surveyor who proceeded to parcel out the country in rectangular chunks. Our forebears not only acquiesced in their meticulous work, which ignored every curvaceous nuance of the landscape; but also, out of the hundreds of comely trees they could have grown, all too frequently selected those two mournful conifers from the Monterey peninsula. It is time we did something about it. The cry for planning in Britain grew from the dreadful effects of urban sprawl and ugliness begun in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution. We too, could look first at our towns, with their festoons of wires like a dilapidated spider web; at the frequent cry that reserves do not pay rates and should be put to "better" use; at our standards of architecture and suspicion of trees. But we need to look also at our countryside, where scope for improvement in visual amenity is virtually unlimited, with a climate and soils that will grow almost anything we could wish for. Must we forever put up with topped and broken-down belts of radiata pine and macrocarpa? Must we have some of our finest distant views obstructed by marching pylons? Must our forest margins remain sombre pine, unrelieved by the brightness of fresh spring green or autumn colour?

If we do not take these matters seriously, what has happened in Britain could happen here. We will have those who want to retain a sort of graveyard—nothing to be touched—battling with those who want to get on with production and never mind the finer points. Let us be thankful that now we have been warned.

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*FORESTS OF AUSTRALIA*, by Alexander Rule, 1967. Angus & Robertson, Sydney. Price \$6.75.

The title of this book is misleading. It should read "A History of Forestry in Australia". There are 20 chapters each with historical, geographical and political facts covering a range of subjects such as Forest Regions and Types, Growth of Government Forest Services, Forestry Education and Research, Forest-based Industries, Multiple Land Use, National Parks, and a final chapter headed "Outlook".

While unsuitable as a reference or students' textbook, neither is it likely to be high on the list of "musts" for the general reader. It will be read with interest by all who have a nodding acquaintance with Australian forestry. For the Australian forester there are many interesting, intimate facts, and personal anecdotes to help liven the otherwise tedious accounts of the evolution of staff training and recruitment, development of research, methods of forest management, and administration of forest land in Australia.