

Treasury



- SARITA DASGUPTA

Corramore comes from the gaelic 'Corrie' (cleft) and 'mor' (big). This was the name of the Logan family's farm in Lanarkshire, Scotland. The Logans owned Corramore T.E. for 120 years until the late 1970s, when it was absorbed into Williamson Tea Holdings.

In 1858, one of the three Logan brothers resigned his army commission in Scotland, came to India and found his way to Ghagrapara in the Mangaldai area of Darrang district, Assam, bordering Bhutan and almost touching the foothills of the Himalayas. After a dispute with some local people the badly injured Mr Logan was left for dead on the banks of the river Bhola. He was sheltered and nursed back to health by the Bodos of that area with whose help he later planted tea in Ghagrapara, working upwards to Kunderbheel. Although Kerkeria was also included in the grant of land to the Corramore Tea Company it was not until 1920 that this division was planted out.

Mr Logan's other two brothers also set out for India, one of them travelling to Assam to join his brother on the estate. Alas, this Mr Logan was greeted by the sad news that his planter brother had died from 'confusion of the brain' (cerebral malaria) on reaching Guwahati and had been buried at the European Cemetery there. After paying his respects he travelled to Corramore and took over the reins of the estate.

In the course of time, Kerkeria, 7 km upward from Ghagrapara, became the main division and the factory and Manager's Bungalow were constructed there. The ever-changing Bhola and the milder Lakshmi flow down from Bhutan along the boundary of the estate on either side and converge below at Shantipur village. The Company built a bridge across the Bhola but this was washed away by flood water on 1 July 1959 when 9.4 inches of rain fell in four hours. The erosion caused by the water was so extensive that it was beyond the Company's means to build another bridge.

The old Burra Bungalow was situated between the



Bungalow Foundation Stone

present one and the old Chhota Bungalow. The present Manager's Bungalow sits majestically atop a hill commanding a panoramic view of the plains below. A brass plaque commemorates the date the foundation stone was laid – 9 April 1937. It is said that a copy of that day's newspaper along with a bottle of beer (some claim it's a bottle of champagne!) were placed in a niche behind the plaque. Since the plaque has been fastened to the wall most securely it is impossible to establish the truth, or otherwise, of that claim! The bungalow was built by Chinese artisans who were such experts at their job that, even today, there is no woodworm or rotting of the wooden door frames as they were built on top of brick platforms. All the bedrooms had wire-netted enclosures around the beds (like a room within a room) with the ceiling fan inside. This was found much more effective than a mosquito net in keeping the insects out and the breeze in!

The new Chhota Bungalow was built around 1968 when a married Assistant occupied it for the first time. This charming bungalow was designed by Mr Esmé Gordon, the last of the Logan family to own Corramore, who was well-known as an artist and architect in Edinburgh. He and his wife, Betsy, visited Corramore for the first time in 1966 and for the last time in the 70s, during the tenure of Mr K.K. (Krish) Bhuyan. The Gordons, in turn, played hosts

to Mr & Mrs Bhuyan when they visited Scotland in the late 70s.

There was a small hangar at the edge of an airstrip behind the Burra Bungalow in which the Manager, Mr Tony Groves, an ex-RAF pilot, kept his light airplane. An excellent tennis player, he flew to the club for his game of tennis. When he was ready to leave, his colleagues at the club would line up their cars on the field and turn the headlights on. He would take off and fly towards the lights of Bhooteachang, bank to the right, fly over Hattigarh and straight on to Corramore. He would circle overhead signaling the workers to

stand on either side of the runway holding lit torches. He ensured that the bungalow carpets were laid out on the runway to avoid the plane's rubber wheels from scorching or melting in the heat! Once Mr Healy took over the estate he planted out the airstrip behind the bungalow as it was too short for the Company's Cessna. He had a longer airstrip constructed on a piece of level ground with a stream flowing below and a breathtaking view of the Bhutan hills. The windsock is 'elephant-proof' – at a height beyond the reach of an elephant's trunk.



Boundary Marker

Mr Bhuyan remembers an incident regarding the Cessna and a herd of elephants. The Cessna had to remain on the airstrip overnight, pending repairs, so Mr Bhuyan organized a group of workers to guard it against elephant-damage. He and his Assistant, Pavan Kaul, went to check that all was well. As dusk was setting in they started lighting the small bonfires arranged around the aircraft to keep the elephants away, only to look up and find that they were surrounded by the creatures!

During World War II, an American aircraft crashed into the hills north of the estate. The oxygen bottle salvaged from the plane was used for many years in the factory as part of the welding equipment.

The estate's hospital treated World War II soldiers passing through Corramore on their way back from the frontlines. In 1962, when Tawang fell to the Chinese, many Indian soldiers found their way to Corramore. It was then that the Indian Army realized the strategic location of Corramore and its surrounding areas and decided to make Hattigarh an army base. The hospital also treated villagers from neighbouring Bhutan, regular visitors to Corramore, especially for the weekly 'bazaar'. They still walk quite a few miles over several days to barter their produce for salt, kerosene and other essential commodities. A marker has recently been placed on the border between the estate and Bhutan.



The ropeway - journey's end

Earlier, the estate used to run a Swedish-made turbine in the factory with hydro-electric power generated by the water flowing in through a canal from the river Lakshmi which originates in Bhutan. The estate paid an annual tax to the Bhutanese government. The Bhutanese Foreign Secretary would cordially invite the Manager, Corramore, to a meeting at Samdrup Jongkar, a Bhutanese

town bordering Darrang district, where they would discuss terms. However, encroachers higher upstream started



The ropeway in operation

diverting the river for their own benefit so there was less water coming to Corramore. By that time the ASEB had also started providing electricity to the estate so they stopped using hydel power from the river waters.

The turbine was used to run the rope-way which brought the leaf in to the factory from the garden. As the estate is situated on hilly terrain, it was easier to collect the leaf plucked from the sections and bring them to the rope-way. There, they were filled into a hundred 20 kg sacks, hung on hooks and sent on their way. The rope-way had to be re-aligned twice and later, motorized. The quantum of leaf now produced by the estate cannot be handled by the ropeway but it is kept in good working order and used occasionally.

The hilly terrain also made it impossible for the staff to cycle around so they either walked or took a lift off tractors, before the advent of motorbikes. One JB, getting on in years, requested Mr Bhuyan to allow him to use a pony. Permission granted, horse-and- rider were soon a familiar sight around the estate.

Corramore being rather far from the nearest town, Tangla,

and subject to flash floods during the monsoons, did not have access to public transport. Mr Bhuyan decided to arrange something. He improved the condition of the road from Ghagra to Tangla and requested the Transport Commissioner, Assam, to commission an ASTC (Assam State Transport Corporation) bus to ply daily between Corramore and Mangaldai, via Tangla. He arranged overnight accommodation for the bus driver and handyman. A privately owned bus, affiliated to the ASTC, still plies the route whenever the rivers permit! In fact, the state of the rivers plays a very important role in the lives (and travel plans!) of the people at Corramore. In their case, 'Man proposes but God disposes' all too often during the monsoons. Most executives posted there have had many an adventure on the rivers during flash floods.



Rations in trouble

settles above it, the executives from Corramore leave the courts, round up their colleagues and drive back immediately.

Pavan Kaul once carried the workers' wages (covered in polythene and tied around his neck!) from one bank of the river to the other, on a rope hung across. He had to make at least two trips, gripping the rope with his hands and feet and inching his way along. His wife, Vidya, who was in a 'delicate condition', was kept blissfully unaware of her husband's gymnastic feat, in order to spare her unnecessary anxiety!

Drinking water was quite a problem at Corramore. Mr Bhuyan organized the supply of piped water to the labour lines from a natural spring on a hill behind the Burra Bungalow. The water flowed down naturally, through the pull of gravity. He discovered another natural spring during extension planting and did the same there. Trees were grown in both the areas to preserve the moisture and ensure that the springs didn't dry up.

Mr Healy, who managed Corramore for fifteen years, from 1961 to 1976, had a few run-ins with wildlife. Once, he went to shoot a man-eating leopard caught in a trap. What he didn't realize was that it was only caught by a claw! His first shot hit her hind leg and the pain made her wrench her claw out of the trap and attack him.



Monsoon Deluge

Once, Mr & Mrs Bhuyan, returning to the estate, were appalled to see only the top of the Assistant, Alok Vira's car in the middle of the river. Unable to do anything, they spent a bad couple of hours praying that all was well. To their immense relief, once the water receded and they were able to cross the river, they found Mr & Mrs Vira safely ensconced in the Ghagrapara JB's house.

While playing tennis at the club, a wary eye is kept on a little triangle up in the hills. The minute a rain cloud



Mr & Mrs Healy, Tarbet Ness, Scotland

Luckily for Mr Healy, since her back leg was injured, she couldn't use it to claw at his abdomen which is how leopards disembowel their victims! Mr Healy managed to use the rifle again,

this time killing her. The doctor was rather shaken by the sight of his Burra Sahab bleeding from wounds on his face and arms but managed to stitch him up.

On another occasion, the whole family, including Wendy, the Golden Labrador, went for a walk up to the hill behind the Burra Bungalow. 17 year-old Shane decided to pick a lily for his mother and got bitten on his foot by a snake. With great presence of mind he killed the snake and put it in his hat so that it could be identified – which it was, as a poisonous one! His father rushed to collect the doctor and bring him to the bungalow as Shane had assured everyone that he would be able to walk back home. He collapsed from shock, however, and his mother sent his sister, Lesley, to bring her father and the doctor back to the hill. Till today, Lesley (married to Mahmud Sultan, a retired tea planter) doesn't remember her 1 km sprint to their bungalow! Thankfully, all was well.

Mr & Mrs Healy retired to Scotland and continue to live in their house which they nostalgically named, 'Kerkeria'.

Elephants still visit Corramore regularly but it has been some time since any other wildlife has been seen on the estate. There are many kinds of birds that can be spotted though; among them, a hornbill or two.

No history of Corramore would be complete without a mention of 'Aunt Lucy', the only sister of the three Logan brothers. She visited Corramore for the first time when she came to India to attend the Delhi Durbar in 1909. So charmed was she by the estate that she took the greatest interest in the property (she was the largest shareholder) till her death in the 1960s, when she was over 90 years old. She quixotically left her holdings in the Company to a Home for cats and dogs and her family had a hard time getting the shares back into their hands!

Corramore covers an area of 470 hectares and produces 14.5 lakh kg of tea annually.

The present Manager, Pushpajit Singh Gill, and his team look after this Shangri-la.

The road seems endless, but, once there, it is worth the journey. Mr E.J. Nicholls, who was a Director of the Company and had spent the major part of his life in Assam, once said, "Corramore, always with splendid possibilities for development has an enchanting ability to bloom again, even after the severe effects of natural or climatic calamities."

Carry on, Corramore!



The Corramore team