

I N T R O D U C T I O N

A considerable proportion of the Northern Range of Trinidad has been under private ownership now for many years. Until 1932, it was mainly covered by cocoa, forest or second growth but with the advent of the depression in the cocoa industry, landowners began to rent out increasing areas of steep hillsides to agricultural peasants, on which to grow crops. These peasants prefer the highest steepest and most inaccessible portions of the hillsides, as the danger of loss of crops by praedial larceny is thereby reduced. In many cases the forests have been removed right up to the summits of the hills and there is very little wood left. The inevitable result of all this has been a vast increase in erosion, flooding and landslides and in many places the erosion has gone so far that there is very little of the original soil left. The area covered in this survey may be taken more or less as a typical example of many similar areas in the Northern Range.

This mountain survey area covers the side of one of the foothills of the Northern Range and comprises part of the Maracas Valley. In common with the lowland area, it is situated in the Tacarigua ward of the County of St. George about nine miles east of Port of Spain.

The area may be described as taking the form of a great inverted V, the arms of which, form ridges on either side and converge at the top to form the apex and summit of the hill at a height of approximately 2000 feet above sea level. The greater part of the area consists of a shallow valley which rises steeply up the mountain, in such a way, that the majority of the land has South-Eastern aspect. The main valley itself is cut up into numerous small valleys which act as watercourses for the surrounding ridges but the general trend of these may be seen from the map.

A look at the accompanying photographs will give an idea of the topography of the land, a vast portion of which, has a slope equal to or even greater than the examples shown. In many

places the gradient is as steep as 1 in 1.

The rainfall is somewhere in the region of 80 inches per annum but in normal years ^(calendar) nearly all the rain falls in the last seven or eight months and it is frequently of great violence.

At the present time, there are no accurate figures available of the total area covered in this survey but, at a round estimate, it may be taken as lying somewhere under 300 acres.

The communications are far from satisfactory. There is a good metal approach road as far as Floradale but, from there on, however, the only means of access is by a stone road and earth path, the roughness and steepness of which, make it quite unsuitable for any form of transport other than the head or the pack donkey. This path is the remnants of the old road used by the former cocoa planters to get their produce down to the main roads but since the cocoa industry faded out nothing has been done towards its upkeep. As illustrated by the photographs, both the head and the pack donkey are employed by the present day cultivators to get their produce down as far as Floradale. At this point it is usually transferred unto donkey carts and hence to markets the chief of which are St. Joseph, San Juan and Port of Spain.