

NOTES ON THE USE OF TRACTORS IN NATAL

By W. R. Andrewes

Owing to the unavoidable absence of Mr. Andrewes, the above paper was read by Mr. P. Fowle, as follows:—

Tractors seem to be coming more and more into vogue for purposes of ploughing and cultivation of land in Natal, both in general farming and cane farms.

So far as my observations and experience goes, the Caterpillar type of tractors appear to be the most useful and efficient. They have the advantage of being workable with a plough of the two-way type, on steeper grades than the ordinary wheel tractor can work on, and also on wetter lands, and are able to turn more easily. There are various other advantages, but these are the most important.

The particular tractor of which I have had most experience is "The Caterpillar Tractor," for which Messrs. Thos. Barlow & Sons, of Durban, are the agents, and who are always ready and willing to give a demonstration at any time and place.

So far as I can gather this machine compares favourably with any other, from a cost point of view. I have seen it working at the Umtwalumi Valley Estates, and the work it does in ploughing, cross-ploughing, etc., is excellent both in quality and quantity. On the flat a 3-furrow one-way plough (Ransome) is used, and on the hillsides a 2-furrow two-way plough (American), agents, Barlow & Sons.

There is no doubt that tractors in general have a great advantage in many ways over oxen. (1) They save labour, one tractor doing as much work daily as seven No. 6 Cockshutt ploughs. (2) They do away with the necessity for providing grazing paddocks for oxen. (3) They obviate the necessity for oxen themselves, which in seasons of drought and disease, make work very expensive and at times im-

possible, and even in normal seasons prove a comparatively expensive item in the cost sheets of a cane farm.

With ordinary care, and periodical overhauling, oiling, etc., the cost of up-keep is small, and the machine can be maintained in first rate order. It was thought that the wearing of the Caterpillar's tracks might prove expensive, but has been found on testing that the wear is almost negligible.

It can be driven and maintained by an intelligent Indian or Native, under the occasional supervision of a European, quite satisfactorily.

It is exceedingly useful on a cane farm in a variety of ways, in addition to ploughing and cultivation, such as:—

1. Hauling of wagons with cane sets when planting.
2. Hauling of trucks along tramline when cutting.
3. Hauling of logs and trees when cleaning.
4. Building materials, etc.
5. Making of roads and tramways in conjunction with a road-maker.
6. Pulling down of trees in cleaning and stumping, and in many other ways which crop up from time to time.

To sum the matter up, I am convinced of the cheapness and utility of tractors as compared with other motive power, and my opinion, based on the experience I have had up to the present, is that the Caterpillar type of tractor is the most suitable for the majority of land under cane in Natal at the present time—and not only cane, but also general farming.