

## VISIT TO DAMPA AND MEGHALAYA - A BRIEF REPORT

Between 27th February and 14th March I visited Dampa Tiger Reserve in Mizoram and several places in Meghalaya. The brief report is based on my observations.

### Dampa Tiger Reserve, 27th Feb. to 6th March

Dampa is the newly created Tiger Reserve (500 km<sup>2</sup>) in Mizoram and is about 10 hours drive from Silchar the nearest airport in Assam. On the way, on 27th night, I could see a leopard cat. Dampa has already been briefly surveyed by three of my students Nitin D.Rai, Charudutt Mishra and T.R.Sankar Raman (Sridhar). Nitin surveyed Dampa for clouded leopard using camera traps, and Charu and Sridhar for serow and primates. The reports "A preliminary survey of clouded leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*) in Mizoram and Sikkim" and "Survey of primates, serow and goral in Mizoram" have already been submitted to Mizoram forest department for necessary conservation action.

Presently Sridhar is doing his M.Sc. dissertation work on 'Bird Communities and shifting cultivation in Dampa' and he was with me throughout the five days I spent in Dampa.

We used a cave (3 days) and a watch tower (2 days) in the core area of the Reserve for camping. In total we walked 80 km and spent three late evenings near water where large mammals are likely to come for a drink. We did not see any tiger sign and the only ungulate we saw, was a barking deer which came to a watering point near the watch tower. We heard barking deer alarm call at least 6 times, 4 times may be made by the same animal. Gaur tracks (once, at least 4 months old), sambar tracks (twice) and pig diggings (twice) were seen. We saw a group of Hoolock and heard at least 10 groups. Both the Great Pied and the Indian Pied Hornbills were seen. *Ratufa bicolor* and several other squirrel species were also seen. Dung of 3-6 elephants which use the Reserve were seen. It is clear that large mammal abundance in the Reserve at present is very

ent for a 53 km drive along the eastern side of  
aileng to Phuldungsei. Observed small patches of  
ust outside the Reserve. Also had a look at the  
between Reserve and the Zopui unclassified forest

(60-100 km<sup>2</sup>). The corridor extends between Phuldungsei and Riangthang village. It is possible to enlarge the Reserve to a maximum of 600 km<sup>2</sup>. I was also told that the Bangladesh border, inhabited by Chakmas, has a low human density. A survey could be done in the Bangladesh side to explore the possibility of a transfrontier Reserve.

What is urgently needed is education to control poaching so that the population of prey species can come up. There could be a few tigers as my students have seen two tiger pug marks in 1993 during the serow survey. Mizoram Government in earnest has started conservation education using church as 95% of the Mizos are Christians and they respect the decrees that come from the church. One has to wait and watch whether this is going to help the prey species to build up and enable the large carnivores to stage a come back. Clouded leopard could occur as there is lots of Red jungle fowl, kaleej and Peacock pheasant. I have collected four scats which could be of a cat the size of a clouded leopard and using thin-layer paper chromatography will try to identify the species.

If possible, the Reserve should be enlarged to 600 km<sup>2</sup> adding the forest areas to the east of the Reserve including Zopui. The possibility of a transfrontier Reserve should also be explored.

There are two BSF camps along the Bangladesh border and the distance between the two camps is about 30 km which seems to be a no-man's land. A trail should be created between the two camps so that the area could be patrolled by the Reserve staff with the assistance of BSF.

Continuous monitoring of Dampa is needed.

#### Nongkhyllem Wildlife Sanctuary, 9-10 March 1995

This small sanctuary, about 75 km from Shillong on the way to Guwahati, is about 30 km<sup>2</sup> in a Reserve Forest of 127 km<sup>2</sup> surrounded by private forests of 150 km<sup>2</sup>. The dense forest is of deciduous type dominated by sal and bamboo. On 10th I could walk with Mr. S. Arwell Nongsiej, ACF, one of the trainees at WII. Abundance of sambar tracks was pleasant. He said that similar abundance could be seen all through the forest and the private forests also abound in prey. I found here are elephant (about 30), gaur and tiger (10).

and clouded leopard have also been positively reported. Meghalaya government is planning to acquire the private forests and at the present rate it would cost the state about rupees six crores. In Meghalaya the state owns only 3.7% of the total forest land and the rest are either private or owned by village councils. If established this could be an excellent National Park near Shillong, superb for bird and large mammal watching and sport fishing as there is a stretch of a river undisturbed for 17 km.

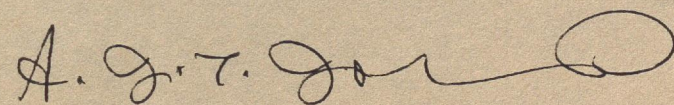
Balphakram National Park, 11-13 March.

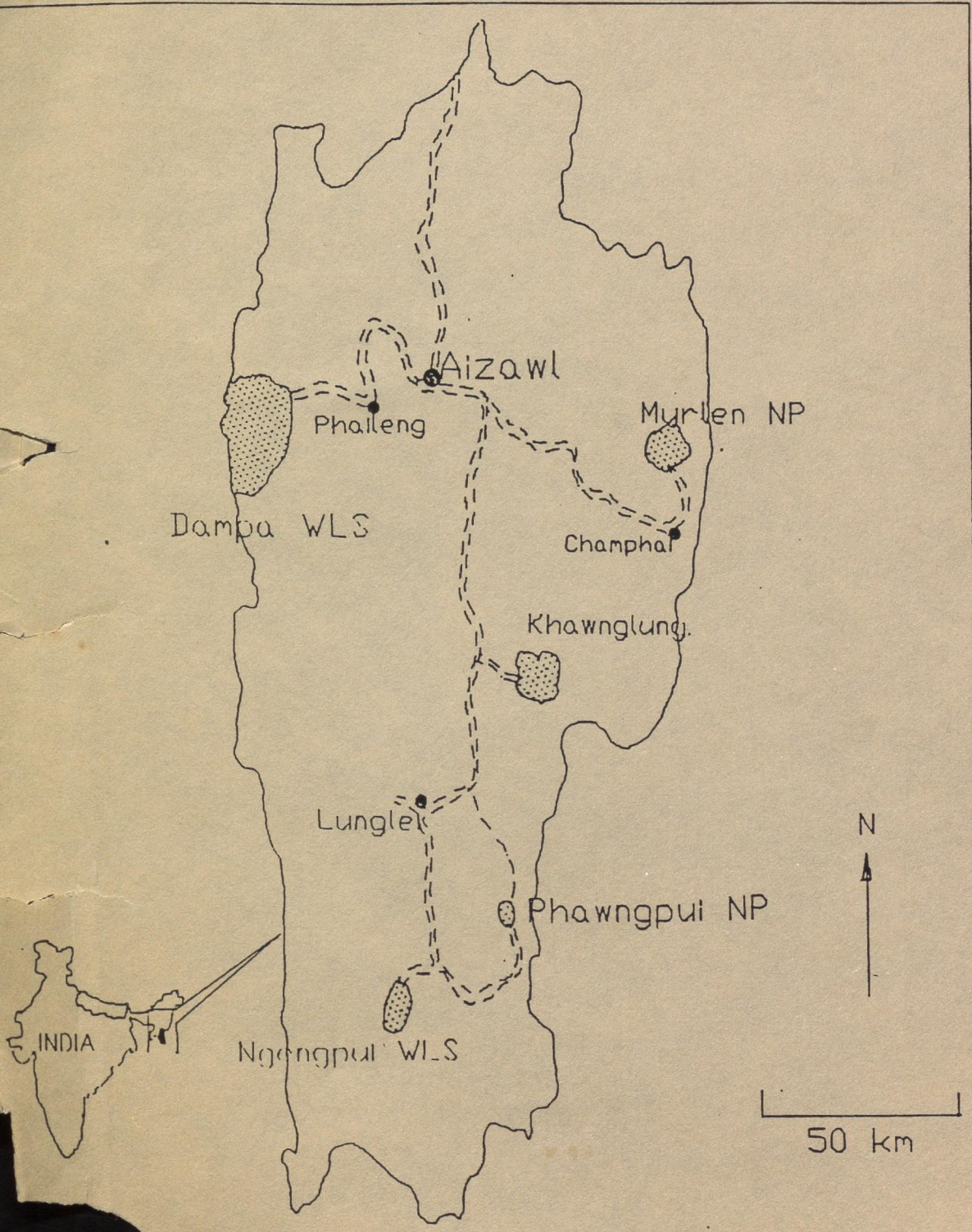
This area is supposed to be the remote splendour of Meghalaya. I spent about 45 hours on the road, which include breakdowns and time spent caught among coal tracks, to reach the Park from Aizawal capital of Mizoram.

In Balphakram I have a student Christy A. Williams doing a survey of the elephant habitats. We could walk about 30 km which included a 14 km walk at night with the wildlife staff which ended in having an exciting encounter with an elephant. We saw tiger pugmark, elephants (three times) and numerous signs of sambar and gaur. Barking deer and Hoolock gibbon were also seen. Stray wild buffaloes are said to occur.

Presently Balphakram is about 500 km<sup>2</sup> and of this 300 km<sup>2</sup> were bought at the rate of Rs.1,50,000/= per km<sup>2</sup>. Wildlife officials report that east of Balphakram (in the west Khasi hills) there is a large patch of about 1000 km<sup>2</sup> of excellent private forest with a population of elephant and tiger. But it appears, the villagers will not be willing to sell the land as they are realizing the land has valuable timber and may also have coal and limestone. If the villagers in west Khasi hills can be educated not to poach then Balphakram in conjunction with west Khasi hills can have a Tiger-Elephant Reserve of about 1000-1500 km<sup>2</sup>. Meghalaya deserves international assistance.

A survey of west Khasi hills is urgently needed.

  
( A. J. T. Johnsingh )  
Joint Director,  
Wildlife Institute of India,  
P.B.18, Chandrabani,  
Dehra Dun - 248 001



MAP OF MIZORAM SHOWING PROTECTED AREAS.

To Tripura



BANGLADESH.

SAZA LOI RIVER.

• BSF Camp.

• BSF Camp.

Phaileng  
Teirei (headquarters)

PRIVATE  
FORESTS.

CORRIDOR

• Phuldungsei

• RIANGTHANG.

Fig 2. Rough map of Tiger Reserve.