

ACCESS TO REMOTE COCONUT AREAS

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IN this issue there is an advertisement for folding boats of a type not previously seen in Ceylon. These boats, when folded, can be carried on the roof of a car, in a bullock cart, by rail or on a side-car chassis and it would appear that they meet the needs of coconut growers, estate proprietors and visiting agents who have to visit coconut estates situated in remote places.

Most estates can be reached by road or by cycling along a cart-track, but there are properties adjacent to our canals, rivers, tanks and lagoons which are difficult of access due to floods, to the absence of roads or to bad roads. There are also properties which can be reached more easily and quickly by crossing water, than by a long road journey round a lagoon, swamp or jungle reserve.

The Director has acquired one of these boats which he has aptly named "*Cocos*" and I was invited to accompany him on a visit to Iranavilla Estate, near Madampe, which can be reached only by crossing water or on foot. The conditions which were unknown, provided a good test of the suitability of the boat for work of this nature.

The boat folds flat and stows into a very small space— 11 ft. \times 1 ft. 6 ins. \times 5 ins., and it can be carried by two people. It can be rowed, sailed or driven by a small outboard motor. The weight of the hull alone is 56 lbs. and the total weight of the equipment and hull is 102 lbs. In addition, the boat is fitted with a reinforced stem to take a double-clamp outboard motor, weighing 26½ lbs. Thus the total load, including petrol and oil is just over 130 lbs.,—the weight of an additional passenger in a car.

The boat is 10 ft. 6 ins. long and 3 ft. 6 ins. broad. It is equipped with two oars and has a mast with a small single lug sail. As a rowing boat, it can carry a total load of 770 lbs. (5 passengers) but the best burden for sailing is 280 lbs. (2 passengers).

The sides, keel, battens, and the floor of the boat are of wood; the bottom of the boat is of strong painted canvas which is completely waterproof and leakproof. The only water which can enter the boat is over the sides in rough weather. The makers say that they have a folding boat which has been in regular use for 20 years, without renewing the canvas, but it must be painted once a year and the woodwork too needs to be regularly varnished.

The Director rehearsed the building up and the dismantling of the boat in his garden, where we found that two people could put the boat together in 10 minutes and dismantle it in 5 minutes. The boat complete with mast, sail, oars and outboard motor was then placed on the roof carrier of a 10 h.p. car and we proceeded, without incident, to Pambala, at the 45th milestone on the Colombo-Chilaw road. Here, as previously directed, we entered an estate and drove to the edge of the Chilaw lagoon.

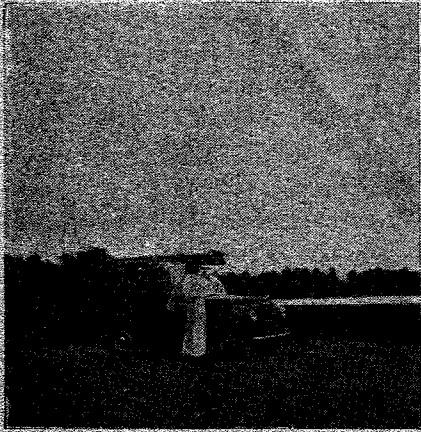
The conditions we met were quite unexpected. The wind had blown a vast sheet of *Salvinia* weed across the lake; furthermore where the water was clear it was obviously shallow and full of



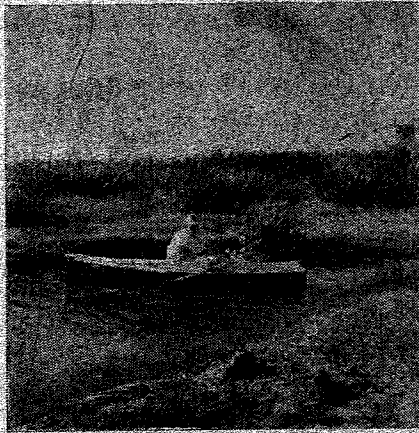
The Bits.



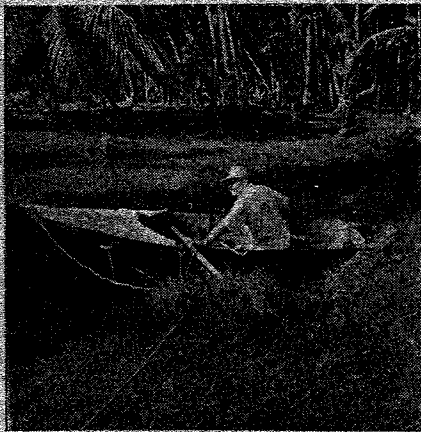
The Boat.



At Chilaw Lagoon
(Shewing Salvinia Weed.)



In clear water at last.



In the Canal.



Arrival at the Estate.

submerged weeds. We therefore decided not to take sail and to rely on oars and the outboard motor to get us to our destination which we had been told was three miles away, across the lake and up the old Dutch canal.

We found the *Salvinia* weed almost a complete barrier to progress and it has now become a real menace to rice fields and to the navigation of inland waterways. With the utmost difficulty we forced the boat through 100 yards of the stuff using our oars as punt poles, but our progress became increasingly difficult as the weed piled up in front of the boat.

Arriving in clear water, we fitted the outboard motor but again we got into difficulties owing to an invisible submerged weed which choked the propeller in its fine, tangled filaments. So we decided to row. A strong cross wind made progress difficult because of the lightness of our boat and it was difficult to keep her headed in the right direction. I noticed however that loaded with two people the boat only required 4 inches of water and we also found that unloaded it could be dragged over a submerged sand bank in only 2 inches of water. Thus the boat is very suitable for use in shallow waters and in river deltas.

Ultimately we reached the entrance to the canal and deep water. We fitted the outboard motor and the rest of the journey was plain sailing and pleasant. The total journey of 3 miles by lagoon and canal was covered in 45 minutes, against the wind. After discussing the drainage problems of the estate with the Superintendent, Mr. Maxwell Pandittsekera, we made the return journey in just over half an hour.

My impressions of the boat is that it is useful and serviceable. It is very light but this is both an advantage and a disadvantage, because although it is easy to transport, at the same it is somewhat unstable in the water and can be easily upset by clumsy and inexperienced sailors. It is in every sense a pioneer's boat because it is so light that it can be taken right up to the headwaters of a river located in deep jungle; it can be dragged in very shallow waters or carried easily over rocks and rapids. Of course the canvas could be holed by a submerged rock but so can a wooden boat.

When the boat was used on Negombo lagoon, it was found to be surprisingly fast and manageable under sail and it would seem that this type of boat would be very suitable for estates in remote places where there are few if any opportunities for recreation and sport.