

THE PAHANG CORPORATION, Ltd.

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THE PAHANG CORPORATION, Ltd.



Kuantan and its Mines.

Great Development.

Steady Output.

(By our Special Commissioner.)

Eight years ago Pahang was known to most people in Singapore and at Home chiefly from its association with the Pahang Corporation, Ltd., and the "baby" companies floated in connection with that concern. It is not, perhaps, worth while to go into all the details connected with the concessions obtained by Mr. William Fraser in 1888 from the Sultan of Pahang, ere that monarch had come under British Protection. Suffice it to say that the area was stated to be 2,000 square miles, though that is probably much in excess of the areas comprised in the considerable concessions of Kuantan, Rumpin and Endau. Work in the two latter has never been very vigorously carried on, and at the present time the Kuantan concession—very much reduced by cancellation by the Pahang Government, nervously anxious not to leave in other hands development it is itself totally unable to undertake—practically constitutes the domain of the company. Much, very much, was said eight years ago about the enormous value of these concessions. Many attempts have been made to



sions. Many extremely enterprising persons stepped in and formed syndicates for buying portions of these concessions, intending—perhaps—to work them. Great was the speculation on the Exchange, £1 shares at one time standing at £9, this value being based on the statements of interested persons who asserted positively that with a working capital of less than £50,000, tin could be produced every year worth £112,500. The only doubt seemed to be whether the annual 15,000 tons of tin would not so depress the market as to lessen the annual revenue to a beggarly 50 or 75 per cent. per annum.

However these speculations, scrip and mining, are things of the past, and the only point that need be mentioned is that the enormous open workings extending along the crests of groups of hills furnish, even at the present day, when the luxuriant hand of nature has concealed them somewhat with tropical verdure, ample ground for believing that mining proper would reveal vast stores of tin ore. There was much justification for the hopes that were then expressed. There is still abundant ground for hope that Pahang tin will form an important factor in the world's supply.

Kuantan.



Pahang, as everybody knows, consists of a series of river districts, generally flat, swampy and mangrove-fringed, near the coast, but consisting in the Ulu of hills of greater or less elevation, with the backbone mountains behind them. For ages the mountain streams have rushed, mud-laden and violent after rains, to the east. The detritus has formed the flat land near the shore, which for half the year is beaten and churned by the great waves of the China Sea during the N. E. Monsoon. The two conflicting waters are responsible for the bars which form such an obstacle to communication with the interior from the sea. For years these "bars" were deemed impassable during the prevalence of monsoon weather, but now regular steamer communication is kept up throughout the year.

Kuantan is the most northerly of the Pahang river districts, and it has one of the nastiest bars, upon which the waves break with extraordinary fury except in the calmest weather. It is distant from Singapore about 240 miles, say a day's journey. Bold hills guard the northern bank of the river, and somewhat mitigate the severity of the monsoon weather within the Kuala. Once inside, a deep



winding river, navigable for ships of light draught for many miles, forms an excellent harbour. On the left bank stands the Pahang Corporation wharf, a large godown, and several houses and bangsals also belonging to the Company. The official village of Kuala Kuantan consists of a police-station, court-house and the Magistrate's bungalow. The commerce of the place is housed in a row of attap erections. The Government has also a wharf, a busy place, the resort of native boats to the number of perhaps half a dozen per month. But then natives have prejudices with regard to policemen and government officials, from their invariable association with taxation. The elaborate system of passes, licenses, and fees in Pahang seems to make that prejudice not unfounded.

Kuala Kuantan is the port of the P. C., Ltd. There all stores are received, housed, and despatched upstream in flat bottomed boats. All tin-ore down stream is here landed, checked, and shipped. The Agent of the Corporation, and the Magistrate, hold about equal sway, the balance of power lying possibly with the former, since with him is the hope of the rich reward that sweetens the not too exhausting labours of the Malays of the river. Without the Corporation's Agent and the money he disburses



for wood-cutting, cargo working, and boat hire up and down the river, Kuala Kuantan would be a mere fishing village, for although Tringganu men come and build marvellously solid boats of a hard wood



called *chinghal*, the men of Kuantan are content to go to sea in fine weather and catch a few fish. Fish and large families foregather in Kuantan.

Up the River.

By the courtesy of Mr. W. H. Derrick, the Superintendent of the Company, I was despatched up river by Mr. R. Latto, the Kuantan Agent, in the mail boat, a light three-man vessel that travels quicker than the ordinary cargo boats. A comfortable bed, a flowing tide, and a peaceful evening conduced to the best of all adjuncts to getting up the lower reaches of the river comfortably, namely, sleep. Above Batu Sawah, where in the old Chinese mining days there was a large village and store and to where, later, the *Perse* used to run, the river becomes more interesting, and beautiful reaches, with a few pebbly rapids, are passed in turn. At Kuala Reman there is a remarkable hill of limestone, rising abruptly from the plain scantily clothed with trees, with great bat-haunted caves. This limestone formation presumably stretches right across Pahang as it crops up, in various places. Its coralline structure indicates the former presence of the ocean. Poling on, for oars are discarded with the tidal influence, the



banks of the river get more precipitous, its bed more rocky, and numerous rapids call forth all the strength of the boatmen, and an occasional plunge into the river to keep stem and stern in line with the current that dashes musically by. From Kuala Reman there used to be a road to Baias and Jeram Batang, but it is now grown up the Government, after being presented with a brand-new road, apparently thinking it not worth while to employ a few coolies to keep down the *bluker*.

Leaving the main stream, some little distance up the Sungei Kenau lies Jeram Batang, whence a footpath leads to

Sungei Lembing,

the head quarters of the Corporation. Situated in a valley of some magnitude, a brawling stream (or a roaring torrent, according to the amount of rain that has fallen up country) winds between high hills, devoted on the left bank to wood-cutting and on the right to tin-mining. Seen in its pristine verdure from a balloon, the valley would no doubt have appeared a veritable Arcadia—tigers, elephants, snakes and alligators notwithstanding. At the present day Sungei Lembing is merely a busy mining valley, with some pretty spots, but on the whole prosaic, for sooth to say.



corrugated iron roofs, buddles, winding gears and tramways do not lend themselves to artistic effect. As a village, however, Sungei Lembing has many charms, especially away from the ceaseless roar of the stamps. The surrounding hills are beautiful, clad in richest verdure; the river babbles pleasantly by; a silver waterfall gleams on the opposite hill; the houses of the employes of the Company show for the most part the signs of much attention, having neat gardens and well-kept paths; and the Chinese and Malays constantly passing seem strong and well nourished, the ill-health that prevailed having disappeared with the jungle and the tigers.

The social life of the place is distinctly healthy, the Club furnishing a common meeting ground, and periodical concerts being organised by Mrs. Derrick, whose musical abilities will be favourably recalled by members of the Singapore Philharmonic Society.

There is no building in the place that does not, directly or indirectly, owe its origin to the Corporation. The village is composed of houses inhabited by the Corporation's employes, or those who feed them. The police station is tenanted by a detachment of Sikhs, to whose cost the



Corporation is graciously permitted by the Government to contribute. Now that the place is doing well, and looking healthy, a Magistrate's house is to be erected, and the village—the Corporation's village be it noted—is to be declared a township, which means taxes and ground rents—Governmental aids to development which mere companies hesitate to employ.

The Mines.

Village. Club and houses; boilers, engines and pumps; stamps, buddles, and furnaces; tramways, reservoirs, and saw-mills; all depend, however, upon the mines. The Superintendent and the acting Mine Manager (Mr. Rich) smiled significantly as they arranged to take your Special down below. The former recommended a good breakfast and an early start—both of which were entirely successful; the latter provided candles and kept a careful watch over unwary feet. A town-man conducted over a piece of jungle in daylight by a Sakei might be excused some slight confusion as to the country he passed over. A three-dimension ramble in a mine, with only the glimmer of a candle to show the gloom, is absolutely confusing to the stranger. Entering a level in the side of a hill—at its side the usual Chinese shrine



invoking good joss—we soon found our feet in water and our heads in Cimmerian gloom. After many turns and twists we came to Chinamen working on the faces of Willink's Lode, fetching down masses of rock and chunks of ore that, even to our unaccustomed eyes, showed plenty of the



dull grey tin-stone. Willink's and Nicholson's are both turning out uncommonly well at present, and show every sign of keeping up a good average. Occasionally very rich 16 per cent. patches are struck. Then everybody, down to the coolie on the face, says *baniak bagus*. In accordance with the well-known mining rule, prospecting and driving are proceeding quicker than stoping, so that though the lode be thrown, or pinched, the battery is to be kept going night and day.

Teague's lode has its shaft at the bottom of a deep conical pit, access to which is gained by a narrow passage, along which it seemed almost impossible to transport the engine which, nevertheless, is there pumping and winding. The gentleman after whom this lode is named wrote, in 1888, a very elaborate report dealing with some sixteen lodes. Many of them still remain unprospected below the surface, some have been transferred to the "baby" companies, to be worked with less rather than more success. It is but right to say however, that the failures are mostly to be attributed to financial rather than mining reasons. It is difficult to believe that the Chinese of old, who undoubtedly moved tons of ore from the outcrops of these lodes, stopped from any other reason than



that they were unable to cope with the water at the depth to which they attained.

The great mine at Sungei Lembing is Pollock's. The shaft of this mine is down 423 feet, and the intention is to reach 500 feet before crosscutting. This, of course, is mining proper: the lode is to be proved at this depth and an endeavour made to follow it down to the granite. At the time of my visit the shaft was being partially re-timbered, and a descent would have been very disagreeable. At 350 feet very rich ore was struck, and the country below is very solid. Captain Harry Teague would doubtless say that Pollock's was an absolute certainty; more cautious men, who will see the matter through, speak of it with as much certainty as any miner can speak of ore that is not actually at the stamps awaiting crushing.

Of Nicholson's and Willink's, two parallel lodes, I have already spoken; they are panning out remarkably well, the former contributing some excellent quality stone and the latter proving well in depth.

Teague's No. 1, is now in 200 feet and Bell's is also being worked, both contributing their quota of crushing stuff.

Brand's Myah, and the Kabang lodes belong to the Pahang Kabang Co., under



the management of the Corporation. There are two batteries of 18 head, but nothing has been done in the way of crushing yet. Fraser's, or the Semiliang Lode is still being developed, and also Bruce's.

Jeram Batang.

The mines at this place are about a mile below Sungei Lembing, the river having a nasty fall between these points that increases the difficulty of transporting heavy machinery and stores. At Jeram Batang four Europeans are employed, and the twenty head of stamps are kept well a-going, crushing 40 tons a day. There is an excellent shaft about half a mile from the battery, the first crosscut at 70ft. from the surface being 345 feet to the lode, which underlies towards the shaft. The drives and stopes have attained considerable dimensions in the hill workings above the shaft level, and plenty of work is going on below. They have an excellent rock drill, driven by compressed air, which is calculated to drive three times as fast as coolies, and at the time of my visit a larger boiler had arrived to meet the additional strain on pumping and furnishing compressed air for the drill, which I had an opportunity of seeing at work.

Magnitude of the Operations.



A mere description of lodes, fails, however, to give any idea of the work that is being done. Let the reader think of *six miles* of drives ; of the deepest shaft in the Malay Peninsula ; of $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles of tramway in connection with the mines, and other two miles for the conveyance of timber ; of bridges, tanks and waterways to bridge the streams, feed the stamps, and drain the mines ; of forty heads of stamps at Sungei Lembing and twenty at Jeram Batang ; of fifty buddles to delight the Cornishmen and seven Frue vanners to set the Superintendent's heart a-jigging with pleasure at the thought of labour saved ; of two pulverisers grinding down the coarse stuff for further treatment ; of two 28 h. p., engines for the batteries and two 15 h. p., for the shafts, not to mention two huge boilers on the river or already awaiting erection ; of pumps above and below ground, from mere babies that throw out quick jets of water to the huge beam pump at Pollock's ; of six roasting furnaces where undesirable minerals are sent through an immense flue far up the hill side ; of stores of machinery, provisions, and dynamite ; of two sawmills kept steadily at work on squared timber. and axes galore cutting firewood ; of fourteen Europeans and seven ladies : and



finally of an army of close on a thousand Malays and Chinese employed on the boat service, wood-cutting and mining.

The Results.

No one unless wilfully blind, can visit Kuantan and not see that the Corporation



has made the district. The original population of Kuantan was probably less than three hundred, large as the district is. Europeans, Chinese, Javanese, and foreign Malays (for your Kuantan Malay is "a rare gentleman" with regard to work) have been brought in, and with their attendants have transformed the sleepy river, particularly in its upper reaches. The Corporation has spent in the country above £150,000, to say nothing of the value of all the tin produced, which has also been spent. It pays to the Government \$22,000 a year in royalty on tin alone. It has been the means of encouraging steamers to visit the Coast. And it has afforded a valuable object lesson to the country of what organisation and discipline can do. The High Commissioner has spoken of some progress having been made in the curtailment of the privileges of the Corporation, presumably on the ground that the Corporation have not improved their concession. His Excellency might find reason to change his opinion if he would see for himself, or send a trustworthy official with leisure to see, what has been done. Nay, he might be persuaded to a reduction in the eight per cent. royalty on tin produced by a company that has worke



loyally all these years, as against five per cent on gold, where the mining is no harder, where no roasting is required, and where the treatment is less elaborate.

Still this material and moral progress will possibly fail to satisfy shareholders in the Company, who will not unreasonably look for financial prosperity and dividends. A start has already been made—apart from that paid from the Pahang Kabang purchase money, years ago—by the payment of three and a half years cumulative dividend on the preference shares.

The number of tons mined and crushed during the last financial year was 23,031 tons, with an average of $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of tin oxide, worth £1.5.0 per ton. During last month (September) Sungei Lembing crushed 1,356 tons of ore, producing 53 tons of tin, while Jeram Batang disposed of $1,256\frac{1}{2}$ tons of stone producing 20 tons of tin ore. Knowing that 75 tons of oxide will produce $52\frac{1}{2}$ tons of tin, the monthly return at £60 a ton means £3,150. The royalty paid during the last financial year was \$21,188—no inconsiderable item in the revenue of the State.

Dividends, however, depend on the margin between the cost of production of tin and the marketable value of the metal



The latter is outside the influence of the Corporation ; the former very much within. That it is not overlooked may be judged from the fact that in 1895 mining cost \$5.05 per ton and dressing \$5.38 ; while in 1897 the cost has been reduced to \$2.43 and \$2.95 respectively. These figures are eloquent of close supervision and hard work on the part of the management and European staff.

Whatever fate may have in store for shareholders in the Corporation, and we hope it will be generous, there can be little doubt that Pahang in general and Kuantan in particular has much to thank the Corporation for. But tin has not the same glamour thrown over it as gold, and it is not therefore surprising to find that the Resident finds not a word in his annual report to say for the Company that produced one-eighth of his State's revenue for last year. If the Government can only be persuaded to leave the Corporation alone—most Governments are only too ready to assist enterprises, by allowances, privileges and even financial assistance—there is a great prospect of the commercial name of Pahang being purged of the evil odour that has hung over it so long in the financial world, by the Pahang



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