

SOME OBSERVATION OF HUMAN ACTIVITY
IN THE KNUCKLES WILDERNESS

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Background:

The Knuckles wilderness presently encompasses a major mountain range of the same name, which is a detached block of the Central Highlands of the Island, stretching from Laggala to Urugala and covering an area of approximately 62 sq. miles.

The uniqueness of this wilderness having clear-cut differences in the main vegetational types, could be attributed to;

- i) Geographic Location, ii) Altitude, iii) Positioning in respect of the two principal wind currents across the Island.

Observations:

The initial large-scale human activity had been the coffee plantations during the British regime. The subsequent activities are:

- i) Opening up of tea plantations and their subsequent expansion.
- ii) Utilization of the forest for fuel by the surrounding tea estates and also for domestic purposes of the estate labour population.
- iii) Chena cultivation by villagers which is rigidly controlled now.
- iv) The growth of cardomom plantations and their rapid expansion like a cancer.

Conclusion:

The author's observations on these human activities are stretched over a period of 20 years, commencing from 1967. It has been noted that these activities are causing a disturbance to the ecosystem of this fascinating and invaluable region. An attempt will also be made in this paper to illustrate a type of symbiotic relationship that existed earlier between the forest and the surrounding villages.