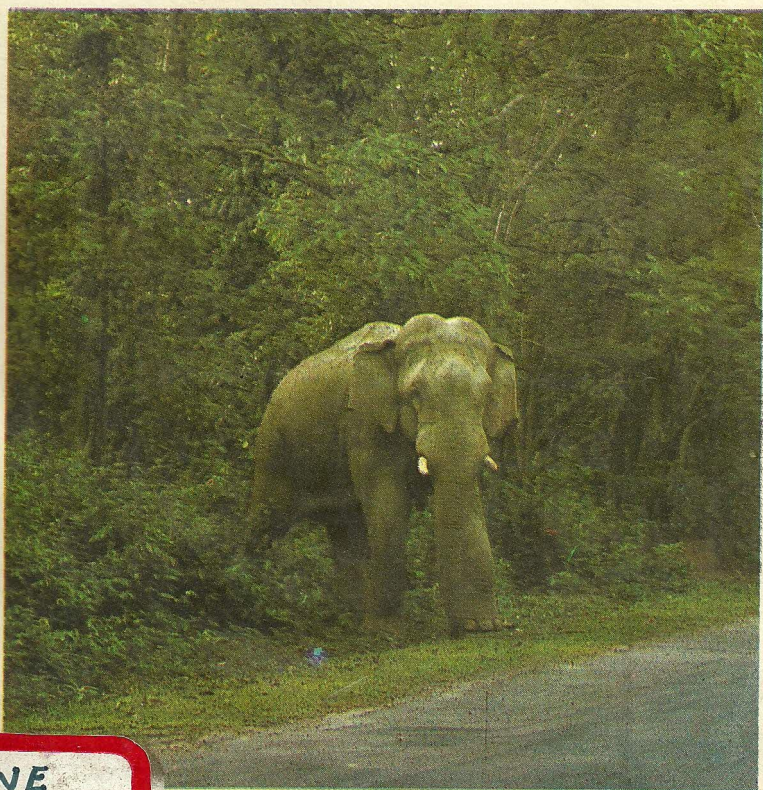


A Naturalist in
KARBI ANGLONG

Anwaruddin Choudhury



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A NATURALIST IN

Karbi Anglong

By Anwaruddin Choudhury

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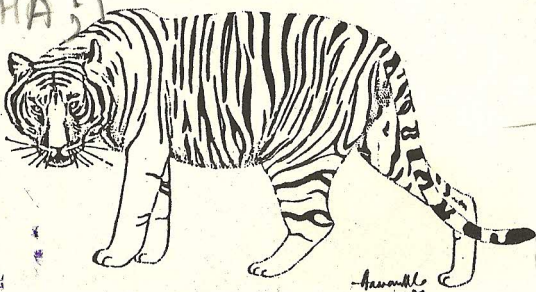
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INTRODUCTION

When I planned to be in the district of Karbi Anglong for a short sojourn, I had in my mind its unexplored wilderness with rich flora and fauna. I arrived Diphu, the district Headquarters in April, 1991, with a very poor knowledge on this rich and diverse district. However, when I left Diphu in June, 1992, I could, at least, claim to be one who had penetrated deep into the heartland of Karbi Anglong.

During my stay of more than a year, I visited almost every corner of the district, including some remote areas like Lamtem Singnar, Khiranggaon, Moulaber, and Khelma. Many of the tours were official which had nothing to do with nature and wild life, but I did not lose any opportunity to document these wonders with my pen and the Canon SLR camera which I always carried with me.

The scenic beauty with lush green forest and picturesque waterfalls, the lovely hot-springs, and the rich and diverse wild life make one delightful. But the real joy lies in sharing such experience with others. Despite all its richness, hardly any information was available on the wild life and jungles of Karbi Anglong. No literature, not even a good piece of article was available, except a passing reference of the Garampani Sanctuary in E.P.Gee's book *The Wildlife of India* (1964).

The district of Karbi Anglong holds the central geographical location in Assam and extends from 25° 32' to 26° 37' N and 92° 09' to 93° 53' E. With 10,330 sq km of area, it is the largest district in Assam. Formerly known as the Mikir Hills district, it came into existence in 1951. Prior to that it formed parts of Sibsagar, Nagaon, United Khasi & Jaintia Hills, and also Naga Hills districts. The area is mostly rugged and hilly being part of an Archaean plateau. The district consists of two disjunct parts, the East, and the West Karbi Plateaus. The West Karbi Plateau is contiguous with the Meghalaya Plateau. Three small plains are there, formed by the main rivers of the district, namely, the Kopili, the Dhansiri, and the Jamuna (an important tributary of the Kopili). The climate of the area is of tropical monsoon type, generally with a cool and dry winter, and a hot and wet summer. The temperature ranges from 7° C (average winter minimum) to 34° C (average summer maximum), and the rainfall from about 800 mm in Diphu-Kheroni area to 2800 mm in the northern slopes. The mountain wall of the Meghalaya Plateau and Barail Range has made Diphu-Kheroni area a zone of rain-shadow, receiving the lowest rainfall in the whole of North-east India. About 45 per cent of the total area of the district is under tree-forest.

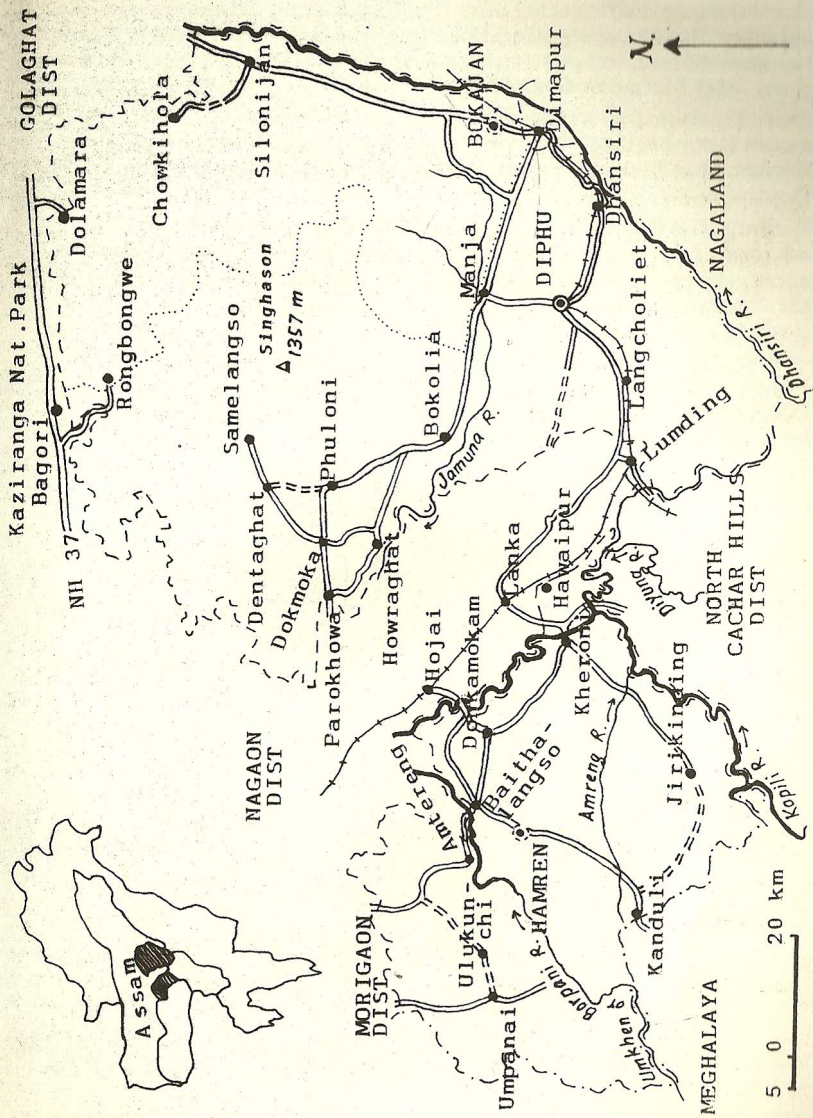


Fig 1. Map of Karbi Anglong showing important places (●), rivers (—), roads (---), and railway (—+—).

Karbi Anglong is inhabited by more than half a million people, majority of them belonging to different hill tribes. The Karbis are the most numerous of the hill tribes. Notable among others include the Dimasa Kacharis, Jaintias (others call them Khasis), Rengma Nagas, Kukis, and the Chakmas. There are also plains tribes like the Bodo Kacharis, Tiwas or Lalungs, and the Tai-speaking Mans. There are three administrative divisions, called the sub-divisions. Two in eastern Karbi Anglong - Diphu Sadar, and Bokajan, and one in western part - Hamren. Most of the development works are looked after by an Autonomous District Council elected by the people.

Hilly areas like Karbi Anglong have fragile ecosystem, and development in the form of expansion of agriculture and settlement in the hill slopes have already signalled a grim future. Time has come to preserve the forests and wild life. But unless the natives derive direct material benefit from such preservation, it will be a very difficult task to motivate them. Solution to such problem rests with tourism based on wild life, scenic beauty, trekking and adventure sports like rock climbing, rafting, and sport fishing, for which Karbi Anglong has enough potentiality. This will ensure added revenue, thus giving benefit to the local population as well as the Government.

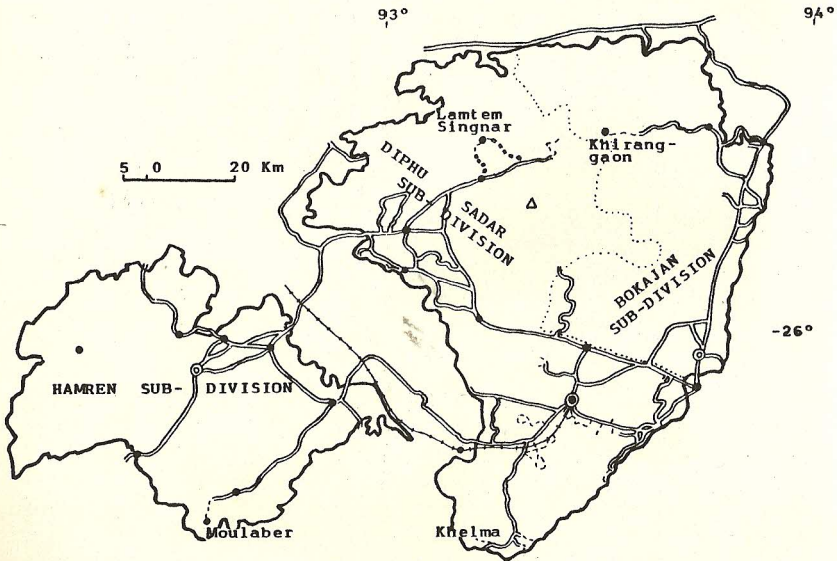


Fig 2. 'My travels' in Karbi Anglong; motor vehicle(—), rail(---), foot(....), and elephant-back(-.-.-).

The aim of this book is to provide an introduction to the rich and varied natural features and wild life of Karbi Anglong for a broad audience by presenting some of the results of my field study. It is designed to open doors and to engage adventurers, trekkers, mountaineers, naturalists, bird-watchers, and also ordinary tourists to explore the little-known wild treasures.

The tremendous support which I received during my 'expedition' in Karbi Anglong cannot be acknowledged in a few words. Administrators, foresters, villagers, friends and relatives, all helped me upto their possible extent, and I thank them all collectively.

I wish to thank A.K. Sachan (Deputy Commissioner), Joya, Honmilli, Tueena, and Mrs Kathar (all Magistrates), Dr Devi, Sushanta Roy, Jalil Barbhuiyan, and Paras Bhattacharya for their support and encouragement.

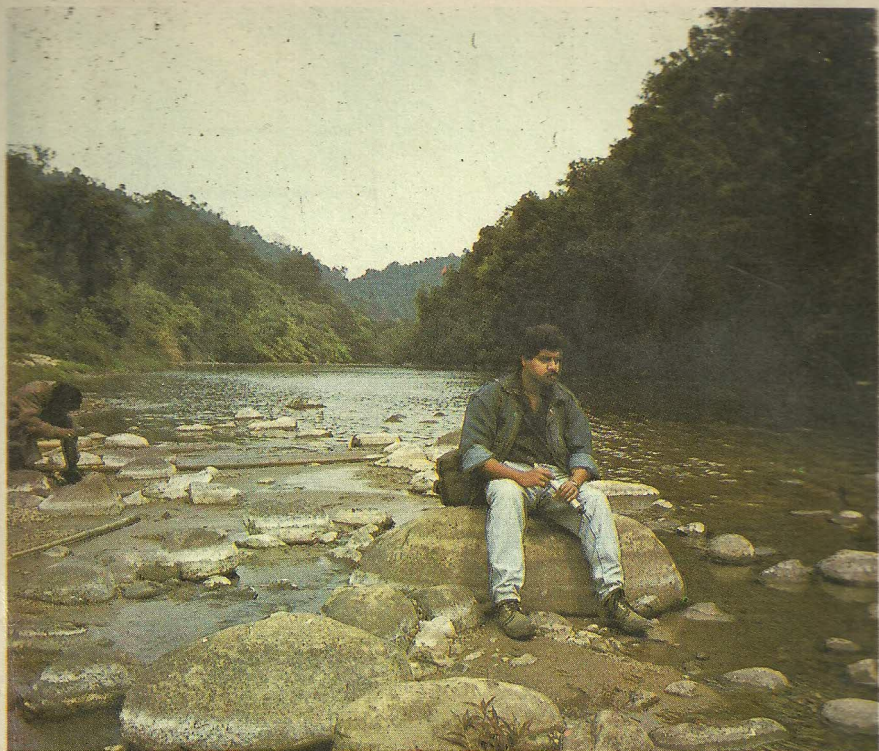
I am also grateful to T. K. Barman (then ASO, Phuloni), S. Ahmed (DFO, Hamren), Havildar Keshab Das, and Nur Hussain for their help during various field trips. R.M. Dubey, Divisional Forest Officer (Karbi Anglong West Division), not only helped me during my trip to the remote and virtually inaccessible Khelma area but also absorbed Sarsing Rongphar, an expert tracker, in the Forest Department at my request. My suggestions were that, Sarsing's field experience be utilised by the department, and secondly, since his occupation was hunting, this will save some wild animals from certain death. Further information on Sarsing are there in *Chapter 6*.

I further wish to acknowledge the valuable suggestions of Prof. Amaresh Datta, formerly of Dibrugarh University, and D.K. Goswami, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Tinsukia. The Assam Science, Technology, & Environment Council (ASTEC) provided funds for a primate survey, which helped me greatly in the field and deserves special mention. Lastly, I am grateful to Mohd. Hussain Khan of Tinsukia for helping during printing stage.

Anwaruddin Choudhury

Camp : Tinsukia

25th October, 1993



Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhury (35) has travelled almost throughout the wild places of Assam. He holds a Master of Arts degree with Gold Medal in Geography and a Ph. D. on Primatology. He is a member of Assam Civil Service and presently Project Director, District Rural Dev. Agency, Tinsukia.

To date Dr. Choudhury has published about 200 articles and scientific papers and one book, The Checklist of the Birds of Assam (1990) Choudhury's other interests are wildlife & nature photography, cartography, philately and drawing (exhibited in the State Art Gallery, Guwahati, 1978) among others.