



## Fordlandia

Natural latex, or rubber, comes from the sap of rubber trees. Native to the Amazon region of South America, they had long been a Brazilian monopoly, and the boom in wild rubber had made many remote jungle towns rich, until thousands of seeds of the tree were smuggled out by an entrepreneurial Brit, Henry Wickham. These were used to start plantations throughout British East-Asia, where the trees, facing none of their natural insect or fungal enemies, thrived. Thus, the Brazilian rubber boom crashed, leaving control of the world's supplies with the plantation owners in Malaysia (where to this day, most of the world's natural rubber is still produced).

But in the late 1920s, the automobile tycoon, Henry Ford, had a vision. He believed in vertical integration—that is, a supply chain of car parts and products united through his ownership. With his factories producing hundreds of thousands of cars, each of them needing rubber tyres, Ford wanted his own source of rubber and resented dealing with the British plantation interests. He therefore decided to buy a huge tract of Amazonian rainforest, where he would transplant his American workers and lifestyle, in order to make the largest rubber plantation on the planet. It would be called Fordlandia — ambitious, grandiose, and doomed from the beginning.

The first mistake was to hire a rather untrustworthy Brazilian to scout for the best location in the Amazon. This man recommended a damp, rocky, and infertile series of hillsides near the Tapajos river, a tributary of the wide and mighty Amazon. In 1928, Ford blindly acquired a 10,000-square-kilometre concession and immediately ordered an immense amount of infrastructure to be built—at huge cost. To this end, earth-moving equipment arrived, tractors, stump-pullers, trains, prefabricated living quarters, and food-making equipment. The surface jungle was cleared, scores of Ford's employees were relocated, and out of this wilderness sprang an instant slice of America, complete with a modern hospital, library, hotels, ice cream makers, and row upon row of prefabricated houses positioned along nicely paved streets.

The second big mistake was that, incredibly, Ford never thought to consult trained horticulturists. He naively assumed that his own company engineers, who had proven their worth in the production of cars, would prove equally adept at this agricultural endeavour. Thus, they planted the rubber trees thickly together, believing that they would flourish in their home environment. However, in the Amazonian jungle, wild rubber trees are actually few and far between — a defence against the prodigious insect life which chews, drills, sucks, and bites. In such environments, monocultural farming approaches are dubious at best. Ford's young rubber trees had no sooner appeared from the ground than they were attacked by caterpillars, ants, red spiders, and most significantly, South American leaf blight, which, to this day, limits the number of rubber plantations in this, the tree's native land.

The next problem was based on cultural differences. The newly planted fields needed hundreds of local workers, who, although well paid, were expected to follow Ford's patronising vision of a healthy lifestyle. Instead of the local custom of working before and after the roastingly hot middle of the day, Ford's workers were forced to do the standard company 9-to-5 shift. Similarly, they had to eat American food and take part in weekend activities considered sufficiently wholesome, such as poetry reading and square-dancing. Alcohol was strictly forbidden at work, in the housing estates, or within Fordlandia's sphere of influence. After a year denied their local customs, the disgruntled workers had had enough, and a riot followed, leaving the hapless American staff scurrying into the jungle to escape injury. It was all finally quelled with the arrival of the Brazilian army.

After three years, and no significant quantity of rubber to show for it all, Ford did what he should have done from the beginning—hired a trained horticulturist, who ultimately concluded that, in whatever manner the rubber trees were planted, the land was not appropriate for their cultivation. With such humiliating news, anyone less stubborn would have given up, yet Ford purchased another tract of land some fifty miles downstream of the Tapajos river—flatter, drier, better drained, and more suitable for machinery — and started all over again. This time, Ford imported blight-resistant Malaysian rubber trees, and much more horticultural expertise. Still 10 years later, in 1942, the operation could only produce a paltry 750 tons of latex rubber. Ford's factories were hoping for almost 40,000.

The final nail in the coffin was the development of synthetic rubber, and in 1945, it was time to admit defeat, although it was not Ford who did so. By that time he was old and ill and had relinquished control of his company to his grandson, Henry Ford II, who closed down the entire rubber operation. The holdings were sold back to the Brazilian government for a pittance, leaving a loss of over \$20 million (which would be over 10 times that much in today's terms) — a complete and utter financial disaster.

## Questions 1-4

Do the following statements agree with the information given in Reading Passage One?

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Write

TRUE	if the statement agrees with the information
FALSE	if the statement contradicts the information
NOT GIVEN	If there is no information on this

- 1  Henry Wickham destroyed the Brazilian rubber boom.
- 2  Rubber trees are well suited to Malaysia.
- 3  The Tapajos river is very wide.
- 4  Fordlandia may have succeeded.

## Questions 5-10

Complete the table.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

	Fordlandia's Problems	Result of these
One	first piece of land not 5 _____ for rubber trees	no 6 _____ of rubber produced
Two	7 _____ were unfamiliar with farming	an unwise 8 _____ approach
Three	not following 9 _____	a 10 _____

## Questions 11-13

Complete the sentences.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

The natural enemy of rubber trees is 11 \_\_\_\_\_

Plantations definitely need the skills of 12 \_\_\_\_\_

Fordlandia closed down upon the invention of 13 \_\_\_\_\_