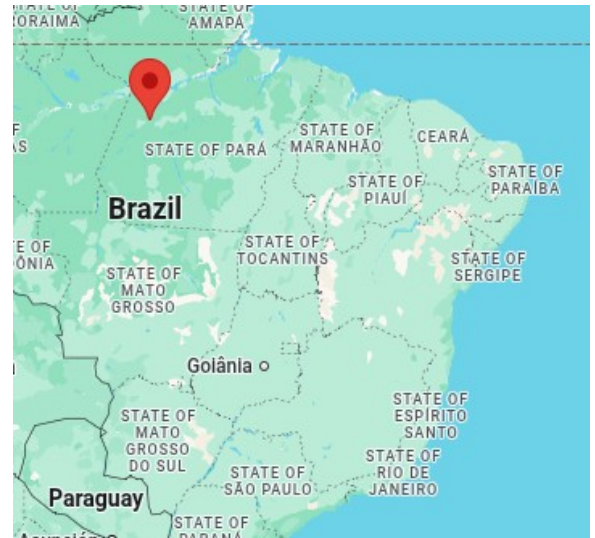


Fordlândia

Fordlândia is a district of Aveiro, Pará, Brazil. It was established by American industrialist Henry Ford in the Amazon Rainforest in 1928 as a prefabricated industrial town intended to be inhabited by 10,000 people to secure a source of rubber for the Ford car factories in the USA. Henry negotiated a deal with the Brazilian government granting him 10,000 km² of land on the banks of the Rio Tapajós near the city of Santarém, Pará, Brazil, in exchange for a 9% share in the profits generated. The project failed, and the city was abandoned in 1945. Only about 90 people still lived in the city until the year 2000, when the population increased a little. Today, the population is about 3,000.



The Beginning

The Model T was the first car that was affordable for the average American family and was the top-selling vehicle for the Ford Motor Company, headed by Henry Ford. To boost productivity, Ford began implementing methods to control his output from the ground up. The company began purchasing means of production for the raw materials that went into the cars, such as sawmills to produce wood for vehicle bodies. In these production areas, Ford also began building “company towns” – villages that provided low-rent housing to factory employees, in which the company owned all of the town’s utilities, stores, schools, and entertainment. Ford envisioned thriving communities centered around a single industry, and many were created around Michigan. Beyond optimizing vehicle production, it seems that Henry Ford aspired to create a perfect society.



In 1927, Ford realized that Sri Lankan rubber prices, under British monopoly, were having a significant impact on his ability to keep his vehicles cheap. So, he began exploring ways to produce his own rubber for tires. He decided that the Amazon was the perfect place to establish his own rubber plantation. Although once a very productive region, the area had suffered from parasites, fungus problems and insect plagues. Henry Ford not only wanted to develop fertile land, but also to create a utopian society within the jungle. So Henry started negotiations with the Brazilian government. An agreement was reached and Henry Ford was given an area of about 10,000 km², called “Boa Vista”. The agreement exempted Ford from taxes on the exportation of goods produced in Brazil in exchange for 9% of the profits, 7% for the Brazilian government and 2% for local municipalities.

The Construction

In 1929, construction began on Ford’s imagined paradise, Fordlândia. As the first basic structures were built, they were segregated. “Villa Americana” was built for the US workers and executives, and a separate area was designed for the Brazilian workers. The areas weren’t just separate, they were disparate too. For example, the Villa Americana had running water, while the Brazilian workers carried water from wells. As construction progressed, Fordlândia became a functional company town, with schools, sawmills, a water tower, cafés, and a hospital, the first of its kind to

perform surgery in the Amazon rainforest. The Villa Americana neighborhood also included a golf course, swimming pool, tennis courts, and a cinema. No roads were available in the area, so it was only accessible by the Tapajós River.

Troubles plagued Ford's paradise from the start. Clearing the jungle to build rubber plantations was more challenging than anticipated, and the company found itself constantly short of workers. Complicating matters, sanitation was not a priority during the early days of construction, and hundreds of workers died of disease.



Town rules

Henry had very specific ideas of what he wanted his utopia to be like and he placed restrictions on the workers living there with their families. A ban on alcohol, tobacco and prostitution proved impossible to enforce and it only increased tensions between company executives and workers. Gambling, Catholicism, and indigenous foods were discouraged. Henry pushed the use of soy milk in Fordlândia, even for babies in the town's hospital. He had strong beliefs regarding proper nutrition, which affected the menus in the town's cafés and the workers' canteens. For example, he demanded the consumption of whole wheat bread and oatmeal, but they were unpopular. This all generated discontent which exploded one day when a Ford executive changed the method of food distribution in the workers' canteens. The workers flew into a rage. The canteen was destroyed, vehicles were pushed into the river, generators were damaged, telegraph wires were cut and the managers were chased into the jungle. Although the Ford Motor Company was paying good wages, their imposition of foreign practices and expectations compromised the success of Fordlândia from the start.

Plagues and diseases

While Ford's social experiment was struggling, his dreams of cheap rubber production had problems too. He didn't consult industry professionals about the feasibility of his plantations and their design. Instead, he relied on his executives to manage the rubber farming. As a result of uneducated managers and poor planning, the plantations were planted in the wrong season and in the wrong type of terrain. The land at Fordlândia was hilly, rocky and infertile, and not suitable for rubber trees. Ford also insisted on maximizing the number of trees per acre, perhaps his biggest mistake. Concentrating his operation, instead of spreading it out, as experts had advised him, put the plants at greater risk from a number of natural dangers. These threats were one of the reasons that the Brazilian rubber trade had collapsed just decades earlier. Rubber plants were vulnerable to disease and pests such as caterpillars. Efforts were made to battle the caterpillars with a natural predator, ants, but their introduction became problematic too. The plantations struggled to be productive and never produced enough rubber to be exported to the USA.

The end

Despite the problems that Henry faced, both in his social experiment and the rubber business, he refused to quit. He continued to pour money into Fordlândia, spending another twenty million dollars over two years. However, in 1945, he finally gave up. The Ford Motor Company sold the land, buildings, and manufacturing equipment to the Brazilian government and left, never to return. The workers of Fordlândia remained, and a large part of the town was turned into a cattle ranch.

Today

Fordlândia still exists today, and has about 3,000 residents, some still occupying the homes that the Ford Motor Company built for their workers. Many buildings, including the hospital and cinema, have been destroyed. There are no water treatment facilities, electricity can be unreliable, and there are no paved roads. 80% of the people who live in the area live in poverty. Some new public facilities have been created, including schools and churches. However, local historian and school teacher Luiz Magno Ribero fears that the town will not exist in 30 years. The last worker who had worked for Henry Ford died in 2023. Many of the town's residents today are descendants of Henry Ford's workers.



Source:

<https://www.thecollector.com/fordlandia-ford-experiment-gone-wrong/>

Images:

<https://www.seattlepi.com/news/slideshow/Photos-from-article-Ever-Heard-Of-Henry-Ford-s-189068.php>

Documentary:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7nnmZWC8_E