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Andasibe – A short history of the study site

The village of Andasibe in central eastern Madagascar lies a three-hour drive east of the country's capital, Antananarivo. It was preceded by a small hamlet called Analamazaotra (named after the forest of the area). During the expansion of the Merina kingdom towards the east coast in the 19th century under King Radama I, it served both as a small military post and a lodging stop on the major route linking Antananarivo with the coastal cities of Andevoranto and Toamasina. After the end of the Merina monarchy, brought about by the French annexation of Madagascar in 1896, the new colonial rulers immediately began converting the old trail into a practicable road and simultaneously built a railway line. In the early 1900s, the French had established a train station close to Analamazaotra village that was named after Henri Périnet, the principal railway engineer on this section. From Périnet station, logging camps along the railway were established for railway construction. The biggest logging camp was established close to Périnet station itself and simply called Andasibe (= at the big camp). Until today, the names Analamazaotra, Périnet and Andasibe are used interchangeably.

Historically, the forests of the area have always been a source of timber both under royal Merina and colonial French rule. As the exploitation of timber (for the construction of railway sleepers and fuelwood for steam engines) and rubber (from endemic *Landolphia* lianas for the upcoming automobile industry) depleted forest resources, the French decided to establish an experimental forest station focused on ways to more sustainably use the forest's resources. In 1909, the

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Station Forestière Analamazaotra became the first of its kind in Madagascar (Louvel 1909). The French experimented with a number of fast-growing exotic trees. The introduction of both pine and eucalyptus dates back to the 1910s and in some areas of Analamazaotra these trees are still prevalent. However, colonial forestry also contributed to an enormous increase in the knowledge of the endemic plants of the region. In the late 1930s, the fashionable Buffet de la Gare was built, which made Andasibe village a popular lunch stop for the daily trains between Antananarivo and Toamasina at the time, as well as a welcome resting place for the weekend. After independence, the Station Forestière Analamazaotra was managed by the Département des Eaux et Forêts (DEF). With tourist numbers and conservation awareness increasing, the eastern part was set aside as a special reserve for the Indri in 1970. It now forms part of Andasibe-Mantadia National Park and is managed by Madagascar National Parks, while the management of the western half of Analamazaotra was transferred to Association Mitsinjo in 2002.