

REPORT ON EXCURSION TO COOLATTIN ESTATE

By T. McEvoy

ON Sunday afternoon, April 22, 1956, some sixty members of the Society and their friends visited the Coolattin Estate at Shillelagh, Co. Wicklow.

The party was welcomed by Major F. M. Doyne, Agent, and Mr. O. V. Mooney, President, thanked the Directors for the opportunity to inspect the historic woodlands of Shillelagh. Lady members availed of Mrs. Doyne's kind invitation to see the gardens while the men toured the woods.

In the time available it was possible to inspect only a fraction of the woodlands which extend to over 1,000 acres and comprise one of the largest private woodland properties in the country. The party entered the woods in an open mature hardwood screen of oak and beech, through a middle aged thriving japanese larch plantation and stopped to discuss management of an european larch scots pine plantation, 45 years old, and 60 feet high. Stocking had been very dense up to recent years when heavy thinning was begun reducing stocking to 250 stems per acre. Squirrels had deformed a high percentage of the pine stems and larch was not vigorous. While Mr. Mooney thought that the plantation would respond to continued normal heavy thinning, Mr. Clear favoured more drastic action reducing the stand to 100 stems per acre and encouraging larch to develop crown over half its stem length.

The next point of interest was a mixed 33 year old stand of norway spruce, sitka spruce, douglas fir, which had grown rather closely and was receiving its first thinning with emphasis on removing rough douglas fir dominants. Most of the produce was being prepared as pit wood for South Wales. Mr. Cusack at this stage detailed the requirements for wood for mechanical pulp for newsprint—1 and 2 metre lengths with 4 inches top diameter sitka spruce.

A 25-30 year old scots pine stand had been severely damaged by squirrels to such an extent that it was suggested that it might be worth while to fell all but select trees and replace with douglas fir which should give a much heavier yield on this dry but fertile soil. Scots pine standards and douglas fir should mature simultaneously. Mr. Donovan (Bree) doubted the economics of felling scots pine at pulpwood size while Mr. Doyle agreed with replacement but emphasised the value of high pruning the standards. Major Doyne found large douglas fir a very satisfactory saw timber.

A moist alluvial flat by a lake was occupied by an excellent norway spruce plantation 35 years old and over 60 feet high with about 300 stems per acre. Discussion centred on the economics of high pruning.

The party then proceeded to a block of mature woodland along the river. The main species here was the famous Shillelagh sessile oak of indigenous origin. There had been heavy fellings during the World War II for oak sleepers and treatment of the rather open woodland was discussed. One section had stocking reduced to 40 selected oaks per acre and had been underplanted with Douglas fir four years ago now up to 5 feet high. This was considered to be a satisfactory solution in this type of dry deep-soiled woodland with *Luzula-Vaccinium* undergrowth on which oak is a low volume producer and douglas fir thrives. The general opinion was that only the very best oak should be retained and stocking could be reduced to 30 oak per acre at a very early stage to allow the douglas fir more light.

The highlight of these oakwoods was a group of old scots pine with heights of 90 feet and breast height quarter girth up to 34 inches with estimated volume in the region of 400 cubic feet. These trees are of excellent form (see Cover photograph) and boring proved timber to be sound. Mr. Deasy explained that five specimens had been selected as 'plus' trees for seed orchard work. The Estate was co-operating with the Forestry Division and it was proposed to take cuttings from the crowns for grafting onto stocks in a seed orchard. In this way it would be possible to obtain seed supplies genetically identical with that borne on the parent trees in a matter of a few years. In this way a strain of scots pine of proved worth would be perpetuated in Irish forests.

After an inspection of the extensive sawmill, and working plant and a demonstration of saw tensioning by the "saw doctor", Major and Mrs. Doyne entertained the guests to an excellent tea and refreshments. Mr. Mooney returned heartfelt thanks on behalf of the Society and Major Doyne replied, hoping to have a further opportunity of showing the other woods to our members.