

Excursion to Lough Eske Forest.

A small attendance of Society members was favoured with an exceptionally fine day when by kind permission of The Minister for Lands and of Mr. Scott-Swan they visited Lough Eske state forest and Lough Eske demesne on Sunday, June 17th, 1956. Mr. Moloney, district inspector, was in attendance and some unusual and valuable silvicultural fare was well presented and fully documented by Mr. Ernest Johnston, the convenor.

The first stand shown to the party was a very remarkable one of sitka spruce planted in 1912 at $4\frac{1}{2}$ ft. \times $4\frac{1}{2}$ ft. spacing with an admixture of *Thuja plicata*, common larch and scots pine. The stand which is now almost a pure one of sitka spruce stands on a dry ridge at an altitude of approximately 225 feet. It was estimated to carry some 7,200 cu. feet per acre in 1950. Now there are some 240 stems per acre with trees 105 feet \times 15 inch Q.G.B.H. The height of an average dominant was estimated by the party to be 112 feet with a B.H.Q.G. of $14\frac{3}{4}$ inches. The crop showed no evidence of check during its life and looked healthy though somewhat sparsely crowned. There was no evidence of butt rot in the stand which had been thinned quite recently. The annual rainfall for the district was given as 60 inches.

The party was then guided to another stand of sitka spruce two or three hundred yards to the south which was in contrast with the former. This stand which stood on pure, black peat which had been considerably drained showed a height growth of only 40 feet in the best trees though the crop was 25 years old. Considerable check had been caused by frost in the early stages and parts of the crop had only closed recently. Current leader growth was, however, good and it was intended to thin the crop heavily (3rd thinning) to about 400 stems per acre and to prune prime stems at about 20 feet apart.

A sitka spruce—*Thuja plicata* mixture at $4\frac{1}{2}$ ft. \times $4\frac{1}{2}$ ft. spacing and 43 years old was then inspected. *Thuja* was mostly suffering from butt rot and also *Keithia thujina*. It seemed, however, as in the first crop we saw that its being in mixture with *sitka spruce* was greatly to the benefit of the latter. Dominants of sitka spruce were 18 inches B.H.Q.G. \times 80 feet in height and in seemingly good health. In a discussion on the treatment of the crop some thought that the most practical approach would be to clear-fell it owing to the erratic stocking or at least to remove the *Thuja*. Others considered that the retention of such a remarkable stand for thinning in the ordinary way would be justified.

At Lough Eske Castle in the very beautiful surroundings of Mr. Scott-Swan's estate we saw still finer sitka spruce which was shown to us by the owner himself who accompanied the party.

This stand was 43 years old and contained a mixture of sitka spruce, douglas and *Thuja plicata*, some silver fir and common larch. The *Thuja*

had been suppressed to an understorey of 65 ft.—75 ft. while at about 85 ft. to 95 ft. douglas was dominated by sitka spruce as large as 22" B.H.Q.G. \times 130 ft. high. Many sitka spruce were of much smaller girth and very drawn up and the stand had been knocked about considerably by wind and was now very difficult to handle.

A discussion was held and opinions were expressed to the effect that the stand might be marketed soon particularly as the middle size saw-log was more attractive to timber merchants than the heavy type as at 22 ins. B.H.Q.G. Considerable comment was made on the *Thuja plicata*—sitka spruce mixtures at Lough Eske which seemed so successful in raising good quality sitka. Indeed the important lessons learnt at this outing were mainly concerned with this mixture found here in such advanced stages as were hitherto not generally known in practice in Ireland. The fine individual performance of sitka in that part of Donegal was also of significance: conditions there suit this tree very well.

O.V.M.
