

## OBSERVATIONS ON THE RESULTS OF CUTTING BACK NATURALLY REGENERATED AND PLANTED ASH AT DONADEA FOREST

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### Compartment 18, Donadea Forest.

On this twentieth day of February, 1945, I stand waist-deep in healthy, vigorous naturally regenerated ash. Just a year ago I stood in this same spot, and then, as now, my thoughts were of the "natural" ash. On that occasion I was, with a very good reason, pessimistic. Around me lay an area of partially-cleared woodland. Parent-trees were left wherever a well-developed healthy tree had been found. The ground had been cleared free of brushwood in the usual thorough fashion of "Charcoal Ltd." The forester's "nightmare" of Donadea rank grasses, had not yet invaded this old woodland, and the peaty soil looked eager and ready to receive next year's seed fall. My concern, however, was not for the natural regeneration which I expected, but for the natural regeneration which had come before the stand was opened up. Around me lay extensive patches of crooked, deformed and diseased natural ash—neither a straight nor a healthy plant in the lot. There they stood, ten or twelve feet high, and, for all their deformity, their cutting back on the morrow afforded me no satisfaction. To those of us who realise Ireland's pitiful dearth of timber, the cutting of any age or kind of tree is excused only by sheer necessity or impending decay. Perhaps, now that the excessive overhead shade has been removed, a careful pruning would be more effective and less destructive. Thus I argue like a counsel for the defence, but in my heart I know that their fate is already sealed, for to-morrow "Carrick" hook and secateurs (for the smaller ones) will cut them to ground level.

They were cut, and to-day, a year later, I am here to compare notes as it were. Perhaps the most unpleasant feature of a State Forester's life is that it is seldom our privilege to view our work at a stage when success is assured. Too often we lay down plantations with care and toil, but long before these plantations are established the "exigencies of the Service" remove us, maybe, a couple of hundred miles away. After one short year, however, this cutting back of natural ash has proved a definite success. What sturdy, straight shoots! No doubt of where they are going—the sky is the limit. Each stump has sent out from two to six shoots. I take out my rule and measure several, finding that they measure from one foot to eight feet in height. I place the average height at 2 feet 10 inches. There is not a sign of the disease from which the parent shoot suffered. This reminds me of the doleful prophesy of the labourer who did the cutting with me: "it's no use, sir, the young shoots will have the same disease." Well, no sign of it yet anyhow!

Next year, I understand, the shoots will be singled. The secateurs in my hand are itching for the work. Selection from such a pick will be easy and agreeable work.

Feeling that the world is a grand place, especially Compartment 18, Donadea Forest, I set out for Compartment 12, where similar work has been carried out. On my way I consider what a pleasant thing it is to deal with natural regeneration. One feels that Nature is on one's side. The selection of species is made for you. Here on the better land of this forest the tree is very unequally matched against grass. The former will win out only by man's assistance and after heavy losses. If we work against Nature we must lose. How much sweat does the mountain farmer lose in his attempt to farm natural forest land?

### **Compartment 12, Donadea Forest.**

In 1938 a Norway Spruce/Ash mixture was planted in this Compartment. The predominant growth is meadow-sweet. The soil is "heavy and tight" and rather peaty. The ash has far outgrown the spruce and now stand twelve feet high. In some cases, however, the stems were so badly shaped as to justify cutting back. I examine six of the stumps which had been cut back. Three have not put out any shoots, and the other three have sent out crooked, deformed, diseased and practically horizontal shoots. Where is the sturdiness, the vigour and the health of the natural ash shoots? Another contrast—those plants we cut back were certainly badly shaped, but they had no disease, but these young shoots have got disease in abundance.

Leaving Compartment 12 I am considerably subdued. I have seen success and failure resulting from the same treatment to the same plant growing in similar soil. The only difference arises because one plant was planted by man, the other was natural seeding. Is it that the root system was not sufficiently established in the case of the planted ash? Perhaps if those struggling, diseased shoots were again cut back this year, the results will eventually be good.

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