

NINTH ANNUAL EXCURSION

THE 9th Annual Excursion of the Society was held in Northern Ireland, with Bangor, Co. Down, as our headquarters. As on previous excursions, all arrangements for travel, accommodation, etc., were looked after by our Excursion Committee. We were once again favoured by good weather and thanks to the excellent arrangements and careful planning of the itinerary by our hosts—the Forestry Division of the Northern Ireland Ministry of Agriculture—our trip was both instructive and enjoyable.

FIRST DAY, TUESDAY, 27th MAY (Report by A. J. Hanahoe)

The excursion commenced with a visit to Glenarm Forest. This forest, containing some 450 acres, is situated in the magnificent glen of Glenarm on the east coast of Co. Antrim. It is well sheltered from the prevailing wind and has good deep soil on its steep slopes.

The first plantation met with was originally one of pure ash which was clear felled during the first world war. In 1929 the resulting coppice stools were thinned down to one stem per stool at about 25' to 30' apart. The ground was afterwards under-planted, with Tsuga and Norway spruce mainly. All the ash now have clean straight boles and light crowns. We were informed by Mr. Parkin, District Officer, that the intention was to leave the ash for another 30 years.

On joining the waiting buses we were brought to another point in the forest where a number of lorries were ready to take us over a recently constructed road up a steep hillside. Most of our members were amazed at the gradient and wondered how the many bends could be negotiated. We were in capable hands, however, and with little difficulty the powerful 4 wheel-drive trucks made the going seem very easy indeed. In convoy we journeyed along the hillside contour through an interesting closed young stand of larch until a halt was called by our guides.

Getting out of the lorries we were faced with a stiff climb straight up a steep hill. All our members, despite advancing years for some of the party, took to the job of getting to the top with alacrity. Near the summit we were shown a badly cankered larch stand out of which one acre had been heavily thinned and under-planted with Tsuga. The cause of the canker was the subject of a lively discussion in which many members took part. It was the opinion of most that it was due to the heavy nature of the soil and some members qualified this theory by referring to the ground flora in which a luxuriant growth of bluebell predominated. The number of trees left standing was given as 250 for the acre block.

After we had descended the hill the lorries again came to our aid and brought us to a number of 21-year-old plantations of larch and spruce. Many of the better quality Japanese larch had been selected for the final crop and high pruned. The cost worked out at about 6d. per tree.

We were then shown a 10 H.P. McConnell Sawmill Unit purchased at a cost of £275 complete. It was interesting to note that the converted light thinnings cut into 4' lengths were being sent to Irish Wallboard Co. at Athy.

In beautiful sunshine, pocket lunches were enjoyed along the banks of a rippling stream. At this stage our older members renewed acquaintanceship with Mr. D. Stewart, retired Forestry Director for Northern Ireland, who for many years worked in Mountrath and other forests in the midlands before going northwards.

Parkmore Forest, at the head of Glenariff, was next visited. Here we were shown over a newly built forester's house at 900' elevation. We were informed that the cost of the building was £2,200 approximately. Convenient to it we were shown a forest worker's house, only something less elaborate in style. The forest itself, comprising 1,461 acres, is divided into two blocks by a high lying county road. The plantable portion at 800' to 1,000' is for the most part covered by a shallow layer of peat over mineral soil. Planting operations began in 1950. Cuthbertson and Beggs ploughs were used in the draining operation.

Our next stop was at Ballypatrick Forest, comprising some 4,000 acres, the greater portion being covered with a layer of peat but sheltered from the prevailing west winds. It was here that Mr. Parkin told us of the experiment to discover whether sheep will seriously damage a young S.S. plantation established on grassland. He explained to the party that an area of 4 acres of 4-year-old spruce was fenced in and that 50 sheep with their lambs were allowed to remain 3 weeks there. There was no apparent damage to the young trees, the only noticeable change from the adjoining ground being that the grass was shorn bare by the intensive grazing.

The party was next taken in lorries over freshly constructed forest roads to a high plateau where ploughing operations were in progress on moderately deep peat showing some evidence of a Sphagnum surface cover. In a short, rather dense vegetation *Calluna* tended to be dominant to *Eriophorum* and *Scirpus*. A sprinkling of *Vaccinium* was also present. We were told that the intention was to have the area planted up with pure S.S.

A rather interesting feature in the drainage work on the slopes was that all the secondary drain mouths were left shallow for a distance back from the point where they opened into the main drains. This, the party was informed, was done with a view to the prevention of erosion. In the construction of the new roads the peat was removed down to the mineral soil. The roads in all cases were left sufficiently wide to allow for side drains where necessary.

This concluded our forestry activities for the day. Returning to our base at Bangor by an inland road we were again given an opportunity of viewing some delightful Co. Antrim scenery.

SECOND DAY, WEDNESDAY, 28th MAY (Report by J. E. Johnston)

For this, the second day of our excursion, we journeyed inland, our first stop being at Portglenone nursery. This is a small nursery and only recently opened. The soil is light, deep, and easily worked, and the production of seedlings will be the main use of this nursery. Several experiments are in progress here, on the time of sowing of Sitka spruce and on the covering of seed beds with a peat and sand mixture. Unfortunately none of the experiments were sufficiently advanced at the time of our visit to show significant results.

Transplants intended for use in farm plantation schemes brought about a discussion of the Ministry's scheme for the supply of young trees to farmers at cost price. Some members held that this could lead to unfair competition with the nursery trade; others, however, felt that the great need for shelter on farms necessitated such a scheme, because farmers often could not afford to spend much on long term investments, and did not always fully appreciate the value of shelter trees.

Mr. Parkin described the method used in the control of "cut worms" with Paris Green and bran bait. These control measures had become necessary following an attack on *Abies procera* seedlings the previous July.

Although this nursery had been in continuous use for three years it had not received or required manurial treatment. Members commented on its clean and carefully tended appearance.

Next followed a series of brief halts at some of the Bann Dumps, Bracknamuckley, Gortgole, The Vow, Castleroe, where we saw interesting demonstrations of successful treatment of river drainage spoil heaps. Originally these plantations were laid down for amenity purposes only but they are now being developed into valuable stands. This process is well advanced on the Castleroe and Gortgole Dumps.

The results of efforts to assist the growth of checked pines on bare scree by the addition of peat mould and by Semsol were examined. Of these treatments, the ameliorating effect of humus on surface conditions appeared to be the best. On almost all sites the absence of development of any effective form of cover other than that provided by the plantations emphasized the value of this work.

Following the tour of the Bann Dumps the party was entertained to luncheon in Portsteward by the Minister of Agriculture, N.I., who was represented by Mr. Harkness, Secretary of the Department.

In the afternoon a visit was paid to Springwell Forest. Here we were met by Mr. McPherson, the District Officer, and shown over an area where some 400 acres of S.S. plantation in the thicket stage which had been destroyed by fire in 1946. An interesting discussion on the dangers of fire in young plantations and the protective measures to combat them developed.

At this forest centre labour supply is a problem and in an effort to solve the difficulty the nucleus of a new village has been formed around the forester's house. At present only the forester's house and eight

workmens cottages are under construction, but it is planned to develop further and to include a school and shopping centre in the village.

THIRD DAY, THURSDAY, 29th MAY (Report by J. J. Maher)

On Thursday, 29th, we travelled south by Strangford Lough through fertile, undulating country charmed by sea and the numerous lakes set in its hillocks. Our destination was Tollymore Park, formerly the residence of the Earl of Roden. As we approached from Newcastle the ancient oakwoods skirting the base of Lukes mountain—a north-western peak of the Mourne mountains—and the extensive coniferous plantations stretching to the upper slopes, presented a very pleasing picture.

This estate containing 1,194 acres was purchased in two lots, and with the exception of 100 acres reserved for agriculture, it was planted between 1932 and 1950. At the time of acquisition the old hardwood and larch crop had for the most part been exploited. Stands which remained were preserved as examples of what can be grown on this sheltered fertile silurian site with an average rainfall of 60 inches. It has always been noted for the excellence of its larch, beech and silver fir, and the magnificent stands and individual trees of these species seen justified this high opinion. One silver felled about 10 years ago is said to have measured 670 cubic feet.

European larch in mixture with hardwoods was used to plant up the low-lying ground. It was also the main species used over the remainder of the estate but gave way to Douglas fir, pure, wherever there was a rank growth of laurels and rhododendron. In the Larch-hardwood mixtures it was observed that the mixture by lines was doing best. Another interesting and controversial contrast was seen in the Douglas fir area, planted in 1935, through almost impenetrable rhododendron. The spacing above the road was 10' between the lines by 5', and this gave erratic growth but on the whole a good plantation. On the lower side of the road, with closer planting, higher stocking resulted, but with a decided reduction in the volume of the individual dominants.

Also seen in this forest was a small portable sawmill powered by a Blackstone oil engine. It is utilized largely to provide material for the Ministry's forests. Examples of gates, stakes and other produce were seen.

A short distance to the rear of the demolished mansion is a walled garden which is now used as a nursery. It was to one corner of this garden that all eagerly made their way to see what might be termed the first cradle of a forest seed orchard in this country. This work, recognised by horticulturalists as of paramount importance in the propagation of elite trees best suited to a locality or particular environment, has only been recognised by foresters in comparatively recent times. This is the first attempt here, and judging by the high percentage strike of Japanese larch and hybrid larch scions grafted on to transplant stocks they have got off to a flying start. It is intended to follow on with Scots

pine and spruces next year. The system of establishing a seed orchard may be described briefly as follows: Stocks as transplants are lined out in the normal way. Then in March, immediately before the buds flush, scions are selected from elite trees and grafted on to the stocks at about 4 to 6 inches above the root collar. When the scions have struck the stocks are cut back $\frac{1}{3}$ and when the growth of the scion has been firmly established the transplants are planted out in a selected site—the orchard.

After an *al-fresco* lunch in the shade of the beautiful cedars lining the avenue we travelled to Rostrevor Forest, via the mountain road. This forest, previously part of the Canning estate, was purchased from a Mr. Lyon in 1928. It contains 3,996 acres—2,072 acres of which were planted between 1930 and 1946. The remainder is considered unplantable at present.

Our first glimpse of this forest was just beyond the mountain crest. To the Wicklow forester it was a familiar sight—spruce in general check on a molinia clad granitic slope. There was a general discussion on how best to treat this site type. Mr. Weston, in a short talk, summed up the general opinion that molinia on this type was a deceptive indicator and with normal treatment it would have been best to plant P.C. He was in favour of the coastal type.

On travelling down slope we came to the Silurian formation and walked through a sessile oak wood which had been underplanted with a variety of species, *Thuya plicata*, *Sequoia sempervirens*, *Cryptomeria Japonica* and *Tsuga heterophylla*. All species average approximately 18' in height and are putting on a steady height growth. Treatment is the problem here. Should the standards, gradually becoming stag-headed, be felled now or allowed to remain to the maturity of the understorey? The general opinion was that gradual removal of the standards would be best and would result in very little physical damage to the understorey.

In this woodland is a small nursery with very promising seed beds of Scots pine, *Thuya plicata*, and Red Oak. Also seen was a 250 gallon trailer water tank which might best be used to fill knapsack sprayers for fire fighting.

Our last stop was at an old sessile oakwood with a sprinkling of cherry and ash, beautifully situated on a moderately steep slope overlooking Carlingford Lough. Clear felled areas and large openings were planted with Douglas fir about 8 years ago. Above the oak woodland Scots pine was defoliated whilst *Abies nobilis* used in mixture with it was growing quite well. Still higher, up to 1,200' feet, Sitka spruce was planted and so far was healthy and putting on steady growth.

After a very enjoyable tea in the local hotel we travelled back to our base via Downpatrick where we visited the Cathedral and St. Patrick's grave.

At the conclusion of our tour and as a mark of our appreciation the Society entertained all those associated with our excursion to dinner.