

Excursion to Mullingar Forest

ANNUAL holidays, bad weather and football were some of the factors which caused the party, which met at Ballymacarrigy on Sunday, 21st August, to be small. Those that did turn up had, however, an enjoyable and interesting afternoon in Baronstown Demesne Property of Mullingar Forest.

At the first stop, Mr. Joyce, leader for the day, started a discussion on the relative merits of under-planting or clear felling with particular reference to damage caused by extraction of the over-storey, following under-planting.

Comparisons were then pointed out between oak growing pure (following removal of 50% J. L.) and oak growing in mixture with N.S. The Norway spruce, of Dutch origin, measured up to almost Quality Class I, while at the same time leaving room for a high proportion of clean oak, also Dutch. This oak, which is about 4½ inches B.H.Q.G. and 20 ft. to timber height, at 23 years, has been severely affected by grey squirrels, which appear to cause more severe damage on the young shoots following opening up of the crop by removal of the spruce. A discussion followed as to the best means of mixing oak with conifers, Mr. Mooney favouring two or three lines of pure oak, between pure N.S. Others preferred groups of various sizes or the intimate mixture as demonstrated by this plot.

At the next stop talk ranged mainly around the question of producing "quality" timber, as well as quantity. The President, Mr. Swan, mentioned the setting out of grading rules which have fixed limits as regards ring-width (not less than 4 per inch) and the number and size of knots allowable per foot-run of board. The Norway spruce in this plot was also Quality Class I but very little remains of the oak which had been put in, in the traditional group system, the groups being 20 feet apart.

The stand which was demonstrated next, proved to be the most controversial, consisting of pure beech planted 22 years ago at 5 ft. × 5 ft. on the site of an old walled garden. The soil is a deep brown-earth with humus darkening the top 12 inches, and with pH ranging from 6.25 in the surface layers to 7.8 at about 21 inches down. The site, which, to a forester, would appear almost ideal proved to be a big disappointment after 22 years. The beech are mainly of very poor quality, 50% could be written off as having no future and, of the remainder, only a very small proportion could be selected with any hope of producing clean timber lengths. The roughness and stagheadedness of the crop provoked many ideas ranging from wide spacing to squirrel damage and led on to the somewhat depressing subject of the economic and desirability of growing hardwoods in Ireland.

The last point of interest prepared by Mr. Joyce was a deep soil-pit in an area subject to frequent deep flooding by the River Inny, as it passes through Lough Iron. It is understood that a new drainage scheme

may lower the level of Lough Iron by about 7 feet thus making available, for planting, a large area of this type. The pit showed up to 3 feet of a rich dark brown fen-peat with a surface pH of 6.3, the remainder having a pH of from 6.7 to 6.8. Vegetation is mainly *Spiraea* with an over-story of alder but it was considered that this type of site might prove ideal for poplars given plenty of side-light.

The rain which had held off all afternoon started falling as the party adjourned and fell steadily for the rest of the evening. However, a large oak tree provided enough shelter for the members to enjoy a tea-break before starting for home.

In concluding, the President thanked Mr. Joyce for his careful preparation for the excursion and also Mr. Reidy, the Forester-in-Charge, who accompanied the party throughout, providing a lot of interesting information regarding his Forest.

A.M.S.H.
