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## Excursion to Monasterevan Forest

THE Society led by our President, Professor Clear, visited Monasterevan State Forest, by kind permission of the Minister for Lands, on 23rd April, 1961. We were met by the Forester-in-Charge, Mr. May, who welcomed the party on behalf of the Minister. He apologised that as he had only taken over the chargeship of this Centre a few weeks before, he was not very familiar with it. The area we were visiting had been acquired by the Forestry Division some eight years previously and consisted mainly of recently cut over woodland. It was a very fertile site suitable for a large variety of conifers and hardwoods and a feature of the replanting was the extent to which mixtures were used and the manner in which they were made.

The first stop was at a mixture of Norway spruce and oak. The Convenor, Mr. McNamara, explained the mixture, which was 3 lines

of Norway spruce and 3 lines of oak both at 5 feet espacement. The ash which appeared in the plot, was sucker ash from the previous crop and its presence was accidental. The Norway spruce was doing well but the oak was not good, with poor growth and many forked leaders. As the original intention had been a final crop of oak, the treatment of this crop was already posing quite a problem. In the discussion which followed it was suggested that this particular oak crop might have been genetically poor but it was significant that this particular property had no previous history of an oak crop, though in a district where the word "dara" appears in many place names, and it was suggested that ash might have been a better choice. In favour of this line type of mixture it was pointed out that the older type of group mixture had fallen into disfavour as being much more expensive. With this line mixture, only the normal number of plants were used, half being Norway spruce and half oak; nevertheless we could expect an almost complete hardwood final crop, while the conifer could be regarded as a cash crop.

Later we saw an *Abies alba* beech mixture, and on the opposite side of the ride a pure Douglas fir plantation. Mr. N. O'Carroll asked if anything could excuse planting the mixture in view of the development of the Douglas fir. Professor Clear took up the challenge and said it was a matter of policy whether to blanket the country with monotonous conifers or to follow the more traditional type of forestry. He believed there was a lot more to forestry than simply growing timber or a large bulk of cellulose. There were also the very important aspects of game and wild life preservation an amenity which was unlikely to be served if the aim was solely a bulk conifer yield.

The last stand visited was a 55/60 year old Norway spruce crop. The Estate records showed that Douglas fir had been planted with the Norway spruce but the proportion was unknown, the last few Douglas fir had been removed in a recent thinning. There was no record of any thinning or silvicultural treatment but it was reasonable to assume that the area would repeatedly have been picked over for selected stems for estate use and what was now left would by no means represent the best. The Norway spruce was Quality Class III but a slabbed butt length showed that knots were remarkably small. A discussion on the qualities of spruce timber then ensued. It was pointed out that the tensile strength of spruce is considerably lower than that of the larches, Douglas fir or Scots pine. It is also a very difficult timber to impregnate with preservative and so it found no favour as a transmission pole.

To conclude the day we were shown a "togher", a submerged bog road. This old road of gravel and timber is now covered by almost 5 feet of peat, nevertheless its site is clearly reflected in the more vigorous and healthy vegetation of the bog surface directly above it. Mr. May had a section of the road carefully excavated so that its construction could be examined. Many interesting suggestions and theories were advanced to account for the existence of this road across the bog with high mineral ground only a short distance to the south and for its

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presence being reflected in the surface vegetation, even though it is now covered by up to 5 feet of peat. No doubt these theories are still being discussed whenever our members meet.

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