

Excursion to Pettigo Forest

THE excursion to Pettigo Forest, on the 21st May, was to the portions of Lough Derg Properties, which lie between the eastern shore of the lake and the Border.

The excursion was well attended and Mr. G. McCool, our leader for the afternoon, welcomed a number of members and their friends from Northern Ireland, and introduced the subjects of the visit, which were to study the afforestation of difficult peat types, and road construction on deep peat.

The first stop was at a gravel pit, where he described the methods of preparation of road sites; how the gravel was raised, conveyed, and applied, with a high degree of mechanisation.

Five miles of road had been completed last year, and eleven miles, in all, were under construction, to serve the plantations. Internal access had previously been very difficult, due to the irregular shapes of the main blocs, which, taken with the topography led to a greater mileage requirement than usual. The party motored between halts throughout the afternoon; and the new road system had obviously revolutionised the ease of working of the forest.

In a general summary of the history of the property, we were told that when 3,380 ac. were acquired from Sir Shane Leslie's Estate in 1936, only 320 ac. were regarded as of good quality, and in all 1,013 ac. plantable. These areas were distributed in over a dozen strips and plots within the property, and were confined to sheltered, flush slopes and troughs.

The main species used were Sitka spruce surrounded by *Pinus contorta*, and an outer fringe of mountain pine.

The older stands on view were 20 to 22 years old and mound planted.

Following the introduction of ploughing and measuring techniques about ten years ago, the poorer lands between the older blocs were treated and planted.

Control plots of P.56 indicated complete dependence for success on the use of fertilizers in the recent plantations.

A discussion of ploughing and drainage patterns took place, and several speakers were perturbed about future inconvenience in silvicultural operations on intensively prepared lands. Mr. McDowell held that root systems would be vulnerable during extraction of thinnings. Mr. McCool pointed out the importance of correlating the working pattern and road system. Mr. Condon favoured deep ploughing. Mr.

McCarthy said that the drained layer of peat had shrunk about 50% in depth in six years. Mr. Condon discussed the relative response and suitability of flush troughs, ridge sites and intermediate inclines. He favoured Sitka spruce with intensive treatment in flush strips, merging gradually to *Pinus contorta* on the knolls.

New Sandrig bow saws were tried out. They were fitted with hard-toothed "throw away" blades, which could not be resharpened. It was explained that in full time working, it had been proved that the time spent on resharpening bow saw blades was uneconomical.

Mr. Lear expressed the opinion that the two-man model was satisfactory, but that the shorter one-man saw was too heavy.

A group of *Pinus contorta* of special interest attracted attention. The trees were notably straight, wind firm, bore a deep living canopy, with slender branches, narrow conical crowns, and four years healthy needles. They had coned from an early age.

It was stated that *Pinus contorta* in Pettigo Forest consisted mainly of inland forms, and it was felt that more robust coastal strains would have been advantageous in the poorer sites: but some members felt that in the long run, the good form of some of the strains used, would prove a better investment.

On displaying manurial treatments, Mr. McCool stated that ground mineral phosphate had proved superior to basic slag.

The members were invited to comment on an area where 22 year *Pinus contorta* appeared to be dying in groups, after several years of slow growth. The site appeared to be comparable with others which bore successful crops; and drainage and other items of treatment seemed satisfactory.

Various speakers suggested saw-fly or other insect damage; toxic effects from bog-iron; unsuitable strain of plants, etc., but no definite conclusion could be reached from the available evidence.

As the party had enjoyed brilliant sunshine and a keen, dry breeze, the final stop for tea was very welcome; and Mr. McCool concluded, by thanking Mr. McCarthy, Forester-in-Charge, and his staff, for a very interesting afternoon. Mr. Simpson and Mr. Dallas expressed the appreciation of the party from Northern Ireland.

J.E.J.