

Excursion to Glennasmole

BECAUSE of the heavy rain and high winds the first outdoor meeting of the year, organised for 21st April, was postponed to Sunday, 12th May. The subject for consideration was Land Assessment and Classification.

The area visited, a commonage in the upper reaches of Glennasmole, Co. Wicklow, had not actually been offered for sale for afforestation but served as a good example of the kind of land considered suitable for tree planting.

Mr. Martin Sheridan, who was introduced by Mr. Michael McNamara, President of the Society, said that while the work involved in carrying out the annual planting programme of 25,000 acres was recognised and widely appreciated, the task of acquiring the land for such a programme was less well understood.

It was appropriate that on this, the first outing of the year, the procedures and problems involved in land purchase be discussed. Mr. Sheridan then detailed the normal acquisition procedure. The precise location on the ground and on the acquisition map of the boundaries of the area for sale was most important and was sometimes more difficult than it might seem. It was also necessary to ascertain full information as to rights-of-way providing access to the area and rights-of-way or other rights, such as rights to grazing, turbary, sporting rights, etc. against the area.

The classification of the land into site types was of critical importance. Using the commonage in which the party stood, as an example Mr. Sheridan dealt with the significant factors of soil origin, site elevation, aspect and exposure. He pointed out that vegetation was particularly valuable in assessing site quality. The commonage ranged in elevation from 900-1,650 ft. The underlying rock was granite. Quoting Moore he mentioned that the agricultural land of the valley was continuous with the calcareous drift of the lower ground.

The vegetation was divisible into three broad types—(I) the grass heath areas at the lower levels which carried *Ulex gallii*, some *Ulex europaeus* and fine grasses as *Agrostis tenuis*, *Festuca ovina* and *Nardus stricta*, (II) interspersed flush areas of limited extent with a cover of *Juncus* species, *Juncus effusus* particularly, and with grasses, and *Polytrichum* and *Sphagnum* mosses, (III) the more high-lying *Calluna* dominated moor, which included such species as *Eriophorum angustifolium* and *vaginatum*, *Nardus stricta* and *Juncus squarrosus*, with *Scirpus* and *Rhacomitrium* coming in on the more elevated ground.

The question as to which species should be planted on the various site types and sub-types gave rise to considerable discussion and difference of viewpoint and the value of the ecological approach to site classification was raised. While many would like to have more definite means of assessing the value or potential of particular sites for tree-

growing, it was considered that, when properly understood and applied, the ecological method was satisfactory. In any event it was the only inexpensive method which was readily available for large-scale use. The alternative would involve the conducting of a series of detailed and expensive studies of the separate factors of environment. It was however suggested that as a long-term measure, aimed at improving our site assessments, a certain proportion of the areas acquired each year should be subjected to such direct scientific appraisal, as well as by the less direct ecological method. Dealing with the economic considerations involved in land purchase, Professor Clear mentioned that in Great Britain it had been estimated that it was not an economic proposition to invest money in areas which had a mean annual increment potential of less than 80 cu. ft. per acre per annum.

In land acquisition for forestry the paying of improved prices with a view to obtaining better quality land would be a worth while investment. It would in fact be more economic to pay £30 per acre for good forest land than to plant poor ground which had no market value.

The possibility or otherwise of ploughing was discussed and was considered to be a factor involved in assessing a fair purchase price.

Mr. D. McGuire said that the estimated preparation costs should also be taken into the reckoning. Mr. McGlynn felt that while it was acceptable to acquire poor quality ground, when it represented but a proportion of the offer as a whole, it was a different matter when areas purchased were largely comprised of such. In his opinion there was a risk that too much lower quality ground might be acquired.

The problem of exposure and the methods—or lack of methods—available in its assessment was raised. Mr. T. McEvoy suggested that some of the opinions expressed in regard to conditions on this commonage might have been biased in consequence of the prevailing high winds on that particular day. Professor Clear stated that while generally speaking bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) is not regarded as an indicator plant, it is useful as a guide to exposure.

Notwithstanding an apparent enthusiasm for further discussion on the problems and implications of this highly important facet of the national programme of afforestation, the onset of a downpour of driving rain forced the party from the mountain side, to the shelter of a local forestry hut, where individual arguments and discussions were continued and a welcome cup of tea was served.

N.M.