

Excursion to Gougane Barra

"There is a green island in lone Gougane Barra,
Where Allua of songs rushes forth as an arrow,
In deep-valley'd Desmond—a thousand wild fountains,
Come down to that lake, from their home in the mountains."

Jeremiah Joseph Callanan.

THIS beautiful secluded West Cork valley is the location of Ireland's first national forest park and the twenty members and friends who braved the elements on an excursion here in August had a most interesting and informative afternoon.

The party was welcomed by Mr. N. Morris on behalf of the Society who introduced Mr. William Shine, District Inspector, representing the Minister for Lands on this occasion and who was to be our leader for the day. Mr. Shine at the outset stated that he would refrain from technical details and went on to give a brief history of the valley.

He stated that in the 4th century St. Finbarr established a monastery on the "Green Island" the ruins, in fact, even the cells used by the monks, are still to be seen and the "Island" which is now linked to the mainland by a narrow path draws crowds of pilgrims annually.

After the battle of Kinsale, O'Sullivan Beara on his march to Leitrim passed through Gougane. In more recent times, the famous Tom Barry, O/C. of the West Cork Flying Column, sought refuge and hospitality here in his many exploits. Gougane Barra in those days was a haven for the "boys on the run" in both Cork and Kerry who were all treated with typical West Cork hospitality by the Cronin family who now own Gougane Barra Hotel.

The area now forming the Department Forest property was acquired 23 years ago and from the outset great emphasis was laid on the value of the scenic amenities, but it is only recently that the actual development work started. The total area is 340 acres of which 238 acres are classed plantable and now carry crops of Norway spruce, *Pinus contorta*, Sitka spruce, European larch and *Abies grandis*. A stand of *Pinus contorta* and Sitka spruce mixture, although still in the early stages of development, aroused some interest. Mr. Shine pointed out that, due to early failures in the original Sitka spruce crop, the area was subsequently beaten up with *Pinus contorta* which nursed the spruce to what is now, a very interesting mixture in the thicket stage. The stands of Norway spruce and Sitka spruce at the mouth of the valley have done very well and have succeeded in reaching and maintaining a quality class II development stage (B.F.C. yield table standards). In the eastern end of the valley on a steep rocky incline a stand of very promising European larch now exists, although some slight damage has been caused to the perimeter by blasting during road construction.

The development of this area as a National Forest Park presented

problems, especially in road construction. A ring road $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles long was constructed round the upper perimeter of the valley. This road is still unfinished but when one contemplated the immensity of the task of blasting a road through solid rock for this distance one realises the tremendous work done in the past few years. It is intended to have this road tarred and open to tourists. In our walk round the "Ring" a number of the famous "thousand wild fountains" were encountered where bridge and culvert construction was necessary. A good example of a Mud Sill bridge exists here and Mr. Shine in pointing it out stated that it is the first traffic carrying bridge across the river Lee which rises in these mountains.

The excursion was marred by heavy rains for the most part but the sun broke through the clouds shortly before our arrival back at the mouth of the valley where Mr. Morris thanked the gathering for braving the elements and for showing great enthusiasm under such adverse conditions. He also thanked Mr. Shine for the excellent leadership which made the afternoon such a success.

E.S.F.

Excursion to Johnstown Castle

THE Society's excursion of September 8th to Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford was attended by members as far afield as Derry, Clare and Cork. Fine weather, an unusual phenomenon of the 1963 outings, and the sheer beauty of Johnstown Castle, helped to make this outing one of the most enjoyable of the season.

Mr. Le Clerc, our leader of the day, was introduced to us by our President, Mr. McNamara. Mr. Le Clerc welcomed us on behalf of the Agricultural Institute. Johnstown Castle he said is the present headquarters of both the soils division of the Institute and the soil survey for Ireland. The estate has approximately 1,000 acres of which 350 acres is woodland and 30 acres amenity. The woodlands themselves are mostly conifers particularly Scots pine and were all planted circa 1890. He outlined the particular problems of management laying special emphasis on timber sales.

Our first stop was made in a mixed conifer wood where we came face to face with the problems Mr. Le Clerc outlined earlier. The crop, a mixture of Scots pine and Corsican pine, was recognised by all present as being of rather poor quality. $11\frac{1}{2}$ d. per cubic foot standing was the highest price offered. Mr. McNamara favoured the gradual conversion of the existing woodland to hardwoods particularly oak. The ability of the ground in question to grow quality oak was proved he said by the many fine specimens he had seen on our walk from the castle. Messrs. Morris and Galligan favoured a clear felling and replanting with Sitka spruce. Many feared that the amenity of the castle and environs would be spoilt by clear-felling and favoured a