

problems, especially in road construction. A ring road $1\frac{2}{3}$ 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

scrub clearance plan and a removal of poorer stems together with under-planting of say silver fir.

Leaving this stand we were introduced to another stand of similar material. Being slightly more exposed the volume per acre did not compare favourably with the previous stand. This led to a discussion about the quality of slow grown timber and many thought that the increased cost of waiting for quality material to mature was not reflected by the price eventually obtained. Mr. Morris outlined the imperative need to high prune Scots pine when it became ready to do so. While other timbers, he said, could hold their dead knots when planked; Scots pine, because of the inherent quality of its sapwood to deteriorate more quickly than its heartwood, dead knots were more likely to fall out.

Our next stop was at an 8 year old Sitka spruce plantation which was showing good progress and which would in time produce not only quality timber but also considerable shelter for the surrounding agricultural land. Mr. Butler said that the woodlands at Johnstown were in effect shelter belts, contributing little in monetary terms but much to the creation of a favourable micro-climate in the estate. A spontaneous discussion arose from Mr. Butler's point in which Dr. McCracken and Mr. McNamara put forward many interesting views.

Before leaving the spruce Mr. Le Clerc drew our attention to an area under bamboo laid down some years ago on an experimental basis. A discussion arose about the utilization of this novel species. One member talked of the cellulose content and fibre length of bamboo, and thought of its possibilities as a processed material. The species he thought might have a place in forestry in the not too distant future if research proved it a profitable short rotation crop.

The tour concluded at the castle where we were entertained to tea in the former chapel. There Dr. Haddon gave us a short history of the chapel, castle and grounds. Originally an Esmonde estate the lands fell, during the Cromwellian wars, to a British captain whose descendants paradoxically played patriotic roles in Wexford's 1798 rebellion. The estate and castle were presented to the State in 1947 and were later adopted for agricultural education.

Mr. McNamara thanked Dr. Hadden, Mr. Le Clerc and the Agricultural Institute for making such a pleasant outing possible.