

Society's Activities

Day Excursion to Pollaphuca

3rd OCTOBER, 1965.

Assembling at Blessington for a visit to the Electricity Supply Board's Liffey Valley plantations which surround Pollaphuca reservoir, the Society was welcomed by Mr. O. V. Mooney, Vice-President. He introduced the leader for the day, Mr. D. Mangan. Mr. Mangan, who is forester with the E.S.B. and is responsible for the silvicultural management of the plantation, welcomed the party on behalf of the E.S.B.

At our first stop, which was at Baltyboys on the western shore of the lake, Mr. Mangan outlined the history of the plantations. In 1940 the valley was flooded to the 600 ft. contour. A belt of land around the new lake bought in connection with the flooding project, remained in the Board's hands. For some years the Board let the land for meadowing and for tillage to a limited extent. It proved difficult to prevent trespass by stock, and as the lettings yielded only £1 per acre per annum it was decided to examine the possibility of timber production on the area. In 1958 it was decided to plant a belt around the lake with forest trees in order to reduce the risk of pollution and to produce transmission poles for the Board's use. The decision to plant led to a detailed assessment of the project. Geologically the lake touches the Wicklow granite range to the east and the Ordovician deposits to the west. In the immediate vicinity the soil is mainly Silurian overlaid with limestone glacial drift, but on the eastern slopes soils derived from the parent granite predominate. The glacial drift soils have a pH of 5.6 to 6 with phosphorus and potassium levels low to medium; and on the granite soils the pH range is 5.4 to 5.8 with phosphorus and potassium levels medium to high. The latter condition may be due to manuring. Amenity aspects also received consideration. When the flooding of the valley was first mooted most of the opinions expressed suggested that the area would suffer scenically as a flat stretch of water could not possibly be as pleasing to the eye as the green valley through which the Liffey meandered. While opinions may differ on that score, the fact remains that the lake drive has, with the years, attracted more and more visitors, particularly motorists from Dublin out for an afternoon's drive. It was therefore decided that openings would be left at the public road and also that as wide a range of species as feasible would be used to add a blend of colour to the view.

The first plantation was laid down in 1958. A belt of beech and sycamore was planted near the public road. Japanese larch and Monterey pine (*Pinus radiata*) formed the central block with alder

along the lake shore. The Monterey pine suffered heavy losses during the winter frosts of 1961-'62 and, although the surviving trees are growing vigorously, it was felt that the risk of failure due to low winter temperatures in the area was too great to justify large-scale planting of the species. It was generally agreed that Japanese larch was very suitable for the dry grassy sites. The species grows vigorously in its early years and gets clear of the ground vegetation quickly. A deciduous species with characteristic seasonal changes of colour, it must rate as one of the most attractive conifers where amenity and timber production are to be combined. Since 1958 the Board has planted 700 acres using 27 different species.

Lively discussions on various aspects of scenic forestry took place. Pleas for wider use of hardwoods and more frequent openings for unrestricted viewing were made and discussed. As the party moved on around the lake the remarkable success achieved by the Board in combining scenic forestry with timber production became apparent.

Mr. Mooney thanked Mr. Mangan for the manner in which he led the party. His courtesy in dealing with the various questions raised was typical of the man. He also asked Mr. Mangan to convey our best thanks to the Board for allowing us to visit the plantations. He said that the Board must now be one of the largest private plantation owners in the country.

After the meeting the party were the guests of the Board at afternoon tea.

M. McN.