Visit to the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Park 7th July, 1968.

Mr. A. M. S. Hanan received the party on behalf of the Minister for Lands. Professor Clear, President of the Society, expressed appreciation on having the honour of signing the visitors book immediately following the notable entries of May 29th. This was the first official visit to the J.F.K. Park since the opening day 29th May.

Mr. Hanan gave a brief account of the background.

Shortly after the tragic death of the late President of the United States of America in 1963, it was decided to provide a fitting memorial in Ireland in the form of an arboretum and forest garden. This project was financed jointly by Irish American contributions and the Irish Government and is administered by an Inter-departmental committee consisting of representatives of the Forestry Division of the Department of Lands and the Department of Agriculture. The Office of Public Works undertook the design and erection of buildings, the construction of roads and responsibility for the provision of water supplies.

The site chosen was at the foot of Slieve Coillte—a commanding hill rising above the Kennedy ancestral home at Dunganstown, Co. Wexford, and 7½ miles south of New Ross. The terrain is slightly sloping to the S.W. between 120 ft. and 600 ft. above sea level. An intensive soil survey found the site to be suitable for tree growth. It is a deep brown earth with a pH of about 6.2. The underlying rock is ordovician schist.

The climate also is considered favourable and the average rainfall is 40 inches per annum. The region is situated in an area noted for its high annual sun duration.

Objectives

1. The provision of a comprehensive, scientifically laid out and fully documented arboretum.

2. The establishment of a series of forest plots to provide a silvicultural knowledge of a wide range of species.

3. To mould these two objectives into an amenity park which will not only provide a place to enjoy leisure in beautiful surroundings but also serve to stimulate interest in the more enlightened use of woody plants.

Historical Background

Historical records support the belief that the hill derives its name Slieve Coiltia, The Mountain of Woods, from the fact that it was densely wooded in ancient times. Its main claim to more recent fame

is, however, its association with the Rising of 1798. It is commemorated in the words of the old song "Boolavogue".

"We took Camolin, Enniscorthy
and Wexford storming drove out our foes
'Twas at Slieve Coiltia our pikes were reeking
with the crimson stream of the foes."

Acquisition :

The Minister for Lands took formal possession on the 22nd. July, 1964, of an area of almost 390 acs. which forms the main block of the park. A further area of 70 acs. was acquired subsequently.

Visit of Study Group to America

A group of officials including experts on afforestation and botany travelled to America in May and June of 1964 to see at first hand Arboreta and Botanical gardens in that country. The group visited the Arnold Arboretum, Mass., Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, The New York Botanical Gardens, Longwood Gardens, Pennsylvania, National Arboretum, Washington D.C., the Morton Arboretum, Chigago, and University of Washington Arboretum, Seattle. The party were most appreciative of their reception in America and of the very valuable assistance they got from all with whom they came in contact.

Contributions by Governments, Arboreta and Institutions

Co-operation has been received from many Governments in the development of the Park. Already 20 countries with whom Ireland has diplomatic relations have either sent plant contributions or indicated their intention of doing so as soon as conditions are suitable.

Great assistance has been received from the Northern Ireland Ministry of Agriculture.

Arboreta and similar institutions in many parts of the world have also taken a practical interest in the project and have offered plants.

Amenity and Recreation

While the main aim of the Park is educational and scientific the park is also being designed to provide for amenity and recreation.

A network of roads and footpaths will afford a wide variety of walks in pleasant parkland settings with convenient shelters and resting points.

A picnic area with tables and water supply is situated within 100 yds. of the main reception centre.

A spacious car park is provided. Cars will not be allowed beyond the car park in the main park area.

There is however a special motor road giving access to a viewing point at 630 ft. above sea level with a panoramic view of Counties Wexford and Waterford including the Saltee Islands, the confluence of the Rivers Suir, Nore and Barrow and the Comeragh Mountains.

Buildings

The Reception centre constructed in Liscannor stone and western cedar is roofed with copper.

The building provides office accomodation and fully equipped lecture room and a large lobby. In the latter are sited display panels including the plan of the John F. Kennedy Park, a map showing arboreta and gardens in Ireland and a world map showing vegetation zones contributing to the arboretum.

Here are artists' impressions showing Plant Evolution and the Flant Kingdom. There is also a model of the Park.

The buildings are laid around an extensive terrace paved in Liscannor stone.

The Kennedy Connotation

John Fitzgerald Kennedy is specially commemorated by a Memorial Plaque in limestone on a granite background situated at the entrance to the building which reads :—

This Park is dedicated to the memory of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, President of the United States of America from 20th January, 1961 to 22nd November, 1963. It is a tribute to the life and work of President Kennedy from United States citizens of Irish origin, organised by the combined efforts of Irish American societies and executed through the co-operation of the Irish Government.

On the terrace is a commemorative fountain hewn from a single block of granite and weighing over ten tons.

The fountain bears the words :

"Ask not what your country can do for you, ...
Ask what you can do for your country."

and the Irish translation :

Ná fiafrigh ce'n mhaith duit do thír,
fiafrigh ce'n mhaith don tír tú féin."

Stop No. 1. International Phenological Garden.

Mr. Hanan described the International Phenological garden scheme which is administered from Offenbach in Germany. It is one of many similar gardens planted in 32 different countries. The plants in all the Phenological gardens are genetically similar being grafted from the same parent plants in Germany. Theoretically the only element affecting the timing of the various phenological phases (conspicuous phenomena of growth) is climate.

Averages of the recorded dates of the phenological phases are obtained for each group of three specimens and the results recorded for comparison with national and international phenological gardens. In this way valuable information on climate trends will be compiled.

The grid system and specimen planting in the arboretum was then explained by Mr. Shekleton.

About 270 acres have been dedicated to the arboretum proper, most of this land is bare pasture but some existing old woodland has been included.

Plant Arrangement

The arrangement of the plants is being determined by Taxonomic classification, the full range being covered in two circuits of the arboretum; one circuit covers the gymnospermae and the other the angiospermae. These two are at times interspersed to improve the overall appearance of the arboretum. The classification being used is broadly that of Englir and Prantl. Three plants of each species are being used, due regard being paid to colour, size and shape for optimum placing.

While recognising that trees are the major objective of the arboretum it is hoped nevertheless to include a wide variety of shrubs capable of growing in this climate. It is estimated that the collection when complete may include up to 6,000 species.

Planting started in 1967. Boundary and internal shelter has been provided using a wide variety of evergreen and deciduous trees. Further amenities include ornamental streams, a small lake and a series of interesting vistas.

Reference Grid

For ease of plotting and indexing a system of numbered grid points was laid out, each point being at the corner of one acre squares. The markers consist of sunken concrete blocks numbered and set to the cardinal points of the compass.

2nd. Stop

A discussion on the treatment and amenity value of existing woodland was held. Mr. Hanan indicated the treatment already undertaken in drainage and the removal of undesirable scrub. The woodland consists of Ash, Oak, Scots pine, Cherry, Beech, Alder, Elm and Sycamore with an understorey of hazel and holly. The ground vegetation was characteristic of mixed old woodland being mainly blue bell, lesser celandine, wood sorrel, ivy and woodbine. It was agreed that the woodlands be left in their natural state.

A short acount of the Park fauna was given. About sixty species of birds have been observed in the Park as well as foxes, badgers, hedge hogs, stoats, rats, field mice, hares and rabbits and various species of bats.

Worthy of note was the prevalence of field mice in conjunction with the appearance of the short eared owl in 1966 and the reappearance of the Hen Harrier after many years of absence. The presence of a number of predators such as Blue Jay, Grey Crow, Sparrow hawk and Kestrel resting in close proximity to game birds like the partridge and pheasant is also worthy of note. It was accepted that efforts to eliminate the Grey Crow should be undertaken.

Following a pleasant walk through the woodland path the party assembled on the lakeside beside shelter No. 3. The treatment of a 6 acre block which was sprayed with gramoxone and planted with various hardwoods and conifers was discussed. The amenity value of the prolific bloom of wild flowers was noted. Mr. Hanan pointed out the extent of the Park, the boundaries of which could be observed clearly from that point. A 1¼ acre lake recently constructed was discussed.

Stop No. 4.

At the chamaecyparis area Mr. Hanan gave an account of the external shelter belts which consist mainly of large mixed hardwood and conifers. The internal shelter belts were then discussed. In view of the apparent exposure to the South-West a system of curved shelter belts was laid out throughout most of the arboretum across the prevailing wind and at intervals of 38 yards. This shelter is intended for the permanent specimen trees and will be removed gradually following establishment of the specimen collections.

Mr. C. McGill, assistant forester, discussed the Meteorological Station attached to the Park.

1. Standard pattern sunshine recorder.
2. Tilting siphon air recorder.
3. Standard rain gauge.
4. Class A pan.
5. Stevensons screen with dry, wet, max. min. thermometers.
6. Thermometers at 2", 4", 8", under soil surface.
7. Grass min. thermometers.
8. Bare soil patch.
9. Cup counter anemometer mk. II.

Observations are recorded daily at 09.00 G.M.T. and include cloud amount, present weather, wind speed and direction, and a coded weather diary covering the previous 24 hours.

Stop No. 5.

Mr. Shekleton gave a brief talk on the newly established clonal collection from the Shelton populetum. There will be approx. 100 individual trees with provision for expansion.

A short description was given of the forest garden and it layout. The area is divided into one acre squares leaving adequate rides and roads between plots.

About 140 acs. were set aside to establish plots of all trees which were thought likely to form a forest crop on this site. The number of species likely to be used is about 250 and plot size will vary from 1 acre to ¼ acre.

It was decided to use a geographical classification in the forest garden by allocating areas to each of the five continents.

To date 56 species, mostly of North American and European origin have been planted covering 40 acres.