

The Wellingtonia in Ireland

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The Wellingtonia or giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) is a remarkable tree for its age and size, as is well known, but its adaptability is even more extraordinary. Within historical times it has been confined in its natural range to small groves in the valleys on the western side of the Sierra Nevada, on the eastern border of mid-California. In Eocene times, 30 million years ago, it was widespread in northern temperate regions, including Britain. Being now so reduced and confined, it might be expected to be one of the less adaptable trees, whereas, in these islands at least, it thrives in as wide a range of conditions as any tree. In Britain, the tallest Wellingtonia is on the Devon-Cornwall border, but the biggest in volume, and itself 150 feet tall, is well north of Inverness, in Easter Ross. Others of 150 feet are in Wester Ross, Kirkcudbright, South-western Scotland, and the New Forest. Although it has little experience of high winds in its native valleys, in this windy quarter of the world, the Wellingtonia is the one truly wind-firm tree that has never been known to blow down. And this despite the fact that it towers above the shelter of its neighbours in so many exposed places. It is true that the recent hurricane in Argyll tipped one over at Benmore, but this had long been a leaning tree, so does not really count fully against it, and all the other trees in a long avenue of them there, withstood the full force of the gale.

On the first of our two tours around Ireland, sponsored jointly by the Irish Forestry Division, the British Forestry Commission, and John Murray, Publishers, and greatly facilitated by the Irish Forestry Division in all ways, the Wellingtonia was found to be markedly best developed in the east Midlands of Ireland and in Co. Wicklow. It seemed to be absent from Co. Kerry, and nearly so in Co. Cork. On the second tour, we found much the same, but we did find one in Co. Kerry, and added Co. Waterford to the area of the biggest trees.

The Wellingtonia was introduced to Britain, and thence to Europe, in 1853. There were two lots of seed, the first collected by J. Matthew in the Calaveras Grove, was sent in August to his estate, Gourdiehill, in Perthshire, and the second, collected by William Lobb for Veitch's of Exeter, from the same grove, arrived in December. They are said to be the first introduction by the fast steamship mail, and both lots were highly fertile. Immense numbers of trees were distributed all over Britain from them. It seems not to be on record, but there can be no doubt that some came to Ireland. One recorded as planted in 1855 at Coollattin, Co. Wicklow, must have been. Unfortunately the tree we found there must, from earlier figures, be a younger tree.

1. Research Branch, British Forestry Commission.

The most westerly specimen we found, is a relatively young tree a hundred yards from the Lake at Muckross Abbey gardens, near Killarney. It is 80 ft. high x 12 ft. 8 in. in girth. In Co. Cork we found two, both at the incomparable Fota, the larger was 107 ft. x 16 ft. 5 in. In the midlands, a very large tree at Birr Castle has been damaged at the top by lightning, like so many in England, but will no doubt repair itself in time. The bole has a girth of 22 ft. 6 in. To the north, at Castle Forbes, Co. Longford, is one now 98 ft. x 15 ft. 8 in. This has added only 20 in. to its girth since 1931, which indicates a slow rate of growth in this region. In Co. Limerick, growth of the only tree measured was also slow. This tree, at Adare Manor, was 55 ft. x 6 ft. 7 in. in 1891; 82 ft. x 14 ft. in 1931, and is now 95 ft. x 16 ft. 10 in. In Co. Laois, growth is somewhat more rapid, and the trees are larger. A rather slender tree at Stradbally House is 110 ft. x 14 ft. 6 in., while an avenue about a mile long, at Emo Park, with a tree each side every 20 yards or so, protruding into severe exposure above the woods, has trees from 95 to 120 feet tall. The greatest girth noted is 18 ft. 4 in., and the exposure has had little apparent effect so far. At Abbeyleix, a *Wellingtonia* planted in 1866 was 45 ft. x 6 ft. when 25 years old. Now 102 years old, the tree 95 ft. x 19 ft. 5 in. In Co. Carlow, at Fenagh House, two trees are 83 ft. x 19 ft. 3 in. and 120 ft. x 14 ft. 6 in. Their increases in girth since 1931 have been 48 and 76 inches respectively.

In Co. Kilkenny, Inistioge is an exceptionally good site for the growth of many conifers, including the coastal redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*), which here is larger than anywhere else in these islands. Its relative, the *Wellingtonia* is, however, far from outstanding, the two there being 108 ft. x 14 ft. 6 in. and 120 ft. x 16 ft. 1 in.

In Co. Waterford, the big *Wellingtonias* start east of Clonmel, at Gurteen le Pcer, where there is a square planting of four among a splendid collection of large conifers. The two southern corner trees are 128 ft. x 19 ft. 11 in. and 126 ft. x 16 ft. 6 in., both with good spire tops that look capable of a much greater height. The other two trees are a little smaller. Further east, at Curraghmore there are even bigger trees. A widely spaced group of mixed Sitka spruce, Nordmann's fir and *Wellingtonias*, includes three of the last species all at least 130 feet tall. The largest of them is 135 ft. x 19 ft. 2 in. although the Sitkas make it look small! Across the road from this distinguished group are two more, 120 feet tall, one 21 in girth, the other 22 feet. This last is the only one big enough to be tree which was 106 ft. x 19 ft. 8 in. in 1931, and which was planted in 1871. Therefore those in the group are probably a little more recent than that. Another, near the House, is 115 ft. x 19 ft. 8 in.

In Co. Wicklow, west of the mountains, there are two slender trees at Humewood Castle, the larger now 123 ft. x 16 ft. 3 in. In the foothills of the south, Kilmacurragh has two trees, the larger

110 ft. x 19 ft. 3 in., and Coollattin has one 125 ft. x 15 ft. 8 in., which was 96 ft. x 9 ft. 9 in. in 1931. By the coast to the south-east, at Clonmannon, it is noteworthy that a *Wellingtonia* planted in 1926 is now 78 ft. x 9 ft. 5 in., which seems a praiseworthy effort, but a coastal redwood beside it and planted at the same time, has the remarkable size of 79 ft. x 12 ft. 11 ins. In the eastern foothills, at Shelton Abbey is a shapely tree of 130 ft. x 14 ft. 7 in., now struggling in acrid fumes from a fertiliser factory. Further north, at Fassaro House are two fine trees from the original seed of 1853 at least, although Mr. John Barrington, whose family planted them, has some evidence that they have been from an earlier, unknown source. Unfortunately the date indicated by this evidence is before the tree was known to be discovered. The larger of these two has lost its top but is 95 feet tall, and has a splendid bole 22 ft. 2 in. in girth. Not far away, at Glencormac are two more, both 110 feet tall, and the larger 21 ft. 1 in. in girth.

It is at Powerscourt, nearby, that the finest *Wellingtonias* are found. A long line of them was planted by the river in 1861. One, near the House end of the line is 140 ft. x 16 ft. 11 in., and two at the far end are 130 ft. x 23 ft. 5 in. and 124 ft. x 25 ft. 10 in. In a strip of wood by the river, a little further along, is another of 140 ft. x 16 ft. 11 in. Of the several others in the gardens, the finest is that in the Tower Garden, which is 122 ft. x 21 ft. 3 in.