

Annual Study Tour 1971

The 1971 Study tour of the Society took place in Fermanagh and Tyrone on 25th-27th May. While the Belfast Forestry Division, our host, was fully represented at all levels, there was a notable and regrettable absence of senior officers from the Dublin Forest and Wildlife Service.

The tour was based at the Carlton Hotel, Belleek, charmingly located on the banks of the Erne, and the quartering and provisioning arrangements were up to the usual impeccable standard, under the direction of Miss Lily Furlong, in the unavoidable absence abroad of the Convenor, Mr. Fergal Mulloy. A tower of strength also in running the tour was Mr. Jim Mackin. A problem in logistics caused by the absence of the bus was efficiently overcome on the third day. Our leader and guide for most of the tour was Mr. J. C. L. Phillips, Regional Officer in charge of the West of Northern Ireland.

The first morning was spent in Ballentempo forest (Foresters: Messrs. J. Doran and P. McAlonen), where Dr. D. A. Dickson of the Chemical Research Division, Ministry of Agriculture, demonstrated a range of manuring experiments conducted jointly with the Forestry Division. The effects on Sitka spruce on blanket peat of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and ground limestone were shown, and deficiency symptoms relating to N, P and K were also seen. There was some suggestion that the problem of nitrogen nutrition of trees on peat may be more intractable than was hitherto believed.

In the afternoon we visited Castle Caldwell Forest (Forester: Mr. G. Cunningham). The main interest was in a series of thinning plots in *Abies grandis* and *Tsuga heterophylla*, demonstrated by Mr. C. N. Parker, District Officer, Fermanagh. The subsequent discussion centred on a possible management policy of no thinning. Following this a talk on the wildlife management of the estate was given by Messrs. S. White (R.S.P.B.) and McLean (Wildlife Officer).

An interesting item at the old Estate gate was a violin-shaped stone commemorating a certain "fidler", Denis McCabe, who, having drunk well but unwisely, was drowned off a barge in Lough Erne in August, 1770.

On Tuesday night the party was entertained to dinner by the Ministry of Agriculture. The Minister was represented by Mr. Malcolm, Assistant Secretary, who welcomed the Society on his behalf.

Wednesday was spent in Baronscourt forest (Foresters: S. Raphael, J. Milligan and D. Drew) and estate. The history of the forest was given by Mr. W. Wright, District Officer. The first stop was in a series of thinning plots in Sitka spruce, demonstrated by Mr. P. Savill, Research Officer, Forestry Division. This was followed by a visit to the respacing trial in Sitka spruce, which is the subject of Dr. W. Jack's paper elsewhere in this issue.

Lunch on this day was taken in the splendour of Baronscourt Castle (through the courtesy of the Duke of Abercorn and his staff) under the somewhat awesome gaze of the family portraits, including a magnificent Gainsborough. After a comprehensive and lucid description of the Estate's activities by the Land Agent, Mr. R. A. L. Waller, we visited the splendid *Azalea* garden. This was followed by a look at an area where dense laurel and rhododendron scrub had been cleared by bulldozer, and finally a visit to some plots of *Nothofagus*, which are a feature of the estate.

On Thursday morning we went to Lisnaskea forest (Foresters: Messrs. K. McDonald and C. Collins), where most of the available time

was spent looking at and discussing a "stem number reduction" trial, one of a series organized on an international basis by the International Union of Forest Research Organisations. Again the subject of no-thinning on fertile but shallow rooting soils was intensively discussed.

The whole of Thursday afternoon was spent on a visit to the extensive operations of Ballycassidy Sawmills Ltd., situated on a runway of the old Enniskillen Airfield. The softwood operations are geared specifically to deal with the small-dimension material now becoming available from wartime and post-war plantings. Its present input averages about 370 tons (about 11,500 Hoppus feet, 415 cu m). We were most hospitably received and shown around by the Managing Director, Mr. George Kidney, and Mr. R. F. Sheridan, who manages the buying and transport to the mill of round timber. The party was most impressed by the care taken at all stages to eliminate wastage.

The tour ended on Thursday evening with the Society's Annual Dinner, presided over by Mr. H. M. FitzPatrick, in the course of which a piece of sawn *Pinus contorta* timber, a rarity in those parts, supplied by Mr. Seamus Galvin, was solemnly presented to the representative of Ballycassidy Sawmills.

A welcome feature of the 1971 Study Tour was the comprehensive, informative, and well-produced 64-page tour handbook supplied to each participant.