

# Meetings

## **International Peat Congress—Helsinki**

The fourth International Peat Congress was held in Helsinki, Finland from 25th to 30th June, 1972. Three Irish foresters attended, two from Northern Ireland and one from the Republic.

Papers contributed to the formal sessions of the Congress have been published by the International Peat Society in 4 volumes. They deal respectively with Virgin Peatlands; Peat Industry; Agriculture, Horticulture and Forestry and Peat Chemistry and Physics.

Two associated tours in south Finland were of particular relevance to forestry and dealt mainly with the classification of peatlands and drainage.

Many Finnish peatlands are raised bogs; there are no climatic blanket bogs. Classification is based on A. K. Cajander's system in which potential site productivity is determined by natural vegetation types. Modern adaptations recognise 3 main divisions: open peatlands, pine swamps and spruce swamps. These are subdivided according to ground vegetation. Years of research, particularly into the effects of drainage and more recently on fertilisers have made it possible to predict in economic terms the effects of treatments applied to some sites.

Responses to drainage of bogs in terms of tree growth are remarkable by Irish standards. This is largely because over most of Finland precipitation is about 600 mm a year much of which falls in the winter months. Summers are relatively hot and dry so that following drainage at 50-70 m spacings and 70 cm deep the peat surface decomposes releasing nutrients, particularly nitrogen. For comparison, in the west and north of Ireland precipitation is about 1,200-2,000 mm and much more evenly spread throughout the year. These conditions favour the formation of blanket bogs and to date little, if any, response has been detected to far more intensive drainage regimes.

Although drainage in Finland results in substantially lower water tables, tree roots do not penetrate to depths greater than about 10-15 cm. This is similar to rooting depths found on peat in Ireland, but Finland, unlike Ireland, does not suffer from gales and wind-thrown crops.

P. S. Savill

## **Grassland or Forestry, Blessington**

A symposium entitled *Grassland or Forestry for Marginal Land*, organised by the Irish Society of Agronomy and Land Use, was held at Blessington, Co. Wicklow on 21st April 1972. Five separate

papers were presented, each followed by a discussion. Mr. J. Mulqueen of the Agricultural Institute in a paper on *Grazing Potential on Wet Drumlins* stressed the extreme impermeability of these soils, which cover an area of about 1.2 million acres in the Republic, and the great difficulty, if not impossibility, of achieving any degree of satisfactory drainage in them.

*The Place of Forestry on Marginal Land* was the title of a paper given by Mr. N. Morris of the Forest and Wildlife Service, in the course of which he showed that in such areas the employment content of forestry is at least as good as that of agriculture. He also adverted to the overproduction of agricultural produce in Europe and the high cost in subsidies.

Mr. B. C. Hickey of the Agricultural Institute gave a paper entitled *Economic Aspects of Grazing and Forestry on Marginal Lands*. This was a rather pioneering attempt to make a direct economic comparison between the two enterprises. He found that on wet drumlin land a random sample of farms showed a lower rate of return than that obtainable from forestry.

One of the most interesting comments of the symposium was that made by one contributor who, besides farming in a big way, also acts as a financial consultant and advisor. He suggested that, taking current inflation rates into account, a discount rate of 2.5-3.0% might be more realistic for forestry calculations. He pointed out that an investment of £100-£120 in afforestation in Leitrim could purchase a present value of about £350 when discounted at 3.5%. This would be very attractive to an investor who was not too concerned about short-term income.

N. O'Carroll