

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

Your editorial on p.6 in the most recent number of 'Irish Forestry' (Vol. 44; No. 1) puts a very important question to Irish forestry in particular, but essentially to the whole of the people on this "green and misty isle" of ours.

I could summarise the problem by quoting you — 'The question then arises — to what degree is the argument of "the common good" to be allowed to conflict with the objective of wealth generation through efficient timber production'.

As in most cases of head-on confrontation, an acceptable solution is most likely to be achieved through some kind of compromise, but as a prelude to realistic discussion, it seems essential that whatever Forestry Acts now govern the area of national policy, they should be given a thorough overhaul.

When the Coolattin oakwoods debacle first made the headlines, I was astounded at the deafening silence from the Society and from our academics. Are we back to the bad old days when forestry policy was dictated by "faceless bureaucrats"? Are there no lingering feelings of guilt in regard to the felling of Lady Gregory's historic house at Coole?

Apart from family roots in Gort, my memory is still clear enough to recall the final weeks of the Forestry degree course in U.C.D., when in about May 1941, as part of the "Grand Tour" (by bicycle), four of us stayed for a week in Gort and visited Coole Park. The big house was standing in its prime, unoccupied then, but with no broken panes of glass or other signs of deterioration. A grand-piano could be seen in the centre of a deserted lounge. The next time I visited Coole, there was not a stone left upon a stone. The Yahoos had struck.

In the case of the Coolattin oak, I am astounded that a clear-felling method was sanctioned. Conceding that most of the oak was mature, maybe some of it over-mature; and allowing that, in the final analysis, one grows timber for ultimate use, I still fail to see why a stipulation was not included in the Felling Licence (I assume there had to be one) to ensure that individual trees were removed in such a manner as to cause the least amount of damage to the oncoming generation of younger trees.

There are no marvellous skills required in this kind of situation: any trained forester would take it in his stride. As well as leaving

some of the trees for side and overhead shelter, he would also ensure the survival of suitably-spaced parent trees for regeneration of the forest area. This, however, is leaving out our Yahoo.

Current indications are that the moneybags are moving in on Irish forestry. A couple of months ago, my early morning radio alarmed me with the news that the Bank of Ireland was buying some area of the nation's State Forest inheritance. I am assuming this is true and not just some form of kite-flying. I ask myself if there is anyone at the tiller or are we just drifting?

Can we get something moving urgently on a complete revision of whatever 'Forestry Act' there may be? I feel the legal and constitutional/policy aspects of this matter are of vital importance, as without proper controls, Irish forestry may end up in a big shambles.

Meanwhile, I am hoping that the C.B.T.R. (Cheque Book Timber Realists) will keep their greedy eyes off Killarney until such time as satisfactory controls can be established.

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(In the interest of brevity editor reserves the right to shorten letters).

Erratum: In the 'Letter to the Editor' of the Autumn 1987 issue of the journal there were two errors in first box of statistics. The corrected box is printed below. The editor regrets the mistake.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Ownership	Conifer	Broadleaf					Total (2+7)
		High Forest		Scrub		Total Broad- leaf	
		Non Protected	Protected*	Non- Burren Type	Burren Type**		
State	309,839	12,509	2,700	1,213	250	16,672	326,511
Private	17,610	32,347	—	33,102	22,498	87,947	105,557
Total	327,449	44,856	2,700	34,315	22,748	104,619	432,068

*Includes 1,700 ha of woodland in statutory nature reserves and about 1,000 ha of forest in national parks.

**Burren (Co. Clare): a region of 45,000 ha of carboniferous rock outcrop.