

Report on the Society of Irish Foresters Annual Study Tour to Northern Ireland, 1996

Tuesday, 4th June

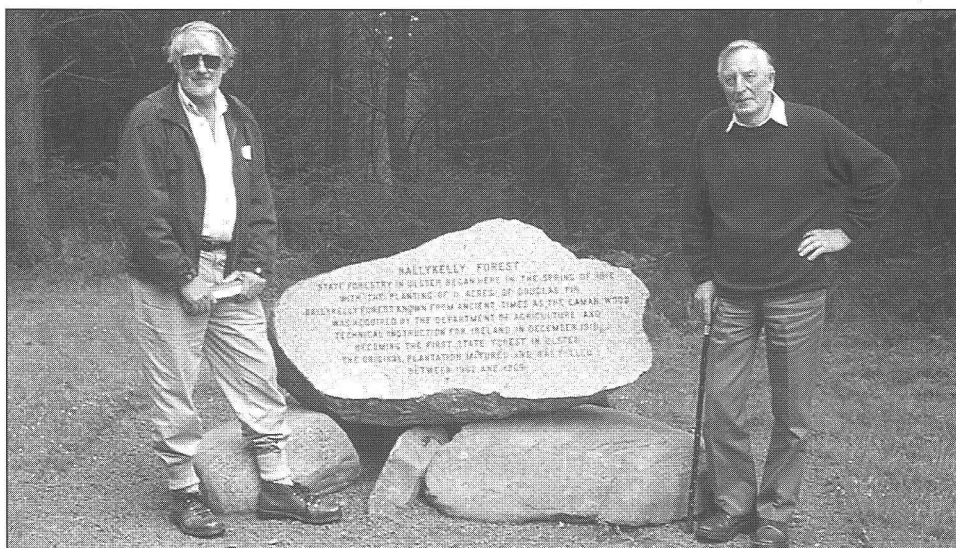
The group of 45 left Dublin that morning and travelled directly to Enniskillen. There we were met by our hosts for the afternoon, George Kidney, Brendan Friel and other members of staff from Balcas Ltd., before being treated to an excellent lunch at the Killyhevlin Hotel. Afterwards, we were taken to the Balcas plant in Enniskillen where we were given a comprehensive tour of the facility, from log intake and bark stripping to a variety of processing and drying procedures. After dinner that evening, Bill Wright, Chief Forest Officer with the Northern Ireland Forest Service, presented the group with an account of forestry in Northern Ireland, followed by a talk by Ian Wright-Turner on forestry in Co. Fermanagh.

Wednesday, 5th June

The morning's topics included short rotation coppice and its potential for energy production. Ground preparation and establishment techniques for Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis* (Bong.) Carr.) on gley soils were examined later that morning at Kesh Forest. The afternoon began with a visit to Coolavanagh Forest, to examine experimental plots of P1992 poplar clones grown for pulp and ready for harvesting after 15 years. At Baronscourt Forest, various respacing experiments were visited, where the discussion widened to emphasise the long term nature and importance of forest research. Baronscourt Estate, one of the largest private estate woodlands in Northern Ireland, was the final stop of the day. As well as forestry, the estate boasts a farm, a Christmas tree enterprise and a garden centre. Other features include a beautiful Victorian garden and the largest Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris* L.) in Ireland, planted in 1830. Following dinner that evening, Cecil Kilpatrick, an Honorary Member of the Society, led the group on a historic tour of the walls of Derry.

Thursday 6th June

Ballykelly Forest, locally known as 'Caman Wood' in reference to its long tradition of supplying hurleys, was the first stop of the day. It is suspected that oak may have been taken from the wood and used in the construction of the Houses of Parliament. Harvesting and extraction were the main themes at Springwell Forest, where a 'no-thin' policy is observed due to the threat of windthrow. Felling in the 1980s presented an opportunity to restructure the forest and to enhance its natural features. The importance of 'conservation corridors' and public consultation and involvement were also stressed. Afterwards, a visit to Slieveanorra Forest included an examination of a number of issues including fertilisation of Sitka spruce stands on nutrient-poor sites, the effect of herbicides and fertilisation on height growth, the importance of drainage and the nutritional requirements of stands at different rates of growth. The group visited the beautiful North Antrim coast and the remarkable Giant's Causeway on its way to Belfast that evening.



Cecil Kilpatrick, former Chief of the Northern Ireland Forest Service, Honorary Member and former President of the Society, with Dr Gerhardt Gallagher, President, in Ballykelly Forest.

Friday, 7th June

Multi-use forest management in the Down/Armagh district was the theme for the day's activities. It involved visits to Gosford, Castlewellan and Tollymore Forest Parks, where our leaders described forest management in areas of high public recreation and amenity. These properties include extensive areas for recreation, camping and caravanning, in addition to other attractions such as the National Arboretum at Castlewellan. The annual tour dinner was held that evening.

Saturday, 8th June

The final morning of the tour dealt with urban and community forestry. The main objective of these forests is to create a woodland amenity for the benefit of the surrounding public, incorporating active community consultation and participation. The first visit of the day was made to the 80 acre Belvoir Park Forest, which caters for approximately 400,000 visitors annually. Facilities at Belvoir include a lecture room, forest trails, forest guides, displays and other educational facilities. The tour concluded with an interesting account of the Forest of Belfast project, a city-wide urban forestry initiative aimed at promoting tree planting by local communities and at improving the quality of urban tree management through the orchestrated involvement of a wide range of public and voluntary bodies. The visit concluded with a guided bus 'tree-tour' through the streets of Belfast, where the concerns and work of the Forest of Belfast could be observed at first hand.

Tom McDonald