

To-morrow's Guided Forest Walk at Curraghchase, Adare, is Organised by the Society of Foresters in Co-operation with the State Forest Services

# "DOWN IN THE FOREST"

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In recent years many of the State Forests have been opened to visitors for recreation. This is a boon which will be appreciated by all lovers of the countryside who want to get off the public highways. On the quiet tracks, which lead through the woods, they will find much of interest and gain some insight into the practice of silviculture and forest management.

## A Haven of Peace

The value of forests for recreation is immense. They are nearly all in places of great natural beauty — in mountain glens with tumbling water-falls, on the shores of lakes or on hills giving panoramic views over open countryside. The rare ideal for walking and climbing, and in many of them the Forest Services have made special provision for public enjoyment. There are marked paths or "trails" to points of interest, viewpoints, picnic sites with tables and benches, drinking water, shelters, car parks, camping and caravan ground, and in some places, swimming pools. These facilities give scope for all kinds of recreation, and all promise tranquility and safety away from the noise and danger of the roads.

## Impressive Progress

A forest walk is an opportunity for people to see the progress which has been made in forestry — afforestation stands alone as a form of state expenditure, which shows visible growth, and citizens have the satisfaction of looking at half a century's tree planting, with the oldest woods now a hundred feet and more in height.

One point that will strike the visitor is that the trees are mainly evergreen conifers; dark, and in the minds of many, rather gloomy looking in their early stages of development. The Irish forester's hands are tied when it comes to the choice of species to plant. The land which comes his way is rarely good enough to support Oak, Beech, Ash, Elm and other "old-fashioned" trees.

He deals with soils too poor for any of these "hardwoods" — in this agricultural country land bought for forestry at a small price is always of low fertility — and he must turn to the less exacting conifers.

## Wealth of Species

Fortunately, we in Ireland have a wealth of world conifer species to choose from, hardy, easily satisfied, fast growing trees which thrive in our climate. More fortunately still, these species produce the kind of timber most in demand, the "softwoods" or "deal" used in house building, paper-making, the manufacture of chip-board and hard-board and for pallets, packing cases and other industrial uses which consume enormous quantities of wood.

Our forests are truly international gatherings: Spruces from Europe and America, Douglas Fir from Vancouver, and Japanese Larch from the Far East, Scots Pine and Swiss larch grow in happy mixture, Eucalyptus from Australia overtop the native Oak in the Wicklow Hills and Himalayan Deodar Cedars thrive on the Galtees at Glengarra in Co. Tipperary.

## Knowing One From Another

The identification of conifers can be bewildering when met for the first time. To the novice

they all look much alike. Getting to know all the species which grow in Ireland would take years but the species commonly used in commercial forestry are relatively few, and naming them correctly calls for merely the slightest close observation. General appearances is a poor guide — what counts is the shape of the leaves and the mode of attachment to the twigs. Let us look at a few:—

A. Leaves in twos, bound together at the base. These are pines, Scots Pine



## A Diminishing Army

Trees are planted in regular rows, evenly spaced at 5 or 6 feet apart so that their foliage may quickly shade the ground and smother grass and weeds which might over-grow them. At this original spacing there are far more trees than can survive to maturity. At 15 or 20 years of age, depending on rate of growth, some will have to be removed to allow those remaining to develop. This first thinning yields poles 3 or 4 inches in diameter, good only for fencing or for pulping or chipping. Later thinnings will give heavier poles, the thick ends of which can be sawn into boards and the thinner material sold to the factories.

This process of thinning goes on at intervals of 3, 4 or 5 years throughout the life-time of a plantation until the initial stock of 1,200 trees at 6' apart or 1,750 at 5' apart on an acre is reduced to about 700 at 18 years, 500 at 21 years, 250 at 30 years and 125 at 50 years when in most cases the ground will be cleared and replanted. Hence for every ten trees that are planted only one grows to maturity.

A good acre of Sitka spruce will produce up to 400 tons of timber over its span of 50 years.

All the older Irish plantations are now in production. In recent years, close on 300,000 tons of timber have been felled annually in the whole of Ireland for sawing in the mills and for manufacture in the factories in Athy, Scariff, Waterford, Coleraine and Clondalkin, besides supplying many thousands of telephone and electricity transmission poles.

## Wildlife of the Woods

Woodlands are the natural refuge of many kinds of birds and animals, and the observant visitor will see much of interest in a walk through a forest. Old woods, or new plantations which follow them on the same sites, especially when they are of hardwoods in the fertile lowlands, usually abound in wildlife.

The build-up of birds and beasts on newly planted waste lands in the hills, however, is usually painfully slow, doubly so in areas of Spruce or Contorta Pine. These species cast a heavy shade which forbids the growth of grasses and shrubs which develop under lighter foliated trees such as Larch and Scots Pine, and provide food for many kinds of birds and for deer and other mammals. Nut-eating squirrels appear when the trees are old enough to yield nuts or cones, and shells and scales will often be seen where a red or grey squirrel has had a meal.

The Forest Services encourage this animal life, much of which is useful in controlling insect pests. Numbers of hare, deer and squirrels are reduced only when damage to trees is excessive. Game is preserved on all forests and attention is given to the provision of "keep" for deer, notably grass and brambles and other shrubs for browsing. Our forests support Fallow Deer, Red Deer, and Japanese Sika Deer in 60 or 70 districts. Fallow are the most common, Red being found only in Kerry, Wicklow and Donegal, while Sika are only in Kerry, Tyrone and Wicklow. Grouse are favoured by burning and fertilising strips of heather on land too high, too exposed or too poor to support trees. Pheasants are often plentiful in forests composed of old estate woods which lie in the midst of arable fields and, of course, wild

pigeons or "woodquists" are everywhere.

Visitors should never forget that the purpose of afforestation is the production of timber. Millions of pounds has been spent buying land and stocking it with trees, and this expenditure can be justified only by an economic return.

Enormous quantities of foreign wood, paper, cardboard and other forest products are used in Ireland, and the duty of the Forest Service is to replace these imports with home-grown materials. This is the aim of all management; other benefits are incidental. The grassy roads which curve so invitingly around a hillside, and the many paths branching from them through the trees, are for the carriage of timber and for the inspection of plantations by the foresters — they are grand for the walker, too, but that is by way of bonus.

## Take Care

Public access to forests has its risks. The greatest danger is fire. Withered grass, furze bushes, dead branches, are all inflammable, and a cigarette end, a glowing match or a pipe knocked out can easily start one. So can a picnic fire. Great care is necessary at all times, and especially in the early summer before a fresh growth of grass has covered the dead vegetation of the previous year. Straying farm animals, can do

great harm in nurseries and young plantations, so keep all gates closed.

And litter! Waste paper does not harm the trees, but it ruins the look of a forest. Everybody loves to see the unspoiled beauty of a glade full of bluebells in spring, the ferns and wild flowers along a path in summer, or the golden carpet of autumn under a larch wood — why spoil it with a cigarette packet, an empty tin, or a scatter of wrapping papers?

## Conclusion

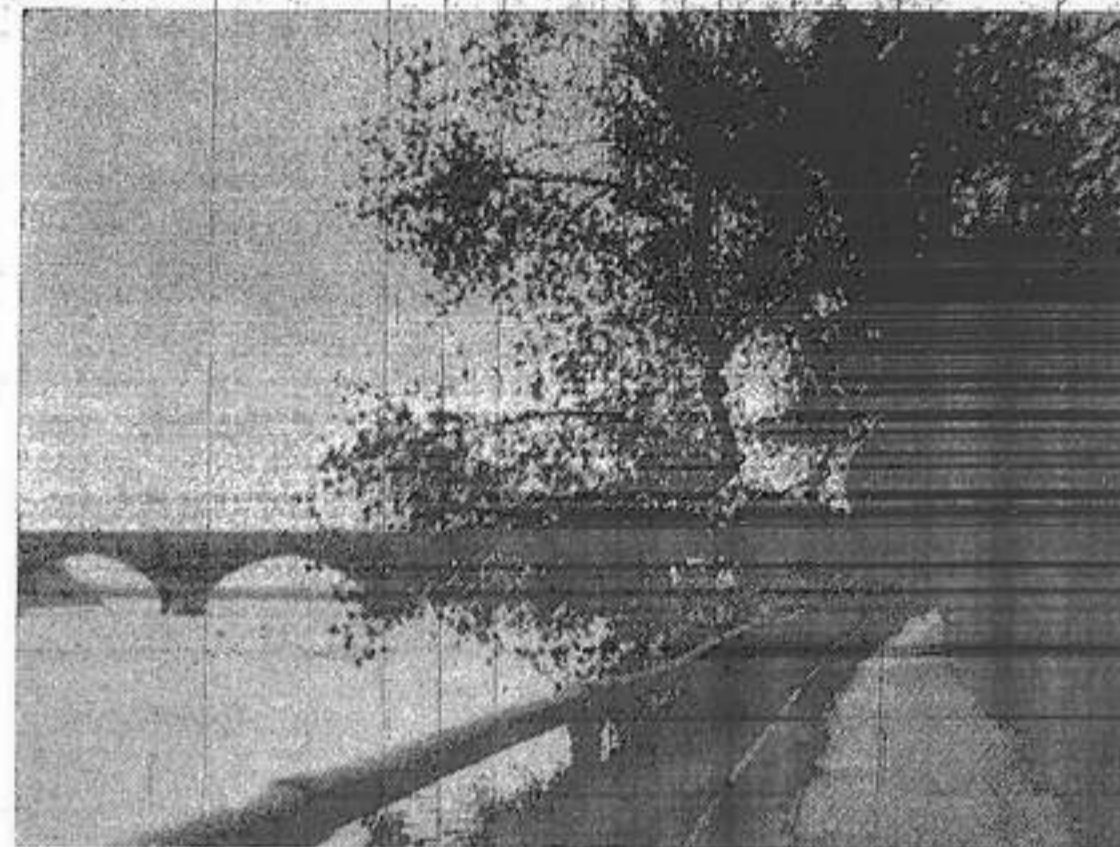
The State foresters of the whole of Ireland now cover almost 31% of the land area of the island (the lowest percentage of any country in Europe).

They represent a wise and fruitful investment for Irishmen, and are already showing a profitable return on the capital invested. Government policy is to double the forest area of Ireland by the end of the century.

In a world where living standards are improving, the demand for timber and its derivatives is increasing steadily. Our forests aim at supplying some of this demand as well as providing a tranquil retreat for all forms of life, both human and wild.

They are in the final analysis a resource which contributes to the wellbeing of all our citizens. In this European Conservation year we have the opportunity of seeing what this contribution is by visiting one of our state forests; forests which you helped to build.

PICTURES BY STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



A pleasant walk by the banks of the Shannon at Corbally.

