VISIT OF TIMBER DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

ARDGARTAN - 5th SEPTEMBER 1959

Since the establishment of the Forestry Commission in 1919, planting has taken place at some 203 forests in Scotland, amounting to some 481,864 acres and the planting programme is at the rate of 30,000 for the next five years.

Ardgartan Forest, part of which lies below us here, is one of the major forests in the West Conservancy of Scotland and lies in the North Cowal District supervised by District Officer Mr. J.F. McGarva. The Forester in charge is Mr. D.J. MacRae who is assisted by three other Foresters.

The total area of plantations at Ardgartan is 5,353 and the annual planting programme is 350/400 acres. The plants required for such a programme are some 600,000, these being mainly raised at the nurseries of Benmore or Glenfinart near Dunoon and Ardentinny.

The very first plantings at Ardgartan were made in 1925, but there has been no regular rate of planting; much has depended on the acquisition of plantable land.

The correct choice of tree species for planting is of vital importance to the forester. Unlike the farmer, who can plant and reap his crop in one year, the forester must wait at least 20 years before any returns do come and possibly 50 to 70 years before his crop reaches maturity. The main species planted in the West are the Spruces (Norway and Sitka), Douglas Fir, Hybrid and Japanese Larch, Lodgepole Pine, Scots Pine and Silver Fir.

Trees are planted at from 5 feet to 6 feet apart so that their side branches will soon close together and exclude light from the forest floor thus killing off the vegetation which is competing with the tree for food and water from the soil. If the trees are kept close for a longer period the lower branches die off themselves. At the age of 12-15 years the forester "brashes" or cuts off the lower dead branches by saw. This enables the forester to have access to his woods for management purposes and also prevents the further development of knots on the lower 6 feet of stem.

When the plantations reach the age of 15-18 years, some 30 feet in total height, it is generally necessary to thin out the plantations to give the better trees more room for root and crown development.

At Ardgartan the annual production of timber from thinnings is some 70,000 cubic feet (Hoppus) overbark and this is likely to increase considerably during the next five years.

As we are to discuss the thinning in greater detail at the next stop, I suggest we board the buses and drive slowly down tothe next stopping point. A brief description of the plantations passed through will be given as we drive along.