

The Irish Society Newsletter*

Specimen trees tall trees big trees old trees historical trees Champion trees—all kinds of remarkable trees

What do we do?

The Irish Tree Society byline says, "*Founded 1990 to promote appreciation of Specimen Trees.*" We have appreciated Specimen Trees in many ways but here are some of the most notable:

- ❖ The Tomnafinnogue Wood, Coolattin, Co. Wicklow was in danger of losing 2000 oak trees. The Irish Tree Society was the driving force to save the oak trees; we raised over £40,000 and successfully persuaded the government to raise the balance of £400,000 necessary for their preservation. Our Chairman, Thomas Pakenham was the Chairman of the joint appeal to save this wonderful wood (1993)
- ❖ Adaptation of the Tree Register of the British Isles computerised records of specimen Irish trees measured by Alan Mitchell to the Botanic Gardens data bank (1995)
- ❖ Printing of the West Cork Woodland Survey by An Taisce (1998)
- ❖ Every year the Society organises a series of trips to visit arboreta and gardens with tree appeal. On page 3 you can read some highlights of our May trip to Scotland. Other trips this year: April, Mount Congreve in Co. Waterford; June, Northern Ireland (several locations) and September, Powerscourt in Co. Wicklow. We get to hear from knowledgeable owners, head gardeners, and foresters about their trees and the general environment, something most of us can't do if we go tree watching on our own.
- ❖ An ongoing activity for the Society and the Tree Council of Ireland is the Tree Register of Ireland (TROI) project. As many of you know, this is to develop a computerised database of outstanding, historic and remarkable trees in the Irish landscape. The two year project is currently scheduled to end next March. Below is one example of what they found.



Aubrey Fennell is standing next to the Champion *Pinus sylvestris* Linnaeus (Scots pine) in Abbeyleix. At 5.58 m in girth, you might say, 'How could anyone miss it?' but the owner didn't realise it was hidden away at the back of the woods.

During the last year and a half, about 3/4 of the original measurements from Alan Mitchell have been updated and many new Champion trees have been uncovered. Some of these are not only Irish Champion trees, but Champions for the islands.

To join The Irish Tree Society contact the Secretary, Lough Park, Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath for a membership form. Annual single membership £10, joint membership £20.

**Edited by Marty Sanders who takes full responsibility for any misspellings or other errors, and apologises in advance for any misquotes of the good people who submitted material.*

The stories are many about people who love trees but never thought *their* big tree was special. The biggest yew, measuring 6.8 m in girth, grows in the front garden of a house in Co. Wexford, clearly showing that remarkable trees occur in practically every setting and possibly just outside your front door!

To date the tallest tree in the TROI database is a 57.5 m *Pseudotsuga menziesii* (Douglas fir) in Powerscourt, Co. Wicklow. (This was listed as 53.14 m in 'Trees of Ireland' by E. Charles Nelson and Wendy F. Walsh, published in 1993.) The largest girthed tree recorded to date is a *Cupressus macrocarpa* (Monterey cypress) in Innishannon, Co. Cork which is 11.2 m at the base.

Here's Aubrey again, this time with a *Fraxinus excelsior* L. (ash) near Clara, Co. Offaly measures 7.68 m in girth and to date holds the title of being the largest ash in Ireland. The owner was unaware of its Champion status.

TROI needs your help to finish the job. Very little data has been recorded about the trees that exist in the western counties (Clare, Galway, Mayo.) What special trees have you seen there that should be in the records? Ads in local papers are asking residents for help but as confirmed tree lovers, can you help?



To spread the word about Ireland's exceptional trees as widely as possible, two events are planned: a book and a website. The book is the brainchild of Ms. Dinah Browne, author of 'Our Trees', a guide to our native trees in the north and how to propagate them, and 'Our Remarkable Trees', (inspired in part by Thomas Pakenham's book) about old/historic/record trees in Northern Ireland. Both of these books are about to be updated to all Ireland versions. 'Our Remarkable Trees' will be retitled and include the information now being gathered for the TROI database. It should be out next year.

The Web site is still in the planning stage but will have pictures and descriptions of trees so people can see what remarkable trees are in their area, as well as forms which the viewer can submit for possible updates or additions to the database.

Aubrey Fennell and Frances McHugh are the hard workers who are measuring and recording data at TROI. They can be reached by phone at 01 284 9211 or at troi@treecouncil.ie. Dinah Browne's current books are available at £5 + £1 p+p from CVNI at Dendron Lodge, Clondeboy estate, Bangor, Co. Down, BT19 1RN.

Laurence Roche Memorial Fund

Larry Roche was a remarkable man and we miss him. We are poorer because he is not with us any more, but so much richer because he walked and talked with us for a while. Larry had great knowledge of trees and agriculture, and valuable experience with both. But perhaps more importantly, he was a gentleman in every sense of the word. His kindness and generosity of spirit added to his knowledge to create real wisdom—a rare commodity.

We encourage you to join us in contributing to his memorial fund to help Larry's work continue, even though he has left us. This fund will go wholly to help relieve poverty in rural Ethiopia, a place dear to Larry in life. Donations may be sent to the Laurence Roche Memorial Fund at:

Natwest Bank, 20 Amhurst Rd, London E8 1QZ (sort code 60 12 18, acct. no. 61809373), or Ulster Bank plc, 95 O'Connell St, Limerick (sort code 98 60 20, acct. no. 71074047), or care of Felicity Roche, Madaboy, Murroe, Co. Limerick, Ireland.

Irish Tree Society millennium wood

A brand new project that needs your help is The Irish Tree Society millennium wood, 10 acres of oak woodland to be, jointly sponsored by Thomas Pakenham and the Society. This is on the north shore of Lake Derravaragh (Lake of the Oaks) in Co. Westmeath, 2 miles from Castlepollard. The property goes down to the water's edge, with a view 6 miles down the lake. It can be reached by public road.

The area was once covered in natural oaks (*Quercus petraea* and *Quercus robur*). Our goal is to cover it again with these natural oaks, this time from all the regions of Ireland. Last year 5,000 acorns were collected from Tullyally, to be potted on by Coillte, who will plant them next year.

We are calling on some of our members to collect at least 1,000 acorns each for the next planting. The goal is ultimately to plant 20,000 native oaks so we need plenty of acorns. Collections should be from good quality trees from a registered site and location of the trees must be given so that the county can be recorded. If you are interested in collecting acorns this autumn, please phone Liam O'Flanagan at 044-61226 for further instructions.

NOTE: The Tullyally estate will be responsible for all expenses for planting and maintenance of the new wood. All or part will be reimbursed from state forestry grants. The Irish Tree Society will not own the property or have to pay anything.

Speaking of planting trees from acorns, we thank Patrick Forde of Seaforde Nursery in Co. Down for this article telling us how to do it. A few paragraphs can't tell the whole story but this is a good start.

Trees and shrubs grown from seed

Though many trees and shrubs can be grown or cloned by cuttings, grafts, layers and micropropagation, some cannot easily. In addition, it is only by growing from seed that we obtain interesting genetic variations. When sowing seed the golden rule is to discover what happens in nature. Some seeds are blown by the wind and land some distance from the parent, like maples. Some like oaks fall beneath the parent, though like acorns they may be carried by harvesting animals to be stored through the winter. Many fleshy fruits will be eaten by birds and the hard seed secreted later.

The first essential is not to let the seed dry out, especially oaks and chestnuts. These should be overwintered in moist sandy compost where they will have the winter temperatures and will be ready to germinate in the spring.

The fleshy fruits such as sorbus and magnolia should have their outer flesh and skins removed as these are an inhibitor to germination. Again, if kept cool then given warmth as in a greenhouse, they should germinate in spring. Some hard seeds such as acacia can be speeded up by soaking in warm water.

The two cardinal rules to remember are that seed does not germinate in the packet, and do not let the seed trays dry out, though care must be taken not to overwater.

Highlights of trip to Scotland

The trip to Scotland was to David Douglas territory so Sunday evening we listened to a scintillating talk about David Douglas by Mr. Sid House. David Douglas was born at Scone and after apprenticeship as a gardener, went on to become an expert botanist, thanks to William Jackson Hooker, the celebrated Professor of Botany at Glasgow University.

Sponsored by the London Horticultural Society he travelled extensively to the northeastern United States, then to the west coast where he explored and botanised. Douglas sent back many seeds and plants to London and Scone, soon becoming famous. But praise preceded neglect, (as it so often does).

He wasn't wanted for botany anymore but did return in 1830 to North America to survey the Columbia River. After extensive travels to Alaska and other points north, he was in poor health and ready to come home. In Hawaii he was botanising when he fell into an animal trap and was killed by a bull caught in the trap. (There was also a suggestion he was murdered because of some woman or another, but this is mere speculation.) He died on 13 July, 1834 when he was only 35 years old.

David Douglas is most famous for the Douglas fir which bears his name, but if you want to know more about the man and his adventures, here are two autobiographies: David Douglas: 'Explorer and Botanist', 1999, by Sid House, ISBN 1 85410 5914 and 'All for a Handful of Seed', by Archie Smith, 1997, ISBN 1-900-489-08-2.

We went so many places in Eastern Scotland and saw so many trees (especially Douglas firs) that this can't be more than a few highlights. We thank profusely the following members who contributed many well-written words and interesting pictures, unfortunately way too many to include in these few paragraphs. Many thanks to David Dowsett, John Doyle, Paddie Mackie, Liam O'Flanagan, Michael Scott, Faith White and James White.

Just to say the names of where we went illustrates the many dimensions of this trip, so admirably arranged by Philip and Patsy Harvey, Mike and Jean Ashmole: Edinburgh Botanic Gardens, Blair Atholl, Taymouth estate, Fortingall, Hermitage, Dunkeld House forest, Murthly Castle, Glendoick, Rossie Priory, Erroll Park, Once A Tree, Branklyn Garden, Meikleour beech hedge, Scone Palace. And there were side trips, like to see the last surviving oak of Macbeth's Binnam Wood. A memorable trip. Some highlights:

After seeing the Botanic Gardens and getting settled at the hotel, we were hosted to a reception by the Perth Lord Provost, Mike O'Malley. (If that sounds to you remarkably Irish in a Scottish setting you are quite right. His Honour's parents were from Achill Island and he comes home frequently.)

Blair Castle was principal home to the Dukes of Atholl until the death of the 10th Duke in 1996. The family was virtually synonymous with two species of *Larix* (Larch), *L. Europaea* and *L. kaempferi*, but the estate is well-known for Diana's Grove, several acres of conifers, including some of the tallest in Britain. At Hermitage, another Atholl property, we saw what is perhaps the largest *Pseudotsuga menziesii* (Douglas fir) outside North America, purporting to be 65 m tall in 1994. (To put it in context, the tallest measured in Ireland is 57.5 m and the tallest in North America are reputed to be 93.5 m.)

Glendoick Gardens, the home and Business Centre of the Cox family, has a very large collection of rhododendrons, as well as Bhutan pines and other notable trees, such as a striking tree with chocolate coloured bark, one of the *Arctostaphylos* family. Mrs. Patricia Cox lead us from the front of the house through narrow pathways and the Woodland Garden to see rhododendrons everywhere—different shapes, colours, sizes. This really was a paradise of colour in a place that has had to come back from dying elms and honey fungus. It just goes to show what hard work and a touch of brilliance can overcome. Husband Peter and son Kenneth were off to China for more specimens which will surely wow us in the future.

Rossie Priory is the ancestral home of the Barons of Kinnaird. Directly below the castellated house in red sandstone is one of Scotland's oldest cricket pitches with an old-world timber built clubhouse with veranda and no bar. Our hostess, Mrs. Caroline Best took us all over the informally laid out property, introducing us to her trees. This is clearly a tree family—the children's middle names are all for trees (Willow, Jack, Douglas and Rowan.) This visit was a lesson in tree identification; not too surprisingly our experts were not always in agreement but it was educational for the rest of us to hear them go through the process of deciding.



Member John Doyle looking quite relaxed against these elegant wrought iron gates at Rossie Priory. There is another set of these gates at the other end of the walled garden, thereby allowing a carriage to pass through in fine style. A more gracious era?

However, we trudged along on foot, admiring fine *Picea smithiana*, as well as *Pinus jeffreyi* and other lovely specimen trees. Rossie Priory suffered very badly from the great storm of 1968, so it is a tribute to the Best's good stewardship that we could see so many fine trees in such excellent condition.

Our last visit on Thursday was to Erroll Park, home of Mr. Lewis Heriot-Maitland. Michael Scott ended our visit with, "You suggested, modestly, that having already seen three tree collections today we might well have had a surfeit of trees—nothing could be further from the truth. That was a bit like suggesting that after listening to the first three movements of Beethoven's 9th symphony, the audience might be bored and wish to dispense with the marvellous finale. That line of *Sequoiadendron giganteum* (*Wellingtonia*) is the most impressive I have seen outside California. Your massive *Pinus contorta* var. *latifolia* S. Wats (lodgepole pine, see right) makes the rather inferior specimens, which we grow in Northern Ireland, seem like a different species. I admit that some of us were rather tired when we arrived but your marvellous motto carved in stone, REVIRISCAM (we live again), brought us back to life.'



Branklyn Garden is a plantsman's garden created by Dorothy and John Renton. The main joy of Branklyn is in the overall layout with winding, narrow paths and short views enticing the visitor onward. Many trees are used as part of the overall design, most notably the golden form of *Cedrus atlantica* 'Aurea' (Atlantic cedar), which is not very often seen in gardens. It stands out against the dark foliage of the tall *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Wisselii'. The conifer which carpets the ground beside the steps is Sargent's weeping hemlock: the botanical name for this has aroused considerable debate over the years—current opinion has it as *Tsuga canadensis* 'Prostrata'—but whatever its name, it is one of the most interesting dwarf conifers and it was interesting in this location.



A few final notes on Scotland: we were impressed with the 32' beech hedge at the Botanic Gardens, but wait till you see the 100' beech hedge at Meikleour (shown left). If you don't mind getting run over by buses while you gawk, it is certainly worth the visit.

Scone palace had several points of interest, such as Douglas firs planted from original seed collected by David Douglas. The largest Douglas fir of these originals is here, measuring 36.5 m tall. And a temple of trees at the arboretum. Huge conifers planted in measured rows creating a place of extraordinary stillness. It was like walking among the giants. Also, there is a new maze being created at Scone with a platform where you can watch poor unfortunates getting lost.

Mike Ashmole is shown here on the left with head forester Crawford Taylor—a native Scotsman—at the Scone Palace arboretum. A fitting end to a very special trip.

Mike did a wonderful job of organising this for us. We had a wide variety of stops and 'lessons to learn'. He and Jean went to every single place, timing the travel and the stops to make sure we had maximum exposure to trees, but some rest time too for enjoying the trip. We owe both of them a real debt of gratitude. Thank you from all of us.



Lastly, here are some judiciously edited excerpts from Michael Scott's thrilling saga about how he started his arboretum. It proves yet again that addiction is hard to cure and once you have it you don't always do the sensible thing. We hope to have an article in each issue on an arboretum started by a member. If you have one you would like to share with us in the next issue, please do get busy writing about it.

"I always wanted a tree garden"

We bought a seventeen-acre small-holding named Laurel Vale which already had many mature trees in the perimeter hedges, providing a readymade if somewhat patchy shelterbelt. The soil was deep and rich, having been used to grow barley and vegetables for many years. Most was well-drained with some boggy tracts around the margin.

With a grant from the Forestry Service, and the help of two forestry students, I planted two and a half hectares of native broad-leaved trees in a wide arc to the west and north of the property. But the obvious site for the tree garden was the rectangular field (47 m. x 132 m.) separating the existing small house from the road. It already sloped gently southwards with tall trees on either side. Standing on the road staring at the field of cauliflower, I tried to visualise a curving drive wending between stately trees from every continent leading to the as yet unbuilt Laurel Vale House. But visions require planning and hard cash to become reality. After we found out the cost of building our house, my wife, Maureen, set a spending limit of £2000 for the first year and £1000 annually for the next five years for the purchase and planting of trees. I decided to start with some large enough trees to take the bare look away, then add smaller saplings.

In 1992/1993 I bought examples of some of my favorites—*Cedrus libani*, *atlantica* and *deodara* (Cedar of Lebanon, Atlas or Algerian cedar, Deodar cedar); *Nothofagus obliqua* and *procera* (Roble beech and Rauli beech; a fine *Sequoiadendron giganteum* (Wellingtonia); a lofty *Eucalyptus globulus* (blue gum); and a sturdy *Liriodendron tulipifera* (tulip tree). At between £100 and £200 each, these rapidly used up the initial budget, but I just managed to afford a decent *Aesculus x carnea* (red horse chestnut), a *Juglans regia* (common walnut) and a lovely 10' *Fagus sylvatica* (common beech). These were followed by dozens of saplings of seed-grown chestnuts, oaks, beech and hazel.

The next year I planted several types of willow, poplar, birch and alder in the boggy bits. We tried to create order out of chaos, anticipating the final height and spread, the colour and the requirements for shelter for each tree, setting the large and darker trees near the edge and smaller and lighter trees near the drive. By buying smaller trees the budget permitted many more purchases than in the previous year and by the spring of 1994 the tree garden was filling up nicely and beginning to look a bit like an arboretum.

I should have stopped there. We had a beautiful tree and shrub garden with approximately 160 specimens of 110 different tree species; in their present juvenile stage they fit perfectly (although soon they will coalesce into a dense wood.) Three years ago I imposed a moratorium on planting but the need for a fix was too much and I now have approximately 100 more different species and varieties in the western arm of the arboretum.

Unfortunately, labelling is haphazard now with purchases recorded on hidden slips of paper. And at this stage, I have some doubt about the species for several pines and maples. So I propose the following: The Irish Tree Society should meet at our home; armed with approximately 250 labels we can agree on the name of each tree and label it. After which our esteemed president might do us the honour to plant a tree. We'll find space somewhere.

A reminder—we pay when you don't!

Nearly every event of the Irish Tree Society requires us to spend money. Money for head gardeners, foresters or owners to give us a guided tour. Money for gifts and gratuities. If the programme says something like, 'Charge £10 to Treasurer before 10th June.' That means £10 *per person* to cover the expenses and you should send it. [*The Treasurer does not feel he should be put in the position of bringing out his collection box. ☺*]

To comment on the newsletter, please contact the editor, Marty Sanders, 067-24987 or at martys@iol.ie. Even better, if you have a short article you would like to write for the next newsletter, we'd like to hear about it.