SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: DUNAMASE WOODS

SITE CODE: 001494

Two small, but prominent hills lie to the west of, and within 1km of, the Rock of Dunamase in Co. Laois. In both cases, unlike the Rock, drift deposits cover underlying limestone.

The main vegetation feature of the hills is woodland. The larger area (about 9ha) is found on the western most hill, where the main woodland tree is Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*), and the size of these trees bear witness to the age of the woodland. Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) is widespread and other trees present include non-native species such as Horse-chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) and Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). The soil is well drained and the ground flora, dominated by Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) with Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*), reflects this.

The smaller woodland to the east, known as 'Beech Wood' is essentially a similar mix of native Pedunculate Oak and Ash, with Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and non-native species, as the name suggests, particularly Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). The ground flora is also similarly dominated by Bluebell with Lesser Celandine and Ground-ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*).

These two woodland blocks are not large, there origin has not been studied, but it is likely that they are historical plantings rather than fragments of ancient woodland. The preponderance of non-native trees detracts from the naturalness of both woodland blocks. However few woodlands occur in Co. Laois, especially those dominated by Pedunculate Oak, a feature of our most prized woodlands. Appropriate management, including the exclusion of stock, and the selective removal of non-native species, would enhance the scientific interest of these sites.

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