SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CAHERMURPHY WOOD

SITE CODE: 000022

Cahermurphy Wood lies at an altitude of 61m about 1km east of Lough Graney on the slope of Knockbeha Mountain in the centre of the Slieve Aughty range. Most of the Slieve Aughty Mountains are Old Red Sandstone but in the Lough Graney depression older rocks outcrop and the wood is growing over Upper Silurian Shales. These have broken down to heavy, poorly drained clay soils, although patches of light sandy material also occur. The wood which is approximately 'L' shaped, slopes gently in a south-west direction.

Most of the wood consists of old spreading Sessile Oaks (*Quercus petraea*), averaging 15m in height, which have clearly arisen from coppicing. Birch (*Betula* spp.) and Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) are also present and in the south-west corner Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) becomes dominant. One specimen of English Elm (*Ulmus procera*) was found.

The shrub layer is poorly developed and the wood presents an open aspect as a result of grazing. At present cattle can wander in freely from the south-east side and in places there is considerable poaching of the ground surface. Grazing pressure clearly lessens to the south-west where thick Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) scrub occurs under Beech in the arm to the north of Cahermurphy House.

Hazel, Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and Beech are the main constituents of the shrub layer, but Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) also occurs. In damper spots Ash and species of willow (*Salix* spp.) are common and in some places willow forms a distinct community. Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and Guelder-rose (*Viburnum opulus*) also occur.

The ground flora is rich with considerable variation occurring with changes in soil and light. Under heavy shade a characteristic, but thin flora of Sweet Vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*), Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), speedwell (*Veronica* spp.), Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), Ivy (*Hedera helix*) and various ferns occur. In places Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) is abundant.

In areas of poor drainage Creeping Buttercup (*Rancunculus repens*) and Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*) form the dominant ground cover with moisture loving species such as Ragged-Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*), Marsh Ragwort (*Senecio aquaticus*), sedges (*Carex* spp.) and bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.).

This wood is a good example of oak woodland on relatively fertile soil. Very little of such woodland exists in the country and for this reason alone the wood is of considerable conservation value.

9.12.2009