SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BALLINAGEE WOOD

SITE CODE: 001750

This small oak wood occupies a boulder strewn glenside along the King's River, and is situated a few kilometres west of Tonelagee Mountain. The soil is a reasonably well drained brown earth-brown podzolic, with a few small gleyed pockets occupied by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) flushes.

The tree canopy is composed of scrub Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*), which is some 9m high and of comparatively recent coppice origin. Occasional Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) also occur. The shrub and herb layers are sparse, with few signs of Sessile Oak regeneration. Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) are the main species recorded.

The bryophytes and lichens are particularly notable on this site, and form luxuriant cover on the ground, boulders and on the trees. The presence of the saxicolous lichens *Hypotrachyna laevigata* and *Sphaerophorus globosus* is noteworthy. The fern Polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*) is common as an epiphyte on the trees.

The adjacent King's River, a fast flowing oligotrophic river, adds to the habitat diversity, while further diversity is created by the presence of small flushes dominated by Purple Moor-grass.

There is a Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) plantation on the south-west side of the site which is about 30 years old, while the edges of the oak wood have been underplanted with conifers, mainly Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*).

The site is fenced and there are no apparent commercial activities, apart from forestry. Despite the exclusion of most grazers, there appears to be little regeneration of trees, while the herb layer is sparse. Also, underplanting by conifers has damaged parts of the site.

The main interest of this site is that it is likely to be a semi-natural remnant of a much larger deciduous forest, with a noteworthy and luxuriant growth of bryophytes and lichens.

25.11.2009