SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: SHOURNAGH VALLEY

SITE CODE: 000103

This site includes two lower sections of the Shournagh River c. 8km west of Cork City – this river flows south-east to join the River Lee which then flows through the City. The Shournagh River has its source in the foothills of the Boggeragh Mountains and is a fairly turbulent river, whose energy, in former times, was used to power the Mills which are now derelict along its banks.

The section furthest north-west from Cork City, comprises areas of wet woodland, scrub and an old estate mixed woodland - Cloghphilip Wood. Wet woodland areas are composed mainly of Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and oak (*Quercus* spp.) with some Crab Apple (*Malus sylvestris*). The ground-flora species include Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus*, Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) and Soft Shield-fern (*Polystichum setiferum*). In some places, Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) has been planted. The areas of scrub are dominated by Grey Willow (*Salix cinerea*) and are developing into willow woodland with some Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), Hazel and Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*). They are grazed by cattle and the ground flora is composed of Common Water-starwort (*Callitriche stagnalis*), Blinks (*Montia fontana*), Bulbous Rush (*Juncus bulbosus*), Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*) and the sedges - Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*) and Common Yellow-sedge (*C. demissa*). The sloping fields adjacent to this part of the river have been abandoned for agriculture and are being colonized by the aforementioned scrub and by Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), whereas the more level fields next to the site boundary are often endangered, with improved agricultural grassland grazed by sheep or cattle.

Within this section of the site is an old planted wood (Cloghphilips) co-dominated by Beech and oak with Hazel in the clearings. The ground flora species include Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Soft Shield-fern, Lesser Celandine (*Ranunulus ficara*) and Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*); wetter areas support the growth of Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*). The introduced species Winter Heliotrope (*Petasites fragrans*), Greater Periwinkle (*Vinca major*) and Columbine (*Aquilegia vulgaris*) are present in parts of the wood. The spread of Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) is also noted in this wood. On the opposite side of the river (north bank) to Clogphillips Wood a young woodland of Hazel, willow (*Salix* spp.) and Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) is developing with a ground flora of Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), Hemlock Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*) and Meadowsweet.

Further downstream in Codatanavally townland a golf course has been built and the grass is mown right up to the river bank and some areas of scrub woodland have also been bulldozed. The remaining woodland here is of an open structure with Beech and Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) being the dominant species, and a ground flora of Bracken, Bluebell and Greater Stitchwort (*Stellaria holostea*). Both Holly and Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*) are spreading through this woodland. Wetter areas are

dominated by Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), willow, Ash and some tall oak. Oak is also regenerating in Bracken dominated areas and like in Cloghphillips Wood, Sycamore is also spreading.

The Coolymurraghne estate woodland consists of a broadleaved woodland mostly of full grown, widely spread oak trees with a diverse understorey growth of Holly with Scaly Male-fern (*Dryopteris affinis*), but the northern end of the wood consists of Beech with pine (*Pinus* spp.) and larch (*Larix* spp.). Much of the ground is steeply sloping (c. 50 degrees) and the ground flora is sparse, possibly limited by dryness and the shading from the abundance of Holly. At the southern end of this wood is an area of old oak and Sycamore coppice, also with Holly and much Ivy (*Hedera helix*) and Navelwort (*Umbilicus rupestris*). An extensive badger sett is found here. This area grades northwards into young oak woodland with Hazel and Holly, and a ground flora of Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*), *Mnium hornum*, Bilberry and carpets of Bluebell.

Dippers and Grey Wagtail are noted to feed along and around the river channel, with Willow Warbler and Redpoll Finches on the higher reaches of the river.

Wood Improvement Scheme grants are being sought (1993) for both Cloghphilip and Coolymurraghne woods. Both of these woods contain large fully grown oak trees, within the surrounding area. They form the most important part of the Valley's woodland. Replanting with conifers or non-native broadleaves is a major threat and the spread of non-native species such as Sycamore, may also be detrimental.

The woods along the Shournagh Valley included in this site (103) are recommended for conservation and are noted to be of regional importance and deserving of NHA status.