

Irregular Silviculture – transformation in practise course

by Nick Turnbull

As a recent graduate of the MSc course in Forestry at Bangor University (via distance learning), I have become used to people talking passionately about forests and trees. After all, trees matter. But persuading others to look again at what they have in front of them sometimes needs evangelists. Experts in the transformation of even-aged plantations to continuous cover forestry, Andy Poore and David Pengelly of SelectFor, take on this role aware that those who attend their course are likely to be a mixture of traditionalists, CCF converts, forest owners, forest managers and students. They understand that such eclecticism requires guidance, tolerance and answers, but also bags of enthusiasm.

Using the Stourhead (Western) Estate as the venue for this course is a masterstroke. As the backdrop to the famous Stourhead landscape gardens, it provides the evidence that careful continuous cover management techniques can pull-off the challenge of ensuring the production of excellent timber whilst maintaining a beautiful environment. But before the course members get to trees, lectures are delivered in the Stourhead memorial hall, administered by the National Trust which manages the landscape gardens, which historically were part of the whole Stourhead Estate. This neighbourliness seems to work, although I learnt later of the creative tension that different management objectives can bring, with the National Trust removing its Larch to protect its Rhododendrons whilst Stourhead (Western) Estates removed its Rhododendrons to protect its Larch.

A good deal of information has to be delivered in these sessions, which included a mixture of technical principles, explanations and history. Absorbing such issues, it becomes clear that continuous cover forestry reeks of common sense; this way we both sustain our forests and make them economical. Nurturing 'stems-with-a-future', providing a helping hand to an



Douglas Fir, the potential....

alternative 'survival of the fittest', means that the best trees fulfil and exceed their potential. The economic return and quality of such trees has to be greater than the average growth achieved from even-aged plantations. But such management requires skill in monitoring, thereby providing a truthful definition to Silviculture as being both a 'science and an art'. The product of such management we were able to see for ourselves.

The Stourhead (Western) Estate woods are a pleasure. Walking amidst a range of species, such as Douglas Fir, Spruce, Larch, Western Red Cedar, Western Hemlock and various hardwoods, one is struck by the sheer diversity, the careful manipulation of nature and the encouragement of the best trees to thrive. The most striking specimens are Douglas Fir, many of which have grown beyond the dbh that they would have expected to reach for harvesting elsewhere. Its rate of growth rises markedly in later life unencumbered by rivals in the canopy.

Sustainability is a key word in continuous cover management. Natural regeneration is an important component, circumventing the need and expense of planting, but also providing a healthier, more genetically robust forest stock that is able to withstand more readily the current onslaught of tree disease and pests. Similarly, wind-throw will occur, but its impact will be absorbed as younger, more robust trees survive.

One vital component of the course is putting the lessons learnt into practise and this is achieved through the use of the Martelescope. This one hectare site contained within the Stourhead (Western) estate



Exercise underway in the Martelescope at Stourhead.



...and the end product.

has every tree within it recorded, measured and graded. Potential capital has also been pre-judged against which a marking exercise can be measured to

reveal whether the principles of continuous cover management have been absorbed. Course members are divided into teams and scores are provided. On this course, a husband and wife team, who own woodland in both Oxfordshire and Dorset, but were new to continuous cover forestry, led the way. Their secret weapon: the wife was French, and the French have always appreciated and understood their trees. No surprise therefore, that Andy Poore and David Pengelly have close association with the French organisation, the Association Futaie Irreguliere (AFI), who have long been involved in researching and practising these methods.

Whilst the Stourhead (Western) Estate has been practising continuous cover forestry for many years, by way of contrast, we were shown work in transforming hardwood compartments at the Rushmore and Cranborne Estates in Dorset, undertaken by Andy Poore. Their example is now being replicated at the nearby Crichel Down Estate, also under the stewardship of Andy Poore, where previously well-loved and well-managed woodland has produced some superb trees through the previous owners' penchant for high pruning. The challenge will now be to similarly transform this woodland to ensure its economic, ecological, and aesthetic viability fit for the 21st Century.



experts in continuous cover forestry...

COURSES IN CONTINUOUS COVER FOREST MANAGEMENT IRREGULAR SILVICULTURE IN THE LOWLANDS: TRANSFORMATION IN PRACTICE

Wednesday 28th to Thursday 29th October 2015

Marking is a difficult skill to learn, particularly within an unfamiliar discipline such as Irregular Silviculture.

These Courses provide an in-depth introduction to the theory and practical application of irregular silviculture in coniferous and broadleaved stands with the emphasis on lowland forests.

The Courses incorporate a marking exercise in which the trainees, in groups of two, undertake the marking decision process for themselves within a one hectare stand under transformation and interact with two experienced practitioners. On the completion of the marking exercise, the trees selected for removal by each group are inputted into a spreadsheet which provides a detailed summary of the silvicultural and

economic consequences of each marking. These data can be compared between the groups and with the marking of the local manager.

The two day course incorporates site visits in irregular coniferous and broadleaved stands and looks at the silviculture of transformation in more detail.

The Courses are based on the Stourhead (Western) Estate, Stourton, near Mere, and the Rushmore Estate on the Wiltshire/Dorset border. The Courses are designed for 14 trainees and will be led by Andy Poore and David Pengelly, both leading exponents of Continuous Cover Forest Management.

Woodland Heritage will be offering some bursaries on a case-by-case basis.



For further information see the Courses section on www.selectfor.com or contact David Pengelly at david@selectfor.com

