Introduction

Following on from the IUFRO conference on *uneven-aged silviculture, in Birmensdorf (Zürich), was the five day post-conference tour.*

In the safe hands of our tour guides Andreas Zingg, Professor Jean Philippe Schütz, and some of the WSL staff we set off on a journey of incredible forests throughout Switzerland and France. These forests had something in common; they were all uneven-aged, or plenter forest, or close-to-nature, or irregular forests. Besides the forests we experienced some breath-taking landscapes in the form of the Swiss Alps, the Swiss and French Jura Mountains, huge vinyards on fertile plains, and the Northern Vosges mountains.

What is a Plenter Forest?

A plenter forest is composed of a diversity of tree species and of tree sizes such that the growing stock is in a state of equilibrium, that is to say that an optimum volume of timber may be harvested regularly and sustainably in perpetuity. It is a forest where the regeneration occurs naturally and constantly. This form of silviculture respects the forest ecosystem which produces maximum benefit, not only from an economic perspective, but also from the perspective of protection, biodiversity, recreation and landscape.

Definition compiled from the work of J. Ph. Schütz

Stop 1 – The Communal Forest of Rougemont (a Mountain Plenter Forest)

Our host: Serge Lüthi

High in the Swiss Alps the communal forest of Rougemont is a 'mountain forest' covering 7,800 ha.

It is an example of the classic Norway Spruce/Silver Fir/Beech species mix. The study site was a one hectare sample plot installed by WSL in 1928, when in this part of the forest transformation began from an even-aged condition. Initially this was done by gap creation (without expansion following regeneration). It is now in a fully developed plenter condition. The plot's elevation of 1,400m above sea level is considered to be on the upper limit for Silver Fir yet it is still dominant. Rainfall is 1,500mm per annum.

Since inception the plot has received 13 repeat inventories on a periodicity of five to ten years. In the centre of the plot sits a large boulder some three metres high covered in ferns and mosses upon which are inscribed the names of the mensurationists who have surveyed the site over the past 85 years.

The production and treatment is focused on the large high-quality trees which are providing stability, room for crown development and, in the case of Silver Fir, stem shading of the lower bole to prevent

demonstrated contained future trees of Silver Fir, Hornbeam and Oak.

It was still ‘early days’ for the project but, to me, this approach seemed rigid, highly prescriptive, and requiring significant time investment. But perhaps this is ideal for a keen amateur, small woodland owner, with time on their hands.

Stop 3 – Les forêts de la Montagne de

Currently the composition is 320 ha of conifer (including 110 ha of Douglas Fir, 172 ha of Silver Fir and Spruce, and 38 ha of Grand Fir and Larch) and 210 ha of broadleaves (96 ha of which is Beech dominant).

Our host, Roland Susse, is one of the founding members of the Association Futaie Irrégulière (AFI).

Concluding Remarks

We were shown a fantastic range of sites from those fully developed over the last 100 years to those just beginning the journey to plenter forest. The latter were probably of more immediate interest to most UK foresters. Kick-starting the transformation process from