CCFG England visit 2103

Cranborne Estate, nr Fordingbridge, Dorset

May 1st 2013

by Glen Harding

On the 1st May 2013, a small group of about 40 people visited the Cranborne Estate in Dorset, by the kind permission of the Viscount Cranborne and the Marquess of Salisbury.

For me, the visit was my first as a CCFG member, and also a visit to the sister estate of Hatfield House (where I currently work); so of great all round interest. As a trained arboriculturalist who is currently 'learning the ropes' in forestry, it was of particular interest, and a great opportunity to learn from all of my experienced peers.

The weather was fine, and we started the day with a visit to Luckhams Mead, a broadleaf stand of 5.42 ha (and also home to the estate’s AFI plot which links into a European database of silvicultural statistics). Andy Poore (the estate’s Forestry Consultant) then proceeded to explain the history of the estate, and the change in management regimes to the current CCF systems. In 2001 the conversion to CCF began, with Luckhams Mead being one of the first sites on the estate to be transformed. Andy then explained the plans for Luckhams wood, along with the specific history of the site. As someone who is new to the CCF principles, the discussion in this wood was very interesting, and the views of the various forest experts invaluable. It was also very clear that their approach involved accurate record keeping, which then leads to clear and well informed management decisions.

The estate’s Head Forester (Richard Deffee) and Phil Morgan (International Vice-chairman of the AFI and President of Pro Silva) then explained more about the AFI plot, its installation and relevance, we were given some plans showing the value of the data.

Luckhams Mead
We then moved on to the next site ‘Hither Dragons’, a middle aged stand of Norway Spruce of approximately 9.6 ha. When in the woods, Richard Deffee gave a detailed explanation of the measurement systems they use, and the equipment involved. The Estate has created an abbreviated AFI methodology which they are now rolling out across the estate woodlands. It was in this wood that we also discussed the estate’s use of target diameter felling to maximise timber income, which varies for the species of tree, as well as the assessed timber grading. Andy and Richard then explained how they were using their thinning cycles (which currently happen every 4 years in their conifer stands) to try and prepare the woodland for the regeneration initiation stage, through promoting structural diversity (by avoiding regular spacing amongst the retained trees); we also discussed threats from windthrow and disease endemics during this transformation period.

After a brief stop for lunch, we moved on to the Estate’s largest block of woodland, Boulsbury Wood which stands at just over 300 ha. We initially visited a fine stand of Douglas fir, which is creating high quality, valuable saw logs, and discussed the transformation the area had been through in the past 10 years, and the plans for the future. Andy and Richard explained the importance of establishing permanent extraction racks, and the long term benefits in doing so. This section of woodland also contained some more of the estate’s local research stands, and Andy explained how this date was used to create price / size curve tables, which allowed them to generate target diameters, allowing them to maximise timber incomes. We then had a discussion about timber sales, and how the estate were utilising their links with other local estates to improve relationships with local timber buyers.

The final stop took us to a very different part of Boulsbury wood where there were generally poor quality hardwoods. Richard and Andy again explained their plans of converting the area to CCF, and again emphasised the importance of establishing extraction racks as early as possible (something the estate did within the cpt in the early part of 2013). It was interesting to compare this broadleaf stand to Luckhams Mead which is several years on into the transformation stage.

The day was a great success, and the information given to participants (both verbally and on hand outs) was extremely extensive. It was clear that Andy and Richard were both working hard to implement the CCF principles across the estate, and it was also nice to see some woods early on in the transformation and hear of the challenges they will face in the coming years within those areas. It was also interesting to see how the management practices differed between conifer and broadleaf stands.

Useful web sites: Cranborne Estate and Selectfor AFI Research
See also handout giving details for each location visited

‘I currently work at the Hatfield House Estate where I have responsibility for managing the park, and also the estates forestry interests in close coordination with the forestry consultant. I have been working here for almost three years now, and it is a very diverse and challenging role, which involves a large amount of grounds maintenance in the park, as well as managing diverse range of forest plantations spanning over much of Hertfordshire. I originally trained in arboriculture, and prior to working at Hatfield, I was the Arboricultural Manager for the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.’

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