CCFG England field visit to the Forestry Commission’s Wykeham Forest
22nd May 2018

The start of the good weather coincided with the CCFG day at Wykeham towards the end of May. This was well attended by almost thirty keen foresters and wildlife managers interested in Continuous Cover Forestry and keeping cool on a lovely day. The event was hosted by Jon Bates, District Forester and Graham Jackson, Forester, who has spent the majority of his working career involved in the CCF in this forest. For many people present the visit was a follow up visit to one on 3rd May 2000 which appears in Issue 17 CCFG Newsletter from July 2000.

The forest as a whole is approximately 1000 ha with the vast majority currently under CCF and the aspiration is to convert the remainder. The WHC is low at between 1-2 with a moist sea breeze and fertile soils.

During the visit eleven sites were examined which made the day extremely educational with plenty of variety contained in a relatively small area. The central office served as a meeting point and refreshment area which was a very pleasant setting.

The first site we visited was a PAWS site which had been previously planted with Japanese Larch / Beech (p.62) strip planted/nurse crop in rows of 1:3. The Larch was un-thinned and the Beech were growing reasonably well but some had been heavily damaged by grey squirrels which are a significant problem within the forest.

The conversion has involved clear felling a 20 metre wide strip out of the block in a North to South orientation probably more due to the orientation of the previous rows and the road rather than by design. There had been no ground preparation prior to restocking. The site has been replanted with Sessile Oak in 1.2m tubes in a random nature at 1.8m average spacing. The expectation is that regeneration of birch will develop outside the tubes and nurse the oak. There were concerns that the light demanding nature of the oak could result in poor growth especially of trees on the edge of the strips.
The next three sites were all within an experimental area where attempts had begun to diversify a single species planted stand in the early 1950’s. The original crop was a poorly performing SP stand on an iron pan soil with varying pan depth of 12” to 3’.

The first experiment had involved a heavy systematic thinning (two rows removed in every 10) when the pine were about 4 m tall. The felled area had been deep ploughed in short strips so as to break up the pan. These strips had been planted with 27 varied species (16 conifers and 11 broadleaves). By the early 1990s there was copious natural regeneration of a number of conifers and broadleaves and CCF management had been introduced (further details can be found in a 2006 article in the Quarterly Journal of Forestry, 100, pp 31-42).

Following three thinnings, a number of the regenerated trees had been recruited into the stand and a varied structure was developing. The performance of the various silver fir species was particularly impressive but it appeared that whilst the timber volume seemed a little low the shade was probably too much for many species to regenerate further without thinning heavily.

The wildlife managers present made a point of the requirement to establish and maintain suitable deer glades in CCF which can also double up as permanent extraction routes. Photograph 2.

The next three sites formed part of a separate experiment which showed the effect of thinning to different basal areas upon the development of natural regeneration. Photographs 3 & 4 show a part of the site which had been previously thinned to 25 m² Basal Area which has subsequently encouraged the development of a thick understorey of regeneration which is mainly of WH partly due to the neighbouring stand of WH. A neighbouring stand of WH which had previously been thinned to a BA of 45 m² showed virtually no regeneration (Photograph 5). Then a similar area of mainly WH thinned to 35 m² BA where there has been a reasonable amount of regeneration.
At the next site, a harvester/forwarder had cleared out an extraction route and opened up the stand. The SS regeneration present was mainly attributable to the several over mature SS upwind of the site and due to the disturbance of the harvesting machinery.

Following lunch the group visited a small clear fell of approximately 100 m x 100 m where several mature SS seed trees had been left to aid regeneration. Ground preparation was discussed although it was felt that the brash should not be windrowed due to an inherent rabbit population. Some scarification would possibly assist regeneration. There was an upwind adjacent block of WH which, it was thought, would result in WH seedlings colonizing the site. There was some discussion as to whether this approach was compatible with CCF, since the closest parallel was with a ‘seed-tree’ silvicultural system.

Then we moved into the adjacent block of WH which had been recently thinned, urea was used and there were no previous signs of any rot. This block of p62 WH previously un-thinned had been thinned to 49 m² BA. This intensity was probably not enough to encourage regeneration under the canopy. This stand will inevitably export seed to the adjacent coupe, see previous notes.

Whilst leaving this area we walked through a coupe where wide racks had been harvested through an old SP stand with more recent and quite ‘leggy’ SS understory. The understory had been quite thick and there was an element of uncertainty as to the response. Several tops had snapped out as a consequence of the relatively large harvesting equipment fighting through the ‘velcro’ crop. Many of the SP overstorey were dying back.
The final sites were several small coupes cut out of a mature JL block. The diameter of the coupes was 2 x the height of the mature trees. These had been ground prepped by mounding and restocked with Noble Fir. The ground prep had encouraged natural regeneration namely of birch and larch while the fir were very successful and had probably benefited from the shade provided by the regeneration. Future weed management will require chemical to suppress competing bramble and raspberries. An adjacent small area had been felled and replanted with DF 5 years earlier. There was a considerable amount of birch regen but also some promising oak regen at almost 4’ height.

This concluded our visit and thanks were extended to all and especially Graham and Jon for a very interesting visit with lots of good practice visible from all their hard work.

Olly Fielden
Photographs courtesy of Olly Fielden