

Science and Business News December 2005

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

Surveying underway at Jeskyn's Farm

One of Forest Enterprise England's most exciting and significant new developments is Jeskyn's Farm in Cobham. This greenfield site was purchased by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), for conversion by the Forestry Commission into a new, 146 hectare community woodland. It is intended to provide much-needed recreational greenspace in NorthEast Kent, as you can read from the project's [first newsletter](#):

FR's Land Restoration and Urban Greening team worked with Forest Enterprise earlier in the year to commission consultants to undertake soil surveys at Jeskyn's Farm. This soil survey, undertaken by Land Research Associates in collaboration with FR, has now been completed, giving a clear picture of ground conditions, soil status and some of the historic activities at the site.

Forest Enterprise's East Anglia Forest District has now invited FR's Urban Greening team to conduct further on-site work, to investigate further environmental aspects as a follow on from the soil survey. Additionally, FR's Peter Crow is working with FC's Tim Yarnell to complete heritage and archaeological surveys of the site. These take the form of desktop studies, supplemented with site walks and will ensure that all significant aspects of heritage and archaeological interests on the site are respected and preserved, in line with current best practice.

Centre for Ecology and Hydrology to restructure

The governing Council of the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) has recently issued a statement of intent to restructure one of its wholly-owned Research Centres – the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH). Under the proposals, five of CEH's nine sites would close – Banchory, Dorset, Monks Wood, Oxford and Swindon. The retained sites would be Wallingford (which would be the headquarters), Edinburgh, Bangor, and Lancaster. This configuration would maintain the benefits of a regional presence but would improve scientific and leadership focus, and create more cost-effective science delivery.

The announcement follows a thorough review of CEH's science by NERC's Science and Innovation Strategy Board and a decision by NERC Council to approve a £15 million future level of core science funding for CEH. Overall staff numbers at CEH are expected to reduce from approximately 600 to 400, over a four-year transition period. Details of the planned changes have been published at <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/consult/ceh/ceh-businessplan.pdf>

Nepal expedition to investigate *Phytophthora* pathogens

The primary reason for the visit to Nepal was to take part in an expedition to investigate the presence of potential *Phytophthora* pathogens of trees in native Nepalese forest ecosystems. Particular objectives were to investigate whether the Himalayas might be the geographic origin of *P. ramorum* and/or *P. kernoviae*, and whether currently unknown *Phytophthora* species are present that could be a threat to UK and European native forests. The research was funded by FAO as part of a larger programme. The team consisted of three Italian forest pathologists/mycologists from Viterbo University, and Clive Brasier and Anna Brown from Alice Holt.



The scientific team sheltering in the rangers hut at Rara lake: third from left, Clive Brasier, far right Anna Brown.

Anna says “The trip started in a lab in Kathmandu where we prepared the media required for the trip. Next the group headed to Kolti in Bajura, a remote area of Western Nepal. Several days were spent surveying the



Mixed broadleaf and conifer forest at ca 2800m

local wild olive groves. Then we headed out on foot on a 120km round trip to Rara Lake (3500m), with a guide, cook, 9 porters and, on the equipment side, everything from tents and solar panels to boxes of petri dishes. The first couple of days took us through mainly agricultural land with bananas, olive and fig trees. Then it was into the forested area. Here the coniferous forest included blue pine, spruce, cypress and yew; and the broadleaved areas elm, oak, *Lithocarpus*, horse chestnut, walnut and maple, sometimes with an understorey of rhododendron. Our field activities through these areas included sampling of plants, streams and soils and DNA and serological tests. Then it was back to the laboratory in Kathmandu for processing and isolation of the fungal cultures, in addition to some basic training of the local Nepalese scientists.”

Forest Focus BIOSOIL project

The Joint Research Centre in Ispra, which has responsibility for the management and co-ordination of the scientific and technical aspects of the EU Forest Focus regulation, convened a group of European soil experts to finalise a ‘BioSoil’ demonstration project as part of the overall Forest Focus programme. The project will include a soil module and a biodiversity module and will be managed in Great Britain by Forest Research’s soil scientists.

The project is based on a strategy of describing and sampling soils at all sites of a 16x16 km network that fall onto forested land, and will be the single largest soil monitoring exercise implemented so far at the EU scale. It will therefore be a test for the development of operational soil monitoring.

Its primary aim is to establish an improved common European baseline of forest soils for environmental applications. Such applications include: investigation of acidification and/or eutrophication; carbon stock assessment, impacts of climatic changes. Another project objective is to evaluate methodology before EU-wide monitoring programmes for other land use types are set up.

The soil survey element will involve detailed soil description, sampling and classification using FAO’s World Reference Base (<http://www.fao.org/ag/saql/agll/wrb/default.stm>). Following a recent tender, two teams of UK soil surveyors have been selected. Andrew Hipkin will be responsible for the Scottish soil survey and Land Research Associates will cover the soil survey in England and Wales.

FR’s Elena Vanguelova recently participated in an EU training course on World Reference Base Soil Profile Description (WRB) and Classification, along with the UK soil surveyors. The course focused on soil profile description according to FAO guidelines and on soil classification according to WRB. “The training is invaluable to help ensure that FR uses the same terminology and soil sampling protocols as our European colleagues,” commented Elena.

Chinese visitors

Agricultural and forestry policy makers from Jiangsu Province visited Alice Holt this month. The delegates were particularly interested by the UK’s environmental monitoring activities, which were described by EHSD’s Sue Benham, Peter Freer-Smith and Rona Pitman (pictured, right). Overall, delegates noted a great deal of common ground in terms of the challenges facing the rural economy, natural resources and biodiversity.



Forthcoming Events

Full details of FR's events are available on FR's internet site:

www.forestresearch.gov.uk/events

New Publications

An evaluation of Forest School in England. Richard Murray and Liz O'Brien. October 2005. 108 pages. PDF version only. <http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/website/forestresearch.nsf/ByUnique/INFD-6HKEMH>

FCIN077 Selecting the Right Provenance of Oak for Planting in Britain. November 2005. J Hubert. 8 pages.

FCIN078 The Influence of Soils and Species on Tree Root Depth. November 2005. P Crow. 8 pages.

Newsletter Team

Editors:

Eleanor Harland

Kirsten Hutchison

Alison Melvin

Production:

Alice Holt Typing Group