

BOOK REVIEW

OCEANIC FORESTRY

Edited by E. H. M. Harris

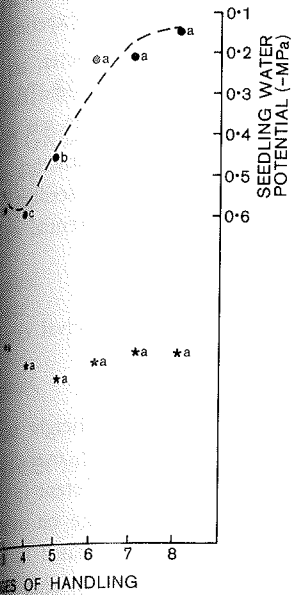
Proceedings of a conference organised by the Royal Forestry Society of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 1986. 44 pages. US\$11 to individuals, US\$38 to libraries.

The President of the Society opened the meeting by reminding those present of the two greatest drawbacks to forestry in Great Britain – wind damage and low profitability. It was these two problems that Oceanic Forestry sought to correct. The Society's role was not to advocate or dismiss, but rather to give this somewhat controversial forest management system a fair hearing.

The first speaker, Major General D. J. Moore, sums up Oceanic Forestry's very worthy objective as "growing the maximum volume of the most valuable produce which the species, the terrain, and the environment can provide". We also learn that the General can stake some claim to the invention of the system. But what is the system? The reader should not hold his or her breath. After some reminiscing about an estate in Ireland, an IRA attack, the Christmas Islands, and the good old USA, we start to close in on the subject – light sawn timber from Sitka spruce, with four rings to the inch and stability being the essentials (heavy sawn timber and pulp should be provided by imports). There are some magic numbers for Sitka spruce. Plant 2400 stems/ha. At canopy closure, a "lopping" to 1000 stems/ha with the cut made at above the first green whorl to retain full ground cover and maintain a forest-like situation. No further silviculture, with harvest at around 32 years, a TSV of 750 m<sup>3</sup>/ha, a tree height of not more than 22.5 m, a taper ratio of 1:60, and of course four rings to the inch.

The delivery of Dr P. S. Savill, a lecturer at Oxford University, concludes that early growth in Oceanic stands did not differ from other stands established at similar densities. He makes a rather cautious observation that Oceanic trees may be more windfirm than denser stands if root development is not restricted by site preparation. His third conclusion, that piece size is greater with wider spacing, would hardly take the reader's breath away.

The third speaker, J. F. Ogilvie from the Forestry Commission, delves into the mysteries of yields and growth in Oceanic stands. He concludes there is no significant yield difference inherent in the Oceanic system although the early thinning may offer some small stem quality improvement over comparably spaced unthinned stands. Spacing has some effect on height development, with greater height increment occurring once canopy closes to the "crown interlock" stage. He saw no evidence to support claims of improved stability over stands planted at 3 m spacing and left unthinned.



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The final speaker, Dr J. D. Brazier from the Princes Risborough Research Laboratory, examines strength properties of structural timber sawn from adjacent Sitka spruce stands. One stand established at 2.8 m and left unthinned corresponded to the Oceanic prescription. The other planted at 1.4 m was thinned in a more conventional manner. Unfortunately there is a sad lack of stand history information and important inventory data are overlooked. Fifteen trees had been removed from each stand and sawn, and the structural properties of the sawn timber analysed. (This paper is interesting in that points raised correspond to the controversy concerning radiata pine spacing in New Zealand). The wider spacing regime comes in for a slating. In terms of structural performance, 52% of sawn pieces from the wide-spaced (Oceanic) regime compared with 84% from the conventional regime make acceptable grade. The wider-spacing regime, too, has a lower yield of select logs, larger and more frequent knots, more juvenile wood, and possibly more reaction wood.

The debate after each speaker is lively with plenty of "fors" and "against". However, by the end of the proceedings I began to wonder if Oceanic Forestry is just a fairly substantial title for a fairly unsubstantiated piece of philosophy on how to grow a conifer crop in Great Britain.

Alan Somerville