

The deserts of Afghanistan to the forests of Scotland

Warwick Taylor, January 2014

My entry into the world of forestry has come later in life than for most in the sector. Originally a languages graduate, I enjoyed several years working and travelling abroad, including a season in Antarctica, before joining the RAF as a commissioned officer in 2002. The ten years I spent in the RAF took me across the world from the Falklands to Scotland and Iraq to Afghanistan, briefing aircrew prior to their missions on the threats they could and would face from adversaries such as the Taliban, Al Qaeda and the Iraqi militias. These were all fascinating experiences, however, I realised that this was not the right career for me in the long-term and left in 2012 to seek pastures new. I have always loved trees, the outdoors and the natural world and forestry was an obvious choice as it combined many of these interests. The major question was how to enter the sector and reach a level which would enable me to use many of the skills learnt in the military such as management and leadership. A one-year, full-time masters degree seemed to be the fastest (and most cost-effective) option and so I applied to the University of Aberdeen and enrolled in the MSc Forestry at the start of the current academic year. The course accommodates students from a variety of backgrounds such as forestry undergraduates, professional foresters keen to gain further qualifications as well as students such as myself who come from other disciplines.

There are seven of us on the MSc Forestry, representing Scotland, England and Wales as well as the Republic of Ireland and Italy. The course is run in conjunction with the MSc Environmental Science and other courses at the University of Aberdeen and many of the subject modules are taught jointly between courses. The MSc Forestry covers key areas such as silviculture, wood properties to products, forest health, forest resource management, forest measurement and monitoring, soil science and other subjects. A number of one-day field trips are conducted locally throughout the course as well as two week-long trips to the Black Forest in Germany and to Cumbria. The course concludes with a three-month research project.

The biggest frustration I have experienced in relation to the course has been the issue of funding. The peculiarities of education funding within the UK mean that a grant from the Scottish Funding Council covering the tuition fees and giving an additional amount for living costs was available for EU students studying the course with the exception of those from England and Wales. This meant that EU students could receive the grant for studying in Aberdeen and then return home, while I was not eligible despite the fact that I was moving to Scotland with the full intention of making my career there. Fortunately the Forest Industries Education and Provident Fund helped defray my costs by providing a small grant and the University of Aberdeen also awarded me a bursary.

I am enjoying the course enormously and I hope that it will lead to a graduate trainee position in forest management in Scotland at the end of the academic year. I am very grateful to the Education and Provident Fund for its grant and I would also like to thank the University of Aberdeen for the bursary. Furthermore, I would like to thank Matthew Woodcock and John Stride of the Forestry Commission at Alice Holt for their initial advice on entering the forestry sector, and

Steve Marston of S. H. Marston Forestry for giving me a few months of forestry work experience and some essential tips on the use of chainsaw.



