

1-1-1998

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Recommended Citation

McIver, H. W.; Malcolom, D. C.; and Wilson, E. R. (1998) "Upland forestry field course, Scotland," *Natural Resources and Environmental Issues*: Vol. 7, Article 62.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/nrei/vol7/iss1/62>

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THE UPLAND FORESTRY FIELD COURSE, SCOTLAND

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The University of Edinburgh School of Forestry has offered field courses during every academic year for over 100 years, and these courses have been regarded as an integral part of forestry education. The program, providing practical forestry experience to students of forestry, ecology, agriculture and wildlife, has been widely held to be a crucial part of their education. Nevertheless, these courses have come under increasing pressure as a result of increased didactic teaching requirements, rising costs and decreasing funding.

This presentation will detail the Upland Forestry Field Course which concentrates on all aspects of forestry under Scottish conditions. One 10 day long field course is offered to third year forestry students as a course requirement, and as an option to other students within the Institute of Ecology and Resource Management. The course has proven extremely popular with students, and student numbers have ranged from 10 to 35 on each course. The course is staffed by between 2 and 4 faculty and 2 graduate student demonstrators.

The course aims: a) to examine the relationships between tree species in upland forests in Scotland and their environment and b) to consider the integration of ecological and economic factors in forest management. By the end of the course the students are able to: i) identify a range of commonly used coniferous and broad-leaved species; ii) understand the selection of tree species in relation to soil and climate conditions; iii) appreciate the silvicultural techniques adopted by managers to attain the objectives of management; iv) be aware of the harvesting methods adopted in upland forests; v) be aware of the interaction of wildlife management, conservation, recreation and amenity with timber production; and vi) appreciate the range of skills required by the forest manager.

A variety of sites are visited each day covering the range of ownership and land uses including Forestry Commission forests (government), private estates, sawmills, nurseries, non-governmental organisations (e.g. RSPB, WWF) and private forestry operations. Exercises are performed at many sites to encourage accurate observation and measurement. Students are required to submit a report on one of a series of topics including silviculture, production forestry, natural regeneration, landscape design and conservation. This field course also has been adapted for post graduate education to demonstrate British forestry to overseas forestry professionals from a number of countries.

After over a century of continuous adaptation, development and improvement the forestry field courses of the University of Edinburgh are a unique and invaluable resource for students in Ecological Sciences. The benefits of such courses to students, future forestry teachers, and to forestry and ecology as a whole, far outweigh their minimal financial costs.