

DIARY of W. L. MASON

Brechfa 15/81 (Forest Garden) with R Jinks

This was my first visit to this impressive collection for 9 years. It was pleasing to see the improvements that have been made to signs and paths, as well as the recent broadleaved plantings on the lower slopes.

We visited all the plots in turn and comments are provided in the attached Appendix I. General points arising from the visit are:

1. The large number of species present and the good health of the *Abies* spp., *Sequoia sempervirens*, *Pinus peuce* and *P. strobus* and a number of the broadleaved plots do suggest that this collection merits being included as one of the FC's 5 national arboreta.
2. The site is also potentially very valuable to FCW as a location for demonstrating alternative species that may be recommended as part of the new Welsh Woodlands Strategy.
3. However, there is clearly a need for further investment continued over a number of years to bring it up to the standard of the other 'national' sites. Aspects that need attention in the short-term include:
 - a. An up to date map (GIS based) of the collection with plot boundaries clearly demarcated.
 - b. Better demarcation of plots on the ground – lay visitors will find it difficult to tell where one species begins and another ends. This should be coupled with improved labelling of the plots.
 - c. A careful validation of the identity of trees in some of the plots. A number of species (e.g. *Abies cephalonica*, *A. delavayi*, *Picea orientalis*) are derived from collections in small British stands and there appears to be some trees in these plots that are not true to type.
 - d. Particularly at the northern end of the garden, there are isolated groups of trees that appear not to be recorded (e.g. *Picea orientalis* uphill from plot 29, *Pinus muricata* to the north of plot 43, 2 *Pinus densiflora* in plot 41). When the mapping and validation is undertaken, these additional components should be recorded.
4. In the medium term, some of the poorer plots and areas of LP filler should be felled and replanted with other species. Appendix II lists some of the possibilities for consideration and others should arise from the proposed Accessions policy for the National Arboreta.
5. It would probably be sensible to develop an informal working group to agree future programmes of work in the forest garden. This is a system that has worked well at Kilmun involving two representatives from the local FD and one or more from FR. This involves a meeting every 6-9 months, agreement on management priorities with discussion on available funding, plant supply, signage and so forth. Meetings are minuted for future reference. If this model were to be followed at Brechfa, then a meeting early in 2010 could be helpful taking things forward.

6. We noticed a recent (1.5 ha?) clearfell on a slope on the other side of the valley from the Forest Garden. If it was possible to increase this in size it could be a very useful location for the species trials being planned for as part of the EU Interreg REINFFORCE project, which could add further value to the development of the Brechfa site.

W. L. Mason
5 November 2009

Distribution:	Diary file	1
	Experiment file	1
	R. Jinks	1
	C. Jones	1
	N. Fielding, TSU Talybont	1
	H. Evans	1
	Neil Stoddart, FDM, Llanymddyfri FD	1
	Hugh Angus, Westonbirt	1
	Helen McKay	1
	Steve Howells	1