

The IUFRO world congress post-congress excursion to Latvia

It was at the end of August last year then a group of forest scientists, altogether 37, from the USA, Japan, Australia, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Germany, visited Latvia in the framework of the IUFRO XXth World Congress post-congress excursion to the Baltic countries under the joint heading a "Forestry in the Changing Socio-Economic Conditions of the Baltic Countries". Among the participants there were much celebrities as, Robert E. Buckman, a one-time

IUFRO president, head of the division of Forest Genetics and Forest Protection, professor Howard Kriebel, Shigehisa Ishihara of the Kyoto University, professor Dietrich Werner of the Marburg University.

The excursion was organised by the State Forest Service of Latvia and Latvian Forestry Research Institute "Silava".

On their first day in Latvia, in the Smiltene Forestry District (North-East of Latvia), the guests saw an elite stand of

Scots pine, actually a genetic reserve of the excellent Latvian *Pinus sylvestris* (sometimes named Riga Pine).

That was followed by, perhaps, the most exciting event in Latvia – a visit to the Gauja National Park – a vast area including the primeval valley of the Gauja River and its confluents and an important natural and cultural monument of the Latvian nation. Mr. Jānis Strautnieks, the director of the park, informed the participants of the management of the area and the problems involved. The guests had an opportunity to see the most interesting sites as well: "Gūtmaņa ala", a cove in the sandstone crops, the Turaida Castle, the folk sanctuary "Dainu kalns" where folk performers met the group singing traditional Latvian "dainas".

Next day the IUFRO group was taken to Mangaļi, a site of sandy dunes on the Gulf of Riga. The host there was Mr. Miervaldis Bužs, a prominent Latvian scholar, who informed the guests of the experience gained in Latvia in afforestating drifting sandy dunes.

Later the guests went to a forest site in the Misa Forestry District (close to Riga, where prof. Pēteris Zālītis showed a 90 year-old *Norway spruce* stand, actually the result of natural regeneration of a transitional bog drained 100 years ago (the standing volume – 584 m³/ha). A lively discussion, forest productivity and carbon accumulation was provoked there.

In the afternoon the group was taken to the Latvia-Finland joint venture, the company "Silva Ltd.") where the

guests on the example of a logging company gained an insight into the socio-economic developments under way in Latvia.

The last day in Latvia was devoted to a visit to the Latvian Forestry Research Institute "Silava". There the guests met the Latvian researchers, lecturers and professors of the Faculty of Forest of the Latvian Agricultural University specialists in forest inventory and practical foresters. Within a poster session staged there, the Latvian experts informed their foreign counterparts of their latest research data and findings directions of research and problems to be tackled. Spontaneous discussions on some topical problem, personal contacts made, interesting things found out – those were the gains of the day.

Later on their guests visited the National Botanical Garden, where the head of the Dendroflora Laboratory Mr. Raimonds Cīnovskis showed them round his rich collection of trees and ornamental shrubs.

For the Latvian forest scientists the IUFRO post-congress excursion was an even of great importance and an occasion to enrich themselves and full assured that they stay in tune with the outside world.

The letters of gratitude later received from Robert E. Buckman, Dietrich Werner, Howard Kriebel and others only prove that the opinion has been reciprocated.