

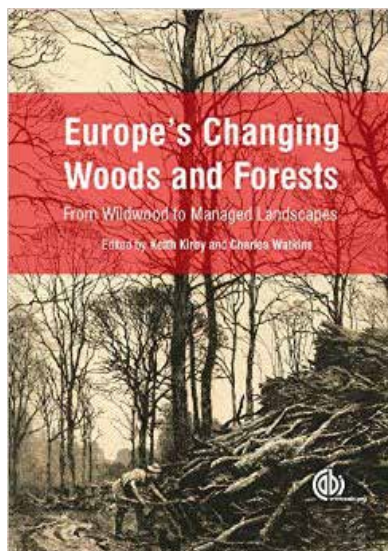
Europe's Changing Woods and Forests From Wildwood to Managed Landscapes

Edited by Keith J. Kirby and Charles Watkins.

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Those of us living in Ireland often bemoan the fact that only small fragments of natural (or mostly semi-natural) woodlands remain for study and enjoyment. The situation in the U.K. is broadly similar. Conversations often refer to the relative abundance of such woodlands or forests in Continental Europe. But is this the case? We often confuse areas that have apparently always been under forest cover but influenced by man to varying degrees with true natural woodlands.

This book, as the title suggests, deals with this and many other issues about the history of Europe's woodlands.

This is a large and detailed book in the tradition of many other CABI forestry publications. Its 363 pages are divided into 5 parts with 24 chapters having content from 36 authors. As a result it is very wide ranging content with many different writing styles evident. Because of this diversity of content it is appropriate to list the 5 parts so that potential readers/purchasers may be more fully informed.

The 5 parts are:-

- Part I: Introduction and overview.
- Part II: The variety of management across European woods and forests.
- Part III: How plants and animals have responded to the changing woodland and forest cover.
- Part IV: A variety of woodland histories.
- Part V: Lessons from the past for the future.

Part I. discusses the current composition of European woods and forests and puts them in a global context. It traces the evolution of modern forest landscapes starting with looking at them before the influence of farming practices. There is a useful section on methods used in studying forest and woodland history.

This is followed in Part II. by chapters dealing with the diversity of woodland management systems throughout Europe. Of particular interest to Irish readers is the chapter by Peter Savill which looks at High Forest Management and the rise of even-aged stands. Having worked in Northern Ireland for a period, Peter is familiar with Irish plantation forestry and makes reference to it in this chapter. The chapter on “Close to Nature Forestry” is interesting given the increasing emphasis on that system in recent years.

Part III. is quite specialised in content in that it deals with the response of plants and animals to changes in woodland and forest cover. Though of more relevance to those specialising in ecology and wildlife management, nevertheless, it makes interesting reading for practicing forest managers.

In Part IV. we are treated to a mixed menu of woodland histories including Italy, Poland, Britain, Ireland, France and Sweden. This section illustrates very well how there are many and diverse woodland histories in Europe and how difficult it is to encompass them in one volume. Each chapter in its own way contributes to our understanding of the subject.

The final section of this book, Part V., attempts to teach us lessons for the future based on our past actions and experiences.

This book is a most welcome and useful addition to the forestry and woodland library. It will appeal not only to foresters but to environmentalists, geographers and historians.

One criticism, though relatively minor, is the concentration of the colour illustrations in an eight-page section in the middle of the book which reduces their relevance to the text.

Kevin J. Hutchinson.