

# Conifers in the British Isles

## A Descriptive Handbook

by A. F. MITCHELL

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In this year of an Olympiad one might readily liken this publication to a reference book of records in the Olympiad of the Conifers. In fact the booklet is a companion volume to the report of the proceedings of the third Conifer Conference convened in 1970 by the Royal Horticultural Society, "Conifers in the British Isles", and also published this year. The detailed tables, of which there are 130, give location, date of planting where known, together with recent and early measurements of height and girth, thus providing a most convenient reference to the record trees, being a selection of over 18,000 measurements by the author on 580 estates in Britain and Ireland, covering 270 species and a further 217 cultivars or varieties.

Mr Mitchell is already well known for his energy and scholarship in matters dendrological. This publication, adding further to his reputation, takes its place in the sequence of memorable recordings from the first Conifer Conference of 1891, when original trees sent by David Douglas were youngsters of sixty years or so, to the immense work of Elwes and Henry, 1906 to 1913, and to the second Conifer Conference of 1931.

With Ireland's favoured conditions for conifer growth, particularly in the East as mentioned by the author, this booklet is of special interest to us. There are frequent references to arboreta and gardens which will be well known in forest circles here. The ready comparison of species here and in Britain and particularly in Scotland is invaluable.

Keys to species of the 43 genera described in the text are provided but as is usual with keys they are more confirmatory than definitive

where the fine lines of division are sought to separate varieties. It is of interest that the four specimens of *P. contorta* quoted from Ashford Castle are listed as *P. contorta* var. *contorta* rather than var. *bolanderi*. The author's comments and notes on various species and growth characteristics, distributed liberally throughout the text add greatly to its value.

Together with 24 full page plates in black and white the 203 line drawings by Christine Darter are excellent and one wishes for more of them—and in natural size rather than the off-putting two-thirds scale size. The work is more likely to appeal to the initiated because of the nature of the subject but an extended glossary and an illustrated guide to the use of typical keys together with notes on the standard method of measurement and confirmation that girth is tabulated rather than diameter, as in the companion booklet, would widen its considerable appeal in forest and estate circles and particularly among students. No doubt the question of cost deterred the publishers from providing a hard cover in a general edition, but for those for whom this work will be an ever-flowing well of knowledge the additional cost of having the booklet thus covered will be justified.

J. F. Durand