



FORESTS IN THE BALANCE:
LINKING TRADITION AND TECHNOLOGY
XXII IUFRO WORLD CONGRESS
International Union of Forest Research Organizations



Pre-Congress Training Course 1 on The Use of Information and Communication Technology Tools in Forest Research at the IUFRO World Congress , 02-05 August 2005

Pre-Congress Training Course

The Use of Information and Communication Technology Tools in Forest Research



IUFRO-SPDC Course Report

Course 1: The Use of Information and Communication Technology Tools in Forest Research

The course was attended by nine participants from seven countries – China, Ghana, India, Kenya, Korea, Malaysia, and the Philippines, with a variety of backgrounds and subject interests. It adopted the ‘seven pillars’ model for information skills training, intended to raise awareness of the pitfalls in using electronic information sources and develop a critical attitude in the assessment of information retrieved. The model, devised by the UK’s Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) for use in tertiary education, was adapted to cover those topics most relevant to developing countries. The seven main topics were:

- 1. What is information literacy and why does it matter?*
- 2. Plugging the information gap*
- 3. Constructing strategies for locating information*
- 4. Locating and accessing information*
- 5. Comparing and evaluating information*
- 6. Organizing and communicating information*
- 7. Synthesizing information and creating new knowledge*

A mix of presentations and practical exercises was included within each topic. Each participant had access to their own computer with internet access, essential for a course of this kind. (The computers were made available to all members of all four courses for personal use in the evenings, and were heavily used).

Emphasis was laid on the use of resources freely available on the internet, but subscription databases and priced software were also described to indicate the advantages or otherwise of using them. Participants were encouraged to discuss the usefulness of particular resource types in their own working lives.

Participants were given cd-roms and encouraged to use PowerPoint for taking notes, recording screenshots and urls. They were able to copy all presentations to their cds as desired, the aim being to provide them with both a practical record of the course with easy access to live links to highlighted resources, and the basis of a ‘back-to-office’ report if needed. In general this worked well as most participants were fairly familiar with PowerPoint, although for some it was a new experience.

On the third and fourth days of the course participants were introduced to the CABI *Forestry Compendium* and the Global Forest Information Service. Both resources were highly rated for usefulness and relevance. Arrangements were made for each participant to receive a free copy of the *Forestry Compendium*, to be collected from the IUFRO stand at the Congress; this was very well received and all copies were collected.

Participants were encouraged to consider the use of internet tools in the creation of local networks and subject interest groups. They were introduced to the concept of ‘blogging’ and

each created their own blog, a new experience for all. A course blog (<http://spdccourse.blogspot.com/>) was also produced, together with a course web site (based at Oxford) on which all presentations were mounted, and a list of key resources for easy reference. The web site (<http://www.plantlib.ox.ac.uk/IUFRO>) will remain available as a resource for participants and others; its use for 'cascade training' within their organisations was encouraged, though most participants were unsure as to the opportunities for that.

Copies of the FAO iMark training module on *Management of Electronic Documents* were installed on all PCs, and used to provide additional training resources in certain topics. Participants were also encouraged to explore the materials further, either in the evenings during the course – which few did – or by registering to obtain their own copy from FAO for use at home. Some found the materials extremely useful and enjoyed the in-built exercises; some found it difficult to grasp the applicability to their own work. However the materials are very well produced and as the iMark programme develops should provide valuable components for closer integration in future courses of this type.

There was particular interest in intellectual property issues, which were covered from the point of view of the use of copyright materials for various purposes, but more emphasis on the rights of information providers would be useful in any future presentation of this course. A session on sources for illustrations was rated very useful by some, and irrelevant by others, depending on the nature of their work; such sessions on particular resource types could perhaps form optional or parallel components in future. A section on the growing 'Amazoogle' effect – find it on Google, buy it on Amazon, sell it on e-Bay – generated lively discussion.

In general the course was rated very useful and relevant: '*...was amazed to see how much information is out there and I didn't know!*'; '*very informative and useful*'; '*it not only gave me new ideas but I was able to make new friends and future collaborators*'. Participants clearly benefitted from interaction with members of the other courses and enjoyed sharing learning experiences; the total number of c.50 seems an ideal number for the groups to 'gel'.

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