

## Member Profile

# Meet Paddy Bruton...Again

BY CHARLES L. VANOVER, ACF

If you attended the ACF Annual Meeting in Charleston, South Carolina this year, there is a good chance you ran into a tall, handsome lad with a strong accent. For certain, it wasn't Rhett Butler, but it might have been Paddy Bruton.

Paddy is a member of the current class of Candidate Members and is our latest prospective member from outside the United States. Paddy hails from the "wee island" of Ireland and brings with him an excellent, working knowledge of forestry in Ireland and elsewhere in Europe as well.

Currently, Paddy is part-owner of Forestry Services, Ltd. in Carrageen, Tipperary County, Ireland. His partner, Peter Alley, is a well known forester and nurseryman in Ireland, also owning the largest ornamental nursery operation in the country.

Paddy was born in Galway County, Ireland in 1975. Galway is located on the western seaboard and is a coastal county with a strong maritime tradition. But instead of being lured to the sea, Paddy found his heart and life's work on the land.

In rural east Galway, where the land is marginal for agriculture, many of Paddy's neighbors were employed in the forestry sector. This included his father who, in addition to being a farmer, engaged in forestry contracting and later became an employee of the state forestry company, from which he retired after 16 years. Paddy says, "I know that he taught me more about practical forestry than any other person."

Paddy and his brother, Peadar, often went to work with their father and when they were older, undertook private afforestation contracts where they all worked together. "My parents always encouraged us to be enterprising and definitely believed we should never be idle," Paddy says.

After receiving a Primary Degree in Forestry from University College Dublin, Paddy worked as a forestry advisor and lecturer at Teagasc—the specialist state advisory service for agriculture. It was during his tenure at Teagasc that he met his future wife Siobhan. Paddy says, "It was love at first sight... even though Siobhan doesn't agree!" It took five years to convince her to marry him. Siobhan is also from a farming background and is currently employed by Teagasc as their only animal nutrition specialist.

## PADDY'S HISTORY OF FORESTRY IN IRELAND

The first humans arrived in Ireland around 9,000 years ago when the island was blanketed by woodland. There were two major types,





mature oak woodlands in the lowlands and pine forests on the poorer soils. Minor quantities of birch woodlands also existed. Alder and ash were uncommon until about 500 years later.

Around 6,000 years ago, the forests started to disappear, particularly in the west and the Midlands. Two main factors are believed to be the cause—the growth of blanket bogs and the development of farming. This eventually led to the confinement of forests to the marginal land and upland areas.

There is no single reason for the ultimate decline of Ireland's forests but it is generally agreed that there were several contributory factors, beginning around the mid 16th century including:

- *Industrialization*  
Shipbuilding, along with iron, glass and barrel (cooperage) production intensified during the 16th century.
- *Plantations of Ireland*  
From 1556 to 1690, large areas of land in Ireland known as "plantations" were allocated to English, Welsh and Scottish landlords. These landlords often cleared forests to create agricultural land.

The plantations were closely followed by a four-fold increase in the population between 1700 and 1840. Vast areas of forests were cleared to meet the increasing timber demand. Thus, the large areas of forests that existed in Ireland in 1600 were all but gone by 1800. To encourage the landlords to plant forests, the Royal Dublin Society began awarding prizes

and medals for planting trees. This led to the manicured gardens of the old estates, some of which remain today.

#### LAND ACT 1881

The land act saw the transfer of lands from the landlords to the tenant farmers. Further clearance of forests ensued as landlords, about to lose their estates, cashed in their timber crops and the new tenant farmers, in urgent need of money, cleared much of the remaining forests in order to make way for tillage and grazing. This period, associated with landlords and English gentry, has contributed to a degree of resentment towards forestry in Ireland.

#### STATE FORESTRY

State forestry began in 1903, when the Department of Agriculture acquired Avondale house in County Wicklow and established a training center for forestry. It is estimated that the total area under forests in Ireland at that time was 1.5 percent of the total land area, roughly 310,000 acres. However, fuel and timber shortages during the First World War resulted in a further reduction to the forest estate.

Following independence and the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, a modest afforestation programme was established focusing on poor quality marginal land. Most new afforestation was undertaken by the state until the Second World War, when afforestation rates naturally fell. Once again, demand for fuel and timber resulted in large-scale deforestation.

The Forestry Act of 1946, (which is still the principal legislative framework for forestry in Ireland) introduced a comprehensive legal framework. This was accompanied by a government policy to increase the rate of afforestation to 10,000 acres per annum, principally by the state.

By 1970, the total planted area of state forests amounted to 530,900 acres. During the 1980s, the rate of afforestation declined due to government policy to exclude agricultural land. By 1989, the total state forest area comprised 751,750 acres. At this time, a new state body, Coillte Teoranta, was established to take ownership and manage the forests.

Following Ireland's entry into the EEC (now the EU) in 1973, serious efforts were made to increase afforestation by private landowners. The Western Package began offering grants in 1981 for the planting of forests on lands marginal for agriculture but suitable for forestry. Initially slow to take off, the effort gained momentum by 1986. This increase in private afforestation coincided with a decrease in state efforts.

The state, with continued financial assistance from the European Union, introduced further forestry grant schemes over subsequent years. Afforestation by private landowners increased significantly, peaking in 1995 when almost 43,000 acres were planted. Since then, despite the availability of generous grants and annual premiums, the rate of afforestation declined to 17,000 acres in 2007. This was principally due to soaring agricultural land prices and competing EU agricultural schemes.

Currently, Ireland has a total forest cover of approximately 1,789,000 acres or 10.5 percent of the national area. This is very low when compared with other European countries. The government's stated objective is for 17 percent forest cover by 2030, a target that now appears unrealistic.

Ireland's entry into the EU has been positive for forestry development in Ireland both in terms of afforestation and the subsequent processing of raw materials. The incentives introduced were on a scale previously unheard of and have resulted in private landowners now accounting for

over 95 percent of annual afforestation. The disadvantage however, is the strict environmental compliance required to qualify for such incentives, with the protection of biodiversity now attracting a greater role in forestry operations.

### SPECIES MANAGED

The following are the main species accepted under the current afforestation scheme: alder, ash, beech, Douglas fir, larch, lodge pole pine, Norway spruce, oak, Scots pine, Sitka spruce, sycamore, western red cedar and yew. We plant various quantities of all of the above, but the major species are Sitka spruce, Japanese larch, Norway spruce, ash, alder and oak.

Natural regeneration is not practiced to any great extent in Ireland. Plantation forestry is really the most practical given we are planting in fertile, lush, former agricultural land where the vegetation cover mitigates against any natural regeneration.

### COMPARING FORESTRY IN THE U. S. AND IRELAND

Of the issues that spring to mind, the most immediate is the disease and insect free status that we enjoy as an island nation. However, a serious problem is developing with deer and grey squirrel and their damage to broadleaves.

The scale of forest cover and operations is also very different. I believe there is a more diverse forest ownership structure

amongst private owners in Ireland, where the average forest size is just 20 acres. It appears that much larger tracts are common in the U.S. and that the private forest sector further developed in age of plantations and wood utilization. We are only at the first and second thinning stage of the private forests established since the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Environmental considerations obviously play a role in both countries and are undoubtedly becoming more restrictive. Currently, all plantations established in Ireland must contain a minimum of 15 percent biodiversity by area. Water quality considerations have effectively ruled out aerial fertilization, which I believe is commonplace in the U.S. I would not like to be the person to propose chemical applications using helicopters in Ireland.

Felling is controlled in Ireland through felling licenses, which are needed before harvesting commences. I'm not sure if this requirement is in place in every state across the U.S.

However, there are similarities between our main species—Sitka spruce and loblolly pine. Both are in the main plantation forests and rotation lengths and management practices appear broadly similar.

In the U.S., TIMOs are obviously becoming more important in terms of forest ownership. This is not comparable to Ireland. Because of our history and our

fight for independence and land ownership, selling or disposing of land is usually a last and least preferred option.

### ACF COMMENTS

I got to know some of the association's members over the past year or so and was delighted to be invited to the Charleston conference. I look forward to attending other events in the future—for both the social and professional benefits.

ACF is a very welcoming organization. The professional nature of the group was an eye opener for me. I found the organization way ahead of comparable organizations in Ireland. The entry criterion for membership into ACF is stringent and the emphasis on professional ethics is to be complemented.

As a lobby group, ACF appears well organized. This is something that is lacking in the industry in Ireland at the present time. As an example, forestry premiums in Ireland have been cut by 8 percent. There is no concerted effort in the industry to lobby the government to reverse this. There are lessons to be learned in Ireland from the way you run your business.

The large attendance at the conference is a testament to the importance that members place on the organization. I would like to compliment the organizers of the event that encompassed both the business and social aspects of ACF.

I can honestly say that the Practice of Consulting Forestry course was the most informative and thought-provoking course that I have attended in five years. The course was well structured and delivered by informed speakers. While the industry in the U.S. is on a different scale to Ireland, there are many facets to the way you do business that are transferable to Ireland.

I am delighted to have been given the opportunity to join this organization and intend to be an active member. ☺

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"I was only ever interested in two potential careers—forestry or farming. Professional rugby would have been nice had I reached that level! I entered University in 1994 and in Year two I had to decide on what degree to major in. Forestry was the clear winner. Working with my father in forestry was a major influence as was observing my Uncle PJ's job.

"The profession appealed to me because of its business model; i.e. plant a crop, control costs, manage it efficiently and sell when price demands it. Its largely outdoor life style also appealed. I'm not an office person and even now the days spent in the office, while essential, are a chore. Its daily variability, the fact that you can see a result for the work you do is also satisfying. The private forestry sector was also developing at the time and this offered opportunities.

"At the ACF conference, Glen Dabney told me he changed his work practice to now do what he enjoys doing. I can honestly say, I enjoy my profession, and money can't buy that."