

The colonial origins of scientific forestry in Britain

This paper traces the origins of modern British forestry in the colonial context, mainly India, and how it was introduced through estate forestry and the universities in Scotland. It will discuss how British forestry became based on scientific principles developed to counter the negative effects of deforestation in continental Europe. Meanwhile in the colonies botanists and other scientists witnessed the negative effects of the overexploitation of forests and the disappearance of vegetation cover. This gave rise to the fear for local or even continental climate change, desiccation, species extinction and soil erosion. To counter these negative effects and a looming timber shortage the Indian colonial Government created in 1864 the Indian Forest Service. It employed German foresters to help set up the service because of their expertise in scientific forestry. Forest workers and officers were sent to France to be trained at the Imperial forestry school in Nancy. It was in the colonial context that the fears raised by colonial scientists amalgamated with the continental European forestry practices. These ideas were brought back from India by foresters returning to Britain, where it provided the fundament on which modern British forestry developed. The continental/colonial forestry practices and theories formed the basis for the curricula of forestry education in late 19th century in Britain.

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