Beech Forests

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Beech Forests

by

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To Nobue, Angelique and Rosanna

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PREFACE

There are some good reasons to start a global study of beech forests. One reason may be the importance of beech for man. In many places and in many ages, beech has played an important role in people's lives (Table 1). Already in old ages beech was useful for nuts, fuelwood and *bokiz*, beechwood tablets carved with runes, from which probably our word 'book' is derived. Beech still plays an important role in people's lives. Another reason for a global study of beech forests is that it lifts us above the detailed but fragmented image of a local study. My study of beech forests started out of love for these often beautiful forests, and, gradually, a small project grew into a world wide study.

Table 1. Beech names.

Scientific name	Name	Language	Meaning - origin
<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	beech	English	bhagos (Indo-European)
do	<i>Buche, Rotbuche</i>	German	
do	<i>beuk</i>	Dutch	
do	<i>bok</i>	Swedish	
do	<i>bøg</i>	Danish	
do	<i>hêtre, fayard</i>	French	hetre = hester (Germanic), indicating young beeches
do	<i>haya</i>	Spanish	
do	<i>faig</i>	Catalan	
do	<i>faggio</i>	Italian	
do	<i>fagus</i>	Latin	phagos = glutton (Greek), referring to edible nuts
do	<i>fagul</i>	Romanian	
do	<i>buk</i>	Czech	
<i>F. sylvatica</i> subsp. <i>orientalis</i>	<i>kayin</i>	Turkish	
<i>Fagus crenata</i>	<i>buna</i>	Japanese	unknown
do	<i>sobaguri</i>	Japanese	noodle chestnut (old), indicating hairy cupule-penduncles
<i>Fagus japonica</i>	<i>inubuna</i>	Japanese	inferior beech
<i>Fagus</i> spp.	<i>shuiqinggang</i>	Chinese	water-green-ridge
<i>Fagus longipetiolata</i>	<i>de' nui cao</i>	Vietnamese	

During my study, I did not encounter any virgin forest beech forest, no matter how much I would have liked it. Man has been around for a long time. Sometimes I feel we underestimate our ancestors. Some of the old forester's books display much knowledge on for example the ecology of trees. Thousand years ago, people knew very well how to use the forest. People knew which trees provided the best fuelwood, or acorns or beechnuts for pigs, and, therefore, which trees should be spared and which trees could be cut. In Europe, millennia of use has strongly affected the forest in a way that can not be undone by 200 years of undisturbed development. We also tend to underestimate the accessibility of some forests areas. I remember travelling for hours on dirt roads, then for several hours past ridges and steep slopes through the beech forest of Shirakami in Japan with a feeling of entering virgin beech forest, only to be shown a 200 years old detailed map with all the small brooks and their names. Two hundred years ago, it was no problem to walk a few days to enter a beech forest. Learning this, I realised the need to know a little more about the human history of beech forest to understand my ecological observations.

This book is about change and development of beech forest: the historical beech forest. In a given situation, science tries to understand what 'has-happened' in order to predict what 'is-going-to-happen'. In this book I try

to give a global but broad description of what 'has happened' to beech forests, in order to give a better prediction of how they will develop in future. I describe forest history, from the role of man to environmental influences to the role of the trees themselves. A connection is made between forest history that is observed in plants (a few years), trees (a century in tree-rings), human records (several centuries) and fossils (millennia). Further, parallels and differences between regions or continents were essential to fill gaps in our knowledge on a local level. We shall see that history decided which trees were where and when, and that man was a mayor player in many regions and in many ways. The prediction of future development will not and can not provide much detail, but will help to anticipate trends or to understand unexpected alternative developments. Understanding alternative developments is important because they may be anticipated due to changes in climate and especially changes in human influences. I hope this book will be of help to those looking for changes in beech forests.

Rob Peters
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