

SUMMING UP AND CLOSE

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14 September, 2003

It is an immense privilege not only to open your proceedings, but to close them and reflect on all that we have learned and shared. Clearly you won't want me to summarise paper by paper: indeed, this afternoon's panel of speakers have highlighted their main points far more eloquently than I could. But it is fair for me to ask: What did you expect, and are you satisfied? Has your first meeting outside the United States succeeded for you?

So, what have we learned? What are the pointers for the future? Firstly, we have shared new knowledge and gained new insights, and even learned some new words like 'shredding'. But what is clear to me is that there is a continuing imperative to name, classify, and identify at genus, species and cultivar level. We continue our God-given task of taxonomy (Genesis 2:20). However, in this work are we neglecting some modern techniques and specifically, use of DNA and its derivative diagnostic tools? There are issues of parentage, of closeness of species, of identifying resistant forms for which reliance on morphological features of the older taxonomy serve us less well.

Secondly, the need for research remains paramount. We have been forcefully alerted to the devastation and threat of *Phytophthora ramorum* causing 'sudden oak death' or SOD. (Now all the more worrying owing to its discovery on beech trees in UK). The knowledge of cultural practices and their impacts, of how treatments affect tree and stand growth and of the interplay of these with silviculture and the environment remain inadequately understood. We need research; we need research that is properly recorded, and we need research to be systematic and sustained, but I fear I am crying in the wilderness. But if there is one area of research to highlight, it has to be oak genetics and how best to utilise the immense diversity of this supremely important genus.

Thirdly I must touch on politics and related concerns for the 21st century. Deforestation is a largely tropical issue, but what of the tropical oaks in the closely related *Castanopsis* and *Lithocarpus* genera? There is ignorance about trees and forests: how can our understanding of oaks help dispel at least a little of this? How can our love affair with oaks serve the greater good? And, too, there is the present anxiety over climate change, the affect of which may well come to dominate all our thinking in decades to come.

Lastly, what is the thread running through the last two days? For me it has been oaks and heritage. In some senses, cultural values are an even greater reason for working with oaks than their remarkable utility. And, as a Christian, and today being Sunday, can I remind you of the gospel oaks of our land under which great preachers like Wesley, Whitfield and Spurgeon proclaimed the message of Christ.

I hope I have captured the essence of our conference. I trust you will depart more knowledgeable, with friendships made or renewed, and with a zeal to continue because you work with one to our planet's great natural assets – the genus *Quercus*.

Finally, there are many to thank, but I would specially add gratitude to God who has blessed us with fine weather for our days in conference and on field trips.