

Report to KfWf from Wildfire 2013

Following the success of Wildfire 2011, the UK's biennial wildfire conference returned from 22nd-23rd October and this year was held at in the Vale Resort, Glamorgan. The venue, more used to hosting the Welsh Rugby Union squad, was a great setting for Wildfire 2013 and looked after us very well. Over 150 delegates, speakers and exhibitors took part in Wildfire 2013 which made for some great conversations and excellent networking over the two days.

The first day opened with a series of three talks outlining the management of wildfires from a range of national and international experiences – South Wales, New Zealand and Ireland. After morning coffee (and cakes!), the NERC-funded Knowledge for Wildfire project reported on its recent activities and introduced the sponsored poster session. This was one of the key sessions for me as it gave me the opportunity to present some of my recent work. Here PhD students, early career researchers and established researchers in the field of wildfire could disseminate their current work to the wider community. There were a variety of topics on display from radar remote sensing of fire scars, to thermal regimes in soils following wildfires, and mapping Manchester's wildfires, with everything in between. One poster showed a free South African app for getting updates on wildfires and fire weather index data. I was able to present some of my initial work on charcoal production in wildfires and got some useful feedback from a number of delegates. The poster abstracts and selection of the posters will be available online at www.kfwf.org.uk in due course. I would like to thank KfWf for the bursary which made it possible for me to attend the conference.



One of the things the Wildfire conferences do so well is the engaging and relevant fieldtrips that are run as part of the conference. This year South Wales FRS and Natural Resources Wales took up the responsibility with ease and treated the delegates to a live demonstration of offensive burning techniques – basically, using fire to fight fire, and to learn about fire behaviour. Why wait for dry fuel when you can bring your own? In an idea borrowed from Catalonia, dry straw was spread on the ground and fire lines ignited with a drip torch. The small trackside cutting was used like a scaled-up lab fire table to simulate fire behaviour with different ignition patterns, slopes and aspects. The surrounding wet vegetation acted as natural control lines. In another unusual



demonstration, a garden leaf blower, more usually used to clear paths and patios, was skilfully used to quite literally blow out the fire. We heard that arson is a significant problem in the rural-urban-interface of the Rhondda Valleys, so it's important that crews have this kind of hands-on training in vegetation fire behaviour and suppression. The partnership approach between the South Wales FRS, Natural Resources Wales and others is working well in reducing incidents, particularly through Project Bernie's work with young people.



The day was formally rounded off by the launch of the Fire & Rescue Service Wildfire Guidance Manual, written largely by Northumberland FRS. Paper and electronic copies of this important document, sponsored by the Scottish Government, were quickly snapped up but it is also available online at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/10/6118>. The conference dinner provided a fitting end to the day and needless to say conversations kept on going into the small hours!

Unlike some conferences I have been to the final day wasn't one where the delegates could sit back and relax. With only half a day available the conference organisers did well to pack in lots of excellent talks from a range of speakers including some in parallel sessions - it was a shame that I couldn't listen to all of them. It was good to see an environmental session, with papers from three young researchers. One thing I was impressed by throughout the conference was the great use of visuals in the talks - from John Dold's infra-red videos of spiral ignition patterns to Tom Smith's inventive use of Prezi to present work on computer modelling of wildfires.

Wildfire 2013 was a great conference and allowed me to catch up with a number of colleagues and to make new contacts - I certainly have some follow up conversations to have in the coming weeks! I would like to thank Rural Development Initiatives for organising the conference and the Knowledge for Wildfire project for financial support. I will definitely be looking forward to Wildfire 2015!

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