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## Forestry still scarred by first world war

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I am a forester and erstwhile steward of some of the forests in the Welsh hills above Llanddewi Brefi. The poetry of Jim Perrin's Country Diary (20 August) struck a painful chord. The spruce plantations of the 20th century originated in the very war that killed the poet Edward Thomas. I regret that we marched them in lines over the hills long after their genesis, as a timber reserve in time of submarine blockade, had become a redundant justification. The nearby Welsh poet Gwenallt wrote (in Welsh) of the "trees of the third war" claiming the farms.

Worse, as Country Diary tells, we still persist, uniform conifer plantations are clearfelled, in "Somme-like" scenes (to use a poignant word, now English), and then replanted in another "rotation" of trees much the same. It goes on quietly, with public subsidies, accompanied by sophisticated talk of "standards" and "sustainable forestry".

It does not have to be so. Some foresters now advocate more natural continuous-cover forestry, eschewing clearfelling, and using thinning, natural regeneration and more native species. Uniform monocultural plantations could be consigned to the dustbin of history, along with the wars of the early 20th century which gave birth to such violent forestry practices on the hills of Britain.

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*Aberystwyth*

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