



IFSS 2017 Participation Report

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Day 1 – 2nd July 2017

After getting our last breakfast from the pretour, we got onto the bus. A few other participants that did not attend the pretour joined us for the 6 hour long bus drive to NMMU George Campus. The rest of the IFSA organising committee were frantically busy doing registrations and allocating rooms. We waited for the international delegates to be sorted out first before we went for our own registrations and room allocations. The rest of the evening was basically free time spent meeting new people.

Day 2 – 3rd July:

The second day was the official opening of IFSS 2017. The OC managed to show off South Africa's talent by getting a group of local xylophone players to welcome everyone. We were addressed by representatives of DAFF, NMMU George campus as well as the Mayor of George. They also had a live broadcast with one of the local radio stations. After the official opening of IFSS 2017 we had a tree planting ceremony. Two people from each region of the world were elected to plant a Yellowwood tree as a symbol of them setting their feet on the soils of Africa. Initially it was just two representatives of each region, but soon after almost everyone was lending a hand in planting the trees.

Lunch was served and immediately after we had our first dialog session. We were divided into groups and three main questions were posed – 1: What is the current role of youth in the global forestry Landscape? - 2: How would you like your role to change in the global forestry landscape? – 3: What needs to be done to put into action our renewed role in the global forestry landscape? – The common answers to these questions were – 1: the youth's new innovative ideas are not being heard or taken seriously; old foresters prefer doing it the 'old fashioned' way. – 2: the youth would like to promote and put into action their new ideas – 3: the key to making a change is educating people younger than us so that we can have a strong backup on our viewpoints.

The official opening gala dinner was held that evening. It was an all-round wonderful experience; the food, the live local band (again South Africa's talent was showcased) and just the positive vibes in the atmosphere was phenomenal.

Day 3 – 4th July: After breakfast, the first plenary session of the IFSS 2017 began. In this General Assembly, IFSA positions were explained and discussed. This was led by former IFSA President Jesse Mahone. Thereafter some MSc students presented their studies and findings to us which was extremely interesting and broadened our thinking and perception of the different aspects of forestry.



The international evening was one of the highlights of the tour. It was great to just experience and appreciate so many different cultures in one room. Each country brought their local dishes and drinks which we all enjoyed.





Day 4 – 5th July:

The first destination after breakfast was the Cango Caves in Oudtshoorn. Here a very enthusiastic tour guide explained the formations of stalagmites and stalactites. He also gave us a brief but informative history session about how the caves were discovered.



Upon our arrival back at NMMU George campus, we prepared for a short walk up the plantations surrounding the campus. One of the lecturers of NMMU led the walk and gave explanations of how forestry is done in South Africa. Most people were amazed at the rate of growth of our trees. Discussions ranged from rotation times to soil affecting factors. After the walk the second plenary session was held. This mainly dealt with changes in the IFSA statutes and by-laws.

Dinner was then served and thereafter we all got together into our regional groups where Ulrich Hechter (NMMU) and Noncedo Ngubane (Stellenbosch University) were elected as the regional representatives for Southern Africa.

Day 5 – 6 July:

The most of this day was spent driving. During the drive the devastating results of the Knysna fires was apparent. Our driving time was a bit underestimated and with lengthy stops in between we eventually reached our destination which was the Manderson Hotel in Eastern Cape. Upon arrival there was some mix up with the room allocations, but it was sorted and eventually everyone went to bed.

Day 6 – 7 July:

More driving was done to reach the summit of the spur on the grounds of Rance Timber in Hogsback. This day was one of the most exciting days of the trip. We visited Rance Timber's plantation where we had one of the most spectacular views. Their fire management methods were explained to us as there was a possible threat of a fire reaching their plantations at the time.

We then drove down to the Hogsback Arboretum where the OC presented us each with our own locally made hiking stick with our surnames engraved on it. Hereafter we had a short hike to “the big tree” which was a marvel! After the hike we headed back to the hotel for dinner.





Day 7 – 8 July:

This day was the epitome of the tour for me as a South African! We first visited the Steve Biko convention centre where we were served a wonderful brunch and after that had the opportunity to visit the grave of the Honourable Mr. Stephan Bantu Biko. The broken chains monument on his grave is what was most heart trembling for me. To pay respects to a man who gave his life for our freedom was a tremendous experience. Knowing that he played a major role to ensure that I would be able to study and make something of myself was the only thought running through my mind. We also passed by his mother's grave as well as the house that he lived in.

We headed back to the convention center where we had a rather short but still explosive tour of the museum. Hereafter we drove back to the hotel and started the 3rd plenary session, which was just some of the participants, running for official positions for the following year, presenting themselves.

Day 8 - 9 July:

We departed straight after lunch for Kwa-Zulu Natal. We made a pit-stop on this 6 hour trek at the Hans Merensky sawmill, where we were greeted by the Stellenbosch University Alumni and two time former SFGA president, Eugene Greyling. We were educated about the history of both the company as well as the founder and then provided with a tour of the sawmill and informed about the processes behind the successful functioning of the mill. Once that was done, the 13 hour drive commenced and eventually ended up at DUT.

Day 9 – 10 July:

This day we drove out to the Mondi Midlands Plantation. We had a brief presentation about the company and its values, then got split into groups. Mondi had different stations set up for us. We saw almost everything there is to see at their nursery, from seed extractions to the growth and preparation of their seedlings. This was one of the most informative sessions we had about South African forestry.





Day 10 – 11 July:

Unfortunately I couldn't take part in this day's activities. I was feeling very sick and had to take a day's rest. The rest of the participants made their way to SAPPI.

Day 11 – 12 July:

We started our day by taking a drive to ICFR, in which we saw young unthinned stands of both *Acacia melonixylina* and a variety of *Eucalyptus spp.* The rate at which these species were growing were quite astonishing, considering a log pile that we passed was only 8 years old. After this pit-stop, we drove to Piet Retief where we spent the evening at Waterside lodge.

Day 12 – 13 July:

This day's activities started off with Mondi's strategic firefighting lessons. Their advanced technology and designs that they've engineered on their trucks were impressive to say the least. It was exciting because at the time when we were there they had an actual fire that they had to fight. We then went off to see their planting techniques. We were exposed to all their machinery and their efficient methods.

After this insightful visit we left for Mpumalanga. On our way we passed a weigh bridge and it was discovered that one of our busses were overweight. After sorting that out we arrived at a lodge where we were to stay for the following two nights.

Day 13 – 14 July:

For the international students this must have been the day they've been waiting for. The Kruger National Park was our destination. We left in the early hours of the morning. Successfully, most of us got to see the big five, amongst many other animals. After this wonderful day we had a traditional South African braai and just spent most of the night socializing around the fire.

Day 14 – 15 July:

This day was also one of the highlights of the trip. We visited SAFCOL and had a brief introduction of the company by one of the employees. Thereafter he took us to one of the most beautiful waterfalls I've ever seen. Many of the participants went for a swim, but the water was way too cold for us South Africans. Thereafter we headed to the only forestry museum in the Southern Hemisphere. After this we headed for Pretoria where we spent the last nights at the AFFIES boys High School.





Day 15 – 16 July:

The second dialogue session took place in the morning where we were posed with another 3 questions – 1: What is the status of the South African forestry landscape? - 2: What do you see as opportunities for SA forestry landscape – 3: .What strategic guidelines and suggestions can you give as a way of capitalising on these opportunities? – The answers that came from our discussions were mainly that we need to implement more agro forestry and that we should try to do less plantation forestry.

After this discussion, we headed to take a tour of FABI facilities and talks about research which is done in the forestry sector. During the tour, we observed their fantastic labs and absorbed their bountiful knowledge regarding forest ecology. Thereafter we went to the main campus where we were greeted by Mr Mike Wingfield and were handed packs containing information regarding the institute, as well as the first ever FABI cap.

This then led to the closing ceremony on the beautiful grounds of the University of Pretoria. We had the privilege of having the Deputy Minister of DAFF grace us with his presence. It was also good to see many guest speakers return for the classy gala.

Thereafter, a bar was booked for us with a private DJ. It was a good evening as it was well controlled. Nevertheless, all fun had to come to an end as we eventually headed back to the residence.



Day 16 – 17 July:



The tour had finally come to an end and we had to follow through with the difficult task of saying goodbye to the people we have become so close with during these few days. We were supposed to

be dropped off at the Gautrain and then leave for the airport, but the busses dropped us at the airport instead. Here we said our last goodbyes and then flew back to Cape Town.