

Novel algorithms for efficiently accumulating, analysing and visualising full-waveform LiDAR in a volumetric representation with applications to forestry

submitted by

Milto Miltiadou

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Milto Miltiadou

Abstract

no more than 300 words

NOTES:

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Purple colour: addition/corrections according to Mike's comments

Red colour: notes

Gray colour: text that is going to be modified

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Abstract

This study focuses on enhancing the visualisations and classifications of forested areas using coincident full-waveform (fw) LiDAR data and hyperspectral images. The ultimate aim is use both datasets to derive information about forests and show the results on a 3D virtual, interactive environment. Influenced by Persson et al (2005), voxelisation is an integral part of this research. The intensity profile of each full-waveform pulse is accumulated into a voxel array, building up a 3D density volume. The correlation between multiple pulses into a voxel representation produces a more accurate representation, which confers greater noise resistance and it further opens up possibilities of vertical interpretation of the data. The 3D density volume is then aligned with the hyperspectral images using a 2D grid similar to Warren et al (2014) and both datasets are used in visualisations and classifications.

Previous work in visualising fw LiDAR has used transparent objects and point clouds, while the output of this system is a coloured 3D-polygon representation, showing well-separated structures such as individual trees and greenhouses. The 3D density volume, generated from the fw LiDAR data, is polygonised using functional representation of object (FReps) and the marching cubes algorithm (Pasko and Savchenko, 1994) (Lorensen and Cline, 1987). Further, an optimisation algorithm is introduced that uses integral volumes (Crow, 1984) to speed up the process of polygonising the volume. This optimisation approach not only works on non-manifold object, but also a speed up of up to 51% was achieved. The polygon representation is also textured by projecting the hyperspectral images into the mesh. In addition, the output is suitable for direct rendering with commodity 3D-accelerated hardware, allowing smooth visualisation.

In future work, the effects of combining both hyperspectral imagery and fw LiDAR in classifications and visualisations are examined. At first, two pixel wise classifiers, a support vector machine and a Bayesian probabilistic model, will be used for testing the effects of the combination in generating tree coverage maps. Higher accuracy classification results are expected when metrics from both datasets are used together. Regarding the visualisations, the differences of applying surface reconstruction versus direct volumetric rendering will be discussed and an ordered tree structure with integral sums of the node values will be used for speeding up the ray-tracing of direct volumetric rendering and improving memory management of aforementioned optimisation algorithm with integral volumes. Further, deferred rendering is suggested for testing the visual human perception of projecting multiple bands of the hyperspectral images on the FW LiDAR

polygon representations. At the end of this project the combination of the datasets will be used along with the watershed algorithm for tree segmentation, which is useful for measuring the stem density of a forest and for tree species classifications.

from EDE:

Firstly, a new and fast way of aligning the FW LiDAR with Remotely Sensed Images has been developed in DASOS and by generating tree coverage maps it was shown that the combination of those datasets confers better remote survey results. This work was presented at the 36th ISRSE International Conference.

Secondly, automated detection of dead trees in native Australian forests has a significant role in protecting animals, which live in those trees and are close to extinction. DASOS allow the generation of 3D signatures characterising dead trees. A comparison between the discrete and FW LiDAR is performed to demonstrate the increased survey accuracy obtained when the FW LiDAR are used.

Finally, the last application is for improving visualisations for foresters. Foresters have a great knowledge about forests and can derive a wealth of information directly from visualisations of the remotely sensed data. This reduces the travelling time and cost of getting into the forests. This research optimises visualisations by using the new FW LiDAR representations and a speed of up to 51% has been achieved.

FW LiDAR has great potentials in forestry and this research has already started to have an impact in the FW LiDAR community by making those huge datasets easier to handle. DASOS is now used at Interpine Group Ltd, a world leading Forestry Company in New Zealand and it has been tested from a PhD student at Bournemouth University who looks into estimating bird distribution in the New Forest. In the future, it is expected that DASOS will be widely used in remote forest surveys (i.e. estimating the commercial value of a forest and detecting infected trees at early stages for treatment).

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Abbreviations and Glossary

AGC	Automatic Gain Controller
ALS	Airborne Laser Scanning
APL	Airborne Processing Library
ARF	Airborne Research Facility
CG	Computer Graphics
CUDA	parallel computing platform available on nvidia graphic cards
DASOS	(δασος=forest in Greek), the open source software implemented for managing FW LiDAR data
DEM	Digital Elevation Model
DTM	Digital Terrain Model (DTM)
FW	Full-Waveform
GB	Gigabyte
GPU	Graphics Processing Unit
LiDAR	Light Detection And Ranging
MRI	Magnetic Resonance Imaging
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NDVI	Normalised Difference Vegetation Index
NERC	Natural Environment Research Council
NIR	Near-Infrared Region of the electromagnetic spectrum
QGIS	Quantum Geographic Information System
TB	Terabyte
VIS	Visual Spectrum
VLR	Variable Length Records
WPDF	Waveform Packet Descriptor Format
UK	United Kingdom

Publications

DASOS-User Guide, M. Miltiadou, N.D.F Campbell, M. Brown, S.C. Aracil, M.A. Warren, D. Clewley, D.Cosker, and M. Grant, Full-waveform LiDAR workshop at Interpine Group Ltd, Rotorua NZ, 2016

Improving and Optimising Visualisations of full-waveform LiDAR data, M. Miltiadou, M. Brown, N.D.F Campbell, D. Cosker, M. Grant, *EuroGraphics UK, Computer Graphics & Visual Computing*, 2016

University of Bath Alignment of Hyperspectral Imagery and Full-Waveform LiDAR data for visualisation and classification purposes, M. Miltiadou, M. A. Warren, M. Grant, and M. Brown, *The International Archives of Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Sciences*, vol. 40, no. 7, p. 1257, 2015.

Reconstruction of a 3D Polygon Representation from Full-Wavefrom LiDAR data, M. Miltiadou, M. Grant, M. Brown, M. Warren, and E. Carolan, *RSPSoc Annual Conference, New Sensors for a Changing World*, 2014.

Awards

EDE and Ravenscroft Prize - Finalist: Selected as one of the five finalists for this is a prestigious prize that recognises the work of best postgraduate researchers.

Student Poster Competition at Silvilaser.

Conference Presentations

Remote Sensing Cyprus (RSCy) Conference, 2017 , Paphos, Cyprus - Oral Presentation

ForestSAT Conference,2016 , Santiago, Chile - Oral Presentation

Computer Graphics & Visual Computing (CGVC),2016, Bournemouth, United Kingdom - Poster Presentation

Silvilaser, 2015, La Grant Motte, France - Oral Presentation

International Symposium of Remote Sensing of the Environment (ISRSE), 2015, Berlin, German - Oral Presentation

Remote Sensing and Photogrammetry Society (RSPSoc) Conference, New Sensors for a Changing world , 2014, Aberystwyth, United Kingdom - Oral Presentation

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Forest Monitoring: Importance and Applications

Forest monitoring involves checking and observing the changes in the structure of the forests and their foliage over the years. It has a significant value in both sustainable and commercial forests, because it contributes to managing biodiversity, maintaining forest health and optimising wood trade procedures as explained below:

- **Biodiversity** plays a substantial role in ecosystem resilience [1] while various human activities affect biological communities by altering their composition and leading species to extinction [2]. For example, in Australian native forests many arboreal mammals and birds rely on hollow trees for shelters [3]. Hollow trees are trees that have hollows, which are semi-enclosed cavities on trunks and branches. They are formed by natural forces, like bacteria, fungi and insects and may take tens to hundreds of years to become suitable for animal/bird shelters. Unfortunately recent studies shown that there us likely to be a shortage of hollows available for colonisation in the near future [4] [5]. Therefore monitoring and protecting hollow trees has a positive impact in preserving biodiversity.
- **Forest Health:** Protecting vegetation from pests and diseases. An example of pests are the Brushtail Possums, which were initially brought to New Zealand for fur trade, but they have escaped and become a threat to native forests and vegetation [6]. In addition, anthropogenic factors have a negative impact to nature. For instance, acid rain is responsible for the freezing decease at red bruces because it reduces the membrane-associated calcium, which is important for tolerating cold [7]. Those changes in nature need to be monitor in order to preserve a healthy and resilience ecosystem.

- **Wood Trade:** Measuring stem volume and basal areas of trees contributes to forest planning and management [8]. For example, measuring stocking and wood quality would help into estimating the cost of harvesting the trees in relation to the stocking [9].
- **Scientific study:** Forests cover approximately 25 percent of the world's land area [Mike's source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_forest_area; but use the wikipedia article's primary source!], with temperate areas such as Europe tending towards 35 percent. Developments that allow more accurate, more complete or more detailed studies of these areas can contribute to better management.

Traditionally, forest monitoring involves field work such as travelling into the area of interest and taking manual measurements. Regarding the need to monitor hollows, tree climbing with ladders and ropes gives very accurate results but is dangerous, expensive, time consuming, and cannot easily scale into surveying large forested areas [10] [11]. Therefore, automated ways of monitoring forests are essential and this is why Remote Sensing has a significantly positive impact in forestry.

1.2 Background Information about Remote Sensing and Airborne Laser Scanning Systems

Remote sensing refers to the acquisition of information about objects, for example vegetation and archaeological monuments, without physical contact and the subsequent interpretation of that information. The sensors used to capture the information are divided into passive and active. For example satellite photography is passive because information are collected from the reflected natural sun light, while Airborne Laser Scanners (ALS) are active because they emit laser beams and collects information from the backscattered laser energy [12].

According to Wanger et al, Airborne Laser Scanning (ALS) is a growing technology used in environmental research to collect information about the Earth, such as vegetation and tree species. Comparing ALS with traditional photography, ALS is not influenced by light and it is therefore less dependent on weather conditions (ie. it collects information from below the clouds, or at night). The laser beam also partially penetrates the tree canopies allowing it to record information about the forest structure below the canopy, as well as the ground [13]. ALS methods are divided into pulse systems, which repeatedly emit pulses, and continuous wavelength systems that continuously emit light. They both acquire information from the backscattered laser

intensity over time, but continuous wavelength systems are more complicated because they obtain one extra physical parameter, the frequency of the ranging signal. Further, according to Wehr and Lohr, continuous wavelength systems are 85 times less accurate than pulse systems [14].

LiDAR (Light Detection And Ranging) systems are active and pulse laser scanning systems [14]. They are divided into two groups according to the diameter of the footprint left by the laser beam on the ground, which is primarily dependent on the distance between the sensor and the target (altitude, in most remote sensing) and the beam divergence. The small-footprint group has a 0.2-3m diameter, is widely commercialised and the sensors are mostly carried on planes (ALS systems). In contrast, the large-footprint systems have a wider diameter (10-70m) and during experiments they were mostly mounted on satellites. Small-footprint systems record at higher resolution but cannot guarantee that every pulse will reach the ground due to the small diameter of their footprint, making topographic measurements difficult, and are limited to smaller survey areas due to the cost and availability of aircraft. In contrast, large-footprint scanners have wider diameters and can therefore scan wider areas with the likelihood of recording the ground to be higher [15] .

In addition, there are two types of LiDAR data: discrete and full-waveform (FW). Discrete LiDAR records a few peaks of the reflected laser intensity, while FW LiDAR stores the entire backscattered signal. The discrete LiDAR has been widely used and a 40% reduction of fieldwork has been achieved at Interpine Ltd Group, New Zealand, with that technology. Regarding the newer FW LiDAR, scientists understand their concepts and potentials but due to the shortage of available tools able to handle these large datasets, there are very few uses of FW LiDAR [16].

The design of the first FW LiDAR system was introduced in 1980s, but the first operational system was developed by NASA in 1999 [17]. The vastly increased amount of information recorded within the FW LiDAR suggests many new possibilities and problems from the point of view of image understanding, remote surveying and visualisation. As an indication, a 9.3GB discrete LiDAR from New Forest, UK, corresponds to 55.7GB of FW LiDAR.

This research is focused on the representation and efficient use of FW LiDAR data and contributes both to forestry visualisations and classifications. Two datasets are used for testing and evaluation: the New Forest and the RedGum dataset. An in-depth explanation of LiDAR systems and the specifications, differences and challenges of the two datasets are given in Section 2. An overview of the specific aims, objectives and contributions of this thesis, set in the context of these datasets, is then given at Section 3.

Chapter 2

Acquire Data

Chapter 3

Overview of Thesis

Chapter 4

The open source software DASOS and the Voxelisation Approach

Chapter 5

Surface Reconstruction from Voxelised FW LiDAR Data

Chapter 6

Optimisation Attempts for the Surface Reconstruction

Chapter 7

Alignment with Hyperspectral Imagery

Chapter 8

Detection of Dead Standing Eucalyptus For Managing Biodiversity in Native Australian Forest

8.1 The Importance of Dead Wood

The value of dead trees from a biodiversity management perspective is large. Once a tree dies, its contribution to our ecosystem continues. The woody structure remains for centuries and it contributes to forest regeneration while providing resources for numerous surrounding organisms [71]. As an indication, more than 4000 species inhabit dead wood in Finland [72], where an estimate of 1000 species has been extinct [73]. These species do not only include animals and birds but also organisms, like fungi. Fungi contributes to wood decaying, formation of hollows and biodiversity, which is an important factor for a resilient ecosystem [74]. Observing the changes of fungal diversity on decaying wood has an increased interest in science [75] [76] [77] in order to ensure the continuous existence of decaying wood in forests.

Specifically in Australia, tree hollows play a significant role in managing biodiversity. Nearly all arboreal mammals rely on hollows with the exception of the Koala and perhaps Ringtail Possums that preferentially make a stick nest, but they use hollows as well. Additionally, a large number of Australian bird species rely on hollows for shelters [5]. Nevertheless, Australia has no real hollow creators like the northern hemisphere (e.g. Woodpeckers), and therefore it relies predominantly on natural processes of limb breakage, insect and fungal attack when access points are provided through damage

caused by wind, storms and fire. These kind of hollows take hundreds of years to form and because of that it is more likely to exist on dead trees. In Australia, studies predict shortage of hollows for colonisation in the near future [3] [4], therefore automated detection of them plays a significant role in protecting those animals. As an indicator of the importance of hollows in managing biodiversity, a few species that rely on hollows was provided as list by the Forestry Corporation of NSW. Those species are shown at Figure 8-1. According to the Department of the Environment of Australian Government and the Government of Western Australia sixe of them are protected, threatened or close to extinct [78] [79]. In Figure 8-1, those six species have a red border and their names are bold in its description.

For the aforementioned reasons, monitoring dead trees is essential for having a resilient ecosystem. Nevertheless, the distribution of dead trees significantly varies making detection of them difficult [80]. Remote sensing approaches has been introduce to automate the process of monitoring forest and further increase the spatial resolution of the monitored area. The following section gives an overview of the related work undertaken in Remote Sensing.

8.2 Related Work

Remote Sensing was introduced in monitoring dead trees in forests in order to improve detection due to their variance spread. Dead trees could either be fallen or standing. The task of identifying those types of them is different from a classification perspective. Fallen trees are identified by detecting segments or line-like features on the terrain surface using LiDAR data [81] [82]. Regarding standing dead trees, their shape (reduced number of leaves or broken branches) [83] and light reflectance (less green light illuminated) [84] are important factors for identifying them.

Previous work on dead standing trees detection, suggests single tree segmentation before dead trees identification [83].

Research on top tree detection with maxima and watershed for delineation. [85]

Improvements include using markers controlled watershed [86]. Hu et al also uses disks of Structural Elements SE to detect tree crowns of different sizes from the CHM as well [87]

Popescu and Zhao, 2008, uses the local maximum filtering of CHM and analyses the vertical distribution of the LiDAR points for detecting tree crowns. [88]

This research is focused on standing dead tree detection of Australian Eucalyptus, whose crown is not a semi-sphere or a cone like pine trees. Eucalyptus trees has In case of Eucalyptus single tree detection is a challenge on its own due to their irregular



Figure 8-1: A number of species that rely on tree hollows of which the red ones / bold ones are close to extinction: Kookaburra, Sulphur Crested Cockatoo, **Corella**, Crimson Rosella, Eastern Rosella, Galah, Rainbow Lorikeet, Musk Lorikeet, Little Lorikeet , Red-winged Parrot, **Superb Parrot**, Cockatiel, Australian Ringneck (Parrot), Red-rumped Parrot, Powerful Owl, Sooty Owl, Barking Owl, **Masked Owl**, **Barn Owl**, White-throated Treecreeper, Hollow Owl, **Brush-tailed Possum** (mammal)¹

¹The images of the birds were taken from the following links (Retrieved on the 27th of April 2016): Kookaburra: <<http://tenrandomfacts.com/blue-winged-kookaburra/>>, Sulphur Crested Cockatoo: <<http://aussiegal7.deviantart.com/art/Sulphur-Crested-Cockatoo-08-153341893>>, Corella: <<http://www.theparrotplace.co.nz/all-about-parrots/long-billed-corella/>>, Superb Parrot: <<http://www.davidkphotography.com/?showimage=637>>, Crimson Rosella: <http://25.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_m3mo89c40r1r4t9h1o1_1280.jpg>, Eastern Rosella: <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-pYxw51WjSOY/UB-LEFgd2KI/AAAAAAAAGw/9z60PUWE6TE/s1600/_GJS6601-as-Smart-Object-1.jpg>, Rainbow Lorikeet: <https://www.reddit.com/r/pics/comments/328fvc/a_rainbow_lorikeet_found_in_coastal_regions/>, Musk Lorikeet: <http://www.rymich.com/girraween/photos/animals/birds/medium/glossopsitta_concinna/glossopsitta_concinna_001.jpg>, Little Lorikeet: <<http://www.pbase.com/sjmurray/psittacidae>>, Red-winged Parrot: <<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/395894623469889727>>, Cockatiel: <<http://up.parsipet.ir/uploads/Cockatiels-for-sale.jpg>>, Australian Ringneck (Parrot): <<http://ontheroadmagazine.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Twenty-eight-parrot-2-min.jpg>>, Red-rumped Parrot: <<http://parrotfacts.net/wp-content/uploads/Red-Rumped-Parrot-on-a-tree.jpg>>, Powerful Owl: <http://farm1.staticflickr.com/219/495796536_f78dac04c1.jpg>, Sooty Owl: <http://www.mariewinn.com/marieblog/uploaded_images/screech2-738532.jpg>, Barking Owl: <<http://www.pcpimages.com/Nature-and-Wildlife/Birds/i-7JKSTp5/1/L/owl%20%281%20of%201%29-L.jpg>>, Masked Owl: <http://www.survival.org.au/images/birds/masked_owl_2_600.jpg>, Galah: <<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/537546905498955709/>>, White-throated Treecreeper: <<https://geoffpark.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/female-white-throated-treecreeper.jpg>>,

structure and multiple trunk splits.

Tree delineation from bottom to top [89]

An interesting work for delineating Eucalyptus recommends delineation from bottom to top. It first identifies standing trunks and then segments the points cloud.

This is then used for monitoring forest health [90]

Nevertheless, this approach is time consuming and here it is introduced a fast approach for rough classification similar to boost cascade [91] but extended to 3D.

Dong, 2009, introduced 3D tree shape signatures for distinguishing Oaks from Douglas fir tree crowns. The 3D shape signatures were generated by getting the distance distribution of random LiDAR point pairs of the two tree crown classes: Oaks and Douglas [92].

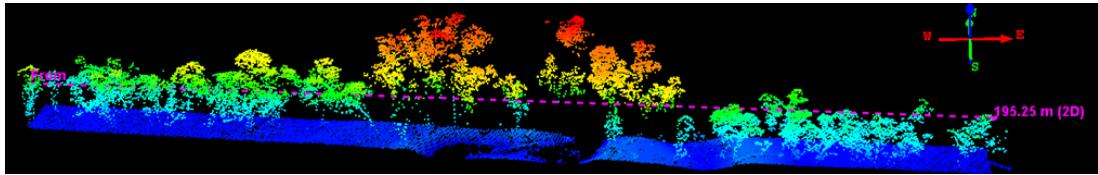


Figure 8-2: LiDAR point cloud showing that there are very limited points reflected from tree trunks.

Traditional ways of interpreting FW LiDAR data, suggests extraction of a denser points cloud using Gaussian decomposition [29] [30]. Nevertheless DASOS was influenced by Persson et al, 2005, who used voxelisation to visualise the waveforms [26]. But, DASOS do not only uses voxelisation for visualisations but also for extracting metrics useful in classification. It further normalises the intensities so that equal pulse length exists inside each voxel, making intensities more meaningful. It is further seems that the literature is moving towards voxelisation with the good results obtained at recent publication on tree species classification [33].

8.3 Data and Fieldplots

The data, provided by RPS Australia East Pty Ltd, were collected in March 2015 from the Riegl (LMS-Q780 or LMS-Q680i?) sensor at an Australian native Forest with eucalyptus. The fieldplots has been provided by (Interprine Group Ltd or Forest Corporation?). The LiDAR data used for this project are provided by RPS Australia East Pty Ltd and they were collected in March 2015 using the Riegl (LMS-Q780 or LMS-Q680i?) sensor. The Riegl LMS-Q??? is a native full-waveform sensor and

Hollow Owl: <http://www.mariewinn.com/marieblog/uploaded_images/screech2-738532.jpg>

the LiDAR point clouds were generated from the waveform instrument data during post processing. In addition, the field plots used for the classifications are provided by (Interprine Group Ltd or Forest Corporation?) and contain around 1000 Eucalypt trees while 10% of them are dead.

33 plots allocated randomly in the area of interest Plot Radius: 35.68m GPS tree location Tree information like Dead trees 2386 Trees 269 Dead Trees

8.4 Actual Data and Problem



Figure 8-3: The shape of dead trees significantly varies from the each other. Here there is an example of two dead trees.

8.5 Methodology

In this chapter, the 3rd feature of DASOS (Table ??) is used for generating 3D priors characterising dead standing Eucalypt trees. These 3D priors are used for detecting dead standing Eucalypt trees in native Australian forests.

8.6 Experiments and Results

8.7 Conclusions

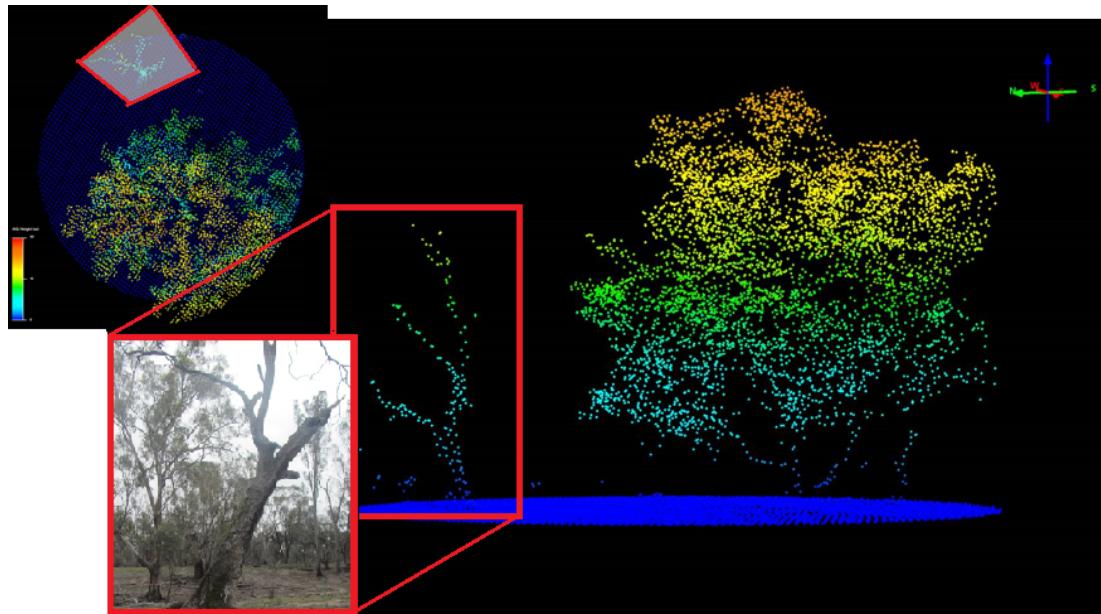


Figure 8-4: Example of a dead tree in relation to the discrete LiDAR point cloud.

Chapter 9

Comparison with Discrete Data

Chapter 10

Overall Results

Chapter 11

Conclusions

11.1 Contributions

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Appendix A

DASOS user guide

Appendix B

Case Study: Field Work in New Forest

B.1 Introduction

This section is a case study containing field work from a non-professional perspective to better understand the challenges of working remotely with forests. Remotely sensed data contain a great amount of information but in order to build a good system for identifying trees and materials, an in depth knowledge of them is required [12]. For that reason, this case study was created; information about the New Forest, which is a forest in the south of United Kingdom, were collected and a small validation dataset was created. The dataset created includes the tree species and approximate heights of the trees in two areas of interest.

Before travelling to the New Forest, two areas of interest were selected. These areas were selected according to the following criteria:

- There were LiDAR data of the selected area to be able to compare what we can see in real life with the scanned data
- Areas that had a variation of tree species were selected. This was done according to the (non-validated) results of a thesis of Bournemouth University that classified the tree species of the New Forest [93]. This helped get a broader range of tree species.

The following sections give a detailed description of the information gathered during the trip. This includes the species and height maps generated, the different types of landscapes found and the challenges faced.

B.2 Validation Data Collected

The tree classes were initially defined by the provided Bournemouth thesis [93]. A colour was chosen for each tree class and, while being in the New Forest, the aim was to mark each tree on the paper map with the corresponding colour. Using QGIS (Quantum Geographic Information System) the classification results of the forest assessment, undertaken by Sumnall in 2013 [93], were coloured with the same colours to ease comparison.

At the aforementioned forest assessment, there were 26 classes from 14 different species; the remaining 12 classes were young versions of the 14 species. Here the classes are reduced to 14 by merging all the young trees into the tree species classes (in the 4 years gap between the 2010 assessment and the visit to new Forest in 2014, the young trees would have aged). See table B.1 for the initial 14 classes. Nevertheless, more tree species existed in the areas of interest in New Forest than those 14 classes. The colours and symbols of the extra tree classes are shown on table B.2.

Tree	Colour
1. Beech	Yellow
2. Oak	Orange
3. Silver Birch	Light Brown
4. Sweet Chestnut	Brown
5. Corsican Pine	Red
6. Coast Redwood	Pink
7. Douglas Fir	Dark Purple
8. Grand Fir	Light Purple
9. Japanese Larch	Cyan
10. Lawson Cypress	Grey
11. Norway Spruce	Blue
12. Scots Pine	Green
13. Western Hemlock	Brown
14. Common Adler	Dark Brown

Table B.1: Colours of the initial 14 classes

During the visit, tree species maps were generated for a few square meters. The position of the trees were found relative to easily-spotted reference points (e.g. road crossing) that were marked in advance. That was done because, according to Dr. Ross Hill, no GPS can be accurate enough when trees are around since the satellite signal bounces off the leaves and reduces the positioning accuracy. In professional fieldwork, a total station is used but, for the purposes of this visit, it was not considered necessary. By the end of the case study, ground maps were coloured according to the tree species

Tree	Colour / Symbols
15. Ash	A
16. Hawthorn	Blue pen colour
17. <u>Malus (Crabapple)</u>	Highlighter
18. Holly Tree	
19. Trees that have been cut down	x
20. Trees that are mixed together	// (added on top of the normal colour)

Table B.2: Classes that were added during the trip

identified and estimates of the approximate heights of the trees were also noted down.

The following four maps were created for each selected area. The first two maps were created before the trip during preparation, while the last two contain the information collected during the field work.

- a screen shot of the area from Google map,
- the classification results from the forest assessment [93],
- the coloured tree species map and
- the approximated height map.

Comparing the validation dataset created with the classifications done at Bournemouth University (which were not validated), it is clear there are misclassifications. This is shown in Figures B-1 and B-2 and it is likely that occurs due to the over-segmentation of trees. Those wrong classifications justify that validation and field work data are essential for building a good classifier.

The first area is included in the LAS file named LDR-FW-FW10_01-201018715.LAS and it lies inside the limits: X = (433453 - 433761), Y = (102193 - 102405) [British National Grid coordinates]. The four maps that relate to these areas are shown in Figure B-1.

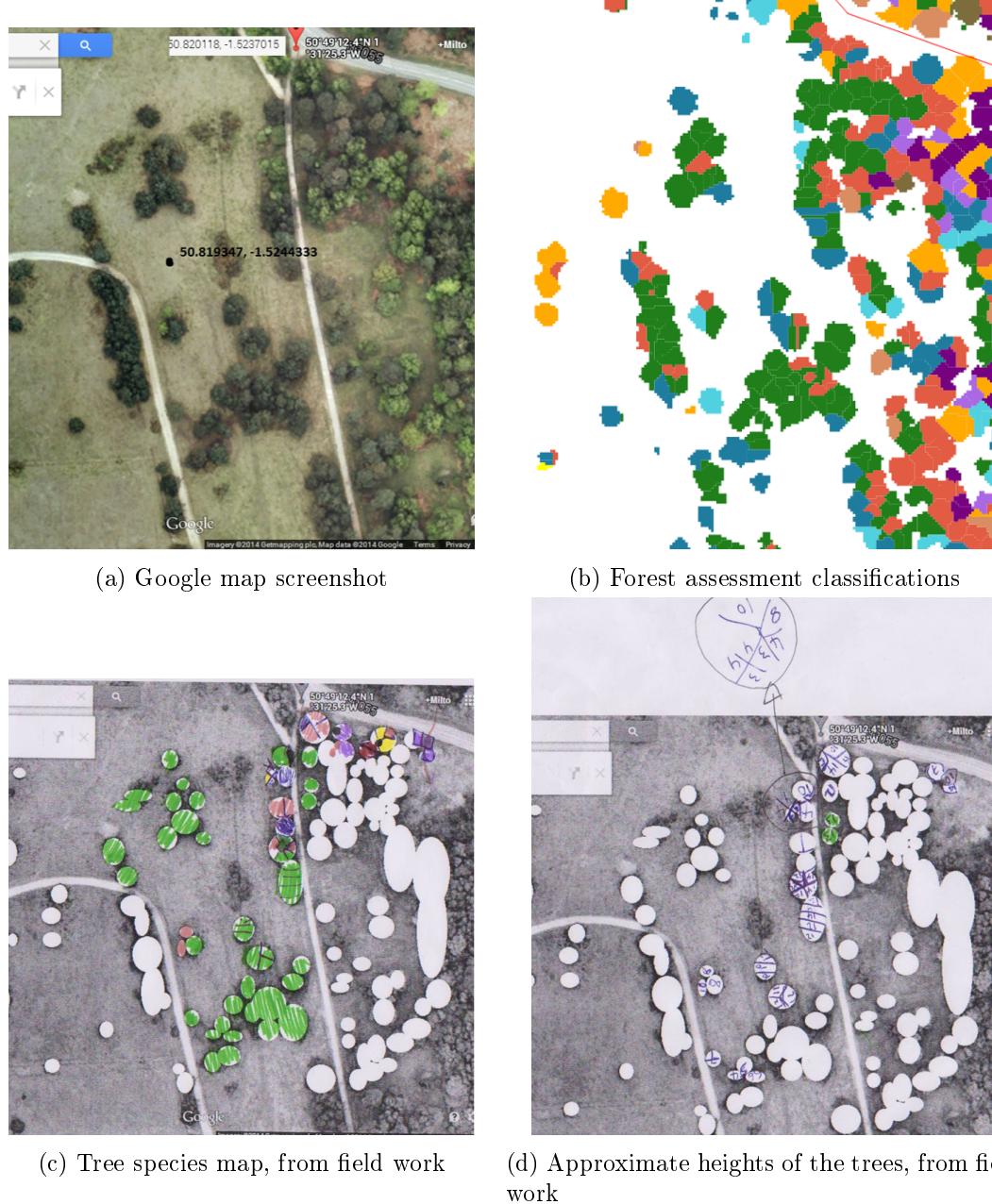
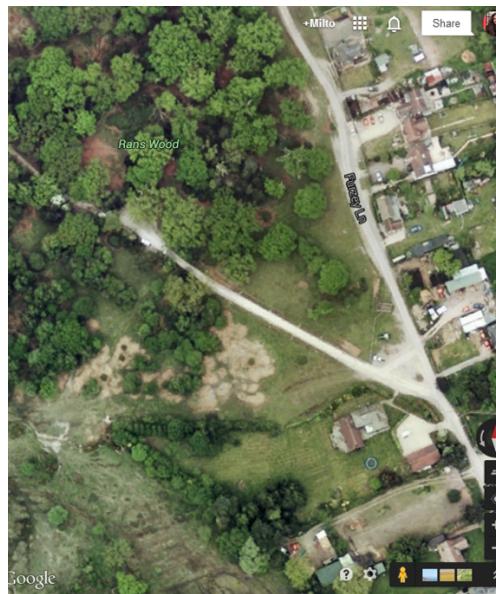
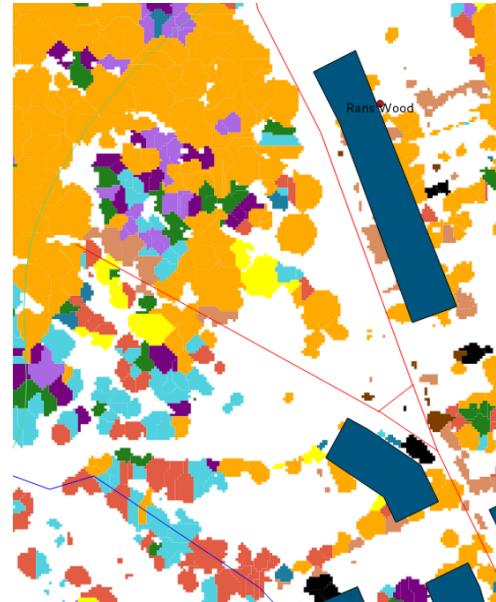


Figure B-1: The first area of interest and the related maps.

The second area is included in the LAS files named LDR-FW-FW10_01-201018719.LAS and LDR-FW-FW10_01-201018718.LAS and it lies inside the limits: X = (436442 - 436835), Y = (102334 - 102585) [British National Grid coordinates]. The four maps created for these areas are shown in Figure B-2.



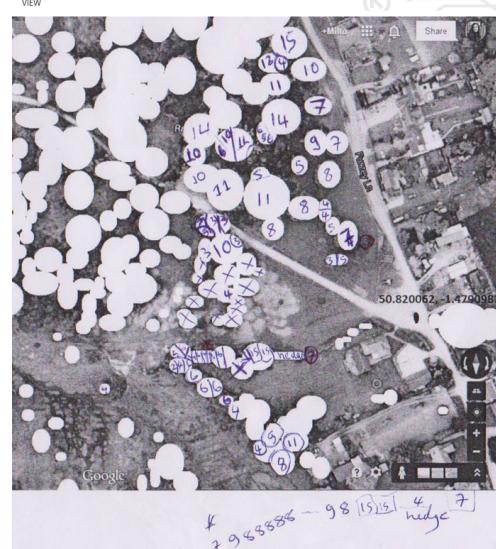
(a) Google map screenshot



(b) Forest assessment classifications



(c) Tree species map, from field work



(d) Approximate heights of the trees, from field work

Figure B-2: The second area of interest and the related maps.

- > Wrong classification due to over segmentation of the trees.

B.3 Landscape types

During the forest assessment in New Forest, not only validation data were collected, but also useful information about classifying the data. The following images show examples of the five landscape types that were found in New Forest:

1. Heather fields:



Figure B-3: Trees that have been cut down

2. Grass with a few scattered trees:



Figure B-4: Grass with a few scattered trees

3. Dense Forest:



Figure B-5: Dense forest

4. Bushes and Shrubs



Figure B-6: Trees that have been cut down

5. Lakes and rivers, which are more rarely found



Figure B-7: Lakes and rivers

Please note that the landscape types could significantly differ according to the scanned area. For example, the landscape of New Forest is flat while the landscape of Eaves Wood (another scanned forest in UK) is hilly. The landscape type should be taken into consideration during classifications.

B.3.1 Classification challenges

This case study brought further understanding of the challenges of creating validation data and writing a tree species classifier. These challenges are listed and explained below with some photos taken during field work:

1. Field work and remotely sensed data collection should happen around the same time to avoid changes that happens over time. In the New Forest case, the airborne data were collected in 2010 and many changes occurred in the intervening time - in the most extreme cases, some trees had been cut down.
2. Machine learning becomes more challenging as the number of classes increases. Regarding tree species classes, it is unrealistic to expect that all tree species will be identified. This point is underlined by the fact that the list of tree species used in the



Figure B-8: Trees that have been cut down

tree assessment held by Sumnall [93] didn't include a number of trees (e.g. holly trees and crabapple) that were widespread in New Forest.

3. There is much more than just trees in the forest, including mobile animals, that may confuse a classification if LiDAR returns hit rocks, animals, vehicles or buildings instead of branches, leaves and trunks. Any classification must account for inevitable errors due to non-target objects being in the scene.



Figure B-9: Animals in New Forest

4. Large validation datasets from a single area will not be sufficient, because trees of the same species are usually gathered together. For instance, the first selected area has many pine trees while the second one has many oak trees. Therefore, it is important to have many field plots spread well within the area of interest.

5. Further, some trees are entwined together which makes it difficult to identify from the data whether they are one or two trees. Examples are shown in Figure B-10; in the left image, the trunks of the two trees are very close to each other and, in the right image, a crabapple and an oak tree have grown together.



Figure B-10: Trees, which are mixed together

B.4 Conclusions and Discussion

To sum up, the trip to the New Forest was essential for better understanding the challenges of remote monitoring of forests. During the visit, a small validation dataset was generated; the species and height of trees that are inside the two areas of interest were noted down. Field work is a time consuming task and weeks are required for generating a big enough validation dataset, but it is essential for understanding the object of interest (trees) in relation to the scanned data. Challenges identified were also explained and this increased knowledge about forests should lead to implementing a better classifier.