

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

submitted by

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Milto Miltiadou

Abstract

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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 (=forest in Greek), the open source software implemented |
| DASOS | 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 |
| NASA | National Aeronautics and Space Administration |
| NERC | Natural Environment Research Council |
| TB | Terabyte |
| 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

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

ForestSAT Conference, Santiago, Chile, 2016 - Oral and Poster Presentation

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

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

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

RSPSoc Conference, New Sensors for a Changing world, Aberystwyth, United Kingdom, 2014 - 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 into 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 cavity on trunks and branches. They are formed by natural forces, like bacteria, fungi and insects and it takes 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 have 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].

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 it's dangerous, expensive, time consuming, and cannot easily scale into 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 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 like vegetation and tree species. Comparing ALS with traditional photography, ALS is not influenced by light and it is therefore less dependant on weather conditions (ie. it collects information from below the clouds). The laser beam further 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 passive 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. This diameter depends on the beam divergence and the distance between the sensor and the target. The small-footprint

systems have a 0.2-3m diameter, have been widely commercialised and 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 adjusted on satellites. Small-footprint systems record at higher resolution but it cannot guarantee that every pulse will reach the ground due to the small diameter of their footprint, making topographic measurements difficult. 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, the discrete and the full-waveform (FW). The discrete LiDAR records a few peaks of the reflected laser intensity, while the 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 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 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 representations of the FW LiDAR data and contributes in both 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 dataset are given in and Section 2. An overview of the thesis along with its aims, objectives and contributions are then outlined at Section 3.

Chapter 2

Acquire Data

The aim of this section is to give a practical and scientific insight into the acquisition of data, because a good knowledge of these methods and their limitations is essential for understanding the related research undertaken. The relations between the two main datasets used in this project are depicted on Figure 2-1 and briefly explained here:

- The **New Forest dataset** from the UK was provided by the Natural Environment Research Council's Airborne Research Facility (NERC ARF). Measurements were collected simultaneously a Leica ALS50-II LiDAR and AISA Eagle/Hawk hyperspectral radiometers on the 8th of April in 2010. It contains Discrete LiDAR, FW LiDAR and hyperspectral images.
- The **RedGum dataset** was acquired in Australia using a Trimble AX60 integrated LiDAR/Camera instrument over the time period from the 6th of March in 2015 until the 31st of March in 2015. It was provided by the RPS Australia East Pty Ltd. Only the FW LiDAR data are used here.

The ALS data are explained first, because they are the main focus of this research, and hyperspectral imagery is towards the end of the chapter. In Section 2.1, an in-depth description of ALS systems and the differences between discrete and FW LiDAR data is given. Section 2.2 briefly discusses the binary file format of the acquired LiDAR data and Section 2.3 is a discussion on the limitations, the differences and the advantages of two LiDAR instruments; the Leica and Trimble. The essential information about the hyperspectral imagery, which is only associated with the New Forest dataset, is then covered in Section 2.4.

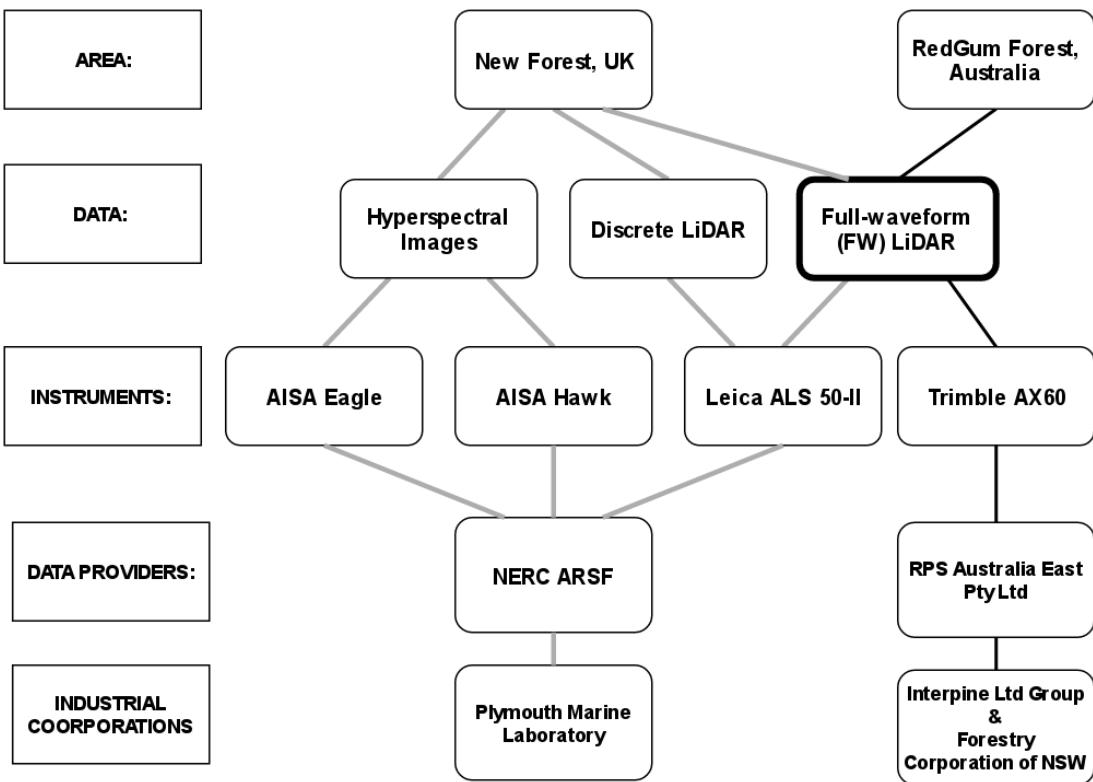


Figure 2-1: Data and Instruments

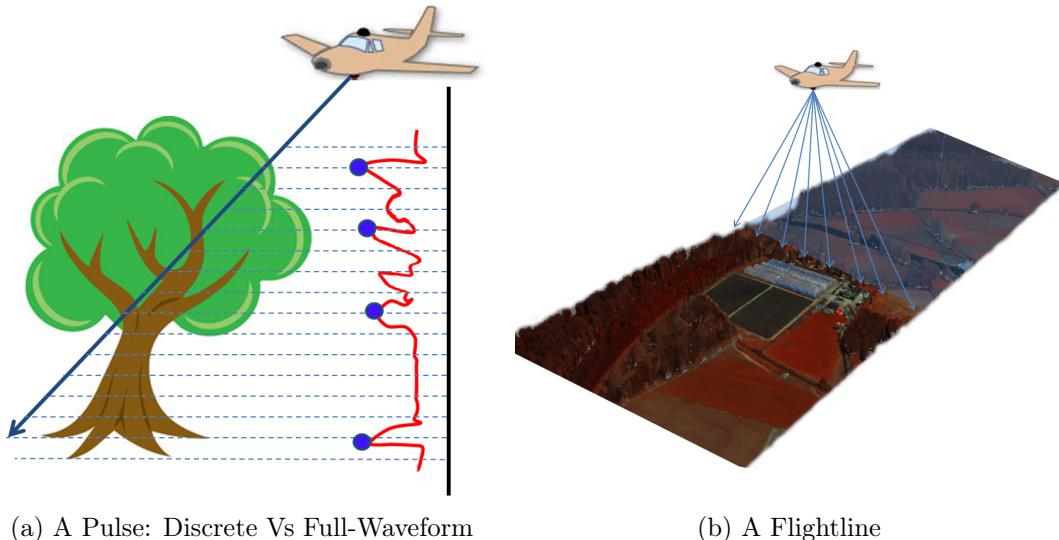


Figure 2-2: Airborne Laser Scanning System

2.1 Airborne LiDAR systems: An in-depth Explanation

The ALS systems emit laser pulses from sensor mounted in a plane and collects information from the time-of-flight and the returned laser intensity. By the time the pulse has travelled the approximately 1-3km from the aircraft to the ground, it is roughly 20cm in width due to beam divergence. When the pulse hits an object (e.g. the forest canopy), then some of it reflects back while the rest penetrates through holes between leaves and branches. The laser pulse continues to hit structures, scattering and partially returning to the sensor until it reaches a solid barrier such as the ground and is fully blocked from further progress. The LiDAR systems record information from the backscattered laser pulse, measuring its round trip time and the returned intensity.

As mentioned at Section 1.2, there are two types of LiDAR data, discrete and FW. The discrete LiDAR observes the returned intensity signals and identifies and [records a few peak intensity returns of the signal](#), while the FW LiDAR system digitises and stores the entire backscattered signal into equally spaced time intervals (Figure 2-2a). The delivered data for the discrete LiDAR is a set of hit points ("returns"), which are associated with laser intensities. The world position of every return is calculated by measuring the round trip time of the laser return, giving a distance from the sensor, which is combined with the precisely known position and orientation of the aircraft/sensor (from GPS, an inertial measurement unit and precise shot direction of the laser pulse). The waveform recordings are triggered by and attached to first returns of discrete LiDAR data (to avoid sampling the uninteresting time period while the pulse travels through the atmosphere) and they are a list of intensities that correspond to the laser intensity returned over time. There is also an offset vector which defines the distance and direction between each wave sample (effectively a compression mechanism, by avoid recording the world position of every sample, replacing it with the location of the first return and this vector).

As shown in Figure 2-2b, the pulses are scanned back and forth across the landscape below (by a rotating mirror) as the plane travels forward. The scanned data has a limited maximum width according to the flight height and the field of view scan angle. During processing the track of the plane is divided into easier-to-handle pieces (flightlines) and saved into separate binary files. In this project the LAS1.3 file format is used for both datasets.

2.2 Brief Description of the LAS1.3 File Format

There are a few LiDAR file formats but the LAS1.3 was the first format to contain FW data and it is the one used to store the data for both New Forest and RedGum datasets. According to the LAS1.3 file specifications [18], a .LAS file contains information about both discrete and FW LiDAR data, with the waveform packets attached to discrete returns and saved either internally at the end of the .LAS file or externally in a .WVS file.

As shown at (Figure 2-3) the .LAS file is divided into four sections and a brief explanation of each section is given here:

1. The **Header** contains general information about the entire flightline. For example, it includes the maximum scan angle used during the flight, whether the waveform packets are recorded internally or externally and the number of **Variable Length Records** (VLR).
2. Regarding the **VLR**, which contain arbitrary "extension" data blocks, the most important information given is the waveform packet descriptors that contain essential information on how to read the waveform packets (i.e. an ID, the number of wave samples and the size of each intensity in bits).
3. The **Point Data Records** are the discrete points and the waveforms are associated with first return discrete points. Each Point Data Record has a spatial location, an intensity and optionally a pointer to a waveform packet as well as the ID of the corresponding waveform packet descriptor.
4. The waveform packets is a list of intensities and they are either saved internally into the **Extended Variable Length Records** section of the .LAS file or inside an external .WVS file. Starting from the associated first return point, the spatial locations of the waveform packet (wave sample intensity) are calculated by adding an offset defined in the associated Point Data Record.

2.3 Leica Vs Trimble Instruments: Limitations, Differences and Advantages

As shown in Figure 2-1, the Leica ALS 50-II instrument was used to capture the LiDAR data of New Forest dataset and the Trimble AX60 for collecting the RedGum Forest FW LiDAR data. It is therefore important to clarify the differences, the limitations and the advantages of each instrument.

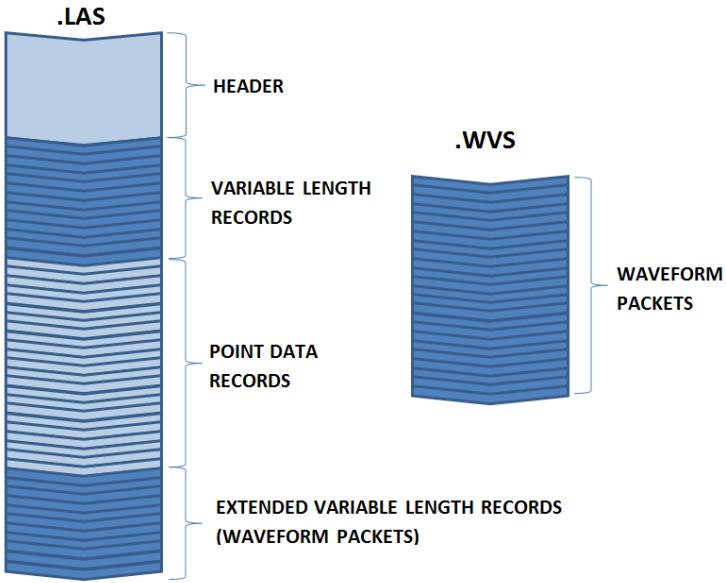


Figure 2-3: How the FW LiDAR data are stored into a binary file, according to the LAS1.3 file format specification

The Trimble performs at a pulse frequency of 400kHz, while the Leica's maximum pulse frequency is 120kHz. Nevertheless, during experiments there were occasions when the Leica discarded every other waveform due to I/O limitations despite being at or below the maximum pulse frequency [19]. The New Forest dataset has been affected by this and, on average, one third of the saved pulses only contain discrete data. We should therefore be extremely careful when comparing Discrete with FW LiDAR data. While [16] concludes that FW LiDAR data worth the extra processing because they have a better vertical profile, [20] states that extra information (the echo-width) from the FW LiDAR data are relatively unimportant. But the New Forest datasets were used for the comparison at [20] and there is no mention about the significantly less waveforms recorded in comparison to the discrete data. It is therefore suspected that their results has been affected by the missing waveforms.

Another problem with the Leica sysyem is the small dynamic range of intensities due to the number of bits used for recording them; the Leica system uses 8-bit integers (0-255 range) while the Trimble uses 16-bit integers (0-16385 range). For increased dynamic range and finer intensities without doubling storage costs, Leica introduced an Automatic Gain Controller (AGC). The AGC is an 8-bit number that defines how the recorded intensity range is shifted across a wider range of intensities. The AGC value is adjusted according to the reflected laser intensity of the previous 64 pulses and it therefore varies across a flightline. Consequently, the raw intensities are incomparable

to each other and, since the relation between AGC and the intensities is not linear, the range normalisation is complicated [21] [22]. In this thesis, the intensities of the Leica system are used as boolean values (whether something existed or not, using a user-defined threshold) to quickly overcome that issue and focus on the major research objectives. Regarding the Trimble instrument, there is no AGC value because the intensities are saved into a 16bit integer and as long as the flight height is constant no normalisation is required. In a few words, the raw intensities recorded using the Leica system are not normalised and therefore not comparable to each other, while the intensities of the Trimble instrument are more meaningful.

The footprint of the laser on the ground depends on the scanning pattern of the instruments and the field of view. The sinusoidal scanning pattern of the Leica system results in a higher density of returns at the edges of the flightline. The footprint of the Trimble instrument is more equally spaced because they are scanned using a rotating polygon. The uneven density pattern of the Leica system is resolved by normalisation during the voxelisation process, but the Trimble's equally spaced pulse pattern is more prone to aliasing when voxelised. Regarding the field of view, the Leica is wider but both systems avoid large angles because otherwise data look deformed at edges of the flightlines.

Last but not least, the Trimble instrument is a native full-waveform sensor; the discrete LiDAR are produced by extracting peak points in post-processing. Therefore one of the purported advantages of a FW system, the concept of extracting a denser point clouds using Gaussian decomposition [13], does not apply in the Trimble's case. This was proven by extracting peak points from Trimble FW LiDAR data using the pulseextract from LAStools [23]; the number of points extracted was exactly the same as the number of points saved into the associated discrete LiDAR files. Therefore discrete data from the Trimble instrument are the same as those generated by echo decomposition and peak points extraction from the FW samples.

To sum up, the Trimble AX60 instrument is a newer sensor and therefore has less problems or design compromises in comparison to the Leica ALS50-II instrument. Table 2.1 summarises the differences between the two sensors.

2.4 Hyperspectral Imagery

Hyperspectral imagery has a positive impact in remote sensing because it contains information beyond human visibility. The human eye receives light from the visual spectrum into three bands (red, green and blue). The hyperspectral sensors captures a larger spectrum and divides its light components into hundreds of bands, recording

Table 2.1: Specifications of the LiDAR instruments used

| Instrument Name: | Leica ALS550-II | Trimble Ax60 |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Scanned Area | New Forest, UK | RedGum, Australia |
| Year of Introduction: | Discrete LiDAR 2009 & FW LiDAR 2010 | 2013 |
| Max Scan Frequency (kHz): | 120 | 400 |
| Recorded Intensity (bits): | 8 | 16 |
| AGC: | Yes | No |
| Scanning Pattern: | Sinusoidal | The footprints are more equally spaced on the ground |
| Max field of view (degrees): | 75 | 60 |

this way more information than a human eye can receive [12].

Nevertheless, there are other compromises - for example, the time taken to integrate incoming light as the aircraft carrying the sensors moves. This means the raw airborne images appear deformed because the pixel length varies across the flightline. NERC-ARF geo-corrects the data using the Airborne Processing Library (APL) [24]. The processing levels are numbered. At ‘level 3’ (world coordinate system) the pixels are equally spaced and sized, which requires resampling and thus may look slightly blurred. The ‘level 1’ data (what the sensor saw) are non geo-corrected but they are associated with a file that defines the spatial location of each pixel. In this thesis, the ‘level 1’ data are used to preserve the highest possible quality.

In practise, the level 1 data are held in two files, the ‘.bil’ and the ‘.igm’. The ‘.bil’ file contains the hyperspectral cube (Figure 2-4), all the pixel values at different wavelengths, and the .igm file gives the x, y, z coordinates of each pixel.

The number of bands and the spectrum range captured depends on the hyperspectral sensor. The data from New Forest were collected using the following instruments:

- the Eagle, which captures the visible and near infra-red spectrum (400-970nm)
- the Hawk, which covers short wave infra-red wavelengths (970-2450nm)

Both sensors divide their spectral range into 252 bands (programmable) and each band is a 2D vector as shown in Figure 2-4).

The hyperspectral images also come with a number of drawbacks. A few are mentioned here but since hyperspectral imagery is not the main focus of the thesis there are not addressed:

- System faults sometimes occurs and the affected areas are masked out. This results in blank areas.

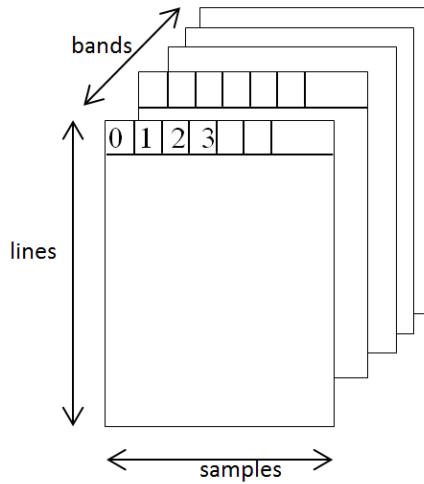


Figure 2-4: This figure shows the order of the hyperspectral pixels saved into the the binary .bil file.

- As a passive sensor, it is dependent on the sun for illumination and thus vulnerable to poor weather conditions
- Due to the high refraction of light at some wavelengths, some bands are highly influenced by humidity (i.e. wavelength 1898.33nm).

To sum up, hyperpsectral images contain information beyond the visible and they are delivered in two files, one contains the hyperspectral cube and the other one the geo-locations of each pixel. In this project, they are used in chapter (Chapter 7), where it is shown that the combination of Remote Sensing data confers better results for generating tree coverage maps.

Chapter 3

Overview of Thesis

3.1 Problem

FW LiDAR systems have been available for a number of years but there still very few uses of FW LiDAR data. NERC-ARF has been acquiring airborne data for the UK and overseas since 2010 and it has more than 100 clients of new and archived data. Many clients request FW LiDAR data to be acquired, but despite the significant number of requests, the discrete LiDAR data has been mostly used on research instead. Some of the factors regarding this slow intakes are:

- Typically FW datasets are 5 – 10 times larger than discrete data, with data sizes in the range of 50GB – 2.5TB GB for a single area of interest. NERC-ARF's datasets are up to 100GB each because most clients are research institutes but for commercial purposes each FW dataset is a couple of TB.
- Existing workflows are only able to work with the discrete data since the increased amount of information recorded within the FW LiDAR makes handling the quantity of data very challenging.

3.2 Aims and Objectives

This thesis explores visualisation and data-understanding for FW LIDAR systems and the overarching aim is to increase the accessibility FW LiDAR in remote forest surveying.

The objectives are the following:

- Enable forestry experts with no computer science expertise to visualise and work with the FW LiDAR data.

- Enable forest understanding through 3D visualisations of FW LiDAR data.
- Improve and optimise visualisations of FW LiDAR data and hyperspectral images.
- Enable browsing of very large scale datasets and spectral bands in an efficient manner.
- Investigate data structures for faster iso-surface extraction of large volumetric datasets and efficient management of voxels.
- Estimate tree coverage and investigate the potential of integrating multiple remote sensing datasets in forestry.
- Dead tree detection in comparison to human detection and remote surveying with discrete LiDAR that will benefit biodiversity management.
- Research whether terrain classification can be improved by the inference of high quality 3D information, for example, using priors over the space of 3D elements.

3.3 Overview

***** the following text has been taken from the IAA2 funding application**

To address the limitations of existing workflows for using FW data we developed the open source software DASOS ($\delta\alpha\sigma\omega\varsigma$ =forest in Greek) and novel algorithms that allow users, without computer science expertise, to work with and visualise large volumes of FW LiDAR data. Our open source software DASOS aims to remove the barriers preventing the use of FW LiDAR. Its contributions, and those of the new representations of the FW LiDAR, are demonstrated in three applications:

- Firstly, foresters can exploit their domain expertise to derive a wealth of information by observing the FW LiDAR data. We therefore improve visualisations for deriving information directly from the data, thus reducing travelling time and the associated expenses of getting into the forests. This cost includes appropriate cars and sometimes helicopters depending on the accessibility of the forests. While previous work on FW LiDAR visualisation talks about point cloud visualisation [25] and transparent voxels [26], DASOS is able to reconstruct the surfaces from the scanned area in 3D. This research further optimises visualisations by using the new FW LiDAR representations to accelerate this process by ****%. ***

I will complete the percentage once related test are completed

- Secondly, a fast way of aligning the FW LiDAR with Remotely Sensed Images has been developed in DASOS. Subsequently, by generating tree coverage maps, it has been shown that the combination of these datasets confers better remote survey results [27].
- Finally, DASOS allow the generation of 3D priors. An example usage of this information is characterising dead standing Eucalyptuses, which as explained at Section ?? are extremely beneficial for managing biodiversity in native Australian forests. This is work in progress and a comparison between the discrete and FW LiDAR will be performed to demonstrate the increased survey accuracy obtained when the FW LiDAR is used.

In summary, FW LiDAR has great potential to improving automated surveying accuracy and consequently reduce the expensive fieldwork conducted in forestry and this research has already started to have an impact in the FW LiDAR community. DASOS is now used at Interpine Group Ltd, a world leading Forestry Company in New Zealand, and a PhD student at Bournemouth University is evaluating it for use in the estimation of bird distributions in the New Forest in the UK.

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3.4 Thesis Structure

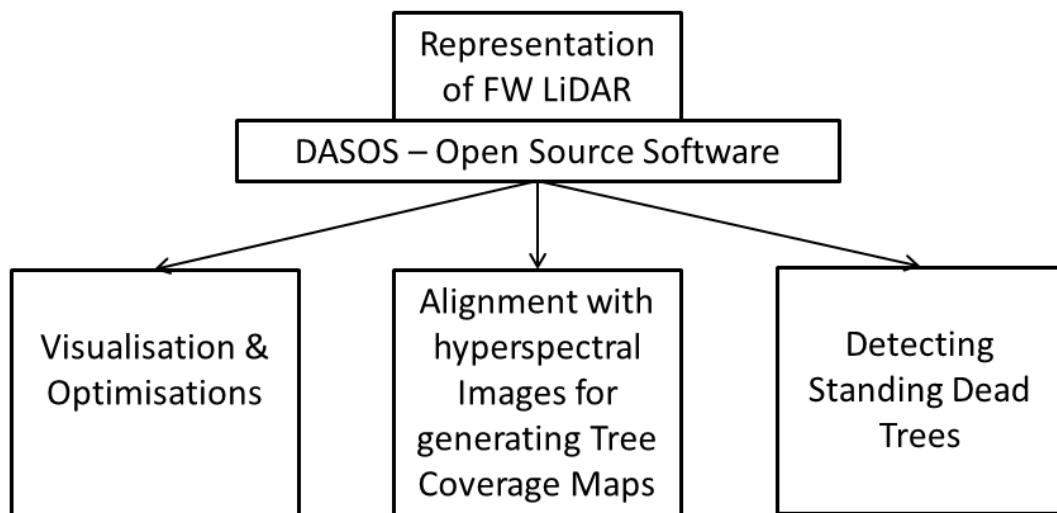


Figure 3-1: The pipeline of the thesis

Chapter 4

The open source software DASOS and the Voxelisation Approach

As mentioned at Section 3.1, there are very few uses of FW LiDAR data because of the quantity of the recorded information. For that reason, DASOS was developed (Section 4.3), as an open source software, to help foresters without computer science background to use FW LiDAR data. In this section:

- An overview of related software packages is given and it is explained how DASOS differs from those packages (Section 4.1).
- The main way of interpreting the data within DASOS (the voxelisation approach) is described (Subsection 4.2).
- Then all the functionalities of DASOS are listed (Section 4.3)
- and by the end everything is summed up (Section 4.4).

4.1 State-of-Art FW LiDAR Software Packages

The most common approach of interpreting the FW LiDAR is the Gaussian decomposition of the waveforms and extraction of peak points [28]. Neunschwander et al used this approach for Landcover classification [29] while Reitberger et al applied it for distinguishing deciduous trees from coniferous trees [30]. Chauve et al further proposed an approach of improving the Gaussian model in order to increase the density of the points extracted from the data and consequently improve point based classifications of FW LiDAR data [17]. The following tools are able to extract discrete points from the waveforms and visualise small areas of interest:

- **Pulsewaves**: it visualise a small number of waveform using different transparencies according to the intensities of the wave-samples and it is able to generate discrete point clouds. [25].
- **FullAnalyze**: supports echo decomposition. Regarding visualisations the user can select single trees from the Graphical User Interface (GUI) and for each wave-sample, a sphere with radius proportional to its amplitude is created and visualised [31].
- **SPDlib**: exports discrete LiDAR and visualises either the samples that are above a threshold level as points or the extracted discrete point cloud. It also colours them according to their intensity value [32].

Echo decomposition and extraction of peak points identifies significant features and further enables the interpretation of the data within existing workflows and software that support discrete LiDAR data. For example, the discrete LiDAR can be analysed using:

- **Lag**: a visualisation tool for analysing and inspecting discrete LiDAR point clouds.
- **Quick Terrain Modeller** : a 3D discrete LiDAR points visualiser, that can generate Digital Elevation Models (DEM) and Digital Terrain Models (DTM).
- **LAStools** : a tool set that classifies noise, visualises point clouds, clips data.

DASOS approach of interpreting FW LiDAR data is fundamentally different from the aforementioned software packages. On the one hand, converting FW LiDAR into discrete, their usage is ease since existing overflows support discrete LiDAR, but on the other hand FW LiDAR contain information about pulse width that are not preserved after peak point extraction. Also the comparison of point clouds depends on the density of the emitted pulses; problem arises with the sinusoidal pattern of the Leica system. For that reason, in DASOS these information are accumulated from multiple shots into a voxel array, building up a 3D density volume. The correlation between multiple pulses into a voxel representation produces a more accurate and complete representation, which confers greater noise resistance and it further opens up possibilities of vertical interpretation of the data. The idea of voxelising FW LiDAR data is explained in the following section 4.2.

4.2 Voxelisation for Interpreting FW LiDAR data

Voxelisation of FW LiDAR data was firstly introduced by Persson et al, who used it to visualise the waveforms using different transparencies [26] and it seems to be the future of FW LiDAR data with the literature moving toward that direction. In 2016, Cao et al used it for tree species identification [33] and Sunmall et al characterised forest canopy from a voxelised vertical profile [20]. This innovative approach is an integral part of this thesis and it is used for both visualisations and classifications [34] [27].

The FW LiDAR data are voxelised by inserting the wave samples into a 3D regular grid and constructing a 3D discrete density volume. According to Person et al, each wave sample is associated with the 3D cell, named voxel, that it lies inside. If multiple samples lie inside a voxel then the sample with the highest intensity is chosen [26]. In order to reduce noise, there are two differences between this approach and the way FW LiDAR data are voxelised in DASOS.

At first a threshold is used to remove low level noise, because when the width of a recorded waveform is longer than the distance between the first hit point and the ground, the system captures low signals, which are pure noise. For that reason, the samples whose intensity is lower than a user-defined noise level/threshold are discarded.

Then each wave sample is associated with the voxel that it lies inside and the second difference is how DASOS overcomes the uneven number of samples per voxels. The intensity of each sample is the laser intensity returned during the corresponding time interval. For example, if 5 samples are inside a voxel and the waveform is digitised at 2ns, then the laser intensity associated with that voxel corresponds to 10ns waveform width. For comparison purposes, it's essential to keep the waveform width consistent across the voxels. For overcoming this issue in DASOS, the average intensity of the samples that lie inside each voxel is taken, instead of choosing the one with the highest intensity [26]. This way the likelihood of the 3D volume to be affected by outliers and high noise is reduced. The following equation shows how the intensity value of a voxel is calculated:

$$I_v = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n I_i}{n} \quad (4.1)$$

where I_v is the accumulated intensity of voxel v . n is number of samples associated with that voxel, I_i is the intensity of the sample i ,

To sum up, during voxelisation the area of interest is divided into voxels. The samples of the FW LiDAR data are inserted inside this 3D discrete density volume and normalised such that equally sized waveform width is saved inside each voxel. The result

is a 3D discrete density volume of the scanned area. Figure 4-1 depicts this process in 2D¹.

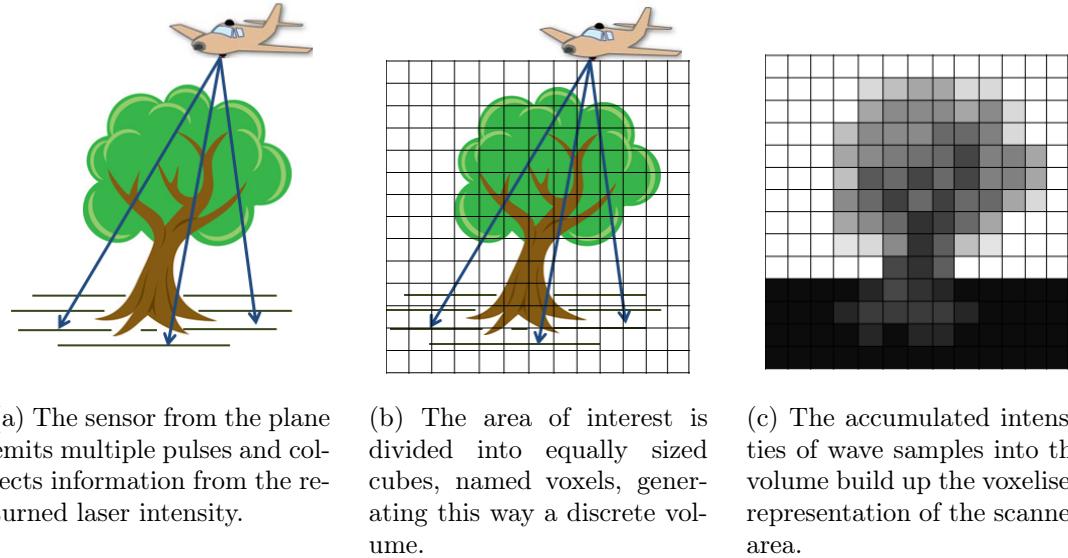


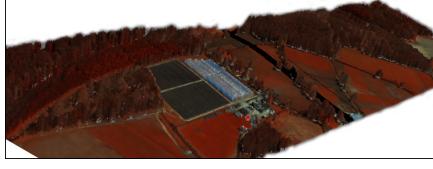
Figure 4-1: The above images depict the voxelling process of the FW LiDAR data in 2D. Please note that the voxelling output in Figure 4-1c shows how ideally the result would look. But in reality, a number of trees may be disconnected from the ground due to missing information about their trunk.

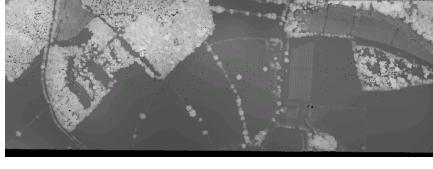
4.3 The functionalities of DASOS

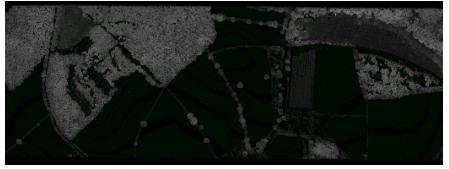
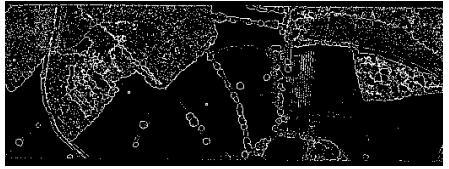
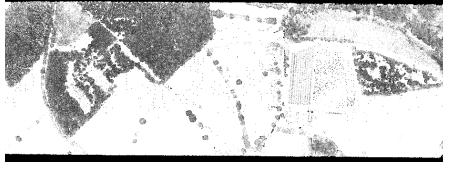
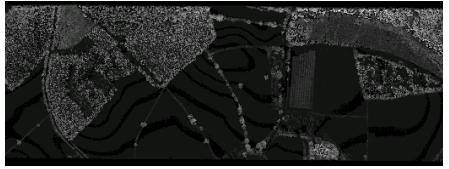
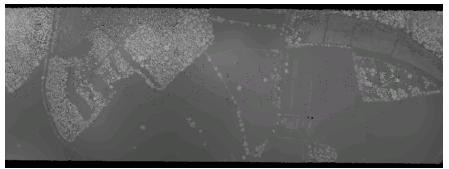
So far, an overview of existing software packages supporting FW LiDAR was given (Section 4.1) and it was explained how DASOS differs from them by voxelising the waveforms (Section 4.2). In this section, the three main functionalities of DASOS are described in table 4.1.

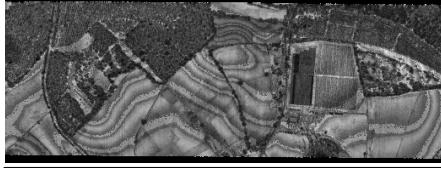
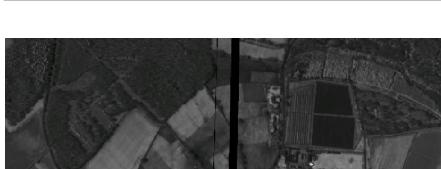
¹In Figure 4-1

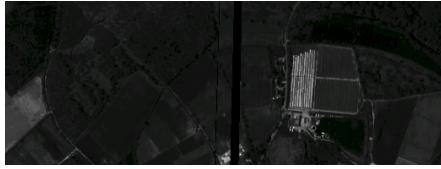
the tree image is taken from: <http://images.clipartpanda.com/tree-clip-artKij4jKriq.jpeg>
and the lane image from: http://gmv.cast.uark.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2013/01/ALS_scematic.jpg

| 1st Functionality: 3D Polygon Mesh Generation | | | |
|---|--|---|-------------------|
| Input | Description | Output Example | Output Format |
| LAS1.3 | <p>3D Polygon Mesh Constructed from the volumetric representation (Algorithms and user-defined parameters are explained in Section 5 while optimisation approaches are discussed in Section 6)</p> |  | .obj |
| LAS1.3 and level 1 (.bil & .igm) | <p>3D Coloured Polygon Mesh Projecting 3 user-defined hyperspectral bands on the mesh (Section 7)</p> |  | .obj & .png |

| 2nd Functionality: Generation of 2D metrics aligned with hyperspectral imagery | | | |
|--|--|--|---------------|
| In section 7 a selection of the following metrics are used for generating tree coverage maps | | | |
| Input | Metric Description (L for LiDAR metrics & H for hyperspectral metrics) | Output Example | Output Format |
| LAS1.3 | <p>L0 - Height: the distance between the top non-empty voxel and the lower boundaries of the volume.</p> |  | .asc |

| | | | |
|--------|---|--|------|
| LAS1.3 | L1 - Thickness: the distance between the first and last non empty voxels in every column of the 3D volume. . |  | .asc |
| LAS1.3 | L2 - Edge detection: The average height difference of neighbouring pixels. |  | .asc |
| LAS1.3 | L3 - Density: Number of non-empty voxel over all voxels within the range from the first to last non-empty voxels. |  | .asc |
| LAS1.3 | L4 - First Patch: The number of non-empty adjacent voxels, starting from the first/top non-empty voxel in that column. |  | .asc |
| LAS1.3 | L5: Last Patch: The number of non-empty adjacent voxels, starting from the last/lower non-empty voxel in that column. |  | .asc |
| LAS1.3 | L6: Lowest Return the height of the lowest non empty voxel (the actual heights are very low and close to each but the example image has been scaled and the different seems bigger) |  | .asc |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|------|
| LAS1.3 | L7: Maximum Intensity the maximum intensity of each column |  | .asc |
| LAS1.3 | L8: Average Intensity the average intensity per column |  | .asc |
| LAS1.3 and level 1 (.bil & .igm) | H0 : Mean the mean of the hyperspectral spectrum. |  | .asc |
| LAS1.3 and level 1 (.bil & .igm) | H1: NDVI Normalised Difference Vegetation index. |  | .asc |
| LAS1.3 and level 1 (.bil & .igm) | H2: Standard Deviation ² The standard deviation of the hyperspectral spectrum at each pixel. |  | .asc |
| LAS1.3 and level 1 (.bil & .igm) | H3: Spectral Signature ² The squared spectral difference between each pixels' spectrum and the generalised vegetation signature retrieved from USGS Digital Spectral Library [35]. |  | .asc |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|------|
| LAS1.3 and level 1 (.bil & .igm) | H4: Band A single user defined hyperspectral band. |  | .asc |
| | |  | .asc |

3rd Functionality: 3D Priors / Signatures

In Section 8, the 3D priors/templates are run over the volume for detecting dead standing trees

| Input | Description | Output Example | Output Format |
|--------|---------------------|----------------|---------------|
| LAS1.3 | 3D Templates | *** | .csv |
| LAS1.3 | 3D | *** | .csv |

Table 4.1: The three functionalities of DASOS

In this sections an in depth overview of DASOS's functionalities was given (Table 4.1). Each functionality is linked to a number of Sections, which describes the algorithms implemented and related applications.

It further worth stating that the up-to-date information about DASOS are provided at: <http://miltomiltiadou.blogspot.co.uk/2015/03/las13vis.html> This link also indicates how to download DASOS, the complete user-guide and the source code, as well as where to seek for support while using it.

4.4 Summary and Discussion

Along with that thesis, the open source software DASOS was developed to encourage foresters to use the FW LiDAR data. The main way of interpreting FW LiDAR data in DASOS is fundamentally different from the state-of-art available software packages. In a few words, the FW LiDAR data are voxelised by inserting the wave samples into

²Those two metrics were implemented specifically for the tree coverage maps [27] and they are not available on the released version of DASOS.

a 3D discrete density volume, which preserves an extra parameter (the pulse width) in comparison to point extraction algorithms. It also accumulates intensity values from multiple shots and stores them into a 3D regular grid, resolving this way the problem with the sinusoidal footprints pattern of the Leica system.

Furthermore, there are three main functionalities of DASOS: the construction of 3D polygon meshes, the generation of 2D metrics aligned with hyperspectral Images and characterisation of objects using 3D priors/signatures. The visualisation outputs are also in the cutting-edge since previous visualisation talk about points [32] or spheres [31], while DASOS is able to create closed polygon representation. In addition, the integration of various sensors of data allows simultaneous interpretation of them and in Section 7, it is shown that this confers better results for generating tree coverage maps. By the end, the 3D priors allows local inspection of data and Section 8 used them for dead standing tree detection in native Australian forests.

By the end it worth mentioning that there a few individuals/organisation that showed interest in using DASOS and in the future, DASOS usage is expected to increased in remote forest surveys (i.e. for commercial forest's stocking estimation or for infected trees detection and treatment).

Chapter 5

Surface Reconstruction from Voxelised FW LiDAR Data

5.1 Introduction

To briefly sum up the previous sections, FW LiDAR data (Section 2) are laser scanning data particularly useful in Forestry, but the huge amount of information recorded make handling of the data difficult. The open source software DASOS (Section 4.3) was developed along with this thesis to ease the usage of the data. DASOS voxelises (Section 4.2) the data before interpretation and this approach is fundamentally different from the related and state-of-art software packages. The output of the voxelisation is a 3D discrete density Volume.

This chapter explains the process of reconstructing the surface of the scanned area from the 3D voxelised FW LiDAR. At first, volumetric rendering¹ approaches are briefly explained at Section 5.2. Section 5.3 gives a mathematical definition to the voxelised data, while Section 5.4 describes the actual algorithm of extracting a surface. By the end the results are given in Section 5.5.

5.2 Rendering Approaches of Volumetric Data

Even though the concept of visualising 3D discrete density volumes (Volumetric Visualisations) is new in forestry and remote sensing, it has been widely research in medical imaging and visual effects. There are two approaches of visualising volumetric data.

The first approach is direct rendering, which repeatedly generates 2D images according to the view point (the camera). It is like "taking photos" from a camera and

¹Volumetric rendering refers the process of visualising 3D Volumes.

putting them in a sequence to produce an interactive video. An example of direct rendering approach is ray-tracing. Ray-tracing generates images by "taking photos"; rays are casted from the view point passing through each pixel and intensity values are assigned to the pixels according to the nearest intersections [40]. Ray-tracing can be time expensive depending on the complexity of the scene and for that reason some of the literature focuses on parallelising the ray-casting process. By introducing parallelisation, real time rendering of small volumetric data (256^3) was achieved by Pfister et al in 1999 [36]. Also, after the release of the CUDA hardware (which is a parallel computing platform on recent nvidia graphics cards), Crassin et al achieved real-time rendering of billions of voxels in 2009 [37].

Even though it is possible to implement real-time interactive environments using direct rendering of the big voxel data, volumetric visualisations of FW LiDAR data is a new concept in remote sensing and for simplicity, this thesis experiments surface reconstruction. Surface reconstruction refers to the extraction of a polygonal mesh, which is a set of primitives like triangles, from the volumetric data. Constructing a surface may take several minutes, but real time visualisations of polygonal meshes are supported by free animation packages (like Blender and Meshlab) and it work on commodity hardware. This is achieved with rasterisation (the second rendering approach), which is a method that maps the primitives to pixels, it is widely used in computer games and it is significantly faster than ray-tracing. Furthermore, interactive operations (e.g. measuring the distance between two trees) are trivial calculations on primitives/polygonal meshes and they are easy to implement.

5.3 Algebraic Definition of the Volume

In computer graphics, polygonal meshes are a set of primitives usually triangles, but some objects are defined differently, for example using a function. Those objects are called either implicit or algebraic. Implicit representation of objects enables a mathematical definition of the 3D discrete density volume generated from the FW LiDAR data (Section 4.2).

Algebraic objects were firstly introduced in computer graphics by Blinn in 1982 [38] to enable the definition of complex objects without saving a large amount of primitives. Each object is defined by a function $f(X)$ and the iso-surface value α . The iso-surface value (iso-level) defines the boundaries of the object; for an object $[f(x), a]$ every n-dimensional point X that lies on the surface of the object satisfies the condition $f(X) = \alpha$. To be more accurate, the following rules apply according to Pasko et al [39]:

- $f(X) = \alpha$, when X lies on the surface of the algebraic object

- $f(X) > \alpha$, when X lies inside the algebraic object and
- $f(X) < \alpha$, when X lies outside the algebraic object

Regarding the algebraic representation of the 3D voxelised FW LiDAR data, X is a three dimensional point (x, y, z) representing the longitude, latitude and height respectively and $f(X)$ is a function that takes X as input and returns the accumulated intensity value of the voxel that X lies inside. Also, the iso-surface value α is a user defined parameter and it is noise dependant (Please look at figure 5-5 to understand how iso-level affects the output of the surface reconstruction of the voxelised FW LiDAR data).

5.4 Surface Reconstruction with the Marching Cubes Algorithm

Even though numerical implicitisation is beneficial in reducing storage memory, visualising implicit objects is not straight forward, since they contain no discrete values. This problem can either be address either by direct rendering or surface reconstruction (Section 5.2).

The Marching Cubes algorithm is an algorithm that polygonises implicit objects using a look up table. Let's assume that $f(X)$ defines an implicit object. At first the space is divided into cubes. Each cube is defined by eight corner points and each corner point lies either inside or outside the implicit object. By enumerating all the possible cases and linearly interpolating the intersections along the edges, the surface of the implicit object is constructed [41].

According to Lorensen and Cline [41], the normal² of each vertex is calculated by measuring the local gradient change. Even though this work well on smooth object (e.g. a sphere defined by its equation), because of the high gradient changes in the voxelised FW LiDAR data this algorithm results into normals pointing into inconsistent directions. This is a problem because when the normals are not consistent, the surface of the object appears rough. For that reason, in DASOS the normal of each vertex is derived by the average normal of its adjacent triangles.

Additionally it worth highlighting that the sampling of the Marching cubes is independent from the sampling of the 3D density volume. But consistency between the two is required to avoid artifacts. Let's assume the discrete volume has $(n * m * k)$ voxels,

²A normal is a vector that is perpendicular to the surface of a polygonal mesh. In graphics, the normals are important for calculating light illumination and each vertex is associated with one for smooth rendering of surfaces.

then the suggested Sampling of Marching Cubes is $((n+1) * (m+1) * (k+1))$, as shown on Figure 5-1; the black grid represents a 2D density grid and the blue grid represents the suggested sampling of the polygonisation. Please note that every point that lies outside the volume is considered to be outside the implicit object. In addition, Figure 5-1b shows the effects of oversampling; the right image was oversampled and the second one was sampled as explained above.

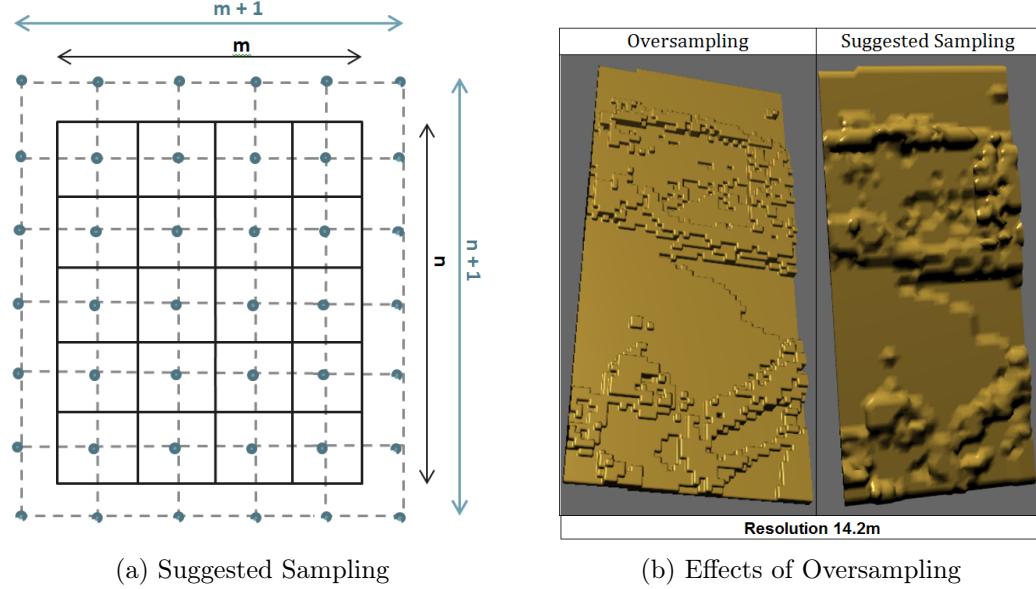


Figure 5-1: The suggested sampling during polygonisation using the Marching Cubes Algorithm

5.5 Results

The output of DASOS is a polygonal mesh exported into a .obj file, which is a standard graphics format. The .obj files can be loaded into various animation software tools like Maya and Meshlab (figure 5-2). Figure 5-3 shows polygonal meshes generated using NERC-ARF data from three different areas in UK. The region of interest is also user defined. The user defines whether an entire flightline or selected area is polygonised (figure 5-4).

Furthermore, there are three main user-defined parameters and figure 5-5 shows how the results are affected once modified:

1. The voxel Length controls the resolution of the output; the bigger the voxel length is the lower the resolution and the number of cubes are.

2. The iso-level is the boundary that defines whether a voxel is inside or outside the implicit object. While iso-level increases the number of voxels that are considered inside the implicit object decreases. For that reason, when it is too high most of the voxels are outside the boundary and the object seems to disappear.
3. The Noise level is the threshold of the low level filtering applied during Voxelisation (Section 4.2). If the noise level is too low, then the noise covers significant features of the data and when it is too high important information are discarded and the object seems to disappear again.

By the end, it is possible to 3D print the meshes using the MakerBot but it's tricky because the meshes are not manifold³ (figure 5-6). Simplification of the mesh would have eased the processing of the .obj file in MakerBot.

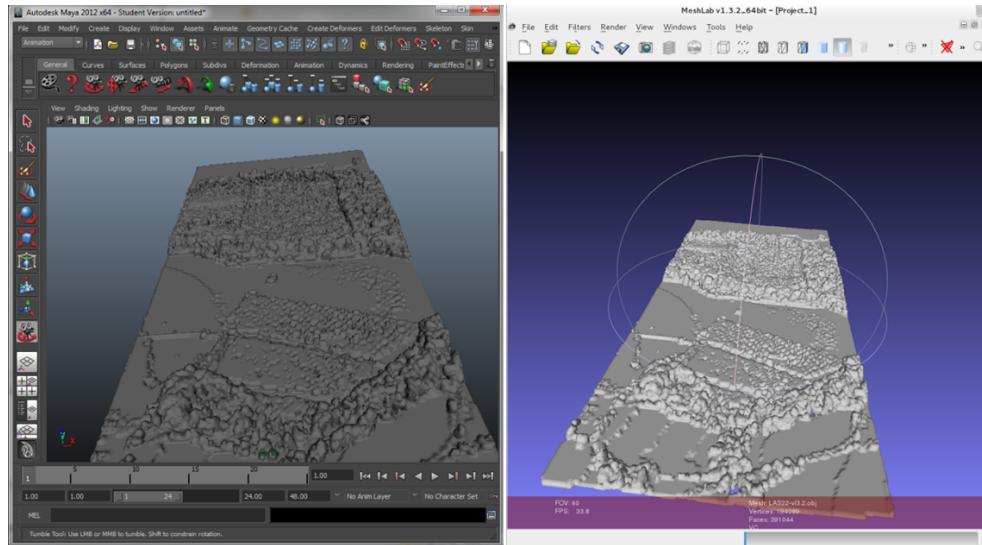


Figure 5-2: Visualising the output of DASOS into animation software packages (Maya and Meshlab)

³A non-manifold polygonal object may have triangle below the outside surface of the object

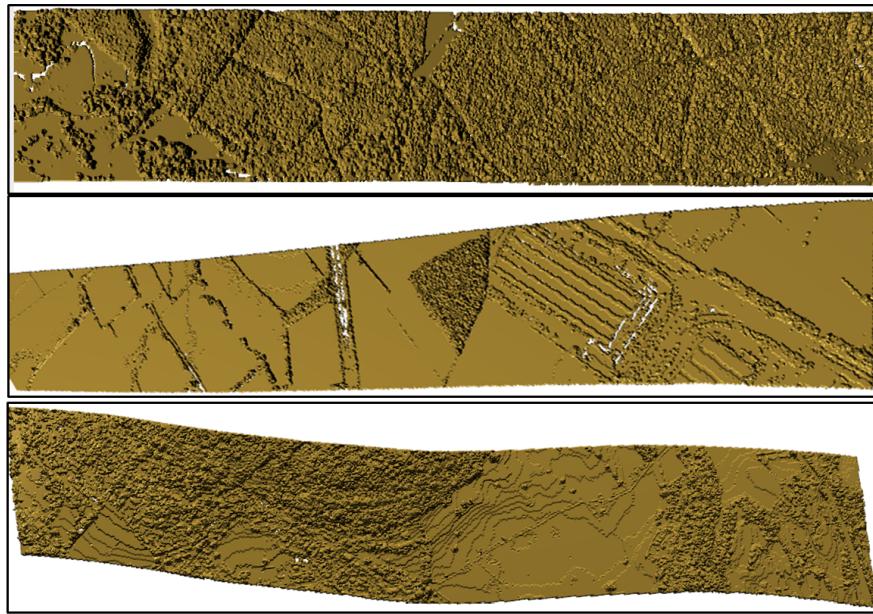


Figure 5-3: Polygonising NERC-ARF FW LiDAR data captured at different areas (New Forest, Milton Keynes and Eaves Wood)

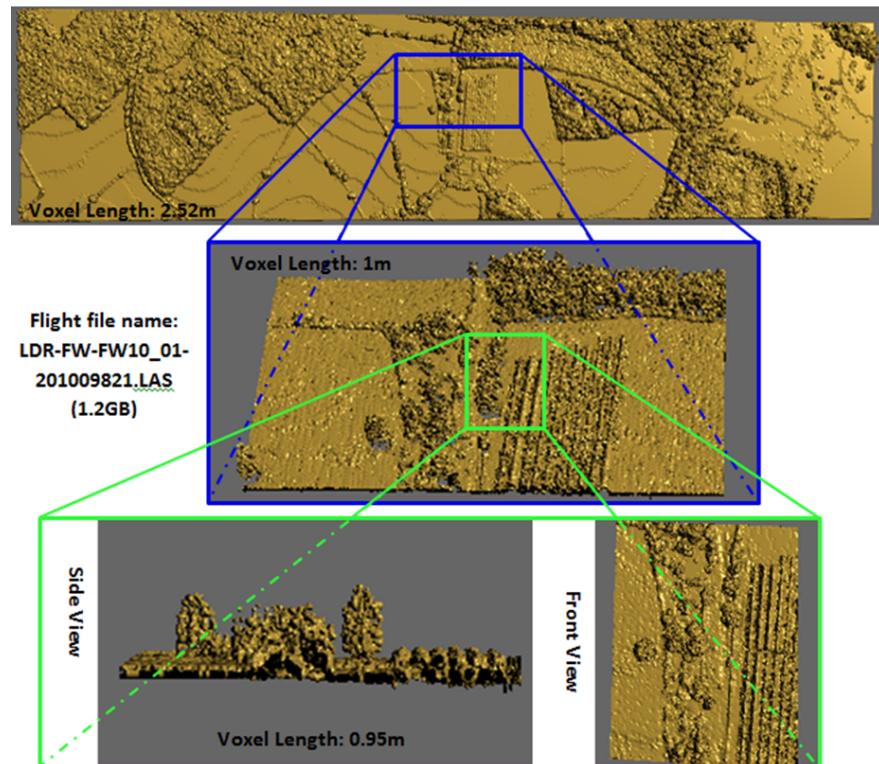


Figure 5-4: Selecting Region of Interest

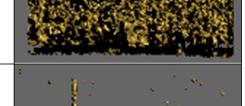
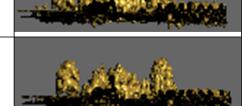
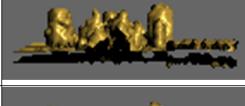
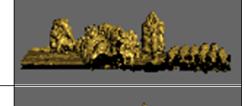
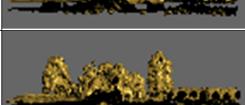
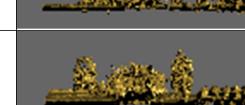
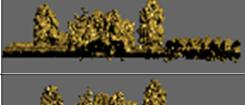
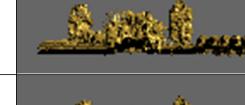
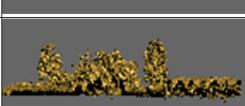
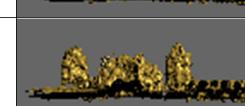
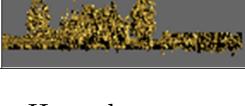
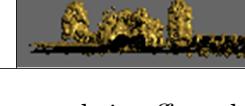
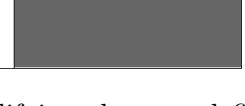
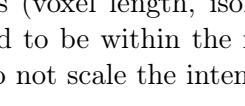
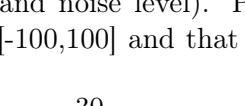
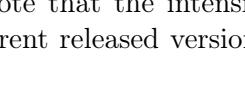
| Voxel Length | Visualisation with different voxel lengths | Iso-level * | Visualisations with various isolevels | Noise Level | Visualisations with various noise levels |
|--------------|---|-------------|--|-------------|---|
| 16.67 m |  | 60 |  | 0 |  |
| 10.0m |  | 45 |  | 5 |  |
| 7.14m |  | 30 |  | 10 |  |
| 5.7m |  | 15 |  | 15 |  |
| 4.44m |  | 0 |  | 17 |  |
| 3.33m |  | -15 |  | 20 |  |
| 2.5m |  | -30 |  | 25 |  |
| 2.0m |  | -45 |  | 30 |  |
| 1.43m |  | -60 |  | 40 |  |
| 1.2m |  | -75 |  | 60 |  |
| 1.0m |  | -85 |  | 75 |  |
| 0.8m |  | -95 |  | 100 |  |
| 0.67m |  | -100 |  | 135 |  |

Figure 5-5: How the output polygon mesh is affected by modifying the user-defined parameters (voxel length, isolevel⁴ and noise level). Please note that the intensities were scaled to be within the range [-100,100] and that the current released version of DASOS do not scale the intensities.

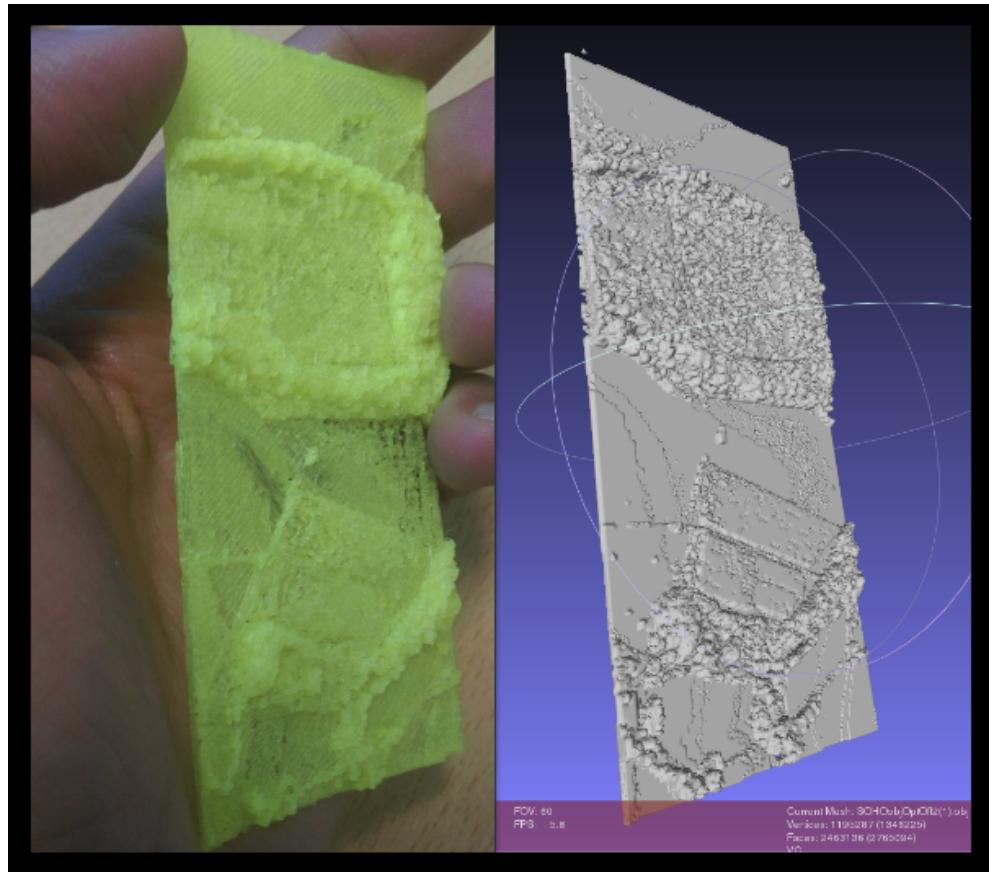


Figure 5-6: 3D printing of New Forest FW LiDAR data

Chapter 6

Optimisations of Polygon Meshes Extraction

the new data structures implemented and introduced for speeding up the surface reconstruction process.

In 1984, Crow proposed an image representation where each pixel value is replaced by the sum of all the pixels that belong to the rectangle defined by the lower left corner of the image and the pixel of our interest (Crow, 1984). Even though more storage space is required to save the image, due to the larger numbers, the sum of every rectangle in the image can be calculated in constant time, once the table is constructed. The integral image can also be constructed in linear time $O(n)$, where n is the number of pixels in the image. One iteration through the entire image is enough to replace the pixel values of the image.

image

6.1 Optimising Surface Reconstruction

The original Marching Cubes algorithm uses a scan line approach and processes all the cubes sequentially. The scan line approach sometimes implies looping through large amounts of empty cubes. To optimise the process, in this research, it is proposed an algorithm that repeatedly divides the volume and utilities Integral Volumes to discard empty volumes during the polygonisation. Using this optimisation algorithm it was achieved an up to 51This optimisation algorithm is explained in the following sections, which are structured as follow:

- Background information, including previous related

work. - How integral images are extended into 3D. - The proposed algorithm of using Integral Volumes to speed up the process of polygonising an implicit object using the Marching Cubes algorithm - Implementation details that contribute to the efficiency and speed up of the algorithm - Results

6.1.1 Background

Much research has been done so far on optimising and improving the polygonisation of implicit surfaces. But most research is based on closed and manifold object. A polygon mesh is closed when it has no holes and it is manifold when it can be unfolded into a 2D continuous surface. In order to guarantee consistent topology, an optimised approach with an enhanced look up table was proposed by Lewiner et al in 2003.

Further surface-tracking was discussed in both papers of (Rodrigues de Araujo and Pires Jorge, 2005) (Hartmann, 1998). Starting from a seed point, the surface is expanded according to the local curvature of the implicit object. Self-intersections and collisions are avoided using heuristic edge length. This method is considered to be faster and more efficient, in comparison with the Marching Cubes algorithm. Because, by tracking the surface, huge empty spaces are not searched and it is also possible to create smaller triangles on places with high gradient changes and bigger triangles on surfaces with low variance. Nevertheless, surface-tracking Algorithms cannot be applied in our case though, because the output of my program is a non-manifold objects. The 3D Volume generated from FW LiDAR data is not consistent, since small footprint Leica FW systems cannot guarantee that the last return is from the ground. For that reason, it is possible that some trees may be separated from the ground. Surface-tracking algorithms converge once the object is closed. Therefore, there is a possibility that they may converge after polygonising a single tree if the seed point lies on a tree that is separated from the ground.

In 1992, Hansen and Hinken proposed parallelising the polygonisation process of BlobTree trees on Single Instruction, Multiple Data (SIMD) machines. BlobTree trees represent implicit objects as a combination of primitives and operations like union and blends (Galbraith, MacMurchy, and Wyvill, 2004). While the depth of the tree increases, the time required to get the value that defines whether a point is inside or outside the object increases as well. On SIMD machines greater speed up is achieved at longer instruction due to the less communication cost. Therefore parallelising the process of BlobTree trees with long depth is beneficial, but in our case the value returned for a given point is calculated in constant time. Further, according to the C++ Coding

Standards by Sutter and Alexandrescu, when optimisation is required is better to seek an algorithmic approach first because it is simpler to maintain and the possibility of being bug free is higher (Sutter and Alexandrescu, 2004).

OpenVDB library manages volumetric data with octrees. My program uses 1D arrays allowing constant time access of voxel values and by importing OpenVDB library, its speed was significantly decreased; while the number of voxels is increasing the time required to get the value of a voxel is also increasing. Further according to the documentation, the VolumeToMesh class “meshes any scalar grid that has a continuous isosurface”, while the surface of the FW LiDAR volumes is not continuous; there are triangles that represent leafs inside the trees and some of the trees may be disconnected from the ground because the last return do not always reach the earth (OpenVDB 2.3.0).

In this report, it is introduced a new method of optimising the marching cubes algorithm. This method utilises Integral Volumes (an extension of Integral Images) to discard chunks of empty cubes during polygonisation. Its effectiveness stands at the ability of integral volumes to find the sum of any sub-volume into constant time and it is important because it works effectively non-manifold or non-closed objects.

6.2 ? Summary

Then an algebraic representation of that volume is defined by the function $f(X)$ and the iso-surface value α . The function $f(X)$ takes as input a point X and returns the associated intensity of the voxel that X lies inside. If the returned intensity is greater than the value α then X lies inside the algebraic object, if it is equal to α then it is on the boundary otherwise it lies outside.

Chapter 7

Alignment with Hyperspectral Imagery

7.1 Previous Work

Regarding the integration of FW LiDAR and hyperspectral in remote forest surveys, there are diverse opinions on whether the integration of sensors improves remote forest surveying. Clark et al attempted to estimate forest biomass but no better results were observed after the integration [42], while the outcomes of Aderson et al for observing tree species abundances structures were improved after the integration of data [43].

[44] Buddenbaum et al, 2013, and [45] Heinzel and Koch, 2012, used a combination of multi-sensor data for tree classifications. Buddenbaum et al use fusion of data to generate RGB images from a combination of FW LiDAR and hyperspectral features, although the fusion reduces the dimensionality of a classifier [44]. Further, in their study, three different classifiers were implemented and the Support Vector Machines (SVMs) returns the best results. SVMs were also used in [45] to handle the high dimensionality of the metrics (464 metrics). In that research a combination of FW LiDAR, discrete LiDAR, hyperspectral and colour infrared (CIR) images are used. Each of the 125 hyperspectral bands was directly used as a feature in the classifier, contributing to the high dimensionality.

Here some of the FW LiDAR and LiDAR features are used but in a digested form (i.e. the width of the waveform), and matches to the spectral signatures of each class are used to reduce the dimensionality.

To enhance the visualisation of FW LiDAR data, a volumetric approach of polygo-nising the data was proposed by Miltiadou et al, 2014. First, the waveforms are inserted into a 3D discrete density volume, an implicit object is defined from the volume and the

object is polygonised using the Marching Cubes algorithm. In this paper we emphasize the sampling of the volume versus the sampling of the Marching Cubes algorithm as well as the effects of using full-waveform versus discrete LiDAR. Further hyperspectral imagery is introduced to improve the visual output and allow parallel interpretation of the data.

7.2 Integrating hyperspectral Imagery

For every scanned area, there are both FW LiDAR and hyperspectral data, but since the data are collected from different instruments they are not aligned. To integrate the data geo-spatially, aligning the data is required. In order to preserve the highest possible quality and reduce blurring that occurs during geo-rectification, data in original sense of geometry (level 1) are used. More information about the hyperspectral Imagery are available in Section 2.4.

The main idea of the geo-rectification is to find the nearest hyperspectral pixel to a point in the fastest possible way. For the reason, we first import the pixels into a 2D grid, similar to [24]. The dimensions of the grid and the length of squares are constant, but in our case the average number of pixels per square (A_{ps}) can be modified and the dimensions (n_x, n_y) of the grid are calculated as follow:

$$n_x = \sqrt{\frac{n_s^2}{A_{ps}}} \quad n_y = \sqrt{\frac{n_l^2}{A_{ps}}} \quad (7.1)$$

where n_s = the number of samples and n_l = the number of lines in the hyperspectral images.

Furthermore, while Warren et al use a tree-like structure, here structure similar to hash tables is used to speed up searching. Hash table is a data structure, which maps keys to values. In our case, we utilise the `unordered_multimap` available with the standard library of the C++ programming language, where for every key there is a bucket with multiple values stored inside. Each square (x_s, y_s) has a unique key, which is equal to $(x_s + y_s * nX_s)$ and each pixel is associated with the square it lies inside. In other words, every key with its bucket corresponds to a single square of the grid and every bucket includes all the pixels that lie inside that square. The next step is for every vertex (x_v, y_v, z_v) to find the pixel whose geolocation is closest to it. First we project each vertex into 2D by dropping the z coordinate and then we find the square (x_s, y_s) that its projection (x_v, y_v) lies in, as follow:

**** EQUATION ****

**** EQUATION ****

where maxX , minX , maxY , minY = the geolocation boundaries of all the hyperspectral image.

From the square (x_s, y_s) we can get the set of pixels that lie inside the same square with the vertex of our interest. Let's assume that the positions and geolocations of these pixels are defined by $p_1, p_2, p_3, \dots, p_n$ and $g_1, g_2, g_3, \dots, g_n$ respectively. Then, by looping through only that set of pixels, we can find the pixel i that lies closest to the point $v(x_v, y_v)$

**** EQUATION ****

7.3 Visualisation

When the hyperspectral images are loaded along with the LiDAR files, then the outputs are:

1. the 3D geometry, which contains all the information about the vertices, edges, faces, normal and texture coordinates, and
2. a texture, which is an RGB image which is aligned with the texture coordinates of the polygon mesh.

Here it worth mentioning that the texture coordinates (u, v) of each vertex lies in the range $[0, 1]$ and if they are multiplied by the height/width of the texture, then the position of the corresponding pixel of the 2D texture is given. The 2D texture is simply an image generated from three user-selected bands for the RGB colours and its width is equal to the number of samples per line while its height is equal to the number of lines.

DASOS projects level 1 hyperspectral images by adjusting the texture coordinates of the polygon according to the geolocation of the samples. That is, for each vertex (x_v, y_v, z_v) we find the pixel, whose geolocation (x_g, y_g) is closest to it. Then by using the position of the pixel on the image (x_p, y_p) , the texture coordinates of the vertex are calculated accordingly.

Finally, we need to scale the pixel position $p_i = (x_p, y_p)$, such that it lies in the range $[0, 1]$. The scale factors are the number of samples (n_s) and lines (n_l) of the hyperspectral image. So, the texture coordinates (u, v) of each vertex $v(x_v, y_v)$ are given by the following:

**** EQUATION ****

| | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|---|-------------------|--------------------|
| Bands | 150th, 60th, 23rd | 137th, 75th, 38th | Bands | 137th, 75th, 38th | 23rd, 120th, 201st |
| EAGLE INSTRUMENT (Visible and Near Infra-red) | | | HAWK INSTRUMENT (Short Wave Infra-red) | | |

Figure 7-1: Results of Alignment; the left table shows results of projecting hyperspectral images from the Eagle Instrument on polygonal meshes generated using FW LiDAR data and the right hand side images results using the Hawk instrument.

7.3.1 Results

7.4 Tree Coverage Maps

In Anderson et al, 2008, [43] an inverse distance weighted algorithm is used to raster the hyperspectral images and the pixel size is constant, 15.8m. While in this study an approach similar to Warren el [24] is used and the resolution is changeable.

Further, the metrics generated from both hyperspectral and LiDAR are 2D aligned pictures. In other words, the pixel (x, y) has the same geographical coordinates in every metric. Further the resolution of the metrics depends on the resolution of the 3D volume. If the dimensions of the volume are (x, y, z) then the dimensions of the metrics are (x, y) . For LiDAR each pixel is coloured according to the information derived from the corresponding column. For Hyperspectral metrics level 1 data are used to preserve the highest possible quality. The same method as section 4.5 is used for finding the pixels from the hyperspectral data that are closest to the centre of the every column of the 3D discrete density volume.

The metrics used in this project are shown in the following table, but the list of the metrics can easily be extended. The metrics L1 to L4 are generated from the FW LiDAR data while the metrics H1 to H4 are generated from the hyperspectral images

To demonstrate the usefulness of DASOS, tree coverage maps are generated using a classifier and the results projected back into the polygon representations as shown in the following figure ***. A Naïve Bayesian classifier using a multi-variance Gaussian model is applied for distinguishing tree covered areas from the ground. The main idea is

for each pixel/column to find the class that is more likely to belong to (Tree or Ground).

7.4.1 Results and Testing

As expected the total accuracy was increased with the integration of FW LiDAR data and hyperspectral images. For validating the results, ground truth data were hand painted using 3D models generated with DASOS. Further there are three test cases and for each test case the following metrics are used:

1. 1. L1-L4: Metrics generated from the FW LiDAR
2. 2. H1-H4: Metrics generated from the hyperspectral imagery
3. 3. L1-L4 & H1-H4: A combination of metrics generated from either FW LiDAR or hyperspectral imagery

An error matrix represents the accuracy of the classifications (Congalton, 1991). Each row shows the number of pixels assigned to each class relative to their actual class. For example, the first row of Table 9 shows that 130445 pixels were classified as trees, where 125375 were actual trees and the rest 5070 were ground.

For each test case, an error matrix is generated to indicate the accuracy of the classification results as verified on the ground truth data (Table 9-11). From the error matrices the classification accuracy of each test case was calculated and is presented in the Table ??.

| | FW LiDAR | Hyperspectral Imagery | Both |
|---------------|-----------------|------------------------------|-------------|
| Tree | 73.55% | 90.79% | 89.52% |
| Ground | 97.83% | 83.09% | 95.48% |
| Total | 87.58% | 86.34% | 92.97% |

Table 7.1: Classification accuracy of each test case

Figure 13 depicts the coverage maps generated for each test case. Three areas were also marked for comparison. Area 1 has been wrongly classified when only the hyperspectral data were used; nevertheless with the height information of the LiDAR data, area 1 was correctly classified. Similarly, area 2 was wrongly classified using the FW LiDAR because the height of the trees were less than the training samples but since the hyperspectral images do not contain height information, the trees were better labelled at the related test cases. By the end area 3 contains greenhouses, which seems to confuse the first two classifications in different ways, while the combination is much improved.

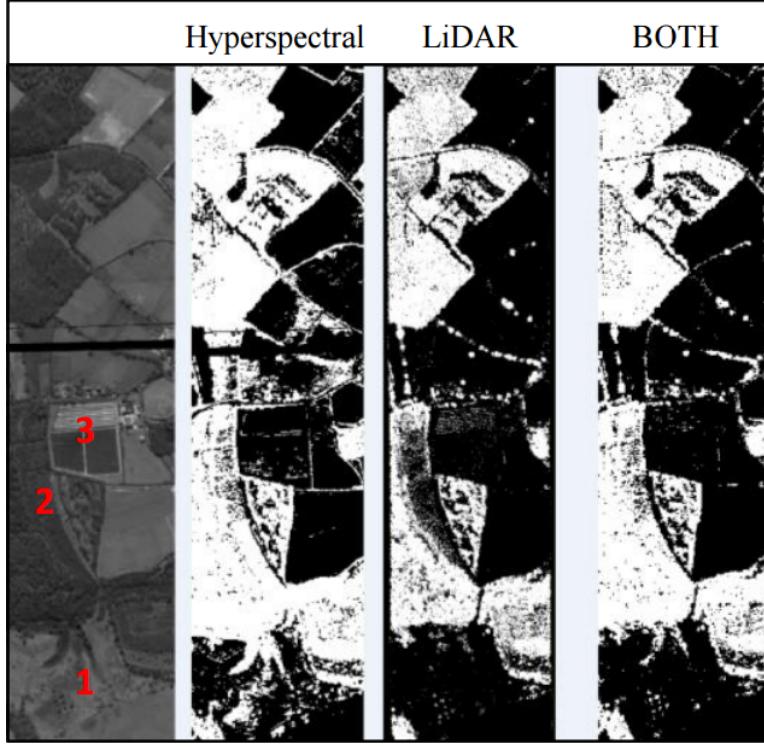


Figure 7-2: Results of Alignment; the left table shows results of projecting hyperspectral images from the Eagle Instrument on polygonal meshes generated using FW LiDAR data and the right hand side images results using the Hawk instrument.

7.5 Summary and Conclusions

In this paper we showed an efficient way of aligning the FW LiDAR data and hyperspectral images. The voxel representation of the FW LiDAR data eases the handling of data as well as the alignment with the hyperspectral images. Furthermore, the spatial representation of hyperspectral pixels into a grid contributes to the efficiency of the alignment.

The visualisation of FW LiDAR data and hyperspectral images has been improved by introducing computer graphics approaches to remote sensing. While the state-of-the-art FW LiDAR visualisations talks about points clouds and transparent voxels, the output of DASOS is a coloured polygon representation which can be exported and interpreted in modeling softwares, like Meshlab.

It was also showed that the integration of the data has great potentials in remote forest surveys. This was demonstrated using a Bayesian probabilistic classifier for generating tree coverage maps. Positive results were shown by improved classification accuracy when both datasets were used.

By the end, the tools developed for this research are now openly available (Section 2).

Chapter 8

Classifications using 3D Prior Models

This talk presents the new features of DASOS, which is an open source software for managing full-waveform LiDAR data and those features are used for detecting dead standing Eucalypt.

The value of dead standing Eucalypt trees from a biodiversity management perspective is large. In Australia, many arboreal mammals and birds that are close to extinct inhabit hollows [5]. Nevertheless, studies predict shortage of hollows in the near future due to tree harvesting and the decades required for a tree to be mature enough to develop a hollow [3] [4]. Dead standing eucalypt trees are more likely to be aged and have hollows, therefore automated detection of them plays a significant role in protecting animals that rely on hollows.

DASOS ($= \delta\alpha\sigma\omega\varsigma$) means forest in Greek and it is an open source software aiming to ease the way of handling FW LiDAR data in forestry [27]. 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].

The new features of DASOS: New features of DASOS which enables observation at tree level: i.e. distribution of intensities at specific area

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?).

examined with Random Forest

The new features of DASOS are presented and used for generating 3D signatures characterising dead standing trees and a comparison between the discrete and FW LiDAR data is performed to demonstrate the increased survey accuracy obtained with the FW LiDAR.

This paper presents a new feature of DASOS, which is an open source software for managing full-waveform (FW) LiDAR data and that feature is used for detecting dead standing Eucalypt trees in native Australian forests.

The value of dead standing Eucalypt trees from a biodiversity management perspective is large. In Australia, many arboreal mammals and birds, which are close to extinct, inhabit hollows [5]. Nevertheless, studies predict shortage of hollows in the near future due to tree harvesting and the decades required for a tree to develop a hollow [3] [4]. Dead standing eucalypt trees are more likely to be aged and have hollows, therefore automated detection of them plays a significant role in protecting animals that rely on hollows.

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 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.

The new feature of DASOS calculates forestry metrics within a radius relevant to canopy height and exports all metrics into a single vector for fast interpretation in advanced statistical tools. Traditional ways of interpreting FW LiDAR data, suggests extraction of a denser points cloud [29] [30], but as mentioned before with the Riegl system this is done at post processing. Nevertheless DASOS was influenced by Persson et al, 2005, who used voxelisation to visualise the waveforms [26], but DASOS also uses it for generating metrics. It further normalises the intensities so that equal pulse length exists inside each voxel, making intensities more meaningful. Further, recent publication on tree species classification showed that voxelisation could confer good results while interpreting FW LiDAR data [33].

Previous work on dead standing trees detection, suggests single tree segmentation before dead trees identification [46] [47] but in case of Eucalypt trees single tree de-

tection is a challenge on its own due to their irregular structure and multiple trunk splits.

In this project, the new feature of DASOS is used for generating 3D signatures characterising dead standing Eucalypt trees and a comparison between the LiDAR point cloud and FW LiDAR data is performed using Random Forest to demonstrate the increased survey accuracy obtained with voxelisation.

Chapter 9

Comparison with Discrete Data

Furthermore, DASOS allows the user to choose whether the waveform samples or the discrete returns are inserted into the 3D density volume. Each sample or each return has a hit point and an intensity value. So, in both case the space is divided into 3D voxels and the intensity of each return or sample is inserted into the voxel it lies inside.

In general the results of discrete returns contain less information compared to the results from the FW LiDAR, even though the FW LiDAR contain information from about half of the emitted pulses (Section 3). As shown on the 1st example of table 3 the polygon mesh generated from the FW LiDAR contains more details comparing to the one created from the discrete LiDAR. The forest on the top is more detailed, the warehouses in the middle have a clearer shape and the fence on the right lower corner is continuous while in the discrete data it is disconnected and merged with the aliasing.

FW LiDAR polygons, compared to the discrete LiDAR ones, contain more geometry below the outlined surface of the trees. On the one hand this is positive because they include much information about the tree branches but on the other hand the complexity of the objects generated is high. A potential use of the polygon representations is in movie productions: instead of creating a 3D virtual city or forest from scratch, the area of interest can be scanned and then polygonised using our system.

But for efficiency purposes in both animation and rendering, polygonal objects should be closed and their faces should be connected. Hence, in movie productions, polygons generated from the FW LiDAR will require more post-processing in comparison with object generated from the discrete LiDAR.

Example 2 in table 3 shows the differences in the geometry complexity of the discrete and FW polygons using the x-ray shader of Meshlab. The brighter the surface appears the more geometry exists below the top surface. The brightness difference between area 1 and area 2 appears less in the discrete polygon.

Nevertheless, the trees in area 2 are much taller than in area 1, therefore more geometry should have existed in area 2 and sequentially be brighter. But the two areas are only well-distinguished in the FW LiDAR. On average the FW polygon is brighter than the discrete polygon, which implies higher geometry complexity in the FW polygon.

The comparison example 3 is rendered using the Radiance Scaling shader of Meshlab (Vergne et al, 2010). The shader highlights the details of the mesh, making the comparison easier. Not only the FW polygons are more detailed but also holes appear on the discrete polygons. The resolution of the voxels of those examples is 1.7m³ is, the bigger the holes are, while the full-waveform can be polygonised at a resolution of 1m³ without any significant holes. Figure 4 shows an example of rendering the same flightline of examples 3 at the resolution of 1m³ LiDAR data.

The last two examples (4 and 5) compare the side views of small regions. On the one hand the top of the trees are better-shaped in the discrete data. This may occur either because the discrete data contain information from double pulses than the FW data (Section 3) or because the noise threshold of the waveforms is not accurate and the top of the trees appear noisier on the FW LiDAR data. On the other hand more details appear close to the ground on the FW LiDAR data.

*** left during copying :s (and the higher the resolution, using FW)

Chapter 10

Overall Results

Chapter 11

Conclusions

11.1 Contributions

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Chapter 12

Appendices

12.1 Birds and Mammals Catalogue

12.1.0.1 Introduction

12.1.0.2 Australian arboreal Mammals

12.1.0.3 Australian Birds

The Forestry Corporation, Australia, provided a list of bird species that rely on hollows. But species are not limited to that list and more species rely uses hollows for shelters.

The provided list of the birds is divided into three groups:

1. Categorised as threatened species according to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, 1999

Corella Eastern Rosella Superb Parrot Barking Owl Masked Owl

2. All the above species are included to the Action Plan for Australian Birds, 2000, as well as the following once:

Powerful Owl Sooty Owl

3. The rest:

Kookaburra Sulphur Crested Cockatoo Crimson Rosella Rainbow Lorikeet Musk Lorikeet Little Lorikeet Red-winged Parrot Cockatiel Australian Ringneck (Parrot) Red-rumped Parrot Powerful Owl Sooty Owl Barn Owl White-throated Treecreeper

12.1.0.4 Web-links of Photos

Mammals · Brush-tailed Possum - protected wildlife (Hollow: <http://www.cavershamwildlife.com.au/comm-brushtail-possum/>) (<http://www.rymich.com/girraween/photos/animals/mammals/possums/trichosurus-macdonaldi/>) .

Birds · Kookaburra (<http://tenrandomfacts.com/blue-winged-kookaburra/>) .

Sulphur Crested Cockatoo (<http://aussiegal7.deviantart.com/art/Sulphur-Crested-Cockatoo-08->

- Corella (<http://www.theparrotplace.co.nz/all-about-parrots/long-billed-corella/>)
 - 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)
 - Galah (<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/537546905498955709/>)
 - 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/>)
 - Superb Parrot (<http://www.davidkphotography.com/?showimage=637>)
 - 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.jpg>)
 - Red-rumped Parrot (<http://parrotfacts.net/wp-content/uploads/Red-Rumped-Parrot-on-a-.jpg>)
 - Powerful Owl (http://farm1.staticflickr.com/219/495796536_f78dac04c1.jpg)
 - Sooty Owl (hollow: http://www.mariewinn.com/marieblog/uploaded_images/screech2-738532.jpg) (http://www.owlpages.com/owls/species/images/greater_sooty_owl_richard_jackson-1.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)
 - Barn Owl (Hollow: http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Barn_Owl_hollow_tree-wallpaper.jpg) (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c6/Tyto_alba_-British_Wildlife_Centre,_Surrey,_England-8a_%281%29.jpg)
 - White-throated Treecreeper (<http://www.birdlifemelbourne.org.au/bird-lists/47-Treecreepers/White-throated-Treecreeper/White-throated%20Treecreeper%2020JB.jpg>) (hollow: <https://geoffpark.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/female-white-throated-treecreeper-1.jpg>)
- Hollow Owl: http://www.mariewinn.com/marieblog/uploaded_images/screech2-738532.jpg