

Archaeology of Woodlands and in Woodlands

In a wooded landscape you will find evidence of human activity that relates to the woods and the trees. This is the archaeology *of* the woods.

You will also find evidence of human activity that is either related to other uses but not specific to trees or woods or of activities during non-wooded phases of time. This is the archaeology *in* the woods.

The type of archaeology varies with the type of woodland - its age, its continuity on the site, whether it is semi-natural woodland, or a secondary re-grown or replanted site. Normally you will find more woodland archaeological features in a wood that is old and which has had minimal disturbance.



Archaeology of Woodland Archaeology in Woodland

Recommended Survey Approach

To survey the pits, platforms, banks and ditches of your woodland a walk-over or transect survey with virtual quadrats for specific features is recommended. The ideal time to complete this is in Autumn or Winter.

See Discovering Neighbourhood Woodlands Leaflet 1 for more information on surveying your woodland.

What is Ancient Woodland and Why is it Important?

Natural England's Ancient Woodland Inventory defines ancient woodland as: *land that has had continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD.*

This date is used because archive documentary evidence indicates that there was little deliberate tree planting prior to 1600AD on ground which had not previously been wooded.

Ancient woodlands are important for a variety of reasons including:

- the range of wildlife found (**Biodiversity**)
- the **Rarity** of the habitat
- the longevity of their **History**
- the value placed on them by local **Communities**
- their overall **Irreplacibility**
- and their Unique archaeology and heritage.

Useful Publications

Anon. (2007) *Understanding Archaeological Landscapes: a Guide to Good Recording Practice* English Heritage (free to download)

Jones, M. (2009) *Sheffield's Woodland Heritage* (4th Ed.) Wildtrack Publishing

Rackham, O. (2007) *Woodlands* Collins (New Naturalist series)

Rotherham, I.D., Jones, M., Smith, L. and Handley, C. (eds.) (2007) *The Woodland Heritage Manual* Wildtrack Publishing (free to download)

For further information visit www.ukeconet.co.uk or contact us at info@hallamec.plus.com or 0114 272 4227 March 2011

Discovering Neighbourhood Woodlands (4)

Pits, Platforms, Banks and Ditches



A basic guide to identifying archaeological features in your woodland



Archaeological features you may find can be related to:

- Land ownership and management.
- Woodland processes and products (pits, platforms, sawpits, storage and processing sites).
- Industrial extraction (stone, coal and other minerals) and industrial processes (tanning).
- Agricultural phases of land use (field systems, boundaries, buildings).
- Recreational and sporting activities now and in the past.
- Settlement sites.
- Military training or Home Guard defence.
- Transport structures.

Banks and Ditches

External Banks and Ditches

Banks and Ditches on an outer boundary provided a barrier to prevent uncontrolled grazing and trespass and were usually quite substantially built. Outer woodland boundaries varied in their construction depending on the materials to hand. Often there was a ditch on the outside of the wood and then a bank to stop animals or people getting in. There may also be walls, fences or hedges on the top of the banks to strengthen the defence. Hedges on their own were also used as a barrier.

Internal Banks and Ditches

Internal ditches and banks can tell us about the economic activities of a woodland or they may suggest that a woodland is secondary and that the original wood may have been cleared. Hedges, banks and ditches were used to sub-divide coppiced woods for management purposes.

Examples



Hut Foundation



Q-pit or Whitecoal kiln



Internal Linear Feature and Wall



Charcoal Hearth



External Wall and Bank



Internal Boundary Bank

Pits and Platforms

There are many different types of pits and platforms found in woodlands, only some relate to woodland uses. It may be difficult to distinguish between these without a careful survey and background historical research. Some of the more common pits and platforms found in local woodland are:

Charcoal Hearths- The area used to process wood into charcoal used in iron production. These are common archaeological features in many woodlands and can be found in any suitable area of potentially ancient woodland. Normally all that remains is a round shallow depression in the ground or a flat surface cut into a slope with a retaining wall on the down-slope. Look out for fragments of charcoal as an additional clue.

Q-Pits- A roughly circular shaped hollow in the ground surface with a channel coming off it. These were linked to the historical production of whitecoal for lead production. Today, few Q-pits are well preserved, however the stoke hole can often be distinguished, as can the remains of the stone lining. They are similar in form to **Potash kilns** and can be confused with these in some areas of the country.

Tree-throw Pits- An oval shaped hollow created where a tree was uprooted and has since rotted away; look for evidence in the surrounding vegetation. These can be confused with Q-pits.

Processing, Storage and Building Platforms- Areas of levelled ground, rectangular or square in shape lying close to a track or path in the woodland. There may be some stone or building material associated with them. Their former use may be difficult to confirm without historical research.