Ancient Woodland Inventory: Volunteer Pack

Ancient Woodland Inventory: Volunteer Guidance

Below you will find the SBIS fieldwork hazard checklist, plus important information on land access and fieldwork considerations.

Access permission

Always obtain permission from the relevant landowner or tenant to enter any private land not subject to open access legislation, and do not continue fieldwork if access permission is later revoked. A letter confirming your participation in SBIS fieldwork has been provided to demonstrate volunteer status and to encourage landowners to grant site access.

Surveyor Health & Safety

As an SBIS volunteer, you are under no obligation to participate in a survey or scheme, nor to visit a particular site through participation in that survey or scheme, even if local survey organisers or SBIS staff have suggested or requested that you do so.

H&S responsibility

Volunteers are responsible for their own health and safety and should not put themselves in a position that could place them, or others, in danger. You should never undertake any work if you have concerns about your own or others' health and safety. If you have any such concerns, you should stop fieldwork immediately.

If you have any concerns, or wish to report any issues encountered, please contact hannah.alred@suffolk.gov.uk.

Fieldwork Hazard Checklist

The aim of this checklist is to help you improve your own personal safety while carrying out surveys by identifying potential hazards and possible mitigating actions.

Note that this information is for guidance only and may not be exhaustive with respect to potential hazards; surveyors carry out a wide range of activities across a range of habitats and regions, and any assessment of risk should take all relevant local factors into account, in addition to any risks relevant to specific individuals (e.g., pre-existing medical conditions).

Danger of injury through accident

- Identify potential hazards in daylight, on arrival at each site
- Wear suitable clothing and appropriate footwear for the location/terrain and weather conditions
- Use footpaths where possible
- Carry a mobile phone with sufficient charge and test for reception blackspots
- Carry a torch and spare batteries
- Carry a first aid kit, whistle, and survival bag
- Ensure you have access to drinking water and food
- Avoid well known danger spots; do not cross railway lines or other potential hazardous sites e.g., quarries or ravines
- Heed warning signs and do not enter private (non-access) land that has been deliberately obstructed
- Avoid contact with livestock and agricultural machinery

Front cover image © Natural England/Peter Wakely

Lone working

- Avoid lone working where possible
- If lone working, always notify someone (partner, friend, neighbour) where you are going, when you expect to be back and details of your vehicle. Agree on a course of action if you have not returned home by the time you stated
- Lone workers should be aware of the location of the nearest house or phone so that help can be called if required

Inclement weather

- Check weather forecast before leaving for fieldwork
- Wear appropriate clothing for the time of year, and be prepared for weather changes
- Carry waterproof and/or warm clothing. Hazards can increase significantly in heavy rain, strong wind, and thunderstorms
- Avoid or terminate outside activity in inclement weather as appropriate

Getting lost

- Carry a mobile phone/GPS with spare batteries
- Do not rely solely on a mobile phone/GPS for navigation, always take a map and compass and know how to use them

Human confrontation

- Consider your personal safety when conducting fieldwork within the vicinity of known or likely trouble spots
- Avoid confrontation with landowners, land workers or members of the public
- Consider the privacy of residents when performing early-morning survey work in residential areas
- If you have any concerns about your personal safety, cease fieldwork immediately

Traffic and driving

- High visibility clothing should be worn whenever working in the vicinity of roads, particularly at night
- Take care to park sensibly, preferably off-road, and do not block entrances

Water features

- Non-swimmers should be accompanied when walking by water
- Keep at safe distance from banks, cliffs, and the water's edge
- Do not cross rivers or streams unless by bridge
- Avoid work when there is a risk of flooding
- If operating below the high-water mark, check high tide times before commencing fieldwork, and allow ample time to leave the intertidal area.

Trees

- Be aware of low, fallen and hanging branches and take care to avoid them
- Do not climb trees or onto tree limbs
- Be aware of other wildlife

Fencing

- Avoid touching or climbing over electric fences
- Avoid touching or climbing over barbed-wire fences
- Ensure your tetanus vaccine is up to date

Unfamiliar dogs

- Do not run away if approached by an unfamiliar dog, but stay calm and still and avoid direct eye contact as this can be seen as a form of aggression or a challenge
- Drop anything you are carrying that may have attracted the dog and try calmly telling the dog to sit or stay
- Ignore the dog if it jumps up – do not shout or push it away as it may see this as a game. If knocked to the ground, remain motionless in the foetal position, and protect your face
- When you do move, move slowly, and remain facing the dog

Tetanus, Leptospirosis (Weil's disease), Lyme disease and Tick-borne Encephalitis

- Clean any cuts, etc. immediately with clean water and cover adequately
- Ensure that your anti-tetanus treatments are up to date (normally within the last 10 years)
- Avoid contact with water, particularly if contaminated with cattle/rat urine
- Wash hands thoroughly and always before eating or smoking.
- If you contract flu-like symptoms, tell your doctor that you may have been exposed to Weil's disease
- Check for ticks on ankles and lower body and carry a tick card for removal

If concerned or to report an incident, please contact hannah.alred@suffolk.gov.uk

Ancient Woodland

Ancient woodland takes hundreds of years to establish and is defined as an irreplaceable habitat. It is a valuable natural asset important for:

- wildlife (including rare and threatened species)
- soils
- carbon capture and storage
- contributing to the seed bank and genetic diversity
- recreation, health and wellbeing
- cultural, historical and landscape value

It is any area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD. It includes:

- ancient semi-natural woodland mainly made up of trees and shrubs native to the site, usually arising from natural regeneration
- plantations on ancient woodland sites - replanted with conifer or broadleaved trees that retain ancient woodland features, such as undisturbed soil, ground flora and fungi

Historical features

Humans have relied on woods for fuel, food and shelter for centuries. We can still see signs of industry and management in woods which can help confirm their ancient status:

1. Tree management is visible in woods through coppiced and pollarded trees.

2. Coppiced trees have been cut back down to ground level resulting in the regrowth of many new stems. These stems would be let to grow for a few years then harvested for fuel.

3. Industry in woodland is more varied. Ancient woods house remains of charcoal production, mine pits, ore roasting hearths and furnaces, though they are not immediately obvious. These industries were based in woods for their steady supply of wood fuel.

4. Boundaries in woodland often look like banks and ditches, sometimes with overgrown hedges and ancient boundary trees. These can be from old deer parks, livestock management or parish boundaries, and some even correspond with old maps.

Wood Pasture and Parkland

Wood-pasture and parkland are mosaic habitats valued for their trees, especially veteran and ancient trees, and the plants and animals that they support. Grazing animals are fundamental to the existence of this habitat. Specialised and varied habitats within wood pasture and parkland provide a home for a wide range of species, many of which occur only in these habitats, particularly insects, lichens and fungi which depend on dead and decaying wood. Individual trees, some of which may be of great size and age, are key elements of the habitat and many sites are also important historic landscapes.

Key features of these habitats are:

1. Ancient/veteran trees which are special as some of the oldest living organisms in the UK.

2. The presence of grazing animals – animal dung contributes to invertebrate and fungal diversity and grazing controls tree and shrub regeneration, maintaining a semi-open habitat.

3. The presence of microhabitats including large diameter (relative to the species) hollowing trees, other decaying wood, rot holes, ageing bark and fallen but regenerating trees, which support a wide range of specialised invertebrates, lichen, and fungi.

4. Nectar sources for invertebrates.

5. Open grassland or heathland ground vegetation.