

Chapter 10 Public access and Veteran Trees

10.1 The benefits and disadvantages of public access

The trend towards greater public access in woodland can bring considerable benefits in terms of greater understanding of woodland processes as well as giving enjoyment to the visitors themselves. However, in some situations the health of veteran trees can be threatened because of this. Probably the greatest single threat to veteran trees in Britain today is their felling on the grounds that they are a hazard to public safety. This complicated aspect is covered in a separate leaflet produced by the Veteran Trees Initiative. There are other ways in which veteran trees may be jeopardised by people. It is ironic that many of these threats arise because the public is appreciating the trees, perhaps for their historic value or unusual appearance.

- **Public access can cause damage to trees and associated organisms in the following ways:**
- **Intentionally by:**
 - burning through intended fires or accidental ones;
 - vandalism, for example damaging trees, damaging the bark, graffiti.
- **Unintentionally by:**
 - climbing on trees, which damages the bark so the tree is unable to transport food and water efficiently;
 - trampling round trees, which can in extreme cases compact the soil affecting water uptake and mycorrhizal fungi (Figure 48);
 - collecting of specimens by the public or survey work by naturalists;
 - removal of dead wood;
 - car parking under old trees (causing compaction);
 - marking trees with waymarks for trails, etc.

Figure 48. See colour plate page 92.

10.2 Solutions

Some solutions to these problems are:

- Inform the public about the value of trees through signs, leaflets, guide books, guided walks and nature trails.
- Fence the tree to reduce compaction, etc. This is not a recommended solution but may be necessary for key feature trees.
- Draw up a collecting code for the site or adopt one already in existence.
- Try selling a limited amount of woodland products (ideally those of lower conservation value) and use the money for site management. Visitors then feel that they are contributing. BUT ensure that only the surplus is sold.
- Relocate car parks to open areas and/or use shrubs for shade and screening or trees not intended as future veterans. Encourage visitors to walk to interesting areas not drive as close as possible.
- Discourage access right up to trees where there is a specific problem, eg by using dead hedging (especially prickly plants).
- Erect raised walkways around key feature trees.