

English Nature Research Report 558

The status and distribution of ancient woodland in Dorset. Part 1: Details of methods used in updating the status and distribution of Ancient Woodland

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Introduction

This report highlights changes in the status and distribution of ancient woodland in Dorset. There is actual change since the 1988 inventory (Spencer, 1988); mistakes in the initial recording between ancient semi-natural woodland and plantation on ancient woodland sites, and mistakes in the digital boundaries. There is also a discrepancy between the area given by the original data and the GIS data because of the differences in technology used to calculate the area. If the boundary digitisation is correct, the GIS data will give increased accuracy than the romer grids originally used. It was difficult to assess in some situations which particular error had occurred.

What was done

Dorset Environmental Record Centre (DERC) reviewed and revised the status of ancient woodland in Dorset. The project involved using data held by DERC to assess whether changes had taken place to sites identified by the Dorset Inventory of Ancient Woodland (Spencer, 1985), revised in 1988. It made use of addition survey information, such as recent field surveys, and colour aerial photography.

The following changes were recorded:

- Any change to the current status of each woodland, e.g. restored to semi-natural, replanted, or cleared, since 1988
- Any woodland areas newly and permanently cleared, for example for agriculture, urban development or mineral extraction
- Changes to the central grid reference generated for each site
- Changes to the names of individual sites, where these had been manufactured in the original document
- Reassessment of the certainty of ancient woodland status of an individual woodland, and grading assigned to each site representing confidence in the status
- Reassessment of the quality of information available for each woodland, upon which decisions are made regarding its status

This project took information from:

- The original ancient woodland data sheets

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- Isaac Taylor Map of Dorsetshire from 1765
- Ordnance survey maps, scanned and geo-rectified, OS 6" County series in Mapinfo
- Aerial photography from 1997
- Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) survey data
- Professor Good's Dorset Botanical Archive, 1931-1939
- Literature

Results and conclusions

The survey has found 62 cases where semi-natural area and plantation on ancient woodland sites were inverted, 49 sites that have been cleared and 55 sites where there were errors in digitisation. From the original database, this represents a loss of 348 ha of ancient semi-natural woodland, a gain of 83 ha of plantation on ancient woodland sites, an additional 59 ha of clearance and an overall loss of area of ancient woodland of almost 291 ha.

English Nature's viewpoint

The Dorset project has been incredibly valuable in updating both the technology and the actual data in the Dorset Ancient Woodland Inventory (provisional). The process underlined that the Ancient Woodland Inventory nationally is showing its age and is in need of updating, and has triggered a wider project to update it.

Selected references

See also PENGELLY & HEATH. 2003. The status and distribution of ancient woodland in Dorset, part 2: An analysis of land use changes resulting in the loss of ancient woodland in Dorset (1988 to 2000), *English Nature Research Reports*. No. 559.

Further information

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