

The Parkland Inventory Project
A pilot study for an inventory of parklands

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The Parkland Inventory Project:

**A pilot study for
an inventory of parklands**

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Preface

The Parkland Inventory Project Pilot Study forms a component of the data gathering phase of the 'Veteran Trees Project'. The Veteran Trees Project is one of English Nature's corporate projects, and is a joint initiative with the Forestry Authority, English Heritage and The Countryside Commission.

Further information on the Veteran Trees Project is available from William Du Croz, English Nature, Northminster House, Peterborough, PE1 1UA.

List of abbreviations

BLS	British Lichen Society
EH	English Heritage
EN	English Nature
GIS	Geographic Information System
ISR	Invertebrate Site Register
JNCC	Joint Nature Conservation Committee
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
NCC	Nature Conservancy Council
NCR	Nature Conservation Review
NNR	National Nature Reserve
NT	National Trust
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SMR	Sites and Monuments Record
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
WT	Woodland Trust

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Introduction

Importance of parkland

Historic parklands are an important component of the English countryside, their continuity of land use having created a habitat of significant cultural, aesthetic and wildlife value. For the purposes of this project, 'parkland' includes surviving medieval deerparks and other similarly enclosed areas of land of later origin, often within large private estates.

Features such as park pales, historical buildings, and the design and layout of the park help to build a picture of how our ancestors lived and managed the land. Parklands can add significantly to the distinctiveness and beauty of the English landscape. Ancient parkland trees and their associated flora and fauna, provide an important element of biodiversity at the British and European scale, where ancient trees and their dead wood habitats are a rapidly declining resource (Kirby et al. in press).

Need for a parkland inventory

There has been a significant reduction in the quantity and quality of parks in England over the last century. In Norfolk, for example, the number of parks over 25 hectares has declined from 161 (as recorded on the second series Ordnance Survey maps) in 1880, to just 79 in 1988 (Norfolk County Council 1988). The main reasons for the loss of parks include ploughing up for agricultural use, urban development in the form of housing, road building and leisure facilities, and mineral extraction. Degradation of parklands has also occurred due to changes in adjacent land use (eg drift from pesticide spray, or urban air pollution), and through lack of appropriate management (eg overgrazing, lack of regeneration, artificial pasture improvement). As one of the least re-creatable habitats in England there is an urgent need to conserve the special features of parklands.

Presently, knowledge of the location and diverse values of parklands is scattered between a variety of organisations and individuals, depending on their particular interest. Ecologically important sites have been identified and in some cases awarded statutory designations (SSSI or NNR) by English Nature. English Heritage seeks to promote the historic and landscape interest of important parklands. The Countryside Commission and county councils hold information on parklands with high value for public recreation. The National Trust owns and manages many parkland sites for a variety of objectives. Voluntary conservation bodies and species specialists have gathered botanical, lichenological, mycological and zoological survey data from many parkland sites. Grant-aiding bodies may also be involved with parkland restoration projects. Unfortunately there sometimes appears to be a great lack of awareness amongst those involved of the often very different needs and objectives of these diverse parkland interest groups. Conflicts over site management priorities are therefore inevitable.

An Inventory identifying all parkland sites and qualifying their ecological, landscape and historic values, would be a valuable first step to effective and coordinated parkland conservation and management. Such an inventory could be made widely available to all those organisations and individuals with an influence over the future of parklands in England.

Aims of the Parkland Inventory Project

This project is intended as a pilot study with the following aims:

- to assess the breadth and depth of information existing on parklands in England;
- to identify gaps in existing knowledge;
- to develop a methodology for producing the inventory which is straightforward and repeatable;
- to design a format for the inventory;
- to produce a pilot inventory for two counties;
- to obtain feedback on the methodology, design and information from intended users.

Methodology

A four stage process was used to produce the pilot parkland inventories:

- a. information needs and sources were identified;
- b. information was collected;
- c. information was collated and used to compile the pilot inventory;
- d. the inventory was used in identifying gaps in knowledge, disseminating the information, incorporating further information.

Identifying Information Sources

Questionnaire

A questionnaire (Appendix 1), was designed to identify the type and availability of parkland information, and sent to a wide range of organisations perceived to have an interest in parklands, including:

all County Archaeologists
all County Gardens Trusts
Garden History Society
TROBI (Tree Register of the British Isles)
British Lichen Society
National Trust
Woodland Trust
Forestry Authority
Countryside Commission
Corporation of London

A summary of the questionnaire responses was produced (Appendix 2).

Meeting

A meeting was held between the main organisations who hold nationally-based information on parklands (Appendix 3), with the intention of identifying the extent, format and overlap of the data each holds, and to discuss the possibilities of data exchange. This meeting established that there is considerable overlap between data sources covering historic parks, but little in the way of ecological data.

Types of Information

The following table illustrates the information sources available and the type of information they could provide that is relevant to the Parkland Inventory Project. There is great variability in the quantity and quality of information available for each county but, for most counties, information is available in at least some of these forms.

Table 1 Types of Information Provided by the Sources Used in the Pilot Study

y = yes information provided
 s = sometimes information provided
 ? = uncertain whether this information is provided
 (blank) = no information available

SOURCE	SITE DETAILS				INFORMATION/GRADINGS						
	name	grid ref	area	type	historic	wildlife designations	fungi	inverts	lichens	birds	trees
EH register ¹	y	y	y	y	y	s (SSSI)					s
SMR ²	y	y	s	y	y	s					s
Lower Plants Database (JNCC)	y	?		?					y		
Invert Site Register (JNCC)	y	y		?		y		y			
Lichen Inventory ³	y	y							y		
SSSI Citations ⁴	y	y	y	y		y	s	s	s	s	s
Keith Alexander ⁵	y	y		y	s	s		y (coleoptera)			
Phase 1 Habitat Maps ⁶	y	y	y	y							y
Phase 1 A3 Habitat Code ⁷	y	y	y	y		y (SSSI, NNR, NCR)					

¹ English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens

² Sites and Monuments Record

³ 1982 Nature Conservancy Council Lichen Inventory of selected British Counties/Regions

⁴ Held at English Nature HQ, Peterborough

⁵ National Trust, Cirencester

⁶ Held at English Nature's local team offices or with County Councils

⁷ On central database at English Nature, Peterborough

Pilot Study

Data collection

Two counties were selected for a pilot study to determine

- accessibility and overlap of data available;
- the best way to construct the inventory;
- the usefulness of such an inventory.

Norfolk and Bedfordshire were chosen on the basis that information was available for both counties in the form of the Sites and Monuments Record, other information sources were available, and they were close to Peterborough.

For each sample county the following were undertaken:

- the Site and Monuments Record (SMR) was viewed and relevant information was extracted;
- the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens file was obtained from which site details, historic gradings, and information on parkland (especially trees) were noted;
- SSSI citations were checked and tree/habitat/species information was extracted (eg important parkland specimens, old pollards, invertebrates, lichens, fungi and birds, including number of species, associated habitat, presence of Red Data Book species, nationally or regionally rare species) and summarised.

NB Some of this information was deleted at a later stage if gradings were provided by another data source;

- the British Lichen Society Inventory was checked for site-based gradings;
- the Invertebrate Site Register (ISR) and Lower Plants databases, developed by staff at the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), were searched;
- Coleoptera records were provided by Keith Alexander;
- Phase 1 habitat maps were checked - for Bedfordshire only - to determine if the parkland was still extant and, if so, highlight some of the tree features of the parkland;
- Wildlife designations (eg County Wildlife Trust Reserve) and ownership/management by voluntary organisations (eg National Trust) were noted if known.

In addition, for Norfolk, site information was based on the Norfolk County Council Survey of Parkland Sites.

Statutory nature conservation designations

As part of the pilot study information about park sites with English Nature designations across the whole country was gathered.

National Nature Reserves (NNRs)

A list of NNRs with possible parkland/veteran tree interest was compiled (Appendix 4) from the following information sources:

- Philip Biss (Designations Team, English Nature) - provided list of possible park NNRs from personal knowledge;
- Peter Marren's book *England's National Nature Reserves* extracted sites which mentioned 'parkland', 'old pollards' or similar;
- the CORDATA database was queried for SSSIs that were also NNRs and had the A3 habitat code (denoting Parkland and Scattered Trees). This procedure identified those sites from the list with the most likely parkland interest, but also pinpointed some less obviously parkland sites (eg Avon Gorge) and had some major omissions (eg Moccas Park). In addition, there were 21 NNR sites with the A3 habitat code which are very unlikely parkland sites. They are presumably coded as A3 for the scattered tree interest (eg Ainsdale Sand Dunes).

This exercise highlighted that NNRs, and consequently also SSSIs, with parkland interest could not be readily identified if 'parkland interest' was not the main criteria for which the site was designated.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

A list of parkland sites of major historic interest that are wholly or partly designated as SSSI's was compiled from EHs REgister of Parks and Gardens. Each of the sites was cross-checked against:

- English Nature's SSSI citations for the above identified sites were checked and the presence of information about trees, invertebrates, fungi, birds or other biological interest was noted, along with further details, such as the number of species and the presence of rare species;
- a printout of SSSIs with A3 habitat code (parklands and scattered trees);
- the British Lichen Society Inventory, and the gradings and availability of species list/map/proforma noted;
- the Invertebrate Site Register and the gradings and presence of parkland/dead wood habitat were noted;
- Keith Alexander's coleoptera records;
- other details such ownership/management of the SSSI, non-statutory designations, other wildlife interest, and any recent developments were included in the 'Notes' column.

Data collation and timing

A spreadsheet system (Microsoft Excel for Windows) was used to summarise the information collected for each of the pilot counties, and for the list of parkland SSSIs. In future it may be possible to down-load parkland site details from the most comprehensive and/or accessible database to a spreadsheet which could have historic and biological gradings added.

Approximate timings for collating and entering the data for one county (Norfolk) are as follows: for c.80 sites, 1 day arranging; 1-2 days collecting; 2-3 days input. Not all possible data sources were examined for this county in the pilot study, but if all the required information was to hand, it is estimated that for each county 7 to 10 days would be adequate to complete data collation and entry.

Data dissemination

The pilot inventories were distributed to all those people who provided us with source information inviting comment and opinion on the usefulness of an inventory of parklands in this form.

Results

1. Norfolk (Appendix 5)

It is thought that all of the main parkland sites (about 80) in Norfolk have been identified by the information search. However the basic information was largely extracted from the Norfolk County Council Survey (NCC 1988) which looked only at those park sites over 25ha, so it is possible that smaller park sites exist which have not been included on this pilot inventory.

The spreadsheet output is preceded by a page 'key to codes', which lists the meanings of all the abbreviations used. The spreadsheet (Appendix 5) was divided into columns (see 1.1 below) relevant to all counties and county-specific columns (see 1.2 below).

1.1 General

Four figure grid references were available for all but a few sites. Area figures were available (usually from the English Heritage Register) for only about half of the sites. Site descriptions (column 4) give the main dates of the park's features and a very brief description of what is to be found there now (information extracted from the EH Register/the Norfolk County Council Survey/and occasionally additional information from the SMR). This column does *not* attempt to describe the present *condition* of the park features, for which reference will have to be made to source material. The columns headed 'information/gradings' list any historic or wildlife gradings known to cover a particular site (see 'Key to Codes'). 'Notes' include information such as ownership where it is known, or other details about any aspect of the site (eg threats/damage etc) which may be of interest to the inventory user.

1.2 County-specific

For Norfolk, three additional columns were added which summarise the information found in the Norfolk County Council/University of East Anglia's Parks Survey. These list whether or not a site 'tree report' exists at the county offices (for details, information is obtainable directly from these); and give the gradings attached to sites by the Norfolk County Council for historic value and visual quality of the landscape.

2. Bedfordshire (Appendix 6)

Over 90 parkland sites were recorded in Bedfordshire (Appendix 6). Unlike Norfolk, the SMR was used as the basis for site inclusion. Consequently smaller sites such as 'landscaped grounds' have also been included. A considerable number of 'park' sites (approximately 30) listed on the SMR under Landscaped Parks/Grounds and Deer Parks are no longer in existence. This includes about 15 former medieval deer parks, five deer parks of unknown date and 10 sites which were other types of parks or enclosed land. These have not been included on the inventory spreadsheet because there was virtually no site-specific information (eg grid reference) available.

2.1 General

The information provided in this section is similar to that used to compile the Norfolk inventory, except that more extensive use has been made of the SMR. Only 15 of the listed parkland sites are on English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens, signifying those of greatest historic importance. Few sites other than English Heritage registered sites had area information available. Park type details and dates were generally available, though for a few sites the information only amounted to whether the park was present on the 1826 Bryants map (or similar). This is indicated in the spreadsheet as 'pre-1826'. Where several different parkland landscapes have been superimposed on one another over time these are indicated by consecutive comments (eg as for Ampthill Park). Emparkment or land enclosure dates were noted where the information was available. Wildlife designations and biological information were very limited for this county. There are only three sites notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and these have little fungi, lichen or invertebrate data associated with them. The only other wildlife designation identified was a RSPB reserve. A more comprehensive search may locate further information. For example, interrogating the ISR on the site grid reference in addition to the SSSI name may identify sites where the ISR name does not match the SSSI name.

2.2 County-specific

In Bedfordshire there have been no separate parkland surveys or grading systems used. Extra county-specific columns include the Sites and Monuments Records code number (for ease of access to further site file information if required) and Tree Data. The latter is a summary of information extracted from the SMR files and the Phase 1 habitat maps. Information in the SMR files generally included important specimen trees, ancient pollards, avenues remaining, and mature trees felled or lost to Dutch Elm disease. A few detailed tree surveys/reports were available, usually in association with restoration plans (eg Old Warren Park). The Phase 1 habitat maps provided information such as tree presence or absence, tree numbers (very few, few), tree density (scattered, clumps, woodland), tree location (boundary, avenue or whether in amenity, semi-improved or improved grassland). Some parks, particularly the larger ones, were identified clearly on the maps by the presence of many scattered trees in amenity land or semi-improved grassland, often surrounding a manor house. Other sites were recognised less easily as parkland; either there was just a small collection of trees in an amenity area immediately around the house, boundary trees only (remnant old parkland trees or not?) or a few scattered trees in improved grassland (vestiges of former parkland or not?). Furthermore, maps showing the park boundaries were not always available in the SMR files making it difficult to gauge the area of search around the grid reference. This exercise did confirm that a large

proportion (at least a quarter) of parks in Bedfordshire have been considerably reduced in extent. Conversion to arable land use is the dominant reason, quite a few have been 'squeezed' by urban development and the remainder have been converted to recreational areas such as golf courses.

3. English Heritage sites with a SSSI designation (Appendix 7)

A total of 72 sites were listed on the English Heritage Register as having a SSSI, or part of one, within their boundaries. A spreadsheet of a similar format to those used for the individual counties (above) was constructed (Appendix 7). Grid references and areas were available for all sites, although the SSSI areas within the park boundary were unknown, due to lack of accurate coincidental maps, and have therefore not been listed. The parkland type and dates are given as above (column 5) with an additional column giving any basic tree information which was available from the EH Register or the SSSI citation. This is not intended as a comprehensive guide to all trees on the site but merely highlights important features. The SSSI name, which may differ from the park site name, is followed by a column detailing whether or not the A3 phase 1 Habitat Code (indicating parklands and scattered trees) has been applied to that site. SSSI areas without this code are likely not to be included in the scattered trees part of the park. The 'information/gradings' part of the spreadsheet is explained in the 'key to codes', along with other abbreviations found on the spreadsheet.

Other points to consider when examining these results are:

- the SSSI information on the EH Register is not updated on a regular basis so that recently notified SSSIs with park interest will not necessarily have been identified and included in the spreadsheet;
- a few of the 72 sites could not be cross-referenced to any known SSSI. No SSSI is or was located at or near the grid reference of the EH Register site. This suggests that some error occurred either when the information was supplied to English Heritage, when it was input onto the Register, or when the SSSIs were searched by grid reference;
- three of the SSSIs were notified for their geological interest only;
- information in the SSSI citations varied considerably in detail. Some comments were very general eg 'diverse' and 'rich' for some species groups. These have been included in the absence of more qualitative data to highlight that biological interest does exist at these sites. Furthermore information supplied in the SSSI citations and other data sources does not necessarily relate to the parkland/veteran tree aspect of the site;
- only three sites had any information on fungi, which may mean that potential sources of information on fungi have yet to be consulted or may simply reflect a paucity of information on this group;
- invertebrate data was extracted from a copy of the ISR which is only updated at infrequent intervals. It is possible that the most current ISR gradings may vary slightly from those quoted here.

Discussion and Recommendations

The methods of the parkland inventory project and the data and results will be discussed in turn, looking at the advantages (*Adv*) and disadvantages (*Dis*) associated with the approaches or data used. Each will be followed by our recommendations (*Rec*) to improve the process of inventory compilation.

Methods

1. Questionnaire

Adv: A questionnaire is a straightforward method for producing a large amount of information in a standardised form (where the response level is good), and it often generates other sources of information.

Dis: Variation in the way questions were interpreted was seen as a limitation. Delays in receiving replies to questionnaires can occur for a number of reasons (sent to an inappropriate person; work pressure; lack of interest) and these can be time consuming to follow-up. A questionnaire is impersonal in nature.

Rec: Alter some of the questions to reduce ambiguity. Ensure the questionnaire is being sent to the most appropriate person (check with a preliminary phone call to reduce delays).

The questionnaire could be customised for particular types of organisations to make it more personal and a list of the organisations being sent the questionnaire should be included in the covering letter.

2. Meetings

Adv: Direct and personal contact can generate enthusiasm for the project and it is possible to discover much additional information.

Dis: Attendance by all invitees is not always possible, therefore potential contributions can be missed. People tend to promise more than they are willing to deliver in practice.

Rec: Plenty of advance warning will maximise the number that can attend. An adequate briefing will ensure attendees know what is expected of them. Diligent 'follow-up' will help to maintain interest.

3. Visits (to collect information)

Adv: It is usually possible to gather the necessary information and often to discuss project ideas.

Dis: There is potential to collect overlapping data (which wastes time) where it is not clear what to expect on a visit.

The time and cost spent travelling to data sources can be a limitation.

Rec: It would be possible to receive information as photocopies or on disk which would reduce travel time and cost.

4. 'Follow-ups'

(to letters/questionnaires/meetings in the form of thank-you letters/project info/progress reports)

Adv: 'Follow-ups' show appreciation, thus maintaining interest and a willingness to help with the project.

Dis: Follow-ups can be time-consuming and costly.

Rec: Producing and sending a Parkland Inventory 'thank-you postcard' with limited space for a short note would save time composing letters.

5. Data collation and entry

a. Timing

Rec: To reduce the length of time taken for data collation and input, a portable PC used to input data during a visit would save considerable duplication of effort (see also the suggestions under 3 above).

b. Who should undertake the inventory compilation task?

For the pilot study the inventory was compiled by contract staff at the central office of English Nature. Is this the best arrangement for continuing with production of the inventory?

Adv: The above arrangement enables staff to have an overview of the compilation procedure, consequently maintaining standards of production, and perhaps achieving the goals of the inventory more quickly where this is the sole responsibility of an inventory officer.

Dis: Funding an additional post may be a limitation, and there are travel time disadvantages.

Rec: There may be potential to assign responsibility for the inventory compilation procedure to local area teams of English Nature. This would obviously have advantages (eg local knowledge/participatory/ generate enthusiasm) and disadvantages (eg varied response depending on individual interest/problems of keeping check on how the inventory is progressing - who would do this? /not enough time) but may circumvent difficulties of funding and achieve more detailed inventories with local input.

Another suggestion would be to coordinate the procedure from a central point, and the coordinator would be responsible for the collection of data which would be difficult to obtain at the local level. The following table illustrates types of information best collected centrally and those best collected locally:

Information collected centrally	Information collected locally
Invertebrate Site Register	Phase 1 habitat maps
BLS Lichen Inventory	SMR records
KA's Coleoptera records	County wildlife designations
NT ownership/parks survey	SSSI citations
Lower Plant Database	Air photographs
	Local naturalist surveys

c. Spreadsheet

Adv: The spreadsheet is relatively user-friendly, and sorting data by different fields is a simple procedure (eg grouping together sites with high historic and invertebrate gradings). The data is easily transferred by disk in editable form, and will be compatible with certain geographic information systems.

Dis: Incompatibility between spreadsheets may be a difficulty, but it is usually possible to convert.

Rec: There is still potential to modify and adapt a spreadsheet from a more comprehensive source (eg Countryside Commission have 1300 entries including all English Heritage registered sites on a Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet).

Developing the GIS potential has many advantages including a Natural Areas approach to parkland distribution mapping overlapping boundaries of, for example, parks and wildlife designations and targeting surveys more accurately. The main disadvantages being cost and time, but these should not be excessive once the initial spreadsheets have been compiled.

Data and Results

1. Spreadsheet design

Adv: The columns are grouped into those common to all counties and those containing information specific to individual counties. This format allows for comparison between counties through a standard format, whilst enabling the inclusion of additional data specific to an individual county.

Dis: The space on the spreadsheet is limited, thus in order to fit the data onto one page it is necessary to use abbreviations which may reduce the ease of data interpretation.

Rec: By taking into account the opinions of people to whom the pilot has been distributed the optimal user-friendly spreadsheet design will gradually be achieved.

2. Data sources

The available data sources will vary between counties.

Rec: It is recommended that the Sites and Monuments Record data source should be used as the baseline for counties where no separate parkland survey exists. The English Heritage Register is an invaluable source, especially for historic gradings. However it records only sites with high historical interest which may not necessarily be the most important biologically and so other sources of information should be used to identify such sites. Biological sources of information are extremely varied in their comprehensiveness for different areas of the country and in the different species groups recorded.

Other potential sources which were not used at this stage and require further investigations are:

- individuals (eg Paul Harding, Oliver Rackham) - for information about particular sites;
- air photographs (eg available from County Councils/National Monuments Record Centre);
- 'target notes' available with Phase 1 Habitat Maps;
- Garden Trusts - for information about particular sites;
- Countryside Commission - parkland covered by the Countryside Stewardship Scheme or Task Force Trees;
- Local Natural History Societies (addresses available) - for possible information about fungi;
- County Records Offices;
- Biological Records Centres;
- National Trust - Survey of Parks and Gardens;
- British Mycological Society.

3. Grading systems

Where the information exists the sites have been graded for a number of different parameters.

Adv: Grading highlights sites of importance for a particular parameter potentially influencing the targeting of resources.

Dis: For many sites no grades exist because no surveys have been undertaken thus their particular interest may lie undiscovered. For some of the parameters no universal grading system has been developed, eg fungi.

The parameters of a particular site may change more quickly than the gradings are updated. The grading symbols, as they appear on the spreadsheet, may be confusing.

Rec: Many of the sites have little or no information on some parameters, particularly the biological ones. This may be because all the information sources have not yet been examined, but could identify sites where further survey might be worthwhile. This will involve time, cost and expertise. One of the potential purposes of the inventory is to target resources effectively by making this information available to those who are in a position to undertake survey work.

Conclusions

The parkland inventory pilot project has achieved the following objectives to the extent indicated below:

1. Determine whether a parkland inventory is a useful component of the veteran trees project

The objective of the Veteran Trees Project is to ensure the continuity of veteran trees in the landscape through assisting with veteran tree management, co-ordinating the work the agencies involved, and developing standard recording methods for veteran trees. The pilot parkland inventory is closely linked to helping achieve these aims by establishing where important parkland sites are located and the value of a number of their important parameters. Without this baseline data it would not be possible to efficiently target the resources available to the Veteran Trees Project in parklands.

Comments from those people to whom the pilot study has been sent will enable EN to assess the usefulness of the inventory.

2. Produce a methodology which can be used to continue compilation of a parkland inventory

It is felt that the methodology used in this study (see Pilot Study: Data collection) has been adequately documented in this report to enable the procedure to be followed elsewhere. Suggested modifications or developments include improving the summary of information in the Parkland Type and Tree Data columns, and to follow up the other potential data sources (listed above).

3. Making recommendations based on the experience of this project for future users

It is hoped that the recommendations arising from this report will be followed through, to take forward the process of compiling a parkland inventory for England.

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