

#### Managing pasture & grazing land for archaeological benefit

##### How do I find archaeological sites in grassland?

Many archaeological sites recorded in pasture may be listed on [Pastmap](#) or on farm **archaeological audits**. However, other sites remain undiscovered and details on existing sites are often scanty. See the Archaeology Scotland Identification Guide for help in recording these new sites.

##### Why are these sites important?

Archaeological sites often survive in best condition in permanent pasture. Changes in climate and production methods mean that many past settlement remains and ancient field systems have been protected as areas used for grazing. The survival of these as upstanding remains makes them a significant cultural asset and of importance as features of great landscape value. They contrast with the ploughed out archaeological remains evident in much of lowland Scotland.

##### Must I take my animals off a site to protect it?

No, maintaining reasonable levels of stock on archaeological sites is important in keeping



The use of the prehistoric clearance cairns in this field as winter feeding stations has led to considerable poaching and degradation of these ancient sites.



Some of our most important archaeological sites are preserved in grassland, such as this prehistoric hillfort in Roxburghshire.

archaeological sites as visible features in the landscape. They depend on continued grazing for their survival. While there may be nature conservation interests in reducing stock and increasing the spread of scrub, this must always be balanced with the effect it will have on the historic landscape. Stock, particularly sheep, can be useful in preventing archaeological sites from being smothered by rank vegetation and tree regeneration.

##### What damage can occur on pasture sites?

Overstocking can lead to considerable destruction on archaeological sites, causing severe erosion and providing easier entry for burrowing animals. Cattle and other stock can cause poaching on mounds and banks, particularly in wet weather. Vehicle tracks can also scar sites. Encroaching bracken & scrub can obscure landscape features, encourage rabbits to become established and cause damage by root disturbance.

*Much of Scotland's archaeological heritage lies in rural areas. This sheet is one of a series giving advice on some of the ways these important remains can be protected during normal rural land management.*

### GOOD PRACTICE

- Monitor your stock levels to prevent them damaging archaeological sites. If damage is occurring remove stock as soon as possible.
- Do not place feed rings or supplementary feed on or near archaeological sites.
- Maintain levels of stock sufficient to prevent an increase of scrub over important archaeological sites and landscapes.
- If scrub or rank vegetation is already established cut down or strim as appropriate, cutting stumps above ground level and allowing them to rot in situ. Remove all cut material off site.
- Prevent rabbits and other burrowing animals from getting established on earthen or turf banks and mounds. Control if already established.
- Seal all exposed banks and earthworks to prevent further damage but do not take materials from known archaeological monuments.
- Do not drive vehicles over sensitive areas, especially if the ground is wet.
- Fence off areas that are susceptible to erosion.
- When reseeding or draining pasture be careful to avoid damaging areas of archaeological interest.
- Control the spread of bracken onto archaeological sites and historic landscapes. Be careful when using mechanical methods of control not to damage archaeological sites.
- Do not rear outdoor pigs on areas of known archaeological interest.
- If in doubt, consult your local authority archaeologist.

see *Historic England  
Archaeology Scotland*

[\*Caring for Archaeological Sites in Grassland  
Pastoralism and its value in preserving cultural heritage in Scotland\*](#)



Erosion exacerbated by stock is causing serious damage to this medieval castle mound in Nairnshire. This is allowing rabbits and scrub to colonise the site.



Scrub and bracken are obscuring this small fort and their roots will be damaging the buried archaeological deposits.

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