

Controlling scrub on archaeological sites

Why is scrub a problem on archaeological sites?

The growth of scrub will obscure archaeological sites, making them less visible features of the farming and historic landscape. Scrub, particularly if it is allowed to develop into mature trees, can cause serious damage through root disturbance to archaeological structures and deposits. Scrub can also obscure sites from being visible features in the countryside. Scrub growth is often increased by fencing of sites or reductions in stocking levels. By removing protection from predators, it can also reduce destruction of sites by burrowing animals like rabbits and poaching of exposed areas by stock.

When should I decide to remove scrub from a site?

Scrub should be removed when it is clearly damaging a monument or allowing other damage to occur, such as giving shelter to rabbits or other burrowing animals. It should also be controlled where by neglect will allow damage to a site in the immediate future. The growth of scrub and trees are often seen as a desirable outcome by biodiversity interests but as can be seen from the accompanying pictures scrub can cause damage to archaeological areas.



The tree and briar growing out of this small drystone building may visually be quite attractive, though their roots will be disturbing any surviving archaeological deposits.



The juniper and birch scrub (and bracken) growing here are obscuring and potentially harming this small fort, some 2,000 to 3,000 years old.

Consult with your environmental adviser if you think there might be a conflict of interest between archaeological/historic and biodiversity concerns.

How should I control scrub on sites?

The best protection is by discouraging scrub from developing and regular grazing by stock will prevent it becoming established. Where it is already extant cutting will be required on a regular cycle to discourage regeneration.

Some species such as gorse (or whins), broom or rhododendrons are particularly difficult to control, as cutting may encourage regeneration from stumps or new growth from spilt seeds. For these species drilling of stumps and adding herbicide may be necessary - but take professional advice before deciding this option, as some chemicals can have significant on buried soils and artifacts.

More detailed information is available from the HS Guidance Note listed overleaf.

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

- Identify where there are archaeological sites on your land, potentially at risk from scrub and make sure they are marked on your farm plan.
- For owners/managers of Scheduled Monuments remember that there is a duty of care to prevent damage to these sites. This includes restricting damage by scrub and trees. Consult Historic Scotland directly if unsure if your site requires management.
- Remove scrub & trees where they obscure sites or areas of archaeological significance. Scrub should also be removed where the roots are potentially damaging buried archaeological sites.
- Cut scrub at ground level and if concerned about regeneration from the stump treat with an appropriate weed killer.
- Remove cut material off archaeological sites and do not burn on site.
- Do not excavate scrub or tree roots but allow these to decay.
- Control the spread of scrub onto archaeological and historic areas from neighbouring stands of trees by grazing control. If this is not appropriate, then seedlings will need to be cut down on a regular cycle, preferably on an annual basis.
- Take advice if unsure whether there is a conflict between biodiversity and archaeological interests on a particular site.
- Avoid causing additional damage to a site under protection or to neighbouring sites during scrub clearing operations.

*Further information - see the 6 page HS Guidance Note **The Control of Vegetation on Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other Important Archaeological Sites** on the **Managing Archaeology** section of our website.*



Scrub and this tree, by inhibiting growth of grass and giving shelter to stock, have encouraged poaching and erosion over this prehistoric burial mound. This has been exacerbated by having the fence line run across the centre of the cairn - see also *Advice Note 27 Fencing*.



The scrub growing on this medieval castle mound has allowed rabbits to breed successfully by giving them shelter from predators. This has been made worse by poaching by stock. Cutting and treating the scrub should be linked to control of the rabbits.