

NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVIDENCE OF CLEARED ANCIENT WOODLANDS IN UPLAND MID-WALES

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Direct evidence of the vast areas of woodland that once covered much of Britain is now largely lost due to initial clearance and generations of agricultural activity, and is restricted to tiny fragments of ancient woodland and wood pasture.

Evidence of cleared woodland can be provided through pollen analysis, place names, and landscape interpretation but especially via estate and Ordnance Survey maps and records, but the majority of woodland clearance occurred long before the original Ordnance Survey, and estate records can be missing or extremely patchy.

Similarly, although a lot of valuable work has been done on this subject, especially by Dr Oliver Rackham in his excellent books, most of this work has been centred on lowland England, and does not generally apply to upland areas, which remain relatively poorly researched.

However, although in its early stages, recent new research conducted in upland mid-Wales appears to have identified another method of locating positive evidence of cleared woodlands by using specific physical field features located in what is now open grazing land. Following initial identification using these features, many of these sites have since been verified as woodland through either checking estate records or maps.

These verified former woodland sites show that using this particular field evidence can be a reliable method of locating former woodland sites, and may be able to identify sites that have escaped or even predate mapping or documentation, and should apply to similar areas of upland Britain outside Wales.