

**Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB  
Historic Landscape Characterisation Project**

**HISTORIC LANDSCAPE TYPE  
DESCRIPTION:**

**TYPE 3 WOODLAND**



ENGLISH HERITAGE

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## Woodland in the AONB: An Introduction

***“a truly venerable tract of forest land, one of the few remaining woodlands in England of undoubted primeval date, wherein Druidical mistletoe was still found on aged oaks, and where enormous yew-trees, not planted by the hand of man, grew as they had grown when they were pollarded for bows’.”***

(From Thomas Hardy (1981) Tess of the D'Urbervilles)



Woodland is a major component of the landscape of the AONB. The quote from Thomas Hardy demonstrates how ancient woodland is a major feature which contributes greatly to the character of the landscape. Many areas of woodland date back to the medieval period and are associated with ancient trees, coppices and semi-natural habitats. Just as important, however, are the post 1800 additions to the woodlands of the AONB. These include new geometric blocks of woodland used as game cover which have been imposed on some areas of downland. Just as striking are the ornamental additions linked to the creation of the great landscape parks of the AONB. Although many areas of old woodland have been cleared or replanted since the medieval period, the general trend over the last 200 years has been towards a more dispersed woodland landscape punctuated by ancient blocks of woodland. There are of course exceptions to this pattern, for

example, around the Donheads, in the Vale of Wardour ancient enclosures and assarts nestle alongside dispersed bands of ancient trees and wooded over common land.

In this project woodland has been split into two fairly broad categories, in-between which there is inevitably some chronological overlaps, so they should be treated with a certain amount of caution. The categories are: -

1. Pre 1800 Woodland
2. Post 1800 Woodland

Woodland which can be identified on 18<sup>th</sup> century county maps has been identified as pre 1800 in date. This leaves the problem of old woodland which is too small scale to be identified on these maps, but is pre 1800 in date. If this woodland is present on the 1820s Ordnance Surveyor's maps and there is other evidence which suggests that it is ancient, then it too is allocated as being pre 1800 in date. In these instances

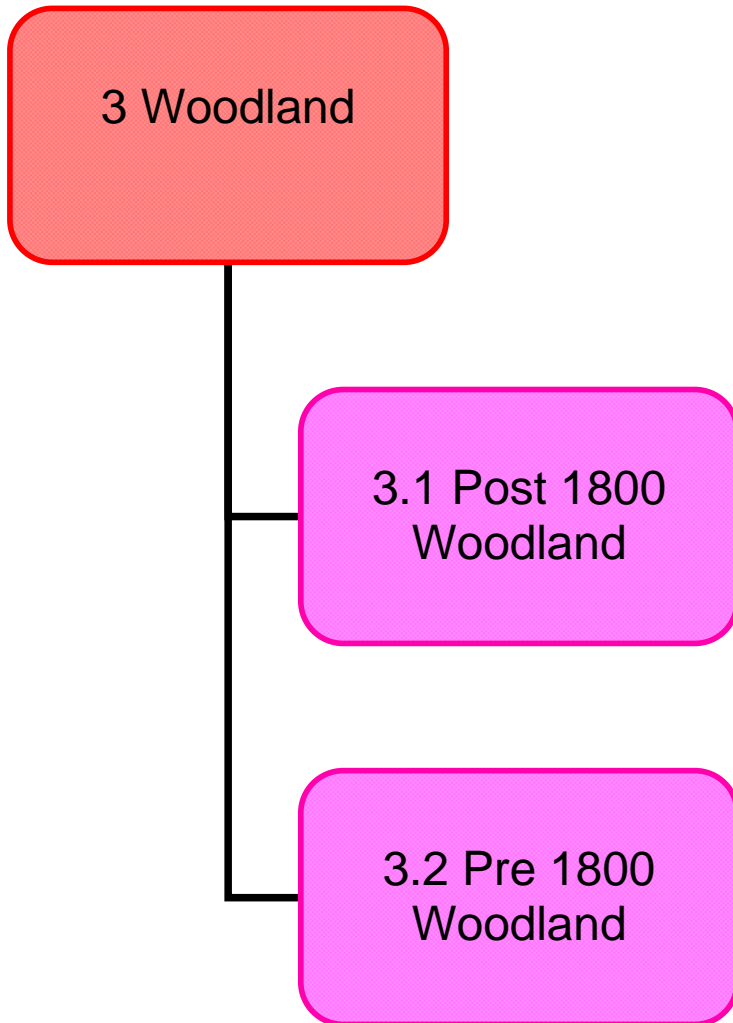
its confidence level is only recorded as “probable”. This evidence includes place name evidence, close association with larger blocks of confidently dated pre 1800 woodland and morphological clues such as association with medieval archaeology.

All other woodland is allocated as post 1800 woodland. This type will inevitably include woodland planted in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, often associated with landscaped parks. The exact date of this woodland cannot be assessed with the map sources available. However the historical processes which led to the planting of these new woodland blocks and strips is much more akin with the woodland created in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries than the older woodland, so it sits more comfortably in this category

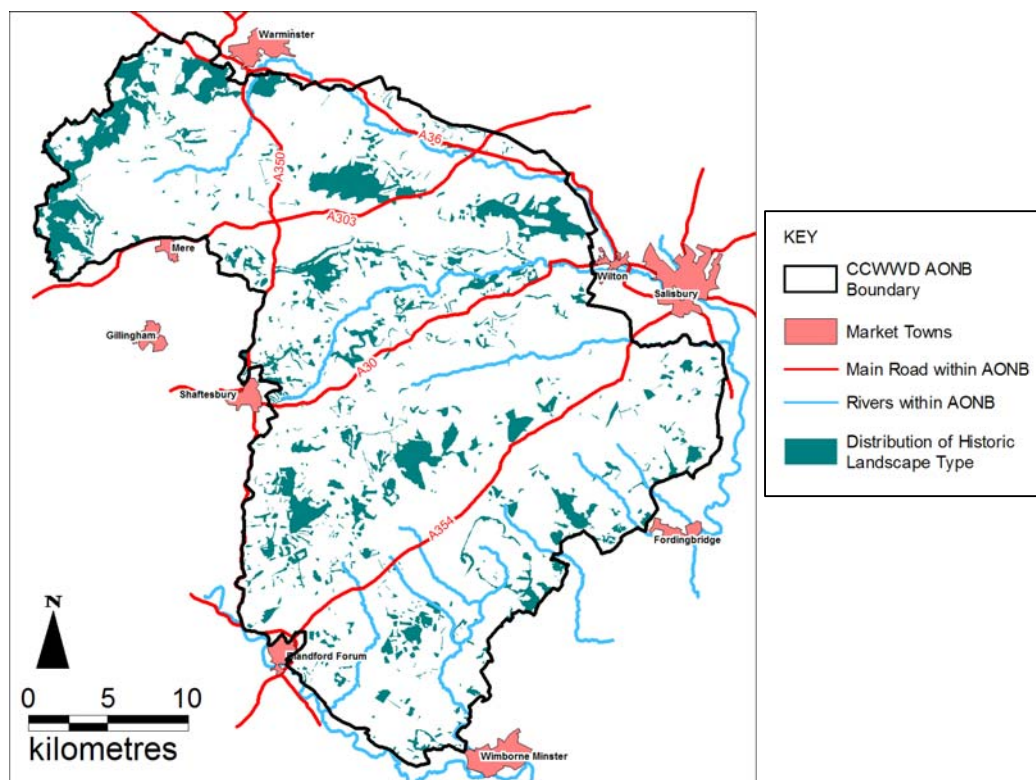
This project chose not to use the more familiar term of ancient woodland used to refer specifically to woodland dating back to 1600 or before in England and Wales, because it was felt that the available map sources do not allow woodland in the AONB to be confidently attributed to existing before or after the date of 1600. Not using this term also has the benefit of avoiding confusion with the Natural England maps and inventories of Semi-Natural and Ancient Woodland.

The Historic Landscape Characterisation Project has split the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB into individual parcels of lands, one of the weaknesses of this approach is that it is not able effectively thin linear features in the landscape. This means that features such as the iconic 3 mile Beech Avenue running past Badbury Rings to Kingston Lacy Park is not included in the dataset.

Organisation Chart illustrating nested Historic Landscape Types



## Type 3 Woodland



### Introduction

Woodland in the AONB identified on modern Ordnance Survey mapping. The age of the individual blocks of woodland have been identified through comparison with historic Ordnance Survey mapping and 18<sup>th</sup> century county maps. Woodlands are found throughout the AONB and although they only cover 13% of the AONB by area they are a major feature of this landscape.

### Distribution

Woodland is found across the whole AONB. Larger woodland blocks are found across the wooded chalk downland of Cranborne Chase and the West Wiltshire Downs. There is a continuous belt of woodland along the north-west greensand hill and to the south of Warminster. This is infilled by more dispersed smaller woodland blocks. Woodland is largely absent from the Ebble Valley, the head of the Wylde Valley, in the area to the north of Mere, to the south of A303 and through parts of the southern downland belt especially along the A354.

### Principal Historical Processes

Much of the pre 1800 woodland is of considerable antiquity representing traces of the medieval hunting forests, chase and parks in the AONB. This woodland is also associated with concentrations of ancient coppices and area of less managed more natural woods. Approximately 60% of the woodland in the AONB is pre 1800 in date.

The post 1800 woodland can be attributed to natural infilling, the creation of ornamental landscapes, larger commercial woods, post First World War planting and the creation of game coverts.

Overall since 1800 there appears to have been an increase in the amount of woodland in the AONB.

### **Typical Historical/Archaeological Components**

Much of the woodland in the AONB is associated with broadleaved natural species and semi-natural areas. There are some areas especially at Fonthill and to the west of Longleat where coniferous species dominate. Much of the woodland is associated with ancient coppices, woodland banks and boundaries.



### **Rarity**

Woodland occurs frequently in the AONB, although it is locally scarce through the Ebble and Wylve Valleys.

### **Survival**

Despite the clearance of ancient woodland to create new fields, especially on the Cranborne Chase, since 1800 there has been a trend towards an increase in the amount of woodland in the AONB. However the new blocks created have tended to be smaller, more dispersed, and more regular in shape. In some locations, for example Grovely Wood, large areas of pre 1800 woodland have been replanted, often with non-native species.

### **Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components**

This type is very recognisable in the landscape, but many of the historic aspects, such as evidence for past woodland management, are only identifiable by experts. Some areas where the woodland is more dispersed, especially through the Vale of Wardour, are more fragile and could be easily corroded.

### **Past interaction with other types**

The type is associated with parkland and in some areas, especially the Vale of Wardour, is integrally linked with the farmland with which it is mixed.

### **Evidence for time-depth**

20% of woodland retains evidence for previous land uses. This 20% is mostly comprised of post 1800 woodland which has been created on previously open land.

## Contribution to the present landscape character

This type has had a considerable influence on the landscape character of the AONB. The subtle differences between the woodland in the landscape contribute greatly to the contrasting landscape characteristics found in the AONB.

### Key Statistics

Total Area:	12,775 hectares, 12.97% of the AONB.
No. of Polygons:	This Subtype is comprised of 1007 polygons, 22.69% of the total number of polygons digitised.
Av. Polygon Size:	Each polygon averages 12.69 hectares in size.
Occurrence:	Frequent.
Previous Coverage:	12,775 hectares, 12.97% of AONB was woodland at the point when this type was at its most prevalent.
Total Recorded Coverage:	The total recorded coverage of this type is 15,223 hectares, 15.46% of the AONB.

### Constituent Types

[3.1 Post 1800 Woodland](#)

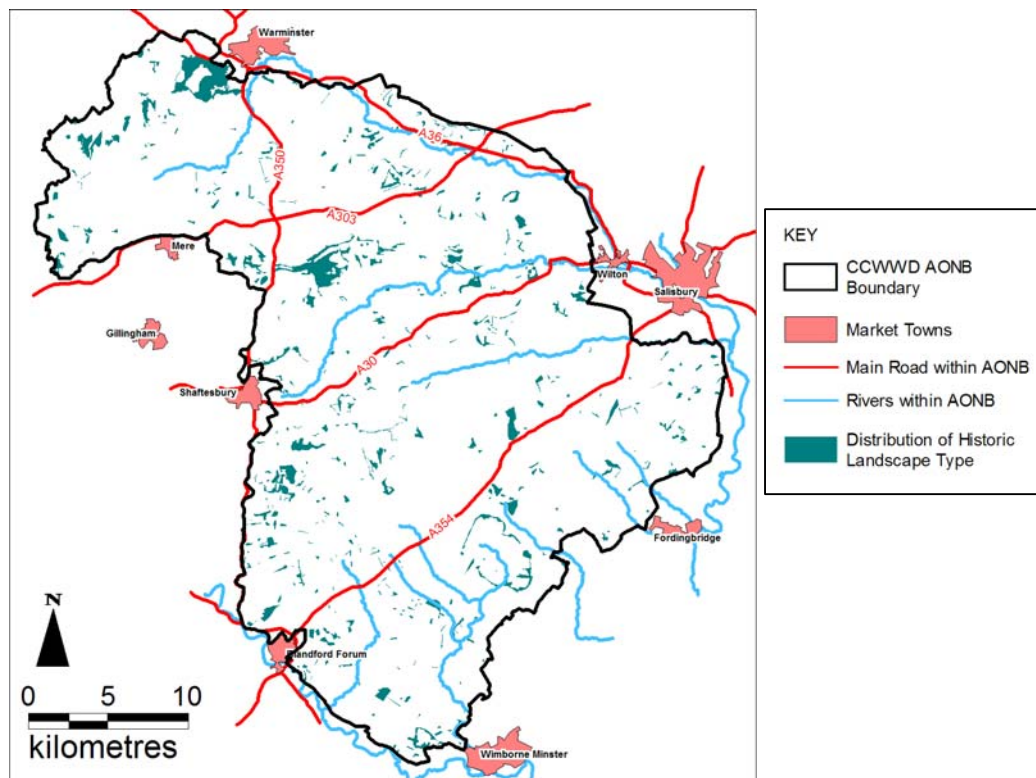
[3.2 Pre 1800 Woodland](#)

### Parent Type

None



## Type 3.1 Post 1800 Woodland



### Introduction

Woodland planted post 1800. Large parts of this woodland are comprised of deliberate planting schemes, but the woodland has also developed through natural colonisation and the regeneration of native species. Much of this woodland is associated with coniferous and non-native species. These woodlands have been identified through comparison of modern Ordnance Survey maps against historic Ordnance Survey mapping. The woodland does not appear on the relevant 18<sup>th</sup> century county map or often on the 1820s surveyors' maps. However the county maps only show larger blocks of woodland so some of the woodland may be 18<sup>th</sup> century in date. This is especially the case with those areas of woodland that are linked to the creation of new landscaped parks.

### Distribution

Post 1800 Woodland is widely distributed across the AONB. In general it is found in small scattered blocks and is absent from areas of the chalk downland in the south of the AONB and along the river valley of the Ebble. There are larger and denser concentrations along the greensand terrace in the north of the AONB especially near Longleat and around Fonthill in the Vale of Wardour. These are the result of new planting schemes undertaken by two of the major landowners in the AONB. There is also a linear distribution of medium blocks of woodland along the edge of the chalk escarpment between Shaftesbury and Blandford Forum. Finally, one striking pattern is the oval belt of woodland which forms the edge of the Brownian ride at Wimborne St Giles. This woodland, of course, dates to the 1770s and is a good example of the

chronological overlap present between the two categories of woodland. This is discussed further in the introduction to this section.

### **Principal Historical Processes**

The creation of woodland since 1800 can be linked to four main factors: -

1. The creation of large blocks of woodland for economic reasons. This led to the planting of the larger blocks of woodland in the northern half of the AONB at Longleat and Fonthill. Some woodland was planted in response to specific economic factors. For example during the agricultural depression in the 1930s some major landowners formed tree planting gangs as local job creation schemes.
2. The creation of small geometric blocks of woodland as areas of game cover and coverts. This is linked to the increasing importance of fox hunting and shooting in the area from 1800 onwards.
3. The creation of ornamental belts of woodland. These new woodland plantings were used to enhance the new landscaped parks which appeared from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to create new arboretums with exotic specimens and to enclose and screen areas. In some cases the planting of new woodlands was aimed at the visual improvement of the wider landscape especially on the newly enclosed high downland. This is not so common, however, as in other areas such as the North Wessex Downs.
4. Natural processes. Some areas of formerly open land and common land were naturally infilled. This process can clearly be seen on Semley Hill and Gutch Common in the Vale of Wardour and on the common land to the west of Dinton Park.

### **Typical Historical/Archaeological Components**

The post 1800 woodland takes three main forms: -

1. Large blocks of coniferous species planted over large areas
2. Smaller blocks planted in geometric shapes associated with a mixture of native and non-native species.
3. Smaller, irregular often sinuous blocks relating to natural infilling and the planting of ornamental belts of trees, associated with a mixture of native and non-native species.

### **Rarity**

Post 1800 woodland is uncommon but widespread in the AONB.

### **Survival**

Over the last 200 years there has been a trend towards the creation of new woodland blocks in the landscape. These tend to be more fragmented and widely distributed in nature than the older pre 1800 woodland.

### **Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components**

This type of woodland would not be associated with very old trees or semi-natural ancient habitats. The smaller geometric blocks are very recognisable especially when they occur on the more open downland. However this type could be easily confused with older woodland which has recently been replanted.

### **Past interaction with other types**

The type can be associated with landscaped parks. In some instances, however, as with the geometric blocks of woodland, it can be imposed upon the landscape.

### **Evidence for time-depth**

Just over 40% of this type preserves evidence of previous land uses. The majority of this is of open land upon which it was planted.



### **Contribution to the present landscape character**

This type has had a considerable influence on the landscape character of the AONB. This influence is dramatically increased when its distribution is combined with the enclosed downland or where it occurs as very large blocks in the landscape.

### **Key Statistics**

Total Area:	4,607 hectares, 4.68% of the AONB.
No. of Polygons:	This Subtype is comprised of 625 polygons, 14% of the total number of polygons digitised.
Av. Polygon Size:	Each polygon averages 7.37 hectares in size.
Occurrence:	Uncommon but widespread.
Previous Coverage:	4,607 hectares, 4.68% of AONB was post 1800 Woodland at the point when this type was at its most prevalent.
Total Recorded Coverage:	The total recorded coverage of this type is 4,647 hectares, 4.72% of the AONB.

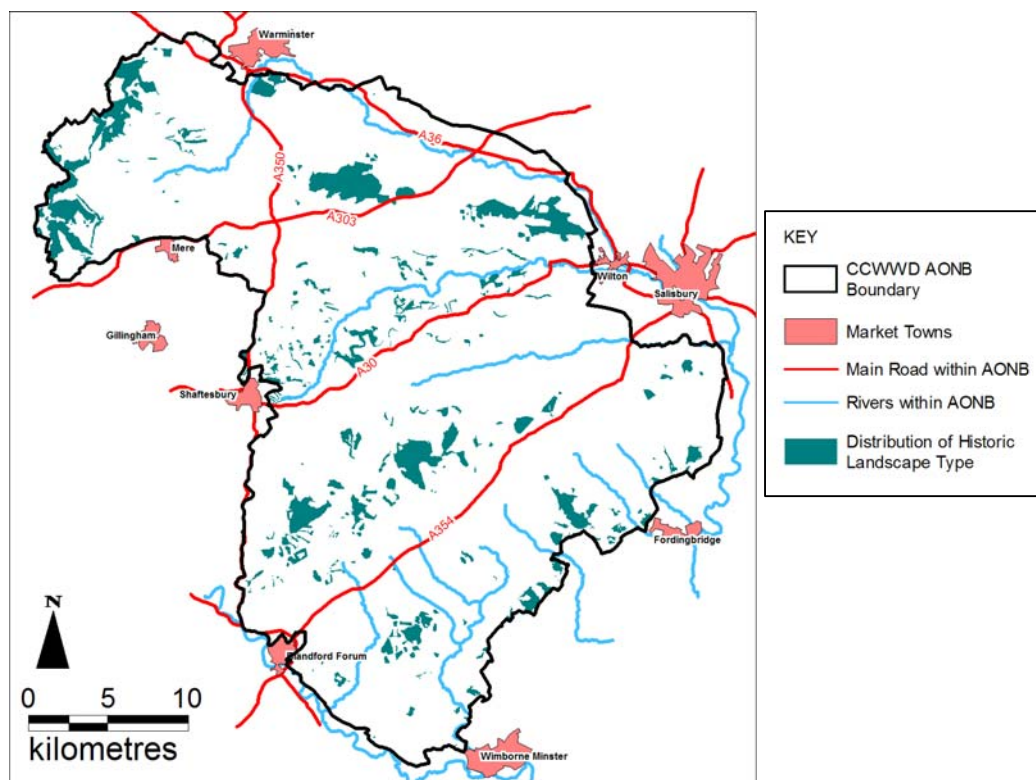
### **Constituent Types**

None

### **Parent Type**

[3 Woodland](#)

## Type 3.2 Pre 1800 Woodland



### Introduction

Woodland that is pre 1800 in date. This has been identified on both modern maps and the historic 1820s Ordnance Surveyor's maps. The larger blocks of woodland also appear on the relevant 18<sup>th</sup> century county maps. Much of this woodland is species rich broadleaf woodland, associated with ancient semi-natural habitats, ancient coppices and ancient trees. In some instances this woodland has been replanted with non-native species in the last 200 years especially across the West Wiltshire Downs. Some coniferous woodland therefore is found on old woodland sites, for example, Grovely Wood.

### Distribution

The pre 1800 woodland is found in large blocks across the northern greensand hills, the tops of the West Wiltshire Downs, the woods of the Cranborne Chase downland, the area between Warminster and Mere, and the Martin to Whitsbury Downland Hills. The woodland is much more dispersed through the Vale of Wardour. There is very little ancient woodland in the chalk river valleys and through large parts of the southern downland belt.

### Principal Historical Processes

Much of this woodland is of considerable antiquity. The woodlands of the wooded downland of Cranborne Chase are the remnants of the woods of the medieval hunting chase, and many of the woods have names which reflect this history. Both the woodland here and through the Downland Hills between Martin and Whitsbury is

dominated by old coppices. Coppicing is a traditional method of woodland management in which young tree stems are cut down to near ground level. In subsequent growth years, many new shoots will emerge, and, after a number of years, the cycle begins again and the coppiced tree, or stool, is ready to be harvested again. Coppices were an important economic resource and were used for fuel, including charcoal production, for making hurdles and wattle and thatching spurs.

Similarly the woodland around Penselwood may be derived from the medieval hunting forest previously found in this area.

The fact that the pre 1800 woodland is much more scattered through the Vale of Wardour suggests that this woodland was subject to considerable early assarting and clearance, maybe due to population pressure in this area.

### **Typical Historical/Archaeological Components**

This woodland is dominated by native broadleaf species, ancient coppicing and semi-natural habitats. The woodland blocks are irregular in shape and are often associated with woodland banks and boundaries. These boundaries can sometimes also form the boundaries of parks, parishes and counties. The extent and form of this woodland has fluctuated quite significantly over time.



### **Rarity**

Pre 1800 woodland occurs occasionally in the AONB and tends to be concentrated in large woodland blocks.

### **Survival**

At least 30% of this woodland has been replanted, especially with coniferous species, since 1800. In addition over 1,200 hectares has been cleared since 1800. Despite this, large blocks of woodland with semi-ancient natural habitats survive especially within the Chase woodlands.

### **Degree of surviving coherence of the historic landscape components**

In areas where replanting has not occurred the woodlands are dominated by old coppicing, ancient trees and semi-natural habitats. In addition the woodlands also contain a wealth of archaeological evidence for prehistoric activity much of which may lie hidden and unrecognised.

### **Past interaction with other types**

The type is associated with other pre 1800 types including ancient common land, open unimproved grass and older assarts and enclosures. These all represent surviving remnants of older medieval and early post-medieval landscapes.

### **Evidence for time-depth**

Only a small percentage of this type contains evidence for previous land uses, suggesting the longevity of these woodlands. This evidence tends to be medieval deer parks and archaeological evidence discussed earlier which has affected the morphology of these later woodlands.

### **Contribution to the present landscape character**

This type has had a considerable influence on the landscape character of the AONB. Woodlands are often situated on higher areas and therefore can dominate many of the major views in the AONB.

### **Key Statistics**

Total Area:	8,168 hectares, 8.29% of the AONB
No. of Polygons:	This Subtype is comprised of 382 polygons, 8.61% of the total number of polygons digitised.
Av. Polygon Size:	Each polygon averages 12 hectares in size.
Occurrence:	Occasional
Previous Coverage:	9,469 hectares, 9.62% of AONB was pre 1800 Woodland at the point when this type was at its most prevalent
Total Recorded Coverage:	The total recorded coverage of this type is 10,327 hectares, 10.49% of the AONB

### **Constituent Types**

None

### **Parent Type**

[3 Woodland](#)