

Case Study

SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

Secrets of the High Woods

Background

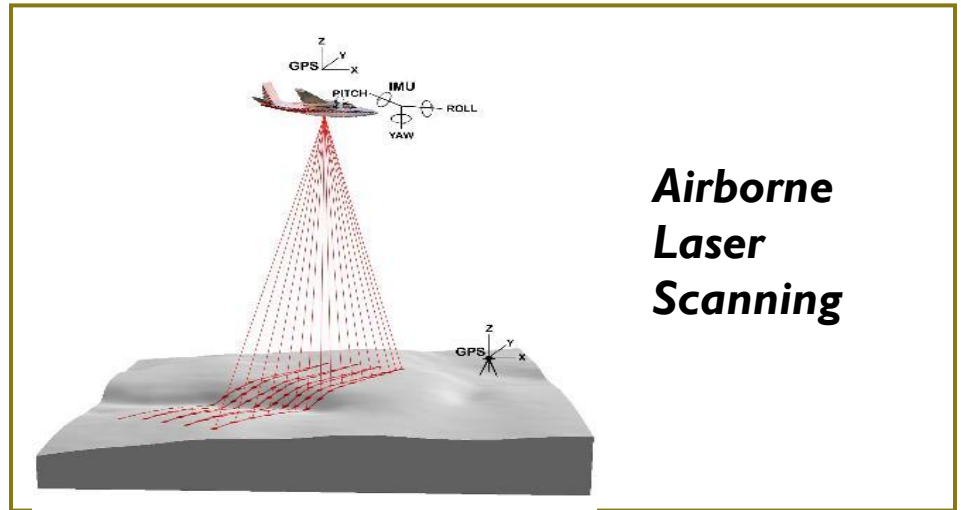
“Secrets of the High Woods” is a cultural heritage project investigating the archaeology of the forested and farmed lands of the chalk Downs between the A3 and the river Arun.

It is a partnership with Chichester District Council and is supported by Historic England, the Forestry Commission and the National Trust, along with community groups and local universities.

This area has a rich heritage. Important sites ranging from the Palaeolithic through to the 20th Century on its doorstep. Many of the best known sites are in the open but there are ‘hidden’ depths to this landscape. Many unknown features of archaeological and historic importance are concealed within the woodland which gives this area its special qualities.

Searching for archaeology in woodlands is notoriously difficult! Traditional techniques, like field walking, survey and aerial photographic analysis are hampered by tree cover and ground vegetation.

Yet this woodland coverage has also preserved our history, protecting delicate archaeological remains from the effects of development and ploughing



The project

This 5 year project is now at the end of the second year of delivery. The South Downs National Park Authority contributed £130,000 to the project which levered in £680,000 of Heritage Lottery Funding. The project has made a significant addition to the understanding of the cultural heritage and the ability of the National Park Authority and partners to conserve and enhance this and to inform future projects.

The project used Airborne Laser Scanning which is a remote sensing technique that allows the collection of topographic information (ground height data) over large areas of landscape using a sensor mounted on a plane. The Lidar survey flight and data processing and the compilation of all the existing archaeological records for the project area was completed in 2014.

The outcomes of the project are to provide :

- Better understanding of the archaeological features across areas of the National Park
- Additional learning resources available to schools and other academic institutions
- Richer information for organisations with responsibility for, or interest in, protecting archaeological features
- Better information for developing policy and strategies which include such features

A newly recruited volunteer team has aimed at reaching a target of ground-truthing one third of the project area before the end of the project period in 2017.

“We found 6,000 bombs on the first big clearance and we used to blow them up every Friday afternoon [...] People down in the villages were told to open their windows every Friday afternoon at four o’clock in case the percussion [...] broke their windows.”

Richard Williamson

The outcome

This project has recruited 130 volunteers, 30% more than the original target

This project has produced a very large data set, local authorities and National Trust Historic Environment Records will be given the data for their areas to inform their future work. The National Park Authority will hold a set of data itself to use with volunteers and operations teams, with land managers and owners and for research.

The volunteers find this project hugely interesting and engaging and individuals are active in ground truthing, archives research and oral history. Volunteers previously involved in heritage were attracted by the potential to work with Lidar data as a new and exciting opportunity.

40% of the volunteers are new to heritage volunteering and comments demonstrate that the project is also successful in attracting volunteers not previously engaged in heritage or with the National Park – they “*find an interest in something I didn’t know I was interested in*”.

In 2016, we will bring the historic landscape to life for everyone through a travelling exhibition from May to September, an e-book and educational materials available through our [Learning Zone](#) 2016 and there is already demand for future showings in 2017.



The future

The project is in its second year and already some legacy is emerging with a significant increase in understanding of this area.

The other major legacy is the pool of informed, interested and active volunteers.

This project has attracted considerable positive media coverage and engaged new sections of the community, especially outside of the National Park. Recently the addition of oral history extracts on the web site has attracted a large amount of interest.

The project has produced a large amount of field work information and will support a wide range of research with Universities and with independent researchers in the community.

The experience of this project is also informing the development of the next large scale cultural heritage project.

Secrets of the High Woods

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