The Ancient Tree Hunt

The Ancient Tree Hunt is a five year project to find and map all the fat old trees across the UK.

This online interactive project is led by the Woodland Trust in partnership with the Ancient Tree Forum and the Tree Register of the British Isles, and is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Scottish Natural Heritage.

We need your help to discover and measure the forgotten treasures all around us and put them on the map. Every tree you find and measure can be added to our interactive ancient tree map with the click of a mouse. Visit www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk for more.

A brief history of tree measuring

One of the first references to tree measuring can be found in parish records of 1630 relating to the ancient churchyard yew at Crowhurst in Surrey. An exceptional elm tree was measured in 1636 after it had been felled in a field in Uttoxter, Staffordshire and in 1664 John Evelyn’s Fruticetum Britanicum described a number of remarkable trees for the first time in print. Measurements are sparse up until the 19th century and the first prolific tree measurer was John Claudius Loudon, whose impressive 8 volume Arboretum et Fruticetum Britannicum (1834-37) provides us with more than 500 historical tree measurements. Between 1880-1895 Robert Hutchison measured nearly 1,000 trees, mostly in Scotland and more than 3,500 records appear throughout the volumes of Trees of Britain and Ireland by Elwes and Henry (1900-1913).

Modern day tree measuring reached new heights with the late Alan Mitchell who measured more than 500 historical tree measurements. Between 1880-1895 Robert Hutchison measured nearly 1,000 trees, mostly in Scotland and more than 3,500 records appear throughout the volumes of Trees of Britain and Ireland by Elwes and Henry (1900-1913).

TIP

1. What you need to measure a tree

Why measure the girth of a tree?

• To experience the excitement of finding that huge old tree
• To help make a national record
• To discover the same tree for yourself as a future vet
• To protect and manage the site

The distance around the outside of a thick or fat object, like a tree or a body:

noun

girth

measure

Where on the tree do I measure?

1. Use a secure place on the tree to avoid damage or injuries
2. Always measure the tree at a 45 degree angle to the ground
3. Measure the nearest, broadest part of the trunk, from the ground level or from the base of a large root, to the top of the main trunk
4. Always ensure the tape is level when measuring
5. Never presume the first attempt is correct, slide or walk the tape around the tree a couple of times
6. Always measure the tree at a height of 1.5m above ground level

What you need to measure a tree

1. A 15m or longer linear metric plastic or flexible steel tape
2. A 1.5m stick to stand next to the tree for accuracy
3. A pencil
4. A carnot original
5. A camera (if you have one)
6. A notepad
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TIP

UK online centres offer free or low-cost access to email and the internet. To find your nearest centre call free on 0800 77 1234
Measuring trees – frequently asked questions...

How do I measure a tree on sloping ground?
Always measure at 1.5m from the ground on the upper side of any slope or the highest part of ground if uneven.
Make a note if there appears to be unusual ground disturbance which may artificially have raised soil levels or if erosion has taken place. Record all relevant notes in the comments box on the recording form at www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk.

How do I measure a leaning tree?
A leaning tree should always be recorded by measuring 1.5m up the underneath side.

What do I do if the tree forks at 1.5m?
If the tree forks or abnormally swells at or below 1.5m, then the smallest measurement below 1.5m must be recorded and the height from ground noted.

What do I do if the tree forks below 1.5m?
With small or very low branches it may be possible to still record at 1.5m, measuring above the branch. Try to record the girth where it would compare best if it had a clean unbranched trunk. Remember to record the height at which you measured.

How do I measure a burried or knobbly tree?
Where burrs or swellings are evident at 1.5m, put the tape around the stem at various points below 1.5m to find and record the smallest girth measurement.
Keeping the tape level may include abnormally large burrs that exaggerate the girth and notes must be recorded of such a measurement. In this situation, it is acceptable to provide a girth measurement with a tape that is not level, thus enabling you to avoid the burrs and measure the smallest girth. Occasionally, a tree may be completely buried on its main stem exaggerating all measurements. Record all relevant notes in the comments box on the recording form.

How do I measure a twinned or multiple stemmed tree?
Trees growing without a clearly defined single stem at ground level may be considered as a multiple stem or arising from a coppice stool. Trees arising either naturally or deliberately planted in this way are not always easy to identify. Trees planted deliberately as a bundle are included here.

Where stems appear to arise from a single tree, rather than from a coppice stool (see top right), treat it as though measuring a single stem by finding and recording the smallest girth around all stems between ground and 1.5m. Measure and record the height above ground you have done this. Add comments on the recording form to describe what you have done.

If multiple stems arise close to the ground and it appears as though the stems may not all be part of the same tree, each stem should be treated and recorded as an individual tree. Where stems are close together this may not be possible and you must treat them as though measuring a single stem by finding and recording the smallest girth around all stems between ground and 1.5m. Measure and record the height above ground where you have done this. Add comments on the recording form to describe what you have done.

How do I measure a copppice stool?
Although coppice stools are not being actively recorded as part of the Ancient Tree Hunt, they do create great interest and the following information can be recorded.
• Measure around the whole stool at the narrowest point.
• Count the number of stems.
• Measure the stems at 1.5m above ground level (or at least the largest two or three).
• Record as with a multiple stemmed tree.
Enter records at www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk.
The tree will be recorded as a coppice.

Are pollarded trees important?
Record all pollards that are clearly of traditional origin, even if the girth is quite small.

Can I estimate the girth?
A tree that is growing on private property where permission has not been obtained from the landowner, within a hedge, surrounded by dense undergrowth, or on the opposite side of a ditch or river, will have to be estimated.

Estimating girth from a distance is only gained by experience. Try estimating the diameter (thickness) of the stem and multiply by three.
Enter records at www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk making it clear if the tree is on private land.

Do not record an estimated measurement other than in hugs, otherwise it will be presumed the tree has been accurately measured.

Can I measure trees on private property?
Always ask permission first if you want to measure trees on privately owned land.

Take care!
Look out for roots, rabbit holes and brambles that might trip you. Beware of low branches, deep water and livestock.

No tree is worth risking future tree hunting!