



A VIEW ON VICTORIA'S ASH

THIS SPECTACULAR SPECIMEN WAS HIDDEN
IN PLAIN SIGHT, BUT CAN NOW BE REVEALED
– DETAILS FROM **TOM HAMMENTS**



The Veteran Ash



Inonotus hispidus on ash



Desiccated Inonotus hispidus

I'd like to have laid claim to finding this tree, since I've lived within a distance that can be measured in metres for two years. I also didn't spot it when driving or walking past the adjacent hedgerow that somewhat camouflages it for nine days out of every 10. Instead, the credit must go to my partner Victoria, who stumbled upon what is an epic tree by any measure whilst traipsing around the countryside trying to entice our baby son to sleep.

Sat on the edge of Gloucestershire, Victoria's Ash can be found in parkland overlooking Chastleton House, now owned and managed by The National Trust. This common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) exhibits most of the idiosyncratic features we assign to a veteran of this species, but does so with some style. It's completely hollow, with numerous windows of daylight apparent when poking one's head through the longitudinal cavity opening to the south.

A sight to behold

It has incredible reactive growth, with basal diameter over double that of the stem just a metre or so above ground

level. In September 2019, it was sporting two-tiered fruiting bodies of *Inonotus hispidus* of fantastic form and colour – these are still in situ but are somewhat desiccated. Its crown is vigorous, with a small proportion of dead wood for such a tree.

It's open to suggestion as to whether its current form comes by way of historic management or by natural failure – both are entirely plausible. If the former, I believe the last cutting to be so historic that signs of such work are not easily interpreted. There are also other ash trees of a similar age in the locality that would have perhaps been managed in the same way – these are certainly maiden.

The field it sits within is accessible to the public, but the frequented paths follow routes between destinations that have diverted people away and around the tree in such a fashion that it can be completely unseen from most angles.

Because other trees may be better suited as shelter for grazing animals, it doesn't appear to have suffered from extensive compaction which is often a problem for trees in comparable settings.

Join us

This leads me nicely, albeit slightly tenuously, onto promoting the newly formed Ancient Tree Forum Gloucestershire regional group. As well as running regular field visits, ATF Gloucestershire plans to deliver training courses, attend regional shows to promote the work of the ATF and have an active role in advising tree owners on management. The official launch of ATF Gloucestershire is due to take place as part of the national ATF Spring fieldtrip.

For more information, please email:
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The ATF champions the biological, cultural and heritage value of Britain's ancient and veteran trees and promotes best practice.
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