

Metal Detecting in the Stonehenge, Avebury & Associated Sites World Heritage Site

A Guide for Farmers & Landowners



Introduction

The Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site Management Plan 2015 identifies metal detecting as a key area of concern for everyone responsible for managing the monuments and landscape.

This guidance is intended to assist farmers and landowners manage requests and advise on dealing with metal detecting on their land.

World Heritage Status

World Heritage Site status is given to a site of Outstanding Universal Value to humanity. Therefore, it is incumbent on everyone associated with the Stonehenge and Avebury WHS to ensure the highest levels of protection are upheld.

Metal detectorists and casual field walkers have made several important finds in the past. However, these are often made without the full and reliable recording of their archaeological context. When this happens, it reduces our understanding of the artefact and its context. It can also lead to the damage or destruction of archaeological features, particularly when many people gather in a small area for a rally. Although metal detecting can be a useful technique when used as part of a properly conducted archaeological project, its uncontrolled use within the WHS should be discouraged. Consequently, landowners and managers are encouraged to refuse permission for metal detecting.

The use of metal detectors within the World Heritage Site is not illegal, but it is illegal to detect and remove finds/artefacts without landowner permission. If landowners are approached for permission to host a rally the National Council for Metal Detecting sets out that owners and organisers should contact the County Archaeology Service at least 3 weeks prior for advice.

<https://www.ncmd.co.uk/code-of-conduct/>



Scheduled Monument Status

Under the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act, it is illegal to use a metal detector on a Scheduled Monument without a 'Section 42' license from Historic England.

There are 74 identified scheduled monuments within the Avebury half of the WHS and 175 at Stonehenge. However, there are hundreds of non-designated archaeological sites within the WHS that are equally vulnerable to damage from metal detecting.

All finds of Treasure, as detailed by the 1996 Treasure Act, must be reported to a coroner within 14 days as well as reported to the Wiltshire Portable Antiquities Scheme Finds Liaison Officer.

The National Council for Metal Detecting has its own Code of Conduct to guide the responsible use of metal detectors.

<https://www.ncmd.co.uk/code-of-conduct/>

The National Trust does not permit the use of metal detectors on its land unless as part of an approved archaeological project.

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/metal-detecting-on-our-land>

Permission is required by Natural England for metal detecting on a known archaeological site included within a Countryside or Environmental Stewardship Scheme.

<https://www.gov.uk/environment/countryside-stewardship>

The use of metal detectors is prohibited on Ministry of Defence land.

Wiltshire Council

Wiltshire Council does not allow metal detecting by the public on land it owns.

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/recreation-parks-open-spaces>

All who find archaeological objects whether through metal detecting or by other means are encouraged to make them available for formal recording. Wiltshire Council part-funds the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) partnership for Wiltshire. PAS is a national scheme hosted by the British Museum for the voluntary recording of finds. The Wiltshire Finds Liaison Officer can assist with identification and recording of finds. Further information can be obtained by emailing wilpartridge@salisbury-museum.org.uk or telephoning 01722 332151.

More useful reading

Historic England (2018). *Our Portable Past*. Swindon: Historic England.

[HistoricEngland.org.uk/advice/planning/consents/section42-licences/](https://www.historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/consents/section42-licences/)

The Portable Antiquities Scheme website:

<https://finds.org.uk/>

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