

Yew News - A Survey of our ancient yew woodlands

Tim Hills of the **Ancient Yew Group** www.ancient-yew.org (hosted by the Tree Register)

Modern technology has made it possible for detailed knowledge about our oldest yew trees to be gathered and placed in the public domain. Ancient Yew Group member Peter Norton has seized the opportunity made possible by new technology to make a comprehensive record of the oldest specimens to be found in our ancient yew woodlands. These are such rare habitats that only four remain in England. Peter Norton's records, which include GPS location, photos and the measuring height of each tree, mean that, for the first time, it will be possible to carry out a repeat study of a large number of these oldest woodland yews.

Peter's first survey was at **Kingley Vale** in Sussex and 48 individual yews can be seen in our Articles webpage under the heading "Survey of England's most important yew woodlands". This survey also made it possible for researcher Toby Hindson to investigate the growth rates of many of the yews and his article appears on the same webpage. Amongst the 48 yews, Toby has been able to identify 15 notables (300 years +) 20 veterans (500 +) and one ancient (800 +). The ancient specimen is a particularly significant find, since it was last recorded as long ago as 1978 in Richard Williamson's *The Great Yew Forest* and was thought to no longer exist.

In addition to the Kingley Vale study, Peter joined forces with Hugh Milner to record the first of two Surrey sites, documenting 27 significant yews at **Druids Grove**. This report is already available on the website, while an account of the woodland area at Newlands Corner/Merrow Down is being prepared for publication and will feature 49 significant yews.

The 4th major yew woodland is privately owned Great Yews in Wiltshire. It is hoped that the estate management will welcome the opportunity to have their yews surveyed.



Ancient specimen yew at Kingley Vale

Photo by Peter Norton