

Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail

Fixed-point photographic monitoring April 2003 to November 2016

The aim of the monitoring regime is to establish a long term record of both National Trail and Scheduled Monument condition. The opening of the Trail in May 2003 meant that a robust method was required to record not only the impact of the additional numbers of visitors to the World Heritage Site but also the impact of farming, burrowing animals, scrub encroachment, forestry, as well as any other agents of erosion or damage that presented themselves.

While the photographic sequence captures changing ground conditions at all times of the year it demonstrates neatly the effect of seasonal soil moisture. In a 'normal' year the World Heritage Site's soils are at field capacity, or saturated, between November and April. This, however, is a guide only and in some years the soils can be at field capacity, or close to field capacity, in autumn and spring months. In 2012, for example, the Wall's soils were saturated for months of the year.

The risk of damage to the green sward path and monument increases when the soils are wet and this is demonstrated in the photographs. It is important, though, to look at long term sequences and not necessarily draw short term conclusions. However, notwithstanding the importance of capturing the effect of exceptional weather events the value of the exercise is the ability to observe long term trends.

The sites were initially selected as a targeted random sample. The mid-point of each Wall-mile was taken as a representative sample point and in the main most of the original sites have been used throughout although some have been reviewed and adjusted slightly if, with the benefit of hindsight, it was considered wise to capture important information.

Some Wall-miles have more than one site; some were of only of a short term duration (although the photos have been left on record); with a few introduced only relatively recently.

The exercise is undertaken every April, August and November and should be completed within a week. This is to try to obtain photos that reflect, as far as practicable, the same climatic conditions across the World Heritage Site. For each site an eastbound and a westbound view is taken. It is essential that the photographer becomes expert at recognising the tell-tale reference points, such as walls, boulders, buildings etc that enable precisely the same photograph to be taken on every occasion. A tripod will help to achieve this. Jpegs should not be less than 1mb in size.

The photographer will not necessarily undertake the later desk-based analysis and interpretation so it is important that as much information as possible is captured in each photo. They should be taken in good light but try to avoid dark shadows, likewise frost and snow disguises or hides worn areas, pinch points etc. It is good practice for the photographer to make field notes of ground and soil conditions and to carry out a debrief afterwards with the project coordinator, talking through each photo.

The jpegs for each site are filed, for example, as follows: 201608 29.1 and 201608 29.2 i.e. the year, month, wall-mile number and whether east or westbound. For example, 29.1 is Wall mile 29 eastbound view with 29.2 the westbound view. A site with a second or third site will see the use of additional suffix, for example, 201604 53B.1 and 201604 53B.2

The folder for each site contains a stand alone photo of the actual fixed point from where every photo is taken, together with an eight figure grid reference for the site. A photographer's field manual contains additional location maps, notes, measurements of distances from reference points, parking, access, landowner permissions, anything to help the photographer re-locate the same point again.

David McGlade

Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail Officer

Northumberland National Park Authority

12th January 2017