ARFORDIR - COASTAL HERITAGE

THE ARFORDIR – INTERTIDAL PEAT RECORDING FORM

What is Intertidal Peat and why is it archaeologically important?

The warming climate at the end of the last Ice Age *c.*2,000 years ago caused the steady melting of the ice sheets, the raising of sea levels and the subsequent gradual inundation of vast areas of low lying land causing the isolation of Britain from the rest of Europe. The peat levels which are present around much of the Welsh coastline are the remnants of this former land surface which were submerged by the rising sea levels. AS they became submerged peat formed, which along with tree stumps and other plant matter can still remain preserved in the waterlogged conditions. The peat we see in the intertidal zones generally dates from between *c.*5500 and 3500 years ago. The peats can also contain evidence for past environments, flora and fauna and even human activity. This material is constantly being eroded by a number of factors and the evidence is gradually being lost.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Site Location or Beach Name – this basic amount of information will allow us to easily recognise where the exposures of peat lie. The date and time of visit allows us to record changes in tides, sand coverage and monitor erosion. It is important for us to know if the peat has been visible before, as quite often areas of peat can be exposed which we have no previous record of, although may be well known locally. Knowing the size of the peat exposure in comparison to previous exposures allows us to determine sand coverage or extents of erosion.

What is visible? Sometimes only clays underlying the peat are visible, demonstrating erosion. Not all peat exposures have tree stumps visible. In some cases the waterlogged conditions also preserve smaller branches, twigs and sometimes leaves and roots, looking similar to that which would be seen on the floor of a woodland. The depth of peat is important for telling us about erosion and the potential for archaeological material. The surface of the peat may survive as quite flat surfaces, or severed by water channels or pockmarked with stone holes. Evidence for modern human disturbance may be present.

Tidal Conditions: The position of the tide is useful for us to determine extents of preservation, similarly whether the visit was taken during a Spring or Neap tide tells us when the peats may be visible again. If you are not sure, don't worry we can work it out from the time and date of the visit. The accessibility of the site is also very important for organising future visits where needed **and never risk your safety when recording**.

Photographs: If you have a digital camera, please take some pictures of the peat. Some cameras, and many mobile phones, have the facility for geo-referencing the photographs (giving an approximate location of where you were standing when the photo was taken). If you have and are able to use this facility, please do, as the information is included within the digital image. If you are able, take photographs of the general extents of the peat, views across the peats to land or landmarks, of individual/groups of tree stump or timbers. If you visit on a number of occasions taking photos from similar spots in the same direction is most useful.

DETAILED INFORMATION – This side of the form is for more specific details - if you do not feel confident in filling it in, please do not feel that you have to.

Grid reference or GPS coordinates of peat, can be obtained either via a hand held GPS or using a map. A mid-point (if possible) allows a location to be placed on our records. For those with a hand held GPS and know how to, way points around the perimeter of the peat exposure can be logged. It is also possible to log points on tree stumps where present. This information can then be downloaded to a computer and passed on to us.

A simple sketch plan with a few coordinates placed upon it is very useful, though a simple sketch by itself is also informative. If tree stumps or timbers are present, sketches with approximate measurements are most useful, as are photos. They can be used as reference points for future visits.

Information on the state of preservation of the peat provides an indication of its archaeological potential, both in terms of environmental remains and human activity. This information is important in assessing whether further visits are essential or otherwise.

Finally the information contained on the forms (in however much detail) will be used to add information to the Regional Historic Environment Record (HER). Dyfed Archaeological Trust maintain the HER for Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire. This information is available at www.archwilio.org.uk. Return forms and digital photographs via e-mail to **j.meek@dyfedarchaeology.org.uk** or by post to: **Arfordir, Dyfed Archaeological Trust, The Shire Hall, Llandeilo, SA19 6AF**

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