# **Environmental Science** Fieldwork

## **By Martin Yeo**



# **Investigation into How Time After Burning Influences Biodiversity in Managed Heathland**

Abstract (3)

Plan Sheet (4-6)

Risk Assessment (7)

Introduction (8-11)

Methodology (12-20)

Data Collection Procedures (21)

Data Collection Notes (22-23)

Interpretation (24-47)

Evaluation (48-51)

Bibliography and Acknowledgements (52-53)

Appendices (54-155)

By recording altitude, soil pH, soil moisture, soil organic content and numbers of every plant species and investigating the relationships between them I was able to find that the proportions of plants on a recovering heathland are constantly changing and if left the area would slowly develop into woodland. I also found that time after burning had little effect on soil properties, which allows an area to quickly recover after being burnt. There was evidence that locational factors would influence the speed of plant recovery through influencing soil properties. More data is required to increase reliability of conclusions.



Measure soil temperature, pH, moisture content & organic content.

I shall measure temperature on site using a soil thermometer, and also take a soil sample. This sample will be analysed later in the lab for pH, moisture and organic content. The pH is measured by dissolving the soil in water, adding soil indicator and comparing the water colour to a colour chart. Moisture content is the difference in mass before and after drying in a 110°C oven, and organic content is the difference in mass before and after burning the dried sample at a much higher temperature (which should combust most organic material).

Measure biodiversity using systematic sampling in each area.

*As mentioned above, I will not be using biodiversity as my main figure, although I may use it for certain species of plant depending on what trends I need to identify in the data (this will be decided after collection). I will now be simply counting the plants in different species, which can be compared in different ways after fieldwork to suit purpose.*

- Possibly analyse one area due to be burned soon analyse just before burning & just after burning. *I have since found out (it was not originally known) that the areas proposed for burning will be quite late in the burning season, around March, which is too late for me to conduct this part of my study. Instead, the areas proposed for burning this year will just be used as older areas in my main study, which will be useful in analysing further progression beyond 7 years of recovery.*
- Further analysis will include other independently determined data.

To prove/disprove my hypotheses I will also need to determine locational factors and rate of recovery. Locational factors will be anything else that I can say about each quadrat, particularly height, as this tends to indicate the proximity to water. Using contours it is also theoretically feasible to work out the aspect of each quadrat. Rate of recovery will be quantified by how quickly an area can return to the same approximate plant proportions as before burning (of course this is simulated by looking at the plant proportions in older areas).

• I will use a variety of statistical tests to analyse my data.

I anticipate that I will not be able to use just one test on my data, and I will need to use different ones to determine different trends and relationships. For example, in order to work out how much influence time of day has on soil temperature, I may simply wish to construct a chart and analyse to gradient. But to work out the influence time after burning has on the number of heather species, I could use Spearman"s Rank or Pearson"s Product Moment. In order to determine what tests I will be using, I will need to collect the data first and work out which tests would be appropriate for which relationships.

## **TIMETABLE**

**16/07 to 28/07 (2007) –** take measurements from selected heath areas.

*This was first rescheduled to a week in August, but I have since realised that it will take longer than anticipated, and is also dependent on relatively dry weather. The study will now take place over the months of August and September.*

**Winter 2007/2008 –** study area(s) planned for burning before & after. *As mentioned above, this will no longer be possible.*

**SIGNATURE OF CANDIDATE DATE** 

 **COMMENTS FROM TEACHER**

#### **PLAN APPROVED BY TEACHER YES / NO**

### **SIGNATURE OF TEACHER DATE**





Worrying hazards:

- **Cycling –** I am an experienced cyclist and I know what to do in most situations.
- **Remote location –** the area is local to me and I have been there many times. Nevertheless I will be sensible and make sure someone at least knows where I am going.
- **Water –** there are many potential water dangers in the area, so I will need to have someone with me if I need to go in/close to the bog or pond for any reason.
- **Animals –** particularly hazardous, but I will be safe so long as I am vigilant. Anti-venom is kept at any local health institution including vets should I need it.
- **Other people –** there have been occasional reports of strange people on the heath, but I will take appropriate caution (see above).



#### **Aim:** To investigate the changes in flora and soil conditions of a heathland recovering after controlled burning.

The main principle behind this recovery is secondary succession. Succession is defined as "the change in plant and animal communities in an area over time from pioneers to the climax community". Primary succession takes place on completely new land (e.g. bare rock), but secondary succession takes place on cleared land, such as heathland cleared by burning. In secondary succession, species are much quicker to re-colonise in comparison with primary succession; this is because the area is already fertile with a healthy soil ecosystem and seeds in the ground. There are no "seral stages" in secondary succession, where the conditions would gradually change over time to favour different species, and it is my belief that after a short period of time similar flora to those before burning will have recovered the area.

I want to know whether these conceptions about secondary succession are true, using managed heathland as my subject. I live very close to the heathland area that I will be studying, and I am keen to know how management has kept it in the condition it is in today.

#### Hypotheses

- 1. The proportions of different plants will remain reasonably similar throughout the recovery period after burning.
- 2. The soil properties will remain largely the same independent of the time after burning.
- 3. Locational factors will influence soil properties, which in turn will influence the speed of recovery.

#### Previously Published Work

To help me get a better idea of what I should expect from this study, I have researched the work of others on a similar subject by looking at the abstracts of their reports. Article 1, on the restoration of heathland habitat in Poole Basin (Dorset), found that many heathland areas had been invaded by other species, such as *Pinus sylvestris, Betula spp.* and *Pteridium aquilinum*. It studies the effect of management in trying to remove these species, and found that it was more successful for some species, such as *P. sylvestris* and less successful for others such as *Betula spp.* **[7]** This gives me an idea of some of the plants other than heather that I could expect to see, and perhaps there will be a relation between time since burning and the presence of these invasive species. Article 2, on heathland management for grazing in southern England, found that grazing generally increases biodiversity and heath plant cover, while reducing the cover of larger shrubs such as those mentioned above. **[8]** This is interesting, because it shows that despite a change in the motive for burning in the New Forest (mentioned in Background to Burning), grazing is shown to still play an important role in maintaining biodiversity.

Article 3 is about the recovery of a heathland after burning, concentrating particularly on stages in the lifecycle of *Calluna vulgaris*, and is set in NE Scotland. The findings are that *C. vulgaris* will recover as expected in most phases of its life cycle, except when in the "degenerate" phase, when it will not recover properly and others will take its place. Another key finding is that after burning the first plants to recover are those with special adaptations for quick recovery, but after about 1 year, the species composition is similar to what it was before the burning, which is more or less what I have predicted. Most importantly the recovery bears no resemblance to primary succession, as I stated at the start of this section. It was found that if burning did not recur with a frequency of about 10 to 15 years (specific to this area in Scotland), the *C. vulgaris* passed into degenerate phase and other plants, such as trees, could start to colonise, demonstrating the need for burning if one wishes to maintain the heathland habitat. **[9]**



#### Conservation Status

My study area has been assigned several statuses normally as part of New Forest heathland. The New Forest as a whole is classified as a SSSI for the value of the vast expanses of natural land, including its relatively large heathland areas. These are credited with being ideal habitats for many reptiles including the rare smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*) and sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*).

Different parts of the study area fall beneath different classifications of SAC. The higher dry heath is classified as H2 *Calluna vulgaris* – *Ulex minor* heath, and is valuable due to the unique way in which it is managed through grazing and burning, which creates ideal habitat for many rare species. The lower wet heath is classified as M16 *Erica tetralix* – *Sphagnum compactum* heath, which is important for rare plant species such as marsh gentian (*Gentiana pneumonanthe*) and several dragonfly species including the rare blue-tailed damselfly (*Ischnura pumilio*). Again it is the unique management that sustains this particular type of heath. There is also a very special type of habitat known as bog woodland (Fig 1.1) in my area, where birch and willow are able to secure themselves on the bog and create a small forested area; little is known about this habitat as of yet but there is evidence from study of ancient pollen that they have existed for a long time.

New Forest heath is a particularly important SPA site, as it supports a variety of rare bird species. The habitat provides specific conditions for ground nesting birds like lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), curlew (*Numenius arquata*) and European nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*); the gorse that grows on the dry heath provides nesting for the Dartford warbler (*Sylvia undata*).

The marsh/bog areas in my study area are Ramsar sites as well, as they are counted as internationally important wetland features and are regarded as the archetypal British mire. It preserves many rare/important species of plant and invertebrate. This is put down to the undeveloped nature of the area that the mires can remain intact. **[4]**

#### Background to Burning

The New Forest has recently become a national park, but the heath is still managed by the Forestry Commission as it was before the national park status. Small areas of heath are burnt in rotation – heather dominated areas in a 23 to 24 year cycle and gorse dominated areas in a 12 to 13 year cycle. This segmented burning prevents a monoculture developing, which would reduce the biodiversity, but instead creates a wide variety of slightly different habitats. The cut and burn programme, as it is known, is currently reclaiming a lot of overgrown heath, some of which has started to develop into forest (Fig 1.2). As a consequence there is plenty of heath that is yet to complete a single cycle. **[2]**





#### Hypotheses

- 1. The proportions of different plants will remain reasonably similar throughout the recovery period after burning.
- 2. The soil properties will remain largely the same independent of the time after burning.
- 3. Locational factors will influence soil properties, which in turn will influence the speed of recovery.

So I need a way to quantify:

- **Proportions of Different Plants –** I plan to use species frequency as my sampling method, as this is more accurate than percentage cover (where one individual of one species occupies a different amount of space than an individual from a different species). This involves counting plants inside a quadrat, which sounds time consuming. I will need to see how long this would take in my pilot study; if it takes too long then I shall develop an accurate method of estimating the numbers of each species in a quadrat.
- **Soil Properties –** it would be a good idea to measure as many soil properties as well, as at this stage I cannot predict which ones may show any variation, nor for what reason they would vary. With the equipment available to me, I am able to measure:
- o **Soil temperature –** I will use a basic soil thermometer with 0.5°C graduations.
- o **Soil pH –** although there is a fieldwork kit for testing soil pH, I feel it would be more time efficient to measure this in the laboratory. Therefore I will be taking soil samples at each site using a soil core extractor (normally used for planting bulbs) and storing the samples in a polythene bag marked appropriately. The lab process involves dissolving the soil in distilled water using barium sulphate, then adding soil indicator and comparing the colour of the water next to a colour chart.
- o **Soil moisture content –** with the equipment I have, this must be done in the lab. Having tested pH, the remainder of each soil sample will be weighed out before being heated in an oven at 110°C for 24 hours in order to evaporate all the water. After this process the

sample is weighed again and the difference in mass is the mass of the soil moisture.

- o **Soil organic content –** having been weighed, the dried soil sample is then heated to a much higher temperature (around 700°C) in order to combust the organic molecules present. The mass of these will be lost as gas molecules (e.g.  $CO<sub>2</sub>$ ) are formed from components of the previous molecules. After heating the burnt sample will be weighed again and the mass lost since drying is taken as the mass of organic content.
- **Locational Factors –** I will try to record any locational variables that I think may have an influence on the results (e.g. altitude/topography).
- **Speed of Recovery –** although recovery is technically taking place throughout the entire time between two burns, for this purpose I will define an area as recovered when it has returned to approximately the same plant proportions as before burning.

Ideally to get the most accurate information on recovery I would study several areas over their full recovery sequence. Unfortunately this would take at least 12 years and could take as long as 24, so I cannot do this. Instead, I have many areas spanning an 8 year period; so I will use these different areas to simulate the first 7 years of recovery in a heathland habitat (one of the ages is for those proposed for burning this year, so those areas are much older). This is a compromise, as it is obvious that each area is different due to locational factors, and there are many unwanted variables to consider such as aspect. I will use my pilot study to get a full idea of the variables that need to be controlled or at least accounted for.

One specific variable that strikes me is that the level of soil moisture could significantly influence my results – plant numbers and species in particular – and the area I am sampling has a full range from dry heath through to valley mires. In order to get enough primary data, I will need to take advantage of every area marked on the heath management map – I cannot afford to avoid any areas regardless of soil moisture. It would be possible to take soil moisture into account when analysing my results, but first I need to know to what degree it will influence plant

numbers and species. This is a question for my pilot study, and I will devise a method to find the answer.

I intend to use systematic sampling of the area as I feel this is a more thorough approach. The sampling will be stratified by separating each smaller area on the heath management map, each of which will be counted as separate data sets. I have therefore divided the entire area into a grid, each square is 100m<sup>2</sup>, this grid allows me to decide the pattern of quadrat placement. The total size of all the managed areas is approximately 397 500 $m^2$ , sampling should normally aim to sample 10 to 20% of the parent population.  $10\%$  would be equal to 39 750 $m^2$ , which would take far too long; so I will need to sample much less than the recommended percentage. I do not think this will compromise my study too much because there are no dramatic changes across the heath that I will miss by sampling less. What percentage I study will be subject to how long it takes to sample one quadrat, which I will test in my pilot study.

One time saving measure is to use larger quadrats, meaning I do not

have to set up as many, in turn allowing me to devote more of my time to sampling. I also predict that larger quadrats will be more representative of the area because I have less chance of missing the scarcer species by leaving less, but larger, gaps between the quadrats. Therefore I have decided that my quadrats will be 10x10m (100 $m<sup>2</sup>$ ), subject to testing on my pilot study.

#### Questions for Pilot Study

**1. Does soil moisture influence plant numbers and species?**

If this is true, then I cannot treat wet and dry areas as the same. I will have to treat wet and dry as two separate sets of data.

*Conduct belt transect along Site 13 NW-SE (Fig 2.1), this covers the*  full range of moisture from dry to bog and is within one site so time

*since burning is not a variable.*

*Take measurements from a 4m<sup>2</sup> quadrat (SE side of line) every 40 metres.*

*Measure soil moisture for each sample point on a relative scale from 1 to 5 as this is only a pilot study.*

*Record numbers of each species at each quadrat.*

**2. To what degree do different species cluster together?** If species group together, I will need to be careful to ensure that the results do not display biased/skewed results by missing certain species.

The greater the clustering, the larger/denser the quadrats will need to be to ensure accurate results.

*Measure approximate area of typical cluster.*

**3. How long does it take to count the frequency of all species in a 100m<sup>2</sup> area?**

I hope to use species density as my sampling method, I need to know how long it would take to sample a given area in order to plan my fieldwork.

*Set out a 10x10 metre quadrat and time how long it takes to count the frequency of each species.*

**4. What species are not on my identification sheet?** Some species (e.g. the genus *Sphagnum*) are not on the sheet I have been given.

If I find any in my sampling area I will need to be able to identify these by finding extra material.

*As I am sampling, record a description and likely identification of any species missing from the original sheet (possibly take a sample home?)*

#### Conclusions from Pilot Study

First of all, I was able to conclude that it is unrealistic to count the number of each species when I am sampling such a large area. The



thick cover that occurs in heathland makes it far too difficult to efficiently determine how many plants there are. This presents a problem , because I need to know precise numbers in order to perform most statistical analyses, and percentage cover is not an accurate enough alternative – I will need to devise a new system for counting numbers.

#### **Does soil moisture influence plant numbers and species?**

While I was not able to use the method I hoped (see above), I was able to make some observations from which solid conclusions can be drawn:

- Travelling towards the bottom of the valley, the soil moisture remains similar for a long distance before increasing suddenly.
- When this change does occur, species diversity increases suddenly as well:
- o The dry heath is dominated by *Calluna vulgaris*, with healthy populations of *Polytrichium spp.* and *Pteridium aquilinium*.
- o Travelling downhill (still dry heath) *C. vulgaris* still dominates, but now with wet heath species in evidence – *Molina caerulea* in large numbers, and low numbers of *Erica tetralix*.
- o Closer to the wet heath but still with a lower soil moisture, *C. vulgaris* has dwindled slightly, with an increase in both *M. caerulea* and *E. tetralix*.
- o The next point I sampled showed a dramatic change as the soil was obviously waterlogged. The area was dominated by *Juncus articulatus* and *M. caerulea*, had a high number of *Myrica gale* with moderate numbers of *Narthecium ossifragum* and *E. tetralix*. There was also a tussock of *Scirpus caespitota*. This is an obvious increase in the number of species, most of which had healthy populations.
- o The high rainfall around the time of study made it dangerous for me to study the true bog area on my own, but I can draw my conclusions from the areas I did study.

So soil moisture does show positive correlation with plant species and affects the numbers within species, I will therefore need to allow for this when analysing my results.

#### **To what degree do different species cluster together?**

While there are patches of certain species (e.g. *P. aquilinium*), on closer examination these are not single species areas, but create an illusion in situations where the other species are not visible. This should not influence to size/intensity of my quadrats.

#### **How long does it take to count the frequency of all species in a 100m<sup>2</sup> area?**

If I had counted each individual plant, I predict this could have taken as much as an hour. However by this point I had realised that this would be unrealistic and instead I used percentage cover as an interim method (having not yet thought of an alternative). This took 30 minutes but could easily be cut down to 20, and I will have assistance most of the time, which will cut the time down further.

#### **What species are not on my identification sheet?**

I found that when using the whole sheet most species could be identified. Some only went as far as genus (e.g. *Agrostis spp.*) but these particular plants couldn"t or didn"t need to be identified more accurately.

#### Modifications to Method

For the 100 $m^2$  quadrat I experimented with percentage cover; this worked well for the higher percentage species such as *C. vulgaris*, but some species occupied a very small area that would return decimal percentages. When analysed, this would create unreliable results that are not truly representative of the proportions of different species. Some tests/calculations are not applicable to percentages, such as the calculation for biodiversity or the chi-squared test.

My solution to this is to combine percentage cover and species frequency – for thick cover species such as heathers and *Pteridium aquilinium* I can use the area (or percentage of quadrat) to provide an approximate number of plants. This will be different for each species, and may be subject to other factors (in some areas *Pteridium aquilinium* can be fairly sparse). This way I can streamline the sampling without compromising the analysis.

This does, however, create another issue that would not be present using percentage cover alone. Plant numbers for different types of plants are noncomparable because individuals of different species occupy different amounts of space and can survive in varying densities. To give an example, in the space that one individual of *C. vulgaris* grows, approximately 4000 blades of *Agrostis* grass can grow. I have devised a mathematical solution to this – I will analyse the number of one species (n) in a quadrat as a percentage of the

average for that species (MEAN) across all quadrats:  $\frac{1}{\sqrt{1-\frac{1}{2}}}\times 100$ MEAN  $\frac{n}{n}$  × 100 (note that

MEAN ignores blank readings).

This effectively creates a hybrid between percentage cover and species frequency, removing the most important limitations (specific to my study) of each method. Having experimented with some artificial numbers (Table 2.1), it seems to me that this creates figures comparable between different sorts of plants. When analysing my data, this calculation will allow me to look at the numbers of plants in relation to their averages in a quantified manner. I cannot tell what use to me this is as yet, because how I analyse the data depends on what trends the data shows once I have collected it.



Judging by the time it took to sample a quadrat, I have decided that the maximum I can reasonably sample is 3% of the parent population. This still amounts to 114 quadrats, which if I allow 20 minutes for each quadrat, will take 38 hours, but I predict that most quadrats will take 15 minutes or less. For systematic sampling, I have marked squares on the grid for the sample area in a uniform pattern (Fig 2.2), the total area of these squares is approximately 3% of the area. Where these squares fall within a managed area of heath, this will be the location of a quadrat. I have had to doctor this slightly to ensure the correct number of quadrats fall within each area, but this doctoring is minor.



Subsequent to my pilot study, the Forestry Commission has

provided me with details of areas that to the best of their knowledge have not been burned for at least the last 25 years. These would be the best areas to act as controls for my study, as they should display as close as possible the natural state of a heathland habitat, with which I can compare the data for managed areas of heathland. As with controls in the lab, this will mean treating them exactly the same as any other area when sampling so as to remove any other variables. Sampling these increases the total area to 434 500m<sup>2</sup>, the total quadrats to 130 and the total time to slightly over 43 hours.

In light of my pilot study, which gives insight into the nature of my fieldwork, I have constructed a variables table and a brief summary of the main limitations.



doing this.



### Lab Work

The lab work, however, is a far more controlled environment and the only unwanted variables will have influenced the soil sample before it was collected in the field. In the lab, I will measure the soil pH, moisture content and organic content. The pH is measured by dissolving the soil in water (this needs barium sulphate in order to make it soluble) and indicator, which will turn the appropriate colour.

The moisture content is measured by observing the change in mass before and after drying a sample in an oven. The organic content is measured by observing the change in mass before and after combusting the organic material to various gases (e.g.  $CO<sub>2</sub>$ ); this needs a temperature of around 700°C, which ideally I would like to achieve with a furnace. Unfortunately this is not available, so I will have to use a Bunsen burner to achieve these temperatures, burning each sample individually; this gives a greater opportunity for variability but I have to work with the equipment that is available to me. The Bunsen burner will be in a fume cupboard to protect from all the gases given off, but this also means that only one gas tap will be available to me, so I cannot use multiple Bunsen Burners to increase time efficiency.





The main areas have an obvious age since burning, and I have assigned minimum ages for those proposed for burning this year and the control areas, with help from Dave Morris at the forestry commission. Only in this way can I properly quantify my data.

This map shows my final sampling plan, the blue squares being the quadrats. Site 16, 17 and 18 are the control sites, which were added later.





#### **Investigation into How Time After Burning Influences Biodiversity in Managed Heathland** Martin Yeo **Data Collection Procedures**

#### Field Work

**Equipment:** tent pegs x 3, 10m string x 2, compass, soil thermometer, soil core extractor, plant identification sheet, soil sample bags, permanent pen, log sheets, sampling map, pencil.

#### Procedure

- 1. Select a quadrat & assign a number in order of the quadrats sampled in that particular site.
	- E.g. Quadrat 5 in Site 13 would be the  $5<sup>th</sup>$  quadrat sampled in that site.
- 2. Locate the quadrat area as accurately as possible, using compass directions & pacing where necessary. Set up axes (N & E) using pegs & string.
- 3. Record quadrat on log sheet, including time sampling started.
- 4. Insert soil thermometer into an open space of ground close to the centre of the quadrat.
- 5. Extract core of soil using tool, place in a sample bag marked with permanent pen (quad & site number).
- 6. Remove soil thermometer & take reading, Step 5 should have allowed enough time for correct temperature reading to be reached.
- 7. Scan quadrat for species & note down each different one that is seen.
- 8. Do a more detailed scan in order to accurately estimate the numbers of each species.
- 9. Dismantle quadrat & select next quadrat repeat procedure.

#### Principles

- Do not count continuous cover species such as mosses & lichens, as it is impossible to identify an individual organism.
- For lower number species, always over-estimate slightly because there are always some concealed individuals. This is not such an issue for larger numbers as this a wider estimate anyway.
- Constant cover of certain plants can be said to produce these numbers (estimated):
- o Heather species & *Myrica gale* 25 per 4m<sup>2</sup>.
- $\circ$  *P. aquilinum* 100 per m<sup>2</sup>.
- $\circ$  Grasses 1000 per m<sup>2</sup>.

#### Lab Work

#### pH Test

**Equipment:** soil pH test tube, bung x 2, barium sulphate, soil indicator, distilled water, spatula.

- 1. Bung one end of test tube.
- 2. Add spatula of soil sample.
- 3. Add spatula of barium sulphate.
- 4. Fill tube with distilled water to  $1<sup>st</sup>$  line.
- 5. Add soil indicator to  $2<sup>nd</sup>$  line.
- 6. Bung other end of test tube, & mix thoroughly by inverting & shaking.
- 7. Compare colour of solution to pH colour chart.

#### Moisture & Organic Content

**Equipment:** crucible x 30, oven set to 110°C, heat proof mat, tripod, crucible support, Bunsen Burner, 2dp balance, large spatula.

- 1. Take mass of crucible.
- 2. Add a large spatula of soil sample to crucible & weigh again, note down mass minus crucible mass.
- 3. Place crucible in oven and repeat steps 1-3 for all 30 crucibles.
- 4. Start oven & leave for at least 24 hours.
- 5. Turn off oven & allow samples to cool.
- 6. Re-weigh all samples, subtracting crucible mass. The original sample mass minus this mass will give the moisture content (which has been dried in the oven).
- 7. Burn each sample in turn using the Bunsen equipment.
- 8. Allow samples to cool, & re-weigh again, subtracting crucible weight. The weight from Step 6 minus this weight will give the organic content (which has been burned off).

#### **Investigation into How Time After Burning Influences Biodiversity in Managed Heathland** Martin Yeo **Data Collection Notes**

Field work took longer than anticipated, but I was able to build up a consistent, efficient procedure. I tested my sampling method by resampling site 2,1 (the first site I sampled) for plant numbers, the results returned were similar enough to confirm that my sampling method was consistent.

Lab work also went better than expected, although I could not sample all soil (see below). It was clear that all the soil organic matter had burnt off before 5 minutes because the crucible had stopped smoking before this point.

#### Changes to Method

Because I was able to conduct an informative pilot study for my fieldwork, that method remaining the same, I simply learnt how best to conduct sampling efficiently. However, I was not able to conduct a test study for my lab-work, and I discovered there were changes to be made. I was not able to perform my procedures on all the soil samples, as I had hoped, because it would have used too many chemicals (for pH) and been too time consuming.

Instead I had to make a stratified selection of samples to try and achieve a reasonable representation of all the samples. I have used these known values to predict approximate values for other similar quadrats that I did not test. Due to the wide range of data in each field that I observed, this could potentially negatively influence any trends in my data.

The predictions have been made for each quadrat with unknown pH, moisture and organic content, by projecting values from the nearest, most similar quadrat with known values onto the quadrat needing values. pH is copied straight across (originally measured to the nearest 0.5), moisture and organic content (which have precise 2dp values) are projected to the nearest 5%.

#### Recorded Variables

**Quadrat:** each quadrat was numbered according to site number and quadrat number within the site, so the fourth quadrat from site three would be numbered as 3,4.

**Age (years):** allocated according to the season in which site was last burnt. Because sampling was performed in summer and burning seasons are in winter, these are 'x'.5 values. Quadrats marked for burning the next season were given 16.5 years, as this will be the approximate time since they were last burnt if they are marked for burning again, although the exact records are not readily available. Quadrats recorded as 25.0 years old are not recorded as having been burnt since records began around 25 years ago. These may be even older but this is the best arbitrary value to assign so that I can plot age on graphs.

**Altitude (nearest 5m):** the original map supplied did not have contours on, so I imposed my quadrat mapping onto an orienteering map, which was adjusted to the same scale as the original map; it had contour intervals of 5m. The altitude was determined by viewing which contour the quadrat was closest to.

**Date and Time Sampled:** recorded as I moved from quadrat to quadrat.

**Soil Temperature (°C):** measured on a soil thermometer, each graduation worth 0.5°C. Sometimes it could be seen that the temperature was between two graduations, in which case an "x".25 value was recorded.

**Soil pH:** recorded from analysis of soil samples back in the lab. Soil was mixed with Barium Sulphate (to dissolve some of the soil constituents), distilled water and soil indicator (to give the colour) in a bespoke test tube and shaken. Then I waited for the soil to settle back down and compared the colour of the solution to a colour chart that came with the testing kit. Colour chart ranged from pH 4.0 to 8.0 in graduations of 0.5

**Soil Moisture and Organic Content (%): recorded from analysis of** soil samples back in the lab, percentage derived as a proportion of the

#### **Investigation into How Time After Burning Influences Biodiversity in Managed Heathland** Martin Yeo **Data Collection Notes**

mass of each in comparison to the original sample mass. Soil samples weighed, then dried at 110°C for 24 hours, change in mass taken to be the mass of water. Soil samples then heated to over 500°C by Bunsen burner to burn off organic content as various gaseous compounds; change in mass before and after burning taken to be the mass of organic content.

**Plant Numbers:** numbers of each plant were estimated by looking at percentage cover and density, and using knowledge of how the plant grows.

**% Mean Plant Numbers:** for much of the analysis I used these figures instead, as it made plants that grow in completely different numbers

comparable. The equation used was  $\frac{1}{2}$  × 100 MEAN  $\frac{n}{n}$  × 100, where n was the number of plants for that quadrat, and MEAN was the average number of this plant across all quadrats ignoring blank readings.

**Notes:** anything unusual about the quadrat was noted.

To interpret the data in relation to the original hypotheses, I will need to investigate many relationships, both expected and unwanted (which then need to be allowed for). First of all it is clear that there are many factors influencing the type of vegetation in different areas, many of these are difficult to identify and even more difficult to quantify. It is thankful therefore that I have collected such a large volume of data because I can use averages, or perhaps compare areas of similar vegetation.

In some cases data is influenced so much by unwanted variables that it is difficult to use that data in proving/disproving my hypotheses, for example soil temperature is influenced by both insolation (indicated by linear variations over time of day) and soil moisture. I will start with a detailed analysis of my recorded soil variables and possible relationships with other variables. This is followed up by any techniques to reduce the influence of unwanted variables and the significance of each for my study in relation to original hypotheses.

#### Hypotheses

- 1. The proportions of different plants will remain reasonably similar throughout the recovery period after burning.
- 2. The soil properties will remain largely the same independent of the time after burning.
- 3. Locational factors will influence soil properties, which in turn will influence the speed of recovery.



#### Soil Temperature

**Chart 3.01 (added later):** frequency intervals used were ≥14, ≥15 etc. up to 27°C. The box plot displays minimum and maximum values, inter-quartile range (the box), mean (blue), median (black) and mode (red). Green line = polynomial 2 trend line.

#### **Chart 3.01:**

This is an interesting distribution, as it shows aspects of normal distribution between 14 and 21°C, and then there is a collection of results in higher temperatures but lower frequencies. This can be seen by the way the mode and median are around the highest frequency temperatures, but the mean is offset slightly by these higher values. Consequentially the green trend line does not show anything near a classic normal distribution shape. The inter-quartile range also centres around the lower section on the graph, where there is a higher density of results. This means that most of the quadrats were within the temperature range with the highest density of results, varying within this range, and then those quadrats with less cover make up the anomalous section at higher temperatures. I observed some of these quadrats in the field, where I noted that there was little or no soil cover, giving higher temperature readings.

#### Relationships



**Chart 3.1:** showing the influence of soil moisture on soil temperature for known moisture values (blue) and predicted moisture values (red). Soil temperature readings were taken for all quadrats.

#### **Chart 3.1**

This graph serves two purposes – most importantly it shows the negative correlation between soil moisture and soil temperature, which I observed in the

field but was not sure how absolute the trend was. I expect that this is due to the high specific heat capacity of water, which makes water an effective temperature buffer, reducing the variations in relation to its surroundings. So the more water present in the soil, the less diurnal variation in temperature (the Sun being the direct source for the majority of the heat in soil). Soil with less water will heat up much more readily during the day (when I was measuring) and cool down much more readily at night. If I took readings at night I would expect a reverse trend of this, as any water in the soil will retain heat absorbed during the day, keeping the soil warmer than if it contained less water.

Secondly it shows the accuracy of my projection from the measured values for soil moisture to those that I estimated would be similar (see Changes to Method). The trend lines are very similar, demonstrated by the formulae, although the gradient values themselves should be ignored because the x and y values are on completely different scales. This similarity is significant because it means I should be able to use my projections of soil conditions for other data to be analysed and still be confident that the sample is an accurate representation of the parent



**Chart 3.2:** showing the influence of time of day on soil temperature in selected sites. Sites are separated because of different conditions and different sampling days. The only sites used are ones with 5 quadrats or over (sufficient size to show reliable trend) and all quadrats must have been sampled on the same day (different days, different temperatures).

population. Also notice the shallow gradient of the trend lines, although they are still representing what I am sure is a significant trend; I think this results from the many uncontrollable factors influencing all of my data, and may indicate that trends are likely to only ever have weak correlation as a consequence.

I have calculated Spearman"s Rank Correlation Coefficients for the absolute values. Full details of the calculations can be found in the raw data section of the Appendix. It has now become clear that this will be the main statistical test for my data, as I want to investigate the strength and directions of various relationships, most of which are in continuous data sets. For this test the null hypothesis should be that there is no significant relationship between soil moisture and soil temperature. The absolute values were found to have a value of **-0.32** (remember we are looking at negative correlation, which is lower than the critical value for 30 degrees of freedom and 0.05 probability of **-0.306** [11]. This means that the null hypothesis should be rejected and I can say that there is a significant negative correlation between soil moisture and soil temperature. More encouragingly the relationship is significant at 95% confidence limits, though I was expecting that – due to all the other factors influencing the data – I would be using lower confidence limits. I found it impractical to use Spearman"s Rank on the projected values, mainly because the calculation uses a particular ranking system that is not effective when many values are the same, as with my projected values. It is also difficult to find critical value tables that go up to 130 degrees of freedom.

#### **Chart 3.2**

This graph shows how in most cases, soil temperature increases with time of day, as in general a positive correlation is shown between the two variables. Logically this should mean that insolation influences soil temperature, as during the times of day I was sampling, the soil was spending more time under sunlight as time went on. The steepest lines seem to be found at the beginning of the day, when not only is insolation taking place, but the Sun"s rays are increasing in strength up to around 14:00, although I believe that just being under consistent sunlight would gradually increase soil temperature anyway. This strengthens the argument that soil temperature cannot be analysed with any meaningful relationship to my original hypotheses, but is a graph worth using to demonstrate the problems I will have with some data.

Again the graph shows that there must be other influential factors involved, as Sites 3, 15 and 17 show no useful correlation (even by the weak correlation standards that I expect); it is interesting that these three sites were all sampled towards the end of the day, reinforcing that argument that the strength of the Sun"s rays have a significant influence on soil temperature. The differing strengths of correlation also suggest other environmental factors influence these values. In fact, Chart 3.1 is showing one of these other factors, as it has been shown that there is a definite correlation between soil moisture and temperature; this is a perfect demonstration of how it is near impossible to control all variables in the field.



**Table 3.1:** extract showing how the date sampled influences soil temperature in Site 13.

17/08/2007 was recorded as "Cool, dry weather during a time of occasional showers."

07/09/2007 was recorded as "Hot, dry weather during a dry period."

22/09/2007 was recorded as "Cool, humid weather during a dry period."

This table shows how, regardless of other conditions, soil temperature will vary with the weather that day. This and Chart 3.2 demonstrate how the influences of conditions on any particular day override any other significant influence that may have relevance to my original hypotheses.

#### Reducing Unwanted Influence

It would be near impossible to allow for the variations mentioned above, mainly because temperature depends on the conditions on the day sampled and the time of day sampled, as demonstrated on Chart 3.2 and Table 3.1. Chart 3.3 shows how there is no relationship worth pursuing between soil temperature and (in this example) the number of species, which also indicates that soil temperature will not have a distorting influence on other relationships; I think it is fair to say that there is no point in trying to allow for the differences in soil temperature and I can conclude that this variable has very little relevance to my original hypotheses. I have however been able to prove part of hypothesis 3, that locational factors will influence soil properties, although soil temperature in this case will have little bearing on



**Chart 3.3:** showing how there is little or no meaningful relationship between soil temperature and the number of species in the quadrat.

speed of recovery. I do not believe that this space has been wasted on a factor that has little influence, as quite a lot of the space has been used to demonstrate this, and the data has been useful to demonstrate the accuracy of my projections using Chart 3.1.

#### Soil pH

pH did not vary much across the heathland, with most readings being either 4.0 or 4.5 in addition to occasional readings of 5.0 and 5.5. There was one particular anomaly of pH 7.0, which I think was probably down to an unknown error in the measurement technique, considering that the quadrat (**15,3**) was not exceptional in any other way. The acidic pH (very acidic for soil) is typical of heathland habitat, and is probably caused by leaching in areas where water capacity of the soil is low.

#### **Chart 3.4**

This is definitely not a normal distribution, and there is little value is drawing a box plot because it would be highly distorted by the asymmetrical results. It almost appears as if this is one half of a normal distribution curve, and that other techniques may have returned lower pH than 4.0; I



**Chart 3.4:** frequency intervals were already present as the measured values – used categorised colours of the soil indicator to determine pH. Values taken from known rather than projected. Green line = polynomial 2 trend line.

would not find this surprising considering the nature of some of the soils in the sample area. This idea is backed up by the green trend line, which also shows a shape expected of half a normal distribution curve. The colour chart I was using went from pH 4.0 to 8.0, a generalised range for all soils. Perhaps half of the values that I recorded as 4.0 where in fact 3.5 and possible 3.0 – this is a limitation of the equipment I used, I could instead have used a specialised indicator designed for my acidic pH range, perhaps designed a titration for very accurate measurements (although this would be very time consuming), or used a pH meter (which are expensive and notoriously temperamental).

#### Relationships

If my ideas about leaching are correct, then I would expect those soils with higher moisture content to have a higher pH, as more moisture

indicates less leaching, and more ions would be held in the soil; I will plot this data on a scatter graph to see if there is a relationship. There is also likely to be a relationship between pH and organic content for two reasons. Soil organisms will influence the pH of their environment by absorbing and releasing certain chemicals, some of which influence pH. The other significant reason is that organisms have certain pH tolerances, so I can predict that the lower the pH, the lower the organic content; this is likely to be the overriding factor of the two. I can plot the relationship of pH with both moisture and organic on the same graph, as they are both measured using the same units.

### **Chart 3.5**

These relationships are interesting, as there appears to be very little influence of soil moisture on pH, and a much stronger correlation between organic content and pH. As predicted, this second correlation is negative presumably because it is far more difficult for soil organisms to maintain their specific internal conditions when in soil of a pH so far away from these conditions.

It is definitely worth running a Spearman"s Rank Correlation test on this data, as graphical trends are not always an accurate representation (especially when influenced by anomalies). This isn"t an ideal statistical test because it uses ranking and there are only 5 ranks of pH in the data,

but it should be an effective enough analysis. The null hypothesis is that there will be no meaningful relationship between soil moisture/organic content and soil pH, and that any apparent correlation is down to chance.



**Chart 3.5:** showing the influence of soil moisture on pH, and the organic content and pH. Values taken from the quadrats with kn (rather than projected ones).

influenced by the anomaly of pH 7.0 as the Excel trend lines are. A good thing that comes from this is that this is one less relationship to factor out when analysing other data.

It is known that different plant (and other) species have different pH tolerances, so this should possibly show as a relationship in my data. I will select several different types of plant (e.g. a heather and a grass) and plot them against soil pH.

The value returned for moisture was **0.056**, which is obviously going to be below the critical values for any meaningful level of significance (e.g. 0.25). This was to be expected from looking at the graph. The value returned for organic content was **-0.024**, which is very surprising considering that on the graph the trend for organic content looks stronger than that for moisture, not the other way round. With an even lower value this will also be well below the critical value for a reasonable significance level. So for both cases I should accept the null hypothesis. Because Spearman"s Rank returns the *probability* of results being significant or due to chance, it seems that this test has confirmed that the trends seen on the graphs were indeed down to chance rather than showing any real trends. It is also worth noting that Spearman"s Rank is probably not as



- 30 - **Chart 3.6:** showing the influence of soil pH on a selection of plant species using projected pH values. Specific points are omitted, only trends are shown. Values for pH 7 anomaly also omitted.

#### **Chart 3.6**

When dealing with a relationship like this, is it often difficult to work out if these are 'real' or just chance. So again I will need to use a statistical test. Although Spearman"s Rank is not ideal for categorised data (pH), I have no better tests at my disposal. Because of the limitations of this test, I will just be using the known soil values and the corresponding figures for these (using projected pH values would generate even more ties), the graph however displays trends derived from projected values as well.

Starting with *C. vulgaris*, a value of **0.011** was returned, which indicates practically no relationship at all, regardless of the level of confidence used. *Agrostis spp.* returned a value of **0.155**, which is still below the critical value even for 75% confidence limits (which I have predicted to be close to 0.2 by looking at values I do know, no actual critical values for low confidence limits could be found). This is surprising, because on the graph this appears to be the strongest correlation, so if the values agree then none of the correlations will be over the confidence limits. The value for *U. europaeus* is **-0.155**, which is both the reverse direction to the trend line on the graph, and also apparently has the same strength as *Agrostis*. This is proof for me that for this purpose, Spearman"s Rank does not work properly; the main contributing factor to this is ties in the data, generated not only by categorised pH values but also because I estimated the numbers of plants many of the values for number of plants will also be tied. This is particularly prominent with *U. europaeus* as the estimates were generally low numbers, which are more likely to be the same. For what it is worth, *M. gale* was **0.402** (ridiculously high and in the wrong direction according to the graph) and *Betula* was **0.395** (also very high). To add yet more error, these last two plants had a lot of "0" values, which would also throw values off. Using the absolute values meant that values for the higher two pH"s were rare, which could also generate inaccuracy.

Using the graph alone (which I consider to be reasonably reliable), I would say definite trends can be found for *Agrostis* and *M. gale*, and possibly for *U. europaeus*. I interpret the virtually flat line for *C. vulgaris* as a sign of the versatility of the plant, contributing to making it by far the most widespread plant on the study area. The relatively strong positive correlation for *Agrostis* probably shows that, as a common grass, it is adapted to less extreme conditions, so while it can survive in healthy numbers even at the lower pH values, more neutral pH"s allow the grass to thrive and sometimes dominate. *U. europaeus* is more surprising, as this is considered a typical heathland plant and would be expected to be tolerant of lower pH; it may be that other factors unfavourable to the species cause low pH and therefore indirectly cause this perceived relationship. However the correlation seen on the graph is not very strong, and we cannot be certain that a verifiable relationship exists – this in fact may be the real reason. *M. gale* has a noticeable negative trend, disappearing from the graph altogether



**Chart 3.7:** showing relationship between site age and soil pH, using projected pH values

by around pH5; rather than pH tolerance, I expect the real reason for this relationship is that, as I suggested for *U. europaeus*, other conditions influencing *M. gale* numbers also serve to influence soil pH. This seems quite likely, as the environment of *M. gale* is a very specific bog environment, which probably means that the soil is normally the same pH, consequentially no *M. gale* is found at higher pH"s because the environment it lives in does not have higher pH"s. *Betula* has very little trend, and I would not interpret it as significant; as with *C. vulgaris*, it was found (in young sapling form) all over the study area, in some places at surprisingly high numbers (e.g. about 50 in a quadrat). Clearly larger specimens do not survive, presumably eaten by ponies before achieving significant size (birch is a known part of the New Forest Pony diet **[10]**); so one could label *Betula* as an opportunistic species – if "predation" was removed I would predict that much of the area would quickly be covered by young birch trees. Another part explanation will be that with the younger areas there hasn"t been enough time for the birch to grow much larger, although this doesn"t explain the phenomenon in older areas.

Because I have shown that for some species it is possible for pH to



#### **Chart 3.7**

This shows that there is basically no influence between site age and soil pH, and because projected values are being used the influence of the pH7 anomaly (which was projected to just 3 quadrats) is reduced, which



**Chart 3.8:** influence of quadrat altitude (height above sea-level) on soil pH, pH7 excluded as it produced a noticeably stronger trend and is probably a procedural error.

is reassuring in case this anomaly is due to a measuring error. This is the first sign that one of my hypotheses is correct – I predicted that soil properties would be independent of time after burning, which was irrelevant for soil temperature but for pH it has been possible to prove that this is true. I will need to wait and see if the same is true for moisture and organic content. Another positive that can be drawn from this is that site age is not an unwanted factor influencing pH relationships.

#### **Chart 3.8**

There is clearly no meaningful relationship between soil pH and altitude, which, together with Chart 3.5, demonstrates that locational factors have little influence on pH, which unlike with soil temperature contradicts the third hypothesis. This lack of relationships makes those observed on Chart 3.6 all the more reliable and accurate.

#### Reducing Unwanted Influence

As I mentioned, there is very little unwanted influence with soil pH, as I could only find one graph that showed significant relationships. But as I also said, it may be necessary to focus on one particular pH when looking at other relationships involving plant numbers, as Chart 3.6 shows that some relationships could be otherwise offset by the influence of soil pH. This should not be too difficult, as around 60% of the pH recordings were 4.0, which judging by the lack of other relationships should cover most types of quadrat (age, moisture etc.).

#### Significance for Original Hypotheses

As discussed previously at the relevant points, relationships for pH have supported hypothesis 2 (Chart 3.7), but contradicted hypothesis 3 (Charts 3.5 and 3.8).

#### Soil Moisture

Out of all the soil lab-work (pH, moisture, organic content), I consider the soil moisture readings to be the most precise and reliable, as the recordings are on a continuous scale (unlike pH) and using the drying oven eliminated most potential human error (unlike organic content). Consequentially I will trust relationships seen here more than other factors such as organic content, which I believe was less accurate.



**Chart 3.9:** frequency intervals used were  $\geq 10$ , 20 etc. up to  $\geq 100$ . The box plot displays minimum and maximum values, inter-quartile range (the box), mean (blue) and median (black); no mode due to continuous nature of data. Green line = polynomial 2 trend line. Values taken from known rather than projected.

#### **Chart 3.9**

This chart displays classic normal distribution – the curve is almost completely symmetrical, as is the inter-quartile range around the median. The mean and median are practically the same – 50.46 and 50.63 respectively (this is why there is just one line, with two colours). If it weren"t for the single value below 10% the entire box plot would be close to symmetrical. And as is characteristic of normal distribution, at least 95% of the data is within 2 standard deviations (18.96) of the mean. To me this demonstrates the wide variation in types of site around my study area. Some of the upland parts had very

thin, dry soil and in some places no soil at all. But the lowland parts close to rivers had deeper, waterlogged soil. This distribution should allow for a full analysis of relationships with other factors as I have a full spread of data.

#### **Relationships**



**Chart 3.10:** influence of quadrat altitude (height above sea-level) on soil moisture using projected soil moisture values.

I have already seen that there is no relationship between soil pH and soil moisture. I will start by investigating a relationship that logic states should exist: that the lower the altitude (and hence the closer to water courses), the higher the soil moisture.

#### **Chart 3.10**

There appears to be no relationship between altitude and soil moisture, for which there may be a number of reasons. The weather conditions were always going to be an issue, because although I could not do any sampling when it was raining, I may have sampled the day after a rainstorm when the soil would contain much more moisture than the day before the rainstorm. It would be worth investigating any possible relationship somehow. And although water bodies would be generally found at lower altitudes, they are not all found at the same level; so a quadrat at around 90m may be closer to a river (and so have higher soil moisture) than a quadrat at 70m. It would be difficult to quantify the proximity to a water feature, not to mention unnecessarily time consuming.

Unfortunately, due to the sparseness of the soil samples tested, there was no way to investigate the influence that

sampling on different days has on soil moisture and still be confident that several other factors (e.g. being part of a marsh) have not influenced the moisture content instead. The moisture values are at least approximate, i.e. the recent rainfall levels could not change moisture content from 30% to 80%, so this is not very worrying, although there will definitely be some unknown influence.

#### **Chart 3.11**

Compared to some of the relationships I have observed, this could be significant. It seems from the trend line that the higher the moisture content, the lower the organic content. This is not really surprising, given that moisture and organic content are measured as proportions of the entire soil, so the higher one percentage is, the lower another percentage must be. The general trend appears to be a higher moisture content and a lower organic content, with one noticeable anomaly of 8% moisture and 70% organic, which can be explained by the tiny size of the sample (0.27g), which was not ideal. This is to be expected, as organic content is normally listed as around 5% of the total mass (obviously most of my readings were greater than that, probably because heathland soils are different to typical soil), while 50% is air and water in varying proportions.



**Chart 3.11:** relationship between organic content and moisture, using known values.

there was only a small number of tied values for number of species. 0.221 is once again within low confidence limits, but importantly it is above the predicted value for the lower limit of 75% (around 0.2). However it is lower than the value for 80% of 0.24, so I can be 75%

It is not worth running any statistical tests on this, as the relationship seen is not one that needs confirming, and has little significance to my hypotheses, although it will need to be taken into account when looking at other relationships.

#### **Chart 3.12**

An interesting relationship, there does not appear to be much correlation. It will be definitely worth running a Spearman"s Rank calculation on this to clarify, although I will only run the calculation for absolute values, as projected values will give too many tied values for number of species. The value returned was **0.221**, which was much higher than I expected, and the reliability is not too questionable as



**Chart 3.12:** influence of soil moisture on number of species in a quadrat, showing both absolute and projected soil moisture values.

confident that soil moisture content is directly proportional to the number of species in the corresponding quadrat.

When looking at some of my field observations this is not particularly surprising, as I found much greater diversity of species in the marshland areas in comparison to drier upland areas. It seems that in marshy areas, despite the domination by cover of *M. gale*, many other species can still coexist in the same quadrat; whereas in areas where *C. vulgaris* dominates, only 2 or 3 other species could coexist. The reason the confidence level is low is that this was a rather general trend I observed, and there were definitely several exceptions at both ends of the scale, such as dry areas with few *C. vulgaris* individuals but many other species; or a marsh area dominated by *M. caerulea*. This is relevant to hypothesis 3, in that soil properties may influence speed of recovery.



**Chart 3.13:** influence of soil moisture on a selection of plant species, using projected moisture values for quadrats with soil pH of 4. Specific points omitted, only trends shown.

#### **Chart 3.13**

As with when I drew a similar graph using soil pH in place of moisture, there are some plants that seem significantly influenced by soil moisture, and others that experience minimal influence. As I stated when analysing that relationship, I have limited this analysis to quadrats with soil pH4 values attributed to them (~60% of the entire data set) to eliminate the influence that pH may have.

I performed Spearman"s Rank calculations on these data sets. Originally I just used the absolute values so as to stay within small sample size as is conventionally used with Spearman's, but it was soon obvious that this gave completely different values to the correlations seen on the graph. So I have extended the calculations to projected values as well, which increases the number of tied values for soil moisture (projected values are rounded to the nearest 5), but not enough to significantly alter the correlation coefficient. Unfortunately *M. gale* and *Betula* had a value of 0 in many quadrats, which gave erroneous values for this calculation, but the other 3 plants had values that made more sense.

*C. vulgaris* returned a value of **0.00**, which although slightly different to the graph, reinforces the idea that there is no relationship

between soil moisture and the number of *C. vulgaris*. As I said with soil pH, this demonstrates the versatility of the species, which is what has allowed it to colonise the whole area and be present in all but one quadrat. *Agrostis* returned a value of **-0.25**, which with a sample size of 81 is 95% significant **[12]** . This further reinforces my impression that *Agrostis* is best adapted to less extreme values, as numbers are lower where soil
moisture is very high, although it does seem to be able to survive at low soil moistures. Chart 3.6 showed that *Agrostis* is also in greater numbers at more neutral pH. *U. europaeus* returned a value of **-0.18**, which by looking at the graph used above I would say is likely to be 90% significant. This is slightly surprising, as the graph shows *Agrostis* and *U, europaeus* as having similar trends; this difference could be real and the graph could be slightly wrong, but I think this is the influence of 38 quadrats containing no *U. europaeus* distorting the calculation. In any case this also shows that *U. europaeus* is best adapted to less extreme conditions similar to *Agrostis*; which explains why both species tended to be found in the upland areas, furthest away from any water bodies. As explained previously, the other two species were distorted too much by quadrats containing no individuals; for the record *M. gale* returned **0.60**, which actually seems too strong, and *Betula* returned **0.31**, which completely contradicts the graph.

Just looking at the trends on the graph, *M. gale* has a strong positive correlation between numbers and soil moisture. This is not surprising, given that this is a wetland plant, and I only ever saw it in waterlogged areas. This is such a strong relationship (seen not only from the graph but by just looking at the raw data) that I may use *M. gale* as an indicator of waterlogged/wetland quadrats. *Betula* shows practically no relationship, similar to what was seen with Chart 3.6, and again I would say that this is a good demonstration of the versatility of the plant, surviving in all sorts of conditions in equal numbers (at least in sapling form).

The similarities between Chart 3.6 and Chart 3.13 are striking, which is all the more surprising given that it appeared there was no relationship between soil pH and moisture content according to Chart 3.5. It may be that the categorised pH values meant that a trend that was actually present was not shown, or it may be that other environmental factors caused an indirect relationship that makes 3.6 and 3.13 similar.



- 37 - **Chart 3.14:** influence on site age on soil moisture. Values taken from a spreadsheet of averages for site ages where enough sites were available to take averages from (e.g. 0.5 years had to be omitted).

# **Chart 3.14**

I chose this format of analysis because it can distinguish several trends in one lineage, as it has done here. When I input the raw data and used a normal Excel trend line, the line was flat. Of course how to read into this relationship is another matter – why is there a large drop around 5/6 years, which has risen back again by 16 years?

This could possibly be a misleading trend caused by similar locations of all sites of a particular age. To investigate this I have drawn **Figure 3.1**, which shows the locations of the sites in question. This map very effectively disproves that idea, as it shows that not only are areas of the same age spread over the entire of the area (so under differing conditions), but also that they have the full range of soil moisture between them. The only exception to this are

the 25 year old sites, which are all located in the same area and have a more restricted range of soil moisture.

I do not think this means I should discount 25 year old sites from this analysis, because it seemed that the age of these sites (which is actually a minimum of 25 years remember) had resulted in the conditions being uniform even in parts where proximity to water should have logically resulted in variation from the norm. It seems that over the long period of time *C. vulgaris* had come to dominate (this will be discussed later) and that soil conditions had changed as a result. I would predict that if there was a site of this age on another area it would actually be very similar despite the different location. This will all be discussed in more detail at the relevant section.



areas were discounted from the age averages; bold text denotes soil moisture/%.<br>- סכ **Figure 3.1:** a locational perspective of site age and soil moisture content. Black

I believe that vegetation has a significant role to play in the changes in soil moisture, although even when using averages locational factors must have had some effect. As an area ages, the vegetation will stabilise the soil moisture level, and this I think is a significant conclusion that can be drawn.

I have contradicted hypothesis 1 somewhat, by highlighting that although the vegetation starts off diverse, most areas will become dominated by *C. vulgaris*, thus indicating that the proportions of plants will change over time since burning; this cannot be conclusively discussed until proper relationships are investigated. In the same stroke, it seems that hypothesis 2 could also be wrong in some cases. And looking at this map supports hypothesis 3, in that the clustering of similar soil moisture values indicates that locational factors influence soil properties.

## Reducing Unwanted Influence

Given the influence of soil moisture on the number of plants and number of species, it may be necessary to distinguish between waterlogged areas and drier areas. I will separate analysis into two categories – quadrats where *M. gale* is present and those where it is not, as *M. gale* is present in all waterlogged areas and absent anywhere else so is a good indicator. I do not need to account for the relationship between organic and moisture content as this is to be expected anyway.

## Relevance to Original Hypotheses

Chart 3.12 has given the first sign that soil conditions will influence the speed of recovery (hypothesis 3), as waterlogged areas tend to have more species in them. Chart 3.14 has contradicted hypothesis 2, by showing that soil conditions may increase in stability as an area gets older. So in terms of the hypotheses, soil moisture has contradicted what was seen with soil pH, although I think that perhaps soil pH trends would agree with soil moisture if measurement methods were improved.

# Soil Organic Content

I am not particularly confident about measurements of organic content, as I discovered at one point that if the Bunsen flame was positioned even slightly off the centre of the crucible then the soil would not burn effectively. I repeated some of the most noticeably incorrect measurements but I am still not sure if my readings are representative of the true organic content.



from known rather than projected. Anomalous value of over 70% was excluded because it was Chart 3.15: frequency intervals used were ≤10, 20 etc. up to 60%. The box plot displays content (or the relationship may work the other way minimum and maximum values, inter-quartile range (the box), mean (blue) and median (black); no mode due to continuous nature of data. Green line = polynomial 2 trend line. Values taken not representative of the quadrat.

## **Chart 3.15**

Having excluded the very high value anomaly, this distribution doesn"t look extremely far off normal, although it doesn"t really fit the criteria very well. The mode and median are about 4% apart and only the left hand side of the graph is of typical shape – the right hand side being far more spread out. This also means that 95% of the data is not within 2 standard deviations (STDEV =  $13.86$ ) of the mean.

I believe that part of the explanation for this is the inaccuracies in measurement, because logically if soil moisture displayed a good normal distribution then organic content should do the same.

I would be very cautious about accepting any relationships that show up with organic content as a result of the dubious nature of the results. Nevertheless I should investigate various relationships briefly so I can follow up any significant trends that arise. The first prediction that I can make is that certain plants may influence soil organic





**Chart 3.16:** influence of soil organic content on a selection of plants. Figures are from projected values, from quadrats without *M. gale* and all pH4. Specific points omitted, only trends shown. 70% anomaly ignored.

# **Chart 3.16**

These relationships are interesting, I was hoping to do the same for common wetland plants in quadrats where *M. gale* was present, but there were not enough quadrats to give accurate trends. As is normal, I shall run Spearman"s Rank calculations on each plant before drawing any conclusions. The predicted critical value for 75% confidence and 62 degrees of freedom is around 0.17. I shall run through all plants before finding reasons for any relationships because I am not sure whether organic content influences plant numbers or the other way round.

*C. vulgaris*, as is seen on the graph, returned the very low value of **0.037**. *Agrostis*, which appears to be the strongest relationship on the graph, gave the value of **0.143**, which is still lower than the lowest acceptable critical value. *U. europaeus* gave the value of **-0.063**, which backs up the graph. *Betula* had too many 0

values to give a reliable correlation co-efficient, which was **0.130** – completely different to the graph. *M. caerulea*, which is the other major trend, gave a very surprising value of **0.130** also, except this time it seems to be a legitimate value; the only explanation I can find for the opposition of the trend on the graph is several anomalously high plant number readings, which would greatly influence a trend line but not influence a Spearman"s Rank co-efficient.

So although none of the values were higher than the critical value, I feel there will still be some small relationship. Both the noticeable relationships were grasses, and if the anomalies are discounted for *M. caerulea* then both are positive with a similar strength. Even when the ability of a single grass plant to grow multiple blades is taken into account, grass plants will still produce higher root densities than many other plants such as heathers and bracken (*P. aquilinum*). So a quadrat with more grass will result in a higher soil organic content from the increased root density. This seems like a reasonable explanation for the relationship.

# **Chart 3.17**

These trends look surprisingly significant, and worth running a Spearman"s Rank calculation on. Admittedly because the altitude values are



**Chart 3.17:** influence of altitude on soil organic content, using known rather than projected values. 70% anomaly ignored.

larger data set increases accuracy. The value returned for this was **0.378**, which for 81 degrees of freedom is well above the critical value for 99.9% significance. Such high significance levels for both organic content and *Agrostis* numbers in relation to altitude cement the relationship between *Agrostis* numbers and organic content. This relationship may end up providing explanations for various other relationships with organic content.

The relationship supports hypothesis 3, as the locational factor (altitude) has indirectly influenced soil organic content. This is also the first piece of evidence of a plant directly influencing another factor.

estimated to the nearest 5m, there will be some ties, but these will be few enough for the result to still be viable. I will run the calculation on the trend including *M. gale*, because both trends are similar and this one has slightly more data to use. The result is equally surprising – **0.375**, which is above the critical value of 0.369 for 29 degrees of freedom at 95% confidence, making this among the most significant (and reliable enough) correlations so far. As I said before, I cannot be sure that this relationship really exists, but at this level of confidence I can be sure that there would still be a relationship (perhaps weaker) if the measuring technique were more accurate.

So I must find an explanation for this unexpected relationship. Having seen the previous relationship between grasses and organic content, I will perform a quick Spearman's Rank calculation on the relationship between *Agrostis* and altitude; I will do this for *all* pH4 quadrats, as a



- 41 - **Chart 3.18:** influence of soil organic content on # species in quadrats of pH4 and using projected values. 70% anomaly ignored.

## **Chart 3.18**

This trend also looks as if it could be significant, and with a Spearman"s Rank value of **-0.288** at 76 degrees of freedom it is *just* 99% significant. The most likely explanation is, as I predicted, that as numbers of *Agrostis* increase, thus increasing organic content, then the numbers of other species decrease. If this is the main/only reason for the relationship then there is no relation to the original hypotheses, although it is important as giving evidence for the way that plants can influence soil properties.



**Chart 3.19:** influence of site age on both soil organic content and numbers of *Agrostis spp*. Values used are averages for each site age where enough sites were available to take averages from.

#### Relevance to Original Hypotheses

### **Chart 3.19**

I included *Agrostis* numbers in this because I wanted to see whether the apparently random fluctuations were mainly caused by this variable. Up to 16 years this could be said to be at least some of the reason, as both curves behave in a similar way, but then between 16 and 25 years the trends go in reverse directions.

I have noticed in other situations that the 25 [plus] year sites have been different to all others, presumably because they have had much more time to stabilise. Unfortunately due to the low sample numbers for soil and the potential inaccuracies in measuring organic content, I do not believe that I should read too much into the influence of site age. So for this study I can say that site age has little influence on soil organic content, supporting hypothesis 2.

### Reducing Unwanted Influence

It seems that the only noticeable relationship I could find was with numbers of grass species. There may be other relationships but I would need to improve my data collection method to get anything more reliable. Therefore there is no need to allow for this relationship because I would really be allowing for numbers of certain species, which are taken to be variable and influenced by several other factors.

I have been able to find support for hypothesis 2 in Chart 3.19, but in my opinion it is actually more significant that I have found evidence that a plant can influence soil properties directly, as has been seen from analysis from charts 3.16, 3.17 and 3.18. This is not part of my original hypotheses, but may have further consequences for other analyses.

### Site Age and Plants

Having worked out all the background influences that may cloud this part of the study, I am ready to proceed with the most relevant part of the study – investigating the various influences that site age has on numbers and distribution of plant species and individuals. I will not be analysing waterlogged quadrats, as they have now been separated to control variables, but there are not enough waterlogged quadrats to allow a reliable independent analysis. I will start with a simple analysis of the influence of site age on the number of species present in quadrats.



**Chart 3.20:** uses data from ages with enough sites to be reliable (as is used in age averages). All quadrats are pH4 and *M. gale* is absent.

### **Chart 3.20**

The restriction of quadrats in this case seems to have been particularly useful, because it has left me with a single type of environment to analyse trends from. The most striking example is sites of age 16.5 years, where the type of habitat varied greatly from site to site, with Site 14 even being semi-wooded. By restricting to non-waterlogged soils with a pH of 4, I have removed these sites and have been left with quadrats of a more typical heathland habitat.

Although it is clear to me that this relationship is real, I will run a Spearman"s Rank calculation on it to see how strong the relationship is. I will not ignore the relationship if it is not said to be significant, because this may be down to tied site age ranks, and this was one of the few relationships that was obvious enough for me to notice it in the field. The value returned was **- 0.419**, which conforms to the graph and is 99.9% significant at 57 degrees of freedom (critical value 0.331). Even when the influence of tied age values is taken into account, this is more than enough to show that the correlation is a strong one.

This is good evidence of secondary succession in action, with initial opportunism – indicated by both the high numbers of

species and the greater range – followed by stabilisation of just a few species. I would predict from this evidence that most typical heathland areas would take a similar path to what is seen here. This discovery contradicts hypothesis 1, where I predicted that the proportions of plants would remain reasonably similar after burning; this was based on the fact that I predicted the "recovery period" to be less than 4 years in length, but in fact it seems that stabilisation takes most of the lifetime of the site (remember than 16.5 year old sites were scheduled for burning, and 25 year old sites are an exception). The next step is to find out what plants are the ones that survive which ones die off after recovery.



## **Charts 3.21 a-e**

First of all it is clear that there are two particularly significant points on this graph – 5.5 years and 16.5 years. At these points many of the curves peak or trough, indicating that there is something significant about them; this significance is either generated by the nature of the data and how it was measured and analysed, or these are fundamental points about secondary succession in typical heathland. I am particularly interested in 16.5 years because this is the point at which most heath areas are burnt, and according to Article 3 from the introduction **[9]** is the point after which *C. vulgaris* "stands" will pass into degenerate phase.

There is significant evidence that the changes around 5.5 years have been brought about by an unusually high number of "wetter" quadrats than is found at other sites. These were not waterlogged but merely supported more hydrophilic species such as *E. cinerea* or *M. caerulea* and less mesophilic species such as *Agrostis*. Something that could have made 16.5 years significant is the fact that by selecting pH4 quadrats without *M. gale* I have eliminated much of the 16.5 year quadrats, leaving behind those of typical heathland variety. This makes the graphs less reliable, but it is unlikely to be a coincidence that this was one of if not the most heather dominated site in the area (excluding the 3 waterlogged quadrats), which I would hypothesise is because this is the point where heather species have reached the peak of their domination, just before they start to slip into degenerate phase. Another argument for this being a real occurrence rather than something generated by the data is that the latter half of the graph makes sense with the data as it is. Ultimately I will not know if this is genuine or not without an extension to the study over many sites of each age and under similar conditions.

Assuming that the point at 16.5 years is genuine, then this is evidence of the sort of timeline that Article 3 described. After the area has developed and many opportunistic species have re-colonised, the heather (mostly *C. vulgaris*) begins to dominate as it develops, which is why so many plants have a downturn in numbers at this point, while *C. vulgaris* and to a lesser extent *E. cinerea* (interestingly *E. tetralix* is more like the other plants) have an upturn. The areas of 25 years or older have not been integrated into the current burn cycle, so they represent the degenerate phase of *C. vulgaris*, where the heather is no longer quite as competitive as it once was, allowing other species to encroach. Notable examples of this are *P. aquilinum*, *V. myrtillus* and *I. aquifolium*. Interestingly this trend does not extend significantly to grasses, probably because the heather, however less competitive, still covers most of the ground space, so species that grow in a sort of "mat" do not stand much chance of re-colonisation.

In theory, if the area is left unmanaged for even longer the heather will degenerate further, and slower-growing species, i.e. trees, will be able to grow to a size where they can survive long-term. This is the point where primary succession could be said to take over from secondary, as the heathland has fully recovered from burning and now proceeds down the natural path of primary succession.

This particular section would have been far more accurate under more controlled conditions, with a less sporadic distribution of ages. It is particularly annoying that for the first 3 years I had only one site, representing 0.5 years. Although what I saw on that site was interesting, it cannot be effectively analysed as I have nothing even close as a reference point.

As for my hypotheses, this very clearly contradicts hypothesis 1, as the proportions of plants change quite dramatically over the recovery period. It is also significant for hypothesis 3 as it shows that the recovery period cannot really be quantified if plant proportions change over time. I was planning on defining this as the age at which plant proportions stop changing, but for many reasons this will not be possible – for one thing I would require far more sites, which would need to be of all ages and be under similar conditions otherwise for comparison. But to see how soil conditions affect speed of recovery I would then need another set under different conditions.

Unlike soil conditions, there are not so many relationships I can look at, these were the main ones that have significance to my study.

# **Conclusions**

First of all, I have found that it is very difficult to control all variables in fieldwork data, it would require a much larger study than I have the time and resources for. I have had to investigate many relationships in order to account for the viability of some variables and to reduce any unwanted influence in various places. Outside of actually testing my hypotheses I have observed interesting trends and phenomena, most significantly that in some cases plants can directly influence soil properties rather than the other way round.

## **Hypothesis 1 – The proportions of different plants will remain reasonably similar throughout the recovery period after burning.**

I had anticipated that after a very short rebound period this hypothesis would turn out to be true. But in fact Charts 3.20 and 3.21 a-e have shown that this is not the case, as the rebound period appears to last at least up to the time that an area is normally burnt. After this period the area begins to de-generate and undergo primary succession, meaning that plant proportions will continue to change but probably more slowly. So in fact there doesn"t appear to be any time where the proportions of plants stay the same. I can categorically state that this hypothesis should be rejected.

## **Hypothesis 2 – The soil properties will remain largely the same independent of the time after burning.**

Although with Chart 3.14 I claimed to have found some relationship, I am not so sure having finished my data interpretation. There is no conclusive proof that it was site age causing these variations, as they appeared to be fairly random. Given I was even looking at averages and the variations were still large, I would predict that something to do with the sites of each age was having an influence, but I cannot tell what. So this renders the hypothesis half correct, as the soil properties appear to be independent of time after burning, but they do not remain the same over the time period. Although if the wording itself is followed this hypothesis should be rejected, as soil properties vary a lot, the principle should be accepted, as it has nothing to do with time after burning.

## **Hypothesis 3 – Locational factors will influence soil properties, which in turn will influence the speed of recovery.**

This was in fact the hypothesis that I devoted the most time to, although indirectly because it was often while investigating unwanted relationships that needed cancelling out. The second half of the hypothesis has turned out to be impossible to investigate, as I found that there was no way of quantifying speed of recovery within the bounds of my study (see above). The first half was still possible to investigate, though. The only chart supporting this part was 3.1; with evidence against present in 3.5, 3.8, and 3.10. One could argue for further support from organic content, but this was mainly down to *Agrostis* numbers. If this hypothesis is extended to the influence on individual and species numbers (which would affect speed of recovery), then there is support for this part in charts 3.6, 3.12 and 3.13; evidence against was given in 3.3. Again more support could be found in organic content, but in this case the relationship was reversed. Although there is no one piece of evidence, I think this hypothesis should be accepted, as it is clear that on occasions locational factors influence soil properties, and that if the study were larger and more precise one could predict that these would influence speed of recovery because they have influence on plant numbers.

### Environmental Significance

There is much emphasis on the environmental importance and value of heathland habitat, as shown by the various states of protection they are under. Investigation of hypothesis 1 has shown that burning is required periodically to prevent degeneration, primary succession and ultimately loss of the classic habitat. Burning also appears to present opportunities for many species during the early stages of recovery (under 10 years), which would not be so common if the heathland was left to naturally develop into woodland. Hypothesis 2 has shown that burning itself does not cause long term damage to the area as the soil conditions are not affected by burning; this allows quick recovery afterwards. Looking at this evidence, it appears that burning is a fully justified method of maintaining the habitat, and of course to some extent it replicates natural conditions, where fires may have occasionally swept an area.

Hypothesis 3 had shown that some areas may be more suitable for this management than others, as some sites such as waterlogged areas appear to behave in different ways to the heathland that needs to be preserved. Some parts may not have required burning before, but were burnt nonetheless; unfortunately I could not investigate this in detail because waterlogged habitats (the most prominent example) were few in number, so did not display enough variety to be investigated.

# Difficulties Encountered

## Field work

The first major difficulty encountered was the weather – it was near impossible to perform a study in the rain because the equipment was not as easy to use in damp conditions and it was very difficult to write or even keep the paper intact. Another problem caused by the weather was altering soil conditions from day to day; this was of course particularly significant for soil moisture, although I still seem to have some meaningful results. It would be difficult to avoid the influence of weather conditions, although I should have anticipated that this would be a problem.

In some places it was difficult to collect soil samples or even insert the soil thermometer, both because the soil was too thin (sometimes hardly there) and other times because the soil was held together very tightly with root networks. This was not a major problem but definitely a setback. The height of bracken was a problem in several areas, as this hindered movement and soil collection, as well as making estimation of other plant species more difficult. The height of bracken also presented a slight health risk in the form of ticks, although the precaution of wearing full body cover meant that none bit me. I am glad that I conducted a pilot study, as I was able to modify my method accordingly to prevent any larger errors in the field.

Animals were not a major problem, but dogs got in the way occasionally by investigating. Ponies and cattle moving through the area sometimes meant I had to wait to set out a quadrat in the space I had designated for it, and because the pony drift was happening at the time of my sampling there were times when I had to at least make my presence known to already alarmed ponies.

The only environmental impact that I may have had was in trampling plants, some of which do not recover easily, but this was unavoidable and I did my best to not unnecessarily trample any plants, particularly fragile ones. Any disturbance I caused to an area would be too temporary to cause any impact, and I was careful not to litter of leave food anywhere.

## Lab work

Obviously not being able to sample all the soil was the biggest problem I faced (especially having collected all the samples). This has also made my data more difficult to analyse (see below). Ideally I would have had the time and resources to sample all the soil, but even assuming this was impossible I should have investigated the lab work earlier, as I would have then known that I would not be able to analyse every sample. This would have meant that I could have carefully selected which samples I should take to be representative of the area, which would have also saved time. As it was I chose the sites in a hurry, leaving some "holes" in my data that had to be estimated by looking at similar quadrats not as close by.

Burning organic content also proved to be difficult, as I found that if the flame was not directly beneath the crucible the contents would not burn, with very little margin of error. This meant that I had to repeat a high proportion of the analyses on my samples to get reliable results. This error would have been eliminated if I"d had access to a kiln or furnace, which I could have left at a high temperature for a long period of time similar to what I did when measuring moisture content, which produced far more accurate results.

By looking at the distribution of pH, I came to the conclusion that the measuring method is flawed. pH is put into set categories according to colour, but this method is very generalised and only really useful for comparing diverse soils against one and other. But most of my soils were recorded as pH4.0, which is the lowest on the scale. This indicates two things, one is that I would need a scale that went lower than pH4.0, and another is that I need a more precise method for measuring because most soils got the same value due to the heavily categorised system. There would be several methods for improvement, the easiest of which would be to find an indicator with a more limited range, as this system effectively uses universal indicator. Other methods include titrations and pH probes, both of which are time consuming and can be temperamental. So in a future study I would look for or devise a special kit for acid heathlands.

There were few safety issues with the lab-work as none of the chemicals or equipment I was using were particularly hazardous, although I did have to be careful about what was going on around me in the lab. I will have caused very little environmental impact because I was using very small volumes of chemical.

## Data Analysis

Problems that I did not experience directly, but indirectly at a later stage, have been put in this category. Certainly the wide range of sites that I was working with has limited the potential of my study, even with 130 quadrats. This variety meant that once many variables were cancelled out the sample size was much smaller than originally, which decreased reliability. Also having a non-even spread of site ages to study meant that I could only draw conclusions about some ages – those with enough quadrats to analyse. Having more quadrats from the first few years would have helped enormously, as I only had one pre-3.5 year site, which meant that I could not analyse it because it was on its own and I had nothing to compare it to.

Testing my hypotheses would have required a wide spread of site ages in sites that were otherwise under conditions similar to each other, and then to test hypothesis 2 I would need another set under a different set of conditions. This could possibly be achieved if I was able to travel further and more often, finding the right combination by looking across a wider range of the New Forest, as the Forestry Commission manage all the heathland, of which there is a lot.

This was the main limitation, but it manifested itself in several different forms and making relationships difficult to identify in some cases.

The sparseness of analysed soils created problems later when I tried to find relationships between soil and other factors, because there was not always enough data. This is particularly annoying because I tried to avoid this by studying many quadrats but this has now been limited by the amount of soil samples I have been able to analyse.

## Other Sources of Error

Any piece of equipment will produce error, but thankfully I did not use much equipment to acquire data. I expect the soil thermometer had quite a high percentage error, as it is a cheap graduated piece of equipment, and graduated equipment is normally quite inaccurate, as is cheap equipment – in this case the alcohol used in the thermometer may not be a particularly good indicator of temperature. I still think that the

thermometer was accurate enough, and it produced predictable relationships (such as soil temperature vs. time of day). The balances used for weighing soil samples went to 2 decimal places, which is enough to eliminate any significant error that would actually influence my data and any trends within it, so there would be no need to go more precise.

### **Improvements**

So the most significant improvement I would like would be to have a much larger range, where I could pick and choose which sites I wanted to use rather than being forced to use all the sites in a small area. As I have said, this would allow me to have a range of ages and control all other factors, but having many areas would also give flexibility to set up small studies into other phenomena, such as how the recovery in waterlogged areas differs.

An obvious improvement, which I consider to be an improvement rather than a correction to my method because it is more of a stretch, would be to analyse all soil samples. This would increase the accuracy when studying some of the relationships considerably and having more quadrats with full data would also increase the flexibility of the study.

I would like to have been able to measure some other soil properties, given the equipment to do so. One of the studies I looked at in the introduction measured various ion concentrations (e.g.  $Mg^{2+}$ ). This would have been useful because it seemed with this study I was obliged to investigate any possible relationship in case it was the main factor influencing another variable; so with more variables I would be more likely to discover the main factors influencing particular variables. This would require more expensive equipment than what I had available to me.

Knowing now which species are the best to use in analyses, I could streamline my study by ignoring exact numbers of other species and just recording their presence. This would save much time and effort but requires the benefit of hindsight to look at which organisms are "indicator" organisms.

### Extensions

Although I was using a control area, it was still in a sense managed to some degree because it displayed characteristics of being burnt further back in time, and the same "artificial" wildlife was present. What I would like to look at is how this heathland differed from completely natural heathland, such as that resulting from sand dune succession of the Isle of Purbeck. Here I could also study how heathland fits into pure uninterrupted primary succession and how much of the differences are down to this sort of succession.

As mentioned briefly above, with enough data on the relevant areas I could study how recovery differs in waterlogged parts of the heathland, which I could not do this time due to extreme lack of data. But with more areas to choose from I could deliberately select waterlogged quadrats for one section of the study; this would be an interesting investigation as are clearly a lot of factors that differ in waterlogged quadrats, resulting in a completely different system.

# Uses and Applications of the Study

As discussed at the end of the interpretation, I have made a contribution to proving that burning of heathland is a justified management method for retaining this sort of habitat, and that burning should happen in the mid-teens (17 years in the case of this area). Given the amount of data I collected on plant numbers, there may be other applications for the raw data from this investigation, although it should be noted that although the replicate study has proven my estimation technique to be consistent, it may not indicate the real number of plants in the quadrat so should probably not be compared to others" data without the % mean calculation.

Ultimately there have been too many problems with my study to give any precise applications for the findings, as they are currently not reliable enough. If some of the corrections and improvements were followed then I might be able to find more meaning in the data. Currently it can only be used to back up theories/concepts rather than find new ones.

- 1. Windows Live Maps [\(www.maps.live.com\)](http://www.maps.live.com/) *Aerial photography of study area. Larger scale maps indicating location of study area.*
- 2. Forestry commission Dave Morris *Heath management maps of study area. Information on cut & burn program.*
- 3. Southampton Orienteering Club & Ordnance Survey *1985 1:15,000 orienteering map of study area. 2007 1:10,000 orienteering map of study area (from Kevin Bracher).*
- 4. Joint Nature Conservation Committee website (www.incc.gov.uk) *Information on New Forest conservation statuses (Ramsar, SAC, SPA).*
- 5. Key to Plants Common on Moorlands by Cory Jones (Field Studies Council) *Identifying plants in the field.*
- 6. Wild Flowers of Britain & Northwest Europe by Christopher Grey-Wilson (Dorling Kindersley) *Identifying* Hypericum elodes *(Marsh St. John's-wort).*
- 7. A study of the restoration of heathland on successional sites: changes in vegetation & soil chemical properties by Mitchell, Marrs, Le Duc, Auld (Journal of Applied Ecology, Volume 36 Issue 5 Page 770-783, October 1999) [\(http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1046/j.1365-2664.1999.00443.x\)](http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1046/j.1365-2664.1999.00443.x) *Analysing abstract for my introduction.*
- 8. Grazing of lowland heath in England : Management methods and their effects on heathland vegetation by Bullock & Pakeman. (Biological conservation, 1997, vol. 79,  $n^{\circ}$ 1, pp. 1-13 (1 p.1/4)) [\(http://cat.inist.fr/?aModele=afficheN&cpsidt=2547500\)](http://cat.inist.fr/?aModele=afficheN&cpsidt=2547500) *Analysing abstract for my introduction.*
- 9. Community dynamics in relation to management of heathland vegetation in Scotland by Gimingham, Hobbs, Mallik. (Springer Netherlands, p149-155) [\(http://www.springerlink.com/content/x34w71l7134x5201/\)](http://www.springerlink.com/content/x34w71l7134x5201/) *Analysing abstract for my introduction.*
- 10. UK Agriculture [\(http://www.ukagriculture.com/conservation/integrating\\_conservation\\_grazing.cfm\)](http://www.ukagriculture.com/conservation/integrating_conservation_grazing.cfm) *Do New Forest Ponies eat birch?*
- 11. OCR Maths Statistics Data Sheet *Extensive Spearman's Rank critical values table.*
- 12. Barcelona Field Studies Centre [\(http://geographyfieldwork.com/SpearmansRank.htm\)](http://geographyfieldwork.com/SpearmansRank.htm) *Graph for predicting Spearman's Rank with higher sample sizes.*
- 1. Rachel Hughes and Mike Farrington (Brockenhurst College) *Advice and support for coursework.*
- 2. Dave Morris (Forestry Commission) *Giving time for two meetings, verbal information and map resources.*
- 3. Berry Stone (Forestry Commission) *Putting me in contact with Dave Morris*
- 4. Isabel Yeo and Katie Marshall *Help on some of fieldwork, particularly in identifying species that I could not.*
- 5. Dell Computers, Microsoft Office and Macromedia Flash *Enabling me to process, publish and print my project.*

# **1. Appendix I (55-59):**

5 different maps of the area, serving different purposes.

**2. Appendix II (60-119):**

Raw data (61-85), % mean data (86-106) and soil data (108-119).

**3. Appendix III (120-154):**

22 Spearman"s Rank calculations, corresponding to various parts of the interpretation section.

**4. Appendix IV (155):**

A short log of the weather conditions on sampling days.



**Aerial Photograph**



# **2007 Orienteering Map**

Orange and cream indicate open

 White indicates forested areas. Green indicates thick vegetation. Blue indicates water (dashed areas are marshes).

 Brown lines are contours of other topographical features.



# **Forestry Commission Map**

Contains details of management sites and when they were last burnt. Also contains the numbers that I assigned to each site.



**Details of quadrat placement**



**Numbers and locations of each quadrat after sampling**

- $\circ$  In the raw data and % mean sections, known soil data is shown as bold, projected data is grey, and on the rare occasion when data had to be projected from an unintended quadrat the values are underlined.
- o The raw data section is just the data as I recorded it.
- $\circ$  The % mean section is similar but with the % mean calculation performed on all plant numbers, thus also enabling more central tendency calculations to be worked.
- o The soil spreadsheet contains the raw data and subsequent calculations for soil moisture and organic content. It contains all other information on quadrats the soil of which was sampled – raw data first and then % mean below that.
- o The anomaly part of the soil section indicates where error in burning off the organic content necessitated repeating the experiment.
- o The central tendency calculations ignore values of 0.


























































































Τ

┯

T



## Martin Yeo **Investigation into How Time After Burning Influences Flora Biodiversity in Managed Heathland Appendix II - Soil**



## Martin Yeo **Investigation into How Time After Burning Influences Flora Biodiversity in Managed Heathland Appendix II - Soil**



























































































- **Day 1 (13/08/2007) –** Fine, dry weather during a dry spell.
- **Day 2 (15/08/2007) –** Cool, damp weather following torrential rain the previous day.
- **Day 3 (17/08/2007) –** Cool, dry weather during a time of occasional showers.
- **Day 4 (21/08/2007) –** Cool, dry weather during a time of occasional showers.
- **Day 5 (02/09/2007) –** Warm & windy during a dry period.
- **Day 6 (04/09/2007) –** Hot, dry weather during a dry period.
- **Day 7 (05/09/2007) –** Hot, dry weather during a dry period.
- **Day 8 (07/09/2007) –** Hot, dry weather during a dry period.
- **Day 9 (22/09/2007) –** Cool, humid weather during a dry period.
- **Day 10 (23/09/2007) –** Humid weather just before a day of heavy rain.