



Original thinking... applied



Bracken Control Case Studies

Cutting: Hand-held Equipment



This is a summary of the information that has been kindly provided by people with current experience of controlling bracken using hand pulling and whipping in different parts of the UK. It provides some real-world experience to supplement the preliminary guidance about each control method.

The detail is limited by the amount of information available. More case study

information is welcomed to allow us to add to the guidance. Please email details to: **Bracken@naturalengland.org.uk**

Where contributors have given their permission to share the information they provided, this can be accessed via the link at the end of the document.

Highlights

- There are a wide variety of hand tools available from sickles, scythes and hand slashers (a cutting blade on the end of a handle) to petrol powered strimmers.
 - Cutting is an effective means of bracken control when carried out over consecutive years.
 - The more cuts each year, the better the results. At least two cuts per year are required to achieve some progress.
 - If undertaking three cuts, these should be carried out in mid-June, mid-July and mid-August.
 - Work with a hand slasher is easier if carried out early in the season, starting in May, as the bracken stems are soft at this stage of development.
 - If resources are only available for one cut, this should be done at the end of the bracken growing the season.
 - After 2-3 years of multiple cuts each year, the fronds will become sparser and stunted.
 - Until late-August, cutting can trigger the development of new fronds from the rhizomes, depleting this energy store.
 - The build-up of bracken litter over several years causes most damage to the understorey vegetation.
 - Removal of bracken litter is not necessary, if cutting early in the season, as the soft material soon disappears. Later in the season, the volume of the cut material increases and, if it is possible, there may be benefits from removing the litter which enable the underlying vegetation to regrow.
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Case Studies

Birkrigg Common Cumbria Historic England

Strimmer and hand slashers

Volunteers have been managing bracken on this common, which has sensitive archaeology, using hand slashers and strimmers. There has been a reduction in bracken growth around the monuments in recent years.

Moelyci Farm Gwynedd Farmer led

Scythe

The aim was to remove encroaching bracken from the waxcap-rich and flower-rich turf surviving underneath. A range of control methods were trialled, but scythes were the preferred option, followed by hand pulling as the fronds became sparser.

Effgill Farm Dumfries & Galloway Farmer led

Scythe

As part of filming for the Farm Advisory Service of the Scottish Agricultural College, a demonstration was undertaken of using a scythe to expose a rock hidden in dense bracken. The rock would be a hazard to any vehicle towing bracken control equipment.

Ayton Banks Gribdale North York Moors National Park

Strimmer and slashers

Using hand slashers and powered strimmers, bracken was controlled to facilitate tree planting.

Further Information

Click on the link(s) below for the original source of information and further details.

- [Birkrigg Common, Cumbria Case Study Link](#)
 - [Moelyci Farm, Gwynedd Case Study Link](#)
 - [Effgill Farm, Dumfries & Galloway Case Study Link](#)
 - [Historic Environment Scotland \(HES\) Site Case Study Link](#)
 - [Ayton Banks, Gribdale, North York Moors Case Study Link](#)
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