

Archaeological dig to assess damage from illegal metal detecting at Iron age forts

Illegal metal detectors risk destroying vital clues into prehistoric life at Edinburgh's Holyrood Park, experts have warned.

Heritage bosses in the capital are proposing a new project to assess the impact caused by enthusiasts trampling over the protect sites.

If approved digging will get under way at the site of Iron Age hill forts dotted around the park to identify "areas of vulnerability," with the threat of footpath erosion also set to be examined.

The defences were built around 3,000 years ago on Salisbury Crags, Samson's Ribs, Arthur's Seat and Dunsapie Crag by the Votadini Celtic tribe.

It's hoped the project will increase understanding of "archaeological features, and the risk from erosion, and to inform strategies for protection, while continuing to allow public access".

Historic Environment Scotland (HES), which manages Holyrood Park, says illegal metal detecting at at archaeological sites has potential to cause them "irreparable damage" and "rob us of our history".

In 2022 detectorists were warned against turning up in search

of artefacts without permission after a “surge” of suspected incidents, which in some cases saw areas of turf stolen from Whinny Hill.

HES are “minded to grant consent” for AOC Archaeology Group’s bid to excavate five trenches at Dunsapie Fort, Crow Hill, Samson’s Ribs and Salisbury Crags.

However, it said as the proposed works “are not considered the minimum necessary consistent with conserving the cultural significance of the monument” they would also need approval from Scottish Ministers.

A report by the Scottish Government said: “Together, the trenches would affect a very small fraction of the known archaeological resource within the park.

“They are proposed and designed to establish areas of good archaeological survival and areas of vulnerability in relation to identified threats, including footpath erosion and illegal metal detecting.

“The assessment works are part of a wider strategy to provide new information about the archaeology of the park for the purposes of management and public interpretation, and as part of a training initiative partnership with Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and the University of Edinburgh.

“Because the trenches are relatively small, well-targeted, and would not involve full excavation of the features they seek to investigate, HES consider that any impact on the overall cultural significance of the monument is likely to be very small.

“The work has been designed to ensure that impacts on the monument are limited. HES consider that the project can be expected to deliver important public benefits, including increasing understanding of archaeological features, and the risk from erosion, and to inform strategies for protection,

while continuing to allow public access.”

AOC Archaeology Group were approached for comment.

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter