








































# Symbols Key

	Parking		Picnic Site		Fishing		Bus stop
	Information Centre		Walks/Trails		Theme/ Pleasure Park		Train station
	Visitor Centre		Cycle Trail		Cathedral/ Abbey		Stile
	Public Convenience		Horse Riding		Museum		Viewpoint
	Forestry Commission		Public House		Castle/ Fort		Gate
	Public Telephone		Viewpoint		Building of Historic Interest		Hazards/ Take care
	Camp Site		Country Park		English Heritage		
	Caravan Site		Garden		National Trust		
	Camp/Caravan Site		Nature Reserve		Other Tourist Feature		
	Leisure Centre		Water Activities		High Weald Landscape Trail		
	Golf Course		Slipway		Interesting feature		

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# Chapter 6: Rolvenden to Flackley Ash, 6.1



## A Changing Landscape

You begin this section by walking into the attractive market town of Tenterden, then through pasture and along a steep wooded valley to Small Hythe, a quiet village that was once a thriving medieval port. From Small Hythe you cross onto the Isle of Oxney, now landlocked but still higher than the surrounding marshes, and then over the River Rother into Sussex and along the Sussex Border Path towards Peasmarsh.

### 122. Georgian or medieval?

Tenterden has a predominantly Georgian feel with its wide tree-lined High Street, Georgian facades with long sash windows, elegant column-edged doorways and tiled walls. This is deceptive as many of the buildings are medieval and Tudor, faced with brick or tiles during the 18th and 19th centuries, when tiles became easily available and fashionable. A look at the heavily-beamed interiors of some of the inns and shops will show you their true origins.

Pick up a town trail leaflet from the Tourist Information Point in the foyer

of the Town Hall on the High Street for details about the buildings. Perhaps stop at some of the old inns or tearooms - Tenterden has more pubs per mile than any other town in England except Hythe!

### 123. Stock market

At the widest part of the High Street are the Greens, where the Tenterden Fairs and weekly stock markets were held. It would have been a regular sight to see flocks of sheep being driven down the High Street to market. As recently as 1974 more than 2,500 sheep changed hands at the May Fair.

### 124. Parish Church of St Mildred

The distinctive four-spired church tower dominates the skyline for miles around. It formerly held a beacon and still acts as a landmark for ships. It is built from Bethersden marble, a highly prized limestone quarried from seams in the Wealden clay to the north.

Remember to allow for British Summer Time if you try to tell the time from the sundial above the porch.

### 125. The Eight Bells

The original timber-framed inn was faced with brick and mathematical tiles in the 18th century. The side view of its overhanging first floor gives away its true age.

Bells Lane, narrow and picturesque with tiny white weatherboard cottages squeezed together, takes the High Weald Landscape Trail out of the town. This quiet lane had a bad reputation in the 1900s due to the fights and drunken behaviour of the families who lived there.

### 126. Tilder Gill

This stunning steep-sided wooded valley bottom is delightful at all times of year, whether to enjoy the flush of early spring flowers, dappled shade on a hot summer's day, autumn colours, or bare trees silhouetted against a pink-tinged winter sky.

Look for the drooping heads of the huge pendulous sedge which thrives in this damp woodland.

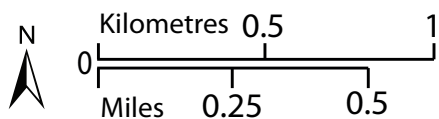
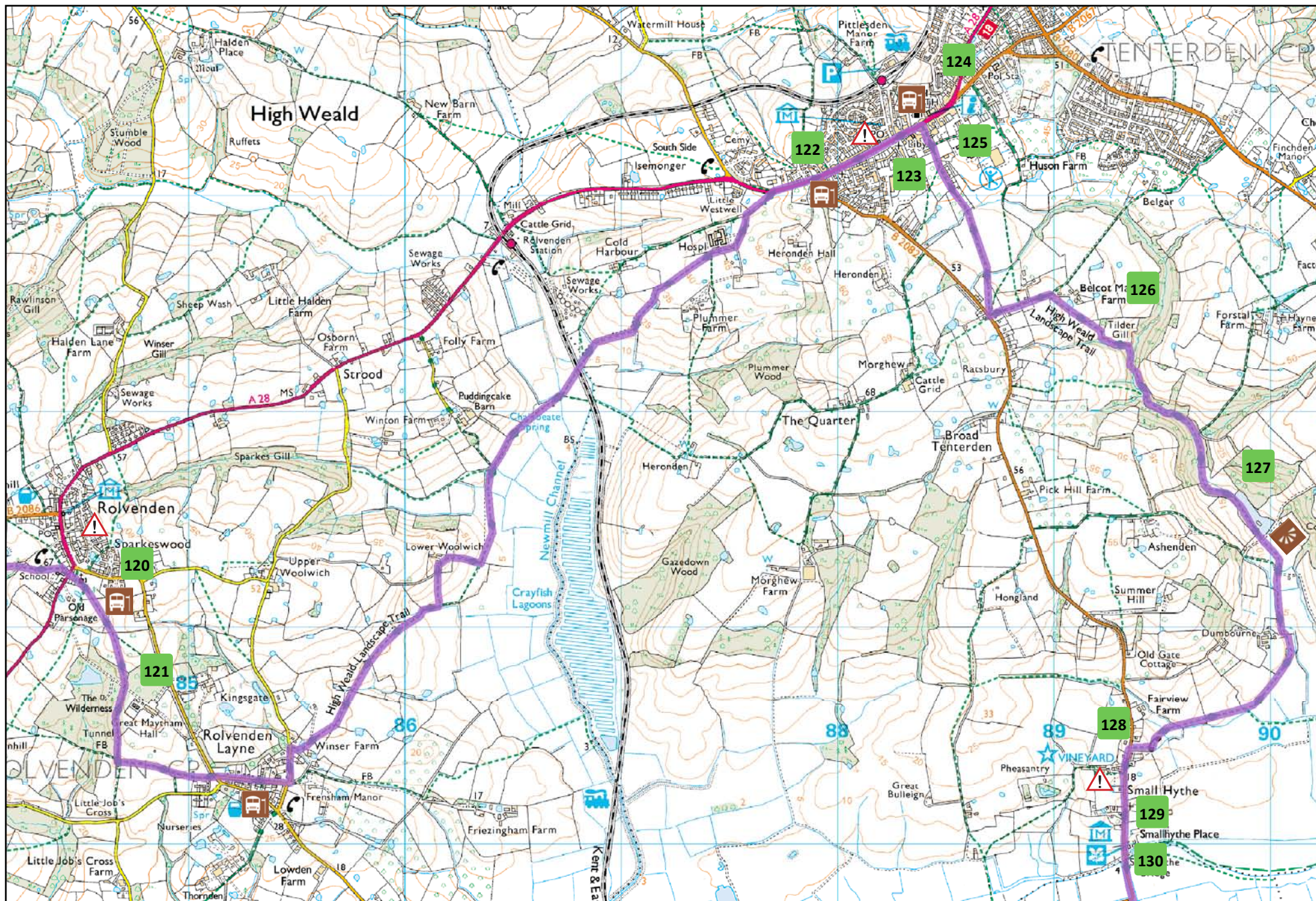
### 127. Laughing frogs



Passing any pond in April or May you may be startled by raucous sounds coming from the water - it is

the croak of the marsh frog! Twelve were introduced into a pond in Stone in 1935 from Eastern Europe and they soon escaped into the neighbouring ditches. It's easy to understand how they got their nickname but local residents may not enjoy them. Listen and look for them in the large pond north of Small Hythe.







 High Weald Landscape Trail  
 4 Interesting feature

Also use Ordnance Survey Map: Explorer 125  
*Section 6, Map 1, Rolvenden to Flackley Ash*  
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### 128. Tenterden vineyards

The acreages of many traditional British crops, such as apples and potatoes, are reducing as cheaper varieties are imported or consumer tastes change. Here a relatively new crop thrives on British soils. The mild climate of the area and the well-drained south-facing slopes are well suited for vines. The Chapel Down Winery has been growing award-winning wines here for 20 years.

### 129. Medieval port?

You may find it hard to imagine that this sleepy little village was once a busy port with more houses than Tenterden. In medieval times, the Isle of Oxney was cut off from the mainland by a branch of the River Rother that ran around the north between Small Hythe and Appledore. The road bridge in front of the house takes you over the narrow Reading Sewer. This drainage ditch is the only evidence of the wide tidal channel that could once only be crossed by ferry.

### 130. Smallhythe Place

The half-timbered manor house that stands close to the water's edge was once the harbour master's house. It became a farmhouse when the port

declined. In 1899 it was bought by Ellen Terry, the Victorian actress, who lived there until her death in 1928.

### 131. Rother Levels

The Levels are covered with a dense network of reed-filled ditches and channels to drain the land and prevent flooding. Old pollarded willows line their edges, to serve both as a windbreak and a regular source of timber. Some have fallen over with age and neglect. Do you think their strange silhouettes add to the slightly eerie atmosphere?

It is still and quiet. Only footsteps and the languid, grazing sheep disturb the calm. In summer colourful dragonflies and more slender-bodied damselflies may dart above the water. The sturdier dragonflies hold their mesh-like wings outspread when resting, whereas damselflies fold their upwards against their bodies.

### 132. Isle of Oxney

In medieval times, Oxney was a true island. Today it still stands out as a distinct hill surrounded by flat marshy river levels. You can clearly see the old sea cliffs at Stone.

### 133. Shipping beacon

Climbing gently across Oxney from the Levels, it's strange to imagine that it was once an island. The church tower, whose beacon guided medieval ships up the Rother, shows as you approach Wittersham village. Spare the time to enter this simple long church - tall arches with carved heads on the columns give a light airy feel. Is the window depicting the farmer with his sheep a reflection of the importance of sheep in the local economy?







Kilometres 0 0.5 1  
Miles 0 0.25 0.5

High Weald Landscape Trail

4 Interesting feature

Also use Ordnance Survey Map: Explorer 125  
Section 6, Map 2, Rolvenden to Flackley Ash  
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### 134. River Rother

In the early 1600s, seawalls were built along the course of the present road running across Blackwall Bridge, and further north at Potman's Heath. Flooding continues to be a risk and in the 1960s the river was straightened and a high floodbank constructed. Despite this, during heavy rain and high tides, the water cannot escape to the sea and it floods over the embankment forming a temporary lake known as Lake Wittersham to the south-west of the bridge.

the names suggest that, at one time, the landowner may have modified the waterflow to form decoyponds to catch wild ducks.

### 137. Mill Wood

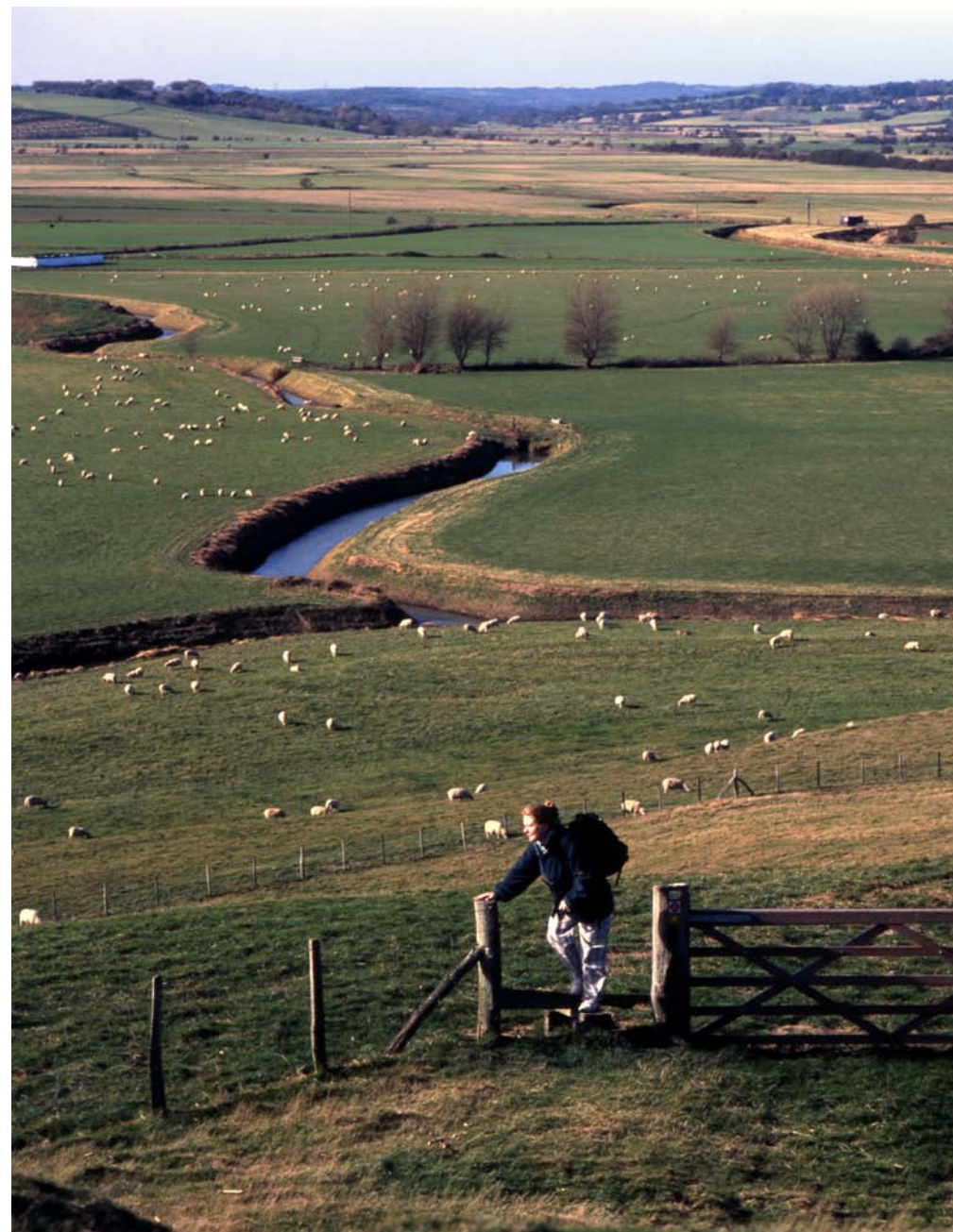
Hard fern, mosses and liverworts thrive in the damp conditions in this oak and chestnut woodland. It's harder to see the animals that also live here but if you look carefully there are plenty of signs of their presence - remains of eaten nuts and acorns, prints, scrapings and holes.

### 135. Sussex Border Path

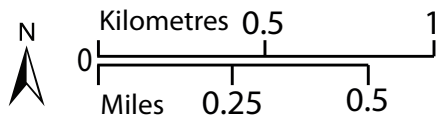
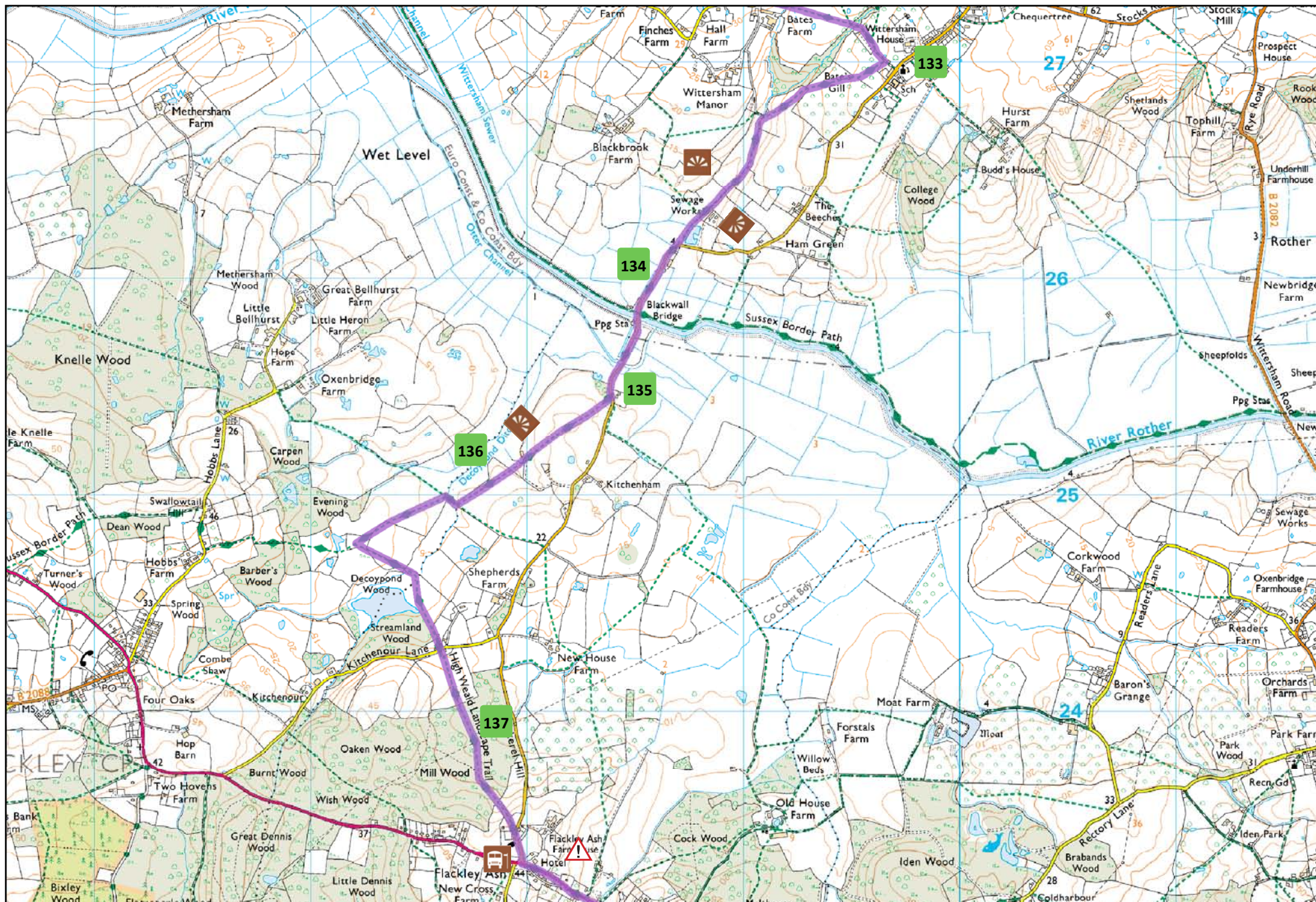
For several miles the route follows the Sussex Border Path across the Levels. This 241 kilometres (150 mile) walking route was devised by the Ramblers' Association and runs from Rye to Hampshire, largely following the boundaries of East and West Sussex with Kent, Surrey and Hampshire.



### 136. To catch a duck

The wet grassland, with pools of open water in the winter, has always attracted wildfowl. You may notice groups of swans and geese or startle ducks into flight from the ditches. The references to "Decoyponds" in







 High Weald Landscape Trail  
 Interesting feature

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