High Weald Landscape Trail

Along & Around the
High Weald Landscape Trail

Horsham • East Grinstead • Groombridge • Cranbrook • Rye

Guidebook

includes detachable route guide and Ordnance Survey maps

Produced by the High Weald Forum.

Designed by Beacon Creative Partnership,
Brambleside, Bellbrook Park, Uckfield,
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Cover photograph: View towards Horsmonden church *David Sellman*

Along & Around the High Weald Landscape Trail

High Weald
Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty

The High Weald was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1983. AONBs are designated by government to assist with the protection and management of some of the most beautiful areas of countryside within England and Wales. The High Weald is the fourth largest AONB and covers 1450 square kilometres (560 square miles).

Using the guidebook

This book is designed to be a practical guide to walking the High Weald Landscape Trail which crosses the High Weald AONB from east to west.

It is made up of two sections: a **Guidebook** which gives an introduction to the High Weald, a flavour of each section of the Trail and guidance on planning the walk; and a self contained **Route Guide**, with maps and information about features passed *en route*.

The weather resistant route guide can be used independently of the guidebook, if required, by carefully removing it from the centre of the book. The guidebook and/or route guide will fit into a map case, thus providing protection against damage, dirt and damp.

Proceeds from the sale of this guidebook will go towards improving facilities for access and recreation in the High Weald countryside.

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Landscape Trail

Acknowledgements

The High Weald Landscape Trail has been initiated, developed and interpreted by the **High Weald Forum**. The Forum is a partnership of local authorities, the Countryside Agency, national and regional bodies and local amenity groups. It was set up on 1989 to assist with the promotion and conservation of the **High Weald AONB**.

The development of the Trail has been achieved through the collaboration of the countryside management projects operating within the High Weald area:

East Sussex Rights of Way and Countryside Management Service including the **Rye Bay Countryside Management Project**

Kent High Weald Project

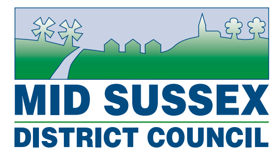
West Sussex High Weald Countryside Management Service

The identification of the Trail and production of the guidebook has been co-ordinated by the **High Weald Unit**.

The Forum is grateful to the following bodies for their assistance with the route development and preparation of the guidebook.

Landowners and farmers
Parish councils
Volunteers

The development and interpretation of the High Weald Landscape Trail and guidebook has been achieved with financial assistance from the **Countryside Agency**, **East Sussex County Council**, **Kent County Council**, **Mid Sussex District Council**, **Tunbridge Wells Borough Council**, **Wealden District Council**, **West Sussex County Council and Horsham Borough Council**.



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High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The High Weald offers a wealth of unspoilt landscape. The rolling countryside is a fascinating mixture of tree-covered ridges, dramatic sandstone outcrops, steep-sided wooded valleys carpeted with wildflowers, glistening expanses of open water and beautiful gardens.

The High Weald is a colourful landscape with trees in every view

Honeysuckle

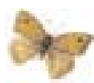
The atmosphere is rural and peaceful. The sunken lanes edged with tall trees and the streams flowing through wooded ghylls have an intimate secretive feel. However, this peaceful countryside is actually highly managed and results from a long partnership between man and nature. It is peppered with pretty villages and historic towns, and farms are strung out along the twisting network of narrow lanes that link the settlements.

Stunning views unfold from every hilltop across the patchwork landscape. Small irregularly shaped fields are sheltered by thick hedgerows and shaws. Church spires and white cowled oasts dot the skylines. There are trees in every view - dense woodlands and plantations, huge specimen trees in elegant parkland, pockets of woodland edging fields, old yews in churchyards. In the west the North and South Downs dominate the distant horizons

MJ

whereas in the east long views open out across the flat river levels near Rye.

This is a colourful landscape, dominated by the darker greens of woodland and the paler shades of pasture. These are broken up by the yellows and browns of arable fields, all merging into endless blue horizons. Local building materials complement nature's palette: warm reds of tiles and brick, golden grey of sandstone churches and bold splashes of white weatherboard.



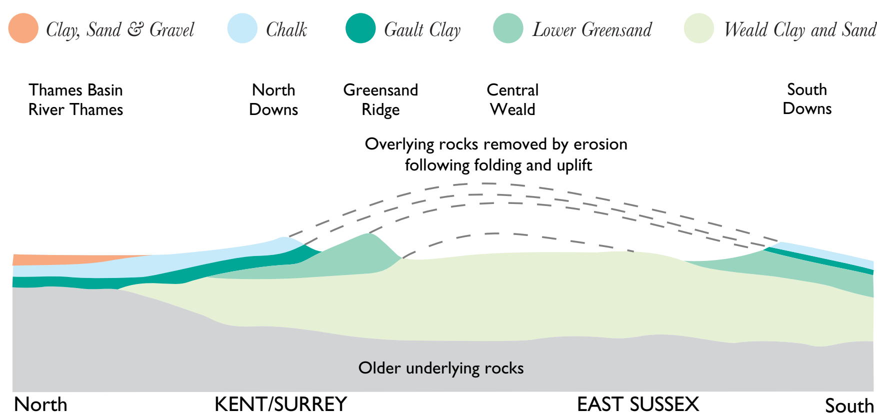
The Foundations of the High Weald

The story of the Weald begins with the rocks that lie beneath, that both give it its form and dictate its land use. Today's landform is the result of climatic changes and earth movements that took place long ago.

Some 140 million years ago you would have seen a very different landscape. Dinosaurs roamed the margins of a huge swamp-edged lake. Giant ferns and tall conifer and palm-like trees flourished in the warm, humid climate. Great rivers ran into the lake. Where the water was fast flowing and shallow, coarse sands were deposited; finer grained muds settled in deeper slow moving water. Gradually, over millions of years, layers of sandstones and clays accumulated.

Earth movements later caused the land to subside and sea covered the whole area. More muds and sands were slowly deposited and the chemical conditions in the warm seas resulted in iron nodules forming in some of the clays. As the sea deepened, layers of chalk, from the shells and skeletons of tiny sea creatures, slowly built up above the sands and clays.

Twenty million years ago the massive earth movements that formed the Alps heaved these layers above the sea creating a chalk-covered dome. Ice, wind and water slowly eroded the chalk revealing the Wealden sands and clays beneath. Gradually the pattern of today's landscape evolved. The rocks at the core of the dome, which were particularly sharply buckled and folded, have formed the steep-sided ridges of the central High Weald. Tunbridge Wells and Ashdown sands, which are tough and resistant, have given rise to the highest ridges and, in places, dramatic sandstone outcrops. Sands and clays which weather easily have formed the gentler slopes and wider valleys. The chalk at the edges of the dome has remained as the North and South Downs.



Outline geological section across the Downs and Weald

Geological map of South East England

The variety of bedrock produces a variety of soils and these in turn allow a wide range of plants to grow, resulting in the distinctive patchwork landscape of the High Weald. For example, Tunbridge Wells sand gives rise to the poor sandy soils of St Leonard's Forest with its coniferous forests and heathland plants, whereas the Wadhurst clay on the lower slopes, to the east of Tunbridge Wells and on the Rother levels, gives rise to much heavier, more fertile soils used for arable crops and pasture.

Valerie Alford ESCC Landscape Group

The Weald was once a dense blanket of trees with small-scale woodland clearings providing summer pastures for coastal landowners

Early morning mist highlights the ridge and valley landform

TL

The Human Factor

Ten thousand years ago lowland England was blanketed with trees. Perhaps the densest area of wildwood was that which covered the Weald, continuing right down to the coast at Fairlight and Pett. This dense oak forest was a barrier to development for centuries. Nomadic early Stone Age settlers preferred the better drained higher ground and avoided the heavy clay and dense forest in the valley.

Its position between the south coast ports and London meant the Weald did not remain uncharted for long. Although the iron-working Celts settled on the surrounding chalk they appreciated the Wealds' rich iron deposits and cut tracks into the forest to work the iron ore and transport the finished goods. The Romans continued to mine the iron and built their straight roads across the Weald, connecting to the south coast ports and Londinium, their administrative centre. They too chose not to settle - the forest was still impenetrable and uninviting. The Weald remained one of the least settled and most densely wooded areas of Britain into the 11th century.

The Saxons were the first to settle in the High Weald and the plethora of Saxon names bears witness to this - 'hurst', meaning hilltop spinney, as in Goudhurst; '-ham' meaning land in a river bend as in Horsham; 'stede' meaning place, as in East Grinstead.

Coastal Saxon settlements were allocated grazing rights over sections of the Weald known as 'dens'. Swineherds drove their herds into the forest to fatten their swine on the rich harvest of acorns. Their temporary shelters and small clearings in the woodland gradually evolved into a scatter of small permanent settlements located mostly on the ridges.

GS

The plethora of Saxon names bears witness to the first settlers

In contrast the coastal areas were developing more rapidly. By the 12th and 13th centuries Rye and Winchelsea were thriving ports, and Tenterden, with its port at Small Hythe, was a prosperous market town.

The introduction of the French blast furnace in the 15th century changed the High Weald forever. Its iron industry developed to make it the industrial centre of Tudor England. The many iron-related names such as Furnace Wood, Forge Farm, Cinder Hill, Colliers Wood reflect this. Huge areas of forest were cleared to make charcoal to fuel the furnaces and more was used for naval ship building and housing for the rapidly growing population. The great forest was no longer impregnable.

By the 17th century the iron and cloth trades were in decline, resulting in increased unemployment and unrest. Many augmented their income with smuggling following the introduction of excise duty and stories of highwaymen abound throughout the High Weald. Farming once again became the main occupation, aided by the improved drainage and cultivation techniques generated by the Agricultural Revolution. By the 19th century parts of the High Weald could well lay claim to the title of 'Garden of England' as orchards covered the slopes, hop gardens were widespread and a wealth of magnificent gardens were being created around the grand houses.

Today the Weald remains predominantly rural although agricultural patterns change as crop subsidies constantly alter in a period of over production. Traditional land-based communities are now bolstered by commuters drawn by the peaceful rural landscape that is so easily accessible to London and the large southern towns. The pretty medieval cottages, characterful oasts and weatherboardeded barns are rapidly snapped up by wealthy commuters, eager to escape from city life.

TL

Characterful oasts are now homes for wealthy commuters

Stone, wood, bricks and tiles are the building materials of the High Weald

Buildings in the Landscape

The Weald boasts a remarkable variety of buildings reflecting the influence of successive waves of settlers and the technology and materials available in each era. Roads were poor and transport slow until well into the 19th century so only local sandstones, clays and forest timber were available to all but the extremely rich.

Sandstone was widely used in the building of the parish churches, different deposits giving rise to rocks of different hues, some grey, others yellow and brown. Occasionally, for a particularly grand building, stone was brought from further afield, such as the Bethersden marble tower of Tenterden church and Caen stone for Wykehurst Place. Stone was costly and difficult to transport and so less often used for more mundane buildings unless close to a quarry. It was often used in conjunction with other materials; lower storeys of stone with brick above, stone window frames set in brick, or large slabs of grey Horsham sandstone used for roofing.

Timber was the most readily available material until the 17th century when it became less plentiful due to clearance of the forest to fuel the iron furnaces and the use of the finest timbers for naval ship building. Timber-framed buildings often have a lopsided or irregular appearance as Tudor builders worked with green, fresh wood which twisted and bent as it dried out.

High quality bricks and tiles have long been made from the High Weald clays. As technology improved, making the large scale production and transport possible, bricks gradually took over as the most popular building material. Tiles, in a variety of decorative shapes, were often hung on the gable ends or upper storeys of wooden buildings to give additional protection against the elements. By the 17th and 18th centuries, tiles and bricks were highly desirable, and many older buildings were faced with brick to give a more fashionable appearance. Rooftiles were of a particularly high quality which is why thatch was so rarely used. The undulating roofs with tall brick chimneys, often with a 'catslide', where the roof is carried down low on one side of the house, are a pleasing sight in the rural villages.

TL

GS

The Priest House at West Hoathly is a well preserved example of the timber framed buildings which still dot the landscape

MJ

The 19th century was a period of romantic revivalism when it was fashionable to build in the styles of earlier eras. The Gothic extravagances of Nymans, and the 'grand chateau' at Wykehurst are just two examples.

Wooden weatherboards remained an alternative to tilehanging in areas where timber was still plentiful. The weatherboard on houses was usually painted white, as in Cranbrook and Hartfield, but farm buildings were often just tarred for cheaper protection.

The buildings of the High Weald also reflect its history. The prosperity of many of the towns and villages in medieval and Tudor times, due to the iron and cloth industries, is reflected in the large number of timber-framed houses that remain today - rows of tightly crowded workers' cottages in many of the villages and larger Wealden hall houses in the surrounding countryside. Agricultural development over the centuries has left a rich legacy of oast houses, square or round kilns for hop drying, old barns and occasional weatherboarded windmills.

There is also an unusual number of grand houses and mansions, built by wealthy iron and cloth families, aristocracy given land by royal benefactors, or 'new gentry', attracted by the beauty of the landscape and its closeness to London. These sumptuous dwellings give us the best opportunity to see the favoured styles of each era. Built with no expense spared, they reflect the fashions of the times, both in building terms and in the landscaping of their grounds. There are Tudor and Jacobean mansions, Queen Anne houses, Georgian white stucco or brick houses.

Table of Architectural Periods

Period	Dates	
Romanesque	1066 - 1190	
Early English	1190 - 1280	Gothic
Decorated	1280 - 1380	Gothic
Perpendicular	1380 - 1550	Gothic
Classical	1550 - 1810	
Gothic & Classical Revivals	1810 - 1914	
Modern	1914 - Present day	

Table of Historical Periods

Period	Dates	
Mesolithic	10000 - 3500BC	Prehistoric
Neolithic	3500 - 2000BC	Prehistoric
Bronze Age	2000 - 800BC	Prehistoric
Iron Age	800BC - AD43	Prehistoric
Roman	43 - 410	
Anglo-Saxon	410 - 1066	
Norman	1066 - 1154	
Plantagenets	1154 - 1399	Medieval
Lancastrians	1399 - 1461	Medieval
Yorkists	1461 - 1485	Medieval
Tudors	1485 - 1603	Renaissance
Elizabethan	1558 - 1603	Renaissance
Stuarts	1603 - 1714	Renaissance
Jacobean	1603 - 1649	
Commonwealth	1649 - 1660	
Restoration	1660 - 1702	
Anne	1702 - 1714	
Hanoverian	1714 - 1901	
Georgian	1714 - 1837	
Regency	1810 - 1820	
Victorian	1837 - 1901	
Edwardian	1901 - 1910	
Windsor	1910 - **Present day**	

Travelling Through

The High Weald separates the south coast ports from London, the centre of commerce, and for centuries there has always been a steady traffic of traders and settlers travelling through.

The heavy clay of the lower ground was a problem for the early travellers, who made their tracks along the drier ridgetops. The first settlements developed along these early transport routes and many of the villages today, including Goudhurst, Brenchley, West Hoathly and Cuckfield, developed from these early hilltop settlements.

It was only the Romans who conquered the clay by building their straight roads on iron slag - the Lewes/London road is a fine example. By medieval times, when the iron and cloth industries were flourishing, more roads were needed to carry the finished goods to London or the ports. Heavy cannons and other iron goods were transported on great waggons pulled by sturdy oxen. These churned up and deeply rutted the roads and were often bogged down in the winter when the roads and tracks became impassable. The many sunken lanes that remain in the Weald today are the result of years of wear on the narrow tracks.

Where possible the rivers were used as an alternative method of transport for heavy goods. Barges transported coal, timber and bricks to and from Rye to Tenterden along the River Rother and bricks for the railway viaduct near Balcombe were transported up the River Ouse.

MJ

Railway lines built in the 19th century between London and the coast still criss-cross the High Weald

Trade and traffic continued to increase and the poor state of the roads was a serious hindrance. This led to the establishment of the Turnpike Trusts in the 18th century. A Trust was set up to maintain and upgrade a key road and it generated the necessary funds by charging road users a fee. Towns and villages on these upgraded routes thrived, such as Tenterden, Cuckfield and Bolney, servicing the stagecoaches and commercial traffic. Several fine coaching inns from this era remain.

The coming of the railways in the mid 19th century expanded trade opportunities further. The construction of lines through the hilly High Weald was a demanding task requiring deep cuttings, tall embankments and lofty viaducts but many railway companies were keen to build, eager to exploit the trade link with the south coast. The London to Brighton line opened first, followed by the Ashford to Hastings line in 1851. Railways gradually lost trade to the improved roads in the 20th century. Many branch lines were closed but the remaining lines are still well used by commuters.

The sunken lanes of the Weald are the result of wear on narrow, clayey tracks

Working the Land

The High Weald is not renowned for its productivity. The thin sandy soils and heavy clays have always made growing crops difficult.

The rearing of livestock was and still is the most productive land use and pasture, grazed grassland, covers much of the area. Other areas of grassland are managed as meadows, cut in June or July as a hay or silage crop to provide winter feeding for livestock. Old meadows and pasture, which have not been fertilised, may contain a wealth of colourful wildflowers which in turn attract butterflies, bees, grasshoppers and a host of other creatures.

Old meadows and pasture, which have not been fertilised, contain a wealth of wildflowers

TL

The gentle wide valley of the Lower Rother and the reclaimed river flats around Rye provide particularly rich grazing and sheep rearing has been a mainstay of the local economy here for centuries. The hardy Romney Marsh breed is particularly well suited to the wet marshland. Cattle were always more important in the Western High Weald. You will rarely see the traditional small red Sussex breed nowadays. The black and white Holstein Friesian is the common dairy animal and there are a wide variety of beef cattle crosses.

It was not until the 19th century, when improved field drainage techniques made cultivation easier, that larger scale arable farming became possible, supported by the improved roads and new railways, particularly in the north of the High Weald. Nowadays the choice of crops is often dictated by European Community subsidies and surpluses and only limited amounts of cereals and fodder crops are grown. Oil seed rape provides an occasional splash of yellow to the hillsides and valley bottoms and the soft blue haze of flax is becoming a more frequent sight.

MJ

Field drainage made larger scale arable farming possible in the 19th century

Hop growing was widespread in the Weald during the 18th and 19th centuries but, due to competition from European imports, it has now dwindled to a small area centred around Goudhurst. Fruit growing still flourishes in parts of the Kentish High Weald but again, acreages are reducing as heavily cropping dwarf varieties are planted, consumer tastes change and cheap imports flood the market.

A Place for Wildlife

Pockets of land too steep or infertile for farming still harbour natural plant communities, adding a special dimension to the High Weald's patchwork character.

The dense forest is long gone but the Weald remains one of the most wooded parts of England, due in part to the value of the timber in former times. Almost all areas of deciduous woodland have been coppiced as the demand for coppiced wood for fuel, tools and building materials was once so high. The High Weald is one of the few areas in England where commercial coppicing still continues, although on a much reduced scale. Conifers thrive in the poorer sandy soils of the Western High Weald although they are increasingly being replaced with broadleaf species.

The gyhlls, steep-sided narrow stream valleys, have also remained densely wooded, and a wealth of damp-loving plants often thrive in the leafy shade cast by the trees.

Fields were originally cut straight out of the forest and many of the dense hedgerows that separate them are relics of the original forest. Wider strips of woodland were often left alongside the fields for additional shelter and to provide a useful source of wood. Hedges and shaws form wooded threads that knit the landscape pattern together.

There are ponds aplenty, some dug by man, others natural depressions, but all holding water because of the underlying water-resistant clay. Many of the larger ones were created as hammer ponds for the iron industry. Others were left after the extraction of iron ore, stone, marl for fulling cloth or spreading on farmland, or brick earth and clay for tiles, bricks and pottery. Some were dug to water livestock or keep a supply of fish. More recently large reservoirs have been created to store drinking water. All add to the attractiveness of the Weald and provide homes and feeding grounds for many birds and aquatic animals.

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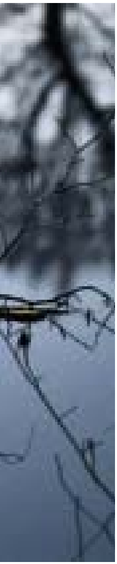
MJ

Hedges and shaws - narrow strips of deciduous woodland, knit the landscape together



Many thousands of ponds are scattered across the High Weald

Areas of open heathland contrast with the woodland in the western High Weald. The mixture of heather, gorse and bracken that thrive on these poor sandy soils support an unusual range of creatures including rare insects, snakes, lizards and the hobby, a dark and slender bird of prey. Heathland is under threat now that changed farming practices have made the grazing of heathland uneconomic.

Another complementary thread of the High Weald patchwork are the beautiful parks and gardens surrounding the grand mansions. Some are set in rolling parkland, so popular with the wealthy in Georgian England, complete with follies and grand specimen trees. Many exotic species including rhododendrons and azaleas were brought back from the expanding British Empire in Victorian times. This triggered the planting of many of the famous gardens in the High Weald such as Wakehurst Place, Nymans and Leonardslee.

MJ

Nymans is one of a number of famous gardens located in the High Weald

A New Industry?

The unspoilt countryside with its rich cultural heritage now attracts visitors from home and abroad. Many of the beautiful gardens, once restricted to the private pleasure of their wealthy owners, are now open to the public. The spring displays of rhododendrons in the gardens founded by the wealthy Victorian plantsmen are especially popular. The historic towns and villages abound with tearooms and gift shops; families flock for rides on the old steam trains and the farms attract visitors to blossom trails, pick-your-own fruit and farm walks. The old network of lanes and paths are used by walkers, cyclists and horseriders; the sandstone outcrops by rockclimbers; the reservoirs for sailing.

Nature has provided the foundations of a distinctive landscape in the High Weald. Centuries of human endeavours have embellished and developed that special character.

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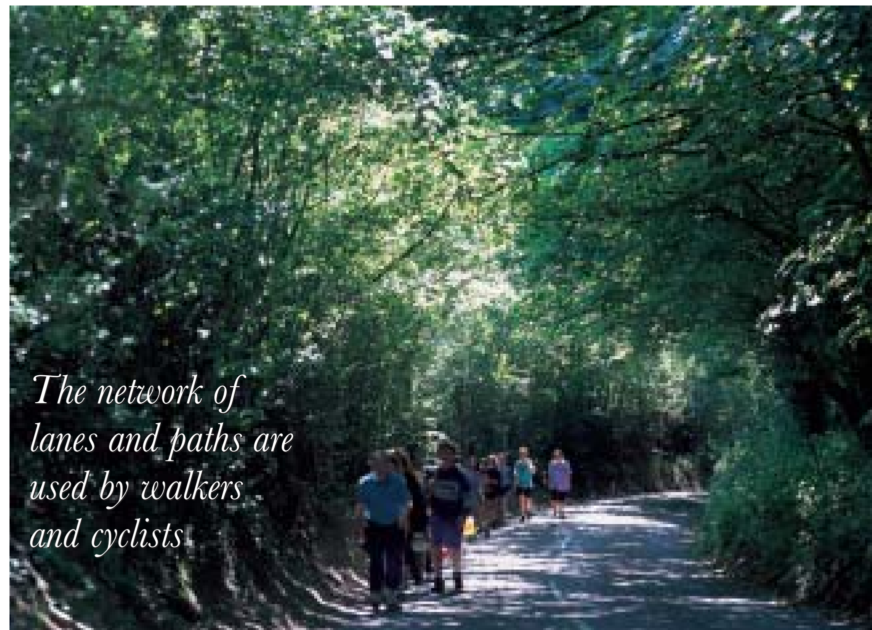
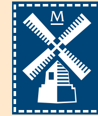


The network of lanes and paths are used by walkers and cyclists



MILLWOOD
DESIGNER HOMES LIMITED

Building on the Past

To many people the High Weald is perhaps best known for its distinctive topography; hills, ridges and valleys, together with extensive woodland, hedgerows and clusters of mature trees. In fact the hill top village or valley hamlet is as much a part of the distinctive Wealden scene and further strengthens its character.

New buildings and settlements in this stunning setting may be an anathema to some, but with careful thought and planning they can enhance the landscape and indeed add to its interest and character. In addition, the countryside must accept some change in order to meet current housing needs which can help support the viability of local communities.

Tonbridge based Millwood Designer Homes has a key objective - to provide quality new homes in rural areas that not only respect the character of the area, but also enhance the landscape quality.

An example of Millwood Designer Homes' regeneration of a 'brownfield' site.

Claydon Hall is typical of Millwood Designer Homes attention to detail. It features reclaimed and recycled materials to ensure that it blends in with its rural surroundings.

The company has a keen commitment to recycling previously developed or 'brownfield' land that is no longer of value to the local community and which detracts from the visual quality and amenities of the area. It is a myth that such sites only exist in large towns and inner cities. Indeed the impact of, say, a coalyard or industrial works is far greater when seen against a backdrop of fields and woods. Often such sites leave a costly legacy of contamination, but it is important that these are brought back to beneficial use before 'greenfield' sites are contemplated.

The inspiration for the design of these homes comes from traditional 15th and 16th century timber framed houses with Millwood using, wherever possible, reclaimed and recycled materials which have a mellowness and pleasing irregularity that mass produced modern materials cannot match.

Attention to detail ensures these houses blend in with their surroundings from the earliest stage, with steep roofs clad in clay tiles, interesting window lines and door styles and substantial chimney stacks.

Inherent in such developments is the careful retention of existing trees and hedgerows together with extensive and sympathetic tree planting. One of Millwood's latest projects included the planting of 1,400 new trees and saplings. The same project featured a drainage ditch, reflecting those often found alongside country lanes, which has been stocked with reeds and grasses deliberately to attract wildlife and aquatic specimens.

Whilst offering quality homes with modern innovations, the aim when planning a new site is to leave behind something the housebuilder will be proud of. Jeff Elliott, Deputy Managing Director comments: "When we finish a project we want to be able to re-visit it after a year and see we have created something which makes a positive contribution to the local community, complements and enhances its surroundings and adds to the diversity and rich landscape of the area - not just see a cluster of new houses at odds with their backdrop".

It is from this beautiful 15th century home at the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum that Millwood Designer Homes gained inspiration for its Yeoman range of luxury homes. Examples of 15th and 16th century Yeoman Wealden Farmhouses can be found throughout the High Weald of Kent and Sussex.

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High Weald Landscape Trail

The High Weald is a stunning area to walk as the constantly changing height and terrain gives ever changing views and variety of walking. Enjoy the wide vistas as you stride along the ridgetops then pass into the seclusion of the wooded ghylls with their cool dappled shade.

The walk can be enjoyed at all times of year - each season adds its own special character. Early spring when the orchards are blossoming and lambs are newborn or May when woodlands are carpeted with bluebells. Summer when the hedgerows are scented with honeysuckle and dog rose and the farmers are busy hay cutting and harvesting. September when the aroma of freshly cut hops is all-pervading in the hop gardens and, in the orchards, the trees are heavy with fruit. The changing autumnal colours and the hedgerow harvest of berries and nuts, or a crisp winter's morning with glistening frost and the smell of woodsmoke.

The walk leads through tranquil countryside, quiet save for the sudden wing beats of a startled duck, water cascading down from an old dam, a tractor turning the soil or the intermittent hoot of a steam train running along one of the reopened lines.

Walking the Trail

The High Weald Landscape Trail has been created to enable you to explore the heritage of the High Weald AONB. The Trail does noes not always follow the shortest route between two villages but meanders through the landscape to take in the wonderful views and the distinctive built and natural features of the area.

The Trail follows public rights of way which largely cross private land. Most landowners along the route welcome walkers on their land provided that they do not stray from the footpath and abide by the walkers code. If you are not familiar with the guidelines please take time to read the code which appears on the back of the route guide.

Route finding should not be a problem given the large scale route maps and the extensive waymarking and signing on the ground. The Trail is clearly waymarked with the Trail logo which shows a church tower against a tree.

The logo symbolises the built and natural features of the High Weald which together produce a nationally important landscape

If you have any queries or comments about the Trail or would like further information on guided walks along the Trail contact:

West Sussex
West Sussex High Weald Countryside Management Service 01243 777620

East Sussex
Rights of Way and Countryside Management Service
01273 481654

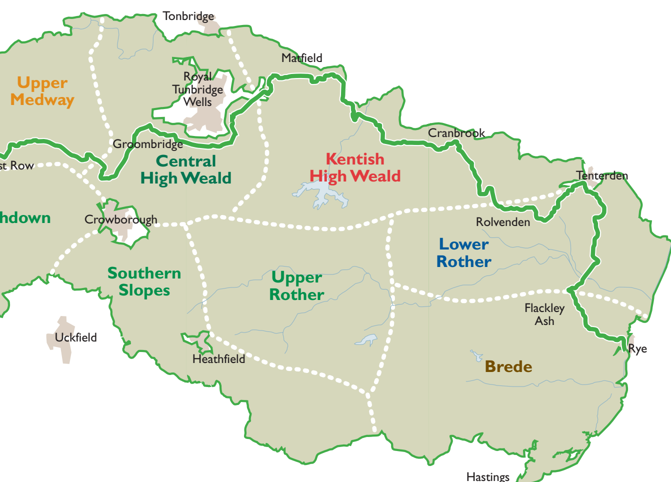
Kent
Kent High Weald Project
01580 715918

Route planning

The High Weald Landscape Trail is approximately 90 miles/145km long and can be undertaken as a long distance walk in approximately 7-10 days. Allow plenty of time to complete your chosen walk. Reckon on walking 2 or 2.5 miles (3.2 or 4km) an hour plus stops. Allow more time if it has been wet as the clays of the High Weald become sticky and heavy with rain!

The Trail has been divided into seven sections with each section traversing one of the landscape character areas of the AONB. The character areas are localities within the AONB which have their own special distinctiveness whether it be the predominance of certain building materials or particular landscape pattern or a combination of these an other factors.

The landscape character areas of the AONB



The table below will assist you with calculating distances between stops on the Trail, working out how long it will take to walk each section and planning accommodation and refreshment stops.

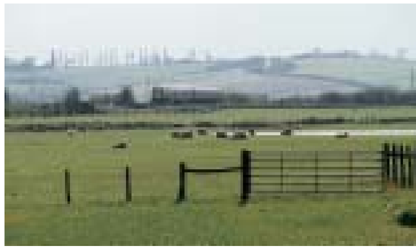
Villages and Towns on the Landscape Trail

Route maps		Distance from the previous location (km)	Accumulative distance (km)	Distance from the previous location (miles)	Accumulative distance (miles)
Section 1	**Western High Weald**				
	Horsham to Slaugham	10	10	6	6
	Trail at Slaugham to Handcross	*1.6*		*1*	
	Slaugham to Bolney	5	15	3	9
	Bolney to Cuckfield	6.5	21.5	4	13
	Cuckfield to Whitemans Green	1	22.5	0.5	13.5
Section 2	**Western High Weald**				
	Whitemans Green to Ardingly	9	31.5	5.5	19
	Trail at Copyhold to Haywards Heath	*2.5*		*1.5*	
	Ardingly to West Hoathley	6	37.5	3.5	22.5
	West Hoathley to East Grinstead	10	47.5	6	28.5
Section 3	**Upper Medway**				
	East Grinstead to Forest Row	4.5	52	2.75	31.25
	Forest Row to Hartfield	6.5	58.5	4	35.25
	Hartfield to Withyham	2.5	61	1.5	36.75
	Withyham to Groombridge	7.5	68.5	4.75	41.5
	Trail at Groombridge to Tunbridge Wells	*3.5*		*2.25*	
Section 4	**Central High Weald**				
	Groombridge to Eridge Green	5.5	74	3.5	45
	Eridge Green to Frant	4	78	2.5	47.5
	Trail at High Wood to Tunbridge Wells	*2*		*1.2*	
	Frant to Matfield	12	90	7.5	55
Section 5	**Kentish High Weald**				
	Matfield to Brenchley	3	93	1.75	56.75
	Trail at Lewes Heath to Horsmonden	*1*		*0.5*	
	Brenchley to Goudhurst	7.5	100.5	4.75	61.5
	Goudhurst to Cranbrook	7	107.5	4.5	66
	Cranbrook to Benenden	7	114.5	4.5	70.5
	Benenden to Rolvenden	5	119.5	3	73.5
Section 6	**Lower Rother**				
	Rolvenden to Rolvenden Layne	1.5	121	1	74.5
	Rolvenden Layne to Tenterden	4.5	125.5	2.75	77.25
	Tenterden to Small Hythe	4.5	130	2.75	80
	Small Hythe to Wittersham	3.5	133.5	2.25	82.25
	Wittersham to Flackley Ash	5	138.5	3	85.25
Section 7	**Brede**				
	Flackley Ash to Peasmarsh	1.5	140	1	86.25
	Peasmarsh to Rye	4.5	144.5	2.75	89
	Total	144.5		89	

Getting to, from and along the Trail

The beginning and end of the Trail is accessible by train and there are a number of other rail links to the Trail.

Wherever possible the route has been planned to link with public transport but some services are infrequent, particularly at weekends. If you do choose to travel by car please use the car parks indicated on the maps. If car parking spaces are not available please park in a sensible location which will not damage road verges or cause obstruction. Leave your car securely locked with valuables out of sight.



MJ

If you wish to undertake the High Weald Landscape Trail in sections you need to plan the return to your starting point. Possible solutions might be as follows:

a) Using public transport or one car and public transport.

b) Using two cars, one at the starting point and the other at the proposed finishing point.

c) Retracing your steps - the scenery can look surprisingly different when walking in the opposite direction.

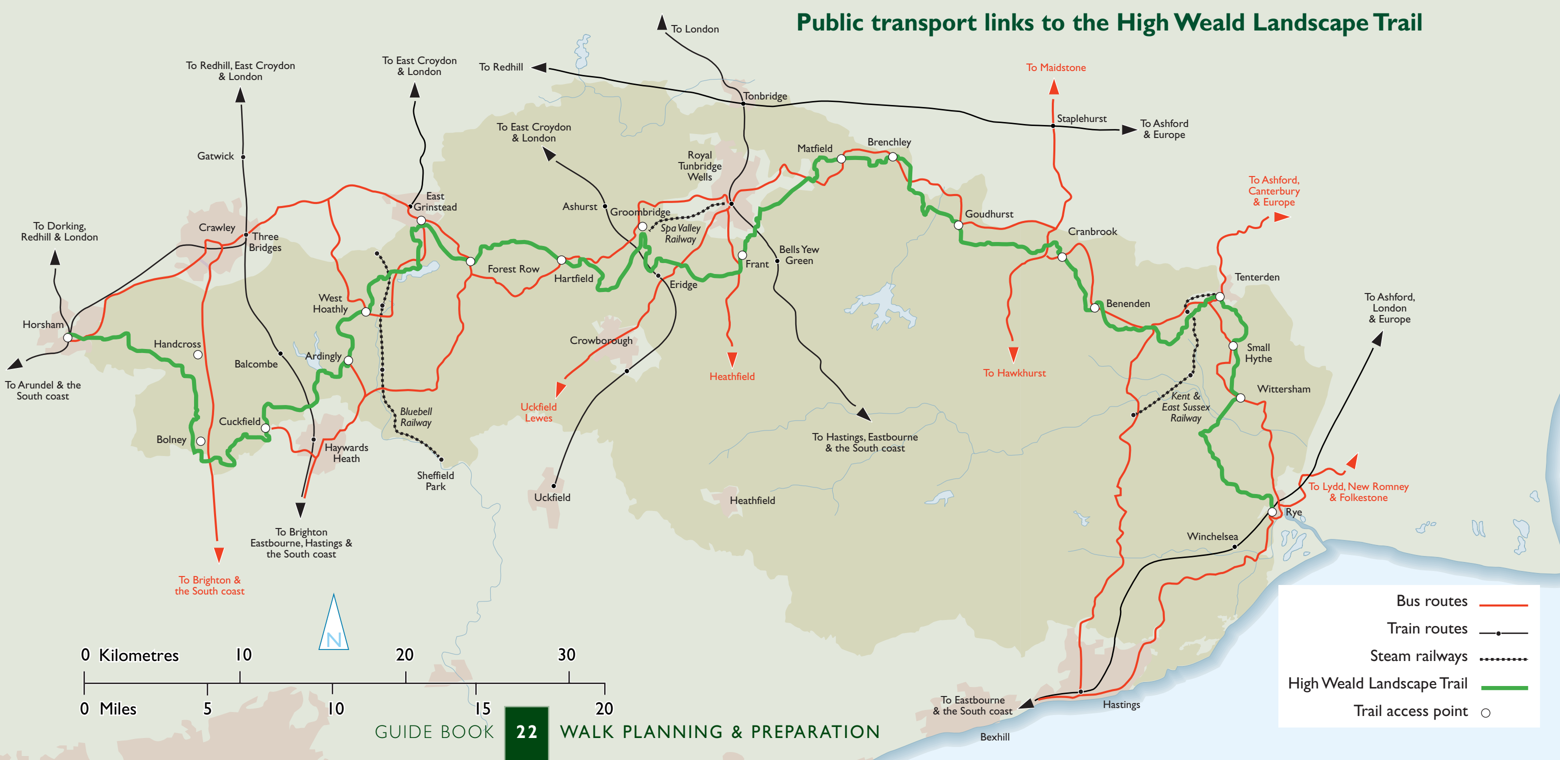
Regional public transport information:

Kent Traveline	0345 696996
East Sussex	01273 474747
West Sussex	0345 959099

National travel information:

National Rail enquiries	0345 484950
National Express (coach)	0990 808080
Journeycall (rail & coach)	0906 5500000

If you would like to combine walking linear sections of the Trail with walking circular walks in the region please see the section on *Other Walking Opportunities* for details.



Accommodation

A range of accommodation is available in most villages and towns en route. It is advisable to book accommodation in advance especially in the summer.

A basic list of accommodation on or close to the route is available from:

High Weald Unit

Telephone 01580 879500, email at info@highweald.org.uk or visit the website at www.highweald.org

For further information on accommodation in the region or assistance with booking accommodation in the area:

South East England Tourist Board

Telephone 01892 540766, email at enquiries@seetb.org.uk or visit the website at www.southeastengland.uk.com or write to The Old Brew House, Warwick Park, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 5TU.

Alternatively contact the tourist information centres located on or close to the Trail:

Horsham TIC	01403 211661
East Grinstead TIC	01342 410121
Tunbridge Wells TIC	01892 515675
Cranbrook TIC	01580 712538
Tenterden TIC	01580 763572
Rye TIC	01797 226696

Other services

There is a shop located in almost all of the villages along the route. However please remember that in rural areas village shops are often closed on Wednesday afternoons, Sundays and at lunch time, normally 1-2pm. Please take this into account when planning purchases.

MJ

By purchasing goods from village shops along the Trail you are helping support an important, but increasingly threatened, rural service

Pubs along the route are normally open between 11-3pm and 5-11pm. Occasionally they may be open all day. Almost all provide food both at lunch time and in the evening.

Only the main towns along the route have banks, so it is important to plan how you will pay for purchases in advance. Most accommodation providers will accept credit cards. Village shops will not accept credit cards for low value purchases.

Visitor attractions

There are a number of visitor attractions located on or close to the High Weald Landscape Trail. Most are open between April and October. Some of the smaller attractions have irregular opening hours and it would be sensible to check these hours before planning a visit. Contact numbers are listed in the *Visitor Attractions* section.

Be prepared

Always wear suitable clothing for the season and waterproof boots. Be prepared for changeable weather by carrying waterproofs in your rucksack at all times of year. Consider taking overtrousers or trousers as protection from any discomfort caused by walking through high or prickly vegetation or rain drenched or dewy crops.

For an up-to-date weather forecast contact Weathercall 0891 772 272

Flora and fauna

Most British wildlife is harmless but do not pick berries or fungi unless you are certain of the identification as some are poisonous.

It is against the law to uproot any plant without the landowner's permission.

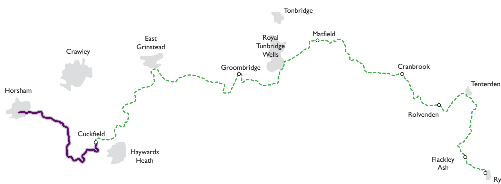
The adder is the only poisonous British snake. You may spot one, distinctive with its 'v' shaped markings, basking in the sun in a heathland clearing, but it is unlikely to bite unless threatened.

Whilst walking in the countryside you will occasionally come across livestock or animals of various types. Generally few animals will cause a problem if they are left undisturbed although they may react badly to the presence of a dog, particularly if there are young in the field. It is usually best to keep a dog on a lead in a field containing stock but be ready to release it if the animals do become aggressive.

CHAPTER ONE

Western High Weald

Horsham to Cuckfield

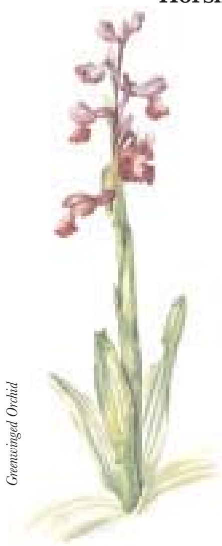


A Forest Landscape

GS

The first permanent settlements were on the ridgetops

Both history and landscape of the westernmost section of the High Weald are dominated by St Leonard's Forest. The name, first recorded in 1213, defined some 12 square miles (31 square kilometres) of ancient wildwood east of Horsham. Legend holds that St Leonard slew a local dragon within it.


Greenwinged Orchid

Outposts in the interior

Summer swineherds from the coastal settlements drove their pigs into the forests via the dry ridgetops.

Even today the majority of roads follow these lines and it was here that the early churches were built and villages gradually evolved. The early seasonal settlements however were in the valleys where the pigs fed on acorns and beech nuts or 'mast'.

The development of heathland

Gradually the trampling and snouting cleared glades; tree seedlings gave way to the plant community we call heathland, dominated by gorse, bracken and heather. Butterflies and other insects flourished in the sunshine, nourished by the plants. Lizards and snakes basked in the clearings, birds perched in the gorse, feeding on the abundant smaller creatures.

The heathland was valued by our ancestors. Their animals grazed there. Gorse was an excellent fuel, as was heather, which also provided thatching for simple dwellings. Bracken made bedding for man and beast and a rich compost for the land.

Nowadays the traditional uses of heathland are outmoded. Ungrazed land soon reverts to woodland. If we want the

open spaces of heathland, and its delicate web of plants and creatures, we must work for it. Clear the trees, control the bracken.

Human endeavour continued to change the face of the Forest. It became a royal deer park in Norman times, with seasonal cattle grazing. This created wood pastures, grassy clearings studded with trees pollarded (their branches harvested) above the reach of hungry mouths. Now we treasure the few remaining pollards at sites like Mick's Cross for their gnarled beauty and the unique community of insects and plants associated with them.

Rabbits, a 12th-century introduction, were raised for food and fur in 'warrens'. Their grazing helped maintain open heathland, even as their wild descendants do today. Stone and clay for building were taken from forest sites. Lime, oak, beech, hornbeam, hazel - different trees were coppiced for different uses. Standard trees provided timber, perhaps 300 small trees for one sizeable dwelling. Woodland was generally managed sustainably but the tree cover gradually decreased.

The rate of change increases

The iron industry spelt further destruction of the Forest, as well as damming streams and wrecking roads. By Elizabethan times only one third of the Forest was tree-covered.

Agriculturists in the 17th and 18th centuries experimented with ways to improve the sandy soils and heavy clays, with little success. Sir Thomas Seymour even wanted to create a 'new town' in it - in the 17th century, 300 years before plans for Crawley New Town were drawn!

Developers in the 18th century were the first to plant larch and pine; exotic softwoods now grow throughout the area. The invention of tile drains in 1840 did help to conquer the clay soils and farming improved.

The pattern of small fields and hedgerows or shaws (the local name for a shelterbelt of woodland) spread. Now modern machinery and methods can grow crops and conifers on almost any soil.

Over the centuries many chose to live in the Forest for its peace and beauty rather than for profit. That appeal is just as strong today, bringing more houses, more cars, more visitors, so that its very popularity imperils this beautiful countryside.

A forest of gardens

Leonardslee, Nymans, High Beeches, Wakehurst Place, Borde Hill ... It is not surprising to find so many famous gardens here. The climate is mild, especially in the valleys; the sandy silty soils are easy to work but not so fertile that they are coveted by agriculturists. If the heavy clays of the valley bottoms grow one thing to perfection it is trees, the perfect foil for gaudier plants. And all conveniently close to London.

MJ

Heathland once covered St Leonard's Forest. Now the area is dominated by coniferous plantations but steps are being taken to regenerate the internationally rare habitat

TL

The Trail leads through shady groves of coniferous woodland

Rhododendron ponticum was introduced into the country by the Victorians. In many areas it has escaped from its garden setting into surrounding woodland where it out-competes native plants

TL

Leonardslee is in many ways typical of the 19th-century Sussex gardens. Sir Edmund Loder found the forest site, with some judicious thinning, a perfect setting for the rhododendrons, azaleas and magnolias that were his passion. He enhanced the setting with Californian redwoods and other exotic trees. The chain of hammer ponds provided a near-perfect water feature.

Marsh Marigold

Pimples and pillboxes

In the spring of 1940 military minds also looked to use the Wealden countryside to advantage. German invasion seemed imminent, the coastal defences might fail. How best to halt a German advance on London?

Pillboxes, pimples and dragon's teeth form part of the answer. You will see these as you walk the Trail - octagonal brick or concrete gun emplacements (the pillboxes) and variously shaped lumps of concrete designed to stop tanks. They were part of one of the lines of defence based on natural obstacles such as rivers and ponds. The concrete blocks were placed to prevent detours around natural obstacles and road blocks. Camouflaged pillboxes would catch the invaders in a deadly crossfire - or so it was hoped!

Victory in the Battle of Britain fought high above the Weald meant the defence lines were never tested though it has been said that high altitude photographs of the construction activity convinced German intelligence Britain was well prepared against invasion. Pillboxes and tanktraps are part of archaeology now, reminders not only of what was but what might have been.

Eila Lawson

Tanktraps are a visible reminder of the Second World War

Guardian of the Forest treasures

A walk around St Leonard's Forest with David Codd, Sussex Wildlife Trust's voluntary reserve manager, is the ideal introduction to its secrets.

David knows where to find the elusive lily of the valley when its delicate perfume fills the warm evening air beneath the trees. He treasures the rare mosses, ferns and small creatures in steep-sided Sheepwash Ghyll where the humid conditions provide a refuge for a community of species that once flourished across the country. That was some 7000 years ago, when all of Britain enjoyed the mild, damp 'Atlantic' climate now mostly restricted to the western seaboard.

Photo by Mike W Richards

Nightjar on ground among heather

David enjoys introducing others to the Forest. A session investigating pond life or the Forest trees stimulates his work with people with learning disabilities. And stories of the local dragon have enlivened many a scout night hike - not everyone knows its lair was (is?) in Dabson Gill, close by the scout campsite in the north of the Forest.

Perhaps his greatest pleasure though is to hear the 'churring' of a nightjar on a summer's night -

'It is a privilege to have so rare a bird nesting within a few miles of Gatwick and Horsham. I hope it stays but it nests on the ground and so, like most of the wildlife here, it's at risk from the increasing number of visitors, especially those who wander from the paths.'

TL

Rare ferns can be found in Sheepwash Ghyll and the many other ghylls which dissect the ridges of the Weald

The Iron Industry

"there be furnaces on every side ... to which purpose divers brooks in many places are brought to run in one channel, and sundry meadows turned into pools and waters, that they might be of power sufficient to drive hammer mills, which beating upon the iron, resound all over the places adjoining."

Camden 1586

Iron was produced on a small scale in the Weald well before Roman times. The ore, mainly from the Wadhurst Clay, was roasted with charcoal in a small temporary furnace. The lump of white-hot 'plastic' iron, known as a bloom, was hammered hard to squeeze out the slag and then to shape it into tools, nails, horseshoes, etc.

The scale changed dramatically in the 15th and 16th centuries. French iron workers introduced the blast furnace and the hammer forge, both worked by water power. A blast furnace, running for as long as supplies of ore, charcoal and water lasted, produced 20 or 30 times as much as a bloomery.

The new furnaces were brick structures with great chimneys and a series of bellows, 10 to 15 feet (3 to 4.5 metres) long, powered by a water wheel. To get a sufficient head of water, the ghylls were dammed, often into a chain of ponds. The

West Sussex County Council

Mike Codd

The range of activity on an iron making site – in the foreground iron ore is being dug from a pit, in the background wood is being burnt to produce charcoal

increased heat produced fully molten iron. This could be cast directly into moulds to produce guns, fire backs, gravestones and the like or into 'pig' moulds. The pig iron was reheated to burn off the excess carbon that made the cast iron brittle and shaped by pounding in the new hammer forges at speeds of up to 150 blows per minute.

The iron industry had an overwhelming and lasting impact on the Weald. Many hammer ponds remain, like Hawkins and Hammer Ponds in the Forest. The maps are sprinkled with names referring to the iron industry - hammer, forge, furnace, pit, mine, col (charcoal) ... as well as the bead-like strings of ponds. The annual charcoal consumption of a Wealden furnace and forge has been estimated at 4,000 acres (1,620 hectares) of coppice woodland - that's slightly more than the area of Horsham town today. Coppice was renewable but much standing timber was cleared, particularly in St Leonards and Ashdown Forests, leaving heath or wasteland. Carts with heavy loads of iron so churned up the roads that 'Sussexiate' became a term for impassable roads.

The industry brought prosperity to the region for some 300 years until the 18th century, when the coal-producing Midlands took over the role of industrial heartland. Perhaps the stories of dragons and headless phantoms in St Leonard's Forest were put about by a generation of unemployed men turned smugglers and highwaymen.

Hastings Museum

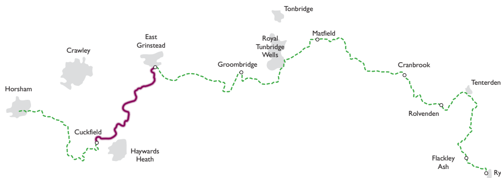
MJ

Hawkins pond is one of many hammer ponds which still remain

The importance of the iron industry in shaping the early landscape of the High Weald is reflected in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty's logo. The logo depicts an anvil, a tool used by blacksmiths to shape iron into a variety of tools and other products

Western High Weald

Cuckfield to East Grinstead



A Landscape for Leisure

Ardingly Reservoir, as well as supplying water to the heavily populated South East, is important for recreation and wildlife TL

The landscape of woodland and farmland continues but with two changes of scale. Two large water reservoirs add unexpected lakes to the landscape and you encounter the first of the bold outcrops of Ardingly sandstone. So prominent are these outcrops that early geologists assumed they were lines of ancient seacliffs.

Devils-Bit-Scabious

Kew in the country

The garden theme continues with Borde Hill and Kew's country cousin, Wakehurst Place. The Royal Botanic Gardens leased Wakehurst from the National Trust in 1967 to extend their work in plant research and conservation, at the same time enhancing one of the best landscape gardens of the Weald with collections of plants from around the world. One section, the Loder Valley, named after Wakehurst's main creator, is a nature reserve dedicated to the plants and animals of the Sussex Weald. The latest initiative is the £80 million Millennium Seed Bank which, by the year 2001, aims to have collected 80% of the seed bearing flora of the UK and by 2010, 10% of the world's higher plant life, principally from the tropical drylands.

The attraction of water

The Loder Reserve extends into Ardingly Reservoir. This sparsely populated countryside, well supplied with streams in steep-sided valleys bottomed with impermeable clay, is a sensible place to site water storage facilities. The prime purpose of both Ardingly and Weirwood Reservoirs is obviously to help meet the increasing

demand for water in the South East, but such sheets of water have other values.

Birds and other wildlife soon move in; inland waters for anglers and sailors are rare in the south-east; and stretches of open water just seem to attract people! A zoning policy operates on both reservoirs, providing space for recreation but keeping disturbance of wildlife to a minimum.

GS

Exotic trees and shrubs grow well on the clay soils of the High Weald

TL

Swans are a frequent sight at Weirwood Reservoir

Steam from the trains running on the Bluebell Railway can often be seen from the Trail

Steam trains and bluebells

You now begin to find yourself crossing a network of railways, used and disused. The sparser settlements of the heavy clay land to the west had to make do with roads, but here 19th-century railway entrepreneurs raced each other to capture lucrative routes, first between London and the population centres of the coast, then link routes between main lines and with smaller towns. Some, such as the Ouse Valley link from Uckfield to the Brighton line near Balcombe, never opened; others closed in the mid-20th century rationalisation of the railways. Stations are often a little distance from the communities they originally served; railways run in predominantly straight lines.

Several of the closed lines have been rescued by steam enthusiasts. The Bluebell Railway now runs regular services on part of the old Lewes to East Grinstead line.

David Mark

William Robinson

of Gravetye Manor, gardener and horticultural journalist, 1838-1935

The wild garden is currently the height of style but as long ago as the 1870s, William Robinson was already promoting planting drifts and clumps of hardy plants, native and exotic, in grass and woodland.

Robinson scorned many of the fashions of his time. He described geometric plots of brightly coloured flowers as 'pastrycook gardening', abhorred the 'immoderate and artificial squirting of water'. It was better to plant in imitation of nature. During the 50 years Robinson lived at Gravetye Manor he produced a number of books and articles propounding his theories. Wild gardens, herbaceous borders and alpine rock gardens - the English style owes much to his advocacy. He was wrong on one point though; he sang the praises of Japanese knotweed, a plant which has escaped from gardens to become a major pest in the countryside.

Robinson bequeathed the woodland around his home to the Forestry Commission, for the purposes of research. The house and gardens are now private property but occasional access is permitted through the National Gardens Scheme.

The Brick and Tile Industry

Walkers and gardeners may have harsh things to say of clay but that strong sticky stuff has its uses.

"Sussex clay be good and strong to serve 'ee long and well be it bricks, pots or pipes or strong tankards for good ale"

Trad.

Brick and tiles were uncommon in the High Weald until the 16th century, although the Romans had used them. Most buildings, even early churches, were built of timber. Some bricks were imported from the Netherlands and Flanders and as they became fashionable, local production began. Chimneys became a possibility; bricklined furnaces became essential for the burgeoning iron industry; tiled roofs less of a fire risk than thatch.

Early brickmakers were itinerant, for bricks are heavy. Where bricks were needed, a nearby source of 'brickearth' or clay was identified and a kiln set up. As demand grew in the 16th century, brick and tile makers settled, often on common land near a village, where clay and fuel for the kiln were accessible. The clay was dug in the autumn and left exposed to be tempered by winter frosts while the workers gathered fuel - the 'lop and top' from timber trees, furze from the wasteland and, later, from planted coppices of hornbeam.

West Hoathly Historical Society

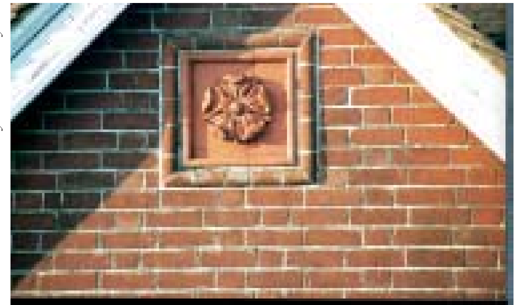
Clay being pushed into a brick mould

Digging clay for brick making

Once the frosts were over, the workers changed to moulding the bricks or tiles and then setting up and firing the kilns. A typical kiln held perhaps 24,000 bricks and as many tiles. Getting this up to 1,000 degrees for the required 48 hours took about six days.

Peter Carrell

Many Wealden ponds were created by digging for clay – particularly those close to houses


West Hoathly Historical Society

Along the Trail, you will notice bricks in a variety of colours, often used in decorative patterns. Some of these colours were produced by variations in the firing. The potassium in woodsmoke could react with iron oxides in the clay, producing a grey/blue colour; furze smoke could turn the glaze greenish.

The clay itself also affected the final shade. Iron compounds produced deep browns and reds, sometimes even blotched or streaked with black. Calcium from chalk, either naturally present or added, resulted in pale buff or cream bricks.

The clay workers had a good appreciation of their raw material and found a use for nearly every geological deposit in the High Weald. Ashdown Sand was just the right mix of clay and sand for good bricks, Wadhurst Clay made excellent tiles, others were fine enough for pottery or so coarse they were reserved for making field drainage pipes. Clays of different qualities were often found on the same site and so it is not surprising to find that early brickworks often produced pottery as well. Bread crocks, chimney and flower pots, roof finials and other architectural decorations were common products.

In early times, clayworking was what we now call a cottage industry. Brickmaking certainly grew beyond this. Bigger works were situated first by rivers and then by railways to facilitate the transport of bricks and later coal to fuel the kilns.

Sharpthorne brickworks, near West Hoathly, was set up beside the East Grinstead line in 1880 and is still a major producer. A small number of handmade tiles and bricks are still produced locally, even at big mechanised works like Sharpthorne. Look closely at the materials being used if you pass any old buildings being restored or extended. The handmade products with their slight irregularities of shape and colour marry better with the original work of the old buildings that add so much to the Wealden landscape.

As for cottage potteries ... ask the next one you pass where they get their clay.

Stacked bricks at Sharpthorne brickworks

TL

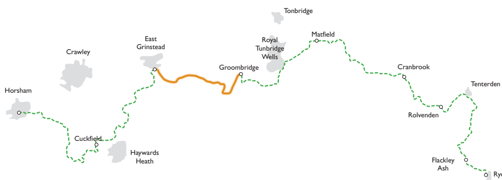
Chimney pots demonstrate the versatility of brick

TL

Clay was also used for architectural decorations

Upper Medway

East Grinstead to Groombridge



MJ

The tributaries of the River Medway have shaped a gently undulating landscape

Man's Mark on the Landscape

The ridge and valley pattern changes now from north/south to east/west so that you are mostly walking with the lie of the land. The tributaries of the infant River Medway have shaped a landscape that is gentler and more undulating than the steep ghylls of sandier areas.

Ox-eye Daisy

Tracks and trails

Your way back into the countryside from East Grinstead is made easy by the flat track of the disused Tunbridge Wells railway line, now known as the Forest Way Country Park. How different from bygone days, when access was so difficult that settlements could be quite isolated in the winter. Then most journeys were made on foot or horseback. The footpath and bridleway network set up over the centuries by daily and weekly trips to work and church is ours to use for pleasure now.

The Romans were the first to build roads in the Weald; you will cross the line of the old Lewes to London road west of Hartfield. They are the only track builders, before modern times, who mastered the land.

Their pavement of iron slag ignored ridge and valley and cut straight through. You can admire a short length of Roman road surface near Holtye (OS grid reference TQ 462388).

Even the 19th century railway engineers chose their route with care. Steel wheels lose their grip on steel rails if the gradient is too steep. Hence the laborious

cuttings and embankments that smooth your way. The nostalgic sight of a steam train puffing through the landscape is restricted to the 'preservation' lines now. But bridges of brick and stone add their mark to the countryside. Each railway company had its own style of station architecture too. 'Important' buildings impressed people, including investors, with the standing of the company

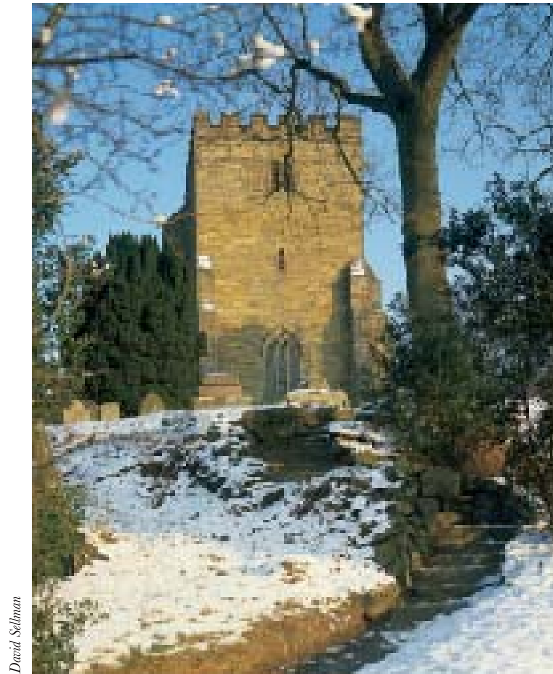
Eila Lawson

The Forest Way has been developed along the route of a disused railway line and is scheduled to be integrated with the national cycle network

Buildings in the landscape

Victorian water works buildings like those at Forest Row and Groombridge are equally worthy brick edifices, with typical attention to decorative detail. The modern concrete towers, where water is pumped up to improve pressure in the taps, are, in contrast, purely functional.

Other services stud the countryside. Some people deplore the huge steel electricity pylons swaggering across the land (cost and technical problems



David Sellman

The story of a community can be unravelled from the headstones found in church yards

discourage the use of underground cables). Others see a certain elegance of form allied to function. There has been a sudden rash of radio beacons and transmission towers in the 90s - the popularity of mobile phones makes its mark even in rural Sussex. Will these become treasured landmarks in the future?

Each successive generation adds its pennyworth to the landscape. 'Traditional' farm buildings add a value to our views that we are not always ready to grant to newer asbestos barns and corrugated iron sheds. These must often be decrepit and tumble-down before they can be regarded as picturesque!

Churches play an important role in the rural landscape, to believer and non-believer. It is not just that elegant vertical accent of a spire in our photograph or the opportunity to admire the changing architecture of the centuries. Much of the story of the community can be unravelled from the monuments, the bequests, the headstones, the alterations and additions to the building itself. Even the fabric of the building usually reflects the rock that is the foundation of the land. Hartfield has one of the many churchyards now recognised as the nature reserve it has long been, with a management plan to protect the wild flowers and lichens and small creatures that live there.

The memorial chapel in Withyham church forms a focus for the Sackville family, which under its varying titles of Dukes of Dorset, Earls de la Warr, Viscounts Cantelupe, has a strong presence in the area. Their patronage is reflected in the admirable architecture of the almshouses and other 16th century buildings in East Grinstead, the manicured grounds of Buckhurst Park, countless inns and a number of lesser buildings.

GS

Buckhurst Park is just one example of the patronage of the Sackville family in the area

Beeching axe to create new footpaths!

This is one headline that never made the front page while Dr Richard Beeching was Chairman of the British Railways Board. Beeching's 1963 plan for the re-organisation of the railways made his name a household word. Destroyer or saviour? It depended on your point of view.

Built piecemeal to serve the needs of the Britain of a hundred years earlier, worn out by the demands of the Second World War and hostage to conflicting post-war political ideologies - nationalise! privatise! subsidise! market forces! - by 1962 the railways were losing nearly £90 million a year. A major rethink was long overdue and Beeching, incisive captain of industry, was called in. His solution was to concentrate on freight, inter-city services and commuters. Who but road hauliers could object? Axe 5,000 route miles, close 2,363 stations? It seemed nearly every one could object!

Whole lines closed. The A22 road now runs through a railway cutting of the old East Grinstead to Tunbridge Wells line. The new road is called Beeching Way, after this famous local resident. Some wanted it to be the Beeching Cut. Many lines are now used as walkways and cycleways, once again getting traffic off the roads.

THE WEALD AT WORK

Farming

A farmer is tied to his soil. He can improve it, with fertilisers or by drainage or irrigation, but it does underlie all his endeavour.

The sandier soils of the central and western High Weald are light and poor - 'hungry' is the farmer's term; the heavier clays are richer, but sticky, hard to work, slow to warm. Farming has never been an easy option here.

The early swineherds probably enlarged natural clearings in the valleys, retreating to their coastal homes when summer passed. Gradually people settled more permanently, though still linked with the coastal fringe. A pattern of augmenting near-subsistence farming with a secondary occupation developed, with the production of iron, charcoal, leather, timber and other goods for the 'home' market. All of these required, in one way or another, the felling of trees; grazing animals helped to prevent forest regeneration.

By the 18th century, the great woodland had given way to a pattern of small irregular fields, mostly grazed by cattle producing milk and cheese for a growing local population. Land on the ridge tops, light enough to plough, would have grown some essential cereals. Cattle dung was the only fertiliser; the farmers also spread 'marl', chalky or sandy clay, in the hope of improving soil texture. Many of the small ponds and depressions you

TL

Even with modern agricultural equipment farmers struggle to plough the sticky soils of the High Weald in winter

The soils of the Medway Valley have always been more suitable for growing crops than the rest of the High Weald

Hastings Museum

George Woods

will see half-cloaked in woodland are marl pits. Others resulted from the quarrying of stone or brick clay for farm buildings.

Wealthier landowners tried to introduce the crop rotations and new techniques of cultivation that were revolutionising agriculture in much of the rest of England. But they reckoned without the Wealden soils. It was the advent of cheap earthenware field drains in the 1840s that allowed a major advance for the heavy soils. Drained of their excess water, they could be ploughed; ploughed, they could be sown with corn.

TL

Grazing animals helped to keep forest regeneration at bay

Now there could be more produce than was needed locally. Turnpiked roads meant this excess could be exported to hungry London. Clear more trees! Enclose land into fields, bigger fields now! Lime could be brought in to improve soil fertility. Alderney and Guernsey cattle were introduced to improve dairy production.

The High Weald now followed the pattern of alternating prosperity and decline that was dictated to British farming by the demands of wartime scarcity, cheap imports and subsidies.

In this present time of agricultural surpluses, the nature of the Wealden soils has won. Technology and artificial fertilisers play their part but most of the land has been returned to growing grass, for grazing or for hay and silage. The cattle that eat it are mostly either black and white Holstein/Friesian dairy cows, or an increasingly variegated mix of beef cattle. The browns and blacks of English beef breeds are now crossed with the creams, buffs and blues of continental breeds.

Some cereals are still grown, again on the better drained high land. You will see wheat, oats and barley, with maize and field beans grown as silage crops.

Farm buildings also record the story of the land's development. You will not see many of the great barns needed elsewhere for storing and threshing grain. Hay was stored as a stack or rick in the yard.

Cattle over-wintered in smaller open sheds. The white-cowled oasts were erected in the 18th and 19th centuries to dry hops, grown mostly for locally made ale.

GS

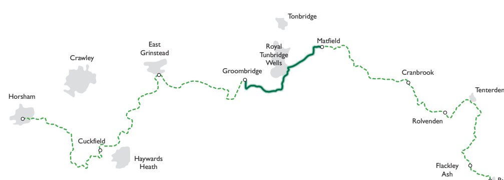
Black and white Holstein/Friesian dairy cows or variegated mixes of beef cattle are a more common sight than the small red Sussex cattle

KCC Tourism

CHAPTER FOUR

Central High Weald

Groombridge to Matfield



A Lordly Landscape

Veteran trees are a distinctive feature of Eridge Park GS

A thread of contrast runs through this section. Harrison's Rocks are thronged with climbers, Eridge Rocks deserted. You pass from the wide ranges of Eridge Park and the open farmland above the Teise to close-hedged valleys and the rectangles of suburban recreation grounds. You taste petrol fumes as you cross main roads then relish the clean untainted breeze.

Hoverflies

A great estate

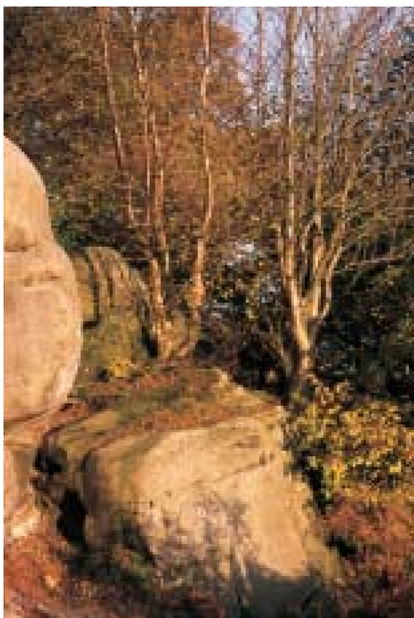
A is for Abergavenny and the letter looms large over Eridge and environs. The Nevill family, later Earls of Abergavenny, inherited the huge Eridge estate in 1456. Their influence on the land they have owned for some 900 years is typical of many great estates, not just emblazoning walls with their family emblems but permeating nearly all aspects of life.

The inheritance included the huge deer park, recorded as emparked, presumably with the usual 'pale' of close-set wooden stakes, by 1420. The deer were probably the imported fallow rather than native red or roe, as they seem to have been easier to contain. The park produced timber and underwood as well as venison, and grazed cattle except when the deer had young at foot. High wire fencing now surrounds part of the Old Park as deer are being reintroduced.

Parkland took on a different dimension in the 17th and 18th centuries; a primary function was now to provide a fitting setting for the great house. In 1792 the Nevills built a new house in the Gothic style (this was

pulled down in 1938 to build a more comfortable 'castle'). They improved the view from the house by pulling down the workers' cottages and building new ones in a more appropriate style. These include the cottages you pass in Eridge Green. The workers were probably well pleased; estate cottages were usually better built than most, for estate owners had responsibilities to their workers as well as rights. The other side of the coin was a degree of control that would be unacceptable today. An early copyhold, the document under which a tenant held his farm, states that the farmer will pay the lord two quarters of oats 'if by some chance [the farmer's] daughter be immoral'.

MJ



Exposed sandrock supports internationally rare bryophtes

In 1792 the estate employed 104 outside workers, including four men to sweep the leaves from the woodland rides. In 1955 there were still nearly 50 employed to run 12,000 acres (4,850 hectares). Estate owners had capital. They were the men who could experiment with ways of improving farming methods and invest in new machinery like the 19th century steam-driven sawmill at Eridge. Their patronage spread to inns and almshouses, churches and schools.

New developments

They could also set the pace. Lord Abergavenny followed advice given to him in the late 19th century and kept land near the expanding town of Royal Tunbridge Wells under grass, ready for quick sale or development. Redundant estate buildings can be converted to light industrial or domestic use.

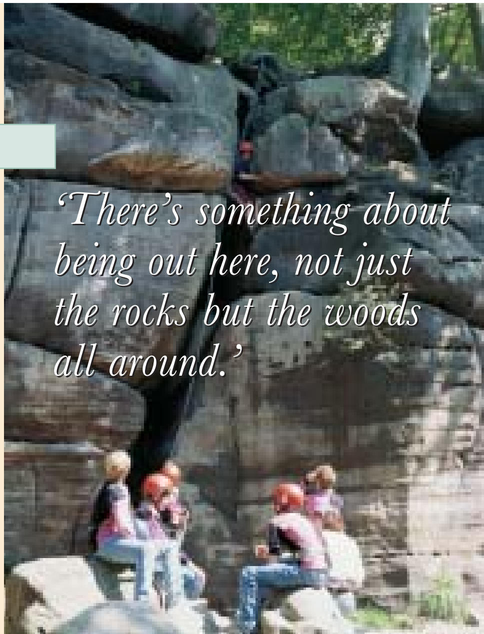
Unproductive woodland can be leased for four wheel drive courses or paintball wars. Other landowners can do the same but the big estates, now often owned by pension funds and insurance companies, still operate on a grander scale.

MJ

The Nevill and Abergavenny plaques are a frequent site on cottages, inns, churches and schools

MJ

MJ



MJ

On the Rocks

This is only Justine Lambert's third time out climbing at Harrison's Rocks but she's sold on them. Her teacher brought her out once and then she started to come out with a friend. 'You need two of you, one to belay while you climb.' She has a minimum of gear - webbing harness, the essential rope, karabiners to run it through, a bottle of silicone gel so that her hands don't slip, despite the sweaty palms.

Why does she do it? 'It's the adrenalin rush, I suppose. And you aren't competing against anyone, it's just the challenge of how far you can get.' She clipped herself to the rope, Sam took up her position and Justine began to climb. Soon she was spread-eagled across the rock, searching for holds, Sam offering advice from her viewpoint. You could see the muscles beginning to quiver with effort.

Justine is a local lass, out from Royal Tunbridge Wells for the morning. Perhaps one day she will be the 12th Everest climber to have begun on Harrison's Rocks.

THE WEALD AT WORK

An Essential Commodity

Fuel, building material, carts, fencing, furniture, utensils, bark for tanning leather ... wood was a basic necessity. As the wildwood was tamed, the men of the Weald developed the skills of woodland management. The raw material might still be there in plenty but their tools were few and primitive. How much less work if trees could be made to grow in ways that made them easier to use.

Fuel in the form of wood or charcoal, for cooking and heating, for furnaces and kilns, was a priority. Fallen branches were not enough. Small trees cut down soon sent up new shoots from the base or 'stool'. Where there was plenty of light, these grew straight and tall, providing a regular harvest of usefully sized stems. A system of 'coppicing' (from the French word couper, to cut) was set up; blocks or 'coups' of underwood, protected from grazing animals by boundary banks and ditches, were harvested when they had grown to a suitable size. The trees could then go on producing wood for many centuries.

Underwood could be used as it was or split. At up to two inches diameter - five to nine years growth - it was perfect for splitting into thin lathes or wattles to support the daub of earth, straw and dung

Hastings Museum

George Woods

All sizes, shapes and types of wood were once used by woodland workers

GS

Coppiced trees provide a regular harvest of useful sized stems

that filled in the spaces between larger timbers in a house. Or for weaving into hurdles for temporary fencing or animal pens. At four inches, it made wheel spokes or was split for weatherboarding. Wood workers knew the qualities of different trees. Ash is springy and absorbs shock; it makes superb tool handles. Willow is light and strong, just right for shovels to turn the heavy clay tempering for bricks under the winter frost. Oak heartwood lasts long; use it for buildings and fence posts.

Larger timber came from the trunks and branches of the standard trees that grew up above the underwood. Small trees were easiest to handle. One large medieval farmhouse is known to have used 330 oak trees. Half were less than nine inches in diameter, a tenth less than six inches. The timbers had to be split or pit sawn, slow laborious work. Builders sized up their trees, fitted shapes to function.

Much timber came from trees grown in hedgerows or in shaws, the small belts of woodland kept to shelter fields. Bigger trees were mostly grown in parkland. Many parks contained wood pasture, where trees were managed like coppice but cut above the reach of the deer and cattle grazing beneath them. This is known as pollarding.

Native wood and timber is now superseded by new materials and imports, though sweet chestnut coppice for fencing material is still marginally economic. Initiatives such as Weald Woodnet are developing new products and new markets that will help to restore traditional woodland management and maintain this element of the Wealden landscape.

GS

Large timber came from the trunks and branches of large or 'standard' trees

GS

Chestnut paling and post and rail fencing, made from split coppice, is still used throughout the High Weald

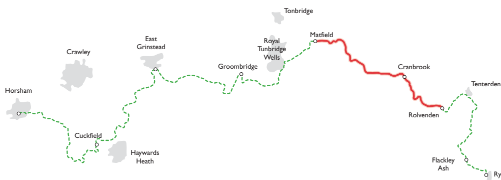
Wood Mouse

Look out for locally made charcoal in shops across the Weald. By using local charcoal you are helping conserve woodland wildlife and traditional rural skills

GS

Kentish High Weald

Matfield to Rolvenden



A Productive Landscape

Orchards and hop gardens give the Kentish High Weald its special distinctiveness. MJ

This area can well lay claim to the title of 'Garden of England' as it has some of the largest remaining orchards and hop gardens in England. The western slopes are clothed with lines of fruit trees, edged by tall rows of poplars, and hop poles still cover the lower slopes around Goudhurst. Oast houses can be seen on almost every skyline, evidence that hop growing was once far more widespread.

Early settlement

Fruit growing is a relatively recent land use and the history of the area is far more varied. As in other parts of the Weald, the grazing of swine began the slow penetration into the dense forest - Benenden, Horsmonden and Rolvenden are just three examples of local settlements which began as Saxon swine pasture or 'dens'. Gradually these small clearings developed into agricultural settlements but, until the early 14th century, the area remained sparsely populated.

A centre of industry

Flemish weavers, encouraged to come to England by the king to strengthen English cloth manufacture, settled around Cranbrook in the 14th century and a thriving cloth industry developed. By the

16th century, as in other parts of the Weald, French blast furnaces had revolutionised iron smelting and Horsmonden became a thriving industrial centre. One huge forge was owned by John Brown, the gunsmith to whom James I granted exclusive rights to the manufacture of naval guns and shot during the Anglo Dutch wars. Other furnaces were situated at Brenchley, Lamberhurst and Tenterden.

The wealth generated by the iron and cloth industries is reflected both in the size and adornment of some of the parish churches and the large number of grand houses. The population grew rapidly and many of the smaller Tudor dwellings may have been weavers' or iron workers' cottages'.

Sally Marsh

Lines of fruit trees give the landscape a distinctive look, rather like thick corduroy

New farming techniques

Farming had always continued alongside the industries but after their decline it became the primary occupation once more. The steady stream of European immigrants during the 15th and 16th centuries brought many new crops and improved husbandry with them and

TL

gradually their novel ideas were absorbed into mainstream farming. From the 19th century, larger scale cultivation developed, following the introduction of improved field drainage and cultivation techniques and perhaps benefiting, in terms of availability of workers, from the demise of the iron and cloth industries.

MJ

Weatherboarded buildings are a lasting remnant of the thriving cloth industry

Hops and ale

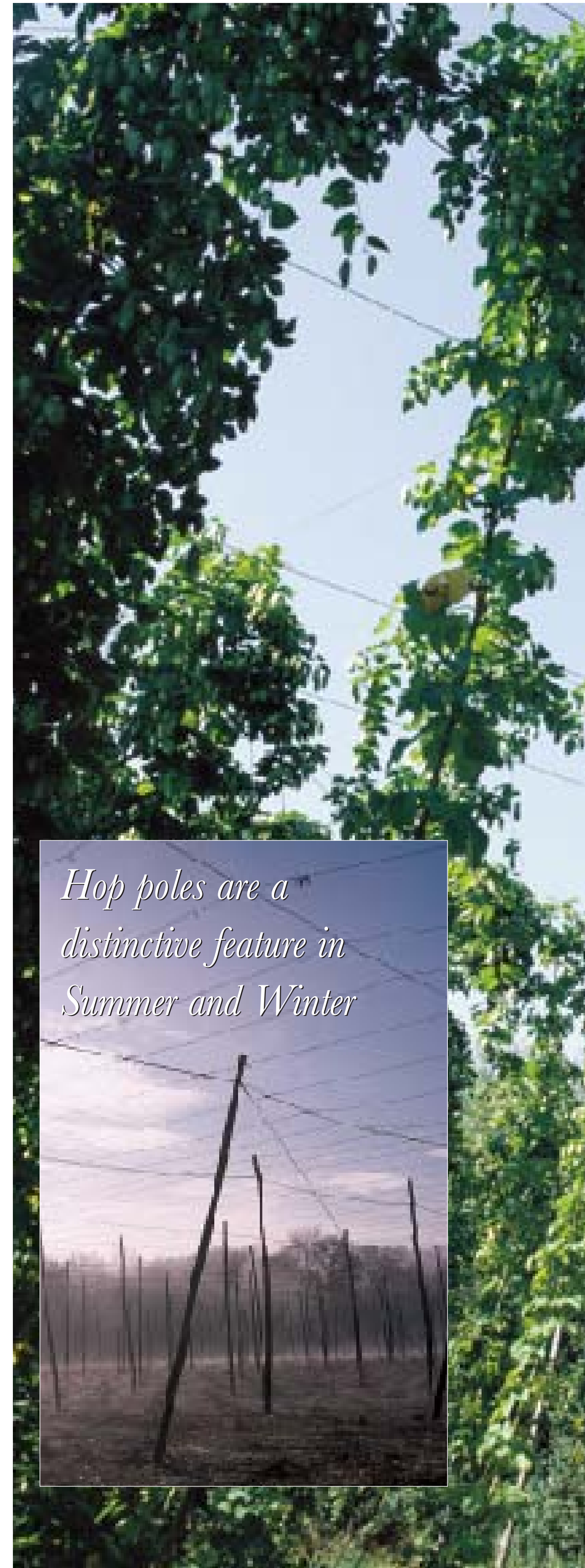
Hops and brewing expertise were one of the European introductions. Prior to this, ale was a sweet, sticky drink very different from modern beer. The hoppy brews were unpopular at first, but hops inhibited bacterial growth, improving the keeping properties, and so were gradually accepted. Initially cultivation was on a small scale, but steadily increased as the taste for the drier, hoppy bitter grew and its extended life gave it a wider market.

KCC Tourism

Dried hops in sacks – it is the female flower cone that gives the familiar bitter flavour to beers

The picking of the long shoots or 'bines' and the stripping of the cones begins in September. Freshly picked hops contain 80% moisture which must be reduced to 6% before being compressed, packed and sent to the brewery.

Drying is a skilled process as the best brewing hops are those which have not dried out completely and have the moisture evenly distributed. At first existing barns were modified but, as demand for hops increased in late 18th century, purpose built buildings, oasts, were developed. Most are now converted to unusual dwellings as electrical drying techniques have taken over and hop production has reduced due to competition from cheaper European imports. Until the 1950s hop picking was done by hand by gypsies and families from the East End of London who came for working holidays in the Kentish countryside. Most hop picking and processing is now mechanised.



Hop poles are a distinctive feature in Summer and Winter

Fruit and hops were never described as growing in fields, always 'gardens' or 'orchards'. One explanation is that tithes, taxes paid to the church, were claimed on fields but not gardens

GS

Siegfried Sassoon

Siegfried Sassoon, the First World War poet and writer, was born in Brenchley and the surrounding countryside was the backdrop to much of his autobiographical writing. 'The Old Century' describes his early childhood and 'Weald of Youth' his early adulthood. His deep love for the landscape pervades all his writing and his descriptions still evoke the Weald.

Convalescing after childhood pneumonia he writes, *"aware and yet unaware of the blue evening distance of the Weald beyond the tree tops ..."* Or describing an exciting skating trip to Furnace Pond, near Horsmonden, in a red painted sledge pulled by ponies *"... my mother drove the sledge across the pond in great style and we felt that we had done something splendid ..."*

As a young man returning home from Royal Tunbridge Wells he wrote fondly *"to the left of the higher ground ... the Weald lay in all it's green contentedness"*, or of his *"... favourite glimpse of Kentish distance above the foreground apple orchards ..."*

'the Weald lay in all its green contentedness'

Siegfried Sassoon

THE WEALD AT WORK

Orchards

"Here's to thee old apple tree, Stand fast root, bear well top, Pray God send us a howling crop, Every twig, apples big, Every bough, apples enow. Hats full, caps full, full quarter sacks full, Holla, boys, holla!"

Traditional wassail chant.

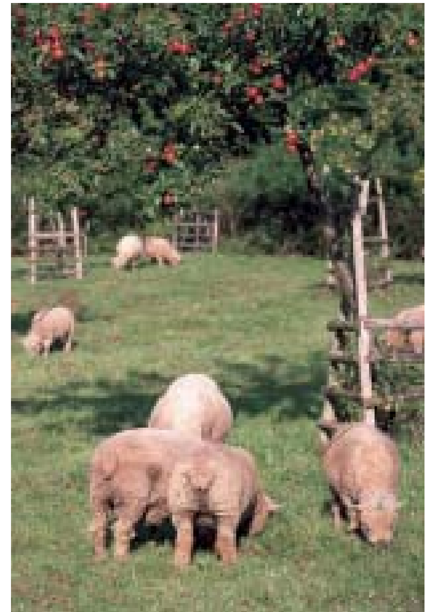
The apple harvest has long been an important part of the local economy and has earned its place in folklore.

Apple wassailing was an annual event, usually carried out around Twelth Night. After dark, farmworkers and their families would gather around the largest tree in the orchard. Toast or cake soaked in cider was placed in a fork of the tree, cider poured around its roots and the tree toasted with a chant such as that above. The trunk was then beaten with sticks and a great noise made with shotguns, cow horns, beating of sticks and shouts to drive away evil spirits and arouse the sleeping trees. The ceremony was believed to have a magical significance, protecting the trees and encouraging a plentiful fruit crop.

'Cider Making'

Hastings Reference Library

George Woods


GS

Traditional orchards are characterised by well spaced trees in sheep grazed meadows

The tradition is still carried on today by some Morris dancing groups in Kent and Sussex, although nowadays it is more a cheerful frolic than the magical ceremony it was once held to be.

The Romans introduced orchard fruits to England and European immigrants brought new varieties in Tudor times. Henry VIII had large apple and cherry orchards planted near Faversham but it was not until the 19th century that commercial orchards became widespread. The High Weald is particularly suited to growing orchard fruits, especially apples, as the slow growing conditions of the cool climate produces fruit with an excellent flavour and the well drained soil on the higher land remains free from late frosts which can settle in the valley.

In recent years, however, fruit growing has steadily declined - since 1961 orchards in the High Weald have been reduced by a third. The mild damp climate that grows such flavoursome fruit also makes British orchards more vulnerable to pests and diseases and bad weather can make harvests unpredictable. Imported fruit from southern Europe can be grown more cheaply and has a more even appearance than British fruit. This appeals to the fickle British customer who now demands cheap, regular shaped, unblemished fruit.

The methods of fruit growing have also changed. The traditional orchard with tall, gnarled, well-spaced trees in a sheep-grazed meadow has largely been replaced by rows of densely planted small bushes. These are usually heavy cropping modern varieties grafted onto dwarf rootstock. Some of the traditional varieties such as Cox are much more difficult to grow and produce a less reliable crop. The dwarf trees are easier to harvest and manage and up to three times as many trees per acre can be planted. Hence, a smaller area of orchard yields considerably more fruit.

However there is a resurgence of consumer interest in older flavoursome varieties such as Russets and Worcester. Grants are available to encourage farmers to restore old orchards and plant new ones with traditional varieties to help conserve this traditional part of the landscape.

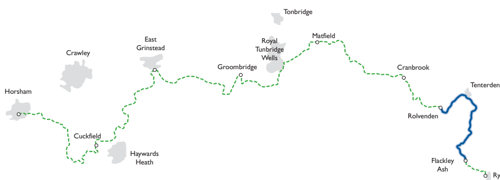
Sally Marsh

Look out for local apples in village and farm shops along the Trail. By purchasing local apples you are helping keep orchards as a feature of the High Weald and supporting rural employment

CHAPTER SIX

Lower Rother

Rolvenden to Flackley Ash



A Changing Landscape

TL

The Rother and Brede levels have always been important grazing marsh

The hills in this easterly section of the High Weald are gentler as they slope down towards the coast. The views are wider and more open across to the marshy river levels and the Isle of Oxney. Pasture dominates the slopes and the flat grazing marsh below. Sheep were the mainstay of the medieval economy and remain important today.

An Elegant market town

Historic Tenterden remains the most important settlement in the area and has retained a prosperous air. Its name is derived from the Saxon, 'Tenet-ware-den', meaning pig-pasture for the people of Thanet.

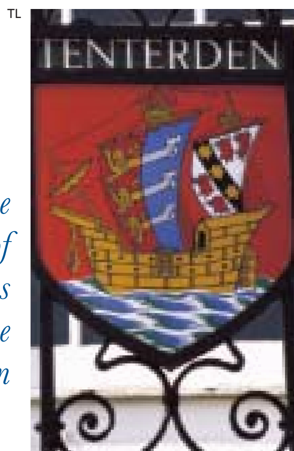
Gradually forest was cleared and the flat marshland below reclaimed. This gave plenty of rich grazing and sheep farming grew in importance. Sheep were overwintered on the fertile lower marshes and then driven along drove roads to the higher land for summer grazing. Tenterden developed as a market town from the 13th century, trading locally and exporting wool. The expanding cloth industry brought further prosperity.

Medieval Tenterden was of great maritime importance - difficult to visualise nowadays when it is ten miles (16 kilometres) from the sea - but, before the Rother silted up, the sea came to Small Hythe, only two miles (3.2 kilometres) away. A licence granted to Archbishop Warnham for the establishment of a

chapel in the parish in the 16th century is evidence for this - it had a permit for the burial of *'the bodies of such who should be cast by shipwreck on the shore'*.

Small Hythe developed as a port and important shipbuilding centre, using the plentiful local supply of forest timber. Henry V had war ships built there in the 15th century. When the Cinque Port of Rye was unable to provide its quota of ships for the king, it turned to prosperous Tenterden for assistance. Tenterden was made a Cinque Port member in 1449, as a 'limb' of Rye, to supply the remaining ships.

Tenterden continued to prosper and remained the centre of commerce, despite the demise of the woollen industry and silting up of the port. It was certainly still thriving in the 19th century when historian and writer William Cobbett described it as 'a market town and a singularly bright spot. It consists of one street which, in some places, is more than 200 feet (60 metres) wide'. (He also commented on the large number of '*very, very pretty girls*' which may have coloured his judgement!).



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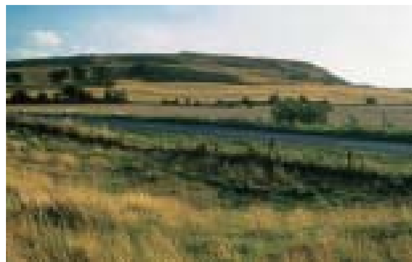
The maritime importance of Tenterden is indicated by the town sign

A man-made landscape

The levels feel open and wild but this landscape is actually man-made. Gradually the sea retreated and the Rother silted up during the 16th and 17th centuries. It became harder and harder to keep the channels navigable. Elaborate drainage schemes were developed - earthen seawalls, ditches and channels - both to prevent devastating flooding and to reclaim the fertile ground for grazing. The Isle of Oxney gradually became landlocked, surrounded by the flat green levels on all sides.



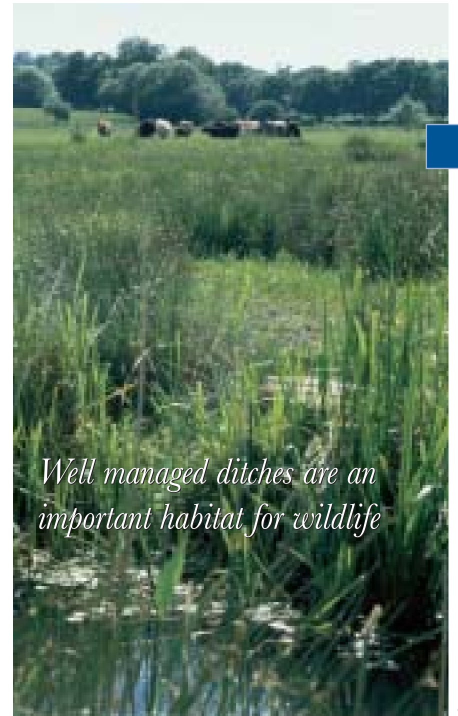
MJ

The Isle of Oxney is now surrounded by grazing marsh

Farming and conservation

The ditches or 'sewers', as many are known locally, form a network which slowly drains water out to sea. The flow of water in the ditches is carefully controlled. In pasture areas, the ditches are kept full and act as 'fences', stopping sheep escaping from the fields. In arable fields, care must be taken to ensure that, in winter, water levels do not rise and flood the crops.

Much wetland wildlife also relies on the careful management of the ditches. Aquatic plants thrive in the shallow water, which in turn provide homes for insects



Well managed ditches are an important habitat for wildlife

TL

and other tiny water creatures. Herons feed in the ditches and reed warblers build their hanging nests in the reeds.

If left alone the ditches would slowly silt up and dry out. Dredging to remove silt damages bankside vegetation and disturbs wildlife. Ideally for conservation only a short stretch or one bank should be dredged at a time, but this may be costly and time consuming. A balance is needed that meets both the economic needs of modern farming and the conservation of this special landscape.

To achieve this balance, several farmers on the levels have entered into conservation management schemes in which they receive payments for managing the marshland using traditional methods. The ditches are sensitively managed, old willows are repollarded, hedgerows maintained or replanted, and wetland complexes created by reflooding certain areas.

Fishermen on the River Rother

MJ

A fisherman's tale

"It's great to get out in the countryside and you see a lot of wildlife from the banks," says Brian Christopher of Clive Vale Angling Club, who regularly fishes on the banks of the Rother.

Brian's favourite time to fish is the quiet late afternoon and evening but he also enjoys the challenge of match fishing. Matches are held at least once a week and fishermen flock to compete on these popular waters where fish such as bream, tench, perch, roach and pike thrive. *"Weighing in the catch from your keepnet is a tense and exciting moment"*, says Brian. *"A good match bag would be 30lbs (13.5kg), an average one 10lbs (4.5kg)"*.

Watching, as a large fish takes the bait, makes you realise the skill involved. Brian carefully plays the fish in, letting it run, then bringing it back several times to tire it out. He gradually reels it in, judging the moment when it is ready to be netted and placed in the keep net. *"If you try and lift it out straight away, its struggling may break your line or it may become unhooked and escape,"* Brian points out.

With the catch safely netted, Brian rebaits his line and settles back at the water's edge to enjoy the rest of this peaceful summer afternoon.

THE WEALD AT WORK

The Woollen Industry

At the beginning of the 14th century, enormous quantities of wool were produced in the area. Much was exported, providing the raw material for the well established Flemish weaving industries. In 1310 over 35,000 sacks were exported, each sack containing 364 lb (165 kg) - equivalent to the weight of two sturdy men. Export duty of 40 shillings per sack was levied which provided the main treasury income.

Edward III wanted to break the Dutch monopoly on the cloth trade to increase employment and improve the economy. He gave incentives to Flemish weavers to encourage them to immigrate, bringing their superior weaving methods and looms. Much of their skill lay in the attention given to the fulling, or cleaning process, which removed the grease and gave a smooth surface and firm texture to the finished cloth.

The plentiful small streams of the High Weald were ideal for damming to create the power for the fulling mills

The Weald was an ideal place to settle. The plentiful streams and steep valleys were ideal for damming to drive the fulling mills (mills with giant wooden hammers to beat the cloth instead of millstones). There was easy access to the ports and London, plentiful building timber from the forest, fuller's earth from the clay and marl soils and, of course, a steady supply of high quality fleeces.

GS

TL
The cottages in Bell Walk, Tenterden may once have been weavers cottages

The industry has also left its mark on our language - the large iron hooks used for drying the cloth has led to the phrase 'being on tenterhooks'

A new merchant class of clothiers developed to manage and co-ordinate the whole process of cloth production and sale. They became very influential and owned much of the Weald. The clothiers were often philanthropic men, founding schools and giving substantial gifts for the upkeep of the parish churches.

Many people were employed in the cloth industry - it took over 40 people to produce one 30 yard (27 metres) long broadcloth. The fleeces were carded and spun by women in the cottages, collected and passed to weavers, fullers and dyers and despatched to port. Many new buildings were also needed. Several grand houses built for the clothiers, some large 'cloth halls' and many picturesque cloth workers cottages remain.

Hastings Museum

George Woods
A steady supply of fleeces from Romney Marsh and the Pevensey Levels ensured the success of the woollen industry

An Act of Parliment in 1566, restricting the export of unfinished cloth, led to the demise of the local cloth industry. It was intended to increase domestic employment but, as Wealden clothiers specialised in exporting cloth for final finishing to Flanders, it was disastrous and the slow decline began. By the 18th century northern weaving centres were also developing, taking advantage of new mechanised techniques that Wealden clothiers were slow to accept and this competition dealt the final blow.

Brede

Flackley Ash to Rye

A Landscape of Rivers and Marsh

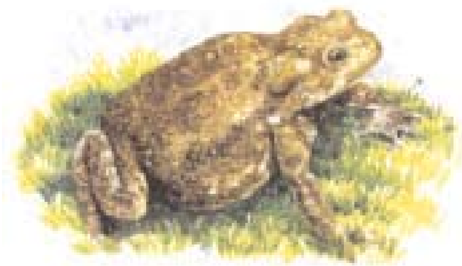
Rye was built on a hill top to gain protection from the ravages of the sea *Lorna Jenner*

This final section feels quite different from the hills and wooded valleys of the true High Weald. Here the rivers are wide and slow and their valleys are flat, open and windswept. The sea has had dramatic effects, washing away the old town of Winchelsea and damaging Rye when both were situated on lower ground.

Hilltop Towns

Both Rye and Winchelsea were rebuilt on hill tops in the 13th century to protect them from the ravages of the sea and invaders. The former ports are now some distance from the sea as the estuaries have silted up and the marshland has been reclaimed for pasture. The area is still prone to flooding as it is low lying and drains the water from three rivers. The Anglo Saxons were the first to build earthen seawalls to control flooding and to reclaim the fertile marshes. In the 14th century a special land reclamation body was set up to oversee the work. It continued to be managed by the Jury's Gut Catchment Board until 1932. The Environment Agency took over responsibility in 1996. The route ends in Rye itself, with its narrow cobbled streets leading to the hill top church. There are few aristocratic houses because Rye was a town of merchants, sailors, boat builders, fishermen and smugglers. Its charm lies in the wonderful mixture of small dwellings, large inns and old warehouses - all beautifully preserved.

Rye retains a maritime feel although the sea receded long ago. Fishing boats still come up the Rother to unload beside the



Toad

walls and a few boatyards remain. Looking out from the town to the estuary, tall masts of fishing and sailing boats still dominate the skyline.

Rye's strategic position on the south coast has given it a turbulent history. Romans, Saxons, Jutes, Danes and Normans all landed here. The most serious attacks, however, were the frequent French raids during the Anglo-French wars in the 13th and 14th centuries. The most devastating raid was in 1377 when every wooden house was burned to the ground. After this, stone walls were erected for fortification.

The Cinque Port Confederation

Since Saxon times ships from south-east England's ports gathered in Yarmouth to land the herring catch. This common interest led to a loose association between the ports which was formalised as the Cinque Ports Confederation, initially with Dover, Hythe, Romney, Sandwich and Hastings as members. The fortunes of the ports constantly changed as the sea currents altered or disasters occurred. During the 12th century Rye and Winchelsea were growing in importance and, in 1156, were invited to join.

During the Anglo-French wars, Cinque Ports' ships were the main vessels available for battle as the King did not yet have a Royal Navy. In return for supplying a fixed number of manned ships the ports enjoyed many privileges. These included freedom from trading dues and taxation, landing rights for the Yarmouth herring catch and honours at court (these still exist in a limited way with the Ports' representatives attending the coronation service in Westminster Abbey).

By the beginning of the 15th century Rye was declining due to the continuing French raids and relentless sea erosion. It still provided a ship to fight against the Spanish Armada but the harbour was silting up and was soon too shallow to hold large warships.

A trading centre

Rye was still an ideal commercial port and the shipbuilders turned to making smaller merchant ships. The arrival of European refugees fleeing religious persecution assisted trade, bringing improved craft skills and trade links.

It was not just legal trading that thrived - the area was equally appealing to smugglers. There were many willing to risk their lives for a share in the great profits available. The flat expanse of Romney marsh with its network of ditches and channels was the sight of many illicit landings under cover of darkness.

Artists' haunt

The charm of the old town and the mystique of the surroundings levels, have attracted artists and writers for centuries. Antony Van Dyck, the 17th-century Dutch painter, made four drawings of Rye. Turner, Millais, Thackeray and Ruskin were drawn to the beauty and calm of Winchelsea. The writer Henry James lived in Rye and, more recently, EF Benson set his 'Mapp and Lucia' stories in the town. An active group of present day artists and writers continues the tradition.

The narrow cobbled streets of Rye would once have been trod by bands of merchants, sailors, boat builders, fishermen and smugglers

David Sellman

Tales of seafaring and murder

The author, John Ryan, whose Captain Pugwash cartoons have entertained both adults and children for almost fifty years, lives with his artist wife, Priscilla, in the heart of Rye.

Originally Pugwash was not directly linked with Rye. As John puts it *"... Pugwash was primarily a pirate who spent much of his time in the Carribean, where all the best pirates hangout!"* It was after he moved to Rye in1987 that John began to set his books in the town. He drew from its rich smuggling history to write *'Captain Pugwash and the Huge Reward'* which gives a lively account of town life, complete with corrupt Mayor and officials, a secret passage, bawdy inns and a ferocious smuggling gang. Rye is called *'Sinkport'*, and many of the places have a familiar ring - Mermaid Street is referred to as *'Barmaid Street'*, Watchbell Street as *'Witchball Street'* and Lamb House as *'Mutton House'*. John's illustrations are all set in the town and many of the historic buildings and street scenes are easily recognised.

'Murder in the Churchyard' uses the same lighthearted style to tell the story of the infamous local murder of Alan Grebell by Breeds, the butcher. John was inspired to write this as the events took place within a few yards of his house, where he walks his dog every night.

Rye was the inspiration for the setting of some of the Captain Pugwash stories

THE WEALD AT WORK

Smugglers

Prior to the 13th century trade was free and so smuggling did not exist. Edward I introduced a customs levy on the export of wool, Britain's primary export, to generate more income for the crown. At first the rates were not high but were steadily increased, making smuggling a highly profitable occupation.

Initially wool was the main contraband but gradually imports such as wine and spirits, and exports such as cloth and leather, were included. The chance of detection was slight as the limited number of customs officers collected duty at ports and did not patrol the coast.

Cinque Port sailors had always had a formidable reputation not only for seamanship but also for ferocity and lawlessness. When income from piracy dried up in the Middle Ages, smuggling was an obvious alternative. As customs officers roles extended the risk of detection grew. Special ships known as luggers were designed which were fast, had great manoeuvrability, and could run in and out to land on the same wind. Whole communities became involved in the business of buying, selling, storing or transporting the contraband. Rye boatbuilders became expert at devising secret compartments to outwit customs searches. Many houses had large cellars and secret passages for storing contraband.

Strand Quay at Rye where boatbuilders would have plotted with smugglers to hide contraband

Hastings Museum

George Woods

For many years the smugglers had public sympathy, looked on as Robin Hood figures, robbing the exchequer to sell goods more cheaply to honest citizens. Public opinion gradually changed as gangs became more organised, ruthless and violent. Corruption and bribing of the Custom's staff was frequent. By the mid 18th century, intimidation reigned supreme - smugglers were often acquitted despite overwhelming evidence against them, informers were beaten or murdered, and ordinary people were too frightened of reprisals not to co-operate. Farmers would leave their stable doors unlocked if smugglers needed their horses. They might be left a keg for their services but the barn could be burned down if they did not co-operate. Gangs had become above the law, defying authority and often re-seizing property from the excisemen.

The Hawkhurst gang were the most feared of all. It was only after the people of Goudhurst stood up to the gang in 1747 that the tide began to turn. Two years later, gang members far overstepped the mark by viciously torturing and murdering two elderly informers. This caused public horror and revulsion and several smugglers were brought to trial and hung.

The incentive for smuggling was removed during the 19th century as policing improved, the coastguard service was established and, more importantly, most duties were reduced as part of Free Trade policies.

Water Plantain

Other walking opportunities

There are a number of long distance walking opportunities within the south-east of England.

North Downs Way 155 miles

A delightful walk of contrasts beneath the shade of Surrey's beech, oak, juniper and yew woodland and across the springy turf of Kent to the white cliffs of Dover.

South Downs Way 100 miles

The South Downs Way follows the line of ancient tracks across the ridges and river valleys of the chalk downland.

Greensand Way 107 miles

Following the greensand ridge the route crosses some of Southern England's highest ground.

Wealdway 82 miles

The Wealdway cuts across England's south-eastern corner traversing the distinctive landscapes of the South East; the Low Weald, High Weald and North and South Downs.

1066 Country Walk 31 miles

The 1066 Country Walk commemorates the year that William of Normandy invaded England and took on the Saxon King, Harold.

The Wey South Path 36 miles

The Path follows the line of "London's Lost Route to the Sea" alongside the Rivers Wey and Arun and the former canal that linked them.

The Saxon Shore Way 163 miles

The Saxon Shore Way follows the ancient coastline of Kent before entering Sussex and continuing to Hastings.

The Stour Valley Walk 51 miles

The Walk follows the path of the River Stour as it meanders through the stunning countryside of East Kent.

Copies of the route guidebooks can be obtained from book shops, tourist information centres and libraries or post free from the relevant county councils. County councils are happy to supply details of other long distance paths and circular walks within the region if required.

Kent County Council
01622 221527
email: env.publications@kent.gov.uk

East Sussex County Council
01273 481654

West Sussex County Council
01243 777610

Visitor attractions

Interesting places to visit on or around the High Weald Landscape Trail are listed below. The attractions close to the Trail are indicated on the route maps by the following symbol –

HOUSES AND GARDENS

Bedgebury Pinetum
Goudhurst 01580 211044

Borde Hill
Haywards Heath 01444 450326

Finchcocks Garden
Goudhurst 01580 211702

Groombridge Place Gardens
Tunbridge Wells 01892 863999

High Beeches Gardens
Handcross 01444 400589

Lamb House (NT)
Rye 01892 890651

Leonardslee Gardens
Lower Beeding 01403 891212

Nymans Gardens (NT)
Handcross 01444 400321

The Priest House
West Hoathly 01342 810479

Sackville College
East Grinstead 01342 321930

Saint Hill Manor
East Grinstead 01342 326711

Scotney Castle Garden (NT)
Lamberhurst 01892 891081

Sissinghurst Garden (NT)
Nr Cranbrook 01580 712850

Sheffield Park Garden (NT)
Danehill 01825 790231

Small Hythe Place (NT)
Small Hythe 01580 762334

Sprivers (NT)
Horsmonden 01892 890651

Standen House (NT)
East Grinstead 01342 323029

Wakehurst Place Gardens (NT)
Haywards Heath 01444 894066

RECREATION

Deers Leap Park
East Grinstead 01342 325858

Ardingly Reservoir Watersports
Ardingly 01892 890661

MUSEUMS

Cuckfield Museum
Cuckfield 01444 881945

Cranbrook Museum
Cranbrook 01580 712069

Cranbrook Union Mill
Cranbrook 01580 712256

East Grinstead Museum
East Grinstead 01342 323636

Horsham Museum
Horsham 01403 254959

Motor Museum
Rolvenden 01580 241234

North American Indian Museum
Horsted Keynes 01825 790314

Rye Heritage Centre
Rye 01797 226696

Tenterden Museum
Tenterden 01580 764310

Ypres Tower and Rye Museum
Rye 01797 226728

VINEYARDS

Tenterden Vineyard Park
Small Hythe 01580 763033

Bookers Vineyard
Bolney 01444 881575

RAILWAYS

Bluebell Railway
Sheffield Park 01825 723777

Kent & East Sussex Railway
Tenterden 01580 765155

Spa Valley Railway
Tunbridge Wells 01892 537715

RESERVOIRS

Bewl Water
Lamberhurst 01892 890661

South East Water
Berwick 01323 870810

NT = National Trust properties

GS

To maximise your enjoyment of the walk allow time to stop at the visitor attractions, such as Groombridge Place en route

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Eila Lawton

Eila is a New Zealander whose love of the British countryside has helped to turn a fleeting visit to the United Kingdom into a stay of some twenty years.

She has been able to share that interest with many others in her work as Education Officer for Surrey Wildlife Trust and as a lecturer in countryside recreation at Merrist Wood College.

Eila is now working from her home in Surrey as a freelance countryside interpreter and trainer. She also leads guided walks in the United Kingdom and abroad.

Lorna Jenner

Lorna is a keen walker with a deep love of the countryside. She knows the High Weald well, having lived in Kent for over 15 years and widely explored the countryside of south-east England.

A biologist by training, she worked as a countryside ranger in North Wales and England and then as a lecturer training countryside staff. She hopes that encouraging others to enjoy the countryside may stimulate a greater awareness of, and interest in, environmental issues.

Lorna now works freelance as a trainer and countryside interpreter.

Sandra Fernandez

Sandra studied Illustration at the Harrow College of Art followed by a postgraduate course in Natural History at the Royal College of Art. She has worked for the National Trust, Courtier, London Zoo, Dorling Kindersley and Kent County Council. Her commissions vary from 3 dimensional greeting cards and book illustrations to large murals. Sandra works as a freelance illustrator from her home in Marden, Kent.

Tristan Lavender

Tristan has always had a strong interest in wildlife and the environment, a fact reflected in his previous work for the Council For the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), and the High Weald Unit. He has used his experience and knowledge to write the Sussex action plan for the protection of wildflower grasslands, a bench mark for the conservation of this rare and vulnerable habitat.

Tristan has lived, on and off, at the edge of the High Weald for over twenty years and has found the landscape and cultural heritage of the area a natural inspiration for his photographs.

Martin Jones

Martin has been a full-time photographer since 1990 having previously been with landscape practice Brian Clouston & Partners in Hong Kong. His work has illustrated several Countryside Commission Landscape Assessments including 'The High Weald - Exploring the Landscape of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'. He has been London's Royal Park's photographer since 1996 and on the Millennium Commission's panel of photographers since 1996. He was the winner of the Architects' Journal 100th anniversary/Arup Photographic Award in 1995. Martin is based in London and Derbyshire.

High Weald
Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty

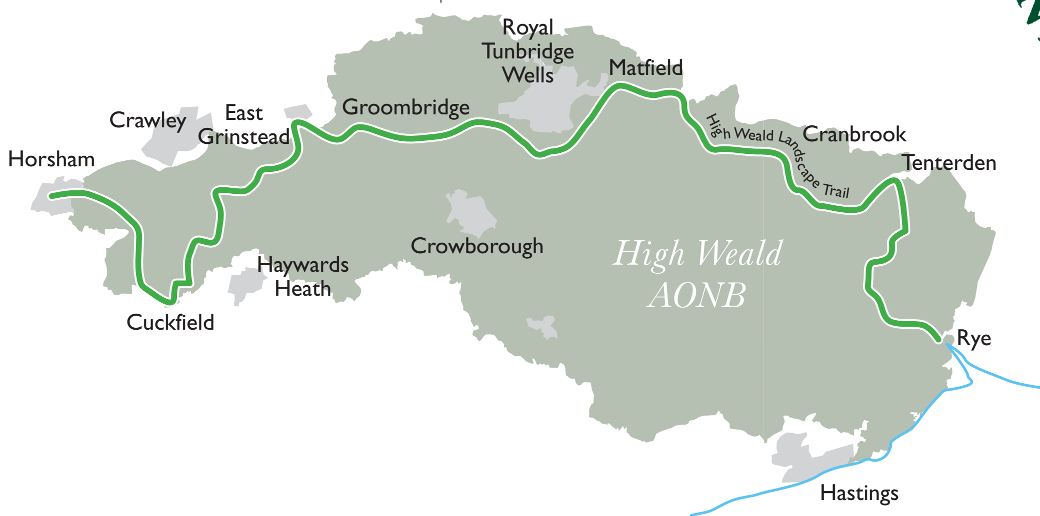
Discover the pleasures of walking in a nationally important landscape

The High Weald Landscape Trail crosses the counties of West Sussex, East Sussex and Kent providing an opportunity to explore the heart of south-east England.

Meandering through the intimate rolling landscape of small fields, hop gardens, orchards, flower rich meadows, and ancient woodland, studded with ponds and sandstone outcrops, the 90-mile/145 kilometre Trail links the ridge top villages and the historic gardens for which the area is famous.

The Trail is suitable for beginners and seasoned walkers and can be completed in seven to ten days or undertaken in sections. It is accessible by public transport at a number of points, allowing you to return to your starting point without retracing your steps.

The route is well signposted and waymarked. Follow the High Weald Landscape Trail logo.



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