

Imagine... if you were only 1cm TALL

Imagine how different this clearing looks to small insects, birds and reptiles.

Grains of sand would be the size of bricks, the low heather would be like thick, scrubby woodland with lots of sunny glades, the sandstone rocks would be the size of a canyon!

If you were 1cm tall, how many different places could you find to make a home?

Many of the plants and animals that live at Birchden Wood rely on the very specific conditions, or habitat, that is found here.



1cm TALL



The digging hunter

Birchden is ideal for the digger wasp. This solitary insect needs light, sandy soil to dig a burrow, where it lays its eggs. The wasp specialises in eating weevils!



When is a bee not a bee?

When it's a hoverfly!
Birchden Wood is classified as ancient woodland: meaning it has been wooded for at least 400 years. Some rare and unusual furry hoverflies live in this woodland habitat. They have a novel way of protecting themselves: they impersonate bees!



Degrees of success

On sunny days, look out for lizards near here, especially on tree stumps and fallen logs that stick up into the sunlight.

Unlike humans, reptiles cannot generate their own heat. So when a common lizard wakes, its body temperature is only around 15° Centigrade. It needs to find somewhere to sunbathe until, ideally, it reaches 30° C. Habitat is therefore very important: it must have easy access to sunny spots, regardless of whether they are boggy or dry.

Common lizards are not very mobile and spend their lives within 50 metres of where they were born. To ensure their habitat remains in good condition, Forestry Commission staff regularly cut back the clearings and rides through Birchden Wood to maintain good sunbathing locations.

The Nightingale's song

The nightingale is a summer visitor to Europe, spending the winter south of the Sahara Desert. When breeding here it likes very dense, scrubby habitat to protect its nest. It also sings its beautiful song from deep within dense scrub. If you hear a nightingale sing at night it's a male searching for a mate!



Our thanks go to the organisations who have supported our work on Birchden Wood.



Local Forestry Commission Office:
Bedgebury Office, Park Lane, Goudhurst, Cranbrook, Kent TN17 2SL
T 01580 211044 E enquiries@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

www.forestry.gov.uk

Designed by www.buffalodesign.co.uk

Imagine... meeting the first British pig farmers in this wood 6,000 years ago

How did Birchden get its name?

Beneath your feet is a shallow, sandy soil overlying sandstone. It is a soil favoured by Birch trees, which have probably always grown on this site.

From as far back as the Neolithic period (c.4300 - 1400BC) the first British farmers - from the South Downs, North Downs and coastal plains - drove their pigs into the High Weald each autumn to fatten them on acorns and beech mast. A practice known as pannage.

Farmers from a particular village returned with their pigs to the same woodland year after year. Their temporary camps and pig pastures were called **dens**.

In 1086 - when pannage was already past its peak - Domesday records indicate that around 150,000 pigs would have been driven to and from the woods of the High and Low Weald!

So, 'Birch' for the trees that characterise this wood and 'den' for the place where the ancient farmers settled.

Ancient damage caused by feet!

The frequent passage of pigs being driven to and from the dens from their parent villages formed tracks known as droves. They remain today in the pattern of lanes, bridleways and footpaths radiating away from the High Weald.

But centuries of use by trotters, feet, hooves - and, later, cartwheels - have worn the soft ground away so that, today, many of the routes have deeply sunken sections. One such track can be seen as the High Weald Landscape Trail enters Birchden Wood, north and east of the car park. People may have been using this particular track for over 6,000 years! Look for this blue dotted line on the map!

Tree fact

As well as being prized for its beautiful silvery-white bark, Birch has been widely used by indigenous people and traditional craftsmen around the world for hundreds of years.

From small acorns...

Domesticated pigs, descended from wild boar, still enjoy acorns as natural food.



Our thanks go to the organisations who have supported our work on Birchden Wood.



Local Forestry Commission Office:

Bedgebury Office, Park Lane, Goudhurst, Cranbrook, Kent TN17 2SL
T 01580 211044 E enquiries@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

www.forestry.gov.uk

Imagine...

a vision
of hell!

The air is thick with the smell of (wood) smoke

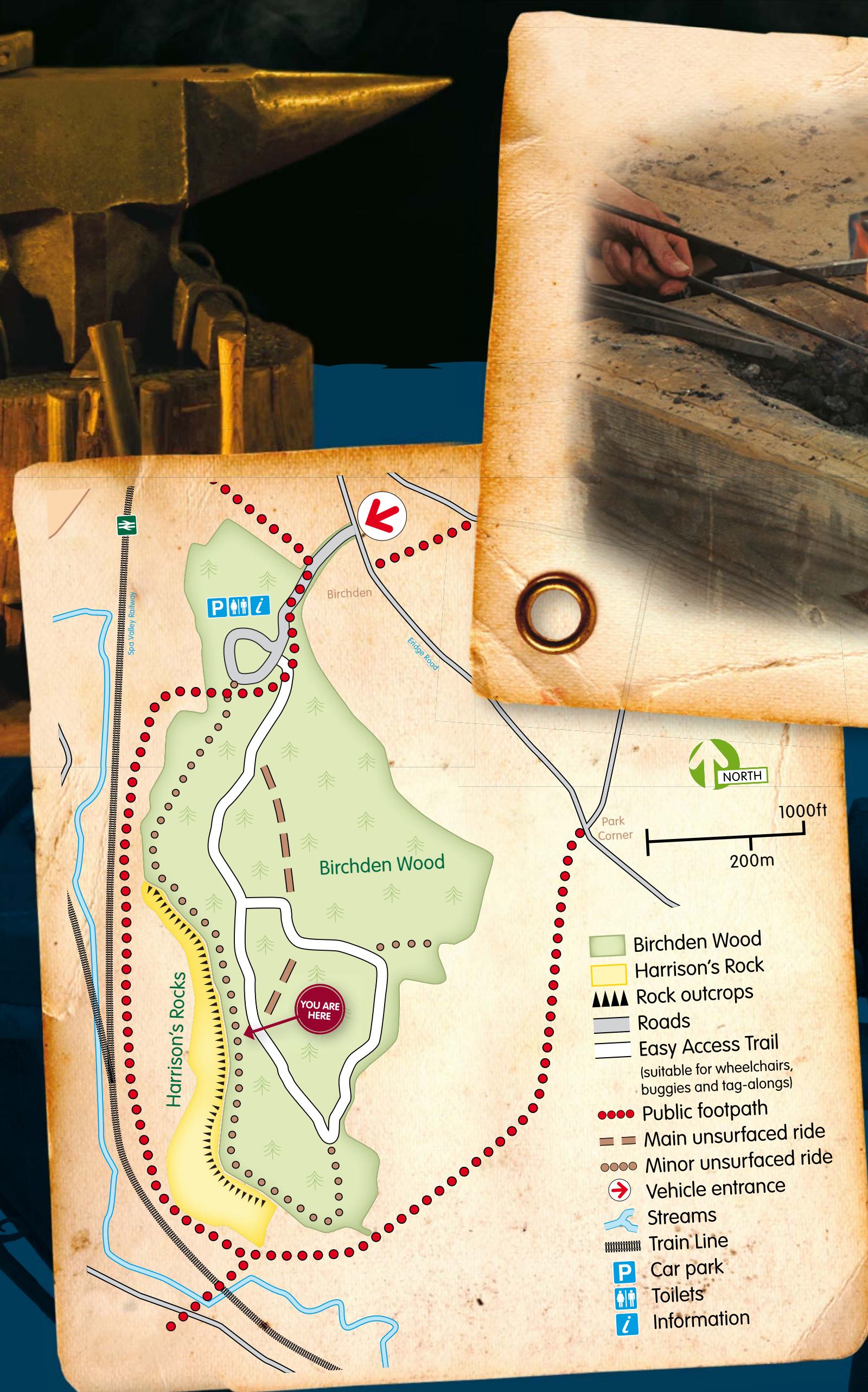
and the loud clanging of forge hammers.

Birchden Wood: an industrial landscape

Here in the High Weald exist all the necessary raw materials - iron ore, wood for fuel, water for power, and stone and brick for building materials - that have allowed iron to be smelted for over 2,000 years.

By the end of Tudor times, up to 100 furnaces and forges operated in the High Weald: the local Birchden Forge and Hamsell Furnace were 2 examples. At this time, the High Weald produced 9,000 tonnes of iron a year - enough to make the Eiffel Tower!

But iron production had a profound effect on the landscape. Compare the loud clanging of hammers and thick smoke to today's relative tranquility!



Tree fact

Coppicing is a traditional woodland management practice. When a coppiced tree is cut down, it grows back quickly with multiple stems. Coppicing provided the wood to make into charcoal to heat the furnaces of the iron industry.

Can you find any trees with multiple stems?



Strong times

From the time of Henry VIII to the late 18th century, almost all of England's cannon came from the High Weald.



Did you know...

Ironmaster and gun-founder Ralph Hogge made the first one-piece, cast-iron, water-powered "furnacecannon" in England in 1543 at nearly Buxted. Making cannon became a highly skilled and profitable business: not only helping defeat the Spanish Armada in 1588 but also becoming the subject of illegal exports.