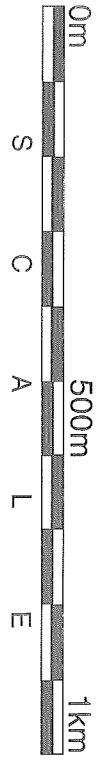
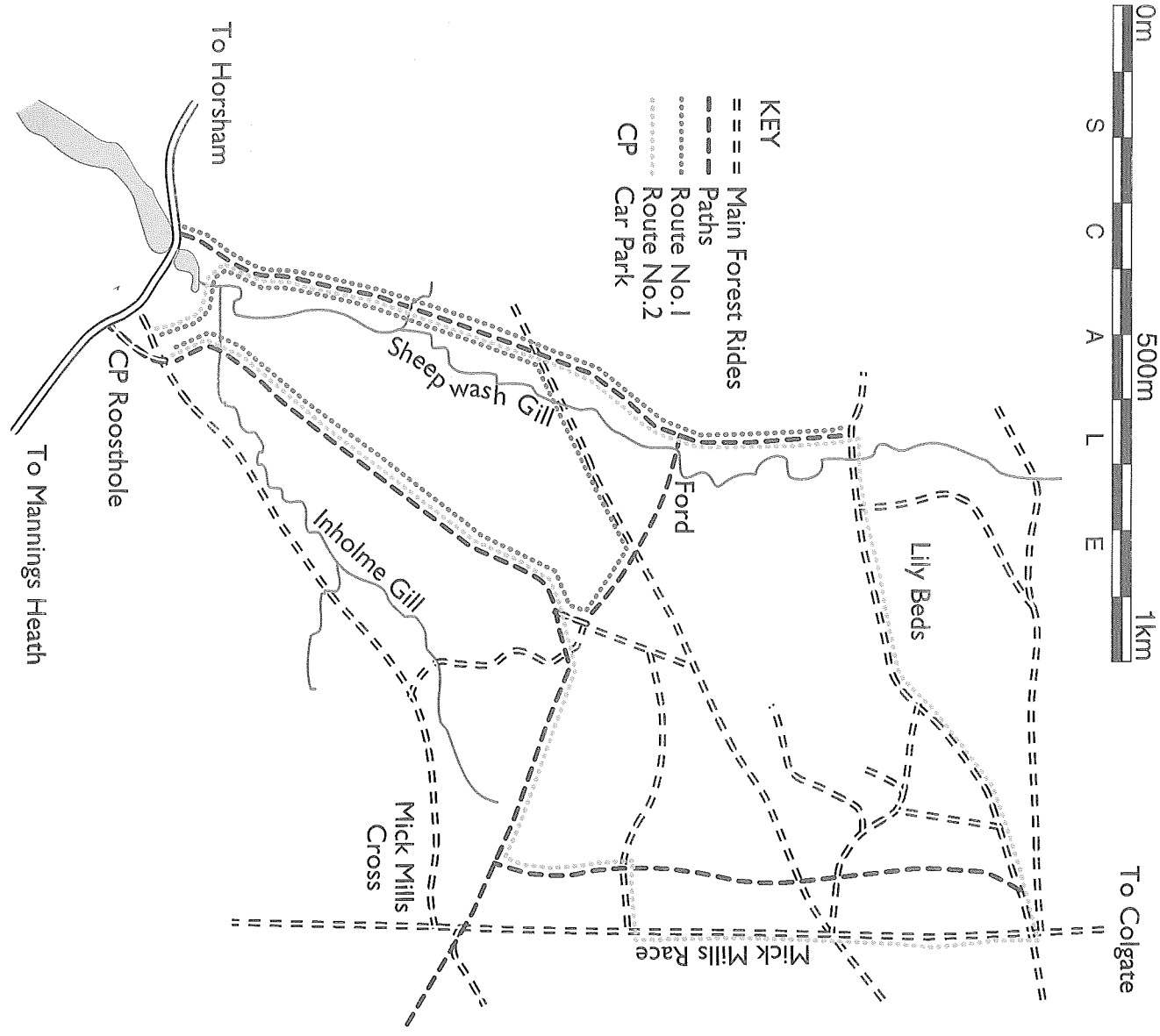


LOCATION PLAN 1:50 000



FOREST ENTERPRISE



Forest Enterprise
Forestry Commission

St. Leonards Forest is managed by Forest Enterprise, the section of the Forestry Commission responsible for managing over one million hectares of national forest. The aim is for attractive and productive forests that everyone can enjoy. St. Leonards is just one of more than 600 forest walks and picnic sites provided by Forest Enterprise throughout Britain.

The forests are some of the best places to experience the peace and quiet of the countryside. Follow waymarked forest walks - or make up your own route. You are free to wander where you like on foot in Forest Enterprise forests marked by the well known "Forestry Commission" sign.

All the forests are working forests too. Forest Enterprise produces more than 3 million tonnes of timber every year. The largest trees are sawn for house building whilst the small thinnings are valuable for paper and chipboard.

Follow the Country Code

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
- Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone
- Guard against all risks of fire • Take your litter home
- Help to keep all water clean • Fasten all gates
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees
- Keep your dogs under close control
- Keep to public paths across farmland
- Take special care on country roads
- Use gates and stiles to cross hedges, fences and walls
- Make no unnecessary noise

In wet weather it is recommended that walkers wear appropriate footwear.

If you would like further information or have any suggestions please contact:

Forest Enterprise,
Weald Forest District
Goudhurst, Cranbrook
Kent TN17 2SL
☎ (01580) 211044

For further information on the Sussex Wildlife Trust contact:

Woods Mill, Henfield
West Sussex
BN5 9SD
☎ (01273) 492630

St. Leonards
Forest Walks

HIGH WEALD AONB UNIT

REFERENCE COPY

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
Thank you



COUNTRYSIDE
COMMISSION



This leaflet was designed and produced by West Sussex County Council Planning Department, and printed by Haid & Havercroft, Worthing, on environmentally friendly paper.

Acknowledgements: Robin Edwards, Sally Nye.

SHEEPWASH GILL

Distance: Approximately 1 mile (1.6 km)
Directions: Please refer to the map and follow the blue waymarker posts.

POINTS OF INTEREST

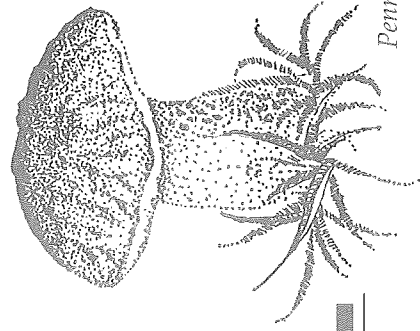
This walk encompasses a variety of habitats.

Sheepwash Gill is a stream ravine set in the Tunbridge Wells sandstone beds. The gill is rich in mosses and liverworts including some rare species. Damp loving Alder trees grow along the gill banks, their cone like seeds are eaten by Siskins and Redpolls. The drier slopes are cloaked with oak woodland.

In summer, White Admiral butterflies fly through sunlit glades. In spring, Redstarts return from Africa, so look out for their quivering red tails. A damp autumn will provide a rich display of fungi including the Penny Bun.

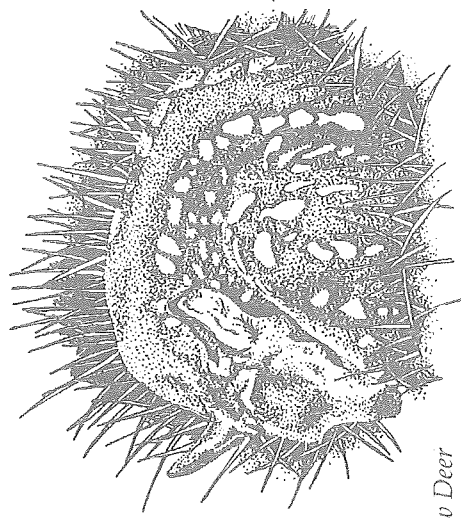


Alder



Penny Bun

Roe deer which first colonised the site in 1965 are often seen in the open areas. The larger Fallow Deer may also be seen grazing the sides of the forest rides. These wide grassy rides which act as fire breaks are also home to butterflies like the Meadow Brown and several species of grasshopper and cricket.



Fallow Deer

Along Mick Mills Race there are large heaps of pine needles. These are the nests of Wood Ants. In warm weather many thousands of ants can be seen sprawling all over the nest, radiating out in columns that can stretch for tens of metres. At Mick Mills Cross the forest remains much as it was in the Middle Ages: mature Oak and Beech trees and much dead and fallen timber. The Great Storm of October, 1987 blew down many of the larger trees yet already dozens of saplings are in competition to become the next generation of forest giants.

Beyond the stream, Silver Birch and lines of planted Western Hemlock dominate the woodland. Birch is an important food plant for the caterpillars of moths. Over 300 moth species have been recorded in the forest.

Scattered clumps of heather grow beneath the birch providing a clue to the area's heathland past when this acid loving plant would have been widespread. Even today some paths are flanked with a ribbon of purple heather flowers in August. Also beneath the birch, in autumn, lurk the white spotted orange caps of Fly Agaric toadstools commonly associated with gnomes and fairies! Sheepwash Gill and Mick Mills Cross are managed as nature reserves by the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

MICKS CROSS

Distance: Approximately 2.75 miles (4.4 km)

Directions: Please refer to the map and follow the green waymarker posts. This walk forms an optional loop to walk one.

POINTS OF INTEREST

This route extends further down Sheepwash Gill and into the wider forest. The contrast between the native woodland cloaking the bank of the gill and the commercial softwood plantations is dramatic. Another visually striking contrast is that between the large open areas that have been clearfelled and the blocks of standing conifers. It is this variety that encourages the diverse range of wildlife.



Birch



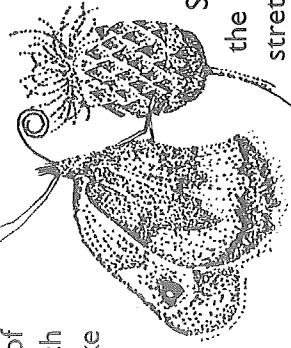
Adder

On warm spring days Adders bask in the sun after a winter spent in hibernation. Lizards also soak up the sun on old tree stumps and patches of bare earth. In summer, the night air carries the strange "churring" call of the Nightjar. Overhead at dusk Woodcocks perform their courtship or 'roding' flights, repeatedly patrolling their territory on slow, beating wings, uttering a deep throaty call.



Nightjar

Meadow Brown Butterfly



History of St. Leonards Forest

St. Leonards was once part of the Great Forest of Anderida that stretched from East to West for 100 miles between the north and south downs. Today the area covers 12 square miles and is part of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

At one time it was probably a Royal hunting forest but by the 16th century the main impact on the forest was the Iron Industry, the most spectacular remnants of which are the hammer ponds. Throughout the forest are the remains of bell pits about 3-4 metres in diameter and 4-5 metres deep from which iron ore was once extracted.

In the 18th and 19th centuries the area was seen as waste land "*producing nothing but rabbits*", (Arthur Young, 1794); "*the soil is poor, miserable ... and in short it is a most villainous tract*", (William Cobbett, 1823).

Today parts of the forest such as Sheepwash Gill and Mick Mills Cross are notified Sites of Special Scientific Interest in recognition of their wildlife importance.

Legends of St. Leonards Forest

The forest has existed for over 5000 years and has many legends associated with it. The most familiar tells of a dragon slain in the 6th century by Saint Leonard the patron saint of prisoners. It is said that wherever Saint Leonard's blood was spilt, Lily of the Valley now grows.

Another myth is that of Mick Mills (or Miles) a smuggler who is said to have met the Devil beside an old Oak tree. The two raced for each others souls and such was their speed that the trees were set ablaze.

Naturally, Mick won and kept his soul but since that time no tree has grown on the path of their legendary contest known as Mick Mills race.

Smugglers promoted stories of ghosts and dragons to keep people away. One unpleasant 19th century spectre was a headless phantom that supposedly lurked amongst the trees at dusk!

Lily of the Valley

