

Weir Wood iron

The High Weald was the most important iron producing area in Roman Britain and again in Tudor times. The Medway Valley at Weir Wood Reservoir contains sites dating to both periods.



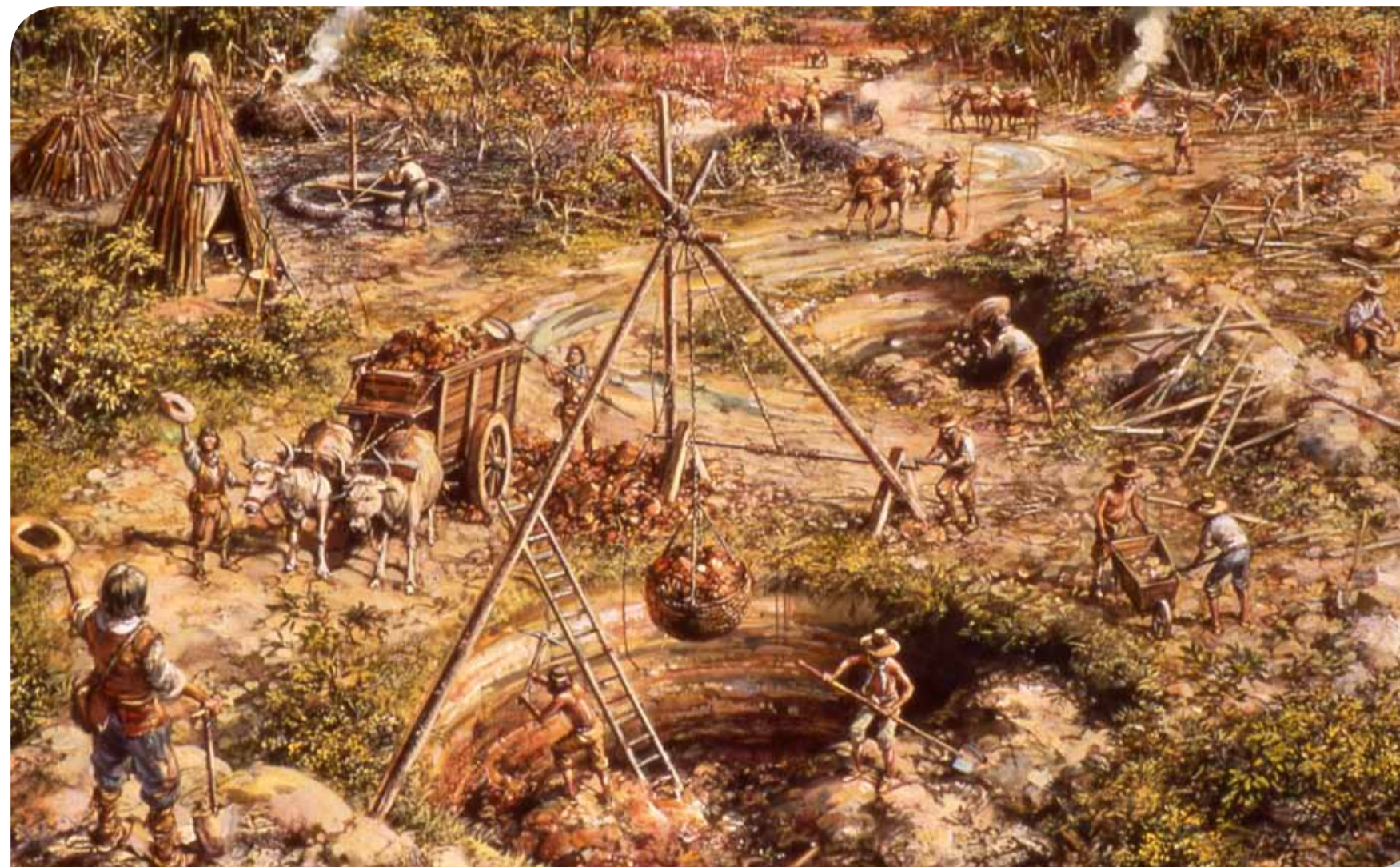
Romans

The first iron records for the area are of Roman origin and have been dated by pottery finds to the late first and second centuries AD. There is a large mound of slag from a Roman furnace at Walesbeech, along the south shore of the Reservoir.



Derek Washington

Tap slag waste from the Roman furnace has been found, as well as pottery remains from the period



West Sussex County Council

Tudors

The whole landscape of the area would have been busy with charcoal making, iron ore mining, fiery furnaces and the clanging hammers of forges. Tracks would have been teeming with carts moving fuel, raw materials and iron produce: including cannons destined for British military campaigns, such as fighting the Spanish Armada.



West Sussex County Council



Derek Washington

Iron still shows its presence in some of the small streams that run down to the Weir Wood valley.



Kate Chitham

Today

The Medway Valley now provides our most valuable commodity – water. The Reservoir has become a place prized for wildlife and recreation, as well as being a beautiful part of the modern landscape.

When iron production flourished here, the landscape would have looked, sounded and smelt very different. But the Roman and Tudor eras are just a couple of periods in a history spanning thousands of years. How might this valley have looked at other times?

To find out more about the High Weald visit www.highweald.org



Weir Wood wildlife

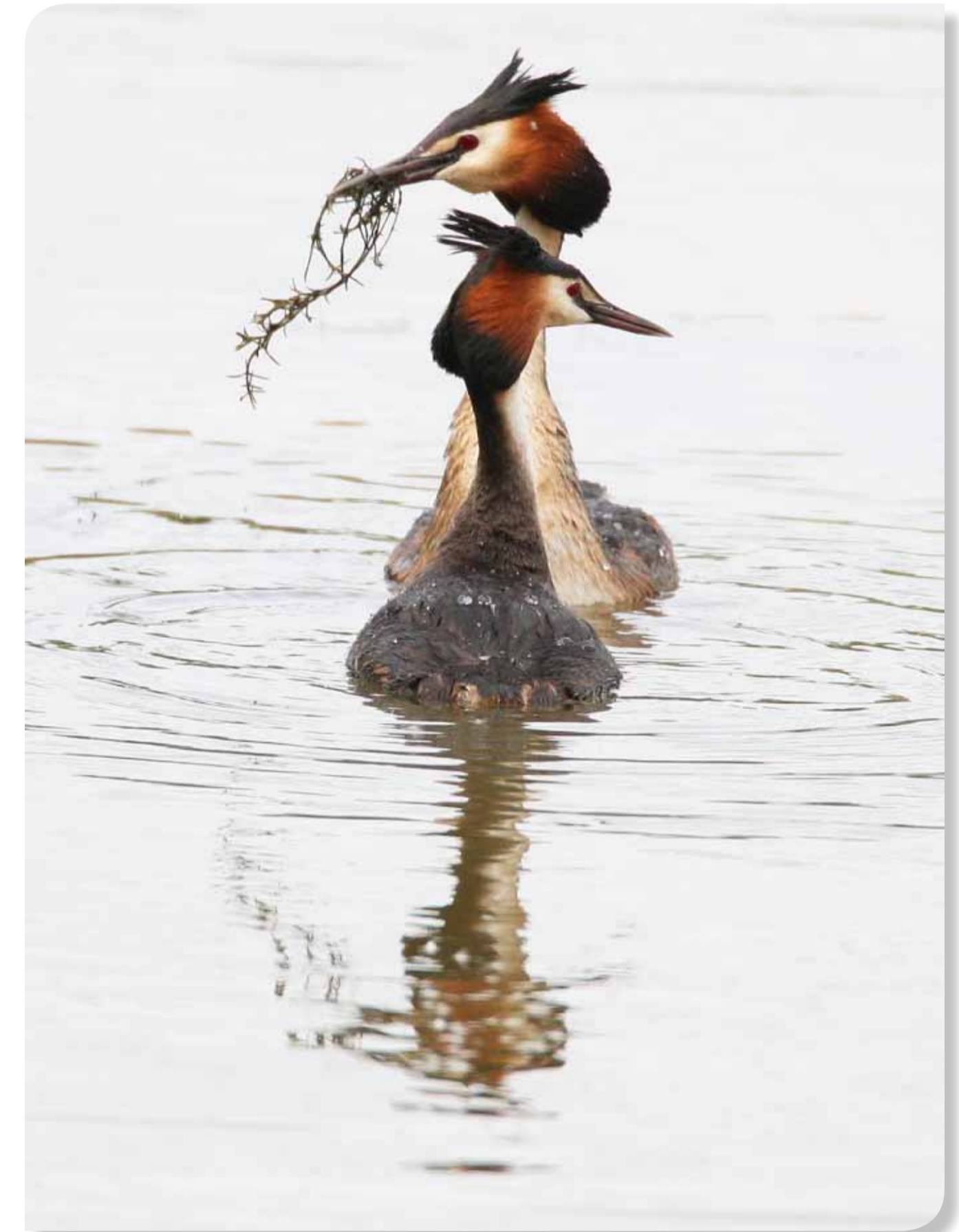
The Reservoir and adjoining land covers 152 hectares and is an important wildlife haven, with many habitats in a small area – open water, river banks, pools, mature trees, scrub, meadow, hedges and fringe vegetation.



Rafts and perching posts in the western end of the Reservoir encourage common terns to spend the summer here. In some years, they have nested successfully on the rafts but have failed in others due to predation by mink. It is hoped that one day otters might arrive and suppress the mink.



This flock of Canada and greylag geese were grazing on the mud flats when a fox emerged, causing much curiosity among the geese, who then walked towards it; stopping when they were just a few metres away. They stared at each other for a while until the fox seemed intimidated and went off to seek easier pickings.



In spring, great crested grebes delight watchers with ritual courtship displays, including head shaking and a weed ceremony.

Photos by Derek Washington



Fallow deer, grazing on lush vegetation growing on the wet mud left by receding water levels.



Southern hawker

To find out more about Weir Wood wildlife visit www.weirwood.me.uk
To find out more about the High Weald visit www.highweald.org



Changing landscapes

The landscape in this valley is in a constant state of change. Water levels fall and rise, and vegetation is quick to colonise the wet mud left by the retreating reservoir. It would soon return to a wooded valley if the reservoir water was drained, as experienced during the 2005 drought – when a mass of birch saplings colonised the exposed reservoir floor.



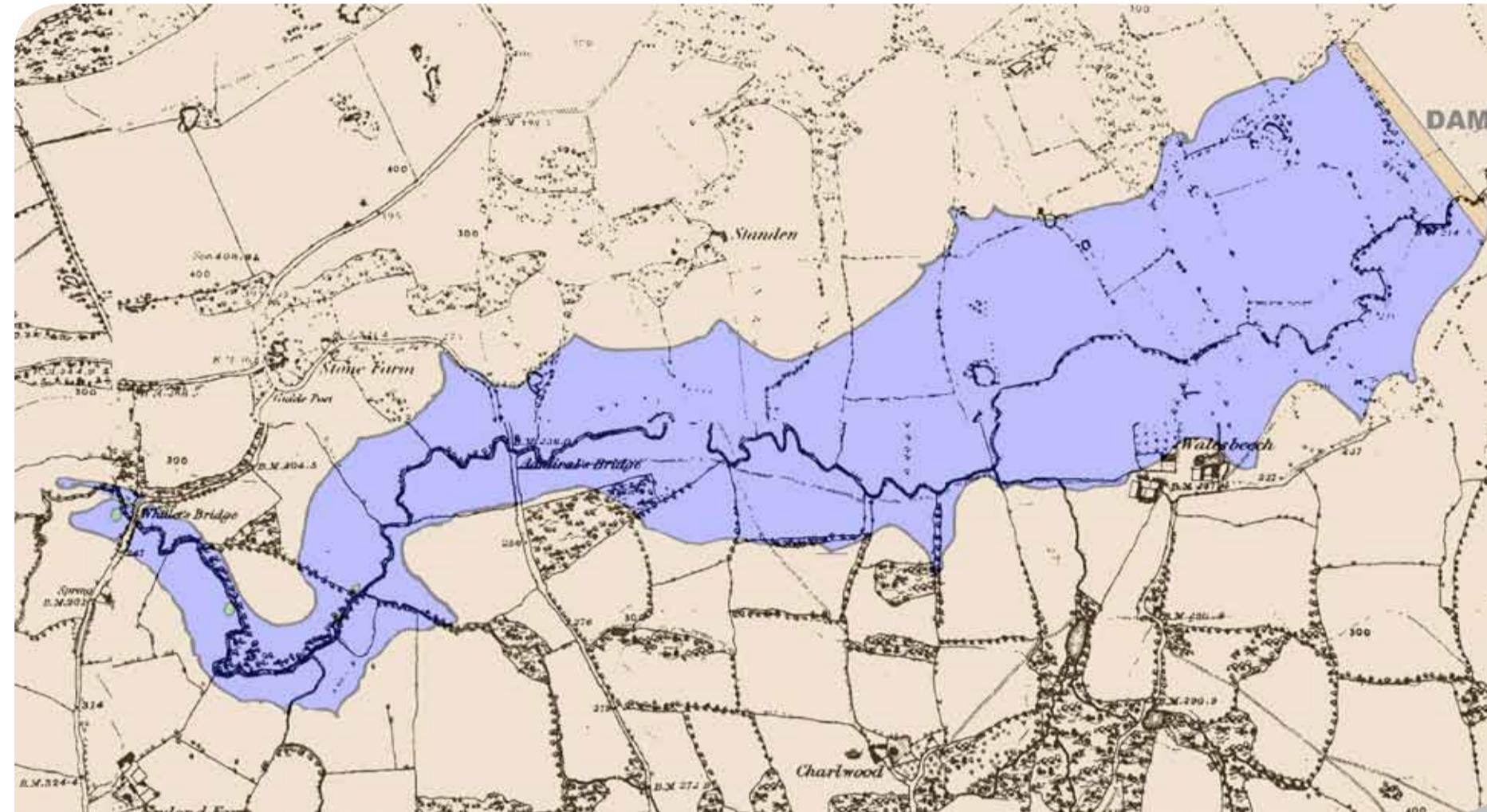
Derek Washington

How big is Weir Wood Reservoir?

Capacity 1,237,000,000 gallons – that’s over over 28 million baths!

Maximum depth 36 feet – over 10 metres.

Three million gallons may be extracted from the Reservoir each day, but even at this rate it would take over a year to empty!



The Weir Wood Reservoir dam was built in 1952 to hold water from the River Medway. By 1954, the valley had filled to create a working reservoir. The 1860s map above shows the course of the Medway, with Weir Wood Reservoir superimposed over it.



Peter Johnson

The old “Admiral’s Bridge Lane” can be seen when the water level is down, as shown in this photo taken in the 2005 drought.



Derek Washington

Orange foxtail (*Alopecurus aequalis*) is a rare grass that thrives on the damp mudflats.



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