

Explore



the local countryside around your school - there's nowhere else quite like it.

Take care of



your local environment as you walk. Remember to follow the Countryside Code. For more information, visit www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk

Enjoy!



yourself and have fun outdoors whatever the weather.

Find out about



the habitats you walk through - discover the story behind the landscape. To find out more go to the learning zone on www.highweald.org

Be proud of



your countryside. Tell other people about the special landscape around your school - even better, take them on your school's welly walk and show them!

www.highweald.org

Walk Facts



The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a nationally important landscape, protected for its historic character of rolling hills draped with small irregular fields, abundant woods and hedges, scattered farmsteads and sunken lanes. It covers parts of 4 counties: East Sussex, West Sussex, Kent and Surrey and has an area of 570 square miles (1,457 square kilometres).

Distance: 2.25 miles/3.6 km.

Time: 2 hour 15 minutes (depending on numbers).

Description: A mixture of surfaced and unsurfaced paths through grassland and woodland, over hilly terrain. There are numerous stiles to cross and one quiet country lane.

RISK ASSESSMENT - Points to consider

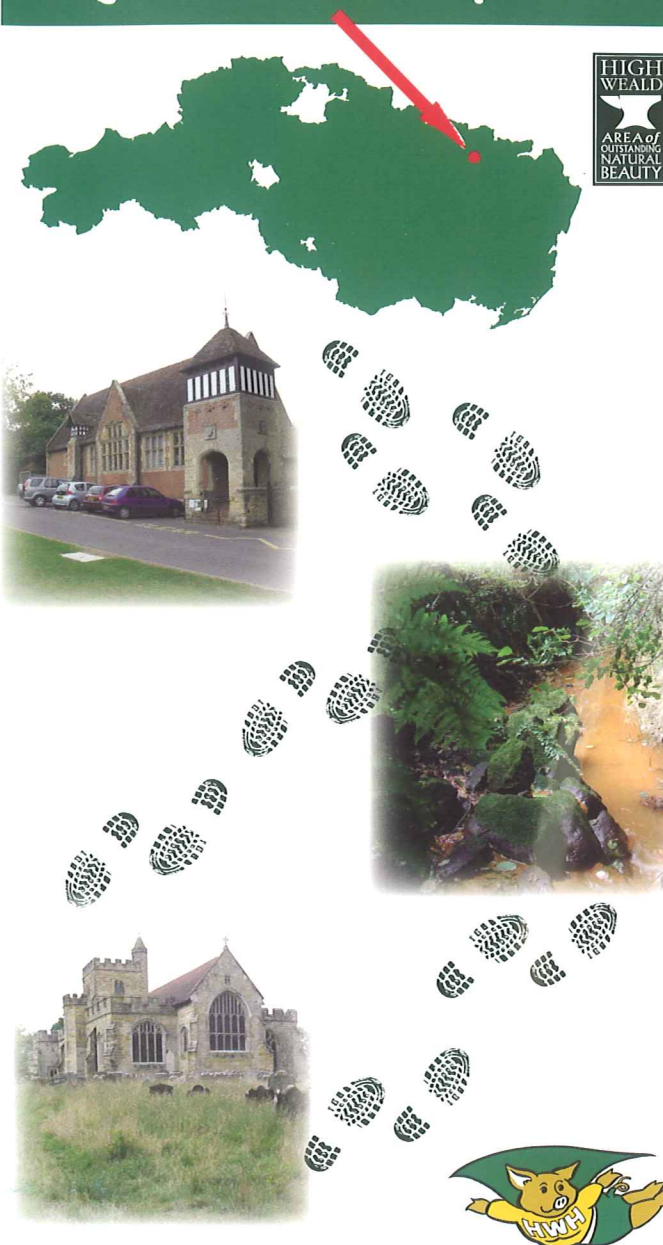
- Wear sturdy footwear or wellingtons.
- Check the weather - waterproofs or hats and sun cream might be needed.
- Taking a drink with you is advisable.
- Adequate staff to student supervision ratios as paths are narrow, the group will spread out and there are roads, bridges and stiles to cross.
- Plants such as nettles and brambles can sting and scratch and berries from plants can cause stomach upsets if eaten.
- There are no toilet facilities, so we recommend that toilet paper and hand wipes are taken as a precaution.
- Everyone must wash their hands before eating.
- A large group of people can be intimidating, especially to animals.
- Beware of forest operations in woodlands.

Remember to follow the Countryside Code

Produced by the High Weald AONB Unit, with support from:



Benenden Church of England Primary School High Weald Welly Walk



Be a High Weald Hero - You can make a difference!

The Story of the High Weald's Fields

One of the distinctive landscape features of the High Weald is its pattern of small, irregular fields. After the Anglo-Saxon period, settlers began moving into the High Weald in increasing numbers. These early farmers began clearing the surrounding woods and scrub to make fields for crops and livestock.

Valerie Alford, ES&CC Landscape Group



These clearances were done in an unplanned way by the individual farmers. This is why the High Weald's fields are relatively small and irregular

in shape. The boundaries were simply formed by leaving strips or 'shaws' of the old woodland between the fields.

Can you count the number of edges in the fields you walk through? How many fields have strips of woodland along their edges?

By the 14th century, the High Weald was settled and looked much the same as it does today. The landscape of the High Weald is essentially medieval: this can be said of few other places in the country.

With their heavy clay soils and steep slopes, many High Weald fields have never been ploughed up to grow crops and have traditionally been used for rearing cattle and sheep. Compared to many areas of Britain, the High Weald still has a relatively large number of ancient, undisturbed, wildflower-rich hay meadows and pastures. These 'unimproved' grasslands are some of our most important habitats for wildlife conservation.



How many different wildflowers and grasses can you see on your walk?

Ancient Woodland

Trees and woodland cover over one-third of the High Weald. Seventy percent of it is classified as Ancient Woodland, which means it has existed continuously since at least 1600AD.

The woods of the High Weald were relatively slow to be cleared because they were a valuable resource: providing timber for building, fuel for heating and charcoal for iron smelting, as well as animal feed - acorns and beech mast for pigs. Even when agricultural clearance did begin in the High Weald, much woodland was retained and continued to provide valuable resources, particularly for the iron industry.

The ancient woodlands of the High Weald have been maintained for centuries by skilled workers using a rotational coppice system.



Coppicing is the name for when trees are cut down low to the ground in such a way that the stems grow back afterwards. The trees are cut once every 10-15 years. The harvested wood is used to make products such as fencing stakes, charcoal and hurdles.

Listen out for the laughing call of the Green Woodpecker. How many different bird songs can you hear?

The High Weald Iron Industry

It is hard to picture the former iron industry in today's countryside of small fields, woodlands and steep, narrow, gill valleys, but in this landscape existed all the necessary raw materials that allowed iron to be smelted for over 2,000 years.

The Wealden geology of sands and clays yielded the iron ore, as well as the stone and brick to build the furnaces; the coppiced woodland provided charcoal for fuel; and the numerous small streams and valleys ensured water power for the bellows and hammers of the forges and furnaces.

For two periods - in the first two centuries of the Roman occupation, and during Tudor and early-Stuart times - the Weald was the main iron-producing region in Britain.

So, where are the remains of iron production? Building stone was too valuable in the Weald to be left unused, so the works were dismantled, and the woods grew back over the former sites. There are clues that suggest the Strawberry Wood Culvert , was connected to the iron industry around Benenden. It was built for heavy traffic, with metallised access tracks, which would have given the necessary grip for pulling up heavy loads. It also leads to the remains of pits, which could have been used for the extraction of iron ore.

Created from text by Jeremy Hodgkinson, Wealden Iron Research Group

What's in a Name?

As far back as the Neolithic period (c.4300 - 1400BC), or even earlier, farmers from the Downs and coastal plains would drive their pigs into the woods each year to fatten them on acorns and beech mast.

This happened during the late summer and early autumn and the farmers would have built temporary shelters in which to keep warm while watching their pigs.

Farmers from a particular village returned with their pigs to the same woodland place year after year. These woodland pig pastures were called *dens*.

The frequent passage of pigs being driven to and from the dens formed tracks known as droves, connecting the dens to their parent villages - often 20 miles away.

Over time the dens became more permanent places of settlement, and if you look at a detailed, modern map of the High Weald - particularly in Kent - you will see what remains of the dens: many villages, farms, fields and woodlands with names ending in '-den'.

Benenden is believed to take its name from Bynning Denn, which in old English translates to "Bynna's woodland pasture".



Edmond, the drover

To find out more about dens and droving visit www.highweald.org. Look out for the links to 'Edmond - an early Saxon drover' and other film clips which tell this landscape story.



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2



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4



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8



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10



11



12

For guidance only, actual conditions may be different from that shown, depending on the weather and time of year.

Photo guide and route description

Starting on the village green take the footpath to the right of the church, following around the edge of the church yard, at the fork turn left **1**. Go through the kissing gate into a field and continue straight on. Go through another kissing gate and head down hill. Ahead, you can see an oast house. Before you reach the road turn left **2**. Cross straight over the gravel path and along the edge of the apple and cherry orchards **3**. When you reach the tarmac drive to Woodside Farm, turn right **4**. If you wish to go on a farm visit you would need to turn left  and follow the driveway into the farmyard. Continuing on the walk at the bend in the driveway by the sign for Bluebell cottage and the cattle grid, cross over the stile directly in front of you **5**. Head straight towards a corner post in the hedge with yellow marker tape on the top, continue straight past this post and head towards the stile into the woods **6**. The trees in this wood include birch, coppiced hazel and chestnut **7** and a pine plantation that has been clear felled in places **8**. Continue on the forest track, heading down hill **9** beware of forest operations. Continue over a stile at the woodland edge into a meadow, beware of the electric fence. Go around the meadow and over a stile onto a lane. Turn left and walk along the lane for approximately 20 metres then turn left onto a footpath **10**.

Cross over the stile into the meadow, go around the edge and over the next stile into the woods, follow path and cross stile into a meadow walk around edge and cross another stile into the woods, 10 metres from the stile is an ancient sandstone culvert over an iron rich gill stream, **11**  beware of the banks and the water. At the edge of the woodland cross over another stile into a meadow, head diagonally left to the top corner of the meadow. Cross another stile onto a track and turn right. After walking about 50 metres go left through a kissing gate into a field, head towards the next kissing gate. Continue in the same direction and through a third kissing gate, go straight on through this gate and follow the fence line towards the football fields. You can see good views of the High Weald. Continue until you reach three stiles on your left, cross these stiles and go into the football field, continue straight and go through a kissing gate into the church yard **12** go through the church yard back to the village green.

Look out for...



ancient woodland



gill streams



wildflowers



Key

 walk route  road  watercourse  numbered views  suggested activity point