

# High Weald Heroes

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 1,457 square kilometres (564 square miles).

## 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](http://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](http://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](http://www.highweald.org)

# Walk Facts



**Distance:** 8.2 km/5.5 miles

**Time:** 4 hours

**Description:** A circular walk through fields and woods. There are some stiles and short sections of road. There are some short hill sections and paths may become muddy when wet.



## RISK ASSESSMENT - Points to consider

- Please use with an Ordnance Survey Explorer Map
- 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.

## Remember to follow the Countryside Code

Produced by the High Weald AONB Unit with support from:



Brenchley & Matfield CE Primary School

# High Weald Welly Walk



Be a High Weald Hero - you can make a difference



1



2



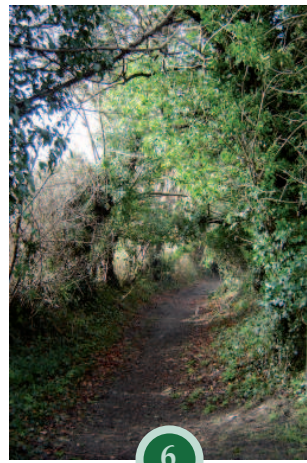
3



4



5



6



7



8



9



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

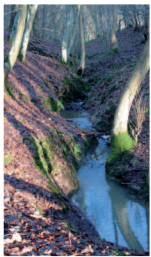
With your back to the school, turn left out of school drive and follow the pavement until you see a gap in the hedge on the left **1**. Go through the hole and walk straight up the hill through the orchard. Turn right at the top of the orchard and then left, through the gap in the fence by the electricity pylon. Keep to the left and then walk left on the tarmac drive. Enter the second orchard, turning right and then left, keeping to the path. Continue following the path, with the orchard on your left and the tall tree line on your right **2**. The path continues for some time and will eventually bend round to the left. Turn right through a gap in the hedge and walk along next to a reservoir, keeping it on your left. At the end of the reservoir go through the opening in the fence, and walk straight on until you come across the gap in the hedge with the footpath sign. Walk on through this gap and come out onto the tarmac track. Walk left down the track until you reach the main road. Cross diagonally right over to a lane **3**. Continue down the lane until you come to a three-way junction. Go down the lane next to the metal gate. Follow the overgrown pathway on your right, and then turn left across the field **4**. Walk across the field towards the path leading into the woods. Follow the path into the woods until it forks **5**. Take the right hand fork and follow the path straight on until you reach the main road. Turn right on the road and walk up to the bend. Carefully cross near the bend and head down the track towards the Nature conservation sign and Cinder Hill wood. Carry on down the track until you reach a footpath leading into the wood on your left **6**. Follow the footpath through the wood.

Eventually the path splits, take the right path, then immediately the one going left. You will reach a large wooden adder **7**  overlooking heathland (this is a good spot for eating your lunch). Go straight on, through a gate down the hill, when you reach a kissing gate on your left go through it entering Brenchley Wood (Kent Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve) and follow the fence line on your right to another kissing gate. Go through this and follow the path to the left, passing a bench on your right **8** . Follow this track for some time passing through a gate until you reach the road. Turn right, then left, and walk up the road until you reach the stile on your left. Climb over it and walk through the meadow. At the opposite corner of the meadow, go over the small stile and bridge (take care as one side has no guardrail). Follow the track over the wooden walkway following the bend left up the slope. Cut across the field, keeping the old chicken coops on your right, climb over the stile, then follow the track leading to another field. Cross this field and go over the stile and turn right. Follow the wooden fence and turn left at the end onto the road. Continue along until you reach Matfield Green. Cross the green diagonally, past the pond **9** towards the post office. Cross the road and go down the right hand side of the post office **10** , following the footpath. When entering the field **11** , follow the path to the bottom left corner, then climb the stile. Follow the path, which leads to an orchard. Turn right and head towards a gate. Come out on to the main road and turn right. After a short distance turn right down a lane, and then left before the first house. Follow this path and then go left along the woven wooden fence. Come out at a lane and turn right to the footpath on the left. Go up the steps and follow the path straight on until you reach the lane. Turn right, and then left down the lane. Turn left onto gravel drive and go forward through the kissing gate following the path. Follow the track, eventually crossing a small ford and bridge **12** . Keep going straight on through the orchard and turn left at the point when the track turns sharply to the right. Continue up the slope through the field and follow the path along a garden boundary. Go through a gap in the hedge at the top of the field by the main road. Come out onto Brenchley Road and turn right towards school, for the end of the walk.

## Look out for...










Orchards



Gill streams



## Key

-  walk route
-  road
-  watercourse
-  numbered views
-  suggested activity point
-  drove route
-  rights of way

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## Ancient Woodland

Trees and woodland cover over one third of the High Weald and are a key landscape feature.

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.

Today 70% of the High Weald's woodland is classed as ancient - having existed continuously since at least 1600AD. They 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, hurdles and trugs.

*Listen out for the laughing call of the Green Woodpecker - how many different bird songs can you hear?*

When the trees are coppiced, the light can reach right down to the ground as the branches and leaves are no longer shading the floor. This means lots of wild plants can grow including bluebells, wood anemones and wild garlic. These plants can attract insects to feed on the nectar and birds and small mammals to eat the fruits and seeds. Often the rarer species are now only found in working coppice.

Woodlands have been managed in this way for hundreds of years and it is important for the plants and the wildlife that we continue to manage them in this way. Buying local wood products helps to ensure that these woodlands are managed in a way that supports a wide variety of wildlife.

## Hop Farming

Early in the 15th century people started to use hops in ale to add flavour and as a preservative.

Initially the hops came from Flanders. However, when a tax was introduced on imported goods, home-grown hops increased. They became a distinctive feature of the eastern end of the High Weald.

Hop plants can grow up to 6 metres so were supported by groups of 3 or 4 chestnut poles. Chestnut poles were favoured because the fibrous wood was strong and more resistant to rot, ideal for slim poles.

Higher beer sales were good news for the coppice workers who produced the poles. To meet the demand for poles more chestnut coppice was planted across the area. In later years, bines with steel wires supported the hops and fewer, taller, but stronger, poles were used.

The hop industry provided a lot of useful employment for poorer families, including children as young as five. In the summer, workers from London's East End fought their way onto crowded trains heading for the hop fields.

After the harvest, the hops were dried in oast houses to prevent them rotting. Fires were lit at the bottom of the oast and hot air rose up through the wooden floor where the hops were spread out. The steam escaped through the pointed cowl in the roof. The work was done by skilled men who lived in the oast till the work was finished.



Oasts were originally square but after 1840 were built round because the circulation of hot air was better.

Many oasts remain today as interesting houses. Hops can be seen in hedgerows and are often depicted in church carvings.

The hop has separate male and female plants. The larger female flowers are the source of the aromatic

oil which was used as a pain killer and appetite stimulant, long before it was added to beer.

*Visit [www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org) to download more High Weald Welly Walks*

## The Garden of England

Kent is famous for its orchards full of fruit. In ancient times, crab apples, sloes and gean (wild cherry), were the only types of fruit available. In the 16th century apples, pears and plums were increasingly planted in the High Weald. In the 19th century Victorians, who were very enthusiastic about growing fruit, developed over 1,500 different apple varieties. The apples were used for cooking, eating and making cider



In the High Weald orchards were particularly plentiful in a belt around Matfield and Brenchley. They were called 'gardens' to avoid the tax on farmland. The fruit trees were tall and widely spaced, with sheep grazing the grass underneath. The trees supported a lot of wildlife such as mosses, lichens, insects and birds.

We have lost most of the traditional orchards from the High Weald. However, the tall hedges that were planted as windbreaks around the orchards, often remain.

Modern orchards have much smaller, or 'dwarf' trees, that are grown closer together to produce more fruit per acre or hectare. The grassy strips between the trees are mown with a tractor. Wooden ladders are no longer needed. Apple pickers use padded buckets to pick the fruit. Fruit is stored in large boxes called bulk bins.

Apples continue to provide food for wildlife such as field mice, hedgehogs, Small Tortoiseshell butterflies, redwings and fieldfares.

## Gill Streams

Steep-sided, wooded gills are a special feature of the High Weald. Gills are formed where a stream has carved a deep channel for itself through the clay and sandstone of a hillside.

