

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: 3.4 miles/5.5 km.

Time: 3 hours (depending on numbers).

Description: A mixture of surfaced and unsurfaced paths through grassland and woodland. There are numerous stiles and bridges to cross and two sections of quiet country lanes.

RISK ASSESSMENT - Points to consider

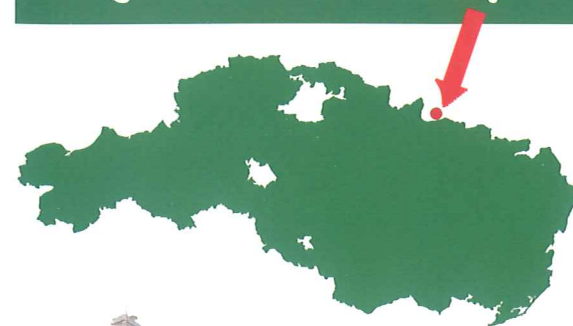
- Wear sturdy footwear or wellingtons.
- Check the weather - waterproofs or hats and sun cream might be needed.
- Taking a drink with you is advisable.
- Adequate staff to student supervision ratios as paths are narrow, the group will spread out and there are roads, bridges and stiles to cross.
- Plants 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:



Colliers Green 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, ESCC 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?

The High Weald Iron Industry

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.

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 exist 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.

Charcoal was traditionally produced by burning wood on a circular levelled hearth, or pit, in a cleared area of the woodland. The wood was assembled to form a domed kiln which was covered with turves to prevent air entering or smoke escaping. The men who made the charcoal were called **colliers** and during a charcoal burn they would live in the woods, in temporary shelters, to tend the kiln.

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. Only place names; the remains of pits and charcoal hearths (flattened circular areas with blackened soil beneath the leaf litter); the tell-tale waste, called slag, from the smelting process; and some hammer and furnace ponds are left to remind us of this once great Wealden industry.

Created from text by Jeremy Hodgkinson, Wealden Iron Research Group

To find out more about the High Weald iron story go to www.highweald.org to meet Jane and Maximilius

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.

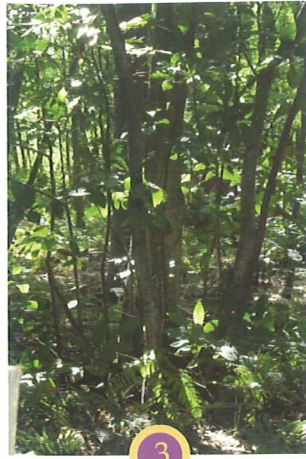
Woodlands have been managed in this way for hundreds of years and it is important for the plants and the wildlife that we continue to manage them in this way. Buying local wood products helps to ensure that these woodlands are managed in a way that supports a wide variety of wildlife.



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

Join the footpath that runs through the school field and orchard, cross over the road, go through a metal gate **1**. Continue straight and follow the arrow through the field **2**. Cross over a stile straight ahead into the woods of coppice chestnut and birch **3**. At the crossroads go straight on **4**. Beware it can be muddy in places. Leave the wood and go across field following the path veering slightly left towards the woods. Go straight into the woods **5** over a stream showing the iron rich water **6**. Go over the stile and walk straight on around the field edge, you can see the remnants of the hop gardens from the poles in the hedge. Go over the stile and continue straight on following the concrete road. (At time of writing the path is diverted around building works). Follow the track heading towards the oast houses in the distance. Go past Combourne Farmhouse and Oast and continue until you reach the road. Go left onto Jarvis Lane and follow this lane until you reach a post box at a junction. Turn left off the road following the footpath into the woods **7**. The wood changes to a pine plantation as you walk through **8**. Beware of the steep drop to your right as you exit the wood. Cross over the stile and continue straight on **9**. Continue straight on through the fields crossing two more stiles, a bridge and another stile, turn right following directional arrow.

Continue over two more stiles and go through a kissing gate, turn left onto a track. Walk past the oast house and at the junction turn right. Walk past the large blue barn on your left and woodwork area on your right. At the waymarker just past the post and rail fencing around the garden, turn left and head across the field towards the woods **10**  At the edge of the wood turn right and walk along the edge until you reach a stile on your left. Cross over into the mixed woodland following a slightly sunken path. Continue straight on passing in front of Old Park Cottage, **11**  walk along the driveway. At the end of the panel fencing turn left at the waymarker. At the crossroads go straight on through the woodland. Beware of forestry operations. At the minor staggered crossroads continue straight on into the pine plantation. Follow the path through the plantation until you reach the road, cross over the stile and turn left **12** . Walk along the road crossing over just past Oak Tree Cottage, following the road back to school.

Look out for...



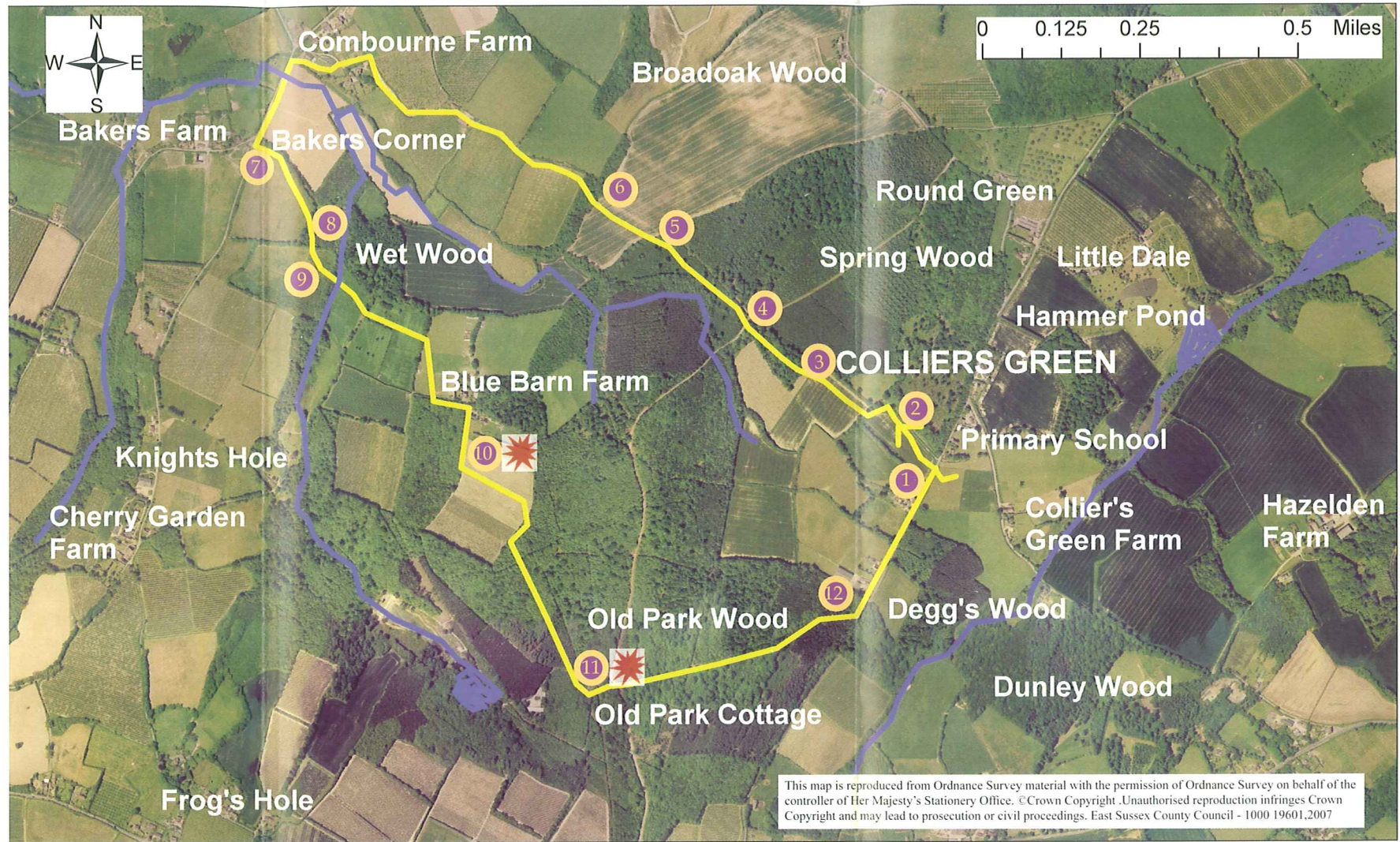
ancient woodland



gill streams



wildflowers



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Key  walk route  road  watercourse  numbered views  suggested activity point