

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of England's Finest Landscapes, 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 (570 square miles).

High Weald Heroes is a primary school programme that encourages children to do the following actions:

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.naturalengland.org.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!



Produced by the High Weald AONB Unit with support from:



Walk Facts

Distance: 2.4 miles/3.8km.

Time: 1.5 hours (depending on conditions and numbers and excluding stops).

Description: A walk mostly through open farmland with stunning views of the landscape and the sea.



RISK ASSESSMENT - Points to consider

- Please use with an Ordnance Survey Explorer Map.
- Wear sturdy footwear or wellingtons, being aware of uneven ground and fallen trees, especially near water and in wet weather.
- Long trousers are advised.
- Check the weather - waterproofs or hats and sun cream might be needed.
- Take care when walking along roads with no pavements; stay close to the edge/on grass verges where possible.
- Taking a drink with you is advisable.
- Consider adequate adult to child supervision ratios as paths are narrow, the group will spread out and there are roads and stiles to cross.
- Plants such as nettles and brambles can sting and scratch; 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 clean their hands before eating.
- Remember that a large group of people can be intimidating, especially to animals.
- Footpaths and rights of way are subject to change. The walk should always be checked for new risks before venturing out, especially when planning to take groups of children.
- Remember to follow the Countryside Code.

www.highweald.org



Icklesham CE Primary School High Weald Welly Walk



Be a High Weald Hero - you can make a difference



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

Photo guide and route description

From the school gate, turn left. Walk along the pavement to the corner. Cross the road and take the path across the grass, heading through the gap in the fence **1** towards Oast House Field, passing Five Villages House on your right. Walk along Oast House Field and take the first right (Oast House Road). Walk down to Main Road and cross over at the crossing, going through the gate that leads into the Recreation Ground **2**. Walk diagonally left across the grass, heading towards the opposite corner (play park and pavilion to your left). Once you reach the far side, cross the small footbridge **3** and turn right to walk along the road (Workhouse Lane). Walk for approximately 100 metres and, just before the turning to Laurel Lane, turn left down the gravel track - by a telegraph pole **4**. Walk straight on, house on your right hand side, to follow the narrower footpath ahead of you. Follow the grassy path all the way around the edge of the field, heading in the direction of the oast house. When you meet the farm track, cross straight over and climb over the stile **5**.

Continue straight on, now heading in the direction of the windmill. Cross another stile and then, shortly afterwards, turn right to go through a gap in the hedge **6**. Now turn left and walk on the road up to the corner and another stile **7**. Cross over and follow the footpath through the field, passing the windmill on your right hand side.

Pause for a moment to take in the panoramic views! Now follow the footpath downhill to reach a stile. Cross over and turn right along the road. Walk on the road for approximately 230 metres, until you reach a 3-way junction. Turn right towards Icklesham and head towards the kissing gate ⑧, just past the farm entrance on your left.

Go through the kissing gate, following the narrow path along the side of the barn. At the end of the path turn left and walk down the stony track – open views to your right. Keep going until you reach a track on your right hand side. Turn down here ⑨ towards the orchard. After a short distance you will reach a large cleared area – bear left ⑩ and walk along the narrow grassy footpath - field on your right, trees on your left. Follow this footpath for some distance, carrying straight on past a stile on your right. Carry on as the path becomes more wooded. At the junction of paths turn left and walk out into a grassy clearing ⑪. Immediately turn right here and keep close to the trees on your right as you follow a narrow path further into the woods. Stay on the main woodland path all the way uphill and through the trees. At the end of the footpath, follow the line of fencing on your right hand side until you reach a kissing gate ⑫. Go through this and turn left to walk along the road. Walk up to the road junction and carry straight on - back towards the Recreation Ground where you previously walked. Now retrace your steps, across the Recreation Ground and head back to the school!

Look out for...



Orchards



Oast Houses



Key

● Icklesham
CE Primary
School

WALK ROUTE

① numbered views

— road

● ● ● historic
routeway

ponds and lakes

! take care, no
pavements on
this road

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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 woodlands are classed as ancient - having existed continuously since at least 1600AD. They have been maintained for centuries by skilled workers using a rotational coppicing system.



Coppicing is 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. Buying local wood products helps to ensure the continuation of traditional management.

Visit www.highweald.org to learn more about the High Weald's woodlands.

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 attract insects to feed on the nectar, and birds and small mammals eat the fruits and seeds.

Often, rarer species are now only found in working coppice.



Ancient Routeways

As far back as the Neolithic period (c.4500 - 2300BC) 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 to keep warm while watching their pigs. These woodland pig pastures were called dens. Many places in the High Weald have names ending in den - for example Tenterden and Playden.



The frequent passage of pigs being driven to and from the dens formed tracks known as droves. Over time the dens became settlements in their own right and the roughly north-south droving routes remained. They can be seen today in the pattern of lanes, bridleways and footpaths radiating away from the High Weald.

Centuries of use by many trotters, feet, hooves - and, later, cartwheels - have worn the soft ground away so that, today, many of the routes have deeply sunken sections.

Look closely at the map in this Welly Walk leaflet to see where historic routeways exist in and around Icklesham.

Oast Houses

Keep your eyes peeled for some historic oast houses on this Welly Walk.

Hops have been cultivated in the High Weald since the 16th century. Traditionally, oast houses would have been used to dry and cool hops before being transported to local breweries and made into beer. Hopped ale or beer was popular for both its taste and superior keeping qualities and, as trade flourished, so too did hop gardens, oast houses and breweries.

Today, only a handful of hop gardens and breweries remain and most oast houses have been converted for residential use.



A Medieval Landscape

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.



Funny-shaped 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. Early farmers began clearing the surrounding woods and scrub to make fields for crops and livestock. These clearances were done in an unplanned way by the individual farmers. This is why the High Weald's fields are often small and irregular in shape.

Orchards

This walk passes by some beautiful High Weald orchards - including organic and traditionally managed sites that are maintained by hand, rather than machines. The history of fruit growing in the Weald has created a uniquely 'textured' countryside. Neat rows and angular patterns of orchards contrast with the smooth sweeps of pastures, shaws and woods.

Older, traditional orchards offer a variety of wildlife habitats all year round. In Spring, blossom provides a source of pollen for bees and moths; in Summer the leafy canopy is a perfect nesting site for many birds, including woodpeckers, chaffinches and treecreepers. Even the fallen fruit in Autumn is a good food source for foraging creatures such as badgers and hedgehogs.

Some of the fruit you will see growing in orchards includes cherries, plums, pears and apples.

