

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.

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



Distance: 6.7 km/4.1 miles

Time: 3 hours (dependent on numbers)

Description: A mixture of surfaced and unsurfaced paths through woods and farmland, over mainly flat terrain. There are numerous stiles and foot bridges, and several roads to cross.



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:



St Mary the Virgin C.E. School
Hartfield

High Weald Welly Walk



Be a High Weald Hero - you can make a difference



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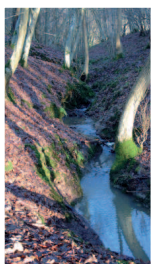
For guidance only, actual conditions may be different from that shown, depending on the weather and time of year

Photo guide and route description

① To begin the Welly Walk, start on the steps in front of St. Mary’s school. Go into the car park, then walk along the drive way and head over to the left towards The Croft and carefully cross the main road. ② Walk up The Croft’s driveway – carry on all the way past the pavilion and the youth centre, go through the gate at the far end down along the path with the hedges on your left. Go through another gate after passing a signpost and carry on through the third wooden gate. Look out for holes and ditches. It leads on to a narrow overgrown path which gets wider. Pass around the gates and carry on straight ahead, passing the field on your left. ③ Continue walking alongside the River Medway, still with the field on your left. ④  You will leave the side of the field and reach a bridge crossing the River Medway. Carry on along the pathway, which can be muddy in wet weather, and pass the iron stained river. Continue straight on through dense woodland, passing a lake on your right. ⑤ You will then pass a couple of historic farm buildings where you proceed up a small hill. When you reach the driveway, cross over it onto the bridleway and footpath, which is signposted. ⑥ Carry on along the sunken path, which can be overgrown, and very muddy in wet weather. After a while you will reach a road and you should turn left along the road walking

uphill, past some more fields. **7** You eventually reach a stile on the left; diagonally opposite on the right hand side is a gap in the hedge. Go through this gap, be very careful not to miss it, and you'll come out in a huge field. Follow the narrow path through the field. You'll reach a campsite with a beautiful huge lake in it. Here you need to turn right heading along the track, you will then see a stile opposite you. You then need to cross it and walk through part of the field (about 100 metres). Then on you're right there is a gap in the hedge - when you reach the gap, turn left and follow the path straight down through the middle of the field. The path can be overgrown so be careful. When you reach the fence at the bottom of the field turn right and follow the path along. **8**  Once you've reached the gate, bear left and follow the path along with trees on your right which are part of an historic woodbank. **9** You will then arrive at a place with lots of similar trees. Here you have to go straight ahead with bushes on your right. When you reach the signpost turn right and go through the kissing gate. **10** Go straight for a bit, then turn left and cross over the bridge. Then follow the path (following the way-maker sign). When you reach the crossroads turn left along the Forest Way. **11** When you reach a Forest Way sign turn right along the path leading across the field. You can see the church in the distance. **12** Follow the path over The Croft. Cross the road and walk up past the Anchor Inn to the church and walk down to the school.

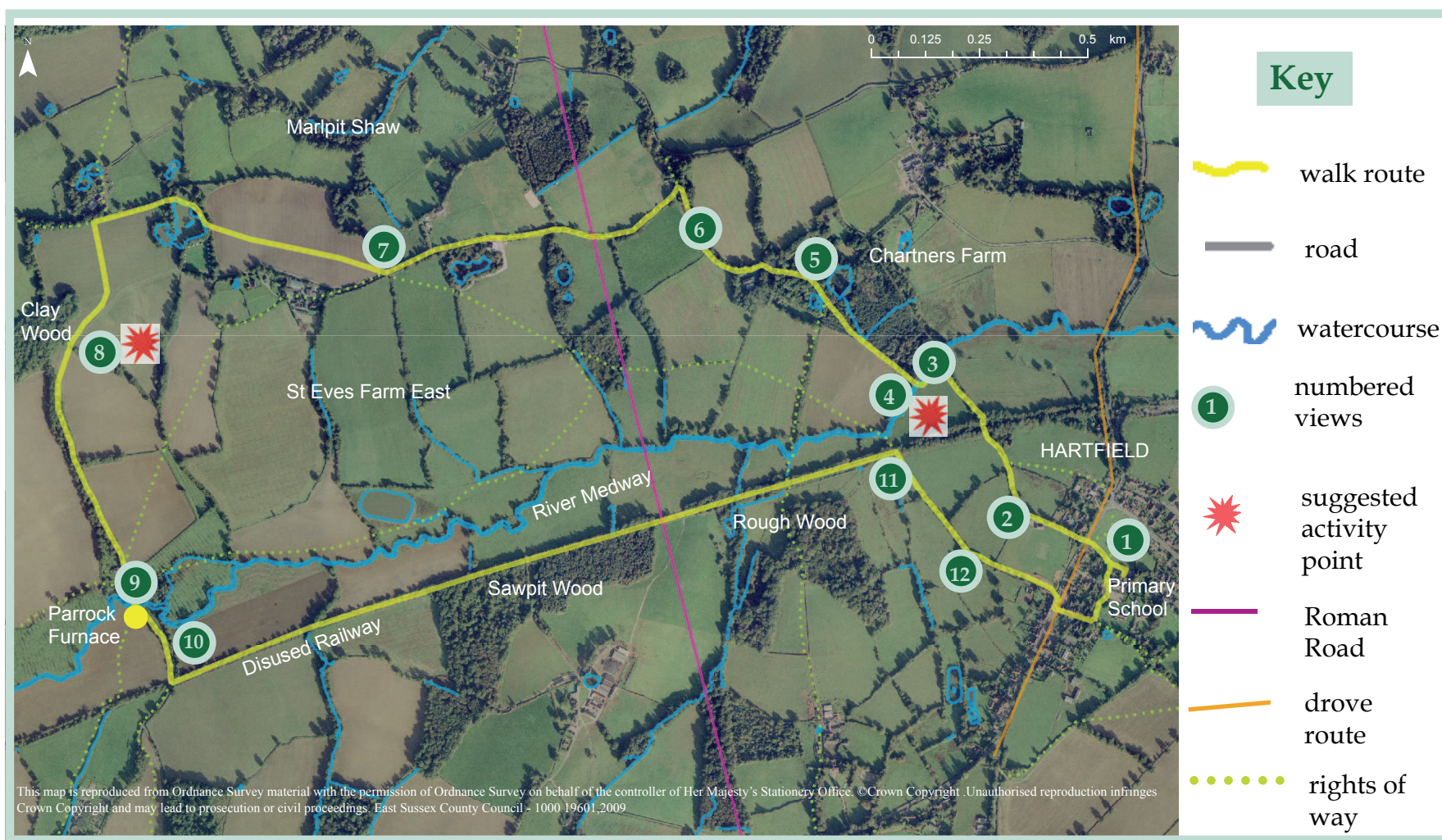
Look out for...



Gill streams



Wild flowers



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.

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. 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.



Valerie Alford, ESCC Landscape Group

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

Building Materials

The traditional building materials and styles of the High Weald are an essential part of the landscape's distinctive character. The building materials have come, in fact, from that very landscape, so it is hardly surprising that they blend in so well. Links with the area's wooded past are evident in the number of timber-framed and weather-boarded buildings, whilst the widespread use of sandstone, bricks and tiles is testimony to the High Weald's underlying geology of sandstone and clay.



Coppiced Woodland

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 and the harvested wood is used to make 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. In fact a whole range of wildlife can use the coppiced woodland to find their food and make their homes.

Woodlands have been managed in this way for hundreds of years. It is important for the plants and the wildlife that we continue to manage them in this way.

On your Welly Walk you will see coppiced hazel and sweet chestnut. At the edges of the path you can see some of the products that the coppiced timber is made into such as post and rail, and pale fencing. Buying local wood products helps to ensure that these woodlands are managed in a way that supports a wide variety of wildlife.

The 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

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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.

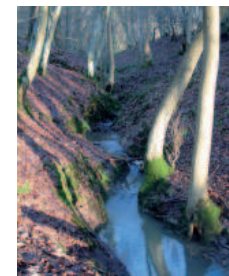


So, where are the remains of iron production? Building stone was too valuable in the Weald to be left unused, so the works were dismantled, and the woods grew back over the former sites. Only the telltale waste, called slag, from the smelting process, and some of the hammer and furnace ponds are left to remind us of a once-great Wealden industry.

Created from text by Jeremy Hodgkinson, Wealden Iron Research Group

In the churchyard of St Peter's you can still see the gravestone of Nicholas Francis, the village blacksmith, who died in 1779. This is the last gravestone on the left between the church and the path. The carving has nearly worn away but it reads...

*My Sledge and Hammer lie reclin'd;
My Bellows, too, have lost their Wind:
My Fire's extinct, my Forge decay'd
And the Dust in my Body's laid
Now I am gone to my long Home,
My Nails are drove, my Work is done.*



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.