



Enjoy & Explore one of England's

Finest Landscapes

on your doorstep

FREE



The Weald Forest Ridge, in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Did you know?

You're surrounded by a landscape shaped by humans over thousands of years.

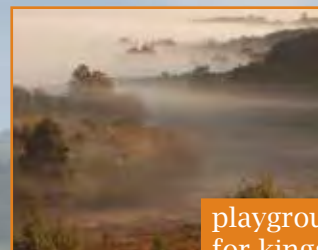
What a great place to **Enjoy and Explore!**

De-stressing
Climbing
Kite-flying
Relaxing
Running
Den building
Cycling
Walking
Admiring the view
Wildlife watching
Riding
Paddling
Foraging
Picnicking
Getting fit
Buying local products
Fishing

You can visit...



woods harvested for centuries



playgrounds for kings

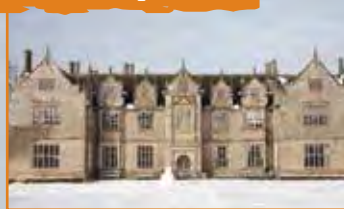


roads created by pigs



internationally important wildlife

historic homes built from the local landscape



and forests with no trees!



Outdoor fun
Exploring
Volunteering
Stream-jumping
Historical research
Hill-rolling



Where can we go and what will we find?

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a nationally important landscape. Within it, the Weald Forest Ridge is home to medieval hunting forests, extensive woodlands, sandstone cliffs, attractive villages, famous gardens, stunning wildlife and much, much more.

There are a wealth of places to visit: from the well-known, lofty heights of Ashdown Forest; to small, intimate woodlands alive with wildlife. Each place has a story to tell and things of interest to spy.

So please use this booklet to find out more, and then head out to enjoy and explore!

Why not buy the Michelin "High Weald I-Spy" book to help you enjoy and explore! Available from good bookshops and tourism outlets.



Be a landscape detective

How can you find out about your local area?

You could, of course, research online or visit your library. But why not go out exploring – looking around you at the villages, farms and woods of the Weald Forest Ridge.

Before Sat Navs, people would navigate by distinctive landscape features. The names that places acquired reflected these features and their uses.

Some place-names are obvious and need no explanation. A **Minepit** Wood or **Furnace** Farm probably relates to the High Weald's former iron industry.

Minepits past and present



Other names are self explanatory when broken down:

- Groombridge – a **crossing** on the River **Grom**.
- Hartfield – a **field** where **harts** (male deer) were seen.

But what about **Chuck Hatch** or **Colgate**?

After 1066, many hunting forests were established: for royalty and rich lords to shoot animals for sport. The forests were enclosed by a bank and fence – called a pale – and a hatch or gate was a controlled crossing of the pale.

Old buildings also reflect the landscape. The abundance of woodlands meant timber-framed or weather-boarded buildings were commonly constructed. And buildings also used stone, bricks and tiles derived from the High Weald's underlying sandstone and clay geology.



Deer-related place name



Find out more:

www.highweald.org/highwealdstory

www.highweald.org/highwealdlandscapetrail

Why not also explore:

Everywhere - villages, farmsteads, woods and fields are all around you!

Or walk parts of the High Weald Landscape Trail.



Follow in the footsteps of pigs

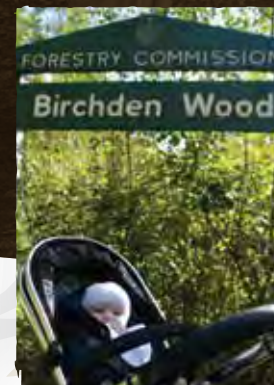
Why are the High Weald's country lanes and ancient footpaths so sunken?

Visit **Birchden Wood**, near **Groombridge**, and find out it's mainly due to the humble pig!

As early as 6,000 years ago, people living north and south brought pigs to the sparsely populated High Weald: to eat the autumnal acorn feast. This process – called pannage – lasted over 5,000 years. Even as late as Domesday (1086AD), over 150,000 pigs made this annual journey. That's a lot of acorn-flavoured ham for Christmas!

Following the same route each year, deep tracks were worn in the soft soils. Walk the public footpath crossing Birchden's entrance road and you'll follow the footsteps of pigs.

The humans – called drovers – set up temporary camps – dens – to tend their pigs. So Birchden was the site of a den in a birch wood.



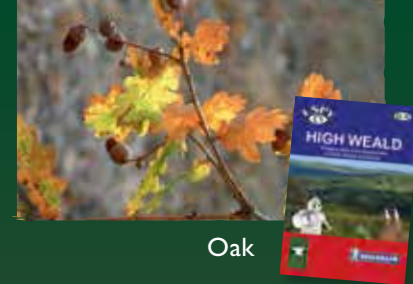
Be sure to find the sculptures that help bring this fascinating site alive.



Art and Sculpture



Today, Birchden Wood has a modern, "Easy Access" trail: smoothly surfaced for buggies, wheelchairs and toddling feet to explore.



Oak

Find out more:

www.highweald.org/birchdenwoods
www.highweald.org/routeways-story

Local Pub/Café:

Junction Inn and Tearooms,
Groombridge.

Local Producer:

Cherry Gardens Organic Farm
& Shop, Groombridge.
www.cherrygardensfarm.co.uk

Why not also explore:

Almost anywhere!
You'll find sunken tracks
everywhere in the High Weald.

Stunning sandstone

Hidden away in the High Weald is one of its most iconic features.

Sediments deposited on a shallow sea bed in the dinosaur age now form inland sandstone cliffs up to 15m high. A great example is **Eridge Rocks**, just west of **Eridge Green** on the A26.

The Weald's sandrock cliffs have attracted humans for thousands of years: for very varying reasons.

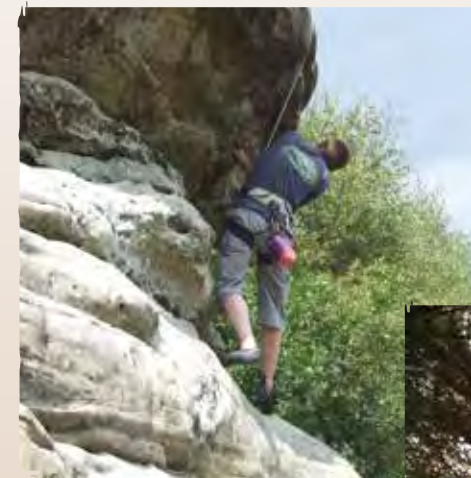
Early hunter-gatherers venturing into the High Weald's dense wilderness used them for shelter.

Later, the rock was dug for building and road stone – creating even more exposures in the abandoned quarries.

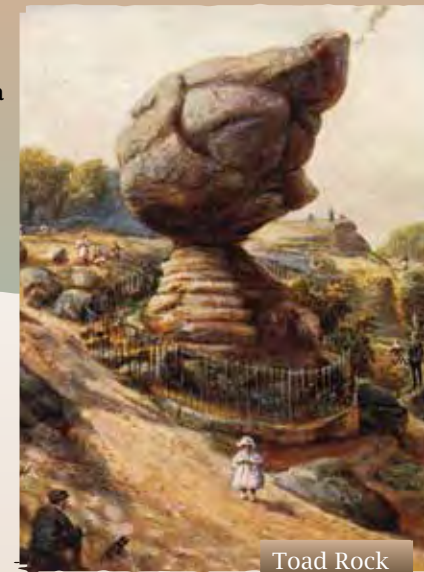
Nowadays, rock climbers flock to the outcrops: the next nearest climbable cliffs are in Dorset or Derbyshire!



The Victorians admired the sandstone cliffs as marvels of creation: often holding elaborate tea parties in elegant dress beneath the outcrops. Individual rocks were named after objects they resembled. “The famous Toad Rock is to Tunbridge Wells what the Leaning Tower is to Pisa” said the writer E.V. Lucas in 1904.



But it's not only humans that appreciate the stunning sandstone. It is home to many rare plants like the Tunbridge filmy fern, which are found nowhere else in the south-east.



Toad Rock



Sandstone mansion

Find out more:

www.highweald.org/landform-story
www.highweald.org/eridgerocks

Local Pub/Café:

Nevill Crest and Gun, Eridge.

Local Producer:

Speldhurst Sausages,
 Sham Farm, Eridge.
www.speldhurstqualityfoods.com

Why not also explore:

- Harrison's Rocks near Birchden Wood
- High Rocks near Tunbridge Wells
- Stone Hill Rocks near East Grinstead
- Toad Rock, Tunbridge Wells.

An exploited landscape



Today, we associate woods with peace and tranquillity.

Sheffield Forest, west of **Nutley**, is a typical example: quiet and full of wildlife to enjoy on a leisurely walk.

But time travel back 400 years and you would have a very different experience. Woods were like today's industrial estates: noisy, smoky, and full of people.



They produced a very valuable resource – wood!

Mighty oak trees provided huge beams: for timber-framed houses and the warships that sank the Spanish Armada. But huge trunks were difficult to move with just horses and carts. Specially dug sawpits were used to plank them up: the poor, sawdust-covered “underdog” in the wet, muddy pit, looked down on by his “topdog” mate.



Wood also provided cooking and heating material, and importantly could be turned into charcoal in earth-covered mounds to fuel the Tudor iron industry.

This is why there is so much woodland in the High Weald - you would hardly grub up one of your most valuable resources. To the careful eye, traces of sawpits and charcoal platforms are still visible at Sheffield Forest. Head there and try to find them!



Locally-made charcoal

Find out more:

www.highweald.org/sheffieldforest
www.highweald.org/woodland-story
www.highweald.org/charcoal

Local Pub/Café:

Coach House Tea Room,
 Sheffield Park Gardens.

Local Producer:

The Old Dairy Farm and Shop,
 Furners Green.
www.theolddairyfarmshop.co.uk

Why not also explore:

- Friezland Wood
- Nap Wood
- Tilgate Forest.

Forests with no trees?

We sometimes think forests should be covered with trees.

So visit **Broadwater Warren** and explore a real Forest.

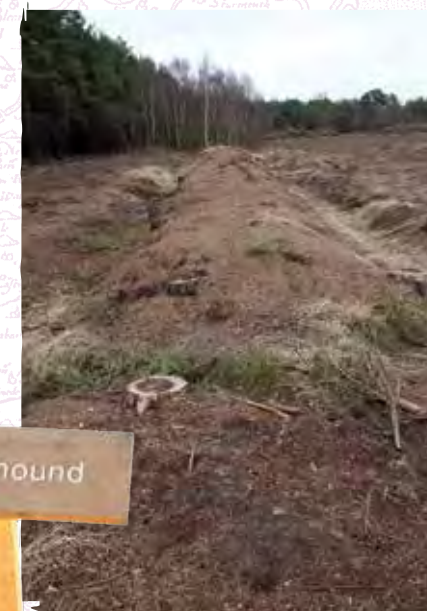
Originally part of Waterdowne Forest, Broadwater was a deer-hunting preserve for the medieval royal court. Visit 500 years ago and you would see open heathland, with only isolated trees. Forests were land set aside for royal-approved hunting, and heathland was a major part of the typical Forest landscape.



Today's conifers at Broadwater were planted, for timber production, only after the Second World War. And the RSPB is now removing significant quantities, in a long-term programme of landscape restoration.



Follow the site's History Trail, and you can find fascinating features from the hunting forest past. Boundary banks mark past land divisions, and ancient, sunken tracks identify former routes across the land. But most obvious is a huge "pillow mound".



Pillow mound



In medieval times, rabbits were farmed for their meat and fur but, being incomers from the Mediterranean, needed cosy artificial burrows to survive the lovely English weather! Archaeologists call these burrows "pillow mounds".

Turn the page to find out how the Weald Forest Ridge's hunting forests later became military training grounds.



Bank

Find out more:

www.highweald.org/archaeology
www.highweald.org/broadwater
www.rspb.org.uk/broadwaterwarren

Local Pub/Café:

Crown Inn, Groombridge.

Local Producer:

Eridge Park Farm Shop,
 Bunny Lane, Eridge.
www.eridgeparkfarmshop.co.uk

Why not also explore:

- Ashdown Forest
- Hargate Forest
- Leechpool and Owlbeech Woods
- Old Lodge
- St Leonard's Forest
- Tilgate Forest.



a million
 voices for
 nature



Take aim... Fire!

Not something you'd expect to hear on a visit to Ashdown Forest!

But for over 200 years the Forest, along with other parts of the Weald Forest Ridge, has been an important military training ground.

Documents record a 1793 camp of 7,000 soldiers near Ashdown's Camp Hill – preparing for impending battles with France. Field kitchens from this time still remain as circular mounds.



Volunteers excavating a field kitchen

Firing ranges were built at a few Forest locations, for riflemen to practice target shooting. You can also see a particularly good surviving range at the RSPB's Broadwater Warren reserve.

Beware veering off the paths on Ashdown, as you can easily stumble into practice trenches from the First and Second World Wars. Look out, also, for anti-tank traps – concrete blocks known as dragon's teeth, over which tanks could not pass. They were often used on Ashdown to stop tank drivers taking short cuts!

Don't tell anyone, but at the 1980's height of the Russian Cold War, a secret nuclear bunker was built inside the Kingstanding facility near Camp Hill.

The army still trains on the Forest today at Pippingford Park.



Military practice trenches



Military trench exposed by a fire



Ashdown's history is just one of many subjects schools can explore on self-guided or tutor-led visits to the Forest. Find out more at www.ashdownforest.org/enjoy/education.php or ring 01342 823583.



Dragon's teeth

Find out more:

www.highweald.org/ashdownforest
www.ashdownforest.org

Local Pub/Café:

Duddleswell Tea Rooms,
B2026, Duddleswell.

Local Producer:

Willowdown Dairy Goats,
A22, Nutley.

Why not also explore:

- Broadwater Warren
- Old Lodge.





Heavenly heather

Heathlands – purple with blooming heather at the height of summer – are an internationally important habitat that has drastically declined in England over the last 200 years.

Near Horsham, they are being restored at two locations – **St Leonard's Forest** and **Leechpool & Owlbeech Woods**.

Heathlands are home to unique plants and wildlife. There are three different types of heather – bell heather, cross-leaved heath and ling – and the spring air is perfumed with the coconut scent of gorse.



Adders bask in sunny spots, and tree pipits and stonechats flit around. Visit a heath on a warm summer's evening and you might hear – or even see – the enigmatic nightjar, with its other-worldly “churring” song.



The actions of humans – clearing trees, grazing their animals, and cutting gorse and bracken for fuel and animal bedding – have created heaths. Management is hence essential to maintain them nowadays.

Visit Owlbeech Wood and you might see black Hebridean sheep chomping the invading birch; with their buddy llamas protecting them from local foxes!



Heathlands also have rich cultural associations. St Leonard's Forest was a well-known smugglers' haunt - its famous dragon is thought to be a myth to scare off the tax inspectors of the 1600's! **Hunt out the modern-day dragon carved into an oak seat.**



Beware,
a bloodthirsty
dragon

smugglers
about!



Sheep (Hebridean)



Find out more:

www.highweald.org/stleonardsforest
www.highweald.org/leechpoolandowlbeechwoods
www.highweald.org/fieldandheath-story
www.horsham.gov.uk/leisure/352.aspx

Local Pub/Café:

The Wheatsheaf, on the Handcross to Lower Beeding road.

Local Producer:

Bangers Galore, Horsham.
www.bangersgalore.com

Why not also explore:

- Ashdown Forest
- Broadwater Warren
- Buchan Country Park
- Old Lodge



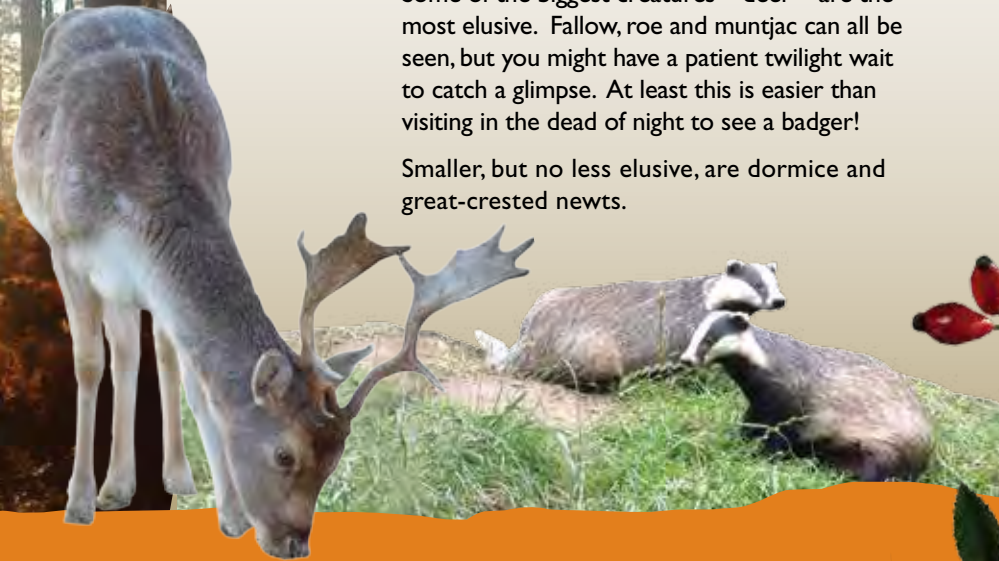
Woodland Wildlife

Woodlands make up 40% of the Weald Forest Ridge.

Hargate Forest, on the edge of **Tunbridge Wells**, is a typical woodland: with rides and glades interspersed between native trees and conifer plantations. It is great for wildlife spotting: some easy, much not so easy to see!

Some of the biggest creatures – deer – are the most elusive. Fallow, roe and muntjac can all be seen, but you might have a patient twilight wait to catch a glimpse. At least this is easier than visiting in the dead of night to see a badger!

Smaller, but no less elusive, are dormice and great-crested newts.



Resident birds are, hopefully, more visible, often with loud calls attracting attention to themselves.

A raucous screech could be a passing jay, whilst a yodelling laugh is the distinctive sound of a green woodpecker. However, anyone spotting a crossbill, a sparrowhawk and a tree pipit all in one day would be very lucky indeed!

You can always cheat and look at the site wildlife interpreted in the Old Carriageway's tree guards!



Hargate Forest is one of eight sites near Tunbridge Wells with specially promoted buggy-friendly walks – perfect for young families to enjoy and explore.

See www.highweald.org/parenttoddlerwalks



Orange Tip

Find out more:

www.highweald.org/hargateforest

www.naturedetectives.org.uk

www.naturalengland.org.uk/advice/wildlifeguide/default.aspx

Local Pub/Café:

Woods, The Pantiles, Tunbridge Wells.

Local producer:

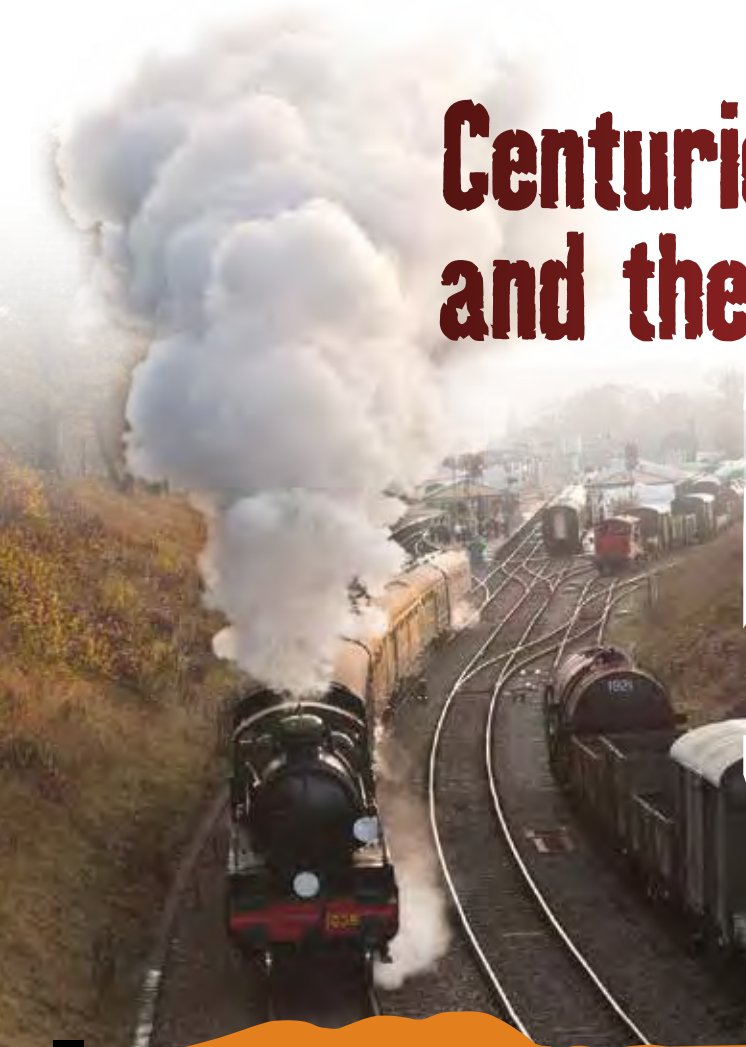
Higham Farm, Bells Yew Green.

Why not also explore:

Almost anywhere – there is a lot of woodland in the Weald Forest Ridge!



Centurions, steam trains and the humble bike



People have travelled through the High Weald for thousands of years. What has changed is how they have travelled.

First explorations were on foot: often accompanied by pigs and grazing animals. The distinctive sunken lanes result from the action of feet, hooves – and later, wheels – over hundreds of years.



Balcombe railway viaduct



At Ashdown Forest's Roman Road car park, you can even stand in the footsteps of Roman traders and soldiers!

18 centuries later and Victorian entrepreneurs brought railways to the area: cutting through ridges and bridging valleys to connect London to the south coast. The new railways brought growth: with the increased mobility allowing London businessmen and bankers to build new country homes with extensive gardens. Several of the lines, however, didn't survive the 1960's cuts of Dr. Beeching.

But the railway's loss has been our gain. Two tourist steam train lines – the **Bluebell** and **Spa Valley Railways** – allow you to travel sedately through the stunning landscape as if in a bygone era. And you can peacefully cycle almost all the way from Groombridge to Crawley on the **Forest** and **Worth Ways** – gentle multi-user routes great for exploring families.



Sunken lane

Find out more:

www.bluebell-railway.co.uk
www.spavalleyrailway.co.uk
www.sustrans.org.uk
www.highweald.org/forestway
www.highweald.org/worthway

Local Pub/Café:

Java and Jazz, Forest Row.

Local producer:

Tablehurst Farm Shop, Forest Row.
www.tablehurstandplawhatch.co.uk

Why not also explore:

By train, steam train, bus, bike and foot. Leave the car at home for a change!



Water, water

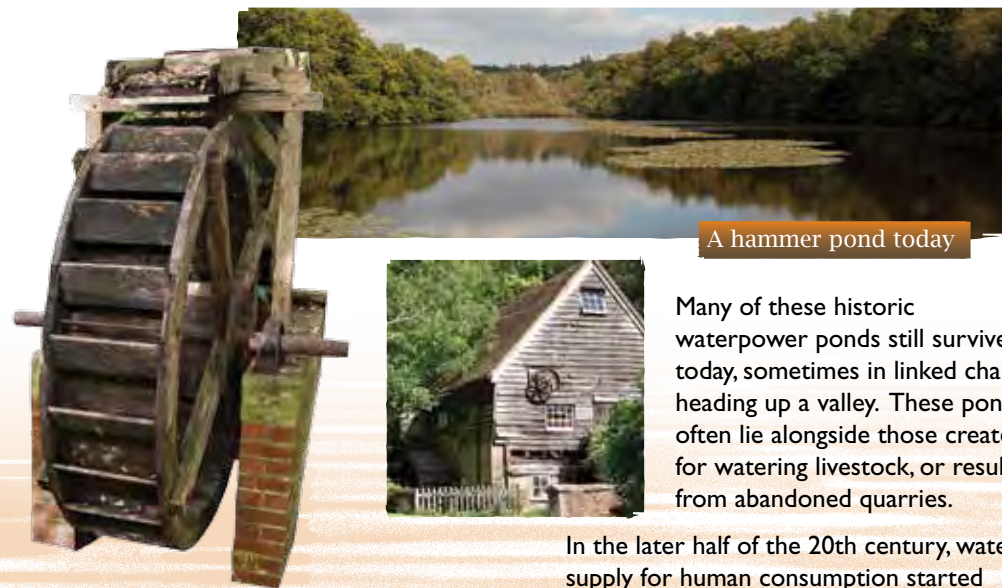
everywhere

Water has always been an important resource in the Weald Forest Ridge: albeit for different uses over time.

Water was an important power source before the advent of steam and electricity. The characteristic, steep-sided valleys – called gills – were often dammed to form ponds and a resultant “head” of water. The Tudor iron industry created many “hammer ponds” to power its bellows and forges, whilst watermills were also a common feature.



Pond bay reconstruction



A hammer pond today

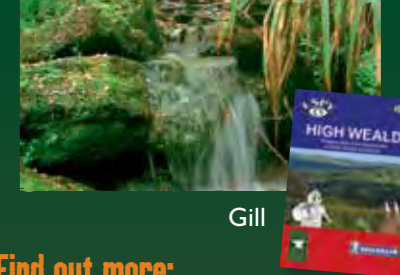
Many of these historic waterpower ponds still survive today, sometimes in linked chains heading up a valley. These ponds often lie alongside those created for watering livestock, or resulting from abandoned quarries.

In the later half of the 20th century, water supply for human consumption started shaping the landscape. Two major reservoirs were constructed: **Weir Wood** (1952) owned by Southern Water, and **Ardingly** (1979) owned by South East Water.

When both are full, they hold over 2,375 million gallons of water – enough for over 55 million baths! But you needn’t just enjoy the reservoir benefits at home. They are great locations for walking and relaxing, and offer fishing and water sport opportunities through clubs and activity centres.



Ardingly Reservoir



Gill

Find out more:

www.southeastwater.co.uk/kingfishertrail
www.highweald.org/weirwoodreservoir
www.highweald.org/ardinglyreservoir
www.weirwood.me.uk

Local Pub/Café:

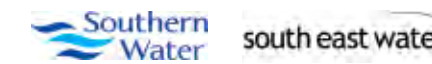
Cat Inn, West Hoathly.

Local producer:

Imberhorne Lane Nursery,
 East Grinstead.
www.camelliasonline.co.uk

Why not also explore:

- Tilgate Park
- Linked ponds on public rights of way north of Horsted Keynes.



Glorious gardens



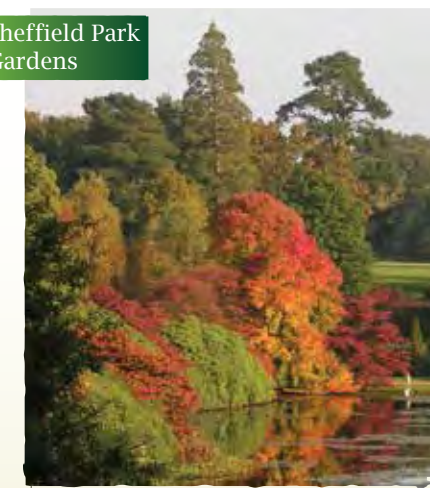
The Weald Forest Ridge is blessed with some of Britain's finest Victorian and Edwardian gardens. But this prevalence of horticultural riches has not happened by chance.

The area's sandy, acidic rocks and shady, steep-sided valleys create ideal soil and climatic conditions for exotic plants, especially Himalayan rhododendrons and azaleas.

The 19th century railways enabled entrepreneurs, making their riches in London, to move to Wealden country house estates. Add in a passion for plant collecting, and numerous private gardens were developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Several are nowadays open for you to explore and enjoy.



Sheffield Park Gardens



The High Beeches

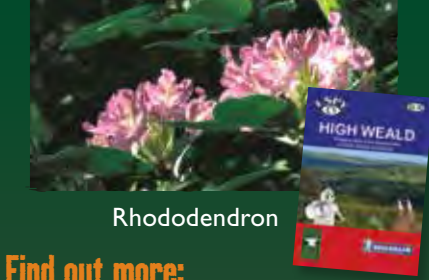
Unfortunately, not all the exotic plant introductions stayed confined to their gardens. Plants such as *Rhododendron ponticum*, Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam have "jumped the fence", and now need radical control programmes to stop them swamping native flora!

Nymans



Other estates from 100 years ago now have very different uses. **Buchan Country Park**, near **Crawley**, is located on land once part of the estate of Philip Saillard – a businessman who sold playing cards and ostrich feathers! Buchan has a Countryside Centre, and woodland and heathland walks around lakes created by Saillard. Well worth a visit!

Buchan Country Park



Rhododendron

Find out more:

www.highweald.org/Edward
www.highweald.org/buchancountrypark
www.nationaltrust.org.uk
www.highbeeches.com

Local Pub/Café:

The Lamb Inn, Lambs Green nr. Rusper.

Local producer:

Tan House Farm Shop, Newdigate.
www.tanhousefarmshop.co.uk

Why not also explore:

- National Trust gardens: Wakehurst Place, Nymans, Standen, Sheffield Park Gardens
- The High Beeches.



This booklet has been produced to enable everyone living in and around the Weald Forest Ridge to be inspired to enjoy and explore.

The **High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty** is one of 46 AONB's in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Its designation helps safeguard its distinctive character and natural beauty.

The 328km² area of the **Weald Forest Ridge** forms the highest ridge of the AONB: spanning parts of East Sussex, West Sussex and Kent.

Between 2009 and 2012, a partnership of 20 different organisations – from the public, private and voluntary sectors – delivered the **Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme**. This Scheme, supported by the **Heritage Lottery Fund**, enriched the area's natural and cultural heritage, and enabled people to understand, learn about, care for, and enjoy this unique landscape.

For more information visit
www.highweald.org

T: 01580 879500
E: info@highweald.org



High Weald AONB Unit, Woodland Enterprise Centre, Hastings Road, Flimwell, East Sussex, TN5 7PR.

Published Spring 2013 by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee on behalf of the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme.

All photography and images copyright High Weald AONB Unit or Vivienne Blakey (www.vivienneblakey.com), except: I-Spy, p7, © Elizabeth Randall; dinosaur illustration, p10, © Alan Marshall; hunter illustration, p10, © Valerie Alford; Toad Rock image, p11, courtesy of Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery; charcoal and sawpit illustrations, pp12-13, © James Cope; oak tree, p13, © Forestry Commission; main image & harvester, p14, © RSPB; pillow mound illustration, p15, © James Cope; Field Kitchen, p16, © Chris Butler; trench, p17, © Vivienne Blandford; I-Spy, p17, © Elizabeth Randall; 2 of heather pics, p18, © Peter Greenhalf, Natural England; nightjar, p19, © RSPB Images; llamas, p19, © Horsham District Council; pigs illustration, p22, © Alan Marshall; pond bay illustration, p24, © James Cope; I-Spy, p25, © Patrick McKernan; High Beeches garden, p27, © High Beeches Gardens; Buchan Country Park, p27, © West Sussex County Council.

Designed by www.buffalozoomedia.co.uk

Involving people with the unique heritage in one of England's Finest Landscapes