

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: 2.5 miles/4 km.



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

Description: A gentle walk through woods and fields with stunning views across the High Weald landscape.

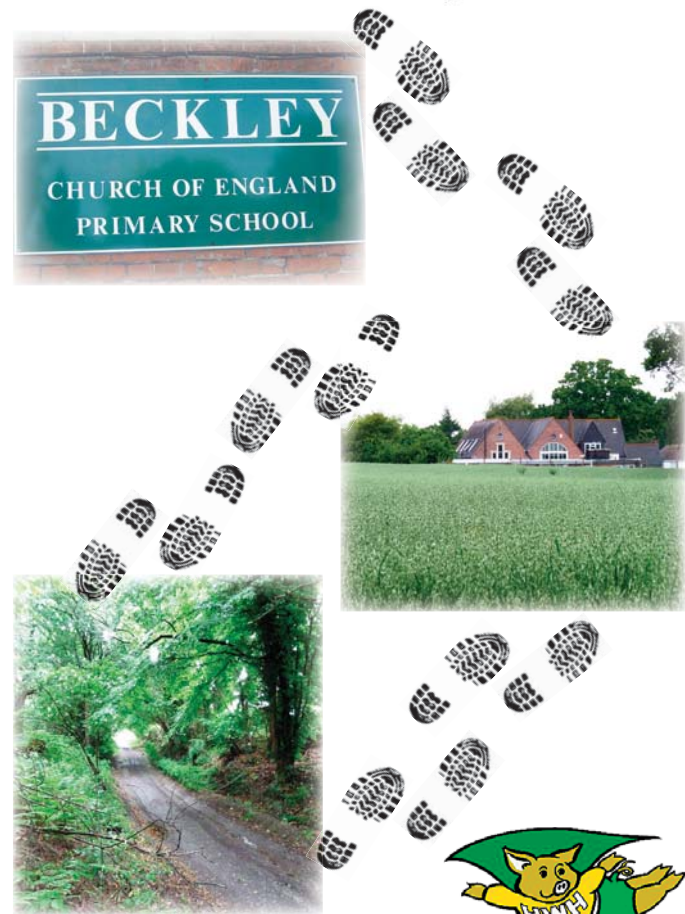


RISK ASSESSMENT - Points to consider

- Please use with an Ordnance Survey Explorer Map.
- Wear sturdy footwear or wellingtons, being aware of uneven ground and fallen trees, especially near water.
- Long trousers are advised - particularly as parts of this walk can become quite overgrown in Summer.
- 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 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

Beckley CE Primary School High Weald Welly Walk



Be a High Weald Hero - you can make a difference



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11



12

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

Photo guide and route description

Turn left out of the school gate and walk along Main Street for approximately 100 metres until you reach a large metal gate on your left **1**. Go through the gate, past a pond on your right, and carry straight on across the field, heading towards the trees. At the edge of the field cross a small bridge and go through the metal gate into the woods **2**. Follow the path through the trees, bearing left where the park forks. Keep going until you reach a stile, cross over, and follow the path as it emerges at the edge of a field, fenced on your right. Continue along to reach, and cross, another stile. Turn left and walk down the grassy path towards another stile at the roadside **3**. Cross the stile, walk up to the main road and turn left. Pass Annfield Cottage and walk along the road for approximately 50 metres until you reach a footpath on your right **4**. Go over the stile and head into a small field, following the path straight on and through a kissing gate. Enjoy the open views of the High Weald to your left and keep going until you reach another kissing gate at the edge of Bixley Wood **5**.

Follow the path into the woods, staying on the path as it curves right **6**. At the junction of paths carry straight on. Stick to the main path, following public footpath signs, all the way through the woods **7**. Eventually you will reach a stile at the edge of the woods **8**, cross over and turn right to walk along the road (Bixley Lane).

At the junction turn right (towards Beckley) **9**. Take care along this road as cars can pass quickly. Keep going until you reach a stile in the hedge on your right **10**, just after Watcombe House. Cross over into a large field and head for the left of the telegraph pole in the middle of the field. At the telegraph pole, bear left towards the metal gate **11** in the hedge. Go through the gate and look right to admire the historic farmstead. Cross straight over the farm track and climb over the stile.

Follow the footpath all the way to its end (take extra care as the ground is quite uneven and this path can become overgrown!). Cross the stile and carry straight on, walking up the driveway, heading away from the house. Go over the cattle grid and turn right along the road (King's Bank Lane). Proceed along here, staying close to the edge as there are no pavements. Look out for King's Bank Oast (on your right) and, shortly afterwards, find the stile on your left **12** that you previously crossed over just before **4**.

Cross back over the stile and retrace your steps back to the school. Walk up the grassy path, turn right over the stile and follow the path down to the woods. Go through the woods, across the field and back to Main Street. Go through the gate and turn right to walk back to the School.

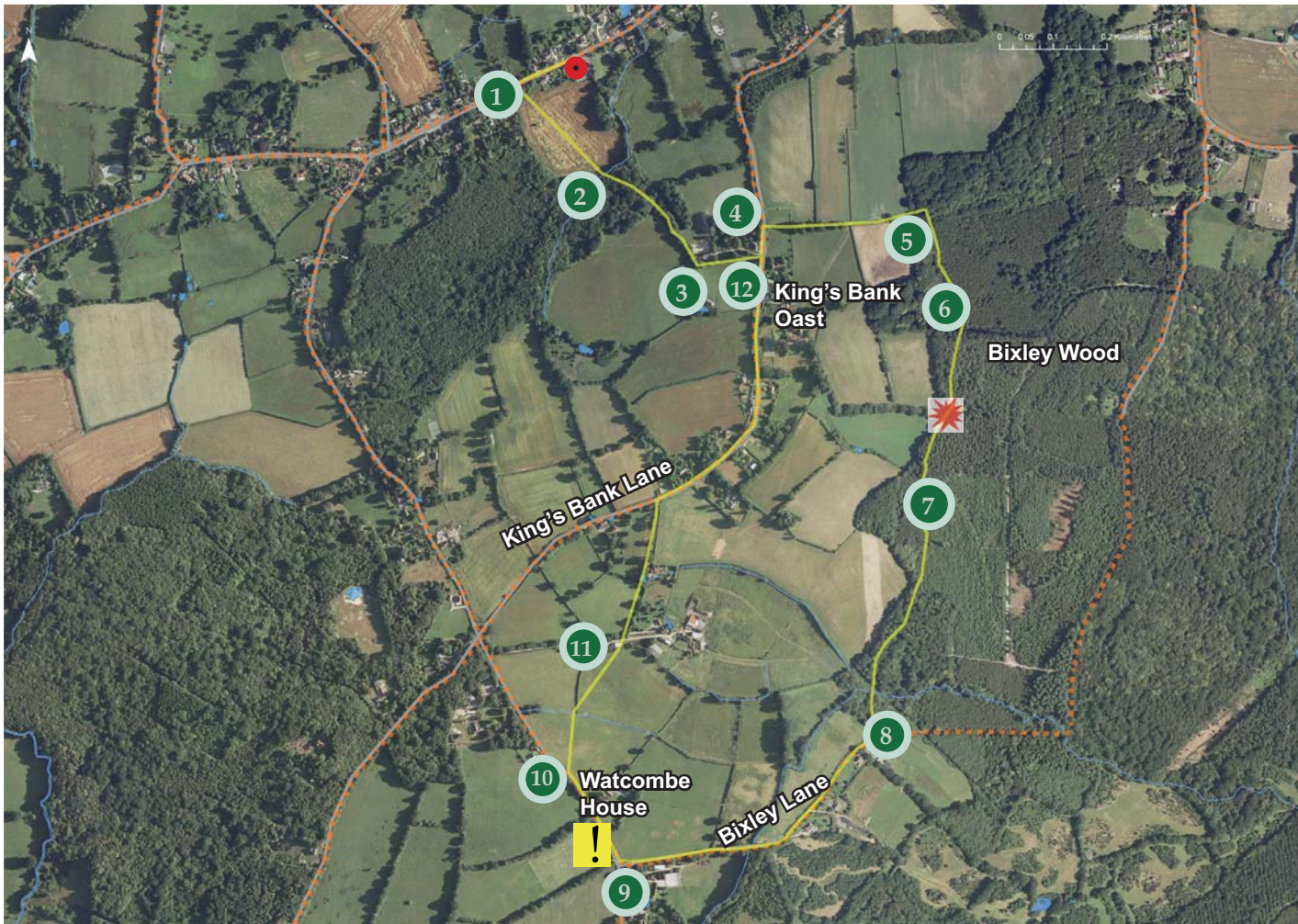
Look out for...











Historic Farmsteads



Coppiced Trees



Key

-  Beckley CEP School
-  WALK ROUTE
-  road
-  historic routeway
-  watercourse
-  numbered views
-  activity point
-  cars passing quickly

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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. On this Welly Walk, Bixley Wood is an example of ancient woodland.



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

Look out for signs of coppiced trees in the woods - see if you can spot trees with multiple trunks!

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.



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 hammers and bellows of the forges and furnaces.



A water powered furnace was built in 1587 just south of the village (so named Beckley Furnace!) and other local place names, such as Furnace Lane and Watermill Lane, give us further clues of the industry that used to exist in this area.

So, where are the remains of such industry? Building stone was too valuable to be left unused, so the works were dismantled, and the woods grew back over the former sites. Reminders of the once great Wealden iron industry can be found in place names, remains of charcoal hearths or pits in the woods - flattened circular areas with blackened soil beneath the leaf litter - or in finding chunks of telltale waste, called slag, from the smelting process.

Adapted from text by Jeremy Hodgkinson, Wealden Iron Research Group

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.

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.



Scattered Farmsteads

The High Weald has many isolated farmsteads, hamlets and dwellings dotted across the countryside. This scattered settlement pattern means the High Weald is the most populated protected landscape in the UK.

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.



Look at the houses and farm buildings on this Welly Walk - what local materials have been used to build them?

Ancient Routeways

As far back as the Neolithic period (c.4300 - 1400BC) 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.

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.

Look closely at the map in this Welly Walk leaflet to see where some of these historic routeways exist in and around Beckley.