

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: 2.8 miles/4.5 km.

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

Description: A mixture of surfaced and unsurfaced paths through woods, fields and along the banks of Weir Wood reservoir. The route goes through a working farm, there are stiles to cross and paths can get very muddy!



RISK ASSESSMENT - Points to consider

- Please use with an Ordnance Survey Explorer Map.
- Wear sturdy footwear or wellingtons, being aware of uneven ground, especially near water. Long trousers are also 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 staff to pupil 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

The Meads 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

Turn left out of the school gate and walk to the end of Mill Way. Turn right and walk down the hill, finding a safe place to cross. Walk past the end of Stockwell Road and, opposite The Old Mill pub, look for a public footpath on your left, leading to Sunnyside Recreation Ground **1**. Follow the path, past the grassy area  and playground, through the metal barrier and into the woods. Continue along the woodland path, following the course of the river, keeping the fields on your right. Take care as you cross the small bridge and keep going until you reach a gate on your right hand side **2**. Go through this gate and bear diagonally left across the field **3**, heading towards the farm buildings. At the edge of the field, go through another gate and turn right to walk along the road. Walk past Boyles Farm – a historic farmstead - on your left and a large pond. Stay on this road, walking uphill, for approximately 650 metres until you reach Busses Farm, another historic farmstead. At the Farm, bear left **4** to walk with the pond on your right hand side. As you reach the end of the pond turn left (follow the signs for 'walkers'!) and head towards a metal gate **5**. Go through this gate and follow the path downhill, enjoying views towards Weir Wood reservoir. Continue on the main track, passing a gate on your right **6**. Keep going until you reach the wide reservoir track and junction of paths. *For a picnic spot, turn right here and walk for approximately 100 metres to the Millennium Picnic Site. Retrace your steps back to this point to continue on the Welly Walk.*

Turn left at the junction of paths and walk with trees on your left and Weir Wood reservoir on your right ⑦ . Continue until you reach a gate ⑧. Go through the gate and walk straight across the field, walking under the telegraph wires, towards a gap in the fence ⑨. Go downhill and follow the footpath as it heads diagonally right towards the corner of the field. Keep going until you reach a stile on your right hand side ⑩, cross over, turn left and walk over the bridge. Cross the next stile and continue straight on, keeping to the right hand edge of the field. As the footpath bears right towards a metal gate, turn LEFT here, do not proceed through the gate ⑪. Walk along the edge of the field with trees to your right and the open field on your left. Keep going straight on until you reach a metal gate. Go through this and continue forward, following the line of fencing on your right hand side. Go through the next metal gate and carry straight on, heading across the field back towards Busses Farm. Go through the wooden gate ⑫ and turn right to walk down the track, away from Busses Farm. Now retrace your steps back to school. As you pass Boyles Farm (now on your right) find the gate on your left leading into the field where you previously walked. Head back through the field towards the woods. Go through the gate, turn left and follow the path all the way back to the recreation ground and past the swings. At the main road turn right and walk up the hill. Turn left down Mill Way and you will soon be back at The Meads School!

Look out for...



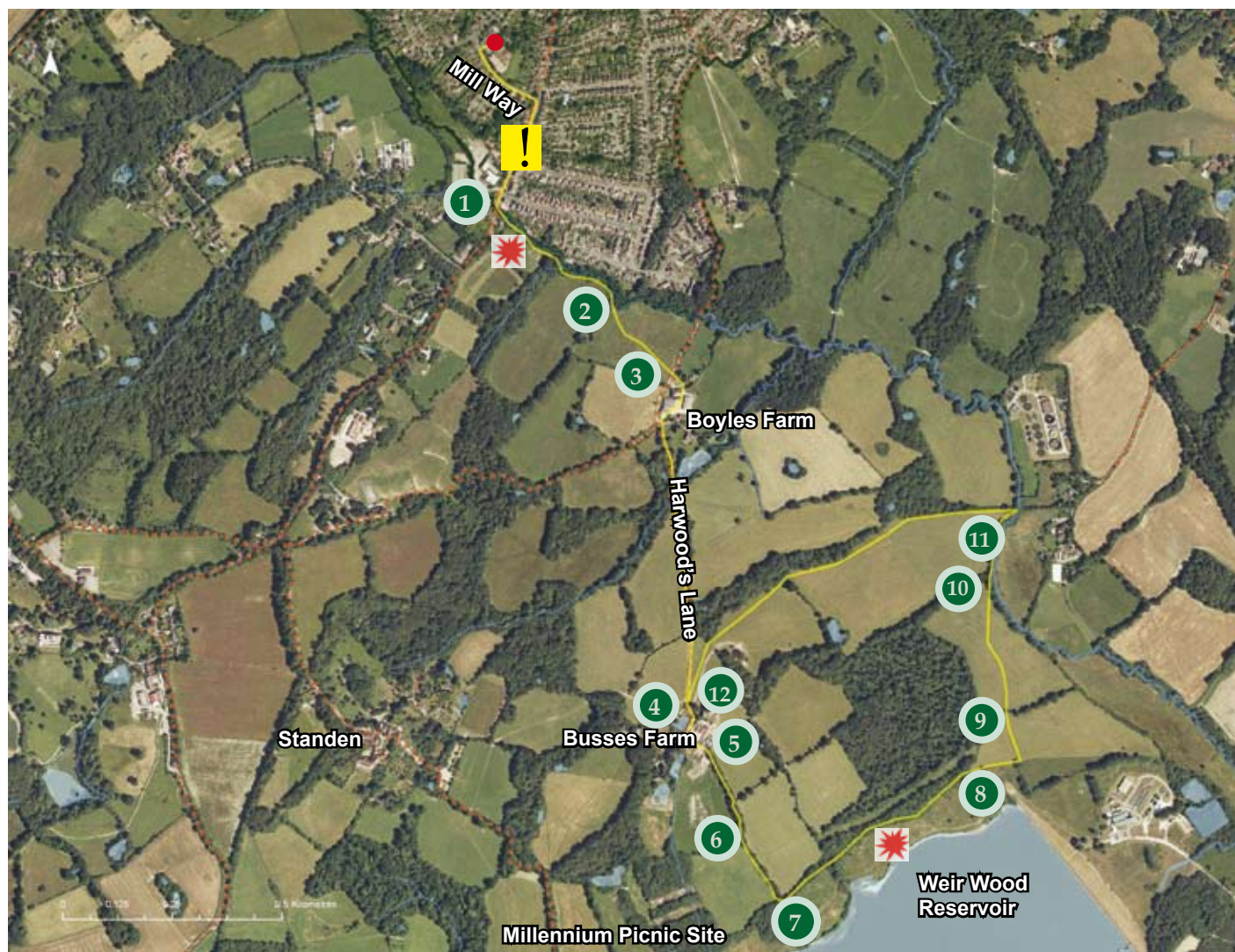
Historic Farmstead











Ponds



Ancient Woodland



Key

-  The Meads Primary School
-  WALK ROUTE
-  road
-  historic routeway
-  watercourse
-  numbered views
-  busy road
-  suggested activity point

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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.

Look out for signs of coppicing on this walk - can you see any 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.



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.



Busses and Boyles Farms are examples of historic farmsteads that you can admire on this Welly Walk.

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 *Standen* or *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.



As you walk down Harwood's Lane, down towards Busses Farm, you are following a historic routeway!

High Weald Ponds

How many ponds can you spot on this Welly Walk? The Weald has one of the highest concentrations of ponds in South East England. Many ponds have developed because of human activity e.g. quarrying, while others were created as drinking ponds for farm animals.



In the High Weald some large 'hammer ponds' can also be found. These were created to power the bellows and hammers of the iron industry.

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.



There are numerous former iron working sites, furnaces and bloomeries scattered in and around East Grinstead as well as a former Roman ironworking site on the banks of Weir Wood reservoir.

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

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