

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.naturalland.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: 3.1 miles/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 by an iron-rich stream. Terrain is gentle, although there are stiles to cross.



RISK ASSESSMENT - Points to consider

- Please use with an Ordnance Survey Explorer Map.
- Wear sturdy footwear or wellingtons, being aware of uneven ground. 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

St Michael's Primary School High Weald Welly Walk



Be a High Weald Hero - you can make a difference



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



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

From the school turn right and walk to the end of Station Road. When you reach Withyham Road turn right and walk along the pavement to reach The Dorset Arms. Cross the road here and head through the gate ① to follow the public footpath along the track. Follow the track, passing the cricket pavilion on your left, carry on to cross the bridge and look for a covered well ② on your right hand side – this is in fact a Chalybeate spring, full of orangey-red water – an indication of its rich iron content. Now retrace your steps back to the main road. Once here, cross the road again and turn left along the main road, walking past the village hall. Where the pavement ends, cross over and follow the public footpath through a wooden gate ③. You will pass Rectory Cottage on your left. At the track that leads up to the church, turn right to walk back down to the main road. Turn left, cross the bridge and walk, with the stream on your left, up to the stile ahead of you ④. Cross over into the field and bear left uphill ⑤ (walking with the pill box at the top of the hill on your right). Head up towards the trees. At the edge of the trees continue to follow the public footpath and head downhill, across the field ⑥ in the direction of the church spire (St Mary's Hartfield). Turn right at the corner of the field, again heading towards the church. Walk with the open fields to your left ⑦ and a line of trees on your right. At the corner of this field cross the stile and continue straight on downhill between the trees. Keep going until you reach a gate and a stile at the edge of the main road. Cross this, and continue straight across the road to cross another stile into a field ⑧.

Keep going and at the end of the line of conifer trees bear right **9**. Walk through the field, across the grass and downhill to reach a stile on your right **10**. Cross over and follow the line of the hedge and trees on your left (walking parallel with the main road up on your right). Keep going, over the next stile by a metal gate, until you reach a wide gap in the hedge on your left. Go through the gap and bear right across the field **11** towards the trees and another stile. Cross this and turn right along a wide path – the Forest Way . Follow this path for approximately 1km, until you reach a gate and the road. Turn right here **12** and walk on the pavement for a short distance until you are back at St Michael's School!

Look out for...



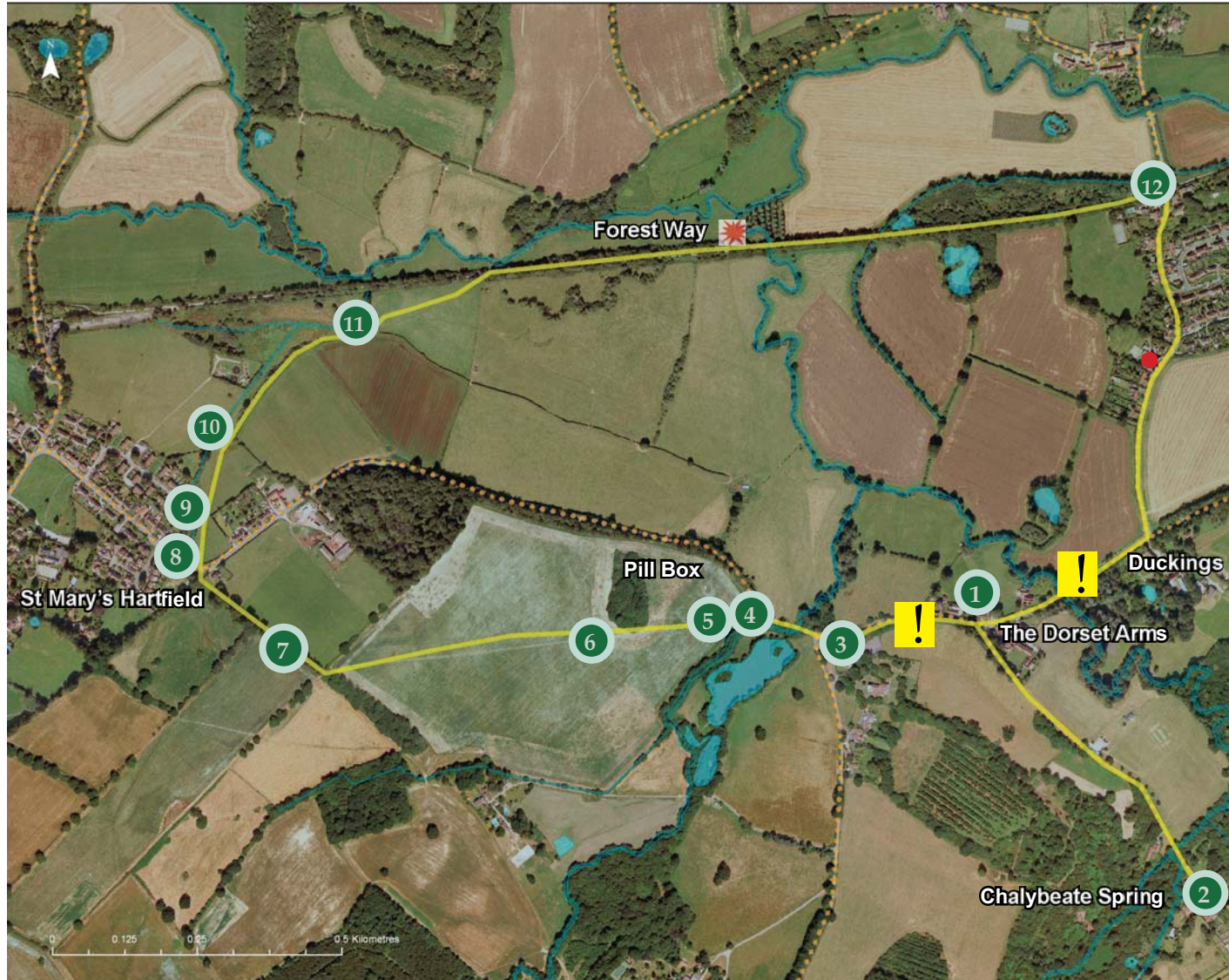
Chalybeate Spring



Former Railway Line



Iron Industry Clues



Key

-  St Michael's Primary School
-  WALK ROUTE
-  road
-  historic routeway
-  watercourse
-  numbered views
-  busy road
-  suggested activity point

This map is reproduced from Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. ©Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. East Sussex County Council, 1000 19601, 2011.

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. 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 often small and irregular in shape.



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 Cowden or Tenterden.

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

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.



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.



The raw materials for making iron were prevalent in Withyham. There are numerous former iron working sites, furnaces and bloomeries scattered in and around the village. Duckings, a historic farmstead at the end of Station Road, is a former ironmaster's house.

On this Welly Walk you will also visit a Chalybeate Spring, an iron-rich source of water. The orangey-red colour is a clear indication of the substantial iron content. The, now overgrown, water powered iron workings nearby would also have been linked to a furnace or forge.



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

Other 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; the telltale waste, called slag, from the smelting process; as well as some hammer and furnace ponds scattered across the area.

Adapted from text by Jeremy Hodgkinson, Wealden Iron Research Group

Forest Way

Forest Way, a former railway line, forms part of this Welly Walk. The line was opened in 1866 as a continuation of the line from Three Bridges. Although becoming a busy commuter line, it eventually fell under the axe of the Beeching cuts in 1966. Ironically, Dr Beeching lived near Forest Row and regularly travelled up to London on the line when he was Chairman of British Rail.



Many of the trees along Forest Way and in the surrounding fields are Alder or Willow. This is because it lies in the floodplain of the River Medway and these trees thrive in damp surroundings. Furthermore, Withyham lies at the point where the rivers Withy and Ham converge. Withyham means 'withy meadow' or water meadow where coppiced willows grow. (Adapted text from *Forest Way interpretation leaflet, ESCC*)

Careful Coppicing

Look out for signs of coppicing as you walk along the Forest Way. 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.



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.