

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.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!



Produced by the High Weald AONB Unit with support from:



Walk Facts



Distance: 3.9 miles/6.3 km (excluding detour in orchard!)

Time: 2 hours (depending on conditions and numbers, and excluding stops)

Description: A mixture of surfaced and unsurfaced paths through woods and farmland, over gentle terrain. There are numerous stiles, steps and foot bridges, with some busier roads to be aware of.



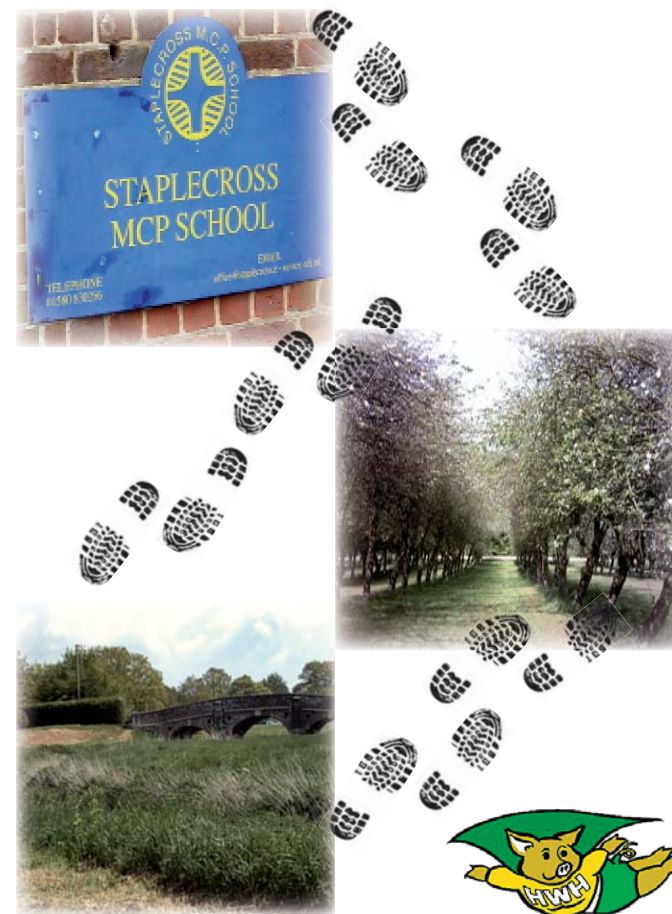
RISK ASSESSMENT - Points to consider

- Please use with an Ordnance Survey Explorer Map.
- Wear sturdy footwear or wellingtons, being aware of uneven ground. Long trousers are also advisable.
- Check the weather - waterproofs or hats and sun cream might be needed.
- 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.
- Whilst there are toilet facilities at Bodiam Castle, we recommend that toilet paper and hand wipes are taken as a precaution.
- Everyone must clean their hands before eating.
- Taking a drink with you is advisable.
- Remember, a large group of people can be intimidating, especially to animals. Take care when entering fields containing livestock.
- Be aware of barbed wire, particularly when crossing farmland.
- *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

Staplecross MCP School High Weald Welly Walk



Be a High Weald Hero - you can make a difference



1



2



3



4



5



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8



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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

Turn left out of school and walk down the hill, following the main road. Take care to walk on grass verges where possible as there is no pavement. Keep going until you reach Hollow Wall Farm, on your left. Immediately after the farm, go through a wooden gate, **1** following the narrow public footpath downhill. At the small pond, bear right. Cross the farm track and head up the grassy bank, following the public footpath arrows. You are now walking with a large hedgerow to your right and stunning views of the High Weald AONB to your left. Continue straight along this path, crossing farm tracks, until you see a wooden gate directly ahead of you. Walk towards the gate but cross the stile on your right hand side, just before you reach it. Once over the stile turn left to follow the narrow, well defined, path through the woodland.

Continue until the path obviously forks. Now take the right hand path leading up to a stile **2**. Cross the stile to enter a field. Head straight across the grass, walking over and then down the gentle hill towards the wooden huts near the trees. Just past the last hut, turn left towards an orchard. When you get to the orchard, turn right to walk towards a wider track. Now turn right again and follow the road towards a small collection of buildings. Just before the buildings turn left and, immediately, find a stile in the fence on your left **3**. Go over the stile and turn right to walk downhill. At the bottom of the hill turn right, cross a stile, and walk straight ahead to cross the next stile a few metres ahead of you. Be aware that this is a paddock and there may be horses grazing. At the path turn left towards the main road (private driveway, please be respectful). Once at the road (take

care, fast cars!) turn right, walk over the bridge and then immediately turn right again **4** to follow the wide grassy path along the River Rother . Keep the river on your right and follow the meandering grassy path, closest to the water, for approx. 1 mile. Take care not to get too close to the water's edge. Once in view, walk towards the bridge **5** and the main road. At the bridge, head up the steps and cross the road. Turn left to follow the footpath into Bodiam Castle **6**, which is a good spot for toilets and lunch. Find a seat on the grass to admire the view of this spectacular medieval castle . After your rest stop, head back to the main road and turn left towards Staplecross, crossing over where necessary to walk on pavements or grassy verges provided.

Follow the road for approx. 1 mile. Once past Dagg Lane carry on round the bend but look out for a small wooden gate **7** on your left, nestled amongst the trees. Go through this gate and follow the track but, shortly afterwards, find another narrow metal gate **8** to go through. Now carry straight on, walking on the grassy footpath near to the line of trees on your right. At the end of the path turn left and cross the stile in the fence on your right **9**. Carry straight on past a large pond on your right. Cross over the next stile and keep going until the path meets a wider track **10**. Now turn left into the orchard. *As a brief diversion to enjoy an organic orchard and some ancient gill woodland, carry on downhill through the trees. At the edge of the orchard, pause on the wooden bridge to look at the gill stream. Now return back up to the entrance of the orchard. Turn left at the orchard's edge towards a metal kissing gate leading into a grassy field **11**.* Walk straight uphill and cross the stile at the edge of the field into Shoreham Lane. Turn right. Head down the road towards the junction and then turn left following the sign to Staplecross **12**. Cross the road to walk on the grassy verges and follow it all the way back up to the school, which will be on your right!

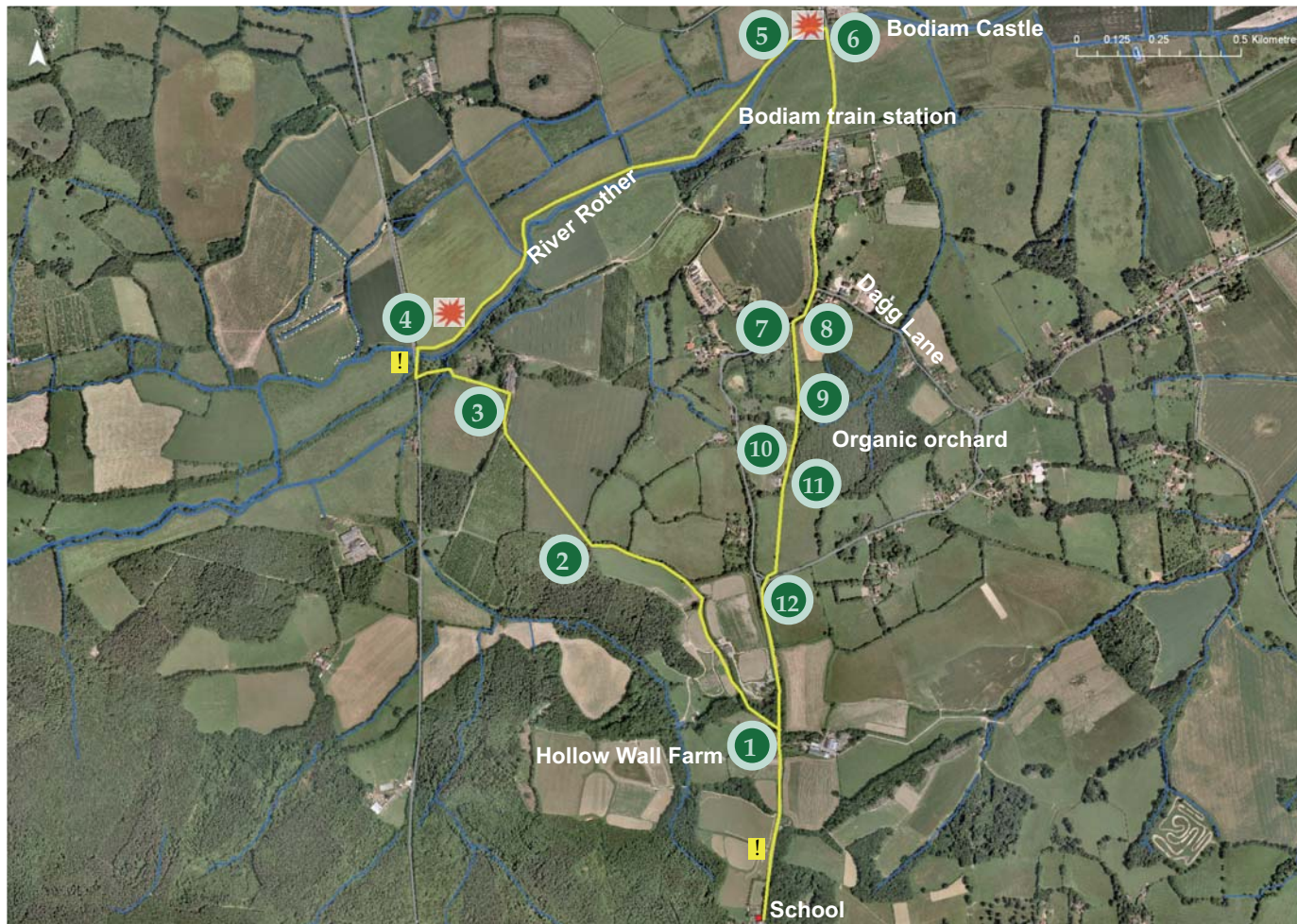
Look out for...



Orchards



Rolling Hills



Key

 WALK ROUTE

 road

 watercourse

 numbered views

 suggested activity point

 busy road

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 coppice 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. 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 to eat the fruits and seeds. Often, rarer species are now only found in working coppice.

Woodlands have been managed in this way for hundreds of years and it is important for the plants and the wildlife that we continue to manage them in this way. Buying local wood products helps to ensure the continuation of traditional management.

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.



Valerie Alford, ESCC Landscape 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.

Compared to many areas of Britain, the High Weald still has a relatively large number of ancient, undisturbed, wildflower-rich hay meadows and pastures. These 'unimproved' grasslands are some of our most important habitats for conservation.



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

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; 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 fro between their parent villages (often 20 miles away) created drove roads. The main road through Staplecross is an historic routeway.

Visit www.highweald.org to find out more about the High Weald's unique landscape.

Orchards

This walk passes through some beautiful High Weald orchards - including organic and traditionally managed sites that are maintained by hand, rather than machines. The history of fruit growing in the Weald has created a uniquely 'textured' countryside. Neat rows and angular patterns of orchards contrast with the smooth sweeps of pastures, shaws and woods.



Older, traditional orchards offer a variety of wildlife habitats all year round. In spring, blossom provides a source of pollen for bees and moths; in summer the leafy canopy is a perfect nesting site for many birds, including woodpeckers, chaffinches and treecreepers. Even the fallen fruit in Autumn is a good food source for foraging creatures such as badgers and hedgehogs.

Some of the fruit you will see growing in orchards includes cherries, plums, pears and apples. Black, red and white currants, gooseberries, strawberries, raspberries and other fruit can also be found growing in the area.

Can you spot the differences between the organic orchard and the managed orchards?



Gill Streams

In the organic orchard, near the end of this walk, pause a moment to admire the route carved out by an ancient gill stream. Underneath the patchwork landscape of the High Weald lie bands of sandstone and clay. Originally formed by water and sediments, then folded by earth movements and finally carved by rivers, these materials give the High Weald its shape. The clay is soft and easily worn away: it forms the low valleys of the High Weald, with the harder sandstone forming the high ridges which run east-west. Steep-sided, wooded gills are a special feature of the High Weald: they are formed where a stream has carved a deep channel for itself through the clay and sandstone of a hillside. Gill streams flow into rivers that have formed wide valleys in the eastern part of the High Weald, before reaching the sea.