

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](http://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](http://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:** 3.2 miles/5.1 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 Wadhurst village. Terrain is mostly gentle and there are several 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](http://www.highweald.org)

# Wadhurst CE 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

From the school gates turn left. At the end of Sparrows Green Road, turn left along the main road towards Wadhurst village. Safely cross the road and turn right down Washwell Lane (by White Hart Pub and opposite Church St.) **1**. Follow the road straight down. Pass the end of Courthope Avenue on your right and continue straight on **2**. Keep going until you reach a stile on your right **3** and cross over into a grassy field. Bear left and walk uphill through the trees, heading across the field to a stile in the far right hand corner **4**. Cross the stile in front of you and immediately turn right. Follow a narrow path between a wire fence and a line of trees. Continue straight past a stile on your right and pond on your left. Keep going to reach, and cross, another stile ahead of you. Once in the field, keep close to the line of trees on your left until you reach a stile in the fence, on the edge of the woods **5**. Cross over and enter Snape Wood, an ancient woodland . Turn right and follow the path to meet the main track. At the main track turn left and head uphill **6**. Stick to this wide path for some distance until you reach a junction of paths. Turn right, past the benches **7**  and continue to stay on and follow the main track. Keep going at the next junction of paths, bearing right **8** to follow the path as it heads gently uphill. Stay on the main track until you see a footpath on your left **9**. Follow this to return to the stile at the edge of Snape Wood. Cross the stile and turn right.



Retrace your steps back along the narrow footpath until you meet the road. At the road turn left and continue for a short distance until it bends sharply left. Take the right fork **10** crossing the bridge and the gill stream. Follow the road up to the water treatment works. At the water treatment works, turn left uphill **11**, following the footpath next to the high metal fencing (which will be on your right). At the end of the path, cross the stile on your right and turn left. Walk uphill through the field, keeping close to the field edge on your left. Keep going, walking between two wooden posts in the hedge. At the corner of the field cross the stile on your left and bear right slightly to cross the stile on your right **12**. Follow the narrow track up to the main road. Take care when you reach the main road to find a safe place to cross. Turn left and follow the pavement back towards the village. Pass Blacksmith's Lane on your right and, once past the Methodist church, bear right where the road forks to walk along Church Street (if you have time, pop into the church of St Peter and St Paul to look at the numerous iron slabs on the church floor). When you reach the High Street follow the road all the way out of the village, retracing your steps back to Sparrows Green Road. Once here, turn right and you will be back at Wadhurst School!

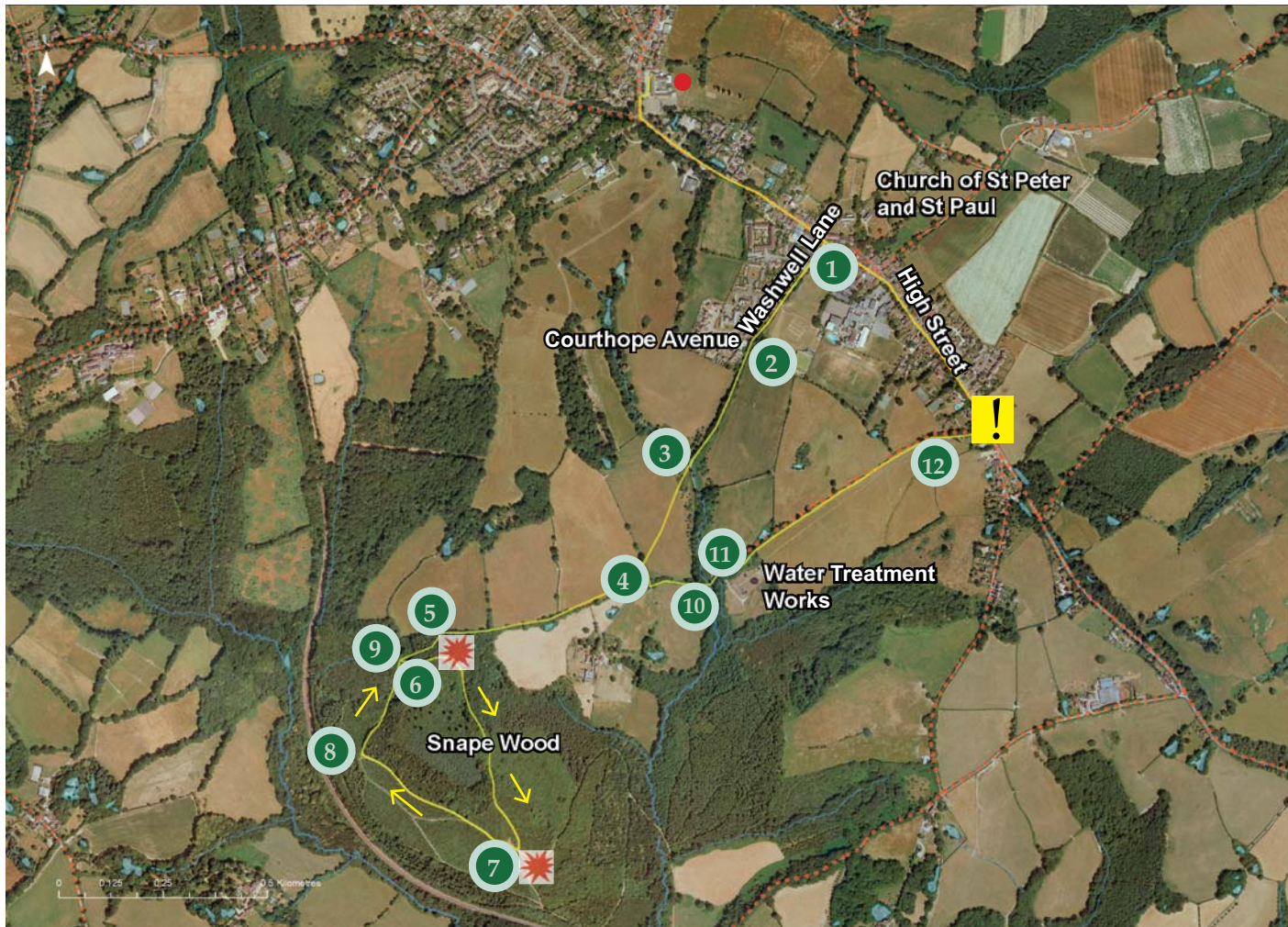
### Look out for...



Gill Stream



Coppiced Trees



### Key

- Wadhurst CE Primary School
- WALK ROUTE
- road
- historic routeway
- ~ watercourse
- 1 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. Snape Wood is an example of ancient woodland on this Welly Walk.



Ancient woodlands 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 coppiced trees on this walk - 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 bellows and hammers of the forges and furnaces.



The raw materials for making iron were prevalent in Wadhurst. There are numerous former iron working sites, furnaces and bloomeries scattered in and around the village.

The history of the High Weald iron industry has particular significance for Wadhurst village, and two former iron masters' houses can be seen on the High Street e.g. Hill House. In addition, the church has over 30 iron tomb slabs on its floor - more than in any other church in England. Most of these date from the 17th century and are a reminder of the flourishing iron industry in this area.

*How many iron slabs can you count on the floor of Wadhurst parish church?*



So, where are the remains of iron production? Building stone was too valuable in the Weald to be left unused, so the works were dismantled, and the woods grew back over the former sites.

Only place names; the 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; and some hammer and furnace ponds are left to remind us of his once great Wealden industry.

Adapted from text by Jeremy Hodgkinson, Wealden Iron Research Group

*Visit [www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org) to learn more about the High Weald's Iron Story.*

## 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.



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.

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 Riseden or Tenterden.

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

## 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.

