

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: 3.1 miles/5 km.

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

Description: A gentle walk through woods and fields with a short section of road walking. The woods can get very muddy and 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 and fallen trees, 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 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

St Matthew's High Brooms Church of England 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, turn left and walk down Powder Mill Lane. Pass Brokes Way on your left and cross Powder Mill Lane to continue walking on the pavement towards the mini-roundabout. As the road bends right, look for a public footpath on your left **1** and follow it into the woods. Turn left and follow the footpath along the line of fencing on your left **2**. Walk along this footpath, keeping the woods on your right hand side. Keep going until you reach a metal barrier. Take a sharp right turn here and follow the footpath to the left of the wooden gate **3** - not down the driveway of the house!

Go down the steps and follow the path - which, for the first part, is narrow and fenced on both sides. As you continue through the woods, stick to the main track, again keeping the houses and fences up on your left and the trees to your right. Keep going until the path forks. Turn right here **4**. Shortly afterwards look for, and cross, the stile on your left into a field. Head diagonally right across the field **5** to reach a stile and gate in the far corner **6**. Go over this and continue straight on to reach another stile on your right shortly afterwards. Go over this stile, by the stream and carry straight on, keeping close to the fence on your left. At the corner of this small field turn left, cross the stile and continue forward. At the metal gate, turn left **7**.

With a pond on your left, walk towards two gates at the end of the field. At the gates, turn right and walk along the hedge to find a stile on your left. Cross over and bear right towards another stile, next to a metal gate **8**. Now cross this and walk across both bridges. Turn right. Follow the footpath with the stream on your right. Continue up to another stile, go over it and turn right, along the bottom of the viaduct. At the road (Powder Mill Lane), turn right and continue walking down the road. When you reach a stile on your right and Forge Cottages (on your left), keep going for approximately 250 metres until you reach a gap in the wooden fence on your left - by a telegraph pole **9**. Turn left here into the field and carry straight on to reach the entrance of Barnett's Wood. Turn left into Barnett's Wood, passing an interpretation board on your right **10**. Follow the path across the bridge and uphill. Where the path forks, bear left towards the benches of the outdoor classroom **11** . At the wooden benches, carry straight on and then bear right down towards a metal kissing gate. Follow the path out into an open grassy area. Carry straight on here to reach the pond. Now retrace your steps back along the Mary Page Bridge to the benches of the outdoor classroom. Head out of Barnett's Wood along the same path that you entered it. Once out of the wood, bear left across the field **12**, heading back towards Powder Mill Lane. At the road, turn left and follow it all the way back to St Matthew's School, which will be on your right!

Look out for...



Wildflower
Grassland



Ancient Woodland



Key

-  St Matthew's CEP School
-  WALK ROUTE
-  road
-  historic routeway
-  watercourse
-  wildflower grassland
-  numbered views
-  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. On this Welly Walk, Brokes 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.

Visit www.highweald.org to watch the 'Jacob' video and discover more about coppiced woodland.

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.



This Welly Walk passes the site of a former water-powered iron working site, by the viaduct at the top of Powder Mill Lane. Local place names such as, Minepit Wood and Forge Farm, 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

Charcoal Pit



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.

Explosive History

Barnett's Wood, visited at the end of this Welly Walk, was not always as quiet and tranquil as it is today. The 'powder' of nearby Powder Mill Lane comes from the making of gunpowder. At the site of the Old Forge in Powder Mill Lane, some of the finest gunpowder in all of England was made. But in 1774, it had to be rebuilt after the pounding of the pestle mill caused the building to explode!



Jim Asher

The very best gunpowder was made using finely ground charcoal from alder buckthorn, which were coppiced to provide the wood for the charcoal burning process. Brimstone butterflies would have been seen here laying eggs as alder buckthorn is a favourite food of their newly hatched caterpillars.

Text adapted from Barnett's Wood Interpretation Board

Can you spot any brimstone butterflies on your visit to Barnett's Wood?

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 High Brooms.