

It is the year CCXII. My name is Sparkatus. I am XV years old and I work at the Beauport Park bloomery site near the coast. I bet you think we grow flowers don't you?

The bloomery here at Beauport Park is part of an enormous and extremely important iron works. It is run by the government, the Roman Imperial State, to supply iron for the Roman navy, the Classis Britannica. I have heard it said that this ironworks is the third biggest in the whole of the Roman Empire!

There is another huge ironworks in the west of the High Weald, but that one is privately owned.

There are lots of iron pits and mines around here first made by people working hundreds of years ago. Now we are opening them up, and are digging new ones too. The Romans have modern ways to extract the iron ore (pieces of rock which contain the iron).

My job is to make charcoal. Tree branches are cut into lengths and stacked carefully to form a dome, then covered with mud, sand and leaves from the woodland floor. The stack is burned very, very slowly, sometimes over a few days. You never quite lose the smell of smoke in your nostrils, or the taste of it in the back of your throat. But at least I am out in the woods and can enjoy the sight and sounds of the birds and animals (along with the sounds of hammering from the works!).

HIGH WEALD • CCXII

SPARKATUS TELLS HIS STORY ABOUT THE ROMAN IRON INDUSTRY

There are worse jobs on the ironworks estate, like mining the stone, or working at the bloomery hearths where the iron is smelted (which means heating the ore to separate the iron from the rock).



When the iron is heated to the right temperature it turns quite squishy. Once it has cooled a little, the iron forms a lump. This has to be beaten and hammered, then heated and beaten all over again several times, until it is just right. The lump of iron is called the bloom. (So nothing to do with flowers you see!)

These jobs are very hot and dirty work. There is a bath house with six rooms and hot water on the estate, but that is only for the use of the foremen and officers. We ordinary workers have to make do with washing ourselves off in the streams and gills, so we

have a reddish tinge to our skins from the iron in the water! We use these streams for cooling the iron too.

My father, Dadalus, is a charcoal burner like me. We have always lived here in the woods during the charcoal-making season, as you have be on hand to

keep the fire going day and night. Charcoal gives off twice as much heat as ordinary wood, so it is just right for smelting iron.

My older brother, Logius, is a woodland manager. He has taught me about how the woodland is coppiced. Young trees are cut down to near ground level. When they regrow they produce several thin trunks rather than one thick one. Trees cut periodically will keep on growing in this way and produce ideal wood for making charcoal.

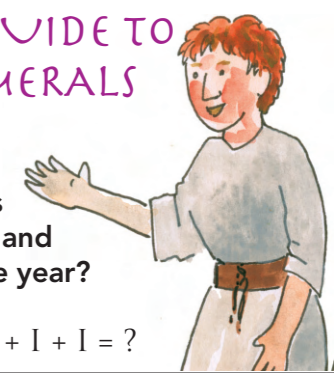
As you can tell, the High Weald is the best place for producing iron. As well as the iron-rich stone and wood for fuel, our rivers make it easy to transport iron by boat to the ports, then by sea to other parts of Europe. Talking of rivers, when the Romans came here, they built wooden bridges across them. It seems funny that no-one had thought of it before!

Many new roads have been made by the Romans, including two important ones which lead to Londinium. Our roads are broad and straight and are built using stone. Main roads are made stronger with left-over iron called slag, which can't be made into anything else. This makes them good for carrying heavy loads. The roads have a slight curve so water runs off them, much better than the soggy old muddy tracks and routeways we have around here.

SPARKATUS'S GUIDE TO ROMAN NUMERALS

- I = 1
- V = 5
- X = 10
- L = 50
- C = 100
- D = 500
- M = 1000

How old is Sparkatus and what is the year?
 X + V = ?
 C + C + X + I + I = ?



WORSE JOBS THAN IRON-MINING?

Cloth-making was another High Weald industry in the Romano British period. Cloth made from sheep's wool was treated in a special way to remove the oils and dirt. It had to be kneaded with a special type of clay, called fuller's earth, found in the area. The clay was mixed with water and urine then poured into tubs to cover the woollen cloth. Slaves had to get into the tubs and trample the cloth in the mixture! Urine was also used as a bleach, to whiten and brighten cloth. Wealthy and powerful Romans wore bright white togas made from one piece of material draped over a tunic and held in place with ornate pins and brooches. Ordinary people wore simple tunics.



CLASSIS BRITANNICA STAMPED BRICKS AND TILES HAVE BEEN FOUND AT BEAUPORT AND CRANBROOK.

Oak has grown in High Weald woodlands for thousands of years. **Beech** has been here nearly as long but recently it has spread a lot. Wise people say this is because the climate has become mild and moist.



LOGIUS'S WORDS FROM THE WOODS

Sweet Chestnut was brought here by the Romans for food. The roasted nuts are good to eat and can be ground into flour for cooking and baking. The wood makes excellent charcoal too.

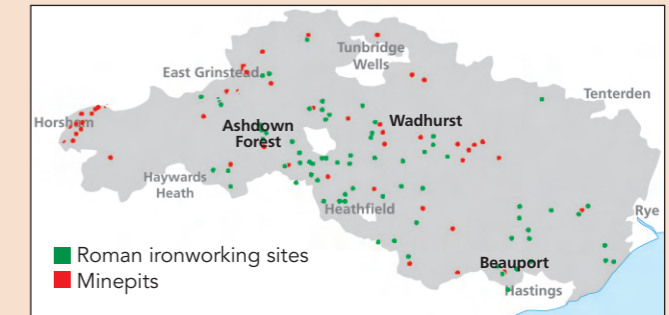


WHERE IN THE WEALD?

There are numerous ancient minepits and Roman ironworking sites scattered over the High Weald. Major sites were at Beauport Park, Bardown near Wadhurst and Ashdown Forest.

View Roman ironworks artefacts at **Battle Museum** and exhibitions at: **Cranbrook Museum; Hastings Old Town Hall Museum; Horsham Museum; Rye Castle Museum; Tenterden Museum; Tunbridge Wells Museum.**

More online at:
www.highweald.org/Maximillius – video of a Roman soldier telling his story
www.romansinsussex.co.uk
www.wealdeniron.org.uk



www.highweald.org/learn/local-products/how-products-are-made/612-wood-to-charcoal.html
www.ashdownforest.org/enjoy/history/IronWorking.php
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