

The Langdon Nature Reserve covers 460 acres of woodlands, flower meadows and old Plotland gardens, making it the Essex Wildlife Trust's largest inland nature reserve. The Langdon Nature Reserve has four main areas, each with its own special character. These are Dunton, Lincewood, Marks Hill and Willow Park.

Dunton is where you will find most of the remains of the Plotland homes and gardens. Nature has taken over again, but you can still see garden plants and orchard trees such as apple, pear, plum and damson. Adders like to sunbathe in the old bungalow foundations. They are shy creatures, so keep away if you see one – the adder is the only British snake with a poisonous bite!

On a clear day you get a really good view of London.

You too can step back to the Plotlands heyday. 'The Haven' was built by Frederick Mills in the mid-1930s and was his family's home for more than 40 years. The bungalow has been restored to its original condition.

You can visit the museum by arrangement with staff on 01268 419103.

Lincewood has some wide Plotland roads for you to ride along. There are roses and sweet peas from the old gardens. Ponds are home to newts, frogs and toads. During May and June you can admire the purple flowers of thousands of green-winged orchids growing on the neighbouring recreation ground.

Don't be surprised to hear the tapping sound of a woodpecker at work as you ride through the woodlands of Marks Hill. All three kinds of woodpecker live here – green, great spotted and lesser spotted. The wild service tree, one of Britain's rarest native trees, grows here.

The hay meadows and rough grassland of Willow Park are a haven for many wild plants and flowers. The meadows are perfect for butterflies and as feeding grounds for the dragonflies and damselflies which hover over Willow Park's nine ponds.

You can contact staff at the Langdon Visitor Centre on 01268 419103.

Terrain Undulating, some rough and muddy terrain

Ordinance Survey Map Ref Explorer Map No. 175 Southend-on-Sea and Basildon
www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/mapshop

Parking Horseboxes Parking by agreement
Langdon Nature Reserve Car Park, Lower Dunton Road. Tel: 01268 419103
Langdon Hills Country Park, (Westley Heights).

Refreshments *The Crown (Harvester) Pub*, High Road, Langdon Hill
Langdon Visitor Centre, 9-5pm Tuesday – Sunday & Bank Holiday Mondays
Tesco supermarket

Transport Cycling by Train - A footbridge links Laindon Railway Station to High Road bridge. Bikes could be pushed directly from High Road onto the Country Ride on the south side of Mandeville Way. There is an alternative, rideable route between Laindon Station and the Country Ride via Station Approach, High Road and

Florence Way. Telephone the Essex Traveline on 0870 6082608 daily between 7 am and 10 pm

Vets *House & Jackson Veterinary Centre*, Chevers Pawn, Rookery Road, Blackmore, Essex
Tel: 01277 823858

Places to visit *Hadleigh Castle Country Park, Hadleigh (8.6 miles/13.8km)* Woodland and meadows with views over the Thames Estuary. Castle ruins nearby. Horseride and footpaths. Free admission (car parking charge)
Tel: 01702 551072

The Dutch Cottage, (9.4 miles/15.1km)
Crown Hill, Rayleigh Eight-sided cottage based on the design of 17th century Dutch settlers
Free admission. Tel: 1702 318150

National Motor Boat Museum, (3.2 miles/5.1km)
Wat Tyler Country Park, Pitsea Hall Lane, Pitsea
The world's only museum devoted entirely to the history of motor boats. Free admission
Tel: 01268 550077.
www.motorboatmuseum.org.uk/home/index.php

Country Rides



BASILDON

6.18 miles/11 km

Riding along these tracks today you may have only birdsong for company, but in the 1930s you would have found yourself in the middle of a bustling community. Children playing in the lanes, mothers hanging out washing in the garden and the sound of hammering and sawing echoing through the tree-tops. These were the Plotlands, where London families built hundreds of bungalows and chalets as their weekend homes in the country.



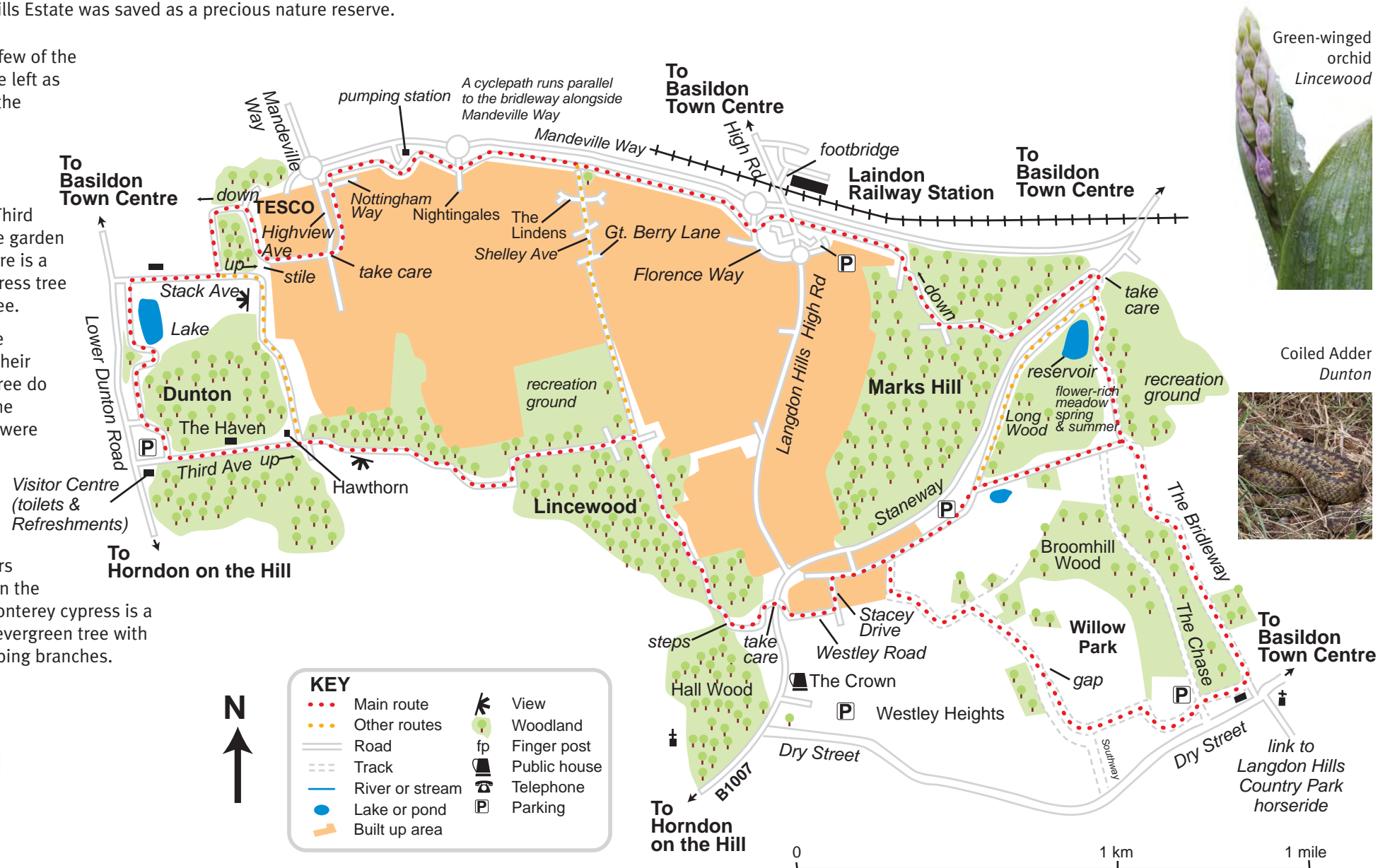
Essex County Council

Basildon became one of eight New Towns built near London after World War II to provide homes and jobs for London's growing population. Most of the old Plotlands were redeveloped, but Dunton Hills Estate was saved as a precious nature reserve.

Looking at the difference in their sizes, which tree do you think is the oldest? They were actually both planted on the first day that Hawthorn's original owners moved there in the 1930s. The Monterey cypress is a fast-growing evergreen tree with upward sweeping branches.



Woodpecker at work
Marks Hill.



Inside Pentlow Church is the tomb of Judge Kemp, his son John and John's wife Elinor. The kneeling figures on the side of the tomb are John and Elinor's children.

You will be able to see Pentlow Tower long before you reach Pentlow. Pentlow Tower is a 90 foot high, eight-sided brick tower standing on Pentlow Hill. It is a folly. This is the name given to a building which seems to have no use. They were often look-out towers or fake ruins built by rich landowners. The name comes from 'folie', the French word for delight or pleasure. Perhaps the word is also a reminder of a castle

built on the Welsh marches by Hubert de Burgh in the 13th century. The castle had only just been built when the conditions of a peace treaty with the Welsh meant it had to be demolished! It was known as "Hubert's Folly".

Pentlow Tower was built as a memorial to his parents by Edward Bull in 1859. Forty-eight churches can be seen from the top on a clear day. Pentlow Tower is on private property. Please respect the privacy of the landowner. You can enjoy good views of the tower from the surrounding countryside.

Terrain

Undulating and hilly in places

Ordnance Survey Map ref

Landranger 155
Bury St. Edmunds & Sudbury
Explorer 196
Sudbury, Hadleigh & Dedham Vale

Parking Horseboxes

Parking by agreement:
The Half Moon Public House,
Belchamp St. Paul. Tel: 01787 277402

Refreshments

The Half Moon Public House,
Belchamp St. Paul.
The Pinkuah Arms, Pentlow
(evenings & weekends only).
Buntings Farm Shop: on B1064.
Clare & Cavendish:
pubs, shops, tearooms etc.

Transport

The Belchamps to Sudbury Station
4.4 miles (7.1km). Public Transport
Information Tel: 0870 608 2608

Vets

Lees & Partners Equine Clinic,
Catley Cross Stables, Wickham St. Paul.
Tel: 01787 269006

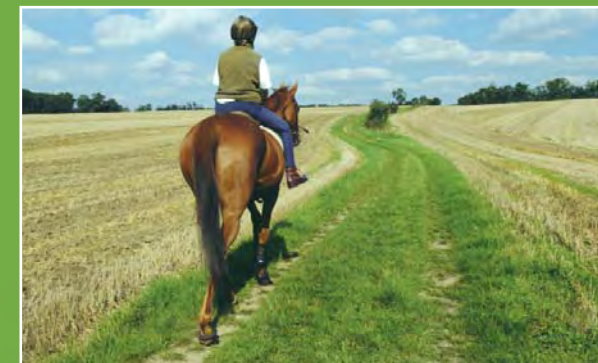
Places to visit

Heddingham Castle, (7 miles/11.3km)
Castle Heddingham. Magnificent Norman keep, with banqueting hall and minstrel's gallery. Lake and woodland walks. Admission fee; please ring for opening times: 01787 460261

Castle Heddingham Pottery (7 miles/11.3km) Studio and showroom, with talks, courses and demonstrations. Viewing free. Tel: 01787 460036

Colne Valley Railway, (7 miles / 11.3km)
Castle Heddingham. Award-winning vintage steam railway. Dine on the luxurious Pullman train. Admission fee. Tel: 01787 461174

Country Rides



THE BELCHAMPS

12.3 miles/19.8 km

Riding down Hoe Lane one Sunday in times past, you might have met the villagers of Pentlow walking to church. Like many churches, Pentlow Church is quite a distance from the community it serves. It is one of only six churches in Essex with a round tower. A local tale tells that the tower was a well-shaft which was exposed above ground when the surrounding earth was washed away in a flood! What do you think?



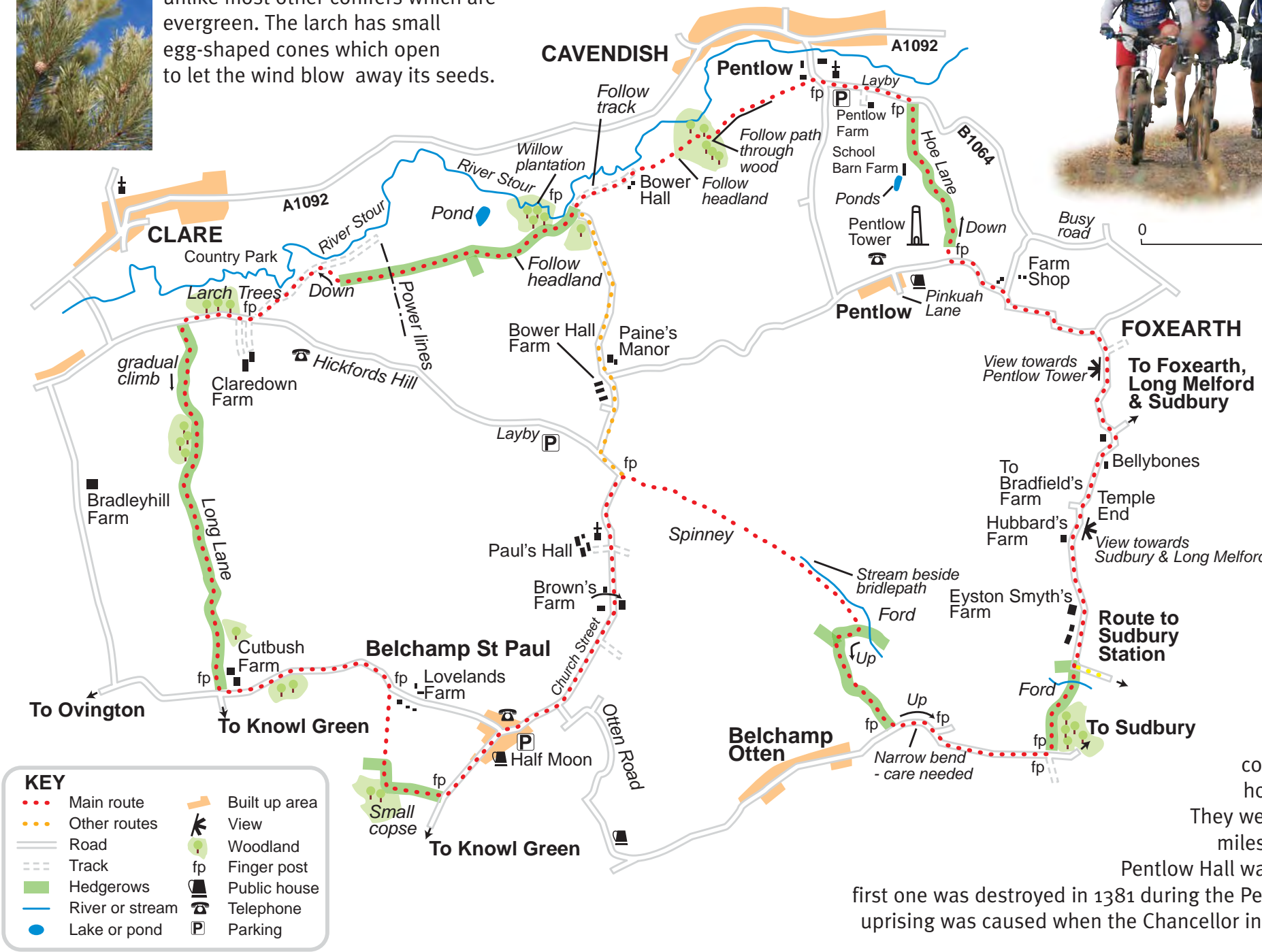
Essex County Council



The larch is a deciduous conifer tree, unlike most other conifers which are evergreen. The larch has small egg-shaped cones which open to let the wind blow away its seeds.



0 1 km 1 mile



The River Stour forms part of the moat of Pentlow Hall. The Hall was probably built on the site of a Roman staging post, as Pentlow is situated beside a Roman road. Staging posts were places where you could swap your tired horse for a fresh one. They were usually about 15 miles apart. The present

Pentlow Hall was built in 1475. The first one was destroyed in 1381 during the Peasants' Revolt. This uprising was caused when the Chancellor introduced a poll tax!

Chalk was formed 100 million years ago in the Cretaceous period which followed the death of the dinosaurs. To give you an idea of how long ago that was, if you counted at a rate of 1 year every second, it would take you more than 3 years to count to 100 million! Chalk was formed from the bodies of tiny creatures which lived in a warm sea. As they died they sank to the sea-bed and their bodies were gradually pressed together.

There is a thick layer of chalk beneath Essex, but in most of the county it is buried under clay and gravel. Around Clavering, the rivers

Stort and Cam have cut down through these Essex 'highlands' to uncover the chalk on their valley sides. The Essex chalklands attract types of plants and animals which make it very different from the rest of the county.

Amongst the summer wild flowers growing on the hedgebanks of Parsonage Lane are the tall hairy stems and purplish flowers of the wild marjoram which loves Clavering's chalky soils. In ancient Greece wild marjoram was a symbol of happiness. Wedding couples were crowned with it.

Terrain

Undulating, some rough terrain

Ordnance Survey Map Ref

Explorer 195
Braintree & Saffron Walden

Parking Horseboxes

Parking by arrangement in the meadow behind *The Fox and Hounds* in Clavering (not the pub car park)
Tel: 01799 550321

Refreshments

The Fox and Hounds, Clavering.
Supermarket on Stortford Road, Clavering.

Transport

Clavering to Newport Station (1.2m/2km)

Public Transport Information
0870 608 2608

Vets

Mercer & Hughes, Devon Lodge, 14
Radwinter Road, Saffron Walden, Essex
CB11 3JB Tel: 01799 522082

Places to visit

Audley End House, Saffron Walden
(*English Heritage*) (6.4 miles/10.4km)
Magnificent, Jacobean stately home, with grounds landscaped by Capability Brown.
Admission fee. Tel: 01799 522399

Mole Hall Wildlife Park, Widdington
(5.7 miles/9.2km) Rare species from around the world plus domestic animals.
Admission fee. Tel: 01799 540400

Bridge End Gardens, Saffron Walden
(6.6 miles/10.7km) Restored Victorian garden, including hedge maze.
Free admission by appointment with Saffron Walden Tourist Information Centre. Tel: 01799 510444

Country Rides



CLAVERING

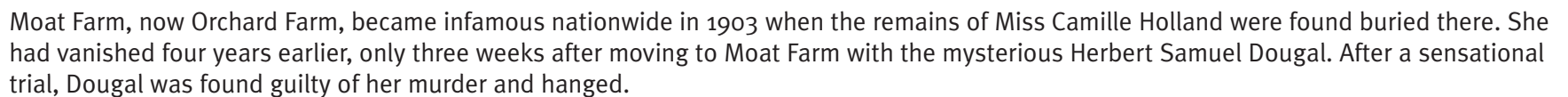
12.8 miles/20.6 km

As you follow these chalky lanes past thatched cottages and isolated farmhouses, it is hard to believe that Clavering could have a darker side. It was master detective Sherlock Holmes who said that most wicked crimes weren't committed in the city but in the lonely houses of the 'smiling and beautiful countryside'. As usual, he was right. Clavering has been called the murder capital of Victorian England.



Essex County Council

Overlooking the ford in Middle Street is Chestnut Cottage. It is the smallest house in Essex. It is only 8 feet wide and 10 feet from front to back. Upstairs is reached by a ladder.



Three different species of deer can be seen in Essex: Fallow, Muntjac and Roe. Particularly large herds of Fallow Deer can be seen in woodland areas and herds as large as 100 are not unusual. Look out for Fallow deer around Bob's Barn Wood and Langford Bottom.

As you ride past Twenty Acre Wood, you will see that this woodland is very shady with few plants surviving on the ground floor. This is because deciduous trees such as Oak and Ash which shed their leaves in autumn have been replaced by coniferous

species. Conifers such as Scots Pine do not shed their leaves in winter and cast a heavy shade all year round depriving plants on the woodland floor of the light they need to grow. Many native woodlands in Britain were planted with Scots Pine in the 1940s and 1950s in an effort to produce a good cheap timber crop resulting in the loss of biodiversity. In recent times the Forestry Commission has made efforts to remove conifers from many of the woodlands in its care to help restore the woods to their original condition.

Terrain

Mostly flat, some hills, muddy in places

Ordnance Survey Map Ref

Explorer Map No. 175

Southend-on-Sea & Basildon

www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/mapshop/

Parking Horseboxes

Parking available at High Tawney car park off Epping Road and with permission at the *Moletrap Inn*. Please phone the pub on 01992 522394 before setting off on the ride.

Refreshments

Moletrap Inn, Tawney Common, Theydon Mount, Stapleford Tawney, 01992 522394

Transport

Theydon Bois Underground Station

Approx. 7 miles away

Vets

House & Jackson, Chevers Pawn, Rookery Road, Blackmore, Essex Tel: 01277 823858

Places to visit

Epping Forest The forest is the largest public open space in the London area, measuring 19km x 4km, two-thirds of which is wooded with the same proportion designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge

Open all year round. Entrance is free.

Tel: 020 8529 6681

Epping Forest Information Centre at High Beach (12.6 miles) Tel: 020 8508 0028

Weald Country Park is steeped in history. It was once a deer park and used for hunting by the Abbots of Waltham in around 1063. Opening times: 8am until dusk (check entrance boards for details). Parking £2 all day. Tel: 01277 261343.

Kelvedon Hatch Secret Nuclear Bunker

(9.1 miles) The biggest and deepest cold war bunker open to the public in southeast England! Admission fee. Tel: 01277 364 883.

Country Rides



STAPLEFORD TAWNEY

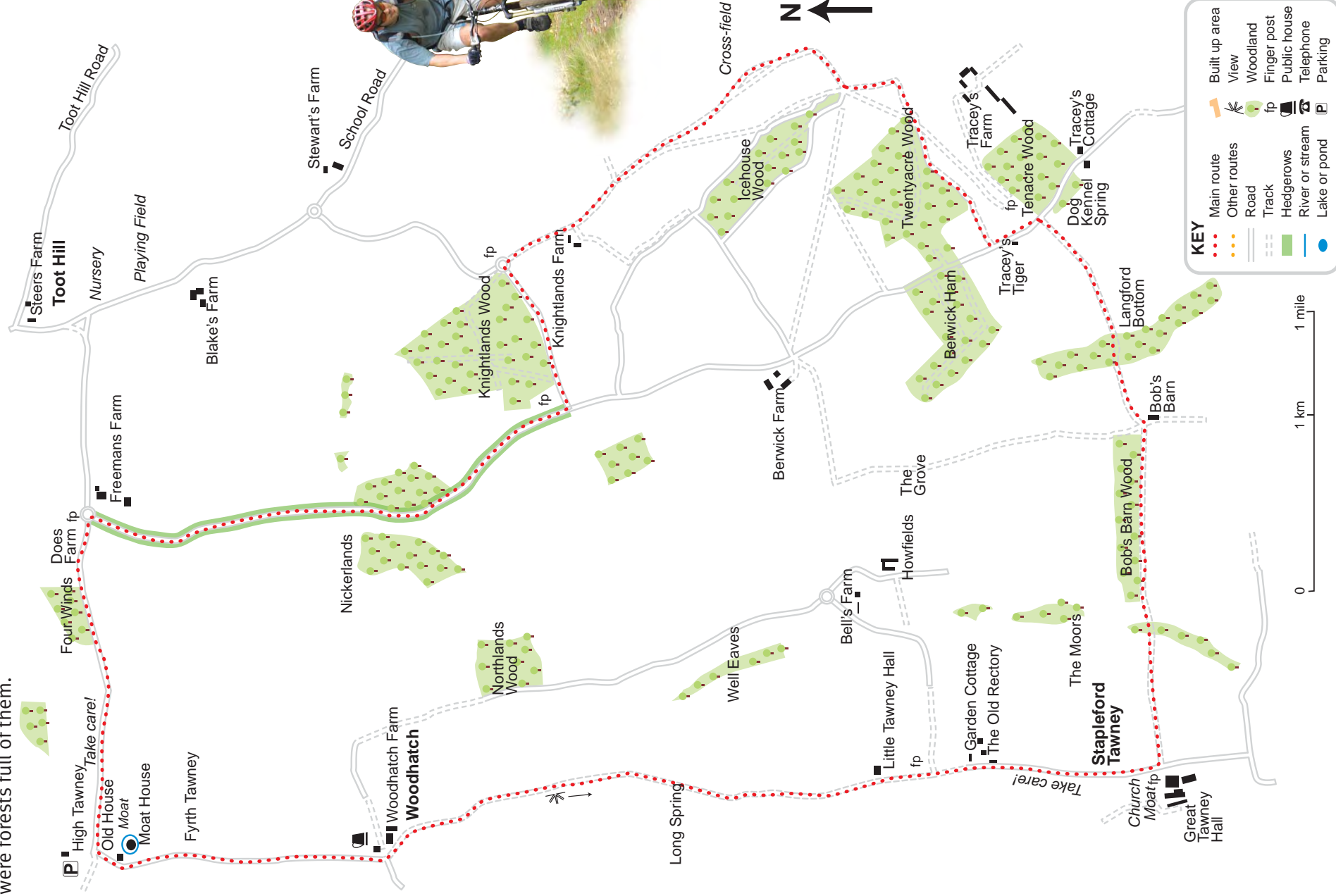
7 miles/11.5 km

Stapleford Tawney is a small parish (670 hectares) located 7 miles north of Romford and is very sparsely populated; approximately 100 people live in the parish making it the least populated parish in the Epping Forest district. In 1771 it was noted by a writer that Stapleford Tawney 'hath but few houses in it and, like the other Stapleford, seems to carry on no other business than that of husbandry'. In the modern era this small rural parish is still devoted almost exclusively to agricultural production with a mixture of livestock and arable farming.



Essex County Council

The ditches along some of the bridleways are full of Horsetail, a plant that is a remnant of prehistoric times. Horsetails are primitive plants because they do not flower and in primeval times they grew to the size of a Fir tree and there were forests full of them.



The farmland on this country ride is scattered with small woodlands known as copses. These woods have survived being 'grubbed' out often because they are situated on land that is difficult to cultivate and not productive for growing crops. For example, Langford Bottom is situated alongside a stream and is prone to flooding in winter which would lead to waterlogging of crops.

Pleshey has one of the best surviving Norman castle earthworks in England. The whole village is ringed by a defensive ditch and bank. Inside this is a 50 foot high castle mound and its moat. You can get a good view of these from Pleshey's main street. A 15th century red-brick bridge still spans the moat.

In 1397 King Richard II heard that his uncle, the Duke of Gloucester, was plotting to overthrow him. The King lured Gloucester away from the safety of his castle at Pleshey. He was taken to Calais, where he was murdered by hired assassins. In Act 1, Scene 2 of William Shakespeare's 'Richard II' Gloucester's widow sighs "With all good speed at Plashy visit me".

She speaks sadly of the castle's "empty lodgings and unfurnish'd walls".

Unfortunately, none of the castle is left today.

The Lord of the Manor at Pleshey had two deer parks created in the surrounding countryside. Wooden fences were built round the outside to stop the deer escaping. The servants loved it because they didn't have to worry about their master coming home in a bad mood after an unsuccessful day's hunting.

Have a look at the collection of leather bottles if you call in at Pleshey's Leather Bottle Inn.

The castle site is privately owned. It is possible to look around the castle site by prior arrangement with the owner's land agents, Strutt & Parker, on 01245 258201.

Country Rides



Terrain

Fairly easy going, unsurfaced routes

Ordnance Survey Map Ref

Explorer 183 Chelmsford and the Rodings

Parking Horseboxes

Parking by arrangement

The Leather Bottle, Pleshey.

Tel: 01245 237291

The White Horse, Pleshey.

Tel: 01245 237281

Refreshments

The Leather Bottle, Pleshey.

The White Horse, Pleshey.

Pubs and shop on Barrack Lane, Great Waltham

Transport

Pleshey to Chelmsford Station
(4.7m/7.5km) Public Transport
Information 0870 608 2608

Vets

Clarendon House Veterinary Centre,

24 The Green, Writtle, Chelmsford

Tel: 01245 422206

Places to visit

Hylands Park, Writtle

Large parkland with Victorian formal gardens, lakes and woods.
Free admission

Tel: 01245 490490 x 2078

Aythorpe Roding Windmill

(5.7 m/9.2km) Post mill restored to full working order. Essential to phone first for details of open days.

Tel: 01621 828162

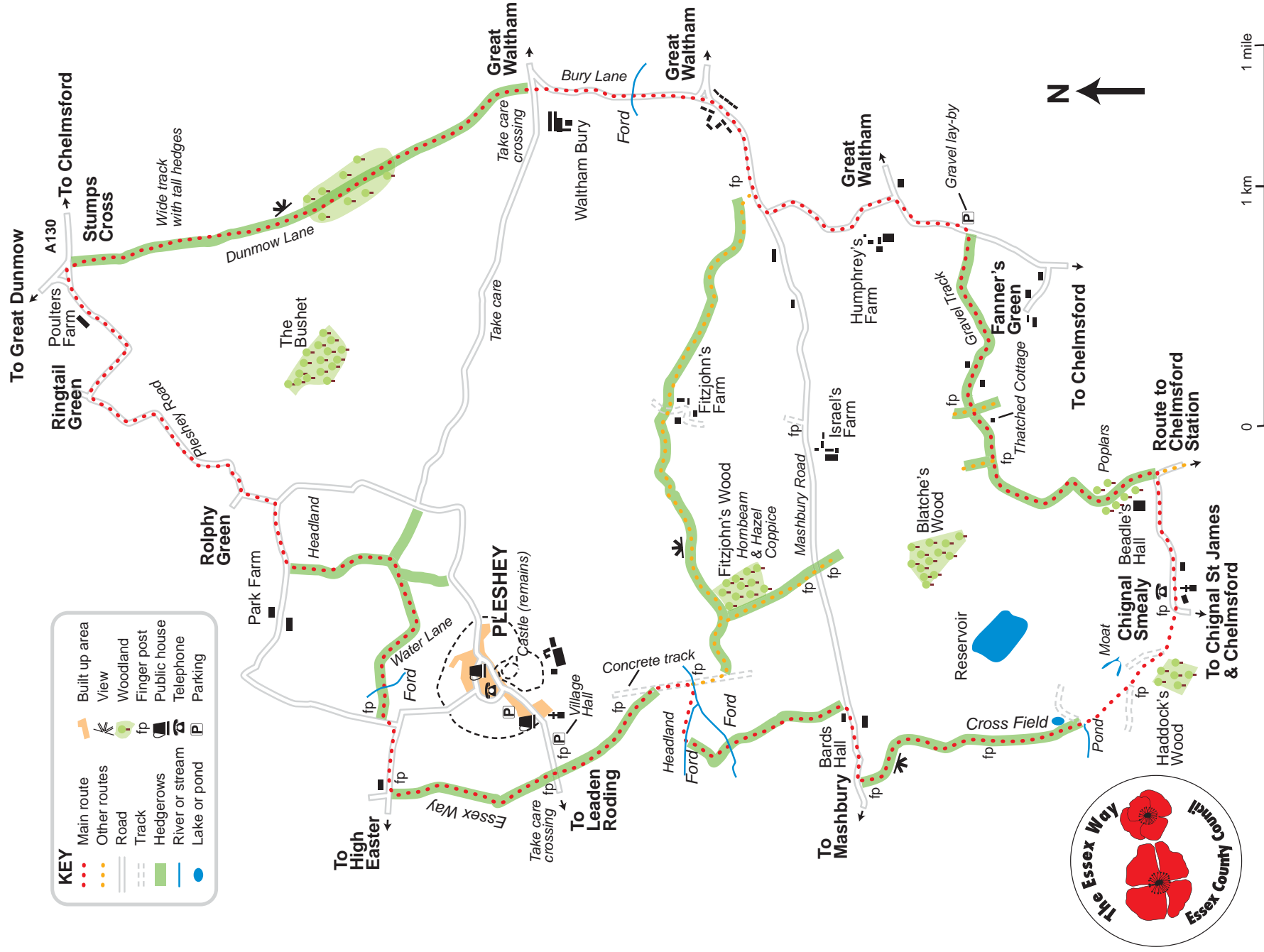
PLESHEY

9.2 miles/14.8 km

Imagine yourself riding along these ancient lanes in the heart of Essex when suddenly you hear the sound of pounding hooves behind you. A medieval messenger gallops past and disappears in a cloud of dust. He is carrying word of conspiracy and murder to his master. The pen of William Shakespeare ensured Pleshey a lasting place in the history of one of the dark deeds of medieval England.



Dunmow Lane used to be the main road between Chelmsford and Great Dunmow. Part of your Country Ride route follows the Essex Way, an 81 mile long distance route between Epping and Harwich. Guidebooks for the walk can be bought from Essex County Council.



There is an avenue of tall, slim Lombardy poplar trees alongside the bridleway near Beadle's Hall. Only the male trees grow into this easily recognised shape. There are many other kinds of trees along this lane. Can you identify the hornbeam, larch, holly and cedar?

How did the tiny village of Chignal Smealy get such a strange name? The name Chignal comes from 'Cicca's nook' (the small place belonging to Cicca). Smealy means 'small clearing'. Chignal Smealy used often to be known locally as 'Brick Chignal' because of its all-brick church.

The town of Brentwood was first known as 'Burntwood' due to a forest fire that created a clearing, which gave rise to the first settlement in the 12th century. Brentwood was also an important pilgrim route for those living in East Anglia travelling to Canterbury. Since this time Brentwood grew as a prosperous market town and a staging post as the London to Colchester road became an important turnpike.

Brentwood has seen its fair share of conflict, whether real or fictional! Ingatestone and Warley have both been used to house militia when war threatened, the former when the Spanish Armada threatened invasion and the latter when the American War of Independence broke out. At this time a mock battle including 10,000 troops

was fought. Warley has also been used to house militia during the French and Napoleonic wars.

As for real conflict, Brentwood became a part of the Peasant's Revolt in 1381 following a riot over a new poll tax. A Chief Justice of the Common Pleas was summoned to restore order afterwards. The peasant's had other ideas, they seized him and forced him to name the jurors who were involved in convicting the original rioters. They were then hunted down and beheaded.

The town of Brentwood is a lot friendlier to visitors today with plenty to do and a lot of green space surrounding it including Weald and Thorndon Country Parks.

Terrain

Some steep hills, mainly rough tracks.

Ordinance Survey Map Ref

Explorer 175 Southend-on-Sea & Basildon

Parking Horseboxes

In the second car park at *Thorndon Country Park North, off the Avenue.*

Refreshments

The Countryside Centre at Thorndon North is open daily from 10am until 5pm in the summer and dusk in the winter. It serves a variety of light snacks and refreshments. There is also an exhibition area, shop and toilet facilities.

Further toilet facilities exist at *Thorndon South Pavilion.*

The Greyhound Pub Magpie Lane. Tel. 01277 249910

Transport

Brentwood Station (*2.3miles/3.7km*)

Public Transport Information 0870 608 2608

Vets

House & Jackson, Chevers Pawn, Rookery Road, Blackmore, Essex Tel. 01277 823858

Places to visit

Brentwood Cathedral (1.6miles/2.6km)

Although this was opened in 1991, the Roman Catholic cathedral building has become a local landmark. It was designed by Quinlan Terry and incorporates the original Victorian church. Free admission. Tel. 01277 265235

Brandler Galleries (1.7miles/2.7km)

The gallery sells and exhibits artwork by major artists from David Hockney and Damien Hirst to Rolf Harris and E. H. Shepherd. Free admission. Tel. 01277 222269

Ingatestone Hall (6.7miles/10.8km)

A 16th century Tudor mansion and gardens built by Sir William Petre. Admission fee. Tel. 01277 353010

Country Rides



THORNDON

9 miles/14.4 km

In the 15th century, Thorndon Country Park was a deer park. These parks were used for hunting in medieval times by the landowner. Now the country park is a fantastic place to view wildlife. Twenty-six species of butterfly have been recorded, including the brown argus and purple hairstreak as well as migrant birds such as siskins and bramblings.

Try and see what wildlife you can spot on your way round.

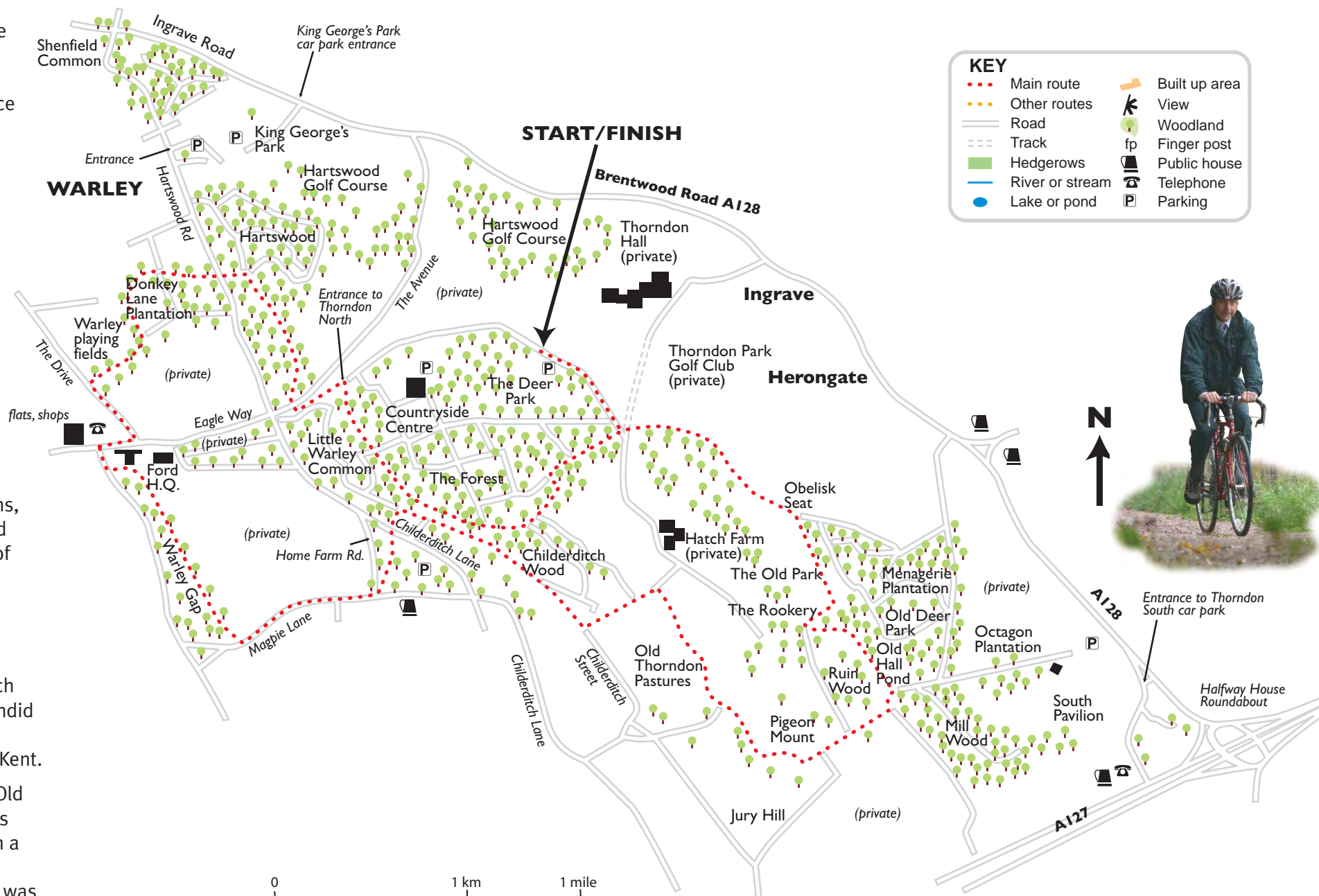


The walk starts and finishes in the Deer Park. This landscape has changed little since the 1500's. In this area you can see some of our oldest veteran trees.

As you continue your walk through the forest and onto Hartwood the trees will change from planted lines of upright conifers, to the twisted hornbeams, towering oaks and sweet chestnuts of the ancient Hartwood.

Standing on the grassy common beside Childerditch Lane affords splendid views across the Thames Valley to Kent.

The area around Old Thorndon Hall was once covered with a vast garden, hot houses and there was even a miniature zoo housed in the area now known as Menagerie Plantation.



The final stretch of the walk passes through the Old Park, this area is owned and managed by the Woodland Trust. Here they have recreated some of the plantings of trees that would have once stood here.