

The Hucking Estate

Thinking big

How to get there

Enjoying the Estate

You can now enjoy the whole of Hucking Estate thanks to the Woodland Trust's ownership and management. Entry is free and a range of footpaths help you to wind your way through the mature woodland, new planting areas, and across the chalk grassland.

There are two way-marked trails to follow (or you can make up your own route) – a short one and a long one.

The short 'blue' route is 1.8 km (1.1 miles) long, takes approximately 30 minutes and starts from the Hook and Hatchet Inn.

The longer 'red route' is 5 km (3.1 miles) and takes approximately 1 1/2 hours, starting from the Woodland Trust's car park.

Please see inside this leaflet for further details about these recommended routes.



WTP/LStuart Cooper



Bluebells in May at Chitt's Wood WTP/LClive Steward



Established in 1972, the Woodland Trust is now the UK's leading woodland conservation charity.

We have three key aims:

- to enable the creation of more native woods and places rich in trees
- to protect native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future
- to inspire everyone to enjoy and value woods and trees

We care for more than 1,000 woods covering approximately 20,000 hectares (50,000 acres). You can visit our sites for free.

*The Hucking Estate lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ANOB). This nationally important landscape is legally protected to maintain its special character for now and future generations. The ANOB covers about a quarter of Kent.

For more information about this ANOB telephone 01622 221522 or visit www.kentdowns.org.uk



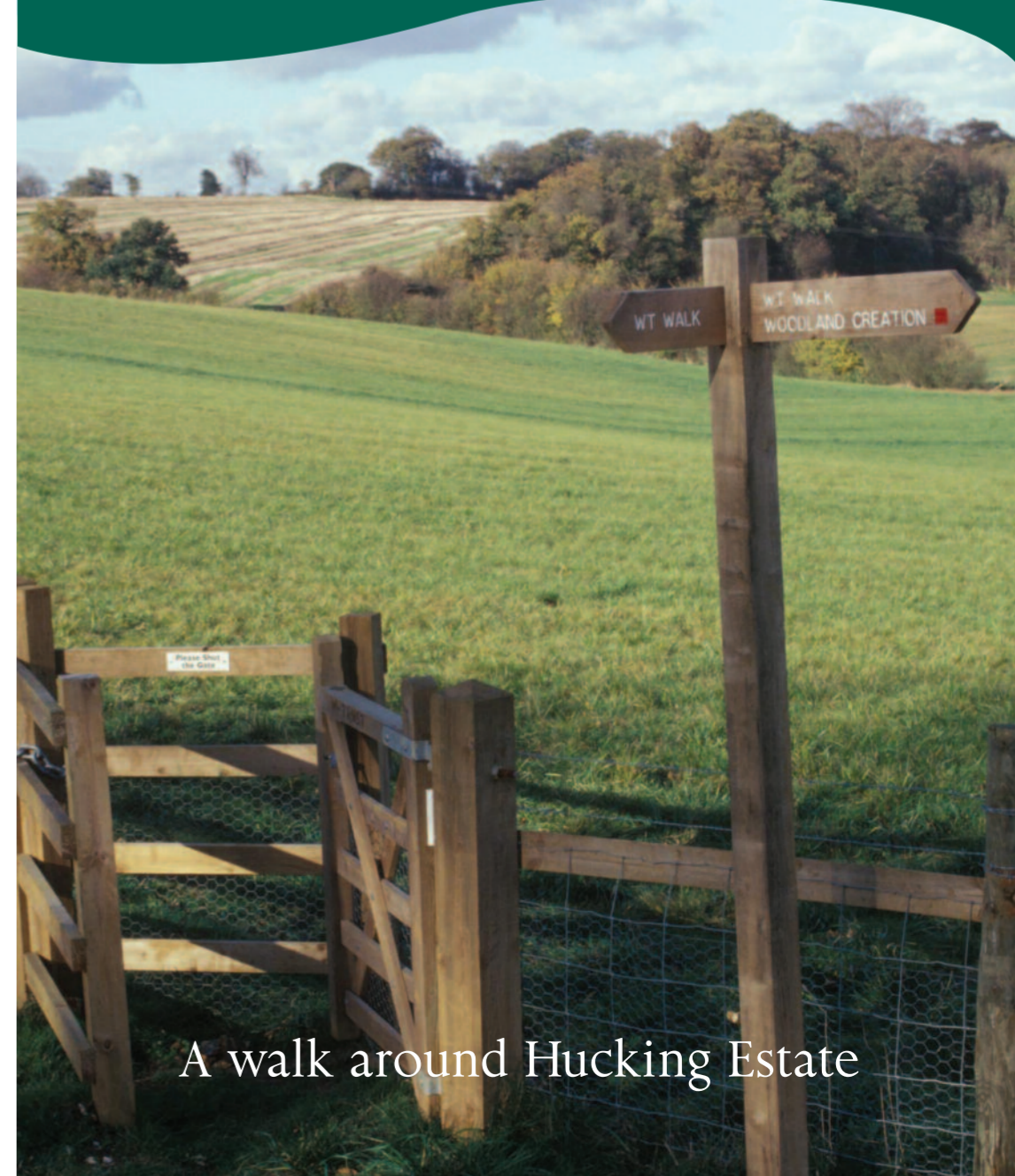
The Woodland Trust would like to thank all the supporters of Hucking Estate

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Bringing the landscape back to life



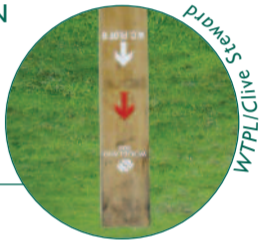
Cover: Hucking Estate – WTP/LBrian Aldrich

A walk around Hucking Estate

Over the past 50 years, massive change has taken place in our countryside and the landscape around Hucking Estate, five miles north east of Maidstone in Kent, is no exception to this.

Modern farming practices, the use of fertilisers and pesticides, plus alterations in grazing patterns, has destroyed or damaged large areas of woodland*, hedgerows and much of the chalk grassland habitat that was distinctive to this area.

That's why, in 1997, the Woodland Trust bought 232 hectares (573 acres) of woodland and farmland at this historic estate, which now lies within the North Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ANOB), with the aim of reversing this trend through a ground-breaking restoration project.



WTP/LClive Steward

Bringing the landscape back to life

The Woodland Trust wants the ancient woods at Hucking to form the core of a restored landscape, which we are bringing back to life by:

- Planting, so far, more than 180,000 native trees and nearly a mile of hedges
- Recreating 55 hectares (135 acres) of grassland focusing on native grass and flower species
- Widening rides and using traditional management techniques to increase woodland wildlife

All this work is being carried out with careful consultation and the support of local people.



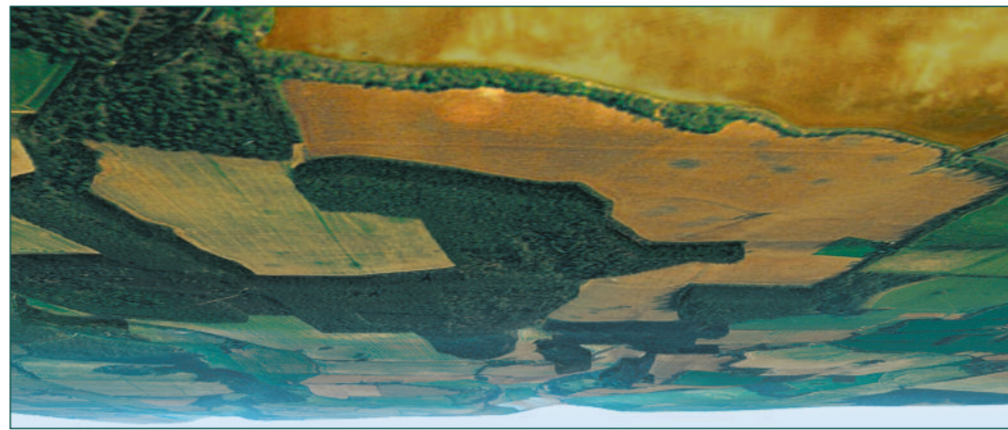
*Within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ANOB)

WTP/LStuart Cooper

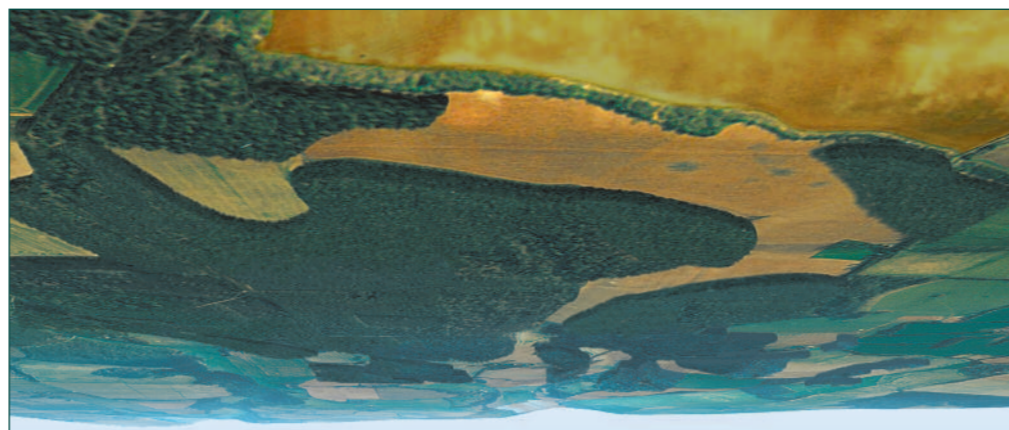
***What is ancient woodland?** Ancient woodland is land that has been continuously wooded since at least 1600AD. It's one of our richest habitats, supporting more UK landscape and it's irreplaceable. But beyond its importance for wildlife, ancient woodland is a reservoir of archaeological and economic history.

Sadly, half the ancient woodland that survived until the 1930s has since been lost or damaged – mainly due to conifer plantations, farming and development.

Today, ancient woodland covers only 2 per cent of UK's land area. This rare and fragile habitat needs our urgent protection.



How the Estate looked in 1997



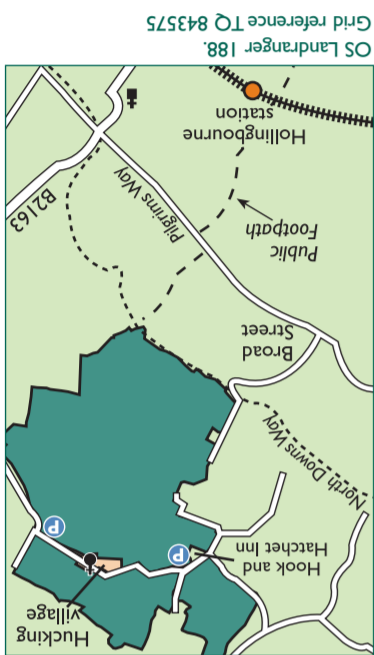
How the new planting will build on existing areas of ancient woodland

There is a direct relationship between the size of a wood and the wildlife it can support. Over the last 100 years, 46 UK woodland species are believed to have become extinct. One of the greatest threats to ancient woodland, and its associated wildlife, has been its continued fragmentation into smaller, more isolated woods. At Hucking Estate, we are tackling this in a big way by expanding and buffering the existing areas of woodland.

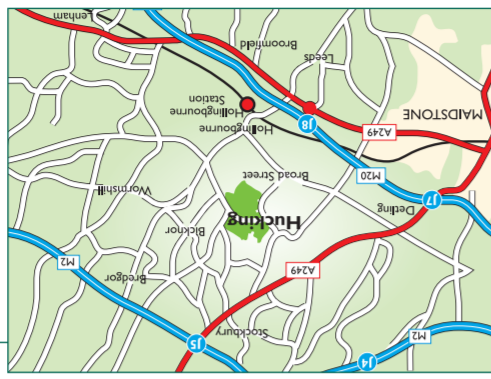
But Hucking is not just a wood. It's a landscape in which all the different habitats – ancient woodland, chalk grassland, hedges and woodland rides – complement each other to provide a diverse range of environments, in which wildlife can flourish.

By rail: The nearest railway station is at Hollingbourne – about a 35 minute walk way. For details of train services call 0870 608 2608 or visit www.traveline.org.uk

Directions from the station: Take the path from the car park up the bank immediately opposite the old station building and turn right over the stile and join the public right of way. Follow this into the field and carefully cross the railway – using the kissing gates. Follow the public right of way straight ahead across the fields, heading towards the farm at the foot of the Downs. On reaching the road turn left and then immediately right at the farm entrance. Follow this track (which is part of the old Droeway) past the cottages and up onto the Downs. When you reach the top of the hill you will be at Hucking Estate.



OS Landranger 188. Grid reference TQ 843575



By car: From Junction 8 of the M20 – follow signs to Lenham and Leeds Castle. At the second roundabout take the road signed to Hollingbourne. Pass through the village and continue up the hill. At the top of the hill turn left and follow the signposts to Hucking. The Woodland Trust's car park can be found on the left just before entering Hucking village. The red route (as shown overleaf) can be accessed from here. Alternatively, if you'd like to stop for refreshments, either before or after your visit, continue through the village until you reach the Hook and Hatchet Inn and its car park. The blue route (as shown overleaf) can be accessed from here.



Hook and Hatchet Inn WTP/LClive Steward

A walk around Hucking Estate

Despite being in the heart of the bustling South East region, Hucking Estate feels remote and peaceful. As you walk around, you can experience areas of mature woodland, often carpeted in blankets of bluebell and other wild flowers, such as early dog violet, early purple orchid and yellow archangel, plus new planting areas and distinctive chalk grassland. There are also spectacular views, at its most southern point near Forestall Wood, looking south-west to Maidstone and across the Weald of Kent.

To enable you to enjoy your visit even more, we've listed below some of the features you might encounter on the 'red' route. For this walk, start at the Woodland Trust's car park, then go through the kissing gate and follow the red arrows on the way-marker posts.

Special features to watch out for:

1 Woodbanks – are earthen banks, usually accompanied by a ditch, which denoted ownership boundaries in medieval times. Today, they can indicate that a wood is ancient. As you enter the walk, see if you can spot the woodbanks and pollarded hornbeam trees, which were sometimes planted along these banks to further reinforce the boundaries. Pollarded trees were cut off at 10–12 feet above ground level to produce a wood crop and increase longevity. This produced straight limbs high above the reach of grazing deer and cattle.



Hornbeam – WTPL

2 Rides – is the term used for ancient paths, created to allow horseback riders to travel speedily through the wood. They are now very useful for walking around the wood, extracting timber, and also provide additional habitats for wildlife, such as butterflies.

As you walk along these rides, following in the footsteps of travellers long ago, look out for the 21 species of butterflies that have been recorded here, including the silver washed fritillary and the rare purple hairstreaks. The latter are often seen in the late afternoon, or early evening (during July), feeding on the aphid honey dew of mature oaks.



White Admiral butterfly – WTPL/Greg Holmes

3 Sweet chestnut – a native tree of southern Europe, but introduced here by the Romans, was coppiced in the past to produce fencing and hop poles*, among other things. Coppicing is the practice of cutting trees just above ground level and produces a tree with many stems radiating from a central stump. We're now gradually thinning these stems to produce taller, straighter trees – called a high forest. Can you spot the coppiced trees and the ones we have already started to thin?



Sweet chestnuts – WTPL/EA James

As these trees mature they develop pockets of deadwood, which is particularly good for woodland wildlife. For this reason, provided it is safe to do so, we also often leave dead trees standing and deadwood where it falls.



Deadwood – Clive Steward

Key	
	New woodland planting
	Ancient semi-natural woodland
	Proposed new tree planting areas for 2010/12
	Open grassland
	Bridleway
	Permissive bridleway
	Car parking

*Hop poles – long wooden poles, traditionally of sweet chestnut, which are used to support the wires in the hop gardens. Hop plants are climbers like honeysuckle and clematis, and in the hop gardens there is a whole series of wires which the plant climbs up supported by the long hop poles.

4 The Droeway – was a road used, in the past, by herdsmen to drive their animals to and from the wood pastures in the central Weald of Kent. These pastures were called 'dens' and may be the origin of nearby places, such as Tenterden, Biddenden and Smarden. Today, this droeway is a byway open to people, vehicles and horses.



The Droeway – Clive Steward

5 Chalk pits – are reminders that man has mined for chalk here for thousands of centuries. It was common in Kent to crush excavated chalk and spread it onto the clay with flint soils of the fields to improve their fertility and productivity.

Chalk wells or draw pits – are more peculiar remnants of the chalk mining industry. There are two confirmed chalk wells at Hucking (though there could have been many more which were subsequently filled-in). Chalk wells are vertical shafts of up to 4.5 metres (15ft) diameter and over 12 metres (40ft) deep, and were probably dug between 1600–1800 AD. In 1996 and in 2006, the Kent Underground Research Group cleared out the two chalk wells at Hucking Estate which had been filled with rubbish, soil and stone. The first to be cleared was in Spratts Dane Wood. The top of this shaft has been grilled over for safety reasons, but it is now home to Daubenton's, Natterer's and brown long-eared bats. The second chalk well is in Ten Acres and it is now awaiting bat occupants!



Long-eared bat – Ardea/Johan de Maester

6 The Pond – is a former iron working site. At the peak of the iron smelting industry which took place at the Weald nearby, people scoured everywhere for ore and, on the crest of the North Downs, occasional fragments of ironstone are still found. Opposite this small pond, you'll find the pippy oak – its trunk all covered in growths.

Timber from these rare, deformed specimens was once much prized by cabinet makers.



Pippy oak – WTPL/Clive Steward

7 Chalk grassland – is a distinctive habitat that teems with insect and plant life. Already our restoration of this habitat, which includes sowing wildflower seeds, is making a difference – the marbled white butterfly has once again been recording at Hucking after years of absence.



Stubs Wood – Clive Steward

8 A huge beech tree – has been left to grow on what is believed to be an old field boundary. Why not take a moment to stop and try to guess just how old this tree really is?*



Beech – Clive Steward

9 New planting areas – provide perfect habitats for small mammals, which in turn attract owls and hawks. We have already planted more than 180,000 native, and locally occurring, trees, such as oak, field maple, yew, cherry, whitebeam, small-leaved lime, hazel and dogwood – and we have plans for further planting at the north end of Hucking Estate from 2008–2010. You may see some young trees with guards and fences around them. This is to prevent rabbits from nibbling them while they are small and vulnerable.

Way-marked routes

Posts indicated by the following symbols

5k (3.1m) mile walk (approx 1 1/2 hours)

1.8k (1.1m) mile walk (approx 30 minutes)

*The beech tree is approximately 180 – 200 years old.