

Walk directions



Look out for these waymarkers to help you follow the route

The walk begins outside the shops in Parkside Road, Cliffe Woods (off the B2000) from where a variety of foods can be bought for a picnic lunch. Buses 133 or 193 connect Cliffe Woods with the Medway Towns and railway stations.

From the car park, cut across the wooded green to the Town Road (B2000). Turn left and then left again into Tennyson Avenue. Turn right into View Road and follow the cycle route signs into Brookmead Road and Englefield Crescent, continuing uphill into Hilton Road.

1 The settlement of Cliffe Woods forms a typical post-war housing estate and large tracts of Chattenden Woods were cleared to make way for houses.

From Hilton Road turn right and follow the National Cycle Route 1 sign around the back of the houses, turn left and continue along the bridleway. At the fork in the path turn left. Turn left again at the next fork and follow the path along a broad track through the woods.

2 Some rare plants associated with coppice woodland survive in Chattenden Wood, such as the stinking iris, whose flowers smell of roast beef, and the beautiful, early purple orchid whose roots were thought to be an aphrodisiac. The 17th century botanist, Robert Turner, wrote that, 'enough early purple orchids grew in nearby Cobham Park to please all the seaman's wives in Rochester!'

Where this path ends, turn right and follow the track into an open area that is regularly coppiced. As the path leaves this area there is another fork. Carry straight ahead, continuing along the bridlepath, which becomes a hard track. At the end of the track is a metal bridlegate. Climb over this and you will arrive on a road. Cross over and follow the bridleway sign along another track between trees. The path emerges onto another road and ahead of you is the entrance to the Royal School of Military Engineering. Turn left and follow the road between high fences.

3 This area is known as Lodge Hill Camp. On the left is the Defence Explosive Ordnance Disposal School with a spectacular array of weapons, which can clearly be seen from the road. The Defence Explosive Ordnance Disposal School and the Royal School of Military Engineering train bomb disposal experts and provide information to NATO forces, helping to identify unexploded devices. The school moved to Lodge Hill in 1966.

At the end of the road the track continues between trees. Where the track ends carry straight on and follow the footpath through a gate and into Berry Court Wood.

4 Listen out for the sweet fluid notes of nightingales singing in the scrubland to your right known as Rough Shaw. A nightingale's song is ever changing and used to both attract mates and deter rival males. Contrary to popular belief nightingales sing in the daytime as well as at night but are rarely seen. Chattenden and Berry Court Woods are home to many other typical woodland birds such as

Please remember your country code and remain on the footpath

Nettle beer

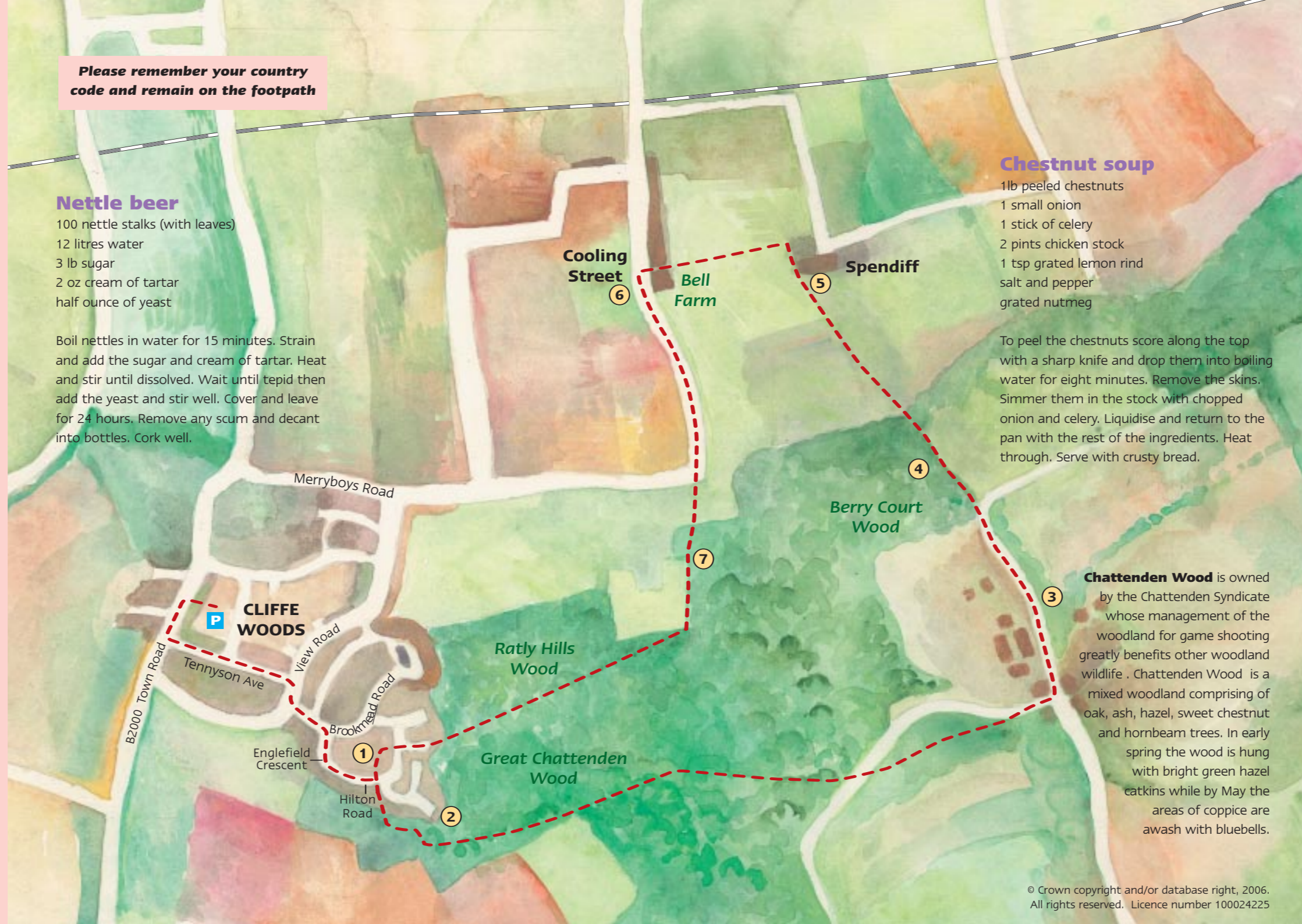
100 nettle stalks (with leaves)
12 litres water
3 lb sugar
2 oz cream of tartar
half ounce of yeast

Boil nettles in water for 15 minutes. Strain and add the sugar and cream of tartar. Heat and stir until dissolved. Wait until tepid then add the yeast and stir well. Cover and leave for 24 hours. Remove any scum and decant into bottles. Cork well.

Chestnut soup

1lb peeled chestnuts
1 small onion
1 stick of celery
2 pints chicken stock
1 tsp grated lemon rind
salt and pepper
grated nutmeg

To peel the chestnuts score along the top with a sharp knife and drop them into boiling water for eight minutes. Remove the skins. Simmer them in the stock with chopped onion and celery. Liquidise and return to the pan with the rest of the ingredients. Heat through. Serve with crusty bread.



garden warblers and turtle doves who particularly benefit from the active coppice management of the woods. At night tawny and little owls hunt for small mammals and birds along the woodland edge.

The track crosses a small bridge and emerges into open fields. From here you can see the broad sweep of the open country and the North Kent Marshes beyond. Carry straight on towards the hamlet of Spendiff.

5 The roofs of oast houses rise up above the village and show that Spendiff was once an active hop growing area. These oast houses also played another role in village life. The Wesleyan Methodists regularly held services in the upper story of one of the oast houses before building their own chapel in the village. The chapel came to be known as, 'The Chapel in the Orchard,' and was also used as the village school. The building can still be seen but is now a private house.

Follow the track straight on, passing a garden on your right. The grass path turns into a concrete track. Follow this round to your left and the path continues between open fields and finishes at a wooden gate. Go through the gate, shutting it behind you.

6 You are now entering another of the area's hamlets. This one is known as

Cooling Street. Many years ago you could have stopped here for refreshments at the unusual Beehive Public House. This tiny, circular, thatched beer house must have been a contender for the smallest pub in England. The pub has long since disappeared and nowadays you will need to travel to Cliffe or Cooling villages to find a watering hole.

Turn left when you reach the road and follow the road alongside fields known as Cooling Common. As the road bends to the right carry straight on, following footpath R575 back into the wood. Continue uphill, keeping close to the fence.

7 The wood on the right is a remnant of old coppice woodland with many large coppice stools. Look out also for the white fronds of candlesnuff fungus. Can you see how it got this name?

At the top of the hill the track emerges onto a broad grassy ride. Turn right. Through the gaps in the vegetation you can see fine views of the woods stretching away towards Upnor and the River Medway.

Follow the track straight on and houses come into view. Follow the path to the right alongside the garden fences and turn left, the path continues between garden fences before emerging back onto Hilton Road. Turn left to retrace your steps back to the car park at Cliffe Woods.



Introduction

We hope you enjoy this walk through Chattenden Woods. It offers an opportunity to learn something of the traditional crafts which have shaped the woodland and to enjoy the views from the ridgeway which forms the backbone of the Hoo Peninsula. This walk is approximately 7km (4.5 miles) and should take around two and a half hours at a steady pace. If you park in Cliffe Woods Village the walk begins with a steep climb through the streets and there is another uphill section from Cooling Common. The bridleways through the wood can be muddy in winter so it is best to wear strong waterproof shoes.

Please keep dogs on a lead to prevent disturbance to ground nesting birds such as pheasants and woodcock.



Stinking iris

Coppicing

Coppicing is a form of woodland management that provided both fuel and a host of raw materials for our ancestors. A coppiced tree is cut near to the ground in order to stimulate the stump into producing many new shoots. These shoots grow rapidly into long straight poles useful for a variety of woodland products. A large woodland would have been sectioned into blocks with each block cut on an 8 to 25 year cycle.

Coppiced timber from Chattenden Woods would have had a variety of uses. Wood from the ash trees would have created hoops for beer barrels, tool handles and hay rakes. While hornbeam wood probably helped create our earliest industry, supplying a strong wood for cogs, pulleys and break blocks.

The cutting of a coppice stool floods the forest floor with light and warmth, creating ideal conditions for forest flowers and butterflies. As it grows, the coppice provides a dense thicket, beneficial to many woodland songbirds.



Nightingale

By the end of the 20th century the market for coppice products had dwindled and many woods were left unmanaged. Today however, with a growing realisation of the benefits and a growth in the desire for natural products, coppice wood is once again being used in a variety of ways, from creating garden arbours to barbecue charcoal and walking sticks.

Trees in coppiced woodland create a mass of branches with a stump in the centre known as a coppice stool. The size of the stump can give you a clue to the age of the tree, which may be much older than its height suggests. Roughly speaking, coppice stools increase in size by 1ft every 100 years. So a 6ft wide stump would have been alive in the Middle Ages. Can you date the coppice stools in Chattenden Woods?

Butterflies of Chattenden Wood

Chattenden Woods was once nationally renowned for its rare butterflies. During Victorian times many entomologists travelled to the wood by train in search of butterflies such as the purple emperor. This spectacular butterfly is one of our largest and most elusive woodland species, hiding itself in the tree canopy for much of its life.



Purple emperor

Unlike many other butterflies it doesn't visit flowers but instead lives on a diet of aphid honeydew, a sticky solution secreted onto leaves in the canopy. Male purple emperors descend to drink from puddles or feed on dung and rotting animal flesh, which provide the insect with essential salts.

In the mid 19th century there were over 3,000 butterfly collectors in Britain. In Chattenden Woods they would have used a variety of skills to attract purple emperors from the canopy. These included shining mirrors into the treetops or spraying the ground with rotting salmon or urine in the hope of luring the butterflies down to investigate. Although these collectors added greatly to our knowledge of the natural world, in Chattenden Woods they over



Orange tip

collected and caused these rare butterflies to become locally extinct. Elsewhere their numbers have declined due to habitat destruction.

Although we can no longer hope to see the purple emperor there are around 20 species of beautiful butterflies still to be seen in the woodland. Among them are the orange tips which fly along the woodland rides in April and May and purple hairstreaks, which are abundant among the oak foliage in July.

The Cliffe Community and Conservation Partnership

**RSPB Northward Hill Reserve
Bromhey Farm
Eastborough, Cooling
Rochester, Kent ME3 8DS**

Tel: 01634 222480

Email: carol.donaldson@rspb.org.uk

The Cliffe Community and Conservation Partnership was set up to support and complement the RSPB Cliffe Pools initiative and in particular to enhance the surrounding area.

The Partnership consists of organisations with an interest in the future of the Hoo Peninsula. It is funded by Medway Council and Medway & Swale Estuary Partnership and is supported by RSPB, countryside organisations, parish councils and local businesses.



Woodland folklore

Ancient Britain was a land covered in woodland from which our earliest people carved out small areas of civilisation. To them the woodlands were a place of danger, magic and medicine and our early folklore is full of tales of tree spirits and their powers. The Celts saw trees as deities and many world religions still use trees as symbols of fertility or knowledge.

The oak tree was sacred to the druids and considered a protection against fire and lightning. Even after Christianity came to Britain oak trees continued to be regarded as sacred. On Midsummer Eve, villagers would go into the woods and cut down branches to fasten to their houses believing that the tree spirit would bestow blessings



*Oh do not tell the priest our plight,
Or he would call it a sin;
But we have been out in the woods all night,
A conjuring summer in.*

Rudyard Kipling

upon them. Newly married couples would dance three times around an oak and then make a cross upon it in the belief that it would bring their marriage luck.

Hazel was another tree thought to be able to predict wedded bliss. To see if a relationship would last, two hazelnuts were placed side by side in a fire. If the two stayed together as they burned the marriage would last but, if the nuts burst apart, the relationship would break up.



A wander through Chattenden Woods