

VALLEY WALK White Waymarkers

This short walk of 1 km. leads down to the main valley, formed by the northernmost tributary of the River Roach, before climbing back to the oak woodland around the car park.

A Start the walk at the drinking trough on the west of the car park and follow the path down into the woods.

Holly trees line the bank on your right. In early spring this area is carpeted with the pale flowers of wood anemones.

B Branch left just before the stream.

Ash trees fringe the valley on your right, oak and sweet chestnut are on the higher ground on your left.

Oaks from this part of the wood were used as piles for Southend Pier in the nineteenth century.

C Turn left at the main valley. This valley is characterised by lush vegetation and a series of irregular banks, pits and depressions.

Ash, willow and hazel fringe the stream and the rich plant life contrasts with the bare ground under the mature hornbeam coppice.

Water pepper grows on disturbed ground along the stream – the leaves have a strong peppery taste and were once used in salads. Look also for hedge woundwort, water mint and enchanter's nightshade along the valley, and a patch of butcher's broom, a spiny leaved



Wood Anemone



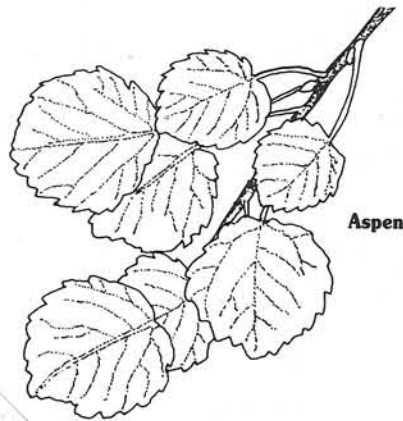
Butcher's Broom

evergreen shrub, on the bramble covered slope on your right.

D A group of willows was coppiced in 1984 and a small marsh flooded behind a dam. The coppiced willow grows up to 3 m. a year whereas the surrounding hornbeam will only grow 1 m. On summer evenings bats can be seen hawking for insects over the marsh.

E Turn left, through the hornbeam coppice and up the hill. Where the path emerges into open grassland there is a wild Crab Apple Tree. In late summer look for the small yellow flowers of cow-wheat.

F Continue up the hill. There is a wild cherry tree on your right. Grey Squirrels are common in this area of the wood, look for their dreys up in the tree tops.



Aspen

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This leaflet is one in a series published by Rochford District Council. The leaflets highlight a number of ecologically important sites and interesting circular walks in South East Essex.

Further information can be obtained from:

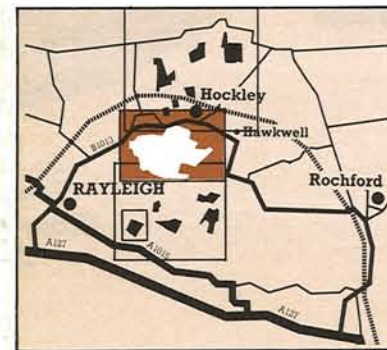
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WOODLAND WALKS IN SOUTH-EAST ESSEX

HOCKLEY WOODS

■ TWO WALKS AROUND THE
LARGEST ANCIENT WILD WOOD IN ESSEX



DISTANCE
BOUNDARY WALK
5km
VALLEY WALK 1km
ACCESS
FROM B1013
HOCKLEY, BULL
LANE,
RAYLEIGH

1

HOCKLEY WOODS

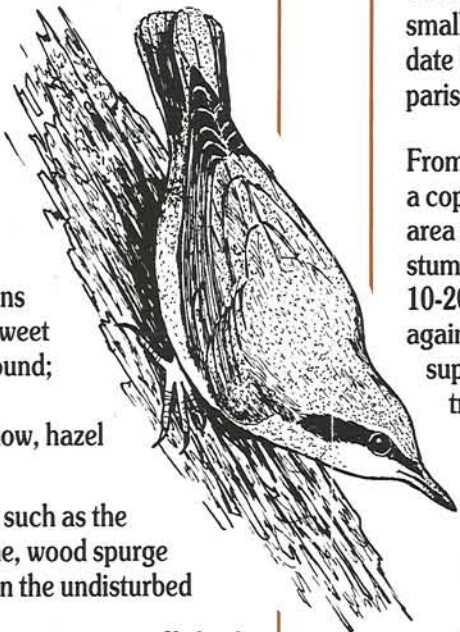
WALK ONE

HOCKLEY WOODS are the largest remaining area of the wild wood which covered Essex after the Ice Age 10,000 years ago.

The woods are a complex mosaic of different trees, each species growing where conditions are most favourable. Oak and sweet chestnut grow on the higher ground; birch on the most acidic soils; hornbeam on the wet clays; willow, hazel and ash along the streams.

Many of the plants in the wood, such as the wild service tree, wood anemone, wood spurge and cow-wheat will only grow on the undisturbed soils of ancient woods.

Hockley Woods have more of these ancient woodland plants than any other wood in the county.



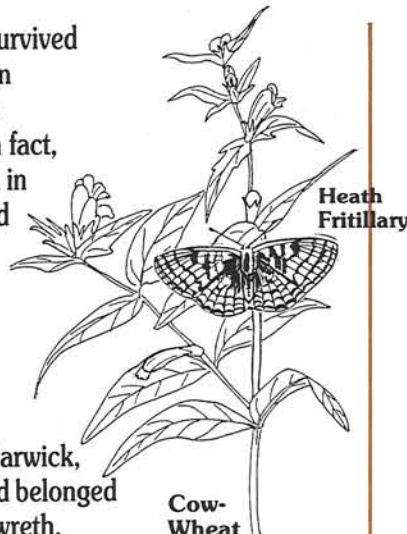
Nuthatch

Hockley Woods have survived because they have been managed as a valuable resource. They were, in fact, a group of woods, each in separate ownership and divided by earth banks which still survive; for example, in the seventeenth century Hawkwell Wood was owned by the Earl of Warwick, whereas Beaches Wood belonged to Beaches Manor, Rawreth.

There are over 20km. of these banks in Hockley Woods and they vary from banks over 1m. high to small bumps on the ground. Some of the earthworks date back to Saxon times, others follow medieval parish boundaries.

From Saxon times the woods have been managed as a coppice. In coppicing most of the trees in a selected area are felled; new shoots rapidly grow from the old stumps and seedlings thrive in the clearing. After 10-20 years the trees have regrown and are cut down again. This cycle is repeated to give a continuous supply of wood. The wood from coppice was traditionally put to a myriad of uses, with each species of tree having special qualities and uses.

Hornbeam is a hard wood and was used for truncheons, cogs in machinery or firewood; sweet chestnut splits well and lasts in the ground and was used for fencing; oak traditionally was used for building and still survives in medieval timber frame buildings.



Heath Fritillary

Cow-Wheat

Coppice management creates a changing patchwork of light and shade. Flowers flourish in the sunlight after coppicing then decline as the trees re-grow. Plants adapt to these changing conditions in various ways; the seed of plants like wood spurge, foxglove and broom may lie dormant in the shade for many years but germinate in sunlight; butcher's broom and dog mercury thrive in the shade; willow herbs and cow-wheat move around the wood as conditions become favourable. The rare heath fritillary butterfly which feeds on cow-wheat has been successfully re-introduced into the woods and can be seen in sunny clearings in June and July.

The great storm of 16th October 1987 damaged many trees in the woods. Whilst many dangerous trees have been cleared, areas away from paths have been left untouched, with smashed and uprooted trees remaining as testimony to the power of the storm.

Hockley Woods are over 130 hectares; they have been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (S.S.S.I) by English Nature, on account of the variety of plants. They are also valued for recreation by the people of south-east Essex. Modern management seeks to reconcile the demands of recreation, education and nature conservation.

Access to the woods is unrestricted; there is a car park off the B1013 at Hockley; two paths have been waymarked and there is a horse riding trail marked with blue waymarkers. Horse riders must not deviate from this way marked trail.

Continued

HOCKLEY WOODS

BOUNDARY WALK Yellow Waymarkers

This walk is 5km. long and follows the edge of the woods linking with public footpaths to Hockley, Hawkwell and Rayleigh.

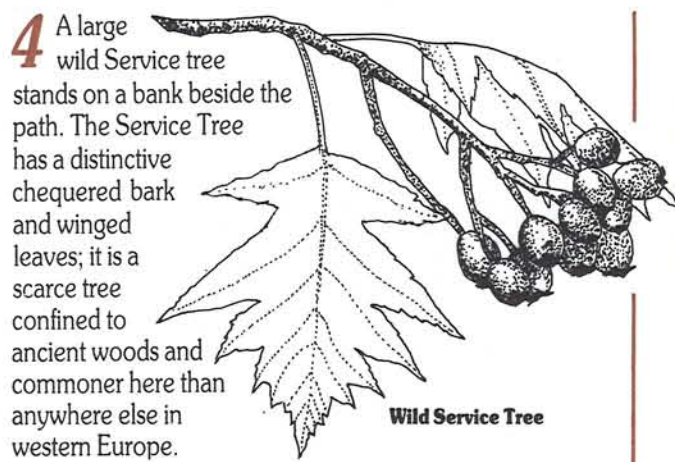
1 Start beside the play area and follow the path down the steep valley. There are oak, sweet chestnut, birch, ash and rowan trees in the valley.

2 Continue down the hill, with gardens on your left and hornbeam woodland on your right.



3 Cross the stream at the bridge and turn left. Hornbeam coppice dominates the east of the woods and the path passes several plots which have been coppiced since 1980. The recently cut plots have luscious vegetation with grasses, honeysuckle, anemones, cow-wheat, foxgloves and broom amongst the coppice stools and seedling trees. Wood ants often build their domed nests in freshly cut coppice.

▲ Footpath to Bullwood Approach



Wild Service Tree

4 A large wild Service tree stands on a bank beside the path. The Service Tree has a distinctive chequered bark and winged leaves; it is a scarce tree confined to ancient woods and commoner here than anywhere else in western Europe.

5 At the eastern edge of the wood is a pond, fringed by a marsh dominated by willows and sallows, but with many wild flowers, including stitchwort, ragged robin, meadowsweet and water mint. Newts, frogs and toads all spawn in the pond, dragonfly larvae live in the water, pond skaters feed on the surface.

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- ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ — BOUNDARY WALK
- — — — — VALLEY WALK
- - - - - PATHS
- ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● HORSE TRAIL
- BANKS

◀ RAYLEIGH B1013 ROCHFORD & SOUTHEND ▶

BULL INN ■

CAR PARK

6 Leave the pond and cut back into the woods. There is another small pond on your right, fringed by Aspen, Sallow, Crab Apple, Alder Buckthorn, Holly and Service.

Take care where the path runs beside the horse trail and turn left up the hill.

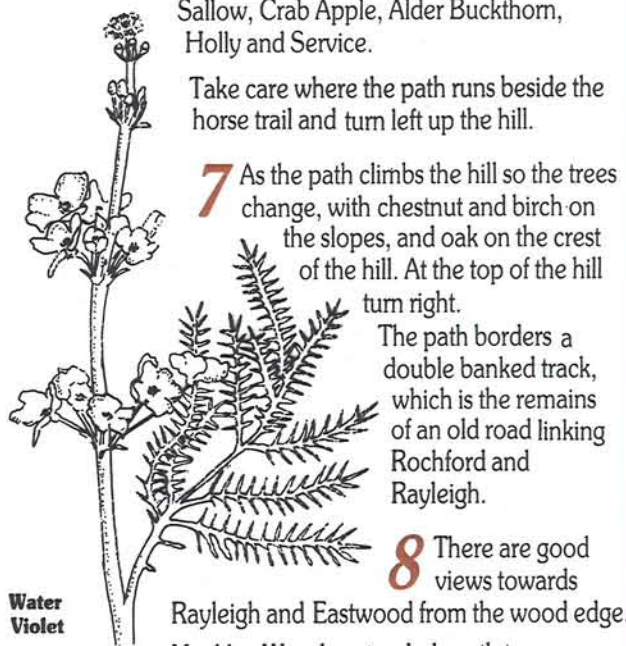
7 As the path climbs the hill so the trees change, with chestnut and birch on the slopes, and oak on the crest of the hill. At the top of the hill turn right.

The path borders a double banked track, which is the remains of an old road linking Rochford and Rayleigh.

8 There are good views towards Rayleigh and Eastwood from the wood edge. Hockley Woods extended south to Eastwood until the 1950's when the area was cleared for farming.

9 Follow the boundary to Bullwood and then turn right into the woods, and then left. Large Holly trees grow on the boundary bank separating Bullwood Hall from Hockley Woods.

10 Continue along the path through an area of sweet chestnut coppice and birch; the soils here are more acidic and bracken glades mark patches of sand left by the last Ice Age. The plants of this coppice differ from the east of the woods; bramble dominates here, bluebells are more abundant and St. John's Wort, centaury and heath speedwell all grow amongst the bramble. In autumn the red and white fly agaric toadstools grow under Birch trees. In summer willow warblers, chiff chaff and white throats all nest in recently coppiced areas.

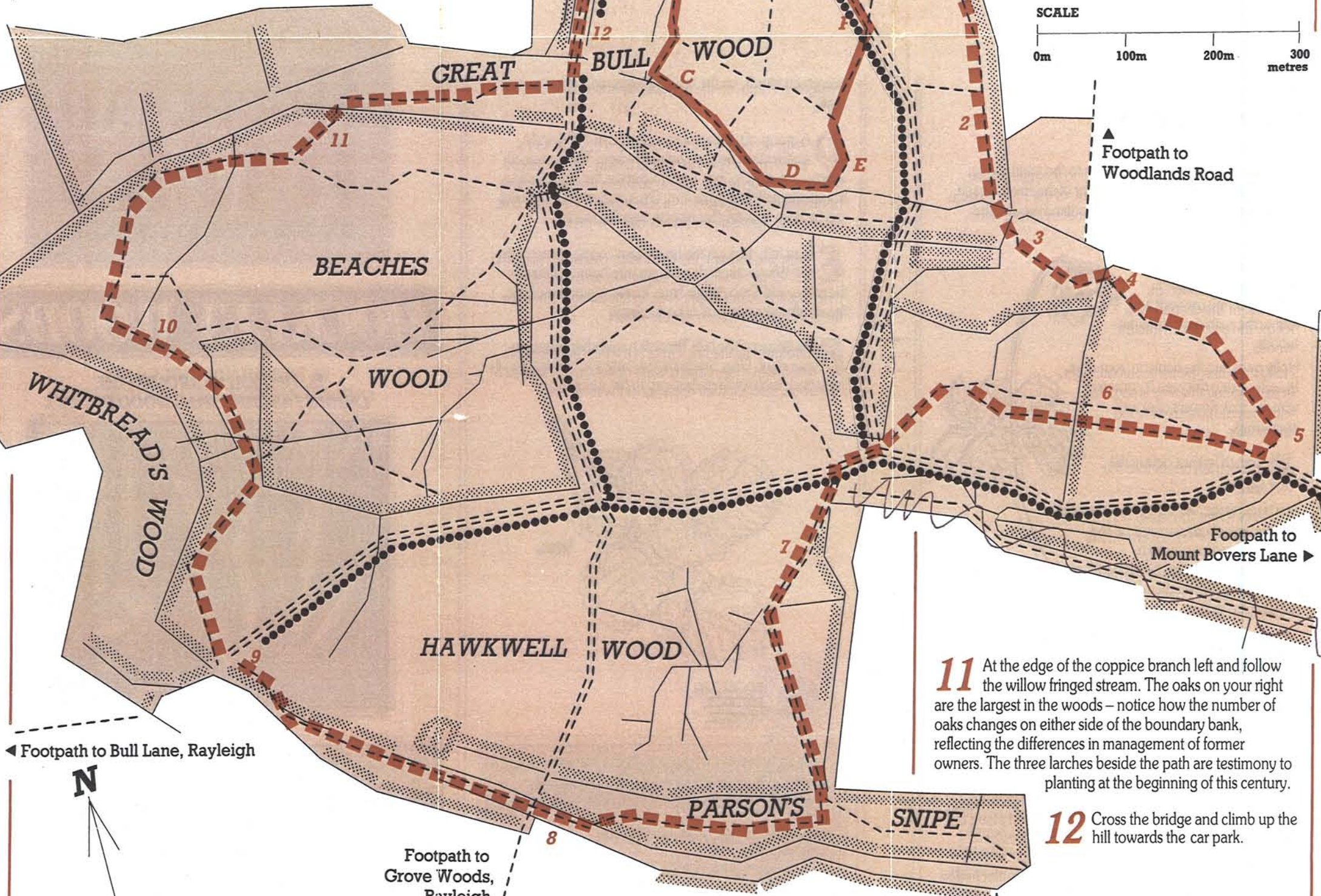


Water Violet

SCALE
0m 100m 200m 300 metres

▲ Footpath to Woodlands Road

▲ Footpath to Mount Bovers Lane ▶



◀ Footpath to Bull Lane, Rayleigh

11 At the edge of the coppice branch left and follow the willow fringed stream. The oaks on your right are the largest in the woods – notice how the number of oaks changes on either side of the boundary bank, reflecting the differences in management of former owners. The three larches beside the path are testimony to planting at the beginning of this century.

12 Cross the bridge and climb up the hill towards the car park.

▲ Footpath to Grove Woods, Rayleigh ▼

▲ Footpath to Gusted-Hall Lane ▼