

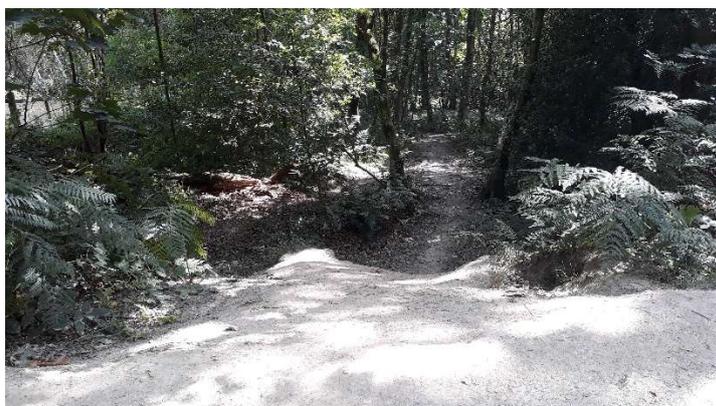
In Search of Dragons



Welcome to the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty an unspoilt medieval landscape. This is a very pleasant, and relatively flat, walk through St Leonard's Forest and open countryside, following the High Weald Landscape Trail for one section.

Distance and duration	7.3 miles /11.7 kilometres 3.5 - 4 hours
Level	Moderate
Start point	Leechpool and Owlbeech woods car park off B2195 Harwood Road, Horsham, West Sussex, RH13 6DZ
Map reference	TQ193313 OS Explorer map OL34 What3words: ///gladiators.books.humble
Other information	Do not rely on the postcode to find the exact location of the car park as it takes you into a residential area. The car park is just off the B2195, on the southern side, about 400 yds west of the roundabout where Harwood Lane intersects with Comptons Lane. It is well signed. One very steep, but short, descent.

I-Spy - Things to look out for in the landscape

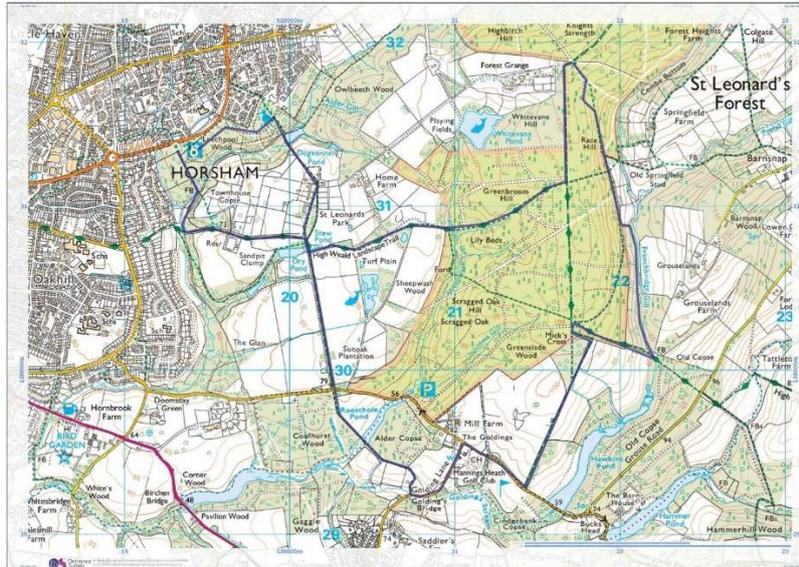


St Leonard's Forest is at the Western edge of the Wealden Forest Ridge which runs from Horsham to Tonbridge. It is part of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Forest lies between Horsham and Crawley and is a pleasant mixture of conifer and Broad-leaved wooded areas. In the Middle Ages it was one of a series of adjacent thickly wooded areas that occupied the 'Forest Ridge' of the Sussex Weald. Archaeological surveys have found that the forest has had many uses over hundreds

of years. From a Medieval hunting forest, rabbit farming to being heavily mined for iron ore for local furnaces.

Legend has it that in the 6th Century a French Hermit once lived in the forest. It is reputed that he famously fought and killed the last dragon in England. It is from him, St Leonard, that the forest takes its name.

The walk



Head back to the entrance of the carpark and take the path on the left just before the metal gates. Very soon turn left onto a straight footpath leading through the wood and ahead over a footbridge and up some steps. The path leads onto a board walk. On reaching a single-track tarmac road turn left.



You are now on the route of the High Weald Landscape Trail. Walk along the road for 0.45 mile until, on your left St Leonard's Park comes into view. This is a large early 19th Century house, now divided into dwellings. Approaching the left-hand bend turn right and on reaching a metal gate turn left just after it to follow a narrow footpath between hedges which continues to a wider metal fenced path.

Cross a gravelled drive and through a gate onto a wide track shortly go right across an area of rough grass. Follow the path along a wire fence at the edge of the field to descend into woodland. Keep ahead at a public footpath sign. On the right is the area known as the Lily Beds.

It is reputed that St Leonard was injured when fighting with the dragon and where his blood fell lilies of the valley grew.

Ignoring the track on the left, continue gently up hill on a wide track through mixed woodland. Keep a sharp look-out for a public foot path sign on the left by a slight right-hand bend. Follow this narrow path, still heading gently uphill. Cross a track to follow the public footpath signs across this area of heathland to, a crossing of tracks and paths.

Turn left here along the public bridleway. The track is a wide and geometrically straight. It is known as Mick Mills race.

The straight track is known as Micks Mills race. Mick, a local braggart, boasted that he could outrace

The High Weald: An outstandingly beautiful medieval landscape...

anyone. The devil took up the challenge. The resulting contest left a course through the forest on which no trees grow



Follow the straight track for 0.45 miles. On reaching the carved dragon bench take the track to the right of it and follow this downhill. Bearing right on the wide track at the public footpath sign to follow the track downhill and then ahead at all public footpath signs.

After 0.5 mile from the dragon bench keep a sharp look out on the left-hand side for an unmarked path that descends steeply into a wooded area (see photograph on the right on the first page). Follow this path bearing right as it follows the banks of Frenchbridge Gill.

The gill can be dry in summer and the surrounding woods are full of bluebells in late April/May. Eventually the path leads away from the gill and after a short steep climb uphill, you join a footpath turn right. Follow this path gently climbing through a wooded area that eventually opens up. Turn left at the High Weald Landscape Trail sign and left again shortly after onto a wide track. Turn left at the public bridleway sign. Follow this path turning right onto mainly a straight track. You will see a vineyard on the left and Mannings Heath golf course on the right. On reaching a lane turn right heading gently uphill past Manning Heaths Golf Club and Wine Estate.



At the junction shortly after the club turn left, signposted for Mannings Heath and head downhill. As the lane bears to the left follow the public footpath sign to the right and through a gate and uphill briefly to a further gate and onto a track entering the woodlands of Alder Copse. Keep along this track to Roosthole Pond.

This is one of the numerous Hammer Ponds in the Forest; the overflow from them provided the power for the hammers used in the iron industry.

Cross the end of the pond, continue gently uphill, now along the side of Coolhurst Wood. Go through a gap by the side of a metal gate and ahead at the road. Walk along the broad, straight tree lined track. Walk for 0.5 miles keeping ahead at both metal gates. On reaching a footpath junction turn right on to a single-track tarmac road which skirts around St Leonards House on the left.

On reaching the gate of Field Lodge turn left onto a narrow fenced public footpath that heads downhill passing Dogkennel Pond and over a foot bridge. Follow the public footpath sign uphill. Go ahead when crossing a path and turn left at the next footpath sign to follow a track. Turn right pass a fenced picnic area back to the car park.

Please follow the Countryside Code:

Respect other people

- Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors
- Park carefully so access to gateways and driveways is clear
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Follow paths but give way to others where it's narrow

Protect the natural environment

- Leave no trace of your visit, take all your litter home
- Don't have BBQs or fires
- Keep dogs under effective control
- Dog poo - bag it and bin it

Enjoy the outdoors

- Plan ahead, check what facilities are open, be prepared
- Follow advice and local signs and obey social distancing measures

Wildlife, including nesting birds, may have moved into new areas and land managers may have provided extra protection for wildlife. Be vigilant and comply with these protective measures so that you do not disrupt the local wildlife