

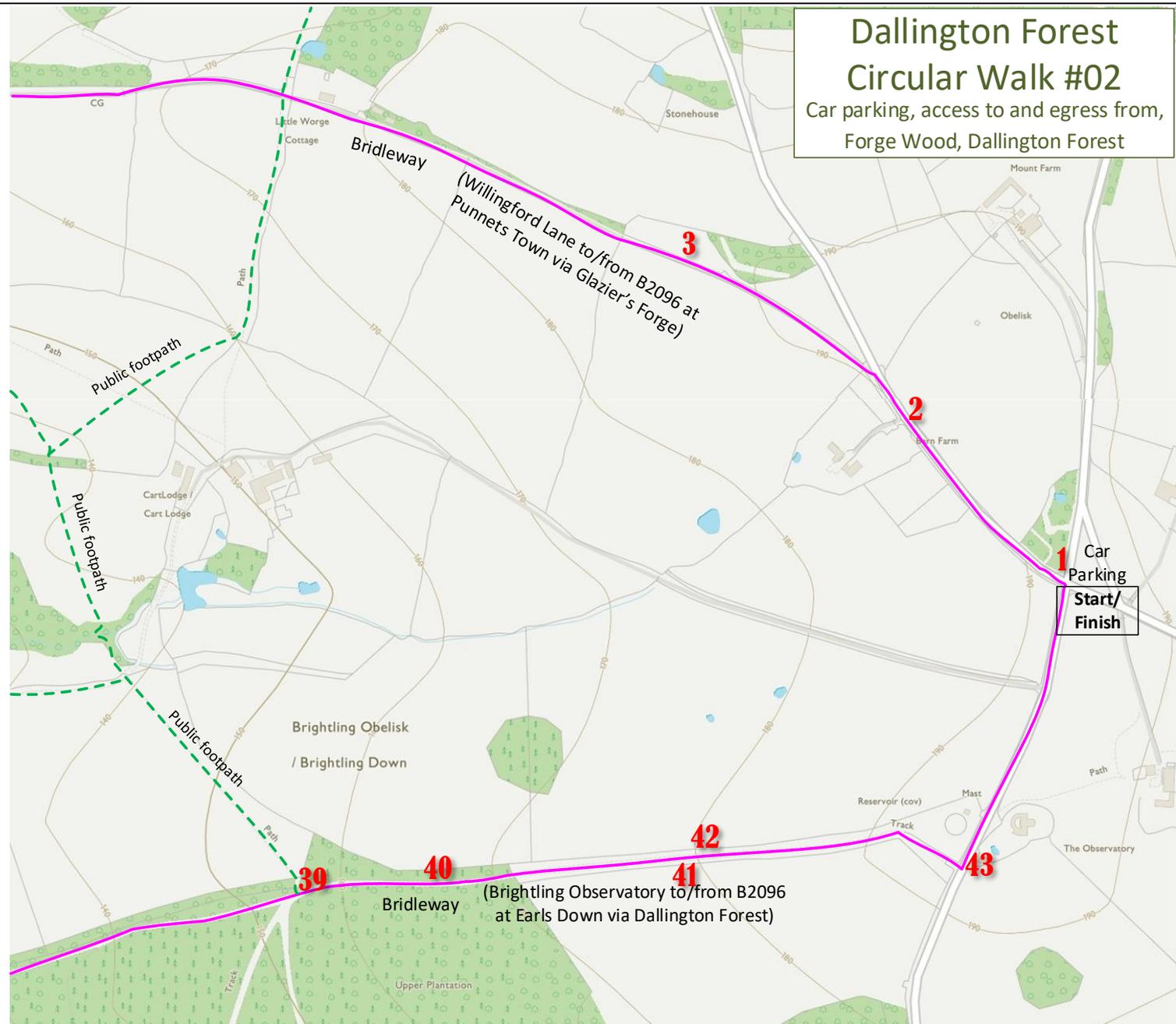
Dallington Forest Circular Walk No. 2

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Veteran Pollard
Beeches, 'King
and Queen',
Ancient
hedgerows**

**4.8 km (3 mi), 90 m
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**Level of difficulty for
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- Under 50 yrs = Easy; you'll hardly notice it
- 50 - 60 yrs = Good exercise; it'll raise your heart rate
- 60 - 70 yrs = Taxing; you'll know you've done it
- Over 70 yrs = Quite challenging



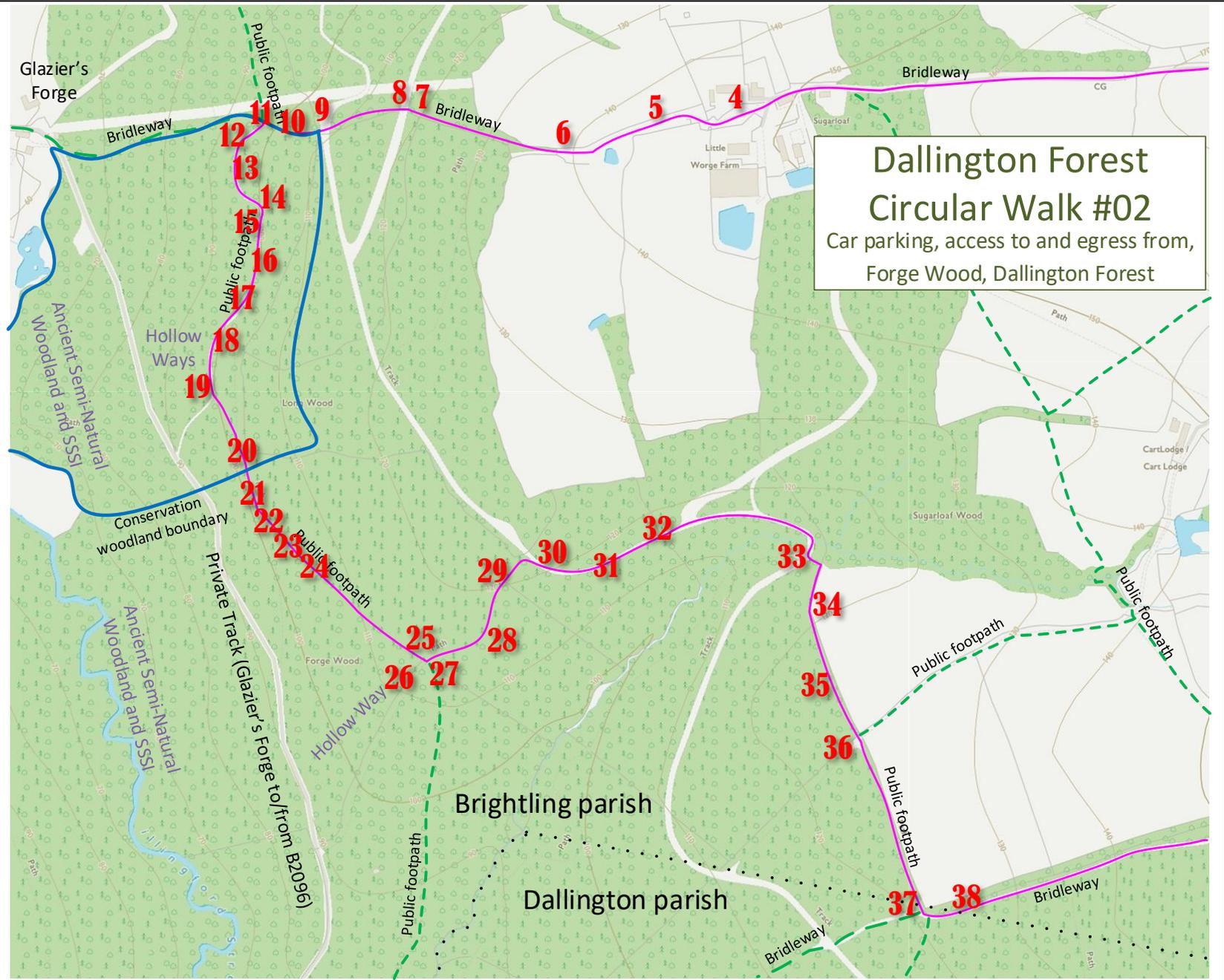
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Introduction On this circular walk you will see breath-taking views over the High and Low Wealds of Sussex, an example of best-practice conservation woodland management, commercial conifer plantations, a grove of veteran pollard Beeches, the 'King & Queen' ancient Beech trees, hollow ways and remnants of ancient hedgebanks.

There are no stiles or other obstacles for walkers or for dogs, but the surfaces can be very muddy and slippery in wet conditions.

The **starting and finishing point** is the grass triangle near the Observatory on Brightling Down (TN32 5HE, Grid Ref. TQ 67114 230981, Lat/Long 50°57'50"N 0°22'42"E). See map on page 1. Please park responsibly.

To follow the walk please refer to the map and the numbered points of interest in the table below.

If you prefer to do the walk in the opposite direction, start with the highest numbered point of interest and work backwards. (Of course, all directions need to be reversed too!)

Be Safe

Before starting there are some things you should know to stay safe on this walk: -

- Mobile phone signals are unreliable in some parts of the forest
- The paths can be very muddy and slippery when wet
- There is one short, steep ascent/descent scramble
- Protect yourself from ticks; from April through October wear long light-coloured trousers and check yourself and your dog after the walk

Respect for the forest and landowners

Some parts of the walk take place on public footpaths and bridleways while others are on Forestry Commission land which I am given to believe is 'open access' for walkers. Some other parts are on paths over private land where the landowners have given me permission to take people for a walk.

The route described here is intended for walkers only. Horses and cycles are permitted only on the bridleways.

It's important to remember that whenever we walk in the forest, we may cause some damage, unintentionally or otherwise. So, let's balance the enjoyment and education we get from the forest and minimise the negative effects of our visit as much as possible by following the Countryside Code (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code>) and, in particular:

- Please be sensitive to the rights and sensibilities of people who live and work on the route of the walk
- Some such people enjoy having unexpected and appreciative visitors, others wish to pretend that they don't exist while others actively resent what they perceive as intrusion*

- Please pick up and take home your dog's poo, especially if within 14 days of worming or flea treatments.

Dog poo degrades the forest soil through nitrification, and the poisons in the poo and on fur from treatments kill indiscriminately the insects and invertebrates that are an essential part of ancient woodland ecosystems and are especially dangerous if they get into the watercourses.
- Please keep to paths and, from March through June, avoid walking off the footpaths and onto the bluebells

Bruising by walking boots damages leaves and stops the plant growing. Foot pressure compacts the soil and kills the bulbs.
- Please resist picking wild flowers, fungi or other plants – leave them there for others to enjoy. Take only pictures.

Part of Dallington Forest is a SSSI making it illegal to damage plants or habitat.

Even outside the SSSI areas it's illegal to pick species protected under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Uprooting any wild plant is strictly illegal under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Some forest plants are very poisonous and small amounts can make you very ill. Contact with some can cause severe skin reactions.
- Strictly **NO FIRES or BARBECUES**

Fires of any type in the forest are very dangerous and damage the above-ground and underground life of this sensitive woodland environment.

More information about Dallington Forest and the Dallington Forest Project can be found at www.dallingtonforest.uk

Points of interest (please refer to the maps above)...

1	<p>From the grass triangle, cross the road to Willingford Lane and walk about 250m along to the Bridleway branching off to your left.</p>
2	<p>On your right is Jack Fuller's Obelisk (the Brightling Needle).</p> <p>John 'Mad Jack' Fuller was an 18th/19th century squire of Brightling who had a reputation for eccentric behaviour. He was an MP and a noted drunk who suffered public disgrace after an altercation with the Speaker of the House.</p> <p>But on his Rose Hill (now Brightling Park) estate at Brightling he erected a number of 'follies' – the exact number is debatable, but about eight – including this obelisk.</p> <p>The reason it was erected is unclear (there is no inscription on the monument) but may have been to celebrate Nelson's victory at Trafalgar in 1805 or Wellington's victory over Napoleon in 1815.</p>
3	<p>As you walk along the bridleway, ahead of you are views over Dallington Forest and on your right are views of the High Weald.</p> <p>On your left, down in the valley almost obscured by trees, is Great Worge. In recent history it was the film set for the 1995 film 'Cold Comfort Farm', but in the 16th and 17th centuries was a manor called 'Werthe'.</p> <p>Detailed records exist of its boundaries and contents of the 'Manor of Werthe' and also a map from 1566-7 showing field boundaries that have hardly changed in more than 450 years.</p>
4	<p>Keep going, past Worge Cottages, until you pass through a wooded area and arrive at Little Worge Farm. Keep going straight on even though it looks as though you're walking through someone's garden.</p>
5	<p>Go past the houses and through the bridleway gate into a grassy area. Pause a while to look over the jump in the hedge on your right and take in a wonderful view towards Burwash Weald.</p>

6	The bridleway now enters a hollow way lined with old, but not necessarily big, trees such as Hawthorn. Pass through a bridleway gate and into the hollow way. It has large sandstone blocks that were probably laid to stabilise the clay surface and make it passable in winter.
7	On your left, just before you cross a ride with metal gates on each side, and a little back from the path and hidden in the wood, is an old wood bank boundary. This one has an unusually angular corner in it.
8	<p>After crossing a ride with metal gates, you'll see an upended root plate on your right.</p> <p>In these situations, there is a temptation to 'tidy up' by removing the fallen trunk so that the root plate drops back into the ground, but this would be a mistake. The soft earth exposed by in the root plate and the ground it's been lifted from is an important habitat for mining bees. They are unable to dig their nesting burrows in compacted earth, so exposed root plates like this are very important for biodiversity.</p>
9	Keep going downhill past the conifer plantation on your left and the mature coppice on your right until you cross another ride with metal gates on either side of you. Keep straight on.
10	The bridleway now goes steeply downhill with mature hornbeam coppice on the right-hand side and the open conservation woodland on the left.
11	After about 95 m you will reach the point where a footpath crosses the bridleway (yellow arrows on a fingerpost), turn left here a slope into the conservation woodland. In spring, this footpath is lined with bluebells.
12	<p>To your left and right are blocks of woodland that have been coppiced.</p> <p>Coppicing, which can be dated back to the Stone Age, is the practice of cutting back a young tree to its base (stool), leaving enough for epicormic (below the bark) buds to create new growth, allowing regrowth for some 7-20 years depending on species, and then repeating the cutting process.</p>

	<p>This creates sustainable wood for tool-making, basket-weaving, construction, animal fodder, firewood, and other uses, and is particularly valuable for woodland diversity and wildlife.</p> <p>Because coppicing rejuvenates the tree, the stool of a coppiced tree can be of immense age. Some have been found that are thought to be many centuries old - not in this forest, unfortunately!</p> <p>The netting keeps out deer that would otherwise eat the regrowth and prevent regeneration of the coppice.</p> <p>Amongst this mixed coppice of hazel and hornbeam are 'standards', good quality timber trees that have been selected because they stand a good chance of one day becoming ancient trees.</p> <p>Also to be seen here and elsewhere in the woodland are 'pollards', trees cut about 3 m or more from the ground and allowed to grow until recut, in much the same way as a coppice. Most of the large Beech trees in the forest are pollards, but the cyclical cutting of these trees ceased approx. 100 years ago allowing the branches to become 'overstood' or overgrown.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">13</p>	<p>The 'coppice with standards' woodland around you consists mainly of Beech (<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>), Birch (<i>Betula pendula</i>), Hazel (<i>Corylus avellana</i>), Hornbeam (<i>Carpinus betulus</i>), English Oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>), and Sessile Oak (<i>Quercus petraea</i>) – all native species – but some good specimens of Norway Spruce have been left for diversity of habitat together with the stools of felled spruce that have been left as seats for the public to use giving a view over the valley.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">14</p>	<p>The conservation woodland practices used have ensured that there is a wide diversity of habitats.</p> <p>Some are 'minimum intervention' with old growth hornbeam coppice, others are open grown trees with wood pasture, mixed coppice and hazel coppice – both with 'standards'. The hazel coppice is on short rotation providing the best habitat for woodland plants.</p>

<p>15</p>	<p>On the right is a fine example of veteran beech with standing decaying wood. Standing or fallen decaying wood is one of the rarest and most special habitats in the forest.</p> <p>The tree is veteran because, although it's not old enough to be considered ancient, it has many of the characteristics of ancient trees – the scars from a tough life. Think of a young soldier returning from active service: he or she is still young but bearing the scars of battle of much older soldiers.</p> <p>It's rare because otherwise well-meaning people feel a need to tidy-up and remove decaying wood, and special because it's the habitat needed by many of our rarest and rapidly disappearing saproxylic insects, plants and fungi. 'Saproxylic' means dependent on decaying wood for all or part of their lifecycle.</p> <p>This tree was one of 6 in the forest in which flight interception traps were hung in 2018, and in which a wetland crane fly <i>Ellipteroides alboscuteatus</i> was found, a species with a northern and western distribution in England and not previously known from SE England.</p>
<p>16</p>	<p>The rides in this conservation woodland are managed to provide a multi-storied approach that benefits wildlife. They have open, sunny conditions in the centre and immediate edges, a higher, shrubby area on each side for shelter and for fruiting shrubs, and progressively higher vegetation up to the height of the surrounding woodland trees. These conditions maximise the habitats that are beneficial to plants, insects, birds and mammals. You will see and hear much more activity on these rides than you will in the dense woodlands later on this walk.</p>
<p>17</p>	<p>On the right are a number of veteran beeches. There used to be more but some have already succumbed to Ganoderma fungus, have fallen and have decayed-away.</p> <p>On your left is a particularly fine example of a pollard Beech that is surrounded by bluebells in the Spring. By the habit of its branches, it seems it was once growing in a relatively open woodland landscape (close to the trunk the branches are relatively horizontal) but later in life trees grew up around it, forcing its branches up in search of sunlight.</p>

<p>18</p>	<p>On your left is an area of short-rotation hazel coppice, used to generate an income for the woodland to help cover the costs of its maintenance.</p>
<p>19</p>	<p>On the right (close to where another track joins the footpath) is one of the many hollow ways converging on Glaziers Forge in the valley below and behind you.</p> <p>On left is a big veteran beech that lost two large boughs in 2018 and suffered more failures in 2021. After being made safe for walkers, as much as possible has been left for the fungi and creatures (known as saproxylics) that depend on decaying wood for all or part of their lifecycle.</p>
<p>20</p>	<p>You are now leaving the conservation woodland and there are a series of abandoned quarries on your right. The sides of the quarries are very steep and the drop long. Please don't fall!</p> <p>On your right as you enter a grove of veteran Beeches, you'll see one tree has branches resting on the ground. This tree is doing what many mature trees do and is allowing clones of itself to be created by layering. Where the branch contacts damp ground roots will grow and, eventually, a completely new layering 'phoenix' tree will have been formed.</p>
<p>21</p>	<p>This Beech Grove is a very special place and has been popular with generations of locals and visitors.</p> <p>Recently, sadly, local residents and visitors have cut off boughs of the trees and left graffiti carvings, all of which have damaged the trees.</p> <p>Can you see the mature beech with a vertical hole into its hollow trunk? I wonder who lives in there. Bats? Squirrels, Woodpeckers? Sit here quietly in the spring and see if you can discover who's using this hole.</p> <p>One of the big Beeches' roots show signs of damage from long ago. It's been speculated that this grove was a destination for 18th and 19th century carriage rides and that the damage resulted from hooves and wheels of carriages turning around the Beech on their way home.</p>

22	<p>You are now entering a plantation of Western Hemlock, <i>Tsuga heterophylla</i>, that was planted in the 1950s after the clear-felling of an ancient woodland of Oak and Beech.</p> <p>Western hemlock plantations are often very dark as they cast dense shade, which means very few plants or wildlife species can live beneath them. They grow rapidly and also seed and spread freely and rapidly.</p> <p>If you crush some needles in your fingers you might detect the characteristic smell of grapefruit. It's this smell that gave the tree its similar name to the poisonous water hemlock. Western hemlock is <u>not</u> poisonous, by the way.</p>
23	<p>On your right you can see examples of mature, almost veteran, Chestnut trees that are being strangled by the Western hemlock.</p>
24	<p>The footpath takes you on through the Hemlock plantation where you can see another example of the failing veteran Beeches.</p> <p>Its interior had been weakened by Ganoderma fungus and the trunk snapped in May 2018. While some of the tree has been 'tidied away' for firewood, it's hoped the majority of it will be left to provide food and shelter for saproxylic invertebrates and fungi.</p> <p>More info: https://dallingtonforest.uk/decaying-wood/</p> <p>In the clearing left by the falling tree you can see evidence of the rapid new growth of Western hemlock from seed.</p>
25	<p>As you arrive at the junction of the footpath with another path, look to your right (NW) and see the remains of a hollow way formed by transporting wood and charcoal during the ironworking industry times.</p>
26	<p>Make a short detour down the path to your right and, just inside in the conifer plantation on your right, you can find a lovely veteran Yew with an impressive root structure clinging to the opposite side of the hollow way.</p>

	<p>The tree has been crowded-out by the fast-growing Hemlock. The Yew's outer branches are dying back and, sadly, it is now in decline.</p>
27	<p>Retrace your steps up the hill to the junction of paths and look to your right along the designated footpath and, among the conifers, you will see the remains of an old hedgebank. All that remains now are a few Oaks and the decaying remains of what were once hedgerow plants and trees.</p> <p>This part of the forest has changed use a number of times over the last 300 years. OS maps of the 19th century show it as a set of fields and then reverting back to woodland and, eventually, into forestry plantation.</p>
28	<p>Continue uphill (NE) on the broad path through the Hemlock plantation with also, on your right, the non-native European Larch (<i>Larix decidua</i>).</p> <p>While the Hemlock plantation is of little value to native wildlife the European Larch provides food for a number of birds including Siskin and Lesser Redpoll and the caterpillars of many moths feed on the foliage, including the case-bearer moth and larch pug.</p> <p>On your left alongside the track are the remains of another old boundary hedgerow visible as a raised bank with old coppice and hedgerow plant stools.</p>
29	<p>Soon, on your left, you will come across two treasures of Dallington Forest; the 'King and Queen'. These are pollard Beeches, both of which are listed on the Ancient Tree Register, and could be 200-250 years old or more (dating trees is an inexact art).</p> <p>Pollarding (periodically cutting off young growth some 2-3 metres from the ground for animal fodder and other uses) rejuvenates trees and can extend their lives for extremely long periods of time. But pollarding ceased for these trees about a hundred years ago. The nooks and crannies between the upright growth has allowed water and debris to collect and pool, providing one of the ways for fungus to get established in the tree.</p>

	<p>You'll see the brown Ganoderma fungal fruiting bodies poking out from the trunk – a sign that the interior of the tree is being turned from hard wood into a soft sponge and will fail in the not too distant future.</p> <p>The King is fast losing his larger limbs, creating new habitats for saproxylic (dependent of decaying wood) plants and animals. Unfortunately, instead of being left to contribute to the forest's important decaying wood habitat the fallen limbs have been largely 'tidied away' for firewood.</p> <p>Walking around the trees your feet will be crunching on a bed of Beech 'mast'; the seeds and husks that have been produced and dropped by the trees. This is an important food source for many animals, and used to be important for 'pannage', an ancient practice of driving herds of pigs from the Low Weald into the forests of the High Weald each Autumn to feed on fallen Beech 'mast' and Oak acorns. Many of the bigger hollow ways in the area were likely formed for this reason from the late stone age onwards.</p>
<p>30</p>	<p>As the path bears right, on the bank to the left in Spring there is a patch of Dog's mercury (<i>Mercurialis perennis</i>) and Lords-and-ladies (<i>Arum maculatum</i>), also known locally as Cuckoo Pint.</p> <p>Dog's mercury is an indicator of ancient woodland but will colonise any deciduous woodland. All parts of this plant are poisonous.</p> <p>It is said that Lords-and-ladies gets its name from its likeness to male and female genitalia symbolising copulation. I couldn't possible comment!</p> <p>It's a remarkable plant in forming an insect trap in the bulbous lower part of the flower where insects, especially owl midges, are trapped and dusted with pollen before being released to pollinate other Lords-and-ladies flowers. In autumn the pollinated flowers form red/orange berries as the other parts of the flower wither away.</p> <p>All parts of this plant, too, are poisonous, the berries being especially poisonous but they have such an awful taste they would be difficult to eat in large quantities. Don't pick it because every part of the plant can cause allergic reactions.</p>

<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">31</p>	<p>Continue SE through a section of woodland that was replanted with native species about 30 years ago.</p> <p>If the trees are in leaf, can you spot the Whitebeam, <i>Sorbus aria</i>, and the rare Wild Service (or Chequers) trees, <i>Sorbus torminalis</i> close to the path? The Wild Service leaves are similar to Maple and in Autumn turn a rich, coppery red.</p> <p>There are now very few mature Wild Service trees left in the UK and it would be wonderful if these young trees get a chance to mature. A number of fully mature trees do exist elsewhere in Dallington Forest but the landowners would like their locations kept secret.</p> <p>More info: https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/wild-service-tree/</p>
<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">32</p>	<p>Carry on this path, around the metal gate that designates a change in land ownership (this part of the track is very muddy in Winter) and keep straight ahead and downhill.</p> <p>On the left is a commercial conifer plantation. Selected timber is extracted from time to time, a technique that is less ecologically damaging than clear-felling.</p> <p>During the extraction process in 2020 some large tree trunks, stripped of their bark, were left for a few weeks before collection. Passing them one day the Tree Warden saw a Great Wood Wasp, <i>Urocerus gigas</i>, or Giant Horntail. laying eggs into one of the tree trunks.</p> <p>For a video of this, see the Dallington Forest Project website at: https://dallingtonforest.uk/invertebrates/</p> <p>These large wasp-like insects are harmless to humans and use their stinger-like ovipositor to drill into the wood to lay their eggs. Once hatched, the larvae live in the wood of pine trees, where they spend up to five years developing. The length of time the larvae spend in wood results in the adults sometimes emerging from harvested timber used for building or even furniture.</p>

<p>33</p>	<p>At the bottom of the slope, go past an iron bar designating yet another change in ownership - this time into land leased by Forestry Commission.</p> <p>Head straight across the gypsum track to the far side. There you'll find a path climbing steeply up a bank and to the right – this can be a bit of a struggle when it's wet and muddy.</p>
<p>34</p>	<p>You have farmland on your left and the Forestry Commission's conifer plantation on the right, and will very quickly arrive at another of the Forest's gems; a <u>very</u> old hedgerow on your left. In fact, the boundary features on the 1566-67 map of Werthe.</p> <p>It looks like a row of very large Beech trees with great knobbly bases that appear interlinked. This is what remains of a 'laid hedge' that has been allowed to grow out for very many years.</p> <p>Hedges are 'laid' by allowing young sapling trees to grow to a few metres in height and then cutting almost through the trunks close to ground level, laying the saplings all over to one side and weaving or tying them together to make a stock-proof barrier.</p> <p>Because the saplings are not quite severed from their roots they continue to grow. In fact, laying is similar to coppicing and seems to rejuvenate the plants so they grow vigorously and quickly establish themselves. Managed in this way, periodically cutting and laying the vertically-growing shoots, a hedge plant can be very long-lived indeed.</p> <p>The trunks of the Beech 'trees' you are looking at are the vertically-growing shoots of a long-abandoned hedge and are probably some 100-150 years old. But the knobbly 'stools' they are growing from are the remains of hedge-laying that could date back many hundreds of years, if not longer. These hedge stools may be amongst the oldest living things in the forest.</p> <p>And they appear to be all the same plant. The interconnections between the stools are likely the remains of the laid parts of the hedge, and a careful observation of the leaf-burst timing of these 'trees' showed that they all came into leaf at exactly the same time. Not conclusive proof they are clones of the same original hedge plant, but it does add weight to that hypothesis.</p>

35	The path continues along the edge of the conifer plantation across ground that is carpeted with Bluebells in the Spring. You will have to step over some fallen decaying tree trunks that, in Autumn, have been festooned with the most glorious assortment of fungi.
36	At this point, you join a public footpath as it enters the wood from the field on your left. Keep straight ahead (SE) along the public footpath along the edge of the wood.
37	<p>The public footpath joins a bridleway at this point, and you leave Brightling parish and enter Dallington parish.</p> <p>Turn left (ENE) up the bridleway.</p> <p>Ahead of you are two tracks going up hill; the bridleway to and, less obvious, a disused track on the left running parallel with the bridleway.</p> <p>The disused track is much older and has some lovely mature trees along its sides, some of which are the remnants of the track's old hedgerows. Keep a look out for them as you ascend the bridleway.</p>
38	<p>At this point you leave Dallington parish and enter Brightling parish.</p> <p>Continue up the bridleway (ENE).</p>
39	Where the bridleway joins a stoned track there is a lovely stand of Scots Pine along the left of the track. Our only native species of pine, the mature trees have lovely reddish-brown bark.
40	Continue uphill along the stoned track, but beware of dog poo – this track gets heavy use by dog walkers and not all of them clear up behind their pets!
41	At points along the track there are views South over Dallington (the church spire is just visible on the sky line) and the Low Weald towards Eastbourne.

	<p>Don't confuse the church spire with the 'Sugar Loaf' – another of Jack Fuller's follies – that you can see standing prominently against the horizon in front of you.</p> <p>Legend has it that in the 1820s while in London drinking with his friends, he made a bet that he could see the spire of Dallington Church from his home at Rose Hill (now Brightling Park).</p> <p>Returning to Brightling he realised he couldn't see the spire and so he had an exact replica built on land at Woods Corner in order to win his bet.</p> <p>It got its name from the conical shape in which sugar was sold at the time, and was a two-storey dwelling for a family in the late 1870s.</p>
<p>42</p>	<p>On your left are views North towards Fuller's Obelisk.</p>
<p>43</p>	<p>At the metalled road turn left and walk past another of Fuller's Follies: an observatory on the highest point in the area and now surrounded by trees.</p> <p>This building was completed in 1818 and was originally furnished with expensive equipment including a high-powered telescope. It is now a private house.</p>
<p>End/ Start</p>	<p>You're now back at the starting point.</p> <p>Please let the Tree Champion know what you think of this guide and how it could be made even better.</p> <p>treewarden@dallington.org.uk</p>