

# Landscape and Nature for All



## Woodland Archaeology of the Kent Downs AONB

The woodland landscapes of the Kent Downs have a long history of woodland exploitation and pastoralism stretching back over at least 5,000 years. The present landscape is the result of a continuous ebb and flow of woodland management, clearance for farming and re-growth as human exploitation of the land has changed throughout the millennia. As a consequence of traditionally managed woods together with a decline in coppicing in the 20th and 21st centuries, woodland preserves evidence of land use change in the form of earthworks, living trees, place-names, old routeways and settlement sites.

### Prehistoric ritual and farmed landscapes

The Kent Downs preserves significant sites of prehistoric ritual monuments in the form of burial mounds. These burial mounds form part of a wider prehistoric landscape of settlement sites and field systems. Fieldwork in woods can reveal evidence of possible prehistoric field systems, present as low wide banks, often with a stone core created by field clearance of flints. Where these low banks occur on sloping ground they form steps or 'lynchetts'. These boundaries are important for preserving stratified archaeological remains buried in the soil.

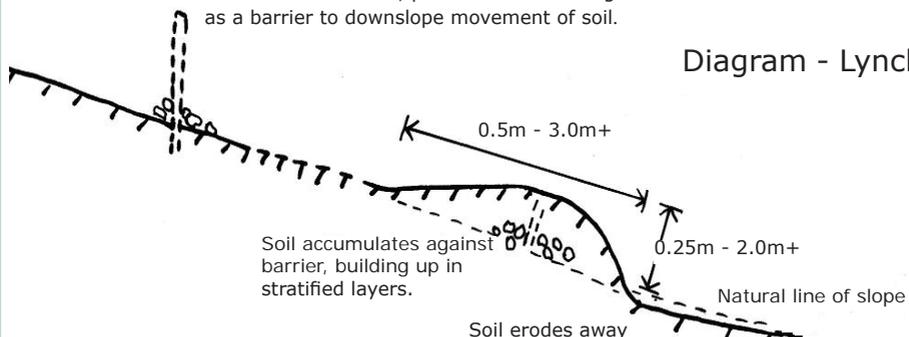
### List of Features

- Neolithic Long Barrows
- Bronze Age Round Barrows
- Lynchetts
- Ancient trackways



Boxley Warren - Pilgrim's Way

Field division - fence, pile of stones or hedge acts as a barrier to downslope movement of soil.



## Mediaeval farming and pastoral land use

Early-mediaeval farmers expanded their farming from the fertile land at the foot of the Downs escarpment to establish grazing pastures and cattle farms on top of the hills. Woods were enclosed earth and flint banks with a ditch on the side away from the wood. These banks were topped with laid and stubbed trees to make stock-proof barriers in order to protect new coppice growth. In some areas of common wood pasture banked enclosures were created for corralling stock such as at Denge Wood. The wood pasture and farms were reached by long winding tracks or hollow ways which snake their way up the Downs escarpment. These sunken tracks are lined by ancient yew, beech and ash trees on top of steep banks.

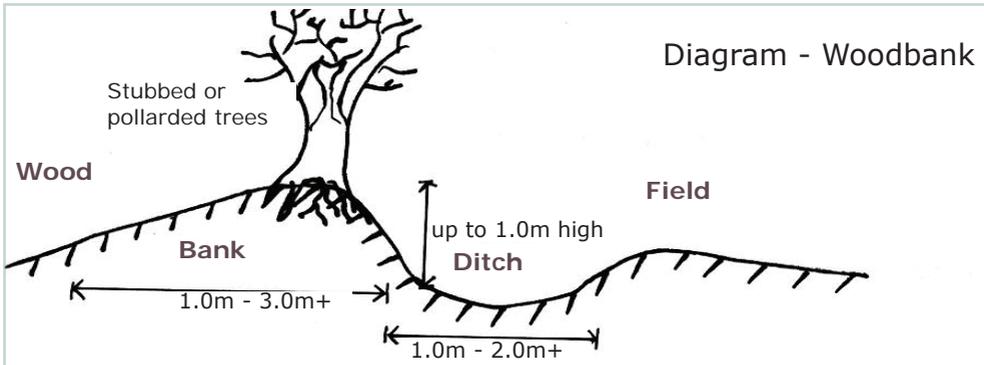
The land was divided into agricultural territories some of which became parishes and hundreds. These boundaries can still be seen winding through woodlands today and are often significantly larger than wood-banks.

## List of Features

- Woodbanks
- Enclosures
- Hollow ways
- Parish boundaries



Parish & Hundred boundary



## Post-mediaeval woodland and mineral exploitation

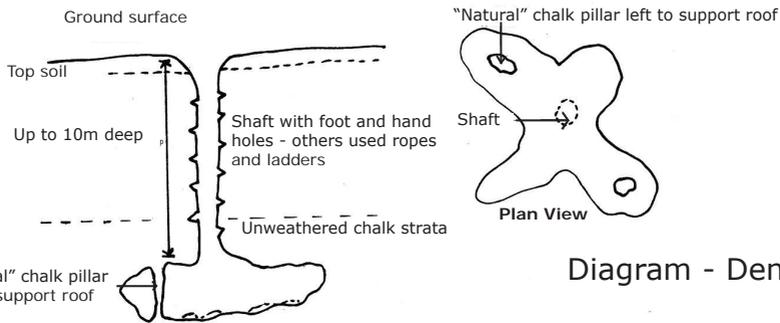
The geology of the Kent Downs has provided valuable minerals in the form of chalk dug from pits for burning into lime. Numerous chalk pits line the edge of the scarp slope. Associated with these pits were often lime kilns. Bundles of underwood or sometimes charcoal were used to heat the kilns. Unweathered soft chalk was dug from 'wells' or 'dene-holes' and spread on clay soils as a soil improver. Dene-holes are found on the edge of woodland near to fields and survive as circular depressions in the ground. Flint was used for building material and 'knapped' flints for guns and tinder boxes (before the use of matches). In the 18th and 19th centuries the character of many of the woods in the Kent Downs changed from a mixture of oak, ash and hazel to that of pure Sweet Chestnut coppice. The chestnut poles were used in the expanding hop growing for the production of beer. The hop bines were grown up the poles in hop gardens. Charcoal production was also carried out in many woods, with burners creating circular 'hearths' or platforms (about 10m in diameter) on which to erect the 'clamp' of wood to turn into charcoal. The charcoal was used for fuel in both lime kilns and oast houses (where the hops were dried).

## List of Features

- Limekilns
- Quarries
- Pits
- Charcoal Hearths
- Deneholes
- Coppice stools



Chalk or flint quarry



### Military use

Kent has been at the fore-front of defence from invasion. Dating from the Napoleonic period in the early 19th century to WWI and WWII in the 20th century there are a legacy of military earthworks in woods. Defence or 'stop lines' were constructed across Kent where defensive structures were erected at key strategic points. Areas of the Kent Downs woodlands were used for military training.

### List of Features

- Trenches or 'fox holes'
- Concrete anti-tank defences
- Pill-boxes
- Bomb craters
- Rifle ranges – targets and butts
- Spigot gun site

### Damage and threats to heritage features

Some sites such as prehistoric burial mounds are statutorily protected (Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1976). Management is with an agreed plan drawn up by English Heritage and the owner/manager. However most sites are unprotected and rely on the sensitive management during periods of active woodland management.

### Positive Actions for preservation of woodland heritage

- Minimise disturbance to known sites
- Undertake survey and record sites on to a management map
- Undertake sensitive management of woodland on heritage sites
- Avoid taking extraction routes over known heritage sites
- Protect linear features across extraction routes with brush
- Site recreational activities, footpaths etc. away from heritage sites
- Restore traditional coppice management in neglected woodlands
- Avoid planting trees on heritage sites

### Threats

- Lack of understanding of the heritage resource
- Insensitive woodland and forestry management
- Off-road vehicles and other recreational activities
- Tree roots and burrowing animals
- Stock grazing



Boxley Warren Whitehorse Stone

## Further Information on Identification of Woodland Archaeology

Weald Forest Ridge Heritage Environment Awareness Project 'Cab Cards' - these are designed to keep in woodland workers vehicles for rapid reference to features found in woods and how to avoid damaging them.

<http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/environment/archaeology/historicenvironment.htm>

"The cultural heritage of woods in the South East" (including the Kent Downs AONB) can be found at:

[http://www.highweald.org/downloads/publications/cat\\_view/390-publications/123-guidance/183-woodlands.html](http://www.highweald.org/downloads/publications/cat_view/390-publications/123-guidance/183-woodlands.html)

and also at:

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/infd-7dlcjj>

Forestry Commission links re - archaeology in woodlands.

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-5W2F23>

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-5W2FZT>

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-5W2J4W>

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-5W2HVT>

For Forestry Commission Publications on the management of Archaeology in woodlands

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-6XCFH3>



**WOODLAND**  
TRUST

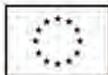


**Forestry Commission**  
England



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European Regional Development Fund  
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L'union Européenne investit dans votre avenir



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naturel  
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Marais d'Opale



**KENT  
DOWNS**

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Outstanding  
Natural Beauty

[www.woodlandadvice.org.uk](http://www.woodlandadvice.org.uk)