

The Serpent Trail

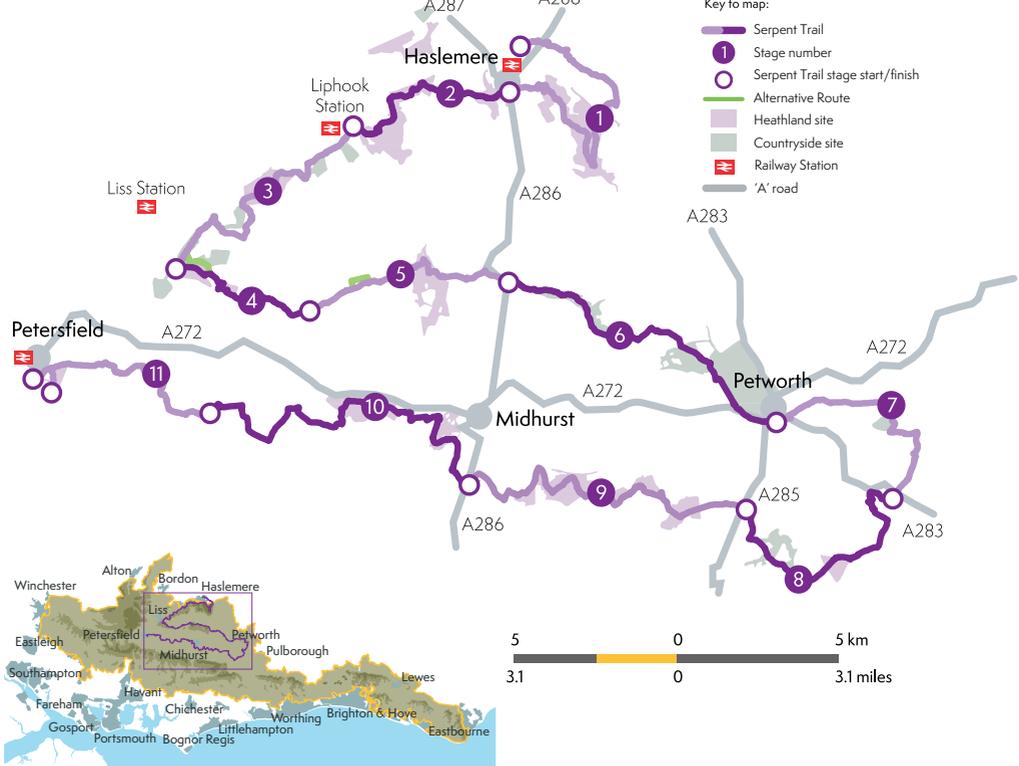


**SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK**

Contents

The Serpent Trail	3
Wildlife	4
Heathland timeline	8
Heathland Today	10
Heathland Stories Through Sculpture	10
1. Black Down to Marley Common	12
2. Marley Common through Lynchmere and Stanley Commons to Iron Hill	14
3. From Shufflesheeps to Combe Hill via Chapel Common	16
4. Combe Hill, Tullecombe, through Rondle Wood to Borden Lane	18
5. Borden, Titty Hill and Woolbeding	20
6. Henley to Petworth, via Bexleyhill, River Common and Upperton	22
7. Petworth to Fittleworth	24
8. Hesworth Common, Lord's Piece and Burton Park	26
9. Duncton Common to Cocking Causeway	28
10. Midhurst, Stedham and Iping Commons	30
11. Nyewood to Petersfield	32
Heathlands Reunited Partnership	34
Take the Lead on the Serpent Trail	35

THE SERPENT TRAIL



THE SERPENT TRAIL

Explore the heathlands of the South Downs National Park by following the 65 mile/106 km long Serpent Trail.

Discover this beautiful and internationally rare lowland heath habitat, 80% of which has been lost since the early 1800s, often through neglect and tree planting on previously open areas. Designed to highlight the outstanding landscape of the greensand hills, their wildlife, history and conservation, the Serpent Trail passes through the purple heather, green woods and golden valleys of the Wealden Heaths.

The name of the Trail reflects the serpentine shape of the route. Starting with the serpent's head and tongue in Haslemere and Black Down, the 'body' turns west, east and west again along the greensand ridges. The Trail 'snakes' by Liphook, Milland, Fernhurst, Petworth, Fittleworth, Duncton, Heyshott, Midhurst, Stedham and Nyewood to finally reach the serpent's 'tail' at Petersfield in Hampshire.

GETTING THERE

BY RAIL The railway stations of Haslemere, Liss, Liphook and Petersfield are all close to the Trail. Visit nationalrail.co.uk to plan your journey.

BY BUS Bus services run to Midhurst, Stedham, Trotton, Nyewood, Rogate, Petersfield, Fittleworth, Petworth and Haslemere allowing easy access to the Trail. Visit traveline.info/se to plan your journey.



WAYMARKERS
TAIL ROUTE The purple waymarkers follow the Serpent Trail from Haslemere to the tail in Petersfield. **This is the route described in this booklet.**



HEAD ROUTE The green waymarkers follow the Serpent Trail from Petersfield to the head in Haslemere. This is the opposite of the route described in this booklet but the points of interest and public transport information for each stage will still be relevant.

COUNTRYSIDE CODE

Respect everyone

- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Do not block access to gateways or driveways and do not park on verges
- Keep to marked paths unless wider access is available

Protect the environment

- Leave no trace – take your litter home
- Do not light fires or have BBQs outside of permitted sites
- Always keep dogs under control and in sight – we are a farmed landscape with livestock and rare ground nesting birds
- Dog poo – bag and bin it, any public waste bin will do

Enjoy

- Plan ahead and be prepared

WILDLIFE

Heaths are a habitat 'rarer than rainforest' and are home to some amazing species.

HEATHLAND REPTILES

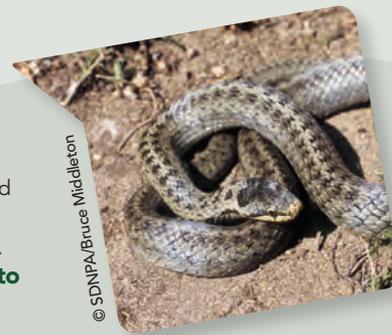


© Bruce Middleton

SAND LIZARD

1 During the breeding season, male lizards have bright green sides. They love the warm bare patches of ground on the heaths, and female lizards lay their eggs in the sandy soil. Sand lizards are much rarer than the viviparous (or common) lizard, which give birth to live young instead of laying eggs. On warm days you are quite likely to spot a common lizard basking on the heath.

When: May to June



© SDNPA/Bruce Middleton

SMOOTH SNAKE

2 Britain's rarest reptile, the elusive and harmless smooth snake has a small population in West Sussex. Dependent on well managed heathland the smooth snake is rarely seen as it doesn't tend to bask in the open. Generally grey or dull brown, smaller and more slender than other snakes (60-70cm), their scales are flat and smooth. **When: Emerge from hibernation in April/May. Give birth to live young in September.**



© SDNPA/Bruce Middleton

ADDER

3 The UK's only venomous snake. Its secretive nature and 'zigzag' markings along its back mean that despite being fairly widespread it often goes unnoticed. Adders will retreat from people and dogs but if they feel threatened, they may bite in self-defence. See arctrust.org/facts-and-advice-on-adder-bites **When: Spring/summer**

OTHER REPTILES YOU MAY ENCOUNTER ARE:

- **Grass snake** – a large non-venomous snake found throughout England and Wales and favouring ponds and rotting vegetation where they may lay eggs. **When: eggs June to July, hatching late summer**
- **Common (viviparous) lizard** – frequently seen on heathland, approx. 15 cm in length, usually brown with spots or stripes. **When: give birth to live young in August**
- **Slow worm** – actually a legless lizard and not a worm or a snake. Shiny appearance, often hides under logs and feeds on slugs etc. **When: seen through spring/summer, 'give birth' in late summer**
- **Natterjack toad** – not a reptile but an amphibian. Extremely rare and threatened by habitat loss. Not to be found on the Serpent Trail but there are small local populations on sandy heath pond systems.

HEATHLAND INSECTS



© Nigel Symington

SILVER-STUDED BLUE BUTTERFLY

1 As caterpillars they feed on the young shoots of bell heather and are protected from predators, such as sand wasps, by black ants. The ants even ferry the caterpillar into their nest to pupate, but why? The caterpillars secrete a sweet honeydew which the ants 'milk' as payment for their troubles. Adult butterflies can then emerge safe and ready to take flight.

When: June to July

SAND (DIGGER) WASP

2 This impressive looking solitary wasp can be found around patches of bare soil on heathland. Females hunt for caterpillars, which they paralyse with a sting before carrying them back to their burrow and burying them alive in the sandy soil. Sometimes the caterpillar can weigh up to ten times the weight of the wasp herself! The wasp lays eggs inside the caterpillar, which the larvae will feed on before later emerging from the burrow themselves as adult wasps.

When: Spring/summer



© SDNPA/Derek Middleton



© Bruce Middleton

FIELD CRICKET

3 Rare black or brown cricket with striking yellow wing bases. They can't fly but can walk up to 100 metres a day. Two cm long, their wing markings resemble intricate wrought-iron work. The males make a loud chirruping call to attract a mate using 'harps', modified veins on their wings.

When: Singing May to mid June

OTHER INSECTS YOU MAY ENCOUNTER ARE:

- **Green tiger beetle** – bright green with cream spots, these beetles can often be seen sunning themselves on the heathland. They move quickly and will run or fly if they are disturbed. They are an aggressive predator on the heath and have a fierce jaw. **When: April to September**
- **Golden ringed dragonfly** – a large dragonfly and voracious predator of other insects. Agile and fast flyers they are black with yellow bands along the body and bright green eyes. **When: on the wing from May to September on heathland**
- **Black darter dragonfly** – a common, small narrow bodied dragonfly. Almost entirely black they frequent damp areas of heathland with a skittish flight to catch insect prey. **When: on the wing June to October**



HEATHLAND BIRDS



© iStock/Jordon Sharp

1 NIGHTJAR
A ground-nesting bird that migrates from Africa during the summer. They feed on nocturnal insects such as flies, moths and beetles, using the hairs around their mouths to detect their prey's wingbeats.
When: Listen at dusk in the summer for the otherworldly "churr" of the breeding males. Territory is also marked by loudly clapping their wings together.

DARTFORD WARBLER

2 A small brown, recently scarce bird. Now recovered in number and often found singing its scratchy song from the tops of gorse bushes. It has a distinctive red eye ring, red breast and long tail. It builds its nest on the ground amongst dense heather and gorse. Sticking to the paths helps to protect this species and its young.
When: Year round



© Bruce Middleton

WOODLARK

3 A rich mellow fluty whistle in early spring tells you a woodlark is flying across the heath. A small brown stripy bird similar to a skylark, this is a key heathland species whose numbers have declined and is therefore closely monitored.
When: Year round



© Derek Middleton

STONECHAT

4 Resident on heathland throughout the country, look and listen out for the stonechat. A small, dumpy and charismatic bird, usually seen at the top of bushes or posts making a distinctive call like two stones being tapped together. The male is highly territorial and has an orange-red breast with a white half collar.
When: Year round



© iStock/Trevor Baker

OTHER BIRDS YOU MAY ENCOUNTER ARE:

- **Common redstart** – a summer visitor to the UK. Similar in size to a robin with a longer tail that constantly quivers up and down. The males develop a bright orange breast and flanks. Feeds on insects and larvae. **When: April to September**
- **Hobby** – another summer visitor, this bird of prey can often be seen on heathland chasing dragonflies and small birds. Similar in size to a kestrel and in shape to a swift, it is also fast and agile in flight. **When: April to October**

HEATHLAND PLANTS



© Beth Nicholls

HEATHER – bell, cross-leaved and ling (left to right in photo)

1 Can you tell the difference between these three heather species?
Cross-leaved heather prefers wetter ground and gets its name from the way that the pale green leaves are arranged around the stem. Ling and bell heather are more commonly found and you can tell them apart by the position and colour of the flowers. Bell heather has dark purple flowers that cluster in groups along the stem, whereas ling has lots of very little flowers all the way up the longer stems. The Latin name for ling, *Calluna*, comes from a Greek work meaning 'to brush' which relates to the fact that heather was once used to make sweeping brooms or 'besoms'.

When: In flower, late summer to autumn

GORSE

2 A common thorny heathland plant with its distinctive yellow coconut scented flowers thriving on the nutrient poor land. It is an important dense refuge for birds and invertebrates but does have to be managed carefully so that it doesn't encroach everywhere. It was once harvested year round for fuelling bakers' ovens.
When: In flower year round



© Jonathan Mycock

SUNDEW

3 Tiny insectivorous plants that use sticky dew drops secreted from their hairy leaves to trap insects that land on them. The round leaves slowly curl around the insect, digesting the prey. Absorbing these nutrients helps sundews to survive on the nutrient-poor heathland soil. Typically found on wetter areas of the heath, the dew was once collected by people for use as an anti-aging cream!
When: June to August



© Nigel Symington

OTHER PLANTS YOU MAY ENCOUNTER ARE:

- **Bilberry** – our native version of the blueberry. Look out for the berries along sunny woodland edges around the heaths. A delicious summer addition to the diet of our forbears and were often shipped to London to the markets. **When: Late summer to autumn**



HEATHLAND TIMELINE

Along the Serpent Trail you will encounter many small areas of heathland that were once a much larger expanse. This extremely rare habitat is the result of human activity dating as far back as 8,000 years ago.



© SDNPA

THE ROMANS
Continued to use heathland for grazing and saw the clear open spaces as ideal locations to build roads. The Roman road from Chichester to Silchester runs through Fitzhall Heath, Iping Common.



SAXONS
The word 'heath' is Anglo-saxon. Grazing was still the main use as well as collecting resources such as gorse. Land ownership and classification became more common.



MODERN
The 1805 Enclosure Act saw much heathland converted into privately owned land. Pine plantations became dominant on the sandy soils and were used for timber and resin. Commoners grazing rights were stopped which left much heathland habitat unmanaged.



TURN OF THE 20th CENTURY
Much heathland was lost as traditional grazing declined and the land was left unmanaged. Some sections started to be used for military training exercise, e.g. Parham and Graffham.



© SDNPA

BRONZE AGE
Heathland took on ritualistic importance. People created burial mounds known as barrows. Many can still be seen today, e.g. Petersfield Heath is home to one of the largest Bronze age burial grounds in the south of England.

NEOLITHIC (LATE STONE AGE)
Humans began to settle in one place, clearing woodland to raise crops. Farming caused soil acidity to rise. The nutrient drop was ideal for heathland plants such as heather and gorse but not so good for crops.



© Rebecca Saunders/SDNPA

IRON AGE
Heather was collected for fuel and building materials and land used for grazing animals. Archaeologists have found evidence of an Iron Age hill fort at Black Down.



© Butser Ancient Farm

MEDIEVAL
Heathland was often classified as common land. Local families would be granted grazing rights. 'Turbarry' allowed them to gather peat and turf for fuel, and heather for ale, dye, roofing, animal bedding or brooms (besoms).



© Rebecca Saunders

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION
The Weald was once a thriving centre of iron and glassmaking industry. Iron smelting used coppiced woodland charcoal. Glass making used potash derived from dried and burnt bracken and sand from the hills around Bexley.



© Joanna Glyde/ SDNPA

Left © Rob Groves/National Trust
Middle © Jane Chandler/SDNPA
Right © SDNPA



Heathland Today

If heathland habitat is unmanaged, the rich biodiversity is gradually lost as a small number of invasive species spread rapidly and become dominant.

Since 1800, heathland cover in the UK has declined by 80%. Recent efforts to restore and preserve areas of natural heathland through landscape scale partnerships such as the Heathlands Reunited Project, have used a variety of conservation methods.

SITE MANAGEMENT

Over time, the once large bodies of heathland have separated into smaller 'islands', making the isolated plants and animals more vulnerable to localised extinction. Careful management of heathland sites ensures that the habitat can thrive. Selectively removing Scots pine, birch and bracken allows other heathland plant species to thrive in the acidic, arid conditions. Clearing scrub also exposes the sandy soil creating basking areas for rare reptile species as well as creating good habitat for invertebrates.

CONSERVATION GRAZING

Some areas, such as Lynchmere Common, were left unmanaged and became covered in trees and scrub. As a result, the heathland wildlife that once thrived there was lost. In 1998, The Lynchmere Society bought the Common with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and began to restore the heath by using cattle to clear the scrub and keep the vegetation in check.



Heathland Stories Through Sculpture

In 2020, as part of the Heathlands Reunited Project, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the South Downs National Park Authority launched its first Sculpture Trail to tell the stories behind some of the heathland sites. Five of the seven sculptures can be found on the Serpent Trail.



© SDNPA/Sam Moore

TENNYSON QUOTE: BLACK DOWN (SERPENT TRAIL STAGE 1)

Famous poet Alfred Lord Tennyson was a keen admirer of Black Down. The sculpture quotes his words from his handwritten documents, using the same script style, and makes reference to the beautiful landscape and view from the site but also nods to its industrious past.



© SDNPA

RESTING REPTILES: WOOLBEDING COMMON (SERPENT TRAIL STAGE 5)

The heathland sites within the South Downs are home to all 12 of Britain's native amphibian and reptile species. The smooth snake is Britain's rarest and most secretive snake. The sculpture here shows the snakes curled up on a bed of birch and oak leaves which are both associated with wooded heath.



© SDNPA/Sam Moore

LAVINGTON LIZARD: LAVINGTON COMMON (SERPENT TRAIL STAGE 9)

Lavington Common provides a home for all three types of lizard that rely on the heaths; the slow worm, common and sand lizard. Sand lizards, which were once nearly extinct in Britain, are now protected by law and still classed as an endangered species.



© SDNPA/Sam Moore

SHEEP PIG: GRAFFHAM COMMON (SERPENT TRAIL STAGE 9)

The sheep pig sculpture is inspired by a map drawn in 1629 showing the heath as a common which was then used for grazing. On the original map there are small drawings of animals which look to be standing on top of one another. This inspired the sculptor to create the sheep pig.



© SDNPA

DRAGONFLIES REST: STEDHAM COMMON (SERPENT TRAIL STAGE 10)

Stedham and Iping Common are home to all five of the heathland dragonfly species found in the south of the UK. The sculpture, designed to look like the wings of a dragonfly, serves as the perfect resting spot for these species.



STAGE
1

Black Down to Marley Common

The Serpent Trail begins at Haslemere Railway Station. Follow the Serpent Trail signage along the High Street to 'Swan Barn Farm' where you emerge into an oasis of rural calm. Continue along the track following the Serpent Trail signs onto the first heathland site, **Black Down**, owned and managed by the National Trust.

This stage of the Serpent Trail will take you up to the highest point of the South Downs National Park at the beautifully named **Temple of the Winds**. Look out for the stone sculpture **1** on your way, which gives more information about the famous viewpoint and its links to Victorian poet Alfred Lord Tennyson. From here there are outstanding views across the West Weald.

Continue following the Serpent Trail signs. As you amble down some of the ancient sunken lanes and drove ways, you can feel a sense of timelessness. Traders, shepherds and chert quarrymen have been using these tracks for thousands of years.

Historically Black Down was considered to be 'manorial common waste' of the manor of River. It was divided up and given to 'commoners' within the area and commoners rights were attached to houses. This allowed local people to graze their animals, collect firewood, fish and cut

-  Cattle grazing, check site signage.
-  Ground-nesting birds: March to mid Sept.
-  Heathlands sculpture.

bracken for fires and cattle bedding and to dig up turf for roofing and fuel. Look out for the gentle belted Galloway cattle grazing here **2**. Black Down is home to a range of endemic bird species such as Dartford warbler, stonechat, woodlark and in the summer months, the enigmatic nightjar.

As you descend Black Down to the end of Stage 1 you may notice Lowder Mill, a beautiful 18th Century grade II listed building.

i PUBLIC TRANSPORT

-  Start: Haslemere Railway Station. Get here by rail or on the Stagecoach Bus 70 and Bus 71 from Midhurst or Guildford.
-  A286 Bell Road use the bus stops where buses can be caught in either direction back to Haslemere train station, Midhurst or Guildford via Stagecoach 70 and 71.

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

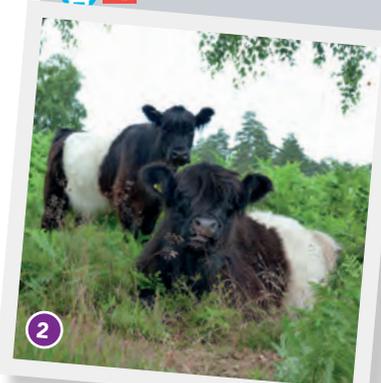


STAGE
1



1

© SDNPA/Sam Moore



2

© National Trust - Rob Groves



STAGE 2

Marley Common through Lynchmere and Stanley Commons to Iron Hill

After crossing the A286 this stage continues to follow the purple Serpent Trail 'tail route' waymarkers. Take Marley Hanger up a steep ascent to the National Trust's Marley Common. As dense woodland thins to reveal patches of heathland look out for more belted Galloway cattle which sometimes graze the common here.

The Greensand Ridge that this stage follows is a remnant of the Weald dome, part of the great Weald-Artois Anticline that runs from south-east England into northern France. Walking west towards Lynchmere Common you will begin to see some classic geological features of this escarpment such as steep wooded slopes and sandstone cliffs.

Lynchmere and Stanley Commons are managed by the **Lynchmere Society**, a registered charity setup in 1991 with help from local fundraising and a Heritage Lottery Fund grant. The Society purchased the 125 hectare lowland heath habitat in 1998 with the intention of restoring it for nature using traditional management techniques. The area is also now a Local Nature Reserve. Without this protection and management, the heathland wildlife would be lost and the land may have been sold off in small sections or now covered in dense scrub.

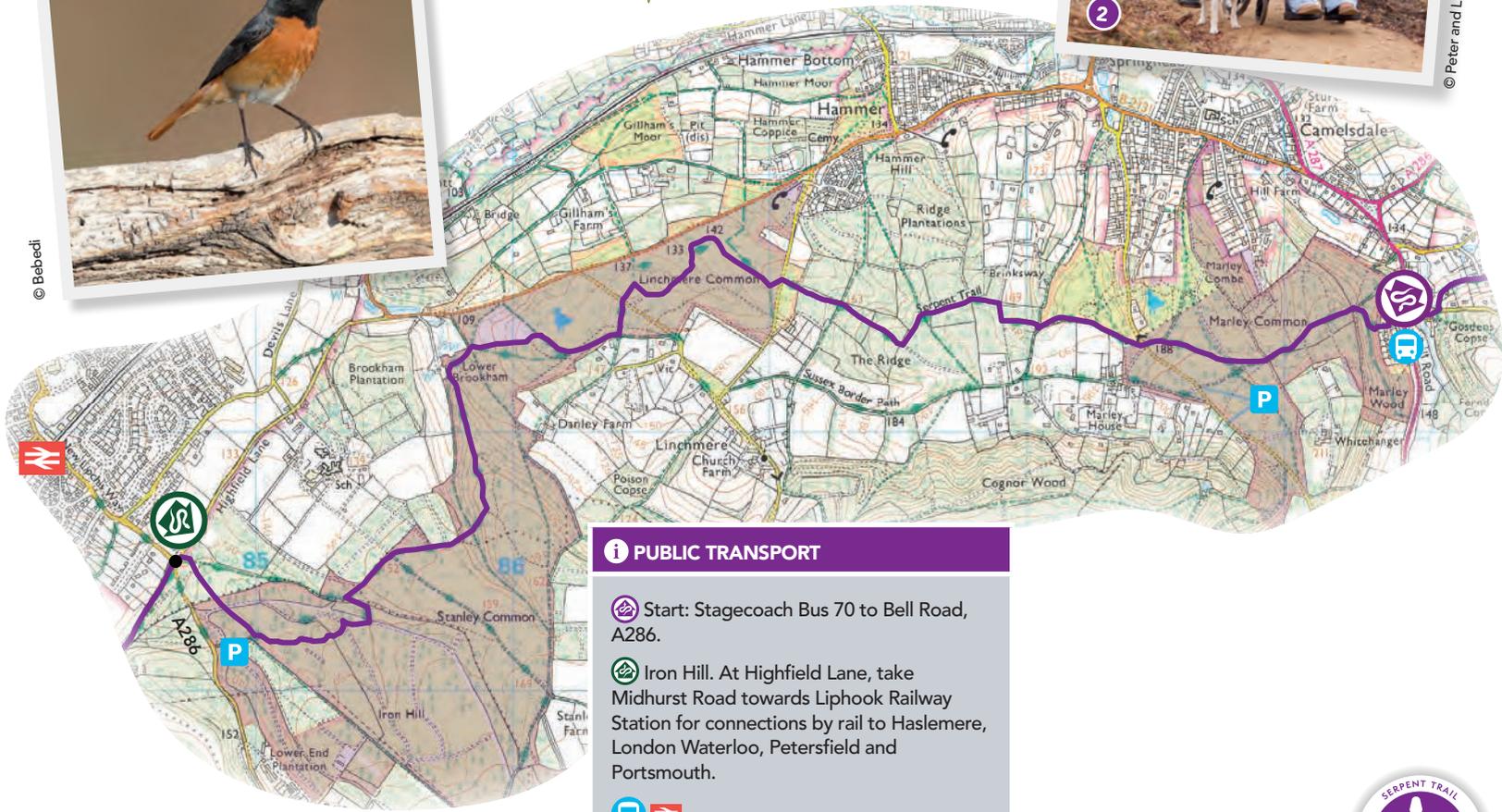
1 The common redstart, has a population stronghold on Lynchmere Common. Similar in size to a robin, with a longer tail that constantly quivers up and down, the males develop a bright orange breast and flanks which contrasts beautifully against their striking black face and throat.

2 Lynchmere also has an accessible circular path suitable for pushchairs and

-  Cattle grazing, check site signage.
-  Ground-nesting birds: March to mid Sept.



© Bebedi



PUBLIC TRANSPORT

-  Start: Stagecoach Bus 70 to Bell Road, A286.
-  Iron Hill. At Highfield Lane, take Midhurst Road towards Liphook Railway Station for connections by rail to Haslemere, London Waterloo, Petersfield and Portsmouth.



wheelchairs so that everyone can enjoy the magic of this habitat.

This stage of the Serpent Trail ends after passing through Iron Hill, a Forestry England woodland actively managed for timber with pockets of heathland.

STAGE 2



© Peter and Louise Seagriff



STAGE
3

From Shufflesheeps to Combe Hill via Chapel Common

Joining the Serpent Trail from Midhurst Road, this section begins by passing through two Forestry England sites – Shufflesheeps and Hatch Fir.

Although these woodlands are predominantly managed for timber (much like Iron Hill in Stage 2) the wide, sunny rides throughout allow heather and other dwarf shrubs to establish on the edges. These small refuges act as ‘stepping stones’ of heathland habitat in between the larger sites which are home to the main populations of rare and endemic plants and animals. **Liphook Golf Club** comes next along the track, acting as another important stepping stone by having heather in their roughs and patches of bare, sandy ground which are great for insects, reptiles and birds – **watch out for golf balls when crossing the fairway here!**

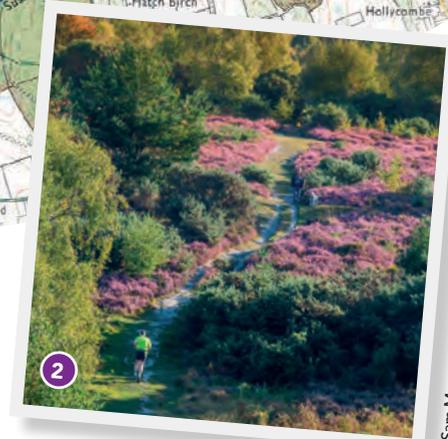
At **Chapel Common**, keep an eye out for the **silver-studded blue butterfly** and the dazzling **poplar beetle** 1 – both of these species have strongholds here as well as a myriad of orchids, acid grassland flowers and heathland bird life.

 Ground-nesting birds: March to mid Sept.

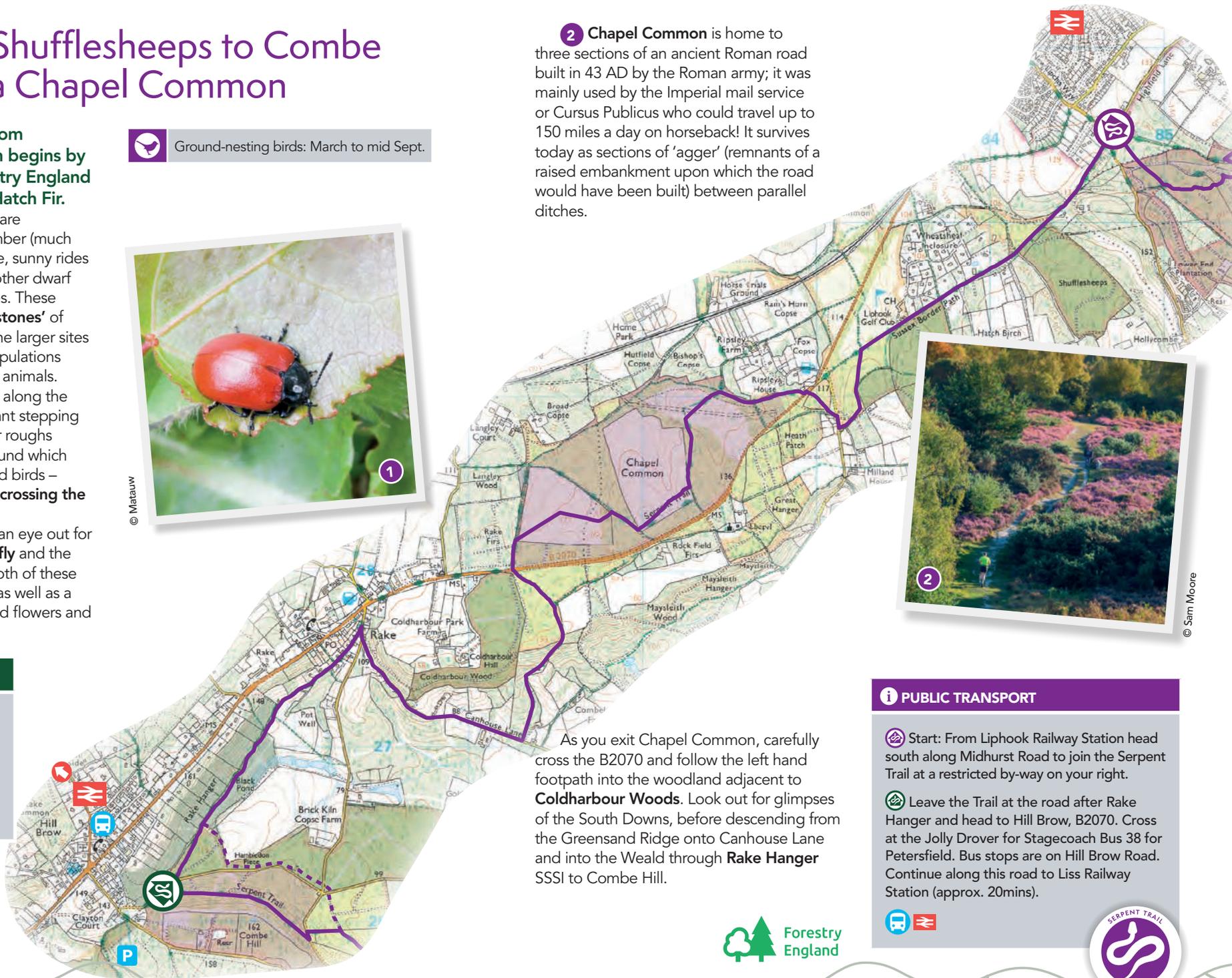


© Metauw

2 **Chapel Common** is home to three sections of an ancient Roman road built in 43 AD by the Roman army; it was mainly used by the Imperial mail service or Cursus Publicus who could travel up to 150 miles a day on horseback! It survives today as sections of ‘agger’ (remnants of a raised embankment upon which the road would have been built) between parallel ditches.



© Sam Moore



i Alternative Route

For those who would rather bypass the downhill bike course at Combe Hill, take the alternative path through Hambledon Piece and re-join the Serpent Trail at Tullecombe in Stage 4. 

i PUBLIC TRANSPORT

-  Start: From Liphook Railway Station head south along Midhurst Road to join the Serpent Trail at a restricted by-way on your right.
-  Leave the Trail at the road after Rake Hanger and head to Hill Brow, B2070. Cross at the Jolly Drover for Stagecoach Bus 38 for Petersfield. Bus stops are on Hill Brow Road. Continue along this road to Liss Railway Station (approx. 20mins).



STAGE

4

Combe Hill, Tullecombe, through Rondle Wood to Borden Lane

This section begins with a walk along a woodland track through Combe Hill – or through Hambleton Piece for those taking the alternative route – arriving at Tullecombe.

If walking through Combe Hill please be vigilant as several steep mountain bike trails cross the footpath here.

The small clearing before the car park at Tullecombe acts as a wildlife refuge and if you approach quietly, is a good place to spot birds, butterflies and deer **1**. The following stretch of the Serpent Trail does not contain any heathland, however it is a fantastic place to appreciate the surrounding woodland and the different types of land management.

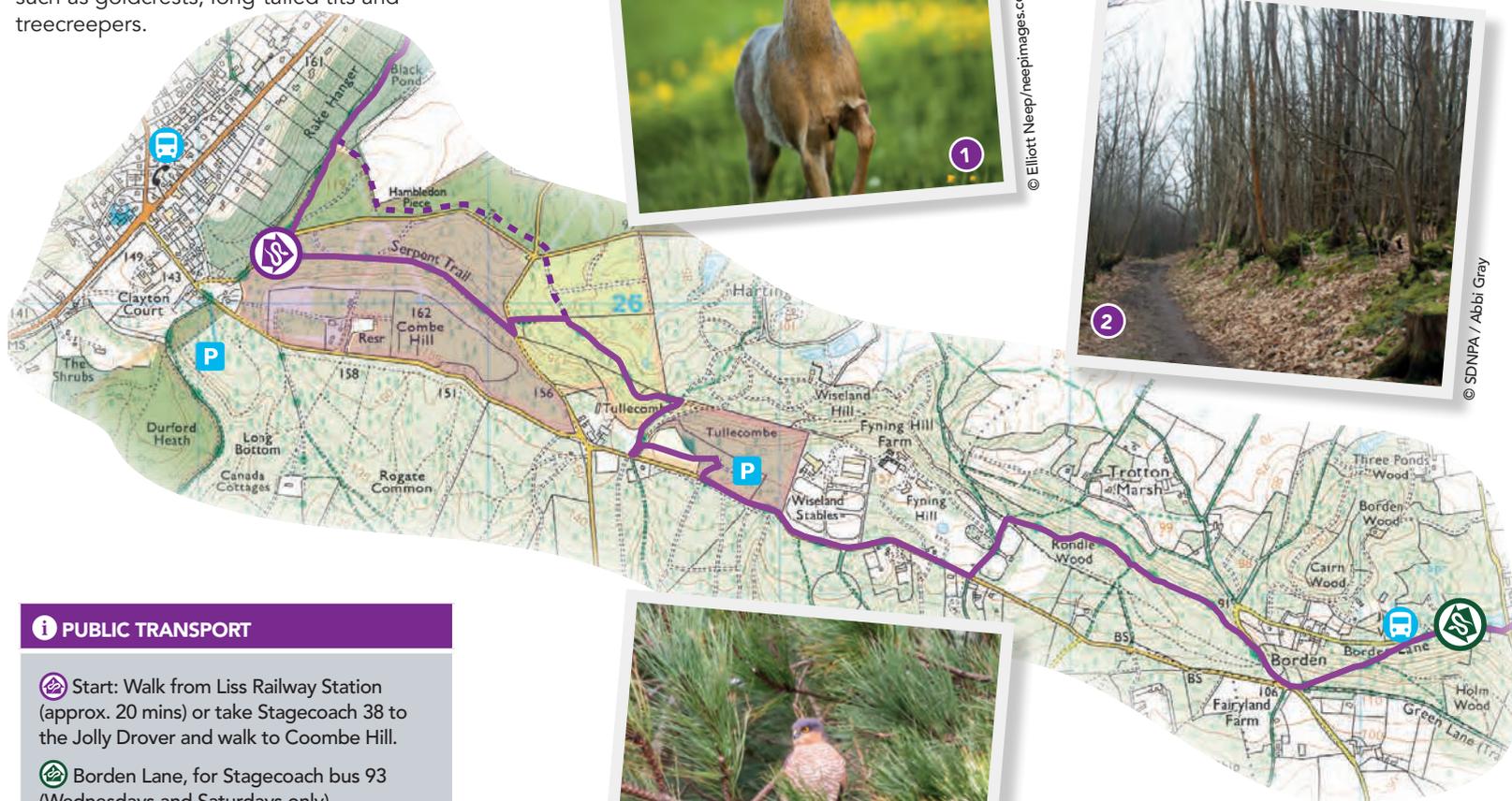
Through **Rondle Wood** **2** you will pass varying ages of chestnut coppice. This technique of cutting a tree down to its base, allowing it to re-sprout and grow, then repeating the process, means wood can be harvested from the same tree for many years; the coppice 'stools' are cut on rotation so there's a supply of appropriately-aged wood to harvest every winter.

Once past Borden the woodland changes character and pine plantation becomes the dominant canopy cover.

i Alternative Route

For those who would rather bypass the downhill mountain bike course at Combe Hill, take the alternative path through Hambleton Piece and re-join the Serpent Trail at Tullecombe.

These trees provide fantastic nesting habitat for **birds of prey** such as sparrowhawks **3**, and the flaky bark hosts an array of invertebrates which are a great food source for reptiles and small birds such as goldcrests, long-tailed tits and treecreepers.



© Elliott Neep/neepimages.com/Sussex Wildlife Trust



© SDNPA / Abbi Gray



© byjohn

i PUBLIC TRANSPORT

 Start: Walk from Liss Railway Station (approx. 20 mins) or take Stagecoach 38 to the Jolly Drover and walk to Coombe Hill.

 Borden Lane, for Stagecoach bus 93 (Wednesdays and Saturdays only).



STAGE

4



STAGE
5 Borden, Titty Hill and Woolbeding

At Milland Road there is an alternative path to Queen's Corner avoiding potentially boggy ground on Iping Marsh.

Whichever route you choose try not to miss the old **Iping Marsh churchyard** 1 and gig shed whose walls have been restored by traditional methods for wildlife habitat.

Once past **Titty Hill** the Trail passes by the village of Redford and begins the ascent up to **Older Hill** 2, where you can see evidence of pre-1900s 'Older Hill quarry'. The view from here is beautiful and is a good opportunity to see the geography of the scarp-slope of the downs rolling into the weald before climbing back up to the greensand ridge.

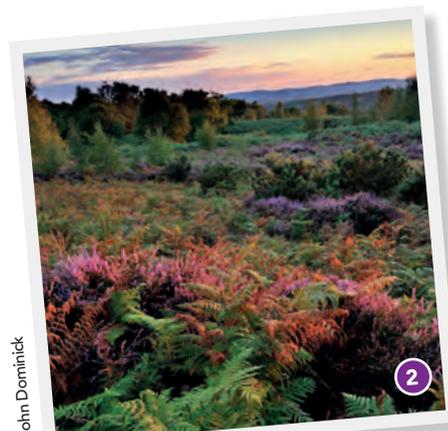
The mixture of woodland and open glades makes a perfect habitat for reptiles such as **grass snakes and slow worms** – these species can be found in sculpture form as part of the Heathland Sculpture Trail 3 just a bit further along the path on the National Trust's **Woolbeding Common**.

-  Ground-nesting birds: March to mid Sept.
-  Heathlands sculpture

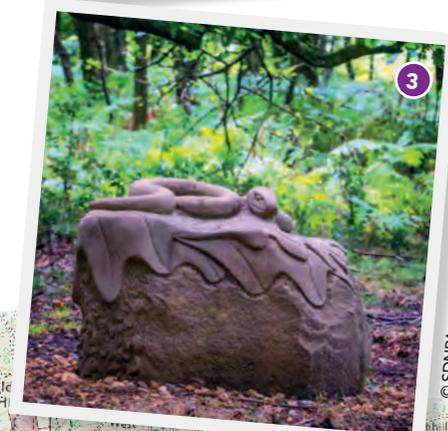
At the very end of this section please take care crossing the A286 as this is a very fast, busy road.



© SDNPA/Abbi Gray



© John Dominick



© SDNPA

STAGE
5

i PUBLIC TRANSPORT

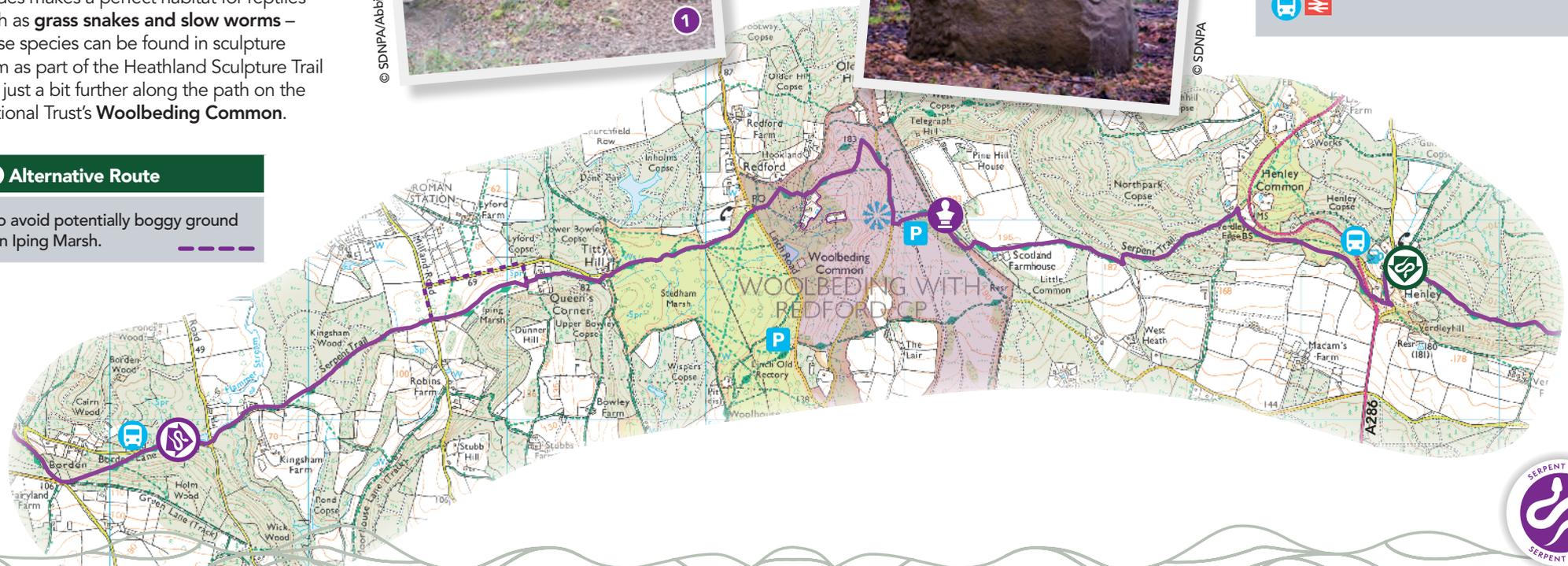
 Start: Borden Lane. Stagecoach bus 93 (Wednesdays and Saturdays only) stops near Borden Village Hall (Borden Lane).

 This section ends in Henley Village. Take care crossing the busy A286 to join the public right of way on the other side of the road. The Stagecoach Bus 70 stops near here on the A286. For buses south to Midhurst, head into the village along the right of way and then turn left and left again to take the short lane uphill back towards the main road. The south bound bus stop is at the top of this lane. For buses heading north towards Haslemere, cross the A286 and walk north along the grass verge until the bus stop comes into view. Then cross the road again. Note there are no pavements on this section of road.



i Alternative Route

To avoid potentially boggy ground on Iping Marsh. ————



STAGE

6

Henley to Petworth, via Bexleyhill, River Common and Upperton

Nearly all of the land in this section of the Serpent Trail is owned and managed by either the Cowdray or Leonfield Estates.

The character of the landscape, villages and landmarks has been shaped by the domination and connection of these historic estates.

Henley is home to many listed buildings including the attractive Duke Of Cumberland Arms. Continuing east, Verdley Woods is owned and managed by Cowdray Estate and home to a small population of re-introduced **pearl-bordered fritillary** 1, which feeds on violets as a caterpillar and relies on clearings with grass and bracken litter; the woods here are ideal for their lifecycle. Look out for adult butterflies from April to July – they have pearl-like white spots with a red border on the underside of their wing and fly close to the ground.



Ground-nesting birds: March to mid Sept.

The woodlands around **Bexleyhill** make up the Northpark Copse to Snapelands Copse SSSI, designated for its **moss, liverwort and lichen communities**; the damp, shady conditions create the perfect microclimate for these primitive plants and lichens to thrive. While the northern section of the woods was once wood pasture, it has now overgrown and is dominated by oak, beech, yew and holly – now a rare and important type of woodland in the south east. The southern section has quite a different character, being maintained as a coppice.

Carrying on through farmed landscape you pass Lord's Wood – a pocket of ancient woodland – and **Lodge Farm** with its 18th century cart bridge 2 and beautiful grade II listed barns and granary building.

The Trail continues through **River and Upperton Commons**, owned and managed by Leonfield Estate. An impressive Folly on the Eastern edge of the commons may have been a lookout for verderers and is now a grade II listed building.

An alternative route towards Petworth is through the National Trust managed **Petworth Park** 3, accessed by the Upperton Gate. This route avoids the busy A272 and takes in stunning scenery of the Park designed by Capability Brown, leading you straight into the heart of Petworth town to rejoin the Trail. Be aware that the gates are closed overnight, so make sure to check opening times before choosing this route.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

- Start: Pick up the Trail in Henley village opposite the Duke of Cumberland Public House. To get to Henley, take the Stagecoach Bus 70 from either Haslemere or Midhurst. The bus stops on the A286 (note: there is no pavement here and care must be taken when walking along the verge or crossing this busy road to join the Trail).
- In Petworth town centre for Stagecoach Bus 1 to Midhurst or Worthing, and Compass bus 99 to Chichester.

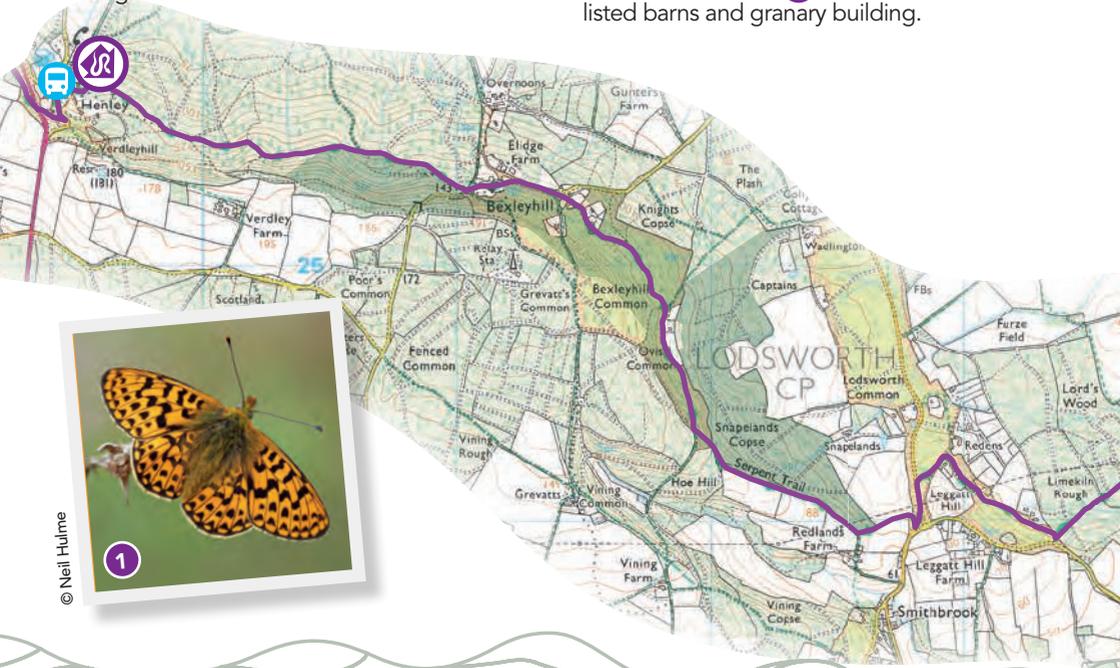


STAGE

6



© Abbi Gray/SDNPA



© Neil Hulme

© National Trust Images/Andrew Butler



STAGE 7

Petworth to Fittleworth

STAGE 7

The historic town of **Petworth** is definitely worth exploring. Many of the houses here were owned by the **Leconfield Estate** – denoted by the battleship grey, now mid brown, doors.

The Trail leaves Petworth and heads for **Flexham Park**, where commercial coppicing can really be appreciated. Look out for the neat rows of coppice stools, the variety of ages of the enclosures and the different species of trees being cultivated for various products. Many species of plant and animal benefit from this type of woodland management, an important and very cute example being the **hazel dormouse** 1.

This tiny native mammal lives most of its life in the tree canopy, only setting foot on ground to hibernate in winter. The variety of tree ages and species in coppice woodland provides a plentiful food resource and much needed connectivity between the canopy. Although their lifestyle makes the hazel dormouse very difficult to spot, you may find signs of their feeding by looking for smooth circular nibble holes in hazelnuts. Another species that utilises coppice woodlands is the nightjar, which you may recognise from being an important heathland species – it follows the clearly cut enclosures each year to nest on the open ground.

Bognor Common is just to the south and is a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The sand quarry is an important site paleogeographically with a possible volcanic source area to the south.

The Trail continues to the attractive village of **Fittleworth**. The popular community shop **Fittleworth Stores** 2 located on School Lane, opened in 2018 if

 Ground-nesting birds: March to mid Sept.



© KatPaws

you are in need of refreshment. Fittleworth also has its fair share of heritage buildings. Gingerbread and Coombe cottage can be seen when entering the village and are both grade II listed buildings, from the 17th and 18th centuries. Also look out for the 13th century St Mary's Church, a Grade I listed building designated for its tower.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

-  Start: Stagecoach Bus 1 and Compass Bus 99 go to Petworth Town Centre.
-  From Fittleworth A283, Stagecoach Bus 1 provides connections to Worthing and Midhurst.



© SDNPA



STAGE
8

Hesworth Common, Lord's Piece and Burton Park

STAGE
8

Hesworth Common, owned and managed by Fittleworth Parish Council, is home to 100 acres of woodland and pockets of heathland with beautiful views of the South Downs.

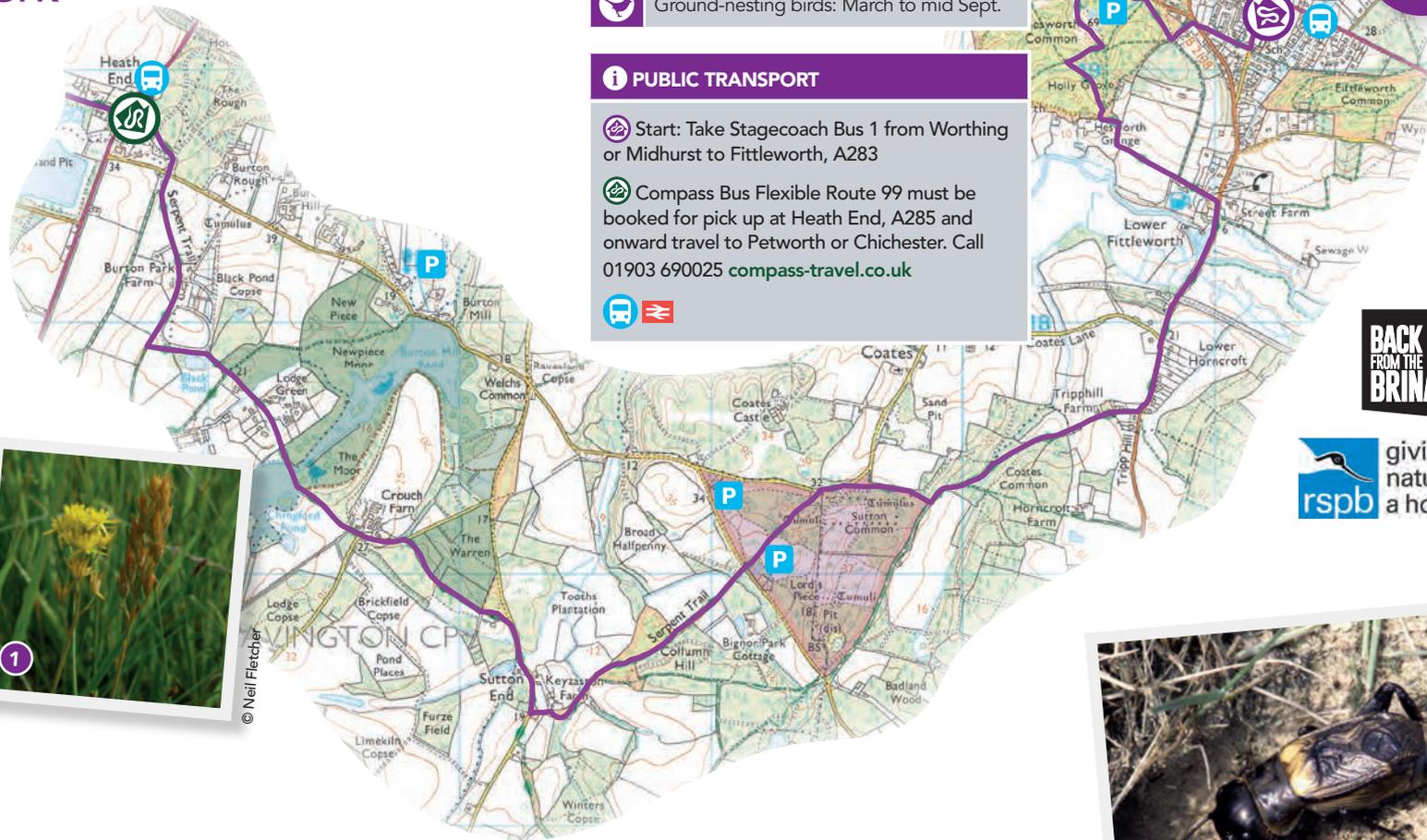
In the wet area of heath at the south-eastern corner of the common, look out for the rare **bog asphodel** **1** with its yellow star-like flowers (June to August). Once thought to cause brittle bones in grazing livestock its Latin name *ossifragum* means 'bone-breaker', but this is really due to low calcium levels in the acidic soils where it grows. Wet heath like this can easily dry up, becoming dominated by scrub and purple moor grass, so scraping areas back to the soil and encouraging ground to remain boggy is very important for the bog asphodel and many other wet-loving species.



1

Turning south along the main road at the Swan Inn in **Lower Fittleworth** look out for a view of **Fittleworth Mill**, once the subject of a JMW Turner painting which can now be seen at the Tate Gallery. The Rother has many old water mills along the river, remnants of a more industrial past. Both bridges here are Grade II listed and are classified as multi-span bridges, designed to replace fords and used for pedestrians and other historical traffic to cross.

If you look over the bridge here it is possible to see sea trout as they return from the sea to the river where they hatched to spawn. Sea trout can enter the river at any time from April onwards, but most will arrive in the summer and early autumn (June to October) and wait in deep pools or in areas of the river with good overhead tree cover until it is time to spawn.



- Cattle grazing, check site signage.
- Ground-nesting birds: March to mid Sept.

i PUBLIC TRANSPORT

- Start: Take Stagecoach Bus 1 from Worthing or Midhurst to Fittleworth, A283
- Compass Bus Flexible Route 99 must be booked for pick up at Heath End, A285 and onward travel to Petworth or Chichester. Call 01903 690025 compass-travel.co.uk

Once the Serpent Trail crosses the Rother it gradually starts to head in a westerly direction again. To the south of the Trail, **Lord's Piece** is owned and managed by Barlavington Estate and home to a small population of the **field cricket** **2**, a rare and threatened invertebrate thought to be extinct in Britain but rediscovered here in the 1970s. This is one of only six populations in the UK and is now the subject of a "Back from the Brink" project led by the RSPB.

Continuing on the Trail you pass **Burton and Chingford Ponds** Local Nature Reserve. The reserve, managed by Sussex Wildlife Trust, has the perfect habitat for a variety of bats, dragonflies and wildfowl. Keep an eye out for the Emperor dragonfly and possibly even a bittern or woodcock. If you are really lucky you may see the migrant bird of prey the hobby catching a dragonfly on the wing – the original fast food.



© Bruce Middleton

2

BACK FROM THE BRINK



STAGE
9

Duncton Common to Cocking Causeway

This section of the Serpent Trail explores several heathland sites which are home to some of the UK's rarest species, beginning with **Lavington Common and Plantation** – owned and managed by the National Trust.

This site is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and home to the rare **sand lizard** 1. Look out for the exotic green male sand lizard during the summer breeding season. Site managers are helping conservation of this species by providing the bare ground favoured for egg laying. To learn more about these rare reptiles look out for the **Lavington Lizard heathland sculpture** 2 as you continue through the common. There are also a variety of Bronze Age features at Lavington, most obviously the round barrows found towards the south of the plantation.

-  Cattle grazing, check site signage.
-  Ground-nesting birds: March to mid Sept.
-  Heathlands sculpture.

Continuing west, **Graffham Common** is owned and managed by the Sussex Wildlife Trust. This former pine plantation is a more recent example of heathland restoration and is home to some rare wet heath plants such as the beautiful **sundew**. There are also



© SDNPA/Bruce Middleton

fantastic viewpoints, at one of which you can also find the next **heathland sculpture** 3. The Sheep Pig is inspired by a map drawn in 1629.

Further along the Trail are **Ambersham** and **Heyshott Commons**, owned by Cowdray Estate. Also designated SSSIs due to the rare species found on them – one of which is Britain's rarest reptile, the **smooth snake** 4. Although you are unlikely to see this elusive and harmless species, there is plenty of other heathland wildlife to look out for (see pages 4-7 for details). Once past the main common you may spot a WWII pillbox through the trees as well as two well preserved barrows at Walkers Copse and Upper Polecats Copse.

Walking along Dunford Hollow you may notice the **Cobden monument** erected for Richard Cobden, a politician in the 1800s known for fighting for free trade.



© SDNPA/Sam Moore



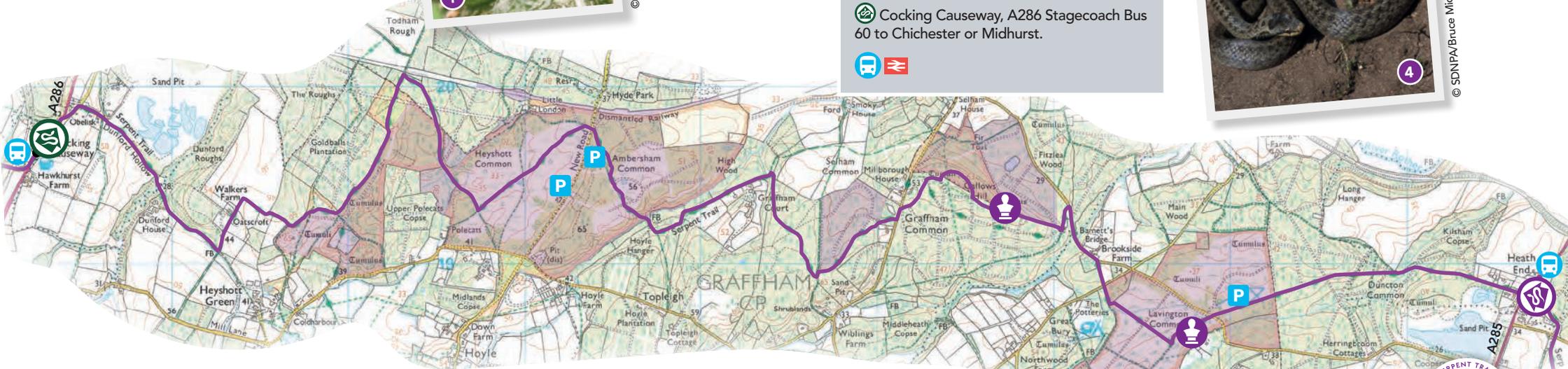
© SDNPA/Sam Moore



© SDNPA/Bruce Middleton

i PUBLIC TRANSPORT

-  Start: Heath End, A285 Compass Bus 99 from Petworth or Chichester (tell the driver you need to get off here).
-  Cocking Causeway, A286 Stagecoach Bus 60 to Chichester or Midhurst.



STAGE
9



STAGE 10 Midhurst, Stedham and Iping Commons

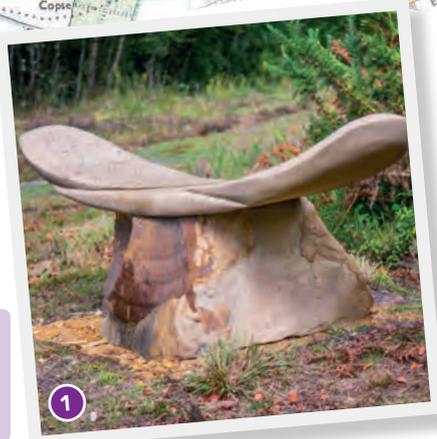
Enjoy extensive views of the South Downs as you cross Cocking Causeway and walk towards Midhurst Common, owned by Cowdray Estate.

On the south-eastern edge of this heathland, sand quarrying and brick manufacturing ran from 1919 to 1985, leaving large pools of water and sheer sandy cliffs. At the southern end of Midhurst Common are the remains of the old Petersfield to Midhurst railway line. Built by London & South Western Railway (LSWR) it opened in 1864, running passengers and freight until 1955.

-  Cattle grazing, check site signage.
-  Ground-nesting birds: March to mid Sept.
-  Heathlands sculpture.

i PUBLIC TRANSPORT

-  Start: From Cocking Causeway A286 (the Greyhound Public House) Stagecoach bus 60.
-  At Habin Hill, Nyewood for Stagecoach bus 54 to Petersfield or Chichester.



© SDNPA

Dragonflies Rest sculpture: Iping and Stedham commons are home to all five of the heathland dragonfly species, including emperor, southern hawkler, broad-bodied chaser, common darter and the golden-ringed dragonfly.

Walking through The Severals look out for the wide forestry rides which support butterflies and aid their movement from site to site – one woodland plant species here is the **common wintergreen** which thrives in dappled shade created by the large woodland tracks.

As you move through Sussex Wildlife Trust owned and managed **Stedham Common** enjoy resting at the next **heathland sculpture 1** Dragonflies Rest, and look out for the cattle that often graze here.

Crossing the road onto **Iping Common**, the long, sandy track is a good place to watch **silver-studded blue butterflies 2**



© SDNPA/Bruce Middleton



© Ismail Mungul

nectaring on bell heather in the summer, and in the evenings to listen out for churring **nightjars** and spot the green luminous bottoms of female **glow worms!** Iping Common is also a **Dark Sky Discovery Site 3**, designated for its clear open skies, away from light pollution, making it an ideal place for stargazing.

In the south-east corner of the site look out for the remains of a barrow complex and Roman road.

STAGE 10



STAGE 11

Nyewood to Petersfield

This final section of the Serpent Trail begins by heading towards West Heath Common, currently used for sand extraction.

Despite the busy quarry there remain small pockets of heath and acid grassland, important habitat stepping stones for wildlife between Iping Common and Petersfield Heath. Look out for the burial mounds to the east of the quarry.

To the west is **Durford Bridge** 1, a scheduled monument, built in the 15th century of local sandstone. To the north west of the bridge is **Durford Abbey**, the remains of a Premonstratensian monastery founded in 1181 by Henry Husey of Harting Parish. The main archaeological evidence of this site is below ground but some masonry features have been incorporated into the later farm buildings which are also listed.

Finally, the Trail snakes towards the very tip of its tail at **Petersfield Heath** 2, a popular and well-used greenspace with a large pond. Petersfield lake was created from marshland in the 18th century and now, alongside the heath, is a major recreational area for locals managed by the Town Council.

The Heath, as well as being an important site for wildlife, has much history, as shown by the numerous (21 in total) Bronze Age barrows 3. A project between 2014 and 2018 brought in archaeological teams to survey and then excavate some of the site. More information can be found at **Petersfield Museum**.

-  Cattle grazing, check site signage.
-  Ground-nesting birds: March to mid Sept.

In 1867 the Heath was enclosed, but the townsfolk burnt down the fences they thought were built to keep them out. Thankfully, residents of Petersfield now enjoy more peaceful activities and the Heath is a popular recreational space. The Serpent Trail ends here with options for refreshment or public transport in Petersfield Town centre.



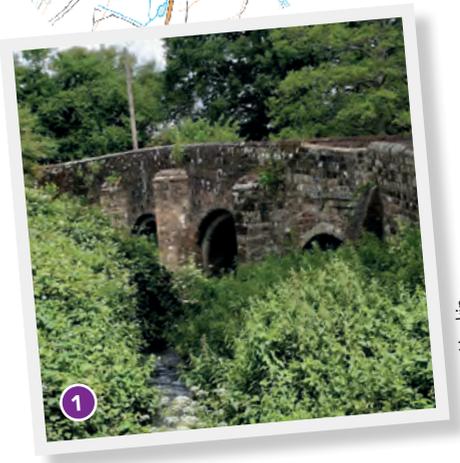
© SDNPA/A.Purkiss



© Rebecca Saunders/SDNPA

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

-  Start: Habin Hill, Nyewood, Stagecoach Bus 54 from Chichester or Petersfield.
-  The Serpent Trail ends on Petersfield Heath, head to Petersfield town centre for the Railway Station and for buses to Chichester (54) or Midhurst (91, 92, 93).



© Darren Hawkin

STAGE 11



Heathlands Reunited Partnership



Heathlands are a haven for some of Britain's rarest wildlife. They are home to all 12 of our native reptiles and amphibians.

In recent years, significant effort has gone into creating bigger, better, joined-up heathland to support and improve the isolated pockets of lowland heath that remain.

By re-engaging and inspiring communities to visit and learn more about their local heathland and the rare plant and animal species that live there, it is hoped that they can be cared for and enjoyed by future generations.

Heathlands Reunited is a partnership project where 11 partners have joined forces

to expand, reconnect and restore the existing 1% of rare lowland heath in the National Park.

The 11 project partners are the South Downs National Park Authority, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust, Forestry England, Hampshire County Council, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Lynchmere Society, Ministry of Defence, National Trust, Natural England, RSPB and Sussex Wildlife Trust.



THE HEATHLANDS REUNITED PARTNERS:



Take the Lead on the Serpent Trail

The 65 mile / 106km Serpent Trail is a perfect place to walk with your four legged friend. These are our top tips for a fun and safe visit with your dog:

- **Take the lead near livestock**
Keep your dog on the lead around cattle and never walk between a cow and her calf. If you feel threatened by cattle, let your dog off the lead and get to safety quickly.
- **Love birds?**
Stick to the paths and keep your dog close, particularly during ground nesting bird season (1 March – 15 September). Curious dogs can disturb the ground-nesting birds on heathland, causing them to abandon their nests and leave their eggs or young to die. Help protect them by sticking to the paths.
- **The scoop on picking up poop**
Always bag and bin dog poo and encourage fellow dog walkers to do the same. The countryside is full of poo, but dog mess is different to farm or wild animal droppings. Dog poo can contain worms and diseases which can be passed on to humans or livestock or contaminate the soil and water table.

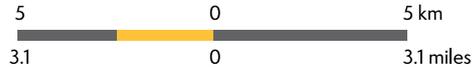
PLEASE BAG AND BIN YOUR DOG POO – ANY PUBLIC WASTE BIN WILL DO.





Key to map:

- Serpent Trail
- Stage number
- Serpent Trail stage start/finish
- Alternative Route
- Heathland site
- Countryside site
- Railway Station
- 'A' road



Contact

01730 814810

@SDNPA

#HelpTheHeaths

#SerpentTrail

/SDNPA

southdownsnp

southdowns.gov.uk



**HERITAGE
FUND**



**Heathlands
Reunited**