

## **NATURE TRAIL THROUGH LITTLEHEATH WOODS**

### **Before You Arrive:**

Please be aware that this is woodland area not a park and, as such, the paths have no hard surface material rendering them very muddy in some places from late Autumn to Spring. Ensure you wear appropriate footwear. From early summer the bramble is very fast growing and can reach out into the paths. You may wish to ensure that your legs are covered.

The paths meander up and down hill and are quite steep in places. Tree stumps and roots render many of the paths inaccessible for mobility scooters.

### **Overview:**

Littleheath Woods covers 61 acres but the Nature Trail is concentrated in the centre area. Depending on the season, as you walk the paths the Speckled Wood butterfly may dance for you and at woodland edges the Gatekeeper butterfly\* appears. You could spot foxes, grey squirrels and deer.

There are now large numbers of Ring Necked Parakeets in the woods and you will certainly hear their raucous squawking. Their presence is giving concern that they are out competing our native birds for food and nesting sites.

### **IF YOU ARE VISITING IN:**

**Early Spring** - You may see the first butterfly of the year to emerge, the bright yellow Brimstone. Very occasionally you may see a Red Admiral or a Peacock that has overwintered here. The first tree to blossom is the Cherry and soon after that the shrubby Blackthorn will flower. In late Spring the woodland is full of our beautiful native Bluebells. Fortunately, the larger, paler and unscented Spanish variety has not taken hold here.

**Summer** – The best time for spotting butterflies and wildflowers in the fields.

**Autumn** – Many types of fungi can be found, appearing and disappearing in a matter of days. Fungi are always present but only emerge above ground when it is time to release their spores. There are so many different fungi that, if you have a special interest, you should bring an identification book with you. Some of the easiest to spot are King Alfreds' Cakes (round & black), Candle Snuff (masses of tiny white filaments which, if you warm them with your breath and brush them gently they give off what looks like smoke), Bracket Fungus (looking like large plates wrapped around tree stems) and Jelly Ears (brownish, ribbed and wobbly).

Through late Autumn and Winter the coppery coloured leaves you see still clinging onto branches are Beech.

**Winter** – look out for flocks of redwings which are winter visitors and look similar to our native Song Thrush.

### **The Trail:**

This is a circular walk lasting 1½ to 2 hours depending on how fast you walk and how often you stop and The Trail covers everything you could see and hear throughout the year. What you actually find will depend on the time of year you visit. There are some main path name signs on trees, mostly at junctions, to help you navigate.

In addition to these Nature Trail Guide pages there are butterfly and wildflower identification lists which you may like to print out and take with you. There is also a link to download a tree identification app.

### Starting Your Walk:

You can join at either Foxearth Rd entrance, **Point 1**, (next to house number 47) or Queenhill Steps entrance, **Point 5**, (at the junction of Queenhill and Littleheath Roads). If you are joining at Queenhill Steps, please turn to **Point 5** in the text.

**Enter the woods from Foxearth Rd and go straight ahead.** (Queenhill Path) On the right as you go uphill there is a large Crab Apple tree. In the autumn when the fruit falls this area smells positively alcoholic! Growing on the left is a large clump of raspberry canes. There are several areas of both raspberries and redcurrants in the woods and, although they do bear some fruit, they don't get enough light to ripen properly. It is likely that all these have arrived in the woods courtesy of our feathered friends.

At the top of the slope you reach a crossroads, **Point 2**, with a Permissive Bridleway post on the right.

### Turn Left at this crossroads

Along this path, on the right, you will soon pass Keyhole Pond. It is really two ponds but, in times of prolonged rainfall, they join in the middle, hence the name. Usually however they remain separated by a narrow strip in front of which is Hazel, Holly, Black Bryony and Wild Rose. The latter's pale flowers appear between May & August followed by red hips in the autumn. This pond, in common with the other two within the woodland, is rainwater fed and will often dry out in the summer months but not before it is host to a mass of frogs' spawn in early spring followed by tadpoles as long as water remains in it long enough. The lance shaped leaves in the pond belong to the Yellow Iris which unfortunately rarely flowers due to low light levels.

Opposite the pond is an area mostly planted with Hazel under Oaks. Beneath the Hazel, Bluebells appear in April/May with Goldilocks Buttercups along the path edge. These are followed by the tiny white flowers of Cleavers in the summer, also called Goose Grass or Sticky Willy, most will know it from the little round green fruits which stick to clothing and pets! Also along this path, in early spring, are the bright yellow flowers of the ground hugging Lesser Celandine. As you reach the end of this path, **Point 3**, opposite is a large patch of Alexanders. This tall, yellow flowered member of the umbellifer family flowers late Spring/early Summer and is common in coastal areas but rarely found inland. Despite this, there are several patches within Littleheath Woods.

### Turn Right and keep right.

Take care along this path at first as the twisted web of tree roots make interesting pattern but can be hazardous under foot. In April & May both sides of this path are a frothy white blanket of another member of the Umbellifer Family – Cow Parsley or, as we prefer - Queens Anne's Lace.

Surrounding the paths here is dense bramble. Much of the ground in Littleheath Woods is covered in bramble and, being extremely invasive, it smothers bluebells and other wildflowers as well as newly planted saplings and coppice stools. It does however provide cover and homes for many of the woodland fauna such as mice and shrews, and long tailed tits will build nests in the taller patches. The flowers provide nectar for butterflies and bees. The blackberries in Autumn are a good food source for birds as well as the mice and shrews. Unfortunately there are no hedgehogs in the woods as there is a large population of badgers here and the two species don't cohabit. Despite the benefits to wildlife, the bramble does need to be carefully managed to attain a balance in woodland flora.

**At the end of this Path is a junction, 5. To your left is the Queenhill Steps Entrance.**

**Take the path on your Right marked with a Queen Hill Path sign high up on an oak tree.**

### If you are starting the walk from QueenHill Steps

**Walk straight ahead to a staggered junction** (noting the tall Red Campion about half way along on your right. which can flower continuously from Spring to Autumn although the flowers are actually dark pink rather than red).

**6. Take the 2<sup>nd</sup> Right marked with a Queen Hill Path sign high up on an oak tree.**

Along this path you will arrive at a seat which is opposite one of two areas in the woods in which disease resistant Elms were planted in 2014. Elm trees, once a quintessential part of the English countryside, were virtually wiped out in late 1960s and 1970s by Dutch Elm disease; it's estimated that over 25 million trees in this country alone fell prey to the disease. This experimental reintroduction has been planted in memory of Paul Shaw who was a well known and prominent member of the Selsdon community for many years until his sudden death in 2012 and has been funded by a generous donation from his family.

In mid/late summer behind the Elm area there are Rowan Trees heavy with berries.

You may hear the Greater Spotted Woodpecker drumming at any time during your walk through the woods as well the Green Woodpecker's distinctive call which sounds like laughter. In Springtime and Summer listen out for birds such as robin, great tit, nuthatch and blackbird. The tiny wren has a powerful tune as does the song thrush. Summer brings visitors such as blackcap and chiff-chaff whose song gives his name. Crows and jays make a raucous sound and may signify the presence of a bird of prey such as sparrow hawk or kestrel.

### **Moving on, at the crossroads, 2, turn left.**

Along this path in late spring, the area on the right is a sea of bluebells.

At the end of this path you come to another staggered junction, 7, and opposite are areas of Hazel coppicing. Coppicing is an historical method of managing trees as a crop which can be harvested on a regular cycle. The tree is cut down to the base of the trunk, creating a "stool" from which multiple stems or "poles" grow, this is done every 5-9 years depending on the thickness of the stems required. In the past much of the rural economy was based on coppicing, the product being used for building, fencing, fuel, furniture and tools to name but a few. Most of our native broadleaved (deciduous) trees can be managed in this way but the most commonly used is Hazel. It is thought that, coppiced correctly and regularly, a Hazel tree can live indefinitely.

These days, there is very limited demand for coppiced products but the Friends do produce bundles of stakes, bean poles and binders both for our own use and for use by local residents in exchange for a small donation. A more important consequence is the benefit to flora and fauna of opening up the woodland floor regularly. When the regrowth is still small, numerous patches of primroses\* may be seen here in early spring.

### **Turn left at this staggered junction.**

Immediately on your left, before you start going downhill, is a large area of bramble, bindweed & nettles. Although the nettle is not very popular with us because of its sting, it is vitally important to several varieties of butterfly which lay their eggs there and, once hatched, nettle leaves are the food source for the caterpillars. Growing amongst these nettles is the Hedge Wound Wort with its purple flower spikes and nettle-like leaves and the White (flowered) Dead Nettle. Still within local living memory this nettle swathe was a grassy area where locals would picnic and play cricket.

A little further on is the Green (or Old) Pond. The ring of mature trees at the back and uphill denote the original edges of the pond which was filled in by the Council just after the war following a drowning. This has been partially excavated now and a Hawthorn hedge has been planted around the pond to make it safe with the thought that, sometime in the future, the picnic area may be restored.

Continuing downhill there are masses of raspberry and redcurrant canes on the left. All the way down the path is edged with Enchanters' Nightshade and some bindweed on the right. As you progress, the hazel coppice block on the right gives way to some Alder which particularly like the damp conditions found at the bottom of the hazel coppice slope. You will reach a seat on the left of the path and, continuing downhill, on the right was an area of self seeded ash saplings which had been nurtured over a number of years but sadly they, along with the other ash trees in the area, have fallen prey to the Ash Die Back disease (Chalara). They are all being monitored and it may be that some prove to have partial resistance and recover - it is too early to tell.

Near to the path on the right a series of Wild Service trees have been planted and thrived for 9 years. They have attractive creamy white flowers, brown berries and good autumn colour. Although native, they are now uncommon and unfortunately seem particularly attractive to squirrels who have now stripped the bark from many, either killing them or effectively destroying them as trees. We are now attempting to save them by protecting the trunk with plastic tube as far up as is possible but they may still be attacked further up.

Further down you will come to a seat on the right, exactly opposite this on the left is a Larch tree. The Larch has needles, like a Christmas Tree, rather than leaves but is still deciduous and its distinctive trunk is a pink-brown colour with scaly-topped ridges.

### **At the bottom of the slope, 8, turn left into the Field.**

Clears Croft is the smaller of two fields within the boundaries of Littleheath Woods and was apparently cultivated for potato growing during the Second World War. The view from the top of the field shows how high Selsdon is, looking south-west out over Purley & Banstead - a wonderful spot to view a summer sunset with thoughtfully provided benches and tables on both sides. Behind you at the top of the field is Blackthorn, a native shrubby, spiny plant best

known for its small black fruits known as sloes which are used to make sloe gin. Unfortunately, being largely in the shade, these clumps don't fruit well.

**Follow the left hand side of the field downhill towards the 6 fruit trees planted near the bottom, Site 9.**

Just before you reach these, between June & September you may be able to find several clumps of the bright orange Fox & Cub (*Pilosella aurantiaca*). This member of the daisy family is also known as orange hawkweed and is extremely attractive to pollinating bees and butterflies as a valuable nectar source. There are also clumps of Ox-Eye Daisy.

The trees in this mini orchard are Damson, Greengage, Victoria Plum, 2 Apple (eating & cooking) and Quince. If you are visiting the woods in Autumn, you are welcome to sample any fruits there may be. At the very bottom of the field to slightly to the right of the orchard is a huge Privet. This is commonly used as hedging and rarely allowed to attain this size. In early summer it's a mass of small white flowers, followed by berries in Autumn.

**Walk along the bottom of the field past an exit (Littleheath Rd/Brent Rd junction)**

In the far corner, **Site 10**, is a mixed planting, particularly showcasing two of our 5 evergreen native trees – Juniper and Box (the other 3 being Yew, Holly and Scots Pine). Both male and female juniper plants are required for the female to produce the fruits which are best known for flavouring gin - you will usually see both green and black (unripe and ripe) berries at the same time. Behind the junipers to the left are two box plants which are most familiar as a widely cultivated garden hedging plant especially popular for topiary. Box is rarely seen at its full height of 12 metres and its wood is so dense that it will sink in water. **Walk back up the field, keeping to the left.**

On your left the field edged with gorse which produces bright yellow flowers at any time of the year and partway along is a small broom bush. You will also notice many molehills in the grass of this field as well as the larger field you will visit later.

**At the top of the field there is another table and seat and just beyond these, Point 11, take the path on the left going uphill**

As you leave the field on both sides are patches of wood sage (no relation to the culinary variety). This is not a particularly appealing plant but it is relatively uncommon.

As you near the top of the second rise on this uphill path, there is a small path on the left path leading to a planted area which is one of the 5 sites of "Continuous Cover Forestry" that has been created within the woods. This is a process whereby small areas of woodland are opened up by felling very old and failing trees. The resulting gap in the canopy then allows for natural regeneration and/or planting of saplings which then form the "next generation" of woodland trees. This type of forestry is particularly important in areas of woodland where the canopy trees are all of a similar age, thus presenting the danger of them all failing at the same time and eradicating the woodland. **Site 11a.** Both sides are a mixed planting of Oak, Cherry & Hazel with some naturally regenerated Birch and Whitebeam. The latter can easily be identified by the white, downy appearance of the underside of the leaves. It is said that the local area of Whyteleafe was named for the large number of Whitebeam that originally grew there.

On a hot day this area is a sun trap and is alive with butterflies, especially Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers, Ringlet, and Commas. A White Admiral has also been seen here, this butterfly favours clearings in woodlands and lays its eggs on honeysuckle which you will notice growing through the bramble and up many of the trees once you **Return to the main path.**

Continuing up the path you are surrounded by Oak trees and on the right is a gravel pit. This excavation was initiated during a period when this was part of a larger woodland used for hunting and the pebbly material utilised to improve the pathways. At the top of this path is a glade of oaks over Blackheath pebbles. Other trees here are misshapen and bent and to the right you will see exposed gnarled tree roots.

**Walk straight across the glade and take the wider downhill path slightly to the right.**

On this path you are again surrounded by Oak trees.

**When you reach a crossroads, 12, turn right onto the Vanguard Way**

The Vanguard Way is a long distance walk of around 66 miles (106 km) from East Croydon to Newhaven on the south coast. The walk was developed in celebration of the 15th anniversary in 1980 of the Vanguard's Rambling Club, who

named themselves after an occasion when they returned from a walk travelling in the guard's van of a crowded train. It crosses Littleheath Woods from Croham Valley Rd to the Addington Rd

The right hand side of this path is a sea of Bluebells in late Spring. As you progress sharply downhill, walk carefully as this part of the Vanguard Way is excessively muddy in wet periods, along some of the way you will be able to stay on higher ground to the left. Also on the left is a large area of Sweet Chestnut. You will notice some are multi stemmed, indicating they have been coppiced in the past. Chestnut is a very hard wood and resists decay almost as well as oak. For this reason it has always been popular for posts and fencing. All the benches in the woods have been constructed by the Friends from fallen Chestnut trees.

**At the crossroads, Point 13, at the very bottom of this path turn left into Fallen Oak Field.**

Walk directly ahead part way along the path mown through the grassland, then turn around to face the way you have just come.

In front of you, rising up on the right along the field edge towards the Pylon, are two seats and the field edge is planted with a mixture of traditional hedgerow plants - Hawthorn, Hazel and Guelder Rose. Further along the edge towards the pylon in the summer you will see the tall, spikey, pink flowered clumps of Rose Bay Willow Herb.

The Sweet Chestnut trees along this edge are particularly good fruiterers. There are many Sweet Chestnut trees in the woods which can provide generous hauls of edible chestnuts for culinary uses. These are distinct from conkers which come from the Horse Chestnut tree which tends to be happier in more open situations than woodlands provide and so there are few of these in Littleheath Woods.

Along the field edge on your left, partially hidden in summer by another patch of Rose Bay Willow Herb, is a "Laid Hedge". Hedge laying is a country skill that has been practised for centuries and is achieved by partially cutting through a saplings' main growing stem and bending it over almost horizontally then binding it in place. Any tree suitable for coppicing can be used – Hazel, Chestnut, Willow, Ash and largely, in this particular case, Hawthorn. Although a well-laid hedge looks beautiful, the original aim was to create a barrier to stop sheep, cattle and other live stock from straying. Once it has thickened, it has the added bonus of being very beneficial to wildlife providing shelter and nesting sites.

On your right in the field itself is a circle of wood which looks like the trunks of felled trees. In fact they are sections of fallen trees that have been sunk into the ground and are popular with groups such as scouts and guides.

Not far inside the field is an area where the turf and topsoil has been scraped off into a bank. This is part of the Butterfly Conservation Organisation's borough wide "Brilliant Butterflies Project". It is hoped that the project will help increase butterfly numbers by establishing additional wildflowers and to this end a number of different plants and seeds have been introduced. Wildflowers generally required very nutrient poor soil to thrive and planting them in the sub soil achieves this.

The field has neutral to acid soil and therefore does not support the variety of wild flowers found in chalk grassland. Nevertheless in late spring and summer there is still plenty to be found. If you have the time to explore you will find, hugging the ground, the bright yellow pea-like flowers of Birds Foot Trefoil and Meadow Vetchling as well as the dainty white stars of the Lesser Stitchwort. Also present are other plants typical of acid grassland such as Heath Bedstraw, Common Catsear, Mouse-eared Hawkweed and Tormentil. Taller are clumps of the cheerful, yellow flowered St John's Wort (Hypericum), cultivated varieties of which are popular garden plants. The very tall white flowers, reminiscent of cow parsley, are in fact Hogweed, the sap of which can be an irritant. Look closely at the flower and you are likely to see at least one Red Soldier Beetle which find this plant particularly attractive. Unfortunately Hogweed is very invasive and has to be controlled to prevent it from crowding out all the other wildflowers. Mid to late summer the purple, thistle like flowers of numerous clumps of Black Knapweed can be seen; these are very popular with the Common Blue butterfly. The most prevalent butterfly in the field is the Meadow Brown, though the less common Marbled White, Essex Skipper and Small Copper can also be seen in the height of summer.

**Turn around and make your way to the cluster of silver birches and gorse, Site 14, on the high point (still in sight of the path by which you entered the field).**

There are several more sunken trunks here from which you can rest in the shade to survey this part of field. In the Autumn examine the grass in this area very carefully and you may be lucky enough to find the most iconic of toadstools – the Fly Agaric (red with white spots) which is commonly found where birch trees grow.

**Cross to the nearest field edge and, turning left, walk to the seat, 15.**

Here, if you look back past the Birch stand and over the roofs of the houses below, you will see the church tower of Royal Russell School.

**Continue walking along the field edge away from your field entry point until you find another seat, 16.**

Some way into the field from here a large patch of Greater Yellow Rattle appears in early summer. Also several clumps of the lovely Devils Bit Scabious can be found in late summer.

**Continue to walk along the field edge for about 25 metres from this seat and turn into the first path on the right 17.**

The path rises up and as you follow it you will see on your right the Cattle Pond, another rain fed area of water. Behind and above this, the concrete structure you can just glimpse through the trees is a water tower.

The numerous clumps of Irises in the pond rarely flower due to low light levels. In the summer you are likely to see dragonflies and damselflies (smaller) skimming the water and circling the pond in search of their prey - mostly midges and mosquitos.

**At the T junction turn right**

**Continue on this path, and, when you reach a crossroads with an oak tree in the middle, go straight on. Keep following this uphill path until you reach a T junction, 18, which is the Vanguard Way. Uphill, to your left, you will see a marker post but you need to turn right and go downhill.**

As you follow this path downhill you will see a large patch of Rhododendrons on the left. This is one of two patches in the woods and, although not native, are popular with local residents. The Friends keep them strictly under control to prevent them spreading. Just above this patch is a new CCF area.

Eventually you will come to a finger post on the left which mentions, amongst others, the London Loop which passes through the woods. The London Outer Orbital Path — more commonly called "The London Loop" — is a 240-kilometre (150 mi) signed walk along public footpaths, and through parks, woods and fields around the edge of Outer London, described as "the M25 for walkers".

On your right is Fallen Oak Field and on your left, just past the finger post, is another CCF area which has been planted with Cherry, Wild Service, Oak, Hazel, Field Maple & Small Leaved Lime together with some Guelder Rose at the edge.

Continuing on this path edged with Enchanters Nightshade, you will be able to see more closely the laid hedge mentioned earlier.

**At the bottom of this path you reach the junction, 13, by which you first entered Fallen Oak Field. Turn Left. (Fields Path)**

This wide path or "ride" takes you gently uphill. In Springtime the bank on your right is a dazzling succession of buttery Yellow Celandine, Wood Anemone (white starry flowers), Bluebell and (at the front) Yellow Archangel. Later you will see the pink flowering Herb Robert which is a member of the Cranesbill family. You can tell from the leaves that it is closely related to the garden variety geraniums.

A number of mature trees have been removed from the edges of this "Ride", mostly dying ash, very old birch and a couple of badly misshapen oaks. This work has been done to facilitate the widening of the Ride. Rides are open, sunny corridors through the woodland, where taller trees have been removed to allow more light in, helping a wider variety of wildlife to flourish. At the edge of the path grow short, small plants such as grasses, herbs and flowers, which butterflies will thrive on. This short vegetation gives way to the shrubby growth like bramble, and then further from the path edge there are small trees that graduate into full woodland with taller, more mature trees and a shadier understory. They often form a link between open areas or glades thus creating a wildlife corridor. According to the Forestry Commission, the greatest benefit is gained when the width of the ride is equal to or greater than the height of the adjacent canopy trees. It is unlikely that the rides in Littleheath Woods will attain that width but nevertheless there will still be great benefits.

Rides are important because establishing woodland edge habitats, which are sunnier and warmer than the woodland proper, create a high level of species diversity. The Forestry Commission estimates that a greater number of species



inhabit the first 10 metres of any woodland edge or ride edge than inhabit the remainder of the woodland. Although Littleheath Woods contains two fields and therefore, it would seem, plenty of “woodland edge”, mostly the tall, canopy trees grow around the boundaries, thus negating the benefit of the edge habitat. Edge habitats benefit many species, particularly rare and declining woodland butterflies such as the small pearl-bordered fritillary and the white admiral. The latter, a classic woodland species in the UK has recently suffered a decline in numbers. These big butterflies can be seen from late June until early August, flying up and down ride edges under the dappled light. The Butterfly Conservation Society also lists Skippers, Black Hairstreaks, Fritillaries and Purple Emperors as particular beneficiaries of rides. The herb layer supports a larger invertebrate population generally with subsequent benefit to birds and small mammals

**Carry on straight up this ride. Shortly before the top there is a small path on the left 19**

On the right is small open area or glade. The grass in this glade is cut periodically and the hazels are coppiced regularly to prevent them creating too much shade. You may notice several Buddleia bushes here which, although not native, are so attractive to butterflies that they have been given special permission to be in this one part of the woodland. In the Spring this area is full of bluebells and the small white stars of Greater Stitchwort. The bramble surrounding the glade is woven to form a hedge, the bramble flowers also being a good source of nectar. A good variety of butterflies have been attracted to this open area, amongst them Silver Washed Fritillaries, Peacocks, Red Admirals, Commas and Small Coppers.

**Continue along the narrow path that runs past the glade and gradually winds uphill.**

Take care at the start of this path – in the early summer months the bramble is rampant and quickly reaches out into the path with its sharp thorns.

The top of this path brings you out into the lovely Beech Glade, **Site 20**. This area is extensively used by Forest Schools and you will notice evidence of their activities. See our website for more information about Elmhurst Schools' adventures.

The Beech trees are around 150 years old - pause to stand under one of the magnificent veteran trees and look up. In the springtime especially enjoy the dark outline of the branches against the lime green of the new leaves and commit it to memory because once these lovely trees die (and all like them) there will be few to replace them. The beech tree is the grey squirrels absolute favourite to predate upon. Once the tree reaches about 20ft tall the squirrel will nibble out the growing tip and strip the bark. The tree may not die but it will effectively become a shrub rather than a canopy tree. The squirrel will attack many trees in this way and are considered one of the greatest threats to the future of our woodlands.

**Walk straight across the glade and find the narrow downhill path in the left hand corner. When you reach the bottom of this path, 21, turn right.**

As you carry straight on this long path, which starts to wind uphill after a while, you will see a number of Yew Trees. These are another of our native evergreen trees and are one of the longest lived of all trees, some found in cemeteries pre date the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The leaves are toxic as are the seeds contained within its red berries. However, birds that feed on the berries cleverly seem to be able to leave the seeds undigested and so are not harmed. Most remarkably of all is the fact that chemicals in yew tree needles are used to create cancer fighting drugs. They are however quite fast growing and their spread has to be controlled as does the other evergreen native which is prevalent in this area of the woods – Holly.

Wherever a holly branch touches the ground it roots and creates another plant. Very soon an ever expanding “thicket” is created and so they do need to be controlled to prevent them overwhelming the woodland.

**As you reach the very top of this path, at a T junction, 22, you will see a seat opposite**

On the left is a badger sett, one of many in Littleheath Woods. This is a large sett and all the bare earth humps are evidence of holes dug over many years. Main setts can be hundreds of years old and have several entrances. If you carefully examine any soft earth at the entrance to one of the holes you should see their pawprints.

On your right is a small area of Elderberry trees with Box bushes to the front. The fruit and flowers of this understory tree can be used to make wine and cordials. There are many elder trees within the woods unfortunately, without regular maintenance, they have a tendency to fall over.

**Turn right at this T junction**

As you approach the Foxearth Rd entrance, you will notice, in common with the rest of the woodland, some trees with ivy growing up the trunk. Ivy presents woodland management with a dilemma. Contrary to popular belief, Ivy itself does little damage to the tree it climbs and it is very important to wildlife. The nectar, pollen and berries of Ivy are an essential food source for insects and birds during autumn and winter when food is scarce. When the growth thickens up it provides shelter for insects, birds, bats and other small mammals. The high fat content of the berries is a nutritious food resource for birds and they are eaten by a range of species including thrushes, blackcaps, woodpigeons and blackbirds.

The problem with Ivy occurs when it reaches the top of the tree trunk and spreads into the tree canopy. This has the effect of making it quite wind resistant and will cause the tree to uproot and fall in high winds. For this reason, once ivy does reach the canopy, sections are cut out of the lower growth so that everything above that point will die off, thus protecting the tree but allowing the ivy to begin its ascent once again.

**Continue along this path until you reach the Foxearth Rd entrance you came in by, **Point 1**, thus completing your circular route.**

**If you started at Queenhill Steps, follow the first part of the walk from **Point 1** which will take you back to your starting point, **Point 5**.**



