

The Red Trail

Near the top of the meadow we find...

D. Common Hawthorn
Crataegus monogyna



Several Hawthorns along here mark the remains of an ancient trackway which can be made out going towards town (and in certain lights, the remains of what was a house can just be made out under the grass). Hawthorn was often used as a boundary-marking tree, and although it rarely grows to a significant height, it usually is very long lived and its trunk can often form weirdly twisted shapes as it ages. It is also known as the May tree, its white blossom appearing in the month of May. There are many old legends and customs associated with this tree.

From here, go back downhill across the other footbridge and return to the yellow trail.

Brockhill Country Park

Once part of a Norman manor’s estate, the park lies between the coast and the North Downs, and is part of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

FACILITIES: Brockhill Café (open daily) ● Play area; Picnic areas ● Car park (charges apply) ● Toilets ● Information. The park is open from 9am to dusk, every day except Christmas Day.

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This leaflet was produced as a legacy of the Kent Heritage Trees Project, a five year project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund celebrating Kent’s tree heritage. A significant achievement of the project was the recording of over 10,000 heritage trees – trees that are old, wide, rare or have a story to tell. Visit tcv.org.uk/kentheritagetrees to view the tree finds and map.

This is one of a series of leaflets created by volunteers to encourage people of all ages to explore the outdoors, learn about nature and heritage trees and enjoy the Kentish countryside.

The Kent Heritage Trees Project was developed and run by The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), a charity that works with thousands of people across the UK, helping them to discover, improve and enjoy their local green spaces and by doing so create happier and healthier communities.

www.explorekent.org

Find out more about the continuing work of TCV and how you can become involved, visit www.tcv.org.uk

Kent Heritage Trees Project is managed by

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The Tree Trails

Kent Heritage Trees Project

Brockhill Park Tree Trail



When the Victorians took over Brockhill Park, they “landscaped” the estate, felling many trees to provide the inhabitants of the house with a view of the sea. There are nevertheless many spectacular trees remaining, and two trails have been created:

→THE YELLOW TRAIL is 0.8 miles (1.3km),

and takes about half an hour to walk. From the café/car park it goes through the former deer paddock, an attractive grassy area with veteran Oak trees, passing the Walnuts, curving downhill to the Victorian lake, once the centrepiece of the estate. The lake is fringed with unusually tall Alders, some Beech, Ash, Elm, Laurel, and ferns. The micro-climate here enables a wide variety of wildlife, and (unusually for this part of England) ferns growing on some of the larger trees, as well as a wide variety of lichen enjoying the moist, clean air.

These paths are surfaced, but there are a few steps and slopes.

→THE RED TRAIL extends about an additional 1m (1.5km) further into the Valley taking about 30 minutes. This is the largest area of the park, where large Oaks, Hazel stools and Field Maples can be found. Follow the course of the Brockhill Stream as it winds down through meadows towards Hythe’s Royal Military Canal. The famous Hollow Oak is found in the middle of one of the meadows.

Paths here are unsurfaced and often muddy; and the livestock usually found grazing here would appreciate dogs being on leads.

This is a fallen Ash tree, used by many as a natural climbing frame. Recently, people have started to knock coins into its crevices, for good luck, or to make a wish. Beware: it is said that removing a coin from the tree will bring bad luck to the thief!



A. The “Wishing Tree”

From the far tip of the Lake, the Red Trail goes further than the Yellow Trail. In an enclosed education area (not accessible when in use by schools) a little downstream from the lake, on the right, is...



B. Crocodile log

Cross the stream into the sheep meadow to...

C. The Hollow Oak

Quercus robur

(See cover photo) The hollow in this specimen is large enough for sheep to use as a shelter, and will be providing lodgings for other creatures as well – bats, mice, hundreds of different types of spiders and beetles – whilst surviving well. It is the section just under the bark that does the work of feeding the tree itself, so having a hollow centre does it no harm.

Up the hill slightly and in the middle of the field is...

Good for climbing on! A fallen Ash, its remaining rotting trunks and associated nooks and crannies provide another vast habitat for small creatures such as beetles, hedghogs, and mice.

The Yellow Trail

Paths are unsurfaced and often muddy; often livestock can be found grazing here so please keep your dogs on leads.

Starting behind the café, our first tree is...

1. Scots Pine

Pinus sylvestris



The only pine native to Britain. Usually growing very tall, this one behind the café is part of the original planting of the parkland in the Victorian days, and is at least 180 years old. Scots Pines were often planted by the Victorians to commemorate historic events (such as a royal birthday), and this one is home to a family of woodpeckers.

Walk past the café and into the park. On the right of the path we come to a group of trees at the foot of the bank:

2. Walnut

Juglans regia



Two mature, one young, and a sapling. Walnuts were brought to the UK from southern Europe, possibly by the Romans. Their nut hides inside a case looking very like a smooth conker. Much enjoyed by the park's squirrels, there is a tiny Walnut sapling down the bank of rough grass, fenced to protect it, which was almost certainly 'planted' for us by these furry-tailed rascals hiding some food for winter treats.

Also here, is a small...

3. Wild Service Tree

Sorbus torminalis



An uncommon tree, sometimes known as the Chequers tree (one possible reason being that the berries were used to make an alcoholic drink). Could be the origin of the common pub name (The Chequers). The berries are round or oval about 1.5cm long. Leaves have several irregular, pointed lobes.



Walk down the path towards the lake. On the right:

4. Oak

Quercus robur

Of the many notable Oaks in the Park, this specimen is one of the largest. Centuries ago this tree was pollarded for fuel or building, giving its trunk a swollen look, with many holes and lumps providing a variety of homes for wildlife – the Oak has more species associated with it than any other native tree.



Brockhill Park Tree Trails

Reaching the edge of the Lake area, look for...

5. Ash

Fraxinus excelsior



A tall woodland tree. Some of the specimens here may have been felled or drastically reduced by the time you read this, as the park has been badly affected by Ash Die-back (*Chalara fraxinea*) disease. As little as possible of a diseased tree is removed, as all wood – alive, dying or dead – provides a rich habitat for so many types of wildlife. Ash fruits are known as “keys” (people used to pickle them) and they hang in bunches on the tree long after the last leaves have fallen.

Keeping the lake on the right, look for...

6. The “Dragon Tree”



An Oak tree on the island rears its dragon-shaped, grinning head over the North side of the lake, waiting to be spotted.



7. Alder

Alnus glutinosa

All around this area, we can find many unusually tall Alder trees, beside, or even in, water. Normally Alders are small to medium size trees, but here and all round the lake they have grown to a remarkable height and are some of the tallest in the area. Valuable in that it “fixes” nitrogen in the soil which is a food for other plants; and its timber is often used for structures

in water such as jetties because it is so rot-resistant. It is also unusual in that it bears both catkins and small cones at the same time.

Going round the other side of the lake we pass:

8. The “Throne”

Castanea sativa



A couple of Sweet Chestnut fell here and one has formed a splendid natural throne, accessed by steps, providing good photographic opportunities. Although fallen long ago, the tree roots are still alive and throwing up new growth. As with most trees in the park, the fallen trunk is left to rot naturally and “feed” the woodland.

9. Beech

Fagus sylvatica



A stand of beech trees, a hardwood planted for its coveted wood working properties, has matured, some having a swooping habit creating layering. The trees cast dense shade, covering the ground thickly with leaf litter in autumn. The spring ground flora changes notably in this area from Bluebells at the woodland border to a carpet of Wild Garlic.

Returning to the café and car park area, you will pass an excellent play area on the left near the top of the hill.