When you're riding on the Cuckoo Trail:

- The history of the Cuckoo Trail
- Wildlife and nature along the Trail
- The Cuckoo Trail runs for 11 miles along the route of the old railway linking three of the district’s larger towns: Heathfield, Hailsham and Polegate. Opened in 1880, the railway was named the Cuckoo Line after the tradition that the first cuckoo of spring was heard here. The line was shut in the 1960s, as part of the “Beeching” cuts.

On the Trail you might see the following: Cuckoo flower:

- Commonly found in damp places along the Trail. The pale mauve flowers with four petals appear in spring. Known as Cuckoo Pint. Can be seen for most of the year in shaded areas. The leaves are arrow-shaped and glossy. The flower starts white, turns yellow and then fades to brown as it ripens. The Cuckoo flower is the Mayflower.

- Orange Tip butterfly starts life as a bright orange egg. This deters other Orange Tips from laying eggs on the same plant. The female butterfly has an orange tip to the cream wings. The green male butterfly has a front wing which go bright orange-red in the autumn and are poisonous.

- Dunnock
- Commonly seen hopping about on or near the ground. Grey-brown with darker stripes on its back and a narrow beak. The Dunnock sings a rolling, dense cover such as thorn bushes and may unwittingly play host to a Cuckoo.

- Small blue butterfly
- Small blue butterflies are common along the Trail. They are a light blue color and are often seen flitting about in the grassland. Their life cycle includes a blue egg, a blue larva, a blue pupa and a blue adult butterfly.

- Green hairstreak butterfly
- Green hairstreak butterflies are found in damp, shaded areas along the Trail. They are a bright green color with a black spot on the wing. Their life cycle includes an egg, a larva, a pupa and an adult butterfly.

- The Orange Tip butterfly
- The Orange Tip butterfly is a common butterfly found along the Cuckoo Trail. It has a bright orange color and a white underside. Its life cycle includes an egg, a larva, a pupa and an adult butterfly.

The Cuckoo Trail is a 14 mile trail for walkers, joggers and cyclists. It is signposted along its route with information boards and maps. It is a great way to explore the countryside and enjoy the beautiful landscape.

How to get to the Cuckoo Trail:

Train: There are stations at Polegate and Hampden Park. For information on timetables: www.nationalrail.co.uk
Bikes can be carried free of charge though there are some restrictions during peak periods. It is essential to check the latest information.
Bus: Service 251, 252, and 54 operated by Eastbourne Buses/Stagecoach links Polegate, Hailsham, Hellingly, Horam and Heathfield. For information: www.bustimes.org.uk
Car: There are free car parks at Heathfield, Horam, Hellingly and Hailsham and on-street parking at Polegate and Hampden Park.
Horsebox: Horsebox space is provided at the Hellingly car park, where the Trail is accessed via an easily graded ramp. A mounting block is provided.
Helping people to choose active travel

Physical Activity Guidelines

Children and young people

Adults

www.healthywealden.co.uk

Walking in Wealden look at the websites:

For more information about staying healthy and active today, visit the websites:

www.healthywealden.co.uk

Cuckoo Trail

Join the challenge

www.cuckoobirds.co.uk

Calculate your distance and the calories you have burnt today!

Can ride between Hellingly and the south of Heathfield and between Summerhill Lane south of Halsham and Polegate. This latter section involves going over a bridge, which crosses the A27 Polegate bypass, where a mounting block is provided at each end.

Cyclists: Don’t surprise people - ring your bell or call out, remembering that some people are hard of hearing or visually impaired. Don’t just assume that they can see or hear you.

Mounting blocks are provided.

There are three car parks along the Trail, which can be crowded on some days. These are located at:

Polegate:

Ashford/Calais 1hr by train

Newhaven/Dieppe 4hrs by ferry

The Cuckoo Trail runs for 11 miles along the route of the old railway linking three of the district’s larger towns: Heathfield, Hailsham and Polegate.

Opened in 1880, the railway was named the Cuckoo Line after the tradition that the first cuckoo of spring was always heard at the Heathfield Fair. Transporting goods by road became more popular, and the line was shut in the 1960s, as part of the “Beeching” cuts.

The history of the Cuckoo Trail

The young cuckoo ejects the hosts’ own eggs and demands all the food. It is grey with a long tail, usually solitary and flying with shallow wing beats.

Dunnock Like a sparrow but not a sparrow! Commonly seen hopping about on or near the ground along the Trail. Grey-brown with darker stripes on its back and a narrow beak. The Dunnock sings a rolling, warbling song from an exposed perch. It nests in dense cover such as thorn bushes and may unwittingly play host to a Cuckoo.

Wildlife and nature along the Trail

Look for the wildlife information boards under Shawpits Bridge at Hellingly.

On the trail you might see the following:

Cuckoo A summer visitor. Listen for the distinctive call from April to June. Lays its eggs in the nests of birds of other species (mainly Dunnock in this area).

Lady’s Smock also known as Cuckoo Flower. Commonly found in damp places along the Trail. The pale mauve flowers with four petals appear in spring.

Orange Tip The orange butterfly starts life as a bright orange egg. This deters other Orange Tips from laying eggs on the same plant. Only the male butterfly has an orange tip to the cream wings. The green caterpillars of the Orange Tip feed mainly on the Cuckoo Flower.

Lords and Ladies Also known as Cuckoo Pint. Can be seen for most of the year in shaded areas. The leaves are arrow-shaped and glossy. The flower starts white, turns black then produces a cluster of green berries, which go bright orange-red in the autumn and are poisonous.

Dunnock in this area).
Heathfield
The market town of Heathfield stands on one of the main ridges of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, giving magnificent views south towards the South Downs. Heathfield gained its market charter in 1316. This charter included the right to hold a fair, which was traditionally held on 15 April. An old lady would appear to release the first cuckoo of spring from her basket, giving rise to the “Cuckoo Fair” name.

Horam
Horam was originally a small hamlet, which grew up around the station, which was supposed to serve the village of Waldron, some two miles away. A small fragment of the platform and the station nameboard survive alongside the Trail today. Horam was the main depot for Express Dairies in the 1930s.

Hellingly
The old station, by the side of the line, is now a private house. Look out for the ornate platerwork, mock-Tudor chimneys, canopy fretwork and stained glass windows. The water mill in Mill Lane is said to be the oldest mill in England.

Hailsham
Hailsham is an historic town, first granted its market charter in 1252 by King Henry III so that it could hold its own cattle market.
The town was formerly famous for its rope making, the largest such industry in Sussex and a statue in the town centre commemorates this.

Polegate
Polegate’s importance dates back to the arrival of the railways in Sussex, in the 1840s. Originally a wayside station on the 1846 line from Brighton to Hastings, it swiftly became a junction for lines to Eastbourne and Hailsham; the latter now forming the Cuckoo Trail. Unsurprisingly, a settlement grew up around the station.

Hampden Park
Along this part of the Trail, look out for birds and waterfowl which are attracted to Shinewater Park. Herons, cormorants and other wildfowl may be seen all year round, while in summer there are also reed and sedge warblers, house martins and swallows.

Accommodation and attractions near the Cuckoo Trail
For details of a wide variety of accommodation and local attractions near the Cuckoo Trail:
www.wealdendosussex.co.uk

Contact us / more information
The Cuckoo Trail is managed as a partnership between East Sussex County Council and Wealden District Council.
For more information see:
www.wealden.gov.uk and
www.eastsussex.gov.uk
Contact the ranger:
countrysidemanagement@eastsussex.gov.uk
For the national cycling network:
www.sustrans.org.uk

If you, or somebody you know, would like the information contained in this document in large print, Braille, audio or in another language, please contact Wealden District Council on 01323 443322 or info@wealden.gov.uk quoting ref number DP.16906.02.18