

Roundball Wood

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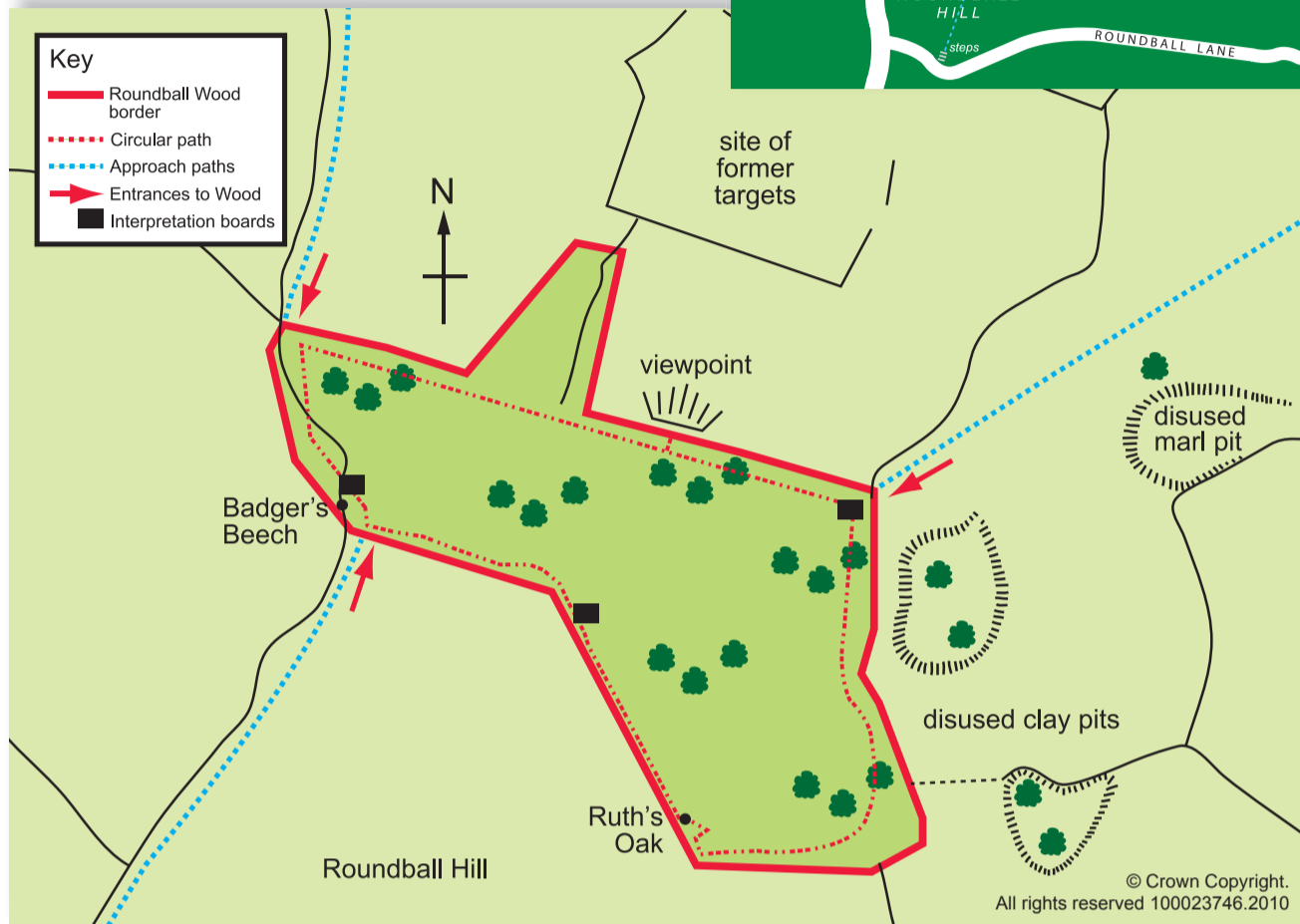
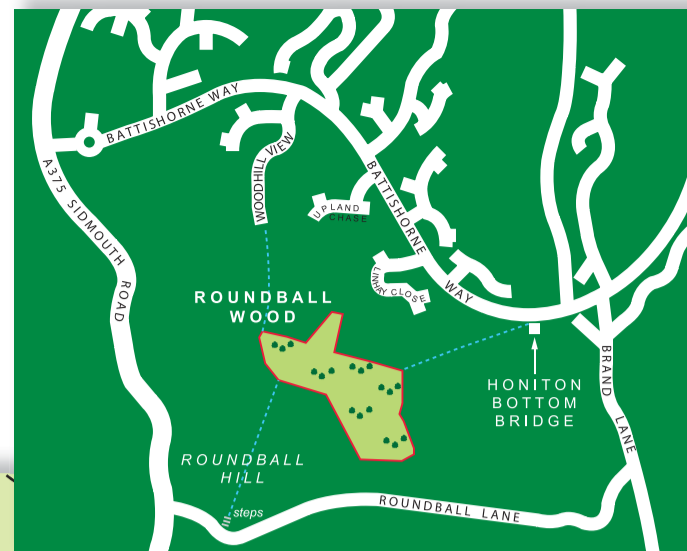


Getting There

See Area Plan. Three permissive footpaths lead to the Wood from public roads (Woodhill View, Battishorne Way and Roundball Lane). The Wood can be reached on foot from the town centre in about 25 minutes.

Alternatively you can park off-road in Battishorne Way at the Battishorne Way Kissing Gate or in Roundball Lane (see Area Plan) and the Wood is about 10 minutes walk from either of these points.

The Wood is a BBC Breathing Place:
www.breathingplaces.org/public/place/37786



Introduction

Roundball Wood is a small area of woodland to the south of Honiton, on the northern slope of Roundball Hill within the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The EDAONB was designated in 1963 and is part of the same family of protected landscapes as National Parks.

The Wood has been leased from the Marker Estate and maintained since 1998 by Honiton Town Council as public amenity woodland and a local nature reserve. It has been described as being 'of exceptional nature conservation and landscape value'. The 1840 Tithe Record refers to it as 'Pasture and Wood' and the Tithe Map of that year shows it as such within its present boundaries.

The Wood is classic semi-ancient wet woodland, with magnificent standard oaks about 200 years old, interspersed with alders and beech of a similar age, and an understorey of holly, birch, and hazel, much of which was coppiced in the past.

Last but not least, there are magnificent views over Honiton, up and down the Otter Valley and across to the Blackdown Hills AONB. The Wood is kept as far as possible in its natural state; visitors are welcome.

Please take reasonable care and go dressed and equipped for rough walking.

Digital Tithe maps and records are available at www.eastdevonaonb.org.uk



The Landscape

Roundball Wood is 150 to 175 metres above sea level, the land to its south rising steeply to 207 metres at the summit of Roundball Hill. To the north the River Otter flows from east to west through its sheltered valley on its way from its source at Otterhead in the Blackdown Hills near Churchinford to the sea at Budleigh Salterton. The old market town of Honiton lies between the Wood and the river, and the Exeter to Waterloo railway line and the A30 both pass along the Otter Valley. On the other side of the valley the land rises to the Blackdown Hills, which are actually a plateau of remarkably uniform height (about 213 metres) scored by several river valleys. Far to the west you can see the tors of Dartmoor on the other side of Exeter.



The character of the Wood is determined by the underlying geology. Its southern boundary lies along the contour line below which is a clay known as Keuper Marl and above which is Upper Greensand capped with clay and flints. The lower (clay) stratum is impermeable, the upper (sand) stratum is permeable, so that rain falling on Roundball Hill percolates down to the clay and emerges sideways as springs, giving the Wood its wet central area. From this wet area a number of streams flow downwardly to the northern boundary and emerge as two or three streams, deep in gullies or gullies, which cut downhill towards the town and the rivers Gissage and Otter.



To the east of the Wood there are three deep pits, probably former clay and/or marl pits. These are not part of the Wood, but can be seen to the left of the path across the field from the Battishorne Way Kissing Gate up to the Wood.

The interior of the Wood may also have been worked for marl (a type of clay that was one of the first inorganic fertilizers) but the size of the trees both in the Wood and the pits indicates that marl was last dug here at least two or three centuries ago.



Trees and Shrubs



The dominant trees in the Wood are standard oaks; these are all about 200 years old, suggesting that they were planted when the Royal Navy needed oak for its men o'war. Such mature oak trees are a haven for fauna and flora, with ferns and mosses growing on them. Rainwater collects in the angles of their branches and forms pools while their many rotten branches are home to innumerable insects and other invertebrates. Inside the Wood, especially in the central wet area, you will see many very old alder trees. Many have several stems of almost equal size, indicating that they were coppiced two or three hundred years ago.



Although the beech and ash are common trees in Devon, there are relatively few in Roundball Wood, probably due to its wetness. There is, however, a magnificent sight of three beech and an oak growing inextricably together in the remains of an ancient hedge-bank.



Among the oaks you will see many birch trees of considerable age. There is also a good deal of holly and hazel. These are the 'understorey' of smaller trees and shrubs that underlies the huge standard oaks, beech and alders.

Evidence of man's involvement down the centuries is provided among other things by the fact that the understorey, especially the hazel, has been coppiced.

Holly was a valuable winter fodder for livestock in past centuries and its growth was encouraged in woods such as Roundball Wood, which were used both as a source of timber and as pasture for cattle.

Grassland

A section of the meadowland has been fenced off along the southern side of the Wood. This land was formerly grazed by cattle together with the remainder of Roundball Hill, but is now ungrazed and mown annually; the cut grass is allowed to dry and raked off. In this manner favourable conditions are created for wild flowers and other plants of impoverished grazing land. In spring and summer you can see bugle, scabious, clovers, thistles, lady's smock and others.



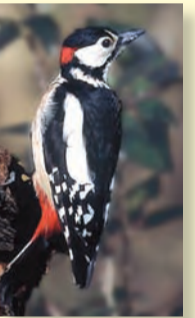
Woodland Plants and Ferns



Among the brambles you will find rich and varied ground flora, including, in season, bluebell, wood sorrel, wood anemone, primrose, dog's mercury, broad Buckler fern, yellow pimpernel, and opposite leaved golden saxifrage. The mix of species indicates that the Wood has been here for many centuries.

Birds

On the fringes of the Wood, look out for our local kestrel and buzzard. Inside the Wood, look out for our own tawny owls and listen for the resident greater spotted woodpecker; you may see him clambering and hear him rattling away high in the branches of one of the tall oaks.



Mammals

An enormous badger sett with many entrance holes sprawls along the bank inside the southern side of the Wood and in the meadow. Please keep to the way-marked paths, and be careful because it is easy to put a foot down one of these holes, which are often hidden by grass.



There is little evidence that the sett is occupied at present, although it has probably been used for hundreds of years and, even if it isn't occupied now, will probably be again at some time in the future.

Especially in the morning or evening, you may catch a fleeting

glimpse of roe deer or a fox. Of course, there are rabbits and squirrels.

Walking Round the Wood

We have created a path which is clearly way-marked and will take you round the Wood just inside its boundaries. Please keep to the paths to avoid damage to the ecology. On the northern boundary bank overlooking the town and the Otter Valley is a viewing point with a bench – please stop here to rest and admire the view over the town.



Around the Wood

The most spectacular approach to the Wood is from Battishorne Way Kissing Gate. As you go up, turn to look at the unfolding panorama, including, to the south of the path, the two majestic oak trees and the old pits.



From the steps in Roundball Lane you can approach the Wood along the hedgerow, leaving Roundball Hill on your right. Do divert to the top of the hill and admire the view. Despite its name the hill is not a hemispherical dome but a long ridge. As far as we know, no archaeological investigations have ever taken place here and there is no evidence that it is man-made, or was ever occupied as a fort, unlike nearby Dumpdon Hill and Hembury Fort.

On the slope between the Wood and the town are the old shooting butts. These were most recently used by the Army when there was a military base at what is now Heathpark Industrial Estate, between the A30 and the railway to the west of the town. The soldiers used to shoot at targets on the butts from below. One of the roads on the modern housing estate is called 'Butts Close'. When shooting was in progress a red flag flew on top of Roundball Hill and you can still see the stone socket in which it stood.

Hedging and Ditching the Devon Way

Most of the boundaries of the Wood are marked by hedge-banks, many of considerable age. We have recently started to lay a hedge along the bank marking the northern boundary of the Wood, and hope to recreate, in time, a model traditionally laid Devon hedge-bank.



Conservation

We want you to enjoy our Wood as far as possible in its natural state. After all, it has been there for hundreds of years! This means that we don't keep it tidy like a park. Branches or whole trees that fall are left to rot where they lie to recycle their nutrients and give a home to wildlife. We try to keep the paths clear and reasonably easy to walk, and in return we ask you to keep to them. We don't drain any areas and we keep hard structures, such as bridges and walkways, to the minimum.

Every now and then, just stop for two or three minutes, look and listen. You will hear and see the birds and insects going about their daily business, and just listen to the silence!

The production of this leaflet has been funded by the **East Devon AONB Sustainable Development Fund**
www.eastdevonaonb.gov.uk

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For more detailed information about the wildlife and plants ask for our Roundball Wood Factsheets.