

## **Welcome to Brading's Histree Trail**

*The Legends and Landscapes Histree Trail is 6.6km (4.1 miles) long with an optional shorter route of 4km (2.5 miles). The trail begins and ends at the Bull Ring in Brading Town Centre. It presents a fairly easy walk. There are some stiles and gates to negotiate, with mostly gentle inclines and descents. The trail may also be muddy and uneven underfoot in places.*

### **Getting There**

*Bus: 2, 3 and 10 to the Bull Ring. Train: runs twice an hour. Brading Station is only a short walk from the Bull Ring. Car: Brading Town Trust pay and display car park is next to St. Mary's Church at the northern end of the High Street.*

**Follow the text and use the map to explore the Legends and Landscapes Histree Trail. Discover the veteran Oaks of Nunwell, follow ancient boundaries and explore Bloodstone Copse. Many trees on this trail are ancient and are among the most magnificent specimens on the Island.**

**(1)** The Legends and Landscapes Histree Trail begins at the Bull Ring. The first tree is a **Yew** tree in the enclosure. The date of its planting is uncertain, but it features as a mature tree in postcards which depict the opening of the present Town Hall in 1903, making it over 100 years old. This **Yew** could have provided welcome shade for cattle during the weekly town market. Nearby, you will see a large iron ring set into a stone plinth. Bulls were tethered to this ring and tormented by dogs in the belief that the stress endured by the bull tenderised the meat.

Pass the Post Office and cross the road at the bottom of The Mall. On the corner is the Brading

Tudor Garden and the Brading Dragon. The dragon was carved by local sculptor Paul Sivell to celebrate the millennium. The timber is **Oak** and derives from the nearby Whitefield Woods to the north of Brading.

From the garden, proceed up The Mall, turn right into the car park of the surgery and go through the gate. This young plantation is Betty's Copse and was planted with native tree species in 2005 with the help of the local community. Head uphill beside the plantation to join the bridleway through the iron gate, then turn right.

Passing Little Jane's chalk pit, typical ancient hedgerow species can be seen to your right including **Hazel**, **Field Maple** and **Ash**. All have multiple stems, an indication that these trees were harvested periodically or 'coppiced' for traditional crafts and building materials.

As the path climbs steeply **Beech** trees come into view to your right. These majestic trees mark the beginning of the Nunwell **Beech** Hanger. 'Hanger' is a local word used to describe woodland located on steep slopes. **Beech** woods are uncommon on the Island and this is the finest example. Take the right fork just before reaching the summit at the low waymarker post to your right. You are now entering Kelly's Copse.

**(2)** Kelly's Copse is named after landowner Cordelia Kelly from whom the land was purchased by the Nunwell Estate in the 1700s. The copse is ancient woodland; it has been continually wooded for more than 400 years. Here you are in the tree canopy with long-ranging views across the northeast of the Island. Carefully follow the path, known as Snakey Lane, as it skirts the top of the copse and descends.

**(3)** A multi-stemmed **Field Maple** marks the point where the paths converge (right). This tree has ten stems which tells us that it was coppiced - cut down to base level and then allowed to regenerate. It is likely to have been a waymarker as this path once formed a route between Brading and Arreton. **Field Maple** is slow growing, often found along old boundaries and rights of way.

From this tree, proceed westwards along the footpath which follows the old parish boundary, laid out in the 12th century. A path known as Ladies Walk used to run adjacent to the current right of way and was used exclusively by ladies until 1900. It was designed to form a backdrop to the private parkland of the Nunwell Estate - glimpses of which will become apparent to your right - with the intention of leading the walker to the point where the best views of the manor house could be obtained. The original path no longer exists, but the name is still used.

**(4)** The tallest **Beech** tree to your right marks the eastern extent of the old Nunwell Estate boundary prior to the 1815 extension. A veteran for its species, this tree provides excellent habitat for bats and nesting birds and, being tall and straight, makes a perfect perching post for birds of prey. In places along the path, sections of the medieval bank boundary parallel with the path are still visible. Look out for incredible ivy growth entwined with some of the trees; the ivy's stems may be thicker than your arm.

**(5)** The next tree is one of the grandest **Oaks** on the Island. This **Common Oak** is known to be over 400 years old. With its gnarled, rotund trunk and tremendous character, it measures a whopping seven metres in girth! This remarkable tree is among the oldest and most celebrated trees on the Island (right).

It is also a 'Bound **Oak**' marking the point where the old medieval Brading Town boundary changes course and follows an old field margin to your right. The Bound **Oak** is an ancient pollard. Pollards often have lumpy nodules and boles and many boughs spreading from one point on the trunk, indicating that timber was periodically harvested in a sustainable way, prolonging the tree's life.

For over 900 years, Nunwell has been the seat of the Oglander family. The estate was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 when it belonged to William the Conqueror. Sir John Oglander, a dedicated diarist, wrote detailed manuscripts during the mid-1600s. These provide us with valuable comments on the Isle of Wight during that period. Most of the parkland landscaping which can be seen today is attributed to his descendant - Sir William Oglander during the 1700s.

George Brannon, Isle of Wight Victorian landscape engraver, spoke of Nunwell and Sir John in his book 'Vectis Scenery' in 1825. He wrote,

*"Noble specimens of every kind of forest tree are to be found in the park, but particularly the oaks, several of which are many centuries old, the worthy baronet employing every possible means of preserving these venerable chiefs of the grove, for his soul holds dear an ancient oak!"*

Continue along Ladies Walk. The avenue of **Common Lime** trees here - originally planted in the early 1700s - was known as The Prospect **(6)**. The avenue was then removed towards the end of that century when informal parkland became fashionable. However, a few specimen

trees were left to blend in with the new landscaping. The existing huge **Lime** trees near the footpath are remnants of the original avenue - the tree to the right is the largest **Lime** on the Island.

**(7)** Pause at the crossroads and, just within the estate fence on the corner, stands a pair of towering **Beech** trunks. Whether this is one or two trees is difficult to determine. The larger trunk has a bough which appears to embrace the smaller trunk. They are known as the King and Queen.

*At this stage in the trail, there is the option to extend the route. If you wish to walk the extension (2.6km/1.6 miles) please continue with the text. If you wish to walk the shorter route please skip to \*\*.*

Continue towards the gate, passing some impressive **Beech** trees planted during the 18th century, and which mark the westerly extent of the Nunwell **Beech** Hanger. Just beyond the gate to the left is a lone **Beech (8)**. It may be a bundle planting - a group of saplings planted closely together which, over time, fused giving the trunk its fluted appearance (right).

Keep to the old highway and, at the top of the hill, cross the field towards the gate in the far left corner, then turn right to join the track downhill. As you walk towards the hedgerow look to the left to view a row of **Beech** trees on the hillside marking the old Nunwell Estate southern boundary.

Once through the hedgerow, turn right and follow the field margin until meeting the road. At the road turn right, continuing for a short distance on the grass verge. Ahead on the hill you can see the Ashey Sea mark - a white

triangular shaped pillar erected in 1735 used as a reference point for shipping.

At footpath B24, descend the steps into Eaglehead Copse. The copse is the site of an ancient settlement and parish boundary. Eaglehead Copse is an **Ash** and **Oak** chalk woodland with mature Hazel coppice. It is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and through careful management supports a healthy population of both red squirrel and dormouse.

Continue through the copse until the path levels out. Along the copse boundary to the left are many fine ancient coppiced trees but two stand out in particular. The first is a multi-stemmed coppiced **Ash** and is likely to be hundreds of years old **(9)**.

Close by is a coppiced **Whitebeam (10)**. Mature **Whitebeam** trees are rare on the Island and are known in local dialect as 'whipcrop' or 'whiterice'. The leaves have a distinctive white, hairy underside giving the tree a slivery appearance.

Continue on footpath B24 and, once past the bench near the crossroads, Eaglehead gives way to Bloodstone Copse. These copses form a wildlife reserve managed by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. A spring rises here in which the water has a reddish hue, said to be the flow of blood from violent fighting between the Saxons and Danes. The truth behind the red colouration of the stream bed is more conventional; it is caused by red algae attached to pebbles and flints in the water.

Leave Bloodstone, continue along the field edge on footpath B34 until meeting Nuncrate Rew. It takes its name from 'Nuncroft' the adjacent field where the original medieval manor house of

Nunwell existed. 'Rew' means narrow strip of woodland. Turn right immediately after entering the rew and follow the path passing by straight **Oak** trees and **Elm** regeneration. Leave Nuncrate Rew, cross the stile into the field and cross another two fields following footpath B24 until you reach Nunwell Farm Lane. *To continue with the extended trail please skip to \**.

\*\* Turn right onto footpath B59 following it along the western boundary of the Nunwell Estate. Pause to view the standing dead **Oak** as the path swings left. As it decomposes, dead wood provides valuable habitat for insects, fungi, mosses and lichens as well as providing nesting and roosting places for birds and bats. Ahead, a panorama of open pasture studded with numerous and splendid **Oak** trees can be seen. The entire area is a protected for its historic, cultural and natural heritage.

Directly ahead is a curious, mushroom shaped **Oak** tree (**7a**). It is in the latter stages of its life, rotting from the top but still strong lower down the trunk – this process is known as 'retrenchment'. It is said that an **Oak** grows for 300 years, spends 300 years resting and a further 300 years gracefully decaying (left).

By tracing the lines of **Oaks** seen in some of the fields nearby, it is possible to visualise the shortest route from the medieval house to the nearby farms. The northerly wood in the distance is Whitefield Wood. It was once a King's Forest, a royal hunting ground belonging to King Charles I. It was replanted during the 1950s with coniferous trees. Proceed down the lane to Nunwell Farm.

\*Cross the first stile to join footpath B23. Head towards Brading in an easterly direction across the field. Cross the footbridge and then the stile beside another large **Oak** tree (**11**). This tree measures over four metres in girth and is thought to be around 350 years old (right).

Climb the slight incline and at the top of the hill look for the fingerpost. Good views of the inner estate parkland can be seen from here. A pair of dead standing **Oak** trees are to your right. Known as the **Antler Oaks**, these trees have been dead for around 10 years. Follow the line of the hedge to your left towards a group of trees.

Ahead, you may notice **Oak** trees on several mounds. These are the remains of brick kilns which are likely to have been used during the construction of the medieval Nunwell Manor. Another ancient pollard; an enormous, anchor-shaped **Oak** tree with a straight trunk and many boughs spreading from one point can be seen (**12**).

This tree, along with many others, would have produced good quality timber. Due to the proximity to Portsmouth, Nunwell timber was extensively used in local ship-building. Records dating from 1805 - time of the Napoleonic war - show that the Nunwell estate produced over £100,000 of timber, equating to millions of pounds today. Before leaving the tree, pause to take in the view of Brading church and Culver Down to the east rising in the distance.

Cross the stile at the fingerpost and make your way to your left along the hedgerow, keeping to the field margin. Here you will find another of

Nunwell's veterans (**13**). This is a Bound **Oak**, the third ancient pollard, thought to have been pollarded as a mature tree, again probably for shipbuilding timber.

The medieval bank boundary is visible here and also in the next field to the right. Retrace your steps along the field margins, then follow the line of **Oak** trees by the footpath across the middle of the field and head for the cottage. These **Oak** trees were planted to mark the northern boundary of the Nunwell parkland estate.

Pause at the final **Oak**, before reaching the clump of **Oak** trees. A clearing on your right affords a great view of another of the oldest **Oak** trees on the Island (**14**). This tree is Old Stumpy and is the fattest and most gnarled of all the great **Oaks** on the Nunwell Estate (previous page) and is the final tree on the Legends and Landscapes Histree Trail.

Continue across the field past the **Oak** tree cluster. At the stile have a last look at the house and estate behind you. At the fingerpost take the steps down, taking care when joining the road as there is no pavement here. Walk a short distance and take the next turning on the right into Doctors Lane. At the end of Doctors Lane take the right fork into West Street which will return you to the Bull Ring where the Legends and Landscapes Histree Trail began.

*Thank you for walking the Legends and Landscapes Histree Trail. There are seven other Histree Trails for you to explore.*

# Legends & Landscapes Histree Trail

main route (red) 4.1 miles / 6.5 km

shorter route (blue) 2.5 miles / 4km



- - - Main route
- - - Shorter route
- - - Route on roads/paths
- - - Route on tracks
- - - Footpaths
- - - Bridleways
- ← Viewpoint
- Tea rooms
- Public house

- Parking
- Toilets
- Picnic area
- Bus stops
- Start

