



A walk around Dartford Heath



Dartford Borough Council and Groundwork Kent & Medway are working together to manage the area to enable local people and visitors to enjoy this natural resource and to preserve its special character for future generations. Much of the work is undertaken by volunteers who carry

Tuesday volunteers

out manual tasks across the heath including clearance of footpaths, repairs to steps and bollards, litter picking and clearance of scrubland for heathland restoration. If you have some time which you could give please ring the number on the back page to find out further details.

People of all ages are welcome on the Heath, but please ensure your safety and the safety of others by following the same simple precautions that you would do in other parkland and open space. If you witness any crime please report it to the police.

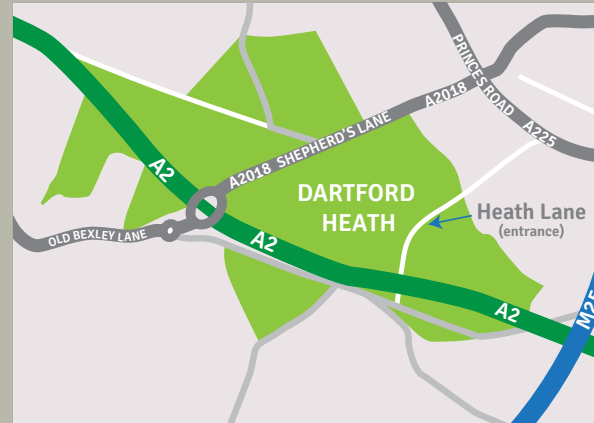
Before you set off, here are a few important points to consider:

- Sturdy footwear is recommended, as some of the paths might be muddy in the winter or after heavy rain.
- It may be beneficial to take a bottle of water if undertaking one of the longer trails.
- At some places, the various trails follow the same paths.



Tuesday volunteers

- The Blue Trail is also a permissive bridleway so please be considerate of horses whilst using this route.
- The yellow trail is an easy access route which should be passable by wheelchairs and pushchairs.



Dartford Heath is located in north-west Kent and situated to the south-west of Dartford town centre. The heath covers an area of 146.21 hectares (361 acres) divided into a number of compartments by roads and is covered by the OS Explorer 162. There are four public car parks around the Heath with the main car park being on Heath Lane.

The Heath, one of the last remaining lowland heaths in the south-east, is registered Common Land and is designated as an area of Local Landscape Importance, Site of Nature Conservation Interest and forms part of the Green Grid Network.

If you would like any further additional information about Dartford Heath, or would like to be involved in its management please contact the Countryside Parks Officer on 01322 285497 or Dartford Borough Council on 01322 343434. We would like your feedback and ask you to visit parks@dartford.gov.uk where your views will be greatly appreciated.



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The Heath comprises a variety of habitats ranging from lowland acid and tussocky grassland to ancient and semi-natural broad-leaved woodland dominated by silver birch and oak. Some areas are true heathland, characterised by a mosaic of heather and gorse. There are also three ponds. It is this diversity that enriches its wildlife value.



Ling, or common heather, is the main component of lowland heath and can live up to forty years. It has tough, wiry stems and pale purple flowers between July and September. Bell heather can also be found on the Heath and is a smaller, more compact plant with slender stems, less woody than those of ling. It also flowers between July and September and its flowers are bell-shaped and a beautiful deep purple.

Ling

The yellow flowers of the common gorse, dwarf gorse or broom may be seen throughout the year, and this fact gave rise to the country expression "When gorse is out of bloom, kissing's out of fashion (season)" as there is hardly a month in the year without some of the shrubs in bloom.

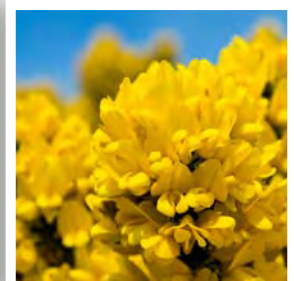


Bell heather

On Dartford Heath the three metre high common gorse and broom dominate the open heath, and without their removal, the lower growing heathers and dwarf gorse would be overshadowed by the taller plants and lost. Historically, this type of management would have been carried out by the local commoners who would have grazed their livestock and removed the trees and shrubs for firewood.



A mosaic of dwarf gorse and heather



Gorse in full bloom

Today, this is replicated by the volunteers, with the help of grazing rabbits, as without management the Heath will become woodland.

The open heathland hosts a variety of wildlife – lizards bask in the sunshine, dung beetles take the rabbit droppings, and labyrinth spiders build their funnel-like webs on the low shrubs. The spring days are filled with the song of visiting willow warblers, whitethroats, chiffchaffs and other migrants that join the resident birds such as the chaffinch, robin and linnets for the summer, building their nests in the dense thickets of gorse and bramble. Swifts fly overhead enjoying the abundance of insects, and flowering plants include the rare petty whin, clustered clover, upright chickweed and annual knawel, as well as the more common violets, bedstraws, harebells, cranesbills, storksbills, and spurreys.

The three ponds play host to newts, frogs and toads, and in the warm summer days are alive with dragonflies and damselflies such as the broad bodied chaser, southern and brown hawker, and the common darter.

As you walk into the woodland areas, you may spot different residents – the arum lilies, foxgloves and bluebells in the spring, and singing blackcaps and wrens, and the drumming and calling of the green and spotted woodpeckers. In the autumn fungi abound, with the huge parasol mushrooms and red and white spotted fly agarics standing out.

There are some interesting landscape features to watch out for on Dartford Heath. On the red and green trails watch out for the Glory Bumps, a series of parallel mounds about 2 metres high. These were formed in the mid-19th Century by the removal of brick earth, a type of clay used to make bricks. The process involved removing 500 to 750 centimetres of earth to expose the seam of



The Glory bumps

brick earth – up to 2 metres thick, and when this had been removed, the process moved along leaving the mounds of earth behind. These bumps have been popular with off-road cyclists and BMXers for generations, and many of the regular heath walkers today have fond memories of their youth on the Glory Bumps.

Other hollows and shallow valleys exist where the sand and gravel which make up most of the heath's subsoil, have been removed for use by the building trade. Although this is forbidden today, in the 19th Century this material was sold by the owner and a heath keeper was employed to monitor and regulate the process. The sandy banks of these hollows are host to miner bees, solitary bees who burrow into the ground to leave their eggs.

Another landscape feature you may encounter on the red trail is the remains of an anti-aircraft gun emplacement which was on the Heath between 1939 and 1944. The concrete roads which serviced the site remain today, including two circles which would have been used to point the guns through 360 degrees.

So Dartford Heath is more than just heathland. It is a variety of wildlife habitats and man-made features holding a multitude of species and places to enjoy, whether energetically as a jogger or walker, or at a more genteel pace.

Fires and how to report them

Under the green exterior, gorse hides a tinder dry fuel source, and fires may occur at any time of year. Should you witness any fires, please dial 999 and give the Fire Service details of the fire's location using the numbered fire-posts as a reference point. NEVER attempt to fight the fire yourself. The danger of fires is one of the reasons that bye-laws exist to ban certain activities on the Heath.

This ban extends to the use of motor vehicles, the removal of plants and vegetation, camping, horses (except on the permissive bridleway), model aircraft, and overnight parking.

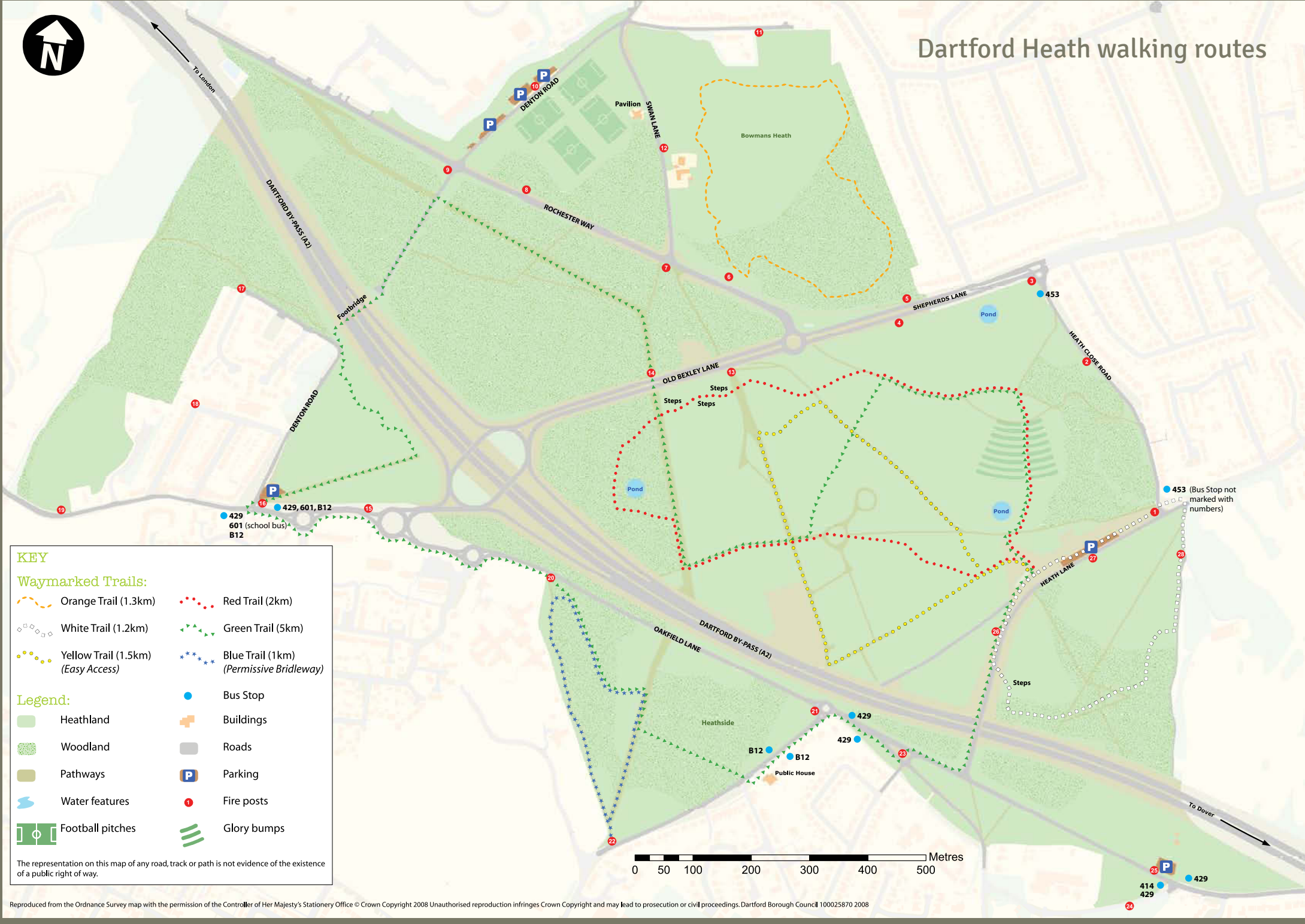
A full list of the bye-laws is posted on the rear of the interpretive boards located around the Heath.



One of the Heath's information boards



Dartford Heath walking routes



KEY

Waymarked Trails:

- Orange Trail (1.3km)
- White Trail (1.2km)
- Yellow Trail (1.5km) (Easy Access)
- Red Trail (2km)
- Green Trail (5km)
- Blue Trail (1km) (Permissive Bridleway)

Legend:

- Heathland
- Woodland
- Pathways
- Water features
- Football pitches
- Bus Stop
- Buildings
- Roads
- Parking
- Fire posts
- Glory bumps

The representation on this map of any road, track or path is not evidence of the existence of a public right of way.

