

Ancient droveways through the Blean



The Radfall Road today. (Diane Comley.)



Pannage.
(*'Les tres riches heures, Novembre'* - Duc de Berry.)



Men ploughing the land.
(Eleventh century Anglo-Saxon calendar.)

Excavations carried out in Chestfield, by Canterbury Archaeological Trust, uncovered the remains of an Anglo Saxon settlement dating to around 800 - 1100 AD. The Blean would have provided the inhabitants with essential resources such as wood fuel and timber for construction, but the excavations' findings also suggest that the settlement was in large part located close to the woods because of its livestock. The remains of animal enclosures for pigs, or swine as they were then called, were found next to remnants of an ancient drove-way (so named because it was a track along which animals were driven). This is believed to have linked the settlement to the woods and the swine pastures within.

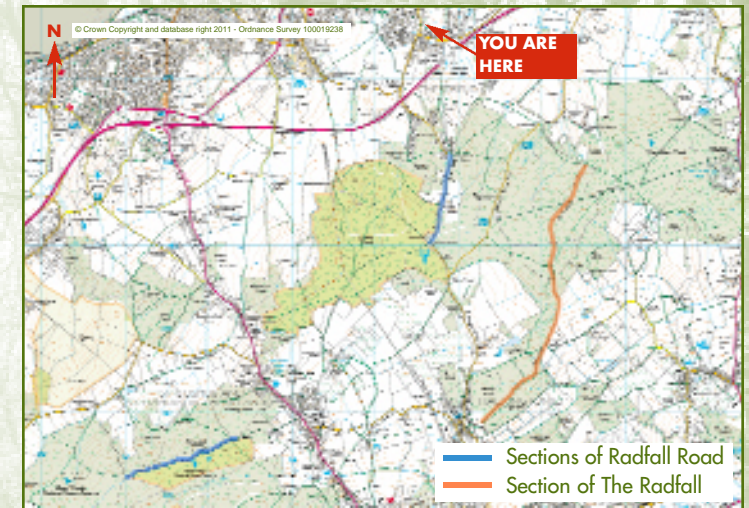
In a practice known as pannage, pigs were taken to feed on acorns and beech mast found on the woodland floor. This also explains the names of many woods within the Blean, (Denstroude and Thornden woods to name just two), which include the suffix or prefix 'den', the Saxon term for pig pasture!

This ancient drove-way is thought to be the northern termination of a much longer one now called Radfall Road, not to be confused with the Radfall, another embanked woodland route. The Radfall Road follows a route from Chestfield through Clowes Wood, Church and Grimshill Wood, towards Dunkirk and South Bishopsden Wood. The Radfall runs north east from Tyler Hill through Thornden Wood towards Herne.

These drove-ways, which are thought to date back to the 5th century, were no doubt used not only for pannage but for transporting other kinds of livestock, especially sheep, as well as commodities such as salt, which in that period came from Chisle. What visibly remain are sections of the woodbanks which once bordered them, keeping livestock from straying into the woods and eating the valuable saplings and young coppice shoots.

If it weren't for the poor agricultural soils of the Blean, it's possible that much of this wonderful woodland would not exist today. However, it has played its part in shaping farming, as farming has also shaped the Blean over the centuries. Chestfield Barn and oast house nearby are visible reminders of this history. Indeed timbers from the Blean can still be found in the older, original sections of the barn.

For more information on the history of the barn, please look at the Whitstable Improvement Trust panel situated beside the footpath.



the Blean is just minutes away...

Covering over 11 square miles, the Blean is one of the largest and most distinctive areas of ancient woodland in England, important nationally for both its wildlife and its history. The Blean has been a working woodland for over a thousand years, and continues to provide woodland products, including firewood and fencing materials, for local people. The splendour and tranquillity of this special landscape can be enjoyed on a network of paths and trails. This panel is part of a series of 18 located around the Blean. To see all 18 panels, visit www.theblean.co.uk. For information about walking in Kent visit www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent.