

A journey through trees and time



Coat of arms for the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral.



A pilgrim from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, artist unknown, 1483.



North Downs Way in the Blean.



No Man's Orchard



Artist's impression of Bigbury Camp. (Christopher Spurey-Green, Canterbury Archaeological Trust.)



Julia Ceasar by Nicolas Coustou. (The Louvre.)

The Chapter Arms pub sign beside this panel is very unusual, as it is the coat of arms for the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral, an unlikely partnership! The Dean and Chapter are the body that looks after the running of the cathedral and its properties, which came into being after the Reformation in 1541. It is thought that the pub's sign relates to the fact that large parts of this area once belonged to the cathedral.

The sign is not the only link between this site and the cathedral, as New Town Road sits on a section of the original Pilgrims Way now largely replaced by the North Downs Way. This ancient route was used by many thousands for their pilgrimage to Canterbury Cathedral and was famously at the centre of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

Today the North Downs Way continues to be used by many walkers and still leads to Canterbury and the Cathedral. On the way it passes through Chartham Hatch village and into an old traditional apple orchard called No Man's Orchard, now conserved and managed by the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership and local community. From there the path enters the Blean at Howfield Wood, which contains the earthwork remains of an Iron Age hill fort called Bigbury Camp (see map.) Kent Wildlife Trust, who now own and manage most of this woodland, have worked with others such as Canterbury Archaeological Trust, to reveal the earthwork remains of this historic site.

This scheduled ancient monument is considered by many to be the scene of Caesar's first battle and victory over native forces opposing the Roman invasion in 54BC. Set on high ground, the camp would have been used by kings, chieftains, local farmers and landowners as a place of safety for themselves and their livestock. The remains indicate that it would have been defended by banks and ditches to the north and steep slopes to the south. The woods around the lower slopes defending the fort by providing cover for the Britons and material to block access routes. Caesar's own written record of the battle states:

'We marched by night (from Deal) for about 12 miles before coming in sight of the enemy forces. They had moved with their cavalry and chariots down from the higher ground (Bigbury) to a river (the Stour near Tonford) and were trying to stop our progress and engage us in battle. When our cavalry drove them back they hid in the wood where they enjoyed a position with extremely good man made defences for some war between themselves because many trees had been cut down and used to block entrances to it. The Britons came out of the woods in small groups to fight and tried to stop our men penetrating their defences. But the men of the 5th Legion holding up their shields to form a protective shell piled up earth against the fortifications and captured the place - I forbade them to pursue far because I was unfamiliar with the terrain.'

- Julius Caesar, *The Gallic Wars*, Book 5. (Note - the inserted locations are where many experts think Caesar was referring to.)

The archaeological finds from the site are kept in various museums around the country, including Canterbury and Maidstone. Ongoing investigations may yet reveal new insight and facts about Bigbury Camp.

Walking in the Blean

North Downs Way (old Pilgrim's Way) route to Bigbury Camp, 1.5 miles (2.4 km)

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 Information on alternative walks from Tourist Information Centres or The Blean Initiative: www.theblean.co.uk

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View from the top of Bigbury Camp 2011.

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 20 located around the Blean. To see all 20 panels, visit www.theblean.co.uk. For information about walking in Kent visit www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent.

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September 2011