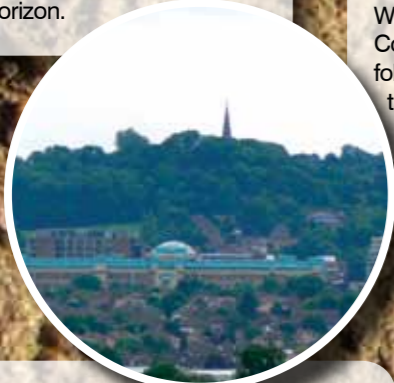


**There are two sections to the nature trail:
The orange route is shorter with more gentle gradients,
ideal for those with limited mobility; the purple route is
longer, with steps, slopes and generally less even terrain –
both finish at the road opposite the Viewpoint car park – enjoy!**

start Start (The View Point): It is okay to park your car here should you need to. There are dramatic views across west London including Harrow-on-the-Hill with St Mary's Church, one of the last remaining Saxon churches in England. On a clear day the North Downs and Surrey Hills are visible on the horizon.



1 Make your way to the western end of the car park and cross the road (take care this stretch can be very busy). You will see a track leading into the woodland with a waymarking sign for the Pinner Grimsdyke Circular Walk. This is part of the historic Harrow Weald Common – follow the trail left.



2 Along this stretch of path there is dense tree cover of beech, downy birch and oak. Below the trees large areas are covered in vegetation which includes bracken (a type of fern), bramble, holly and ivy. If you look carefully you might also spot honeysuckle. Vegetation below the tree canopy is known as 'understorey'.



3 As you walk the route you will notice the ground here is undulating – it is a pattern repeated over much of the Common. This is the result of former gravel digging activities in the 19th century. These gravel banks and hollows are now home to unusual plants including rare ferns.



4 Directly in front of you is a deep hollow fringed with rhododendrons and filled with marsh plants like yellow iris and willow scrub. This was once an ornamental lake built by Sir William Gilbert (of Gilbert and Sullivan fame) in the 1890s, who owned the grounds and nearby house. Tragically, on 29th May 1911 Gilbert invited two local girls to swim in the lake. He died attempting to help one of them when she got into difficulties. Continue left and make your way around the lake, to end up at the sign on the north side.



5 Carry on past the sign, to the right, marking the death of Sir William, and then between two magnificent 'sentinel' Wellingtonias. Redwoods like these were discovered in the 1850s during the Californian gold rush and are amongst the largest living things on earth. Walk along the short section of path lined with yew trees. At its end you are greeted by more magnificent trees and a wonderful view of Grim's Dyke Hotel



11 A narrow strip of grassland appears either side of the path here. The soil is lime deficient. The main grassland species are red fescue, common bent and purple moor-grass, the latter species is rare in London. It is here where the last vestiges of heathland were recorded back in the 1980s and its re-establishment most likely.



10 You cross a series of ditches which drain the interior of the Common – mosses, rushes and ferns are dotted along their banks. A number of large oaks mark the Common's boundary. These are about 150 years old. A little further along on the right is an old pollarded oak that predates these. Pollards have had their branches lopped off in the past. Cross over Len's Avenue (named after Leonard Renery a past keeper of the Common).



9 Cross the main track. You should now be following a short section of the London LOOP. Turn right and continue past the cottages. A little further on, the ditch on the left-hand side deepens. The bank is topped with the remnants of an old hawthorn boundary hedge. Uncommon plants like wood sorrel and hard fern survive in the damp, shady conditions the ditch offers.

8 Orange route walkers: continue on to Old Redding and the Viewpoint car park where our walk began. Cross the road carefully. Purple route walkers: Turn left just before you meet the main road. Initially, pines and other evergreens of the old Grim's Dyke gardens line the route but these abruptly give way to native species as the land rises and once again you are on the Common. There are logs and other fallen dead wood either side of the track. This is excellent habitat for birds, insects and fungi. The most common tree here is downy birch, a relative of the more familiar silver variety. Bear left at the end of the path (at post 17) and continue on to the cottages.



7 Head back towards the old wall and Gilbert's Lake. Bear left and take the gently rising path marked by the handrail. You are now following part of the London LOOP one of the capital's key walking routes. This stretch follows the boundary of the old Common and the once more formal Grim's Dyke gardens. This is marked by dense native tree cover of beech, downy birch and oak to the left and more exotic species to the right.

6 Before continuing a slight detour is called for: Turn left and pass by a section of broken wall. Carry on walking until you are standing on a low bridge. This crosses the Grim's Dyke (the structure which lends its name to the Hotel and grounds). Grim is one of the many names for the Norse God Woden. When exactly it was built or its function is currently unknown - it is possibly late Iron Age. This is now an important area for wetland plants, insects and birds.



12 The trees here are typically 50-100 years old and the area more open (with little vegetation below). Most are oak - with rough bark. Beech and rowan are also found – these have smooth bark. Rowan has pinnate leaves whereas beech leaves are elliptical.

13 This is an area of beech woodland with a few younger oaks beneath. There is little ground vegetation. On quiet days, red fox and muntjac deer can be seen here. Turn right just before reaching Common Road to head back south.



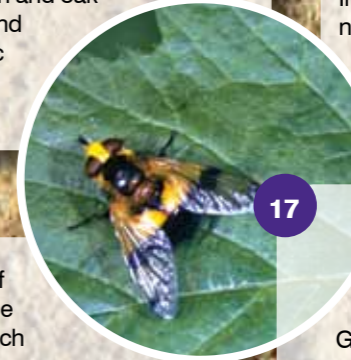
14 Beech trees also dominate this area. Some have been growing since the 1960s. These are joined by a number of other trees including hornbeam (which has elliptical many-toothed leaves and steel-grey, fluted bark), downy birch, oak and yew (one of only three native conifers). On a warm, sunny day, the glades here are a good place to see speckled wood butterflies. Cross over Len's Avenue again.



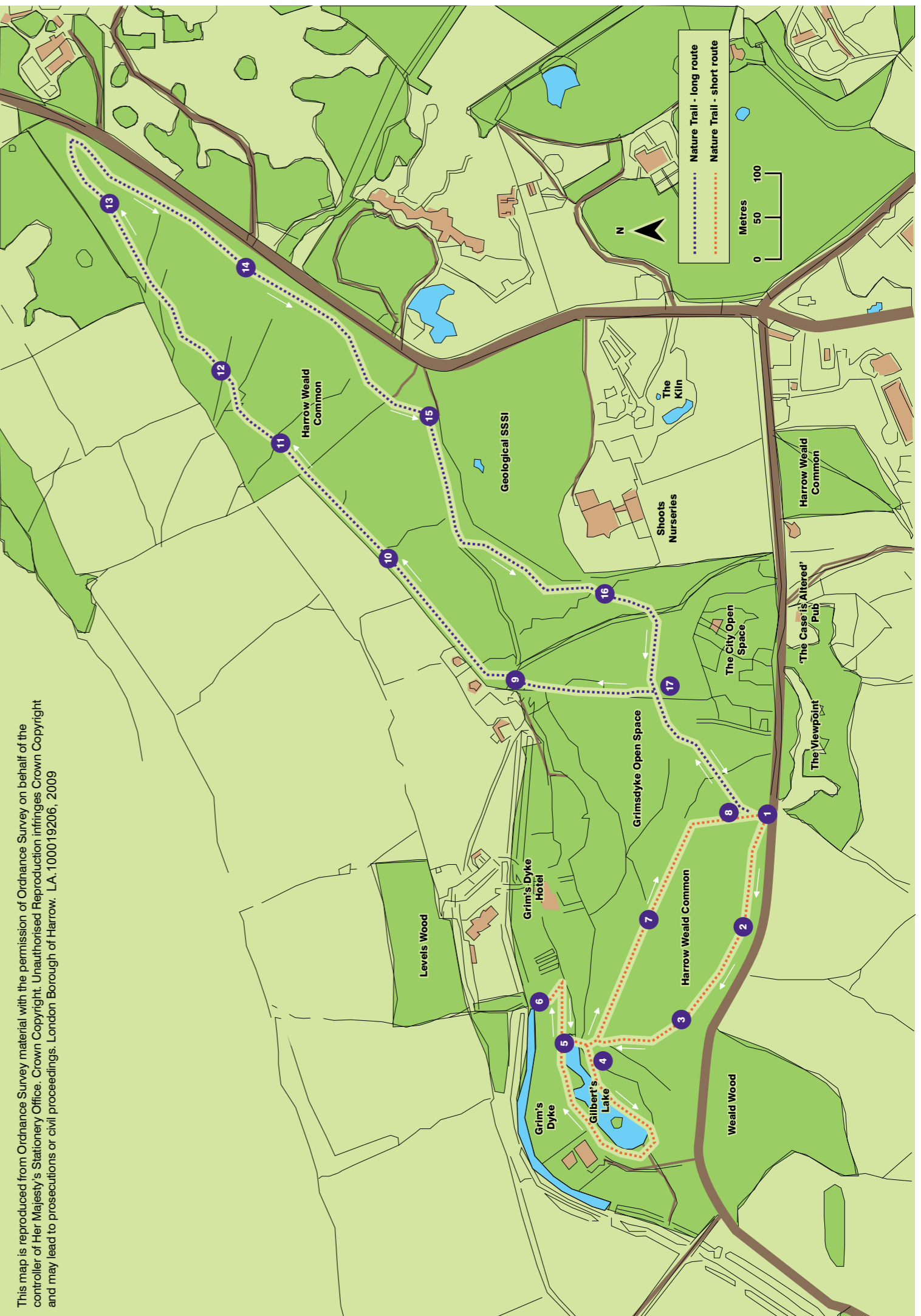
15 To the left you will see a fence behind which is a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest (or SSSI). Such sites are the best examples of their kind in England. Here Ice-age gravels are exposed. The origin of these 'Pebble Gravels' as they are termed, is uncertain. The boundary bank with the Common represents the land level prior to gravel extraction and is now topped with some fine specimens of oak.



16 Some of the drainage ditches which cross the Common have their source within the SSSI. Around the channels, where there is enough light, uncommon plants occur e.g. the lesser spearwort with its attractive yellow flowers. This is a type of buttercup.



17 Head through the woodland and cross the main track, eventually emerging on the tarmac road to the Grim's Dyke Hotel. There is a seating area and some fine specimens of deodar cedar and oak. Carry on across the road and through the woodland. A downwards slope marks the edge of the old Grim's Dyke gardens. A little further along you turn left onto the track to Old Redding and the Viewpoint car park where our walk began. Cross the road carefully.



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Harrow Weald Common Conservators

This body was established by the Metropolitan Commons (Harrow Weald) Supplemental Act of Parliament on 20 June 1899 to "regulate and manage" the common. For over a hundred years the conservators have cared for the common, preserving, for the community, the delightful open space we find today.

Originally the Conservators were representatives of the Harrow, Wealdstone and Wembley Urban District Councils, Harrow Weald and Pinner Parish Councils and the Hendon Rural District Council but as these bodies were abolished Harrow Council took over the appointment of the conservators and financing of their work. The current board (2009) consists of five local councillors from Harrow Weald ward and elsewhere in Harrow. The Conservators are prohibited from receiving any remuneration by parliament.

The issues faced by the original Conservators were different to today. They prevented the removal of "turf sods, gravel, sand and other substances", prevented "bird catching, gin traps, laying snares and taking birds eggs" and were responsible for the "apprehension of gamblers, card sharps, squatters, vagrants, persons guilty of brawling or any idle or disorderly person". Breakers of the bye laws could face fines of £5 and 40 shillings per day for continuing breach.

Today's Conservators face different challenges. We seek to preserve the nature of the common, striking a balance between providing a haven for wildlife and offering leisure facilities. The Nature Trail represents the single largest development in public access to the common in the last 20 years. Speaking on behalf of the Conservators, we hope you enjoy your time on the Common as much as we do.

Tony Ferrari

Chairman Harrow Weald Common Conservators October 2009



Harrow

Weald Common

Nature Trail

3.75 km (2.35 miles)

Starts at the Viewpoint - directions: form Uxbridge Road (A410), Harrow Weald, head along Brookhill (A409) towards Clamp Hill, turn left at Old Redding, the View Point car park is 420 metres (455 yards) on the left. Nearest bus route: 258 to Clamp Hill.

