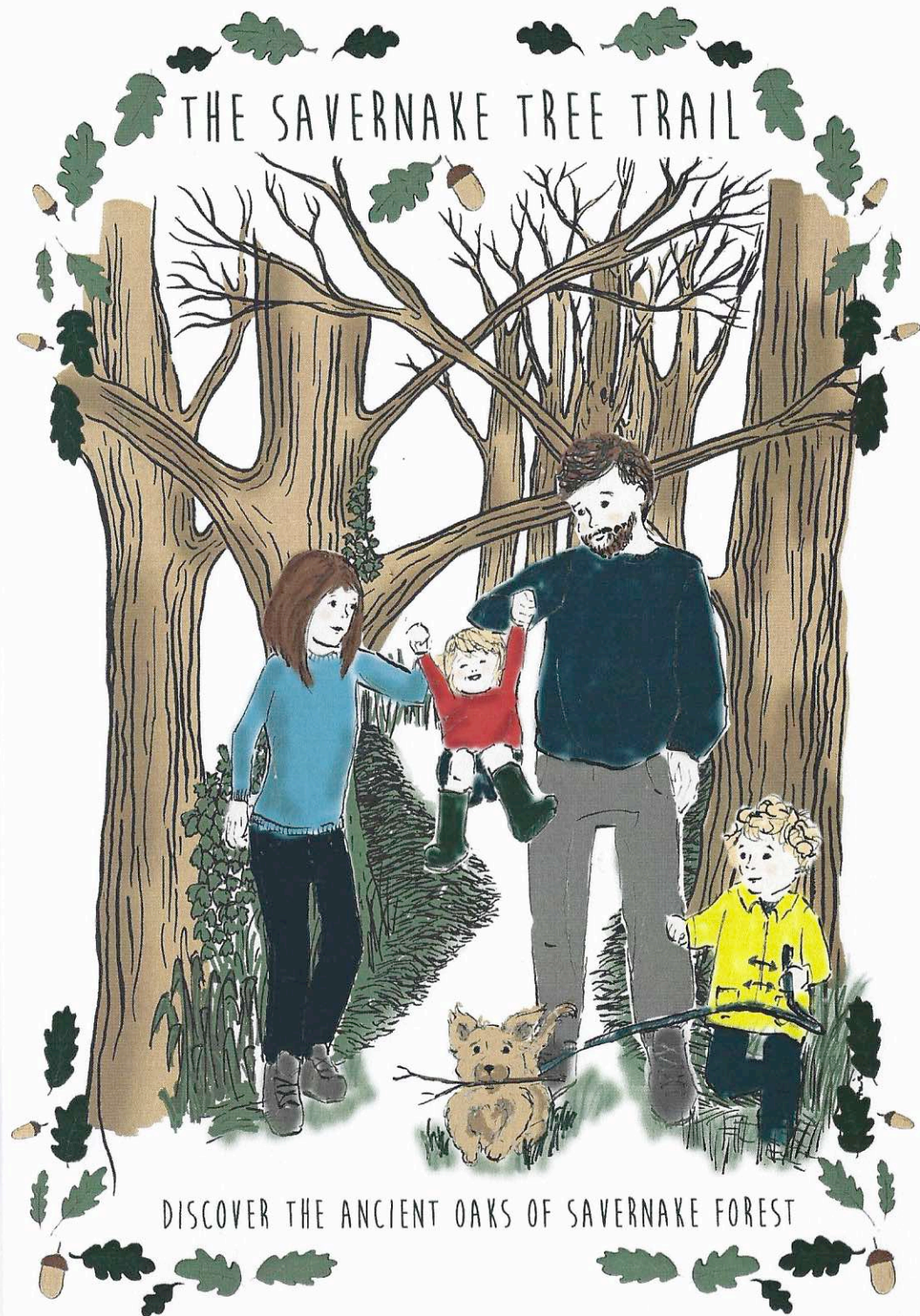


Illustrations by Charlotte Dryden-Kelsey.



DISCOVER THE ANCIENT OAKS OF SAVERNAKE FOREST

THE SAVERNAKE TREE TRAIL

Savernake Forest can be reached by footpath from the South East edge of Marlborough. If you come by car head to the North West corner of the forest, just off the A346, where there is free parking in the Postern Hill Car Park (SN8 4ND). This is where our trail begins.

BUMBLE OAK can be found on the north side of the road to the parking area, opposite the information panel. Of all the veteran trees on the route, this may not be the most impressive, but it is certainly the easiest to locate. From here, take the path opposite the sign to the loos and head into the forest.

After half a mile turn left at the crossroads (the junction of White Road and Grey Ride). Here you will find the statuesque WHITE ROAD OAK, with its girth measuring in at nearly a whopping 7 m.

Continue down this track, taking the next path on your right. This is called Long Harry and, though it is not sign posted, look out for an information board there. Follow the path and keep your eyes peeled for a diagonal track crossing it. 100 m after you see this track, take the turning on your left.

Here you will find a clearing with SADDLE OAK 1 and SADDLE OAK 2. This pair are so named due to the near horizontal growth of their branches; Saddle 1 looks a little worse for wear than Saddle 2.

Return to the main path and continue for half a mile. Turn right when you reach GRAND AVENUE. At 3.9 miles, the beech-lined avenue is the longest in Britain, stretching from the outskirts of Marlborough to almost the front door of Tottenham House.



Big Belly Oak

Grand Avenue connects with 7 other forest rides at Eight Walks, which acts as a hub linking all the major walks through the woodland. Here, take the top right path, passing by a large open glade.

Walk on for half a mile before taking an overgrown track on your right (this comes shortly after a discreet path on the left). At the fork, turn right where you will find the unremarkable REPLACEMENT KING OAK.

Return to the left fork to discover three oaks in quick succession – SPIDER OAK, ORIGINAL QUEEN OAK (in an advanced state of decay, having been planted to celebrate the wedding of Jane Seymour to Henry VIII in 1536) and NEW QUEEN OAK.

Continue until you reach a crossroads. Turn right and walk on until you are nearly at the main road. You will be able to hear the traffic.

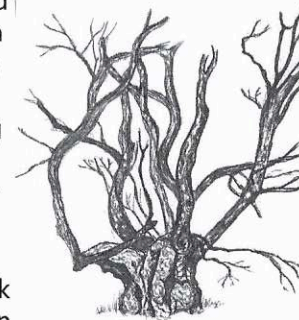
About 100 m before your track actually meets the busy A346, you will see a dead ivy-covered tree on the right and a path – take this. In the absence of any signs or landmarks directing you to the BIG BELLY OAK is actually rather tricky.

Your best bet is to look firstly for an overgrown track on your left, about 100 m after that you will see a rough trail that crosses a fallen tree. Take this trail, climbing over the tree, following your nose towards the road until you find the holy grail that is this great grandfather of the forest.

Said to have taken root about the time of William the Conqueror, Big Belly Oak certainly lives up to its name, with a trunk of 10.8 m, held together with a wide metal belt.

Retracing your steps and climbing back over the fallen tree, rejoin the path and turn left. Continue along the path until you reach a driveway; turn right, then left at the next crossroads. After the path bends to the right – at a gate – fork left, then fork right again as the path begins to climb.

OLD PAUNCHY can be found further down this path. You cannot miss this distinctive tree with its bulbous base. Continue on until you reach a track ahead. Turn left, then immediately right crossing over Long Harry onto a small path.



Cathedral Oak

CATHEDRAL OAK, arguably the jewel in the crown, comes almost at the end of the trail. Unmarked but unmissable, on the very northern edge of the forest, it is magnificent. Continue on through the clearing, turning right when you meet a track to return to the car park.

This route is a treasure hunt of ancient oak trees, sharing space with thickets of bracken, wide open glades and wandering trails. Miles of meandering paths crisscross the woodland though this particular trail spans just 6 miles of relatively easy, flat walking (tiny children can do a much shorter version – “the Acorn Walk” - by just looping the top part of the walk – see map).

Don't expect any signposts, don't expect any colour coding and DO take Ordnance Survey Explorer map 157 – available to buy from The White Horse Bookshop at 136 Marlborough High Street.