



Beech (including Copper Beech) - *fagus sylvatica*



The best time to spot Beech is in late spring when the fresh, lime-green leaves on the young trees make a splendid backdrop for the bluebells.

Beech is widespread throughout Selsdon Wood. There are many young beech trees in the triangle delineated by Bluebell Grove, The Wend and Leafy Grove and this affords the most spectacular view at bluebell time (below right - 20/4/08). Almost all the mature trees in this area are oaks and these form the canopy with the young beech trees forming the understory beneath. The young trees are doubtless the progeny of the ancient Beech in The Wend. This was unsafe and the top was removed a few years ago leaving a massive standing trunk to serve as home to insects and birds (right - 1/4/12).



The young trees often hold on to the dead leaves, which can be seen amongst the slim buds in the winter (below 30/3/12). The leaves are oval and minutely toothed with a gossamer fringe when new (below 11/5/12).



Beech bark is smooth and grey with rippling on older trees. Male and female flowers are separate rounded tassels but there are none on the young trees because Beech does not flower until it is 30-80 years old. A typical lifespan is 150-200 years and one of the largest trees in the wood is a huge Beech at the end of Vincent Avenue, which is around this age. There are four others of a similar vintage above the path in Vale Border.

The fruit is a small nut borne singly or in pairs in soft-spined husks called cupules (right 5/5/12). The edible nuts are called beech mast. It is hard to spot the flowers as they are borne high in the mature trees but the beech mast can be found on the ground beneath them in the autumn.



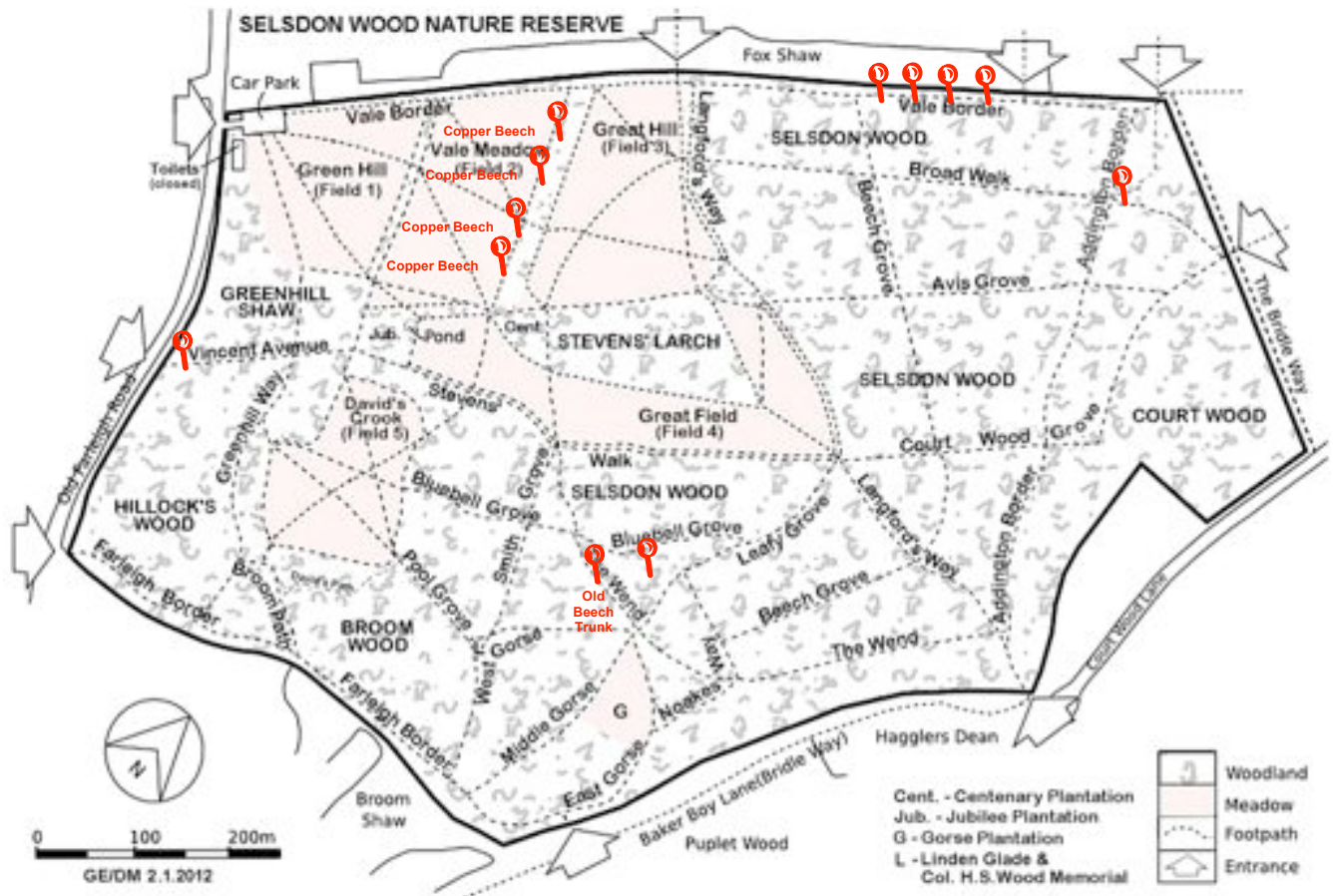
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There are four Copper Beech in the strip of woodland between Fields 2 and 3 (above left 3/5/12). Their regular distribution suggests that they were planted deliberately. There is also a young Copper Beech at the top of Field 1.

Take a walk along Bluebell Grove in April to see the prettiest views in the Wood.

Beech is common throughout Selsdon Wood.
The map shows the locations of some notable specimens mentioned overleaf.



Mystery Plant found in 2015

In the spring of 2015 we were puzzled by the appearance of a mystery plant in the Centenary Plantation. Initially the plant appeared as on the left with a possible white petal-less flower between two leaves the shape of elephant's ears. After a few days the central bud opened out into a pair of fairly standard toothed oval leaves (see right). This proved that the original leaves were seed leaves (or cotyledons) but there were lots of possibilities for oval leaves - Cherry, Hornbeam, etc. Luckily the second one I tried searching for hit gold - see the attached link. They are Beech seedlings:-) <https://riseofnorthwoodnt.wordpress.com/2014/06/02/beeceh-seedlings/>

