

Dinosaurs once walked Wakehurst – and now you can follow in their (giant) footsteps!

A trail for dinosaur lovers, young and old.

🕒 1–1.5 hours

Dinosaur trail

Wakehurst

For details visit, kew.org/wakehurst

Royal Botanic Gardens
Kew

Thank you for visiting today

With so much to explore, pick up one of our carefully curated trails to discover what makes Wakehurst so special:



Membership

Your membership helps protect rare and threatened species for generations to come. From just £40 a year, you'll support pioneering conservation. With Wakehurst membership, you'll enjoy these benefits:

- 📄 Unlimited visits to Wakehurst
- 📄 Discounts on events and workshops
- 📄 Regular e-news bulletins, special offers and Kew magazine in digital format
- 📄 10% off in the shop
- 📄 Exclusive member events
- 📄 **NEW** Members' coffee club card
- 📄 Free parking
- 📄 One free visit to Kew Gardens

Sign up today and we'll refund your day ticket.

To find out more, speak to our team at the Visitor Centre, give us a call on 01444 894067 or sign up online at kew.org/wakehurst-membership

🌿 Monkey puzzle (*Araucaria araucana*)

During the Jurassic period, which started 200 million years ago, these spiky trees would have been lunch for a dinosaur. Maybe these tasty treetops were the reason the diplodocus evolved such a long neck!

2009 – Seed-collecting expedition to Chile

Wakehurst's plant collector Jo Wenham and her team have gathered over half a million seeds from 80 different species of monkey puzzle. Most are stored in the Millennium Seed Bank, but because monkey puzzle seeds don't survive the banking processes of drying and freezing, 40 rare trees were propagated (grown) and planted here, in our living laboratory.



Jo Wenham on a seed-collecting trip to Chile, 2009.

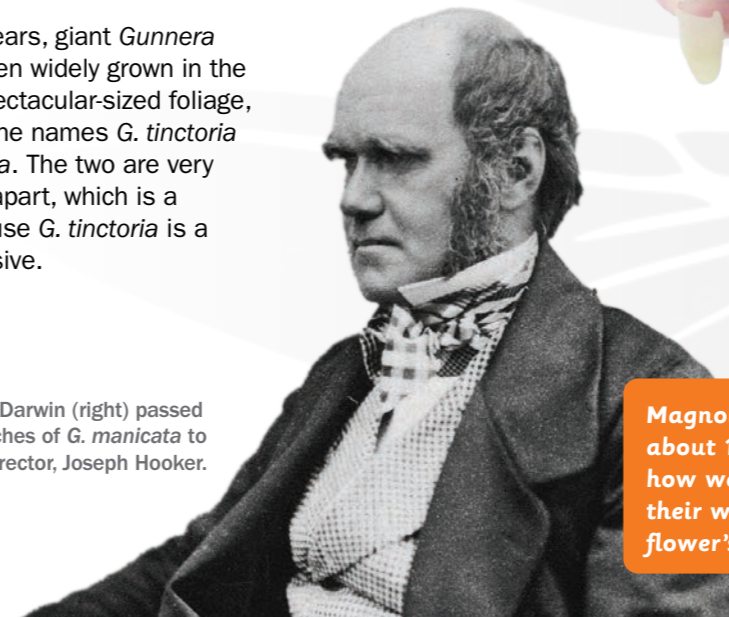


🌿 *Gunnera* species

With their enormous spiky leaves and fearsome stems, everything about these plants makes you think of dinosaurs. It's easy to imagine them growing millions of years ago and being munched by a giant reptile! And you'd be right – they were food for triceratops and duck-billed dinosaurs.

For over 150 years, giant *Gunnera* plants have been widely grown in the UK for their spectacular-sized foliage, usually under the names *G. tinctoria* and *G. manicata*. The two are very difficult to tell apart, which is a problem, because *G. tinctoria* is a menacing invasive.

Charles Darwin (right) passed on sketches of *G. manicata* to Kew's director, Joseph Hooker.



Leaf of *Gunnera manicata*.

🌸 *Magnolia*

Magnolias grew on the planet before bees existed, about 142 to 65 million years ago. Without bees, how were they pollinated? Large beetles worked their way under those heavy petals and into the flower's centre.



🦋 Dragonflies

By our insect standards, the emperor dragonfly is big! But imagine their prehistoric ancestors with a wingspan of 75cm - that's about twice as wide as this leaflet. Creatures were bigger then because there was more oxygen in the air.

Emperor dragonflies have the largest wingspan of any British dragonfly, at about 10.5 cm.

© makamukio / Pixabay



🌿 Maidenhair tree (*Ginkgo biloba*)



Queen Mary plants a *Ginkgo biloba* tree at Wakehurst in 1927.

Ancient roots and the royal connection

An enormous maidenhair tree at Kew Gardens is one of five iconic trees known as the 'Old Lions', which are the last survivors from Kew's historic beginnings as a botanic garden. Planted in 1762 by Princess Augusta, it's one of the first grown in the country.

Queen Mary planted one at Wakehurst in 1927, and Queen Elizabeth II planted another at Kew Gardens in 2009.

The ginkgo tree is one of the oldest tree species in the world! It's the last survivor of an ancient group of trees that goes back to before even dinosaurs! At 270 million years old, they're known as 'living fossils'.

Although the ginkgo's yellow fruit smells like vomit to us, their stink was irresistible to dinosaurs!

Wakehurst is home to one of the tallest living Christmas trees in the UK.



🌿 Coastal redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*)

These are nature's skyscrapers – the tallest trees on Earth. Not only can a coastal redwood live for up to 2,000 years, but they've been around for a very long time too – as far back as the Cretaceous period, which ended 66 million years ago, when the tyrannosaurus rex walked the Earth.

Fire kings

These colossal trees thrive at Wakehurst alongside their better-known cousins, giant redwoods (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*). Redwoods have thick, spongy, flame-resistant bark and can drop their lower branches to prevent fire spreading up to the canopy.

Did you know that some of the earliest fossils discovered worldwide were from nearby Cuckfield? And that in 2014, dinosaur fossils were unearthed during construction work at Ardingly College, just down the road?

Dinosaurs really did walk Wakehurst!

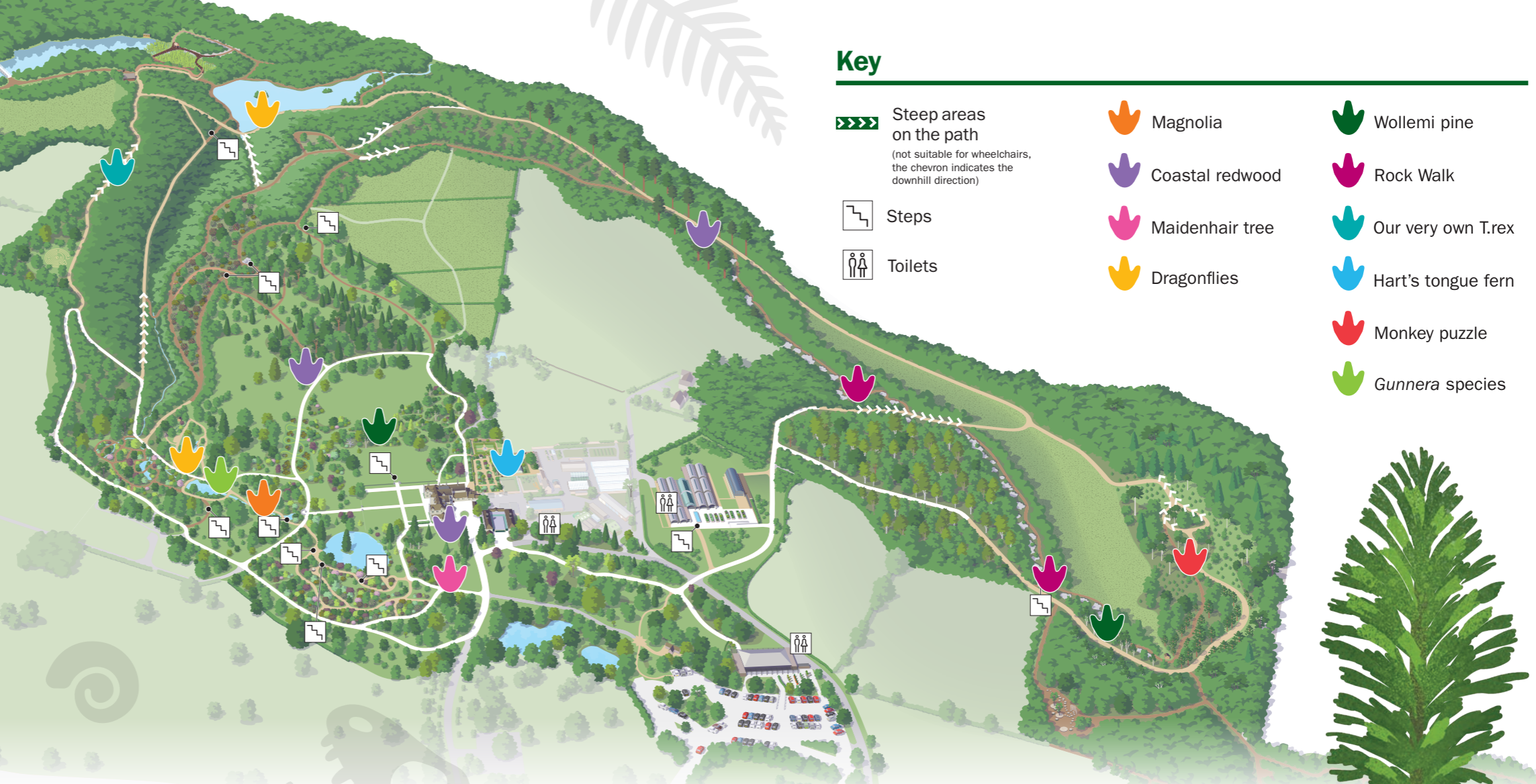
This trail explores ancient trees and plant species that have survived since the time of the dinosaurs, offering a glimpse into a world millions of years old. Many are now rare and threatened, and at Wakehurst, we protect them for the future.

Hart's tongue fern
(*Asplenium scolopendrium*)

Can you spot this unusual plant? It's the only fern without divided leaves. Think of your hand with fingers together and apart – this one is like a hand with its fingers together! Ferns were one of the first plants to evolve on land and make oxygen. This helped other life forms exist out of water.

If you carefully turn the fern over, you'll see orange spores. Plants that don't have flowers use spores to reproduce.

Illustration of hart's tongue fern, 1775.



Our very own T.rex

Have you found our very special rock? What would be a good name for our stoney-faced friend?



T.rex rock in Westwood Valley.



Rock Walk - a home for living archaeology.

Rock Walk

Cryptogams are plants without flowers or seeds, such as ferns, mosses and lichen. They evolved about 400 million years ago and were the first plants to make oxygen.

Our sandstone outcrops are the ideal home for cryptogams because, without roots, they rely on the moisture and nutrients held, like a sponge, in the stone. Wakehurst's Francis Rose Reserve is the first of its kind in Europe, and shelters 18 of the rarest species of these living relics.

Wollemi pine
(*Wollemia nobilis*)

These trees were thought to be extinct until 1994, when they were rediscovered growing secretly in a canyon in Australia!



Wakehurst-grown Wollemi pine seeds were banked for the first time in 2025.

Nothing attracts a gardener's attention more than a tree that's thought to be extinct coming back to life. To make sure the newly discovered species was kept safe, the trees were propagated (grown) and sent to botanic gardens around the world. Wakehurst has 15 of the very first Wollemi pines introduced to the UK.

Key

Steep areas on the path
(not suitable for wheelchairs, the chevron indicates the downhill direction)

Steps

Toilets

Magnolia

Coastal redwood

Maidenhair tree

Dragonflies

Wollemi pine

Rock Walk

Our very own T.rex

Hart's tongue fern

Monkey puzzle

Gunnera species

