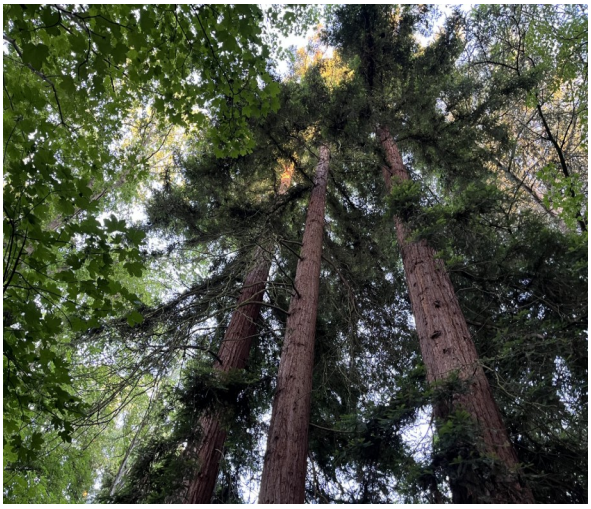
# A Nature Engagement Walk for Wellbeing

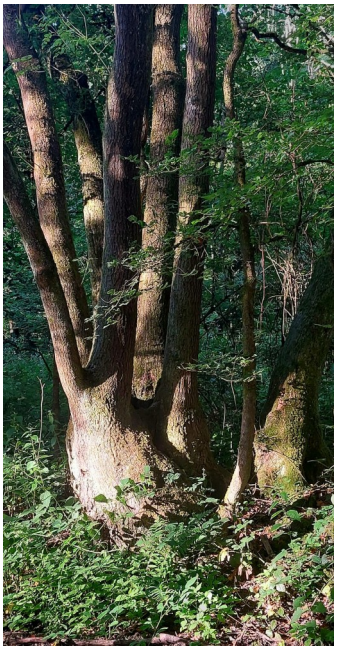
## Great Big Green Week 12 June 2026

## Liz Lennie



Barley Mow Wood. A stone's throw from the leafy outskirts of Woking where we've lived for nearly 50 years, yet I'd never heard of it. Only 10 hectares containing about 48 different types of trees, thanks to it having once been a nursery.
Now managed by the Woodland Trust, it has great character and atmosphere under a high canopy where you can follow paths or meander on soft ground uncluttered by invasive bushes, brambles or bamboo.

I heard about the walk at our local WI and, looking for a light-hearted evening stroll with like-minded people, decided to take my husband, who has dementia, trusting that it would soothe both of us and be all right for each to hug a different tree.



Health and Safety First! Our guide, Jo, said she'd be inviting us to try this and that but not to touch an oak or a yew. I'd always known a yew can be poisonous but never heard of the Oak Processionary Moth and its scary caterpillars – harmful to trees, animals and humans. They are predominantly found here in South East England and, in this month, June, we enter the period of greatest risk. If you spot the caterpillars or their filmy nests, report them immediately, so they can be professionally destroyed.

The first of many pauses in the woodland. We were invited to close our eyes to focus on breathing – slowly in and more slowly out – and then to do a slow-motion walk, trying to suppress the need to talk.

Second stop. Jo gave us each a cardboard frame to help us choose/compose a scene of personal appeal to our sense of sight. I looked up to the canopy punctured with soft sunlight.

I soon ceased counting stops, so many to recall. I can't tell you all. However, here follow a few that came to mean much to me.

One was the only exercise we did in pairs. We had to exchange with another walker an early memory of experiencing nature. Mine was repeatedly loving the soil and stones while slowly growing up on our farm on The Hog's Back. My husband's partner retold for the group his love of Scottish mountains, lochs and islands, even reciting the names of The Small Isles, Eigg, Rhum, Muck and Canna. However, he couldn't recall anything she had said. Nobody minded.

Gradually we unwound on our slow walk through the calm dimness of the woods. However, suddenly a stunning change.

We found ourselves on open ground, full of light on lush grass, bright with daisies and buttercups – but Jo invited us to close our eyes, rooting our feet on the uneven ground to improve our balance and then do four quarter turns (after four long silent pauses) to feel any change of sensation on our face. I couldn't feel much – except relief on being invited to move into a second meadow – where I dared to pick a buttercup, holding it under Jo's chin to ask that childhood question "Do you like butter?" Smiles all round, especially when she gave us each a small plastic bottle of bubble liquid (water, soap and sugar) with a wand fixed under the lid. Blowing through the oval hole, I did notice my improved breath control as colourful bubbles streamed up into the pale sky to catch the late, evening sun.



On moving on again, I hear myself boldly calling out that we hadn't yet hugged a tree and mimed so doing – while saying (perhaps just to myself?): "I'm choosing this rare beech – or did he choose me? I like his bark so smooth and red, his trunk so straight and tall - so tall I've crooked my neck as he has quite turned my head!"



Anyway, at this the other walkers reached out to pat the rough ridges of the giant redwoods around which we happened to be gathered.

Soon after that we stopped to sit or lie for twenty minutes, eyes closed, hearing nothing but the subtle sounds of countless birds – and two young boys speeding past us on their bikes. Jo's alarm went off and someone said their phone app identified the sporadic, irregular tapping as that of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.



Jo wanted us to follow her – we'd not seen the aged yews – but a local lady knew another shorter way out – past the largest, frilliest fungus I'd ever seen – and a gigantic hedgehog that – laugh – turned out to be a spiky log!



Refreshed, renewed, serene, moods changed, we left Barley Mow Wood in various shades of green.