


Greensand Country Heritage Trees

The Redwood Grove, Rushmere Country Park

The tree in front of you is a Giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*); a species that, when fully grown, has become the largest living tree on our planet. It originates from the southern part of the Sierra Nevada in California, USA, where the largest and oldest can be found. One tree called, The General Sherman, currently holds the world record as being the biggest tree in volume. It is over 30m (98ft) in circumference at its base, 85m (279ft) tall and believed to be 2,000 years old.



This species first arrived in Britain in 1853, when it was given the common name of “Wellingtonia” to commemorate the life of the Duke of Wellington, who had died the previous year. This name was never accepted in North America, where it briefly became known as the “Washingtonia”, after US President George Washington. Its botanical name, Sequoia, is generally believed to celebrate the Cherokee Indian Sequoyah who, in 1821,



developed a simple alphabet that enabled anyone in the tribe to easily learn to read and write. Today, its most commonly used name is the Giant sequoia but it is also referred to as the “Mammoth Tree” and “Big Tree”.

In its native habitat there are about 70 groves of these trees (depending upon how many trees define a grove), but many of these have fewer trees in them than can be found here and in nearby Plantation Road, Linslade.

Our tree was planted in about 1870 and, although one of the oldest in Britain, it is a mere sapling! However, it is already over 6m (20ft) in circumference and the tallest trees here are 41.5m (136ft) tall (2020). Taller than nine double-decker buses on top of each other! Sheltered by the natural sandstone ridge, they are the tallest trees on the Greensand Ridge Walk and some of the tallest trees you will come across throughout all of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire. In several churchyards on top of the Greensand Ridge, to the east of Bedfordshire, there are Giant sequoia that reach higher into the sky than any other tree in the county!

Many trees will have originated from the first 1853 seed and the earliest recorded planting of a Giant sequoia in Bedfordshire is an 1856 tree at Wrest Park, Silsoe (9m circumference 2019). Trees planted at Woburn by the 6th Duke of Bedford are given an 1866 planting date.



Look out for the cones of this tree, which are about the size and shape of a small hen’s egg. The cones take two years to develop and inside each cone there are about 200 tiny black seeds - some of the smallest tree seeds that will grow into the biggest of trees! Conditions have to be just right for germination, so producing thousands of seeds is part of the tree’s survival strategy, along with its thick, spongy bark, which protects it from forest fires. But you won’t see any seedlings naturally growing at Rushmere, as it is the same forest fires that create the specific environment needed around the tree for its seeds to be released and successfully germinated.

The Heritage Tree Post has been installed by kind permission of the Greensand Trust.

