

Bluebell Wood

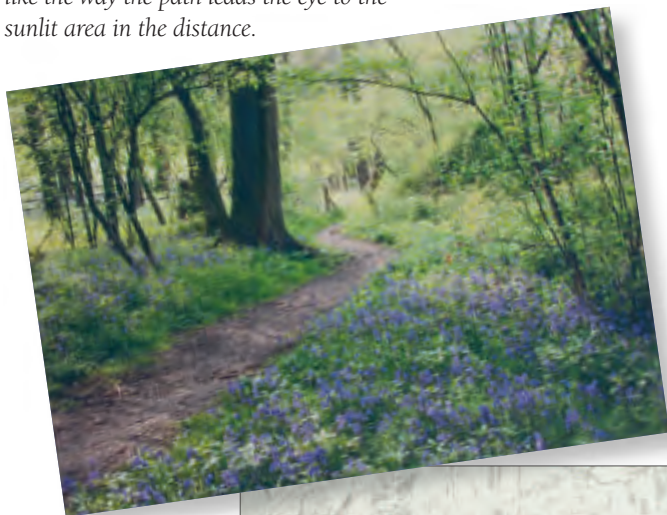
A wood filled with bluebells is a very special and fleeting example of flowers in the landscape. Although it is impossible to fully capture the atmosphere, scents and breathtakingly beautiful colours of bluebells growing en masse, we cannot be blamed for trying! Watercolour, with its delicacy and translucency is such an appropriate medium to use.

Keeping the blues and violets and pinks clean and fresh will be the main challenge in this project. The bluebells grow amongst green foliage and we know from basic colour theory that pinks/purples and green mixed together can make a sombre grey. So we have to be wary of letting these colours mix too readily on the paper.

Dappled sunshine is characteristic of spring woodland and in this project I try to retain the light in the painting by keeping the first washes fresh and not painting over them too much.

A lightness of touch is necessary for the trees and spring foliage too. The secret is to leave gaps in the foliage as you drag your brush across the paper. You can then weave your tree trunks and twigs in and out of the gaps for a natural effect. So let's get started!

Here I found a ready-made composition using the camera's viewfinder. I especially like the way the path leads the eye to the sunlit area in the distance.



I drew this sketch to help me simplify the composition and understand the distribution of lights and darks.





The finished painting.

YOU WILL NEED

425gsm (200lb) Rough surface watercolour paper 38 x 28cm (15 x 11in)

2B pencil

Board

Masking tape

Masking fluid and brush

Kitchen paper

Brushes:

Nylon size 3 round, 16mm ($\frac{5}{8}$ in)

filbert, size 12 round, two size

10 rounds, two size 6 rounds,

size 3 rigger and size 1 rigger

Watercolour paints:

raw sienna, aureolin, French

ultramarine, burnt sienna, Winsor

violet, cobalt blue, Winsor

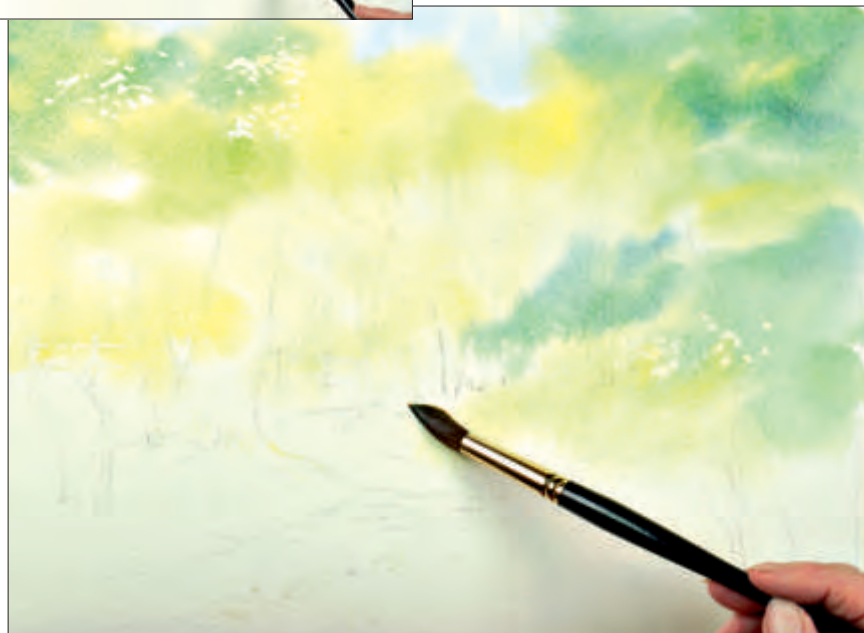
blue, quinacridone magenta,

permanent rose, Hooker's green

dark, transparent yellow



1 Sketch out the main shapes on the paper using a 2B pencil. Secure the paper to the board with masking tape, prop the board up and use the nylon size 3 round to apply masking fluid as shown. Prepare the following wells: a yellow well of raw sienna and aureolin; a dark well of French ultramarine, burnt sienna and Winsor violet; a blue well of cobalt blue, Winsor blue, Winsor violet, quinacridone magenta and permanent rose; a green well of Hooker's green, aureolin, French ultramarine and transparent yellow.



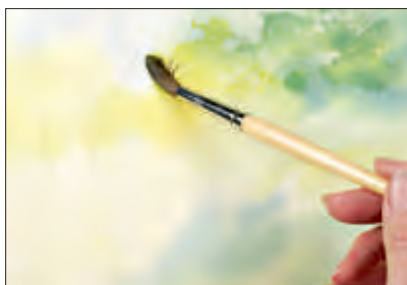
2 Wet the whole paper thoroughly with the 16mm ($\frac{5}{8}$ in) filbert brush and clean water. Lay in the sky at the top with cobalt blue (see inset), then lay in the foliage at the top with the size 12 round using colours from the yellow and green wells to create a variegated wash.

TIP

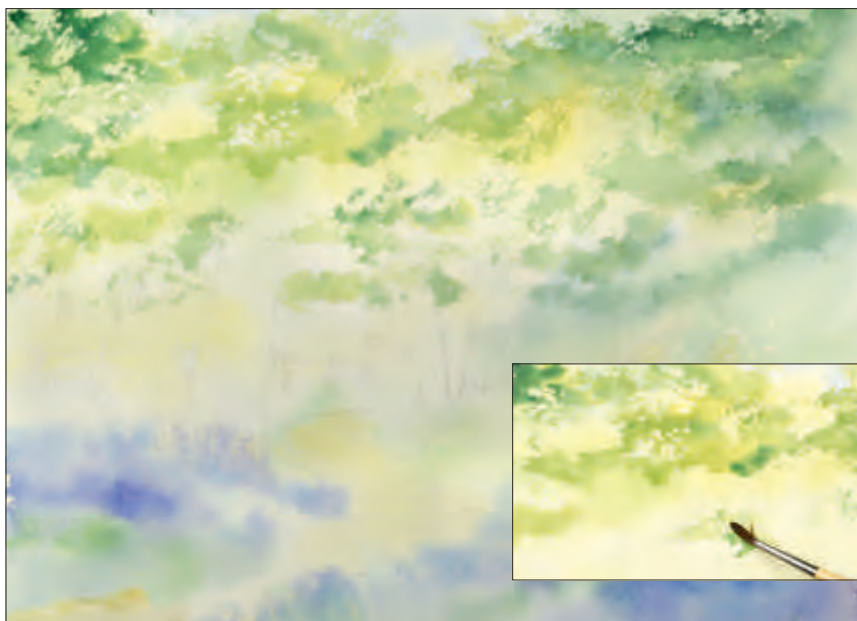
It is important to keep the blues and violets clean, so use a large area separate from the other colours. A white dinner plate works very well!



3 Continue laying in the variegated wash, introducing the colours from the blue well over the bluebells, and using the dark and green wells to lay in the foliage. Keep the colours in the centre fairly dilute to suggest a light area that draws the eye along the path.



4 Allow the painting to dry. Using the colours from the green well with a size 10 round, dry brush the paint over the paper in the top right. Splay the brush by adding a little pressure to produce a broken leafy canopy effect.



5 Continue this over the rest of the foliage area, remembering to keep the dark tones towards the sides and lighter tones in the centre. Swap to a size 6 round for the distant foliage (see inset).



6 Switch to two size 10 round brushes, one for clean water and one for paint. Using French ultramarine and the darker colours from the green well, fill in the dark background between the trees and beneath the canopy. Wet each area, then drop in the colour and blend it away.



7 Using a size 10 round, lay in a raw sienna wash on the trunk of the largest tree.



8 Working wet-into-wet, add colours from the dark well to the trunks and draw them up into the foliage. Use the tip of the brush to bring out the shape of the leaves with negative painting.

9 Paint the nearby tree in the same way, then bring out the bluebells at the base of the trees with negative painting, and suggest the root structures to finish this stage of the trees.





10 Paint the other background trees in the same way, using more dilute mixes for the more distant trees. Paint with a broken, hit-and-miss action to give the impression the foliage is in front of the branches.

11 Using the colours from the green well and a little burnt sienna, paint in a layer of dark across the middle of the painting. Blend it away upwards using clean water. This gives a sense of distance and brings out the fence.



12 Using the blue well, draw a dry size 10 round across the bluebell areas with short strokes of the side of the brush. Keep the brush moving and vary the colours as you work. With the help of the paper's texture, the marks you make will look like separate bluebell flowers.

Tip

Draw the loaded brush over some kitchen paper to draw out excess moisture. This helps you with the dry brush technique.



13 Change to the size 6 round brushes for the distant bluebells, and continue until all of the bluebells are painted.



14 Allow the entire painting to dry thoroughly, then use a clean finger to remove all of the masking fluid.



15 Using the size 6 round brushes, paint in the unmasked leaves in the canopy using aureolin.



16 Working wet-into-wet, add tonal variation with the colours from the green well.



17 Still using the size 6 brushes, paint the fence with colours from the dark well dropped into raw sienna.



18 Add a little French ultramarine wet-into-wet to suggest shading on the fence.



19 Mix up a large quantity of burnt sienna and French ultramarine, then use the side of a size 3 rigger to paint in the main shapes of the tree on the left of the foreground.



20 Switch to a size 1 rigger to paint smaller branches and twigs on to the tree.



21 Paint the right-hand tree in the same way, adding some smaller saplings at the base.



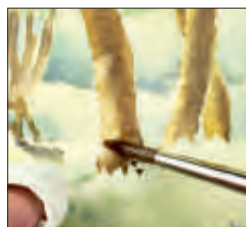
22 Using bright, strong colours from the green well, add leaves to the right-hand tree with the size 3 rigger.



23 Use a size 6 round and colours from the blue well to lay some colour on the unmasked bluebells.



24 Wet the grassy banks on either side of the path with clean water, and drop in various colours from the green well to give you a variegated effect.



25 Wet your size 6 round and use it to agitate the paint on the left-hand side of the central group of trees. Dab the area gently with kitchen paper (see inset). This will lift out some of the paint and create a highlight to give the effect of dappled sunlight.



26 Wet the right-hand sides of the same group of trees and drop in a mix of French ultramarine and burnt sienna.



27 Make a shadow well of French ultramarine, burnt sienna and a little Winsor violet. Use a size 10 round brush to paint the side of the foreground tree.



28 Blend out the colour with a wet size 10 brush, drawing it across the tree and path.



29 Using dilute colours from the shadow well with the size 10 round brushes, continue drawing the shadow across the whole foreground. Leave broken areas for dappled sunlight, and use a stronger tone in the lower right.

30 Add other hints of shadow to the background in the same way, using a size 6 brush. Allow the painting to dry.

