



Aylesford to Maidstone walk

Ancient sites and a fine viewpoint on Kent's North Downs

Length **Main Walk:** 19 km (11.8 miles). Four hours 45 minutes walking time. For the whole excursion including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 9½ hours.
Circular Walk, returning to Aylesford: 17½ km (10.9 miles). Four hours 20 minutes walking time.

OS Map Explorer 148. Aylesford, map reference TQ720587, is in Kent, 5 km **NW** of Maidstone.

Toughness 5 out of 10.

Features Although only a small village on the banks of the **River Medway**, **Aylesford** has a long history. In this area there are neolithic burial sites, memorials to battles from the Roman and Anglo-Saxon eras, a medieval bridge and many ancient buildings. There are also reminders of brick, tile and cement manufacturing, paper mills and quarrying, but many of these old industrial sites are being redeveloped for housing and the only significant blot on the landscape is a large paper recycling plant across the river in Snodland.

Aylesford station is 1 km from the village centre and the walk starts with a fine view across the river to **The Friars**, a Carmelite priory which was dissolved by Henry VIII and used as a private residence until the main house burnt down in the 20thC. The site was then bought back by the Carmelites and restored to its former use; it is open to the public daily (free entry) except on Christmas week. The route crosses the river on a new road bridge for a picture-postcard view of the village's medieval bridge and other historic buildings.

The main route out of the village takes you past a large flooded sand pit and then through a new **vineyard**, an increasingly familiar sight in southern England. In between the villages of **Eccles** and **Burham** is the latter's medieval church, now isolated and all but abandoned since the village relocated to higher ground in the mid-19thC.

The walk now climbs steeply up the wooded North Downs to a popular picnic site on open downland, **Blue Bell Hill**. The panoramic view would have been rather different if the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (HS1) had been routed through the valley below as originally planned, but even without this intrusion a nearby dual carriageway effortlessly disturbs the peace by remaining audible for the next 2½ km or so.

The descent from Blue Bell Hill on the **North Downs Way** takes you past a neolithic dolmen whimsically known as "Kent's Stonehenge". **Kit's Coty House** was originally part of a long burial chamber but these entrance stones are all that survive. Two more ancient sites are nearby but less conveniently placed: the only right of way to **Little Kit's Coty House** is off a busy road, while the **White Horse Stone** requires an out-and-back detour of almost 1 km.

The route back to the River Medway goes through [Cobtree Manor Park](#), a small country park with traces of its former existence as Maidstone Zoo, dotted with interesting trees and sculptures. The final part of the walk into the county town of [Maidstone](#) is along a stretch of the Medway revitalized as the **Maidstone River Park**, initially on the towpath and then through [Whatman Park](#) on the opposite bank.

Walk Options

Throughout the walk several alternative routes and detours are described, with directions to the features listed above which are not on the main route.

At Burham Church you can lengthen the walk by 2½ km with a circuit around a meander of the River Medway. This area of reeds and water meadows makes a nice interlude and there is a stone memorial to the **Battle of Medway** (AD 43) on the embankment, but the large paper recycling plant directly opposite rather detracts from the experience.

For a slightly shorter ending you can turn right instead of left when you reach the River Medway and complete a **Circular Walk** back to **Aylesford**.

Transport

Aylesford is on the Medway Valley branch line (Strood–Maidstone West–Paddock Wood), with a half-hourly off-peak service (hourly on Sundays). It is possible to travel out via either Tonbridge/Paddock Wood or Maidstone (walking between Maidstone East and Maidstone Barracks), but in general the quickest route is on the High Speed train from St Pancras, changing at Strood; with a good connection, the total journey time on this route is about 1 hour.

At the end of the Main Walk there are direct trains to Victoria from Maidstone East. The town's other two stations are on the Medway Valley line.

The most flexible ticket is a [return to Maidstone stations](#), but for the Circular Walk a [return to Aylesford](#) is cheaper and valid for travel via Tonbridge as well as Strood. In both cases you will need to have a ticket routed "Plus High Speed" (or buy an upgrade) to use those trains.

If you want to abandon the walk there is a bus service through Burham, Eccles, Aylesford High Street and past Cobtree Manor Park to Maidstone (hourly Mon–Sat, every two hours Sun).

If driving, there is a small free parking area at Aylesford station. As an alternative you could do a truncated circular walk from the village, using one of the two free car parks by the new river bridge.

Suggested Train

Take the train nearest to **09:50** from **St Pancras**, changing at **Strood** for **Aylesford**.

Lunch

An early lunch option (after 4¼ km) might be the **Red Bull** pub (01622-718135) in **Eccles**, but this only serves food at lunchtime on Fri–Sun.

The main lunch places are in the village of **Burham**, after around 7½ km. The [Butcher's Block](#) (01634-786626) in Church Street is an up-market restaurant/bar which serves excellent food to 2.30pm Wed–Fri, 4.30pm weekends (but closed all day Mon and no food Tue lunchtime). At the top of this street on Rochester Road [The Windmill](#) (01634-864570) is a traditional village pub, serving good-value food.

If none of these places appeal you could take the alternative walk route via **Burham Common**, 1 km beyond the village. Hidden away in woodland at the top of Blue Bell Hill, the [Robin Hood](#) (01634-861500) is a popular country pub serving freshly-cooked food until 2.30pm Mon–Thu, all afternoon Fri–Sun.

Tea

There is no shortage of tea places towards the end of this walk, with the **Cobtree Manor Park Café** (open to 4pm Mon–Fri, 5pm weekends) being well placed for a mid-afternoon break on both walk options.

On the **Main Walk** there is a seasonal kiosk on the island beside **Allington Lock**, the **Little Old Toll House** (07860-684555; opening hours “weather dependent”). A little further on you could sit and watch the river traffic from the outdoor tables of the **Malta Inn Beefeater** (01622-717251).

In **Maidstone** there are plenty of pubs, cafés and coffee shops tucked away in the streets, alleyways and shopping malls making up its pedestrianised town centre, some with outdoor seating. There are far too many eateries to list in full, but the directions include a short detour via a mall with branches of **Costa Coffee** and **Patisserie Valerie**, and (a little further on) two places in the same arcade which might tempt you: the French **Café Frédéric** (01622-297414) and the Italian **Vesuvius Café** (01622-296767). The nearest pub to the station is a JD Wetherspoons, **The Society Rooms** (01622-350910). In the station itself there is a small buffet on Platform 1.

On the **Circular Walk** you could check out some places while passing through **Aylesford** in the morning. **Hengist** (01622-885800) is a “modern restaurant and bar in a 16thC building” serving full afternoon teas. The **Chequers Inn** (01622-717286) is also in a historic building and has a fine riverside terrace, while **The Bush** (01622-430331) is a traditional village pub. Finally, the **Village Pantry** (01622-792673) describes itself as a “happy mix of tea shop and curios”, but closes at 4pm and all day Sun.

Allow at least 20 minutes from any of these places to reach the station, about 1¼ km from Aylesford's High Street with a level crossing to negotiate along the way.

Help Us!

After the walk, we would love to get your [feedback](#)

You can upload photos to the [SWC Group on Flickr](#), and [videos to Youtube](#). This walk's tags are:

**By Car**

Start ME20 7LL **Finish** ME14 1QN

Help

National Rail: 03457 48 49 50 • Travelline SE (bus times): 0871 200 2233 (12p/min) • TFL (London) : 0343 222 1234

Version

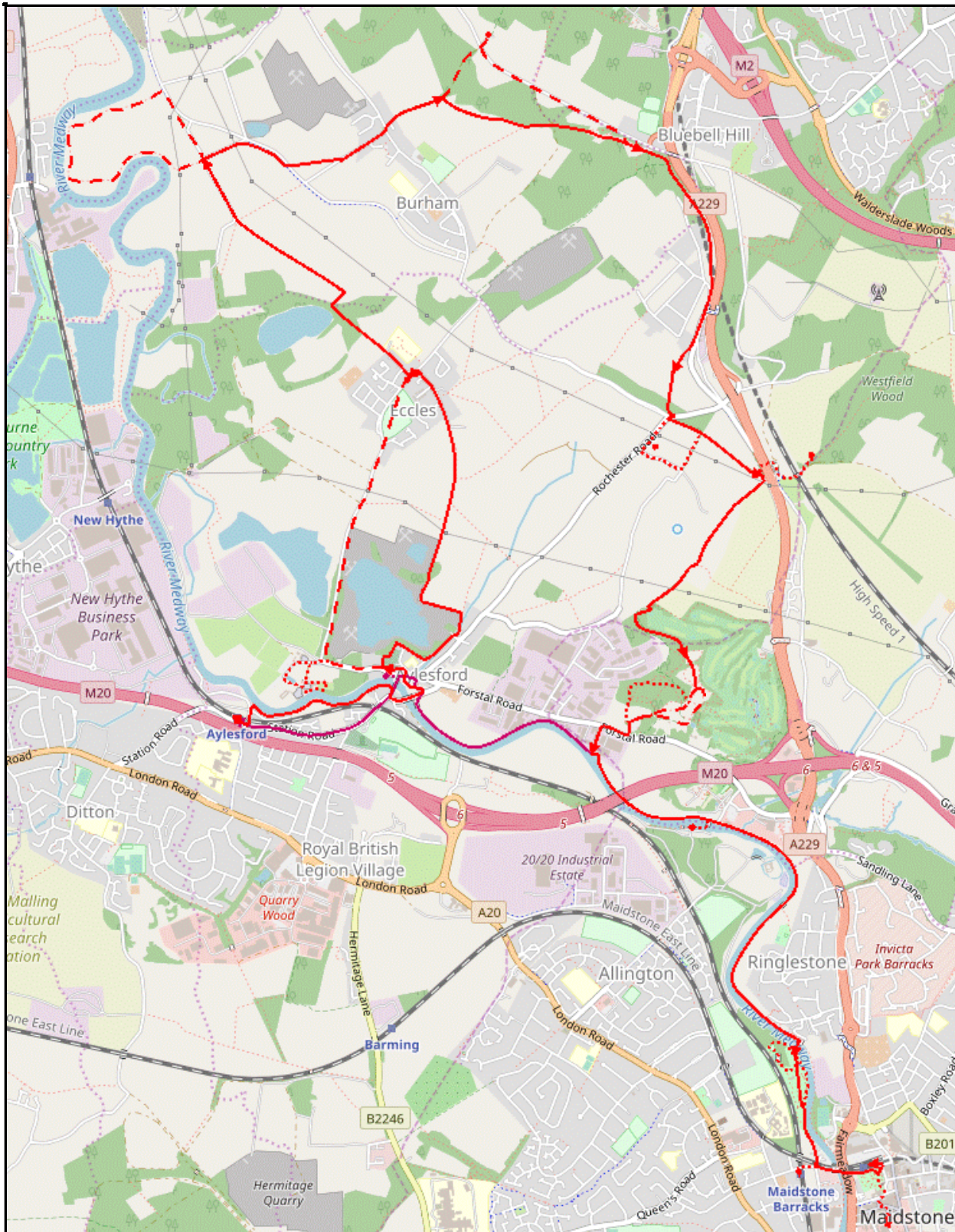
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Walk Directions

Walk Map



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Walk Options

- M. Main Walk (19 km)**
- a. Circular Walk, returning to Aylesford (17½ km)**

Walk Directions

- 1. Aylesford Station to Aylesford Church (1¾ km)**

Arriving from Strood, cross the footbridge to exit from Platform 1. Turn left onto Station Road, then **turn left** again to go over the level crossing. Where this minor road (Mill Hall) bends left, keep ahead across a patch of grass to come to the **River Medway**. **Turn right** onto the riverside path, initially alongside a new housing estate. On the opposite bank you soon pass the restored buildings of **Aylesford Priory**¹ (which you could visit in §2b).

Continue along the riverside path for a further 600m, passing the remains of an old wharf as you approach the village. After a final right-hand bend the path comes out by the medieval **Aylesford Bridge**². Although you could cross the river here, the suggested route is to go out to the nearby main road and turn left, crossing via the new road bridge for a picture-postcard view of the village.

On the other side **turn left** into the car park and double back through it. Near the middle take a path on the right signposted to the High Street and follow it past the garden and side entrance of the **Hengist** bar/restaurant. Turn left briefly onto the High Street and **fork right** up Church Walk. Either **turn left** behind the first house onto a lane leading to the church, or go a bit further uphill and walk through the churchyard to its south door. If open, the parish church of **Ss Peter & Paul**³ is well worth a visit.

2. Aylesford Church to Eccles (2½ or 3¼ km)

Continue in the same direction along the elevated path, with the village below on your left. Avoid steps down to the High Street and go up to the corner of the churchyard, where there is a signposted footpath off to the right.

If you want to visit the Carmelite Priory which you saw from across the river, follow the directions in §2b. However, the continuation of this route to Eccles (alongside Bull Lane for 1¾ km) is not the most interesting and you could choose to retrace your steps and do the main route in §2a.

a. Main route (2½ km)

For the main route go up a few steps onto the enclosed footpath, which works its way around the side and back of the churchyard and eventually comes out past garden fences onto a narrow lane (Mount Pleasant). Turn left onto this one-way street, with occasional glimpses of the flooded **Aylesford Quarry**⁴ (East Lake) through the trees on your left. In 200m the lane curves down to the right towards Rochester Road, but shortly before reaching it **turn left** past vehicle barriers onto a signposted footpath.

The development plan for Aylesford Lakes includes a new access road cutting across this footpath, so this right of way might change or look different in future.

The path leads into the corner of a field where you **fork left** to head **W** along its edge, climbing gently and soon with extensive views across the large flooded quarry. Follow the field edge round to the right in the corner, then in 100m bear left as indicated. Go through a copse and then along a grassy path between fences to emerge in the corner of **Kit's Coty Vineyard**⁵.

Go straight ahead along a broad grassy strip between the vines and a line of trees on your right, ignoring footpaths off to both sides. Keep ahead where the trees end, gradually curving left towards houses. At the end of the vineyard continue on a grassy path past some scrubland and through a kissing gate onto a residential street on the outskirts of Eccles.

Follow this street (Mackenders Lane) for 350m to its T-junction with Bull Lane, where the **Red Bull** pub (a possible early lunch stop) is on the right. To continue the walk turn left onto Bull Lane, briefly heading away from the North Downs and back towards Aylesford, then **turn right** into Eccles Row.

b. Route via The Friars (2¼ to 3¼ km)

For the alternative route continue along the tarmac path, which drops down slightly and becomes the pavement to the extended High Street. In 250m the entrance to **The Friars** is ahead on the left where the road turns sharply right.

A brief circuit around The Friars is described below. Please respect the quiet nature of this religious institution, particularly in the piazza and chapels of the Shrine Complex.

- **Suggested Circuit of The Friars (1 km)**

Turn left off the entrance driveway by a pedestrian crossing onto a broad tree-lined avenue leading to the **Shrine Complex**, opposite a pond. A signposted **Rosary Walk** loops around the back of the chapel buildings and returns alongside the River Medway (you could also detour into the long narrow **Peace Garden** via the Gatehouse on the left). To complete the circuit, go past the pond and turn right onto a signposted footpath parallel to the main driveway, passing the **Tearoom** in a converted barn near the exit.

For the direct route to Eccles, return to the road and head **N** on the continuation of the tarmac path you were on earlier. This footway runs alongside Bull Lane, initially screened by a line of trees but for most of the way on a grass verge. There are glimpses on both sides of the flooded **Aylesford Quarry**⁴ (West and East Lakes).

In 900m the footway becomes a pavement. Ignore paths off to both sides and continue along Bull Lane for a further 450m, into the village of Eccles. Where the road swings left, go past metal railings at the bottom of Hawkes Road onto the large Recreation Ground. Make your way diagonally across it to the far left-hand corner to rejoin Bull Lane and continue along the main road for 100m. Unless you want an early lunch stop at the **Red Bull** pub (75m further ahead on the right), *turn left* into Eccles Row.

3. Eccles to Burham Church (2 km)

Go all the way along Eccles Row. At the end of this cul-de-sac keep ahead on a bridleway, passing allotments on your left and going past a vehicle barrier onto a shady path between tall hedges. Follow this long straight path for 500m, then turn right as indicated in front of another vehicle barrier, away from a reservoir which you might be able to glimpse through the trees. Go out into a large field and keep ahead briefly along its right-hand edge.

In 100m *turn left* at a marker post onto a broad path across the field (a right of way not shown on older OS maps). In 350m this bridleway comes to a projecting hedgerow and continues alongside it. In the far corner of the field ignore bridleways off to both sides and keep ahead on a lane, heading **NW** towards Burham church. After passing a few houses you come to a road junction by the entrance to **St Mary's**⁶ church, which is worth a quick visit.

If you want to extend the walk with a loop alongside the River Medway, follow the directions below.

- **Optional River Circuit (+2½ km)**

For the extension continue in your previous direction on Old Church Road (ie. turn left if leaving the churchyard). Where the old road swings right towards New Church Road by an information panel about the history of **Old Burham**, keep ahead on a new cycleway. After going alongside the new road for 150m *turn left* onto a signposted footpath, joining the **Medway Valley Walk**⁷ for the rest of this loop.

This soon becomes a narrow tree-lined path, with occasional glimpses of the new river crossing away to the right at Peter's Village. You pass some overgrown **industrial ruins**⁸ and the path opens out to run between reeds and water meadows on the riverside embankment. It then swings round to the left to head towards the **Smurfit Kappa**⁹ paper recycling plant across the river in Snodland.

Just before the path turns left again there is a memorial stone and a faded information panel about the **Battle of Medway**¹⁰ in AD 43. After another left turn and a gentle curve round to the right, *turn left* at a footpath waymarker to head towards Burham church (you could also detour ahead into **Burham Marsh**¹¹ nature reserve, returning the same way). The footpath leads back to the road junction by the church.

4. Burham Church to Burham Down (1¾ km)

At the road junction take Court Road, heading **NE** (ie. go straight ahead if leaving the churchyard). Where this meets New Court Road veer right onto the cycleway alongside it, gently uphill. In 300m cross the road at the designated crossing point and take the footpath opposite, a clear grassy path between fields leading up to the village of Burham.

At the top go past a small car park and continue on the narrow road through the village (Church Street). In about 100m you pass the **Butcher's Block** restaurant/bar on the right, a possible lunch stop. At the top of the street cross Rochester Road carefully towards the

Windmill pub, another possible lunch place.

To continue the walk go up Old School Close, the cul-de-sac next to the pub. Where it turns right **bear left** onto a tree-lined track, a public byway. After climbing steadily for 350m there is a new wooden bench in a gap in the trees on the left with a view of the downs, and a footpath branching off to the right.

5. **Burham Down to Blue Bell Hill (1¼ or 1¾ km)**

If you want to visit the last of the possible lunch places, follow the directions in §5b.

a. Main route (1¼ km)

To bypass the pub **turn right** off the byway onto the footpath, slanting gently uphill across the hillside. If you wish you can detour through one of the gates on the left into **Burham Down**¹² nature reserve, where a narrow chalky path runs parallel to the public footpath.

At the end of the nature reserve continue along the footpath. This bends left where another footpath joins from the right and climbs more steeply. Keep ahead at a path crossing, still climbing. In a further 200m or so **veer right** through a wooden gate with a **Bluebell Hill Picnic Area** concrete marker.

Take any path slanting gently uphill across the open downland. In about 100m there is a wooden bench near the top of a steeply sloping patch of grassland, where the alternative route comes in on the **North Downs Way**¹³ (NDW) from the top of the hill.

When level with the bench, follow the path into a belt of trees and through a wooden gate onto another part of the downs. Continue along a broad grassy path, passing more benches where you could pause to admire the view across the Medway Valley. The path then goes below a small car park where there is a **memorial stone**¹⁴.

b. Route via the Robin Hood (1¾ km)

Keep ahead on the byway and follow it for a further 400m to a lane at the top of the hill, where there is a pub sign. Go straight ahead onto the pub's driveway and down a short slope to the **Robin Hood** pub.

To continue the walk, retrace your steps up the drive and **turn left** onto the lane (Common Road), joining the **North Downs Way**¹³ (NDW). In 400m ignore a byway down to the right. In a further 500m **turn right** through a gap in the hedge with a NDW waymarker. Go through a wooden gate and follow a short grassy path sloping down to the left; there is a wooden bench off to the right, where the main route comes in.

When level with the bench, follow the path into a belt of trees and through a wooden gate onto another part of the downs. Continue along a broad grassy path, passing more benches where you could pause to admire the view across the Medway Valley. The path then goes below a small car park where there is a **memorial stone**¹⁴.

6. **Blue Bell Hill to Kit's Coty House (1½ km)**

Beyond the car park, go past a NDW waymarker into a wood. Follow the path across the wooded hillside, leading to a T-junction in front of the noisy A229. Turn right to go downhill on the NDW, ignoring a bridleway and then a footpath down to the right. The path stays fairly close to the road, not very effectively screened by trees. It leads into a driveway which you follow out to the main road.

You have to endure 300m of unappealing road walking. Keep to the right, on a narrow verge beside the slip road joining the dual carriageway. Go past a side road and ignore a footbridge over the A229 to continue along the slip road (Chatham Road). Eventually, at the end of a long wooden fence, **turn right** at a NDW signpost.

Go down a flight of concrete steps and skirt around a wooden barrier at the bottom. Ignore a path off to the right to continue on the tree-lined NDW, still descending and soon with a large field on your right. In 175m there is a gap in the trees on the right leading out to an ancient monument guarded by high metal railings, **Kit's Coty House**¹⁵.

7. **Kit's Coty House to Wellhead (1 km)**

This section includes optional detours to two more ancient monuments, but most would only rate them as "worth seeing, but not worth going to see" (as Dr Johnson famously said of the Giant's Causeway).

From Kit's Coty return to the North Downs Way and carry on downhill, eventually coming out onto a road (Pilgrims Way¹⁶) at its junction with Rochester Road. The main route continues along the NDW on the other side of Rochester Road (use the traffic island off to the left to cross this busy road safely), but if you are prepared for some very awkward road walking you could take the first detour below.

- **Detour to Little Kit's Coty House (+600m)**

The only right of way to this group of sarsen stones is off Rochester Road to the right, so you have to walk down this busy road for 200m **taking great care as there is no footway or verge for pedestrians**. A signposted gap in the hedge on the left-hand side leads to **Little Kit's Coty House**¹⁷ in a small enclosure.

Instead of returning the same way, it is better to continue along Rochester Road for a further 50m and then turn left into a lane (Pratling Street). Where this turns sharply right after 300m, **turn left** onto a bridleway. In 250m **turn right** at a path crossing to resume the main route on the NDW.

Continue along the NDW, gradually approaching the noisy dual carriageway you encountered earlier. The path eventually veers left up a short slope and comes out onto a concrete track in front of the elevated A229. The main route turns right here to leave the NDW, but before continuing you could take the second detour below.

- **Detour to the White Horse Stone (+900m)**

To see this sarsen stone you need to make an out-and-back detour along the NDW. Turn left briefly onto the track, then turn right to go through a subway under the A229. The track curves right and comes to a junction where you **turn half-left**. Follow the NDW (and also the Pilgrims Cycle Trail) round to the left and over the HS1 railway line, then fork left onto a chalky tree-lined path. After climbing gently for 75m **turn left** up a few steps in the bank to find the **White Horse Stone**¹⁸ on the edge of a field.

Return the same way: back across the railway and down to the right to go under the A229; turn left onto the concrete track and go past the turning for the NDW.

8. Wellhead to Cobtree Manor Park (1¾ km)

After leaving the NDW and going along the track for 30m, **turn right** onto a signposted footpath. Go through the hedge and across a field, heading **SW** and soon with a belt of trees on your right. Shortly before reaching the field corner **veer right** at a footpath waymarker onto a short path through the trees. Go out through a metal kissing gate and continue in much the same direction for about 400m on a well-defined grassy path across several fields, passing through more gates along the way.

The footpath leads onto a grassy track which comes to a T-junction with a tarmac driveway. **Turn right** and follow this round to the left, now on a public byway going between the converted farm buildings at Great Cossington. 250m after passing the last of these (Oast House), and before the byway swings right towards houses in Pratling Street, **turn left** through a gap in the hedge. Go past a footpath waymarker and across a stream into a small grassy area, where the public footpath continues across a golf course.

Although you could stay on the public footpath, there is little or no waymarking across the golf course and so the suggested route is to **turn right** onto a (potentially muddy) track looping around the course, with a variety of signs indicating that it forms part of a Run England route, a Horse Ride and a Tree Trail. This woodland track soon curves up to the left, with glimpses from the ridge at the top across the course to Blue Bell Hill (and a less appealing view of an industrial estate down to the right).

After going alongside a golf fairway for about 200m **turn right** at a path crossing to rejoin the public footpath you were on earlier, coming in from the golf course. Follow the footpath up a slope and straight across a horse ride at the top. This takes you through a belt of trees into an open area of grassland dotted with trees, an unsignposted 'back door' into **Cobtree Manor Park**¹⁹.

9. Cobtree Manor Park to Cobtree Wharf (1¼ km)

There are several possible routes through this fairly small country park to the exit by its car park (see map).

Starting from the north-western corner of the **Secret Glade**, take any of the grassy paths heading roughly **SE** to cross the **Summer Meadows** and reach a surfaced path. This is a loop out from the car park so you can go either way; both routes go past some of the park's **sculptures**²⁰.

Turning left will go through the **Arboretum** and past the old **Elephant House**; turning right will go through a striking **Avenue of Hornbeams**. When you reach the car park there is a **Café** in the **Visitor Centre** if you want to stop for refreshments.

*For a further exploration of the park you could take the path into woodland behind the **Zoo Park** play area, follow it round to the surfaced path you were on earlier, then take a different route back to the car park.*

To continue the walk, leave the park by the main vehicle entrance; if it is locked pedestrians can exit through a gap in the hedge to the left. Turn right onto Forstal Road and go along it for 175m, crossing over carefully at some point and passing the entrance to a Travis Perkins branch. On reaching a car showroom **turn left** onto a signposted footpath and follow it between fences to a stretch of the Medway designated as **Maidstone River Park**²¹.



If you are doing a Circular Walk back to Aylesford, complete the directions at §12.

10. Cobtree Wharf to Whatman Park (3 km)

Turn left onto the riverside path, skirting around the derelict Cobtree Wharf. Shortly after passing under the two road bridges carrying the M20 you can take either fork where the path splits; they are only separated by a line of trees, with the left-hand one bordering fields at the back of **Kent Life**²², a museum of rural life which you could access up ahead via Lock Lane. After the paths rejoin you go past the large **Allington Sluice Gate**²³.

You could detour across this weir onto the island (there is a seasonal kiosk, the **Little Old Toll House**, next to **Allington Lock**), but the main route continues along the riverside path. After passing Lock Lane you come to another possible refreshment place with a fine waterside setting, the **Malta Inn Beefeater**.

In the next 2 km you get views of **Allington Castle**²⁴ and **Allington Marina** on the opposite bank, and squeeze past the attractive **Gibraltar House** (a former inn) on your left. The river makes a long turn to the right, then back to the left and eventually comes to a new footbridge. **Turn sharp left** to go up its zig-zag access path (or scramble up the bank) and cross the river on Moncktons Lane Bridge into **Whatman Park**²⁵.

11. Whatman Park to Maidstone East Station (1¼ km)

For the most direct route through this small country park, simply carry on along the surfaced path through its centre, passing the **Jolly Roger** play area and veering left at **The Triangle** to join the riverside path.

*For a further exploration of the park you could veer right before the play area and loop around its north-western part via the **Tree Walk** or **Woodland Walk**, eventually passing under Moncktons Lane Bridge and going through **The Islands** nature reserve to join the riverside path.*

Keep the river on your left and leave the park at the far end. Continue through a parking area and follow its access road under a bridge carrying the Maidstone East railway line, emerging onto a road at a bend. The final part of the walk is back across the river to this station (for direct trains to Victoria), but if you want to head directly to a station on the Medway Valley line follow the directions below.

- **Finishing at Maidstone Barracks Station**

For this alternative station **turn right** and go up Buckland Hill for 100m, where there are two flights of steps down to the platforms at Maidstone Barracks station. Trains to Aylesford and Strood leave from Platform 1 on the far side.

To complete the full walk, go up a flight of steps to a walkway at the top of the railway bridge. Turn right to go across the river alongside the tracks. You can see Maidstone East station ahead but if you have time to spare you could nip through an opening in the brick wall on your right into **Brenchley Gardens**²⁶. If you are not venturing into the town centre leave the garden in its north-eastern corner, opposite the station entrance.

- **Detour to the Town Centre**

Make your way across the garden to its south-eastern corner, where there is a memorial stone to the **Battle of Maidstone**²⁷. The building on the right is **Maidstone Museum**²⁸, and opposite its entrance **Fremlin Walk** makes a convenient place to start investigating the many eateries in the pedestrianised town centre.

Inside this shopping mall there are some places with outdoor seating at the right-hand end. For a longer detour turn left instead, then turn right to come out on Earl Street in front of the **Hazlitt Theatre**. In Market Buildings to the right of the theatre there is a French bistro/pâtisserie and an Italian café in the Corn Exchange arcade on the left.

The simplest way back would be to retrace your steps via Fremlin Walk, but if you want to explore further you could carry on along Market Buildings to the High Street. If you do this, make your own way back by following street signs to the Station (or Museum).

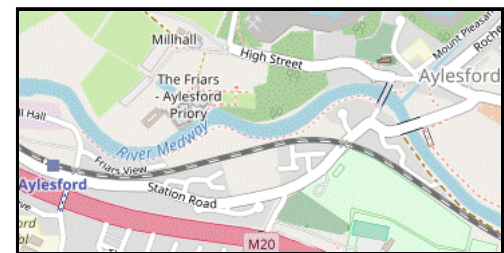
There is a side entrance directly onto Platform 1 (for trains to London) through a gap in the brick wall behind the small parking area. To reach other platforms enter via the ticket hall.



12. **Cobtree Wharf to Aylesford Station** (2¾ km)

Turn right onto the riverside path, away from the derelict Cobtree Wharf. At first there is an industrial estate on your right, then open fields. In 1¼ km the path crosses a side stream on a wooden footbridge (with Aylesford's new road bridge ahead on your left), and swings round into one of the two car parks off Forstal Road. Cross the main road carefully and retrace your morning route through the other car park and along the path to the High Street.

The path passes the **Hengist** bar/restaurant, which serves afternoon tea. Two more refreshment places are just off to the right: the **Village Pantry** tearoom (but this normally closes at 4pm) and **The Bush** pub (a short distance along Rochester Road from the mini-roundabout), but to continue the walk **turn left** onto the High Street. The final refreshment place is 50m past the old bridge, the **Chequers Inn**.



To complete the walk, cross the river on the pedestrianised old bridge. You can see the railway line ahead at a level crossing, but the station is over 1 km away. You could reach it via the riverside path you took in the morning, but you might be stranded on the wrong side of the other level crossing on Mill Hall.

A slightly shorter (and less risky) route is to keep ahead on the main road and go over the first level crossing. In 200m keep right at a road junction and continue on Station Road for a further 650m to reach the station. Trains to Strood leave from Platform 1, on the near side.

Walk Notes

1. **Aylesford Priory** (now called **The Friars**) is a Carmelite priory, founded in 1242. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries it passed into private hands but in 1949 the Carmelites were able to buy it back, sensitively restoring some of the old buildings and adding four new chapels. It is a popular place for pilgrimage and retreats.
2. **Aylesford Bridge** dates from the late 14thC, replacing an earlier wooden structure. The village (originally 'Ægel's ford') was one of the few places where the Medway could be crossed in this part of Kent.
3. **Ss Peter & Paul, Aylesford** dates from Norman times and the lower portion of the tower survives from that period. The North chancel contains two particularly impressive 17thC monuments, the Banks Memorial and the Colepeper Tomb, and there is a nicely decorated organ in the North aisle.
4. **Aylesford Quarry** (on two sites separated by Bull Lane) was used for extracting sand and gravel for over 100 years. There are plans to develop the eastern part of the site for housing and leisure activities under the name **Aylesford Lakes**.
5. **Kit's Coty Vineyard** covers 95 acres and is planted with Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Bacchus grapes. The wine producer Chapel Down was able to acquire the land in 2007 after a decision was made to reroute the Channel Tunnel Rail Link through a tunnel under Blue Bell Hill (it had been designated as the site for the Mid-Kent Parkway station).
6. **St Mary, Burham** was built in the late Norman period and extended in the 13thC. The church was more or less abandoned when most of the population moved to the Pilgrims Way higher up the valley in the 19thC, and is now cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust. The old church has nevertheless outlasted its replacement in the new village, which was demolished in 1981.
7. The **Medway Valley Walk** runs for 45 km, between Rochester and Tonbridge. This part of the Medway is less accessible and the loop near Old Burham is one of the few places between Rochester and Aylesford where it actually goes along the riverbank.
8. These **industrial ruins** were the rear walls of the West Kent Portland Cement Company's chamber kilns, one of the few visible reminders of the area's industrial past.
9. The **Smurfit Kappa** paper mill recycles around 500,000 tonnes of paper and cardboard annually.
10. The **Battle of Medway** was the first recorded battle in the Roman invasion of Britain ordered by Claudius, although its exact location between Aylesford and Rochester is disputed. The ability of the heavily armoured Roman legions to cross the river and their victory over the native tribes after two days of fighting was a significant event in their conquest of Britain.
11. **Burham Marsh** nature reserve is a tidal reed bed on the River Medway, managed by the Kent Wildlife Trust.
12. **Burham Down** nature reserve is an area of chalk grassland and woodland, grazed by sheep or goats and managed by the Kent Wildlife Trust.
13. The **North Downs Way** runs for 246 km along the length of the North Downs (with two sections at its eastern end), from Farnham in Surrey to Dover in Kent.
14. The **memorial stone** on Blue Bell Hill commemorates the pilot and two paramedics who died in July 1998 when a Kent Air Ambulance helicopter crashed into woodland after hitting power lines.
15. **Kit's Coty House** is a dolmen of three sarsen stones supporting a capstone, all that remains of a neolithic burial chamber. The earthen long barrow which extended 70m to the west has been destroyed by ploughing. It was once thought to have been a memorial to a British chieftain (Catigern, or Kit) killed in a battle at Aylesford in AD 455, but the tomb is at least 5,000 years old.
16. **Pilgrims Way** is a fanciful name which was added to OS maps by a 19thC surveyor. There is no real evidence that this 192 km route between Winchester and Canterbury was used by medieval pilgrims to the shrine of Thomas Becket, but the legend was embellished by Hilaire Belloc and other writers. Much of the route actually follows an ancient trackway on the southern slopes of the North Downs, linking the narrowest part of the English Channel to the sacred sites of Stonehenge and Avebury.
17. **Little Kit's Coty House** is a group of about twenty fallen sarsen stones jumbled together. They are assumed to be the remains of a burial mound but the site was damaged in 1690 before reliable records had been made. Its alternative name (the Countless Stones) is associated with several megalithic sites, from the folk lore that an individual will be unable to determine their exact number.
18. The **White Horse Stone** is the name given to a sarsen megalith. The White Horse was the emblem of some of the Saxons and Jutes who invaded Britain after the departure of the Romans (and is still the county symbol of Kent), but it is not known how the stone acquired its name. There are some smaller stones nearby but (unlike Kit's Coty) no evidence of a long barrow.
19. **Cobtree Manor Park** is on the site of Maidstone Zoo, a private menagerie which was open to the public from 1934-59. Many species of trees have been planted to create a varied landscape of parkland garden and woodland, with reminders of its past in the old Elephant House and a new zoo-themed play area. The park is managed jointly by a charitable trust and Maidstone Borough Council.
20. The four **stone sculptures** in Cobtree Manor Park were commissioned from Jason Mulligan in 2012; Will Glanville's wooden sculpture was relocated to the park in 2010.
21. **Maidstone River Park** was developed in 1998-2001, a Millennium project which transformed an area of industrial wasteland in the town. It incorporates the riverside path between Aylesford and Teston (pronounced *Teeson*), as well as parks and gardens linked by three new footbridges across the river.

22. **Kent Life** is an open-air museum of rural life, on the site of a derelict farm which had been bequeathed to Maidstone Borough Council. It incorporates the original farmhouse and other buildings dismantled from elsewhere in the county and re-erected.
23. **Allington Sluice Gate and Lock** are at the tidal limit of the River Medway. The 31 km stretch of river upstream to the Leigh Barrier outside Tonbridge is the Medway Navigation.
24. **Allington Castle** was built in 1281 and converted into a mansion in the 15thC. It is a private residence, not open to the public.
25. **Whatman Park** was opened in 2001, on land donated by Whatman plc as part of the Maidstone River Park project. It includes a striking piece of public art, a 60m-long representation of the **Double Helix** sculpted by David Annand.
26. **Brenchley Gardens** were designed and laid out in 1871 by Alexander McKenzie, an influential landscape designer whose commissions included Finsbury Park and Alexandra Palace.
27. The **Battle of Maidstone** memorial is inscribed *This stone marks the last stand of the Royalist defenders of Maidstone on the storm lashed night of the 1st June 1648*. One of the fiercest battles of the English Civil War, it was an important victory for the Parliamentary forces under General Fairfax.
28. **Maidstone Museum** (free entry) opened in 1858 and contains a diverse collection of historical objects, fine art and natural history. It is housed in Chillington Manor, an Elizabethan manor house purchased by Maidstone Corporation.

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