



# Aylesford to Maidstone walk

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

**Length** **Main Walk:** 18¾ km (11.7 miles). Four hours 30 minutes walking time. For the whole excursion including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 9½ hours.

**Circular Walk, returning to Aylesford:** 17¼ km (10.7 miles). Four hours 5 minutes walking time.

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

**Toughnes** 5 out of 10 (4 for the Circular Walk).

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**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 20<sup>th</sup>C. 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-19<sup>th</sup>C.

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 2¼ 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 service (hourly on Sundays). It is possible to travel out via either 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 both Victoria (daily) and Charing Cross (Mon–Sat) 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**.

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**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; closed Mon & Tue) in Church Street is an up-market restaurant/bar which serves excellent food to 2.30pm Wed-Fri, all afternoon at weekends. 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; closed Mon & Tue in winter) is a popular country pub serving freshly-cooked food all day.

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**Tea**

There is no shortage of tea places towards the end of this walk, with the **Cobtree Manor Park Café** (01622-239989; usually open to 5.30pm, earlier in winter) 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 **Pâtisserie 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. Across the river you can see the riverside terrace of the historic **Chequers Inn** (01622-717286). You then go through the grounds of **Hengist** (01622-885800), a "modern restaurant and bar in a 16<sup>th</sup>C building" serving full afternoon teas. Nearby, **The Little Gem** (01622-715066) claims to be Kent's smallest pub, while the **Village Pantry** (01622-792673; open to 4pm Mon-Sat, closed Sun) describes itself as a "happy mix of tea shop and curios".

*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.*

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**Help Us!**

After the walk, please leave a comment, it really helps. Thanks!

You can also upload photos to the   SWC Group on Flickr (upload your photos) and videos to  Youtube. This walk's tags are:

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**By Car**      **Start** ME20 7JL      **Finish** ME14 1QN

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**Help**      National Rail: 03457 48 49 50 • Traveline (bus times): 0871 200 22 33  
(12p/min) • TFL (London) : 0343 222 1234

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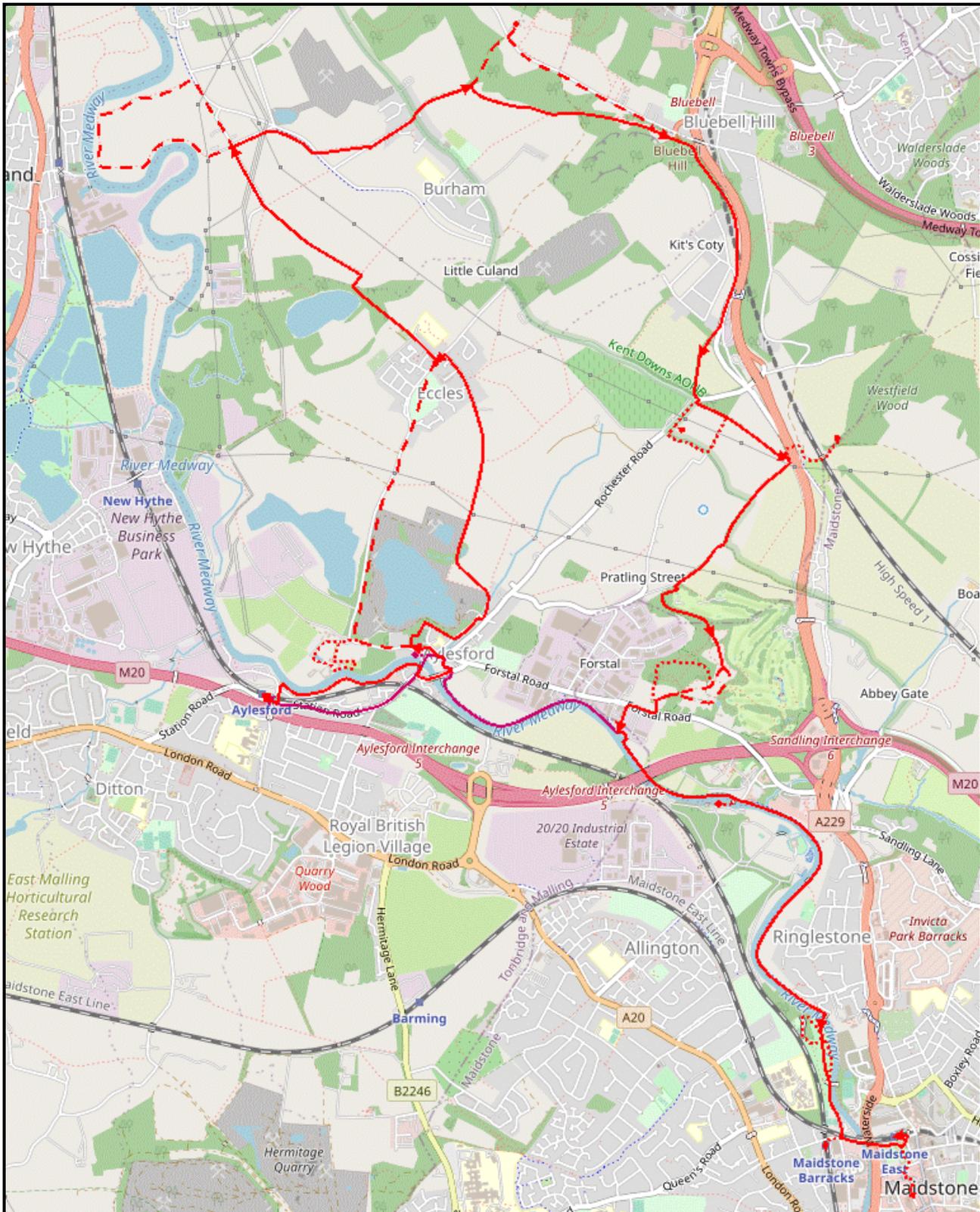
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## Walk Directions

# Walk Map



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## Walk Options

**M. Main Walk (18¾ km)**

**a. Circular Walk, returning to Aylesford (17¼ km)**

# Walk Directions

## A. Aylesford Station to Aylesford Church (1¾ km)

1. 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 **The Friars**<sup>1</sup>, which you could visit in [7·b].
2. 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**<sup>2</sup>. 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.
3. On the other side **turn left** into the car park and double back through it. Near the middle take a path on the right and follow it past the garden and side entrance of the **Hengist** bar/restaurant.
4. 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**<sup>3</sup> is well worth a visit.

## B. Aylesford Church to Eccles (2½ • 3¼ km)

5. 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 [7]. However, the continuation of this route to Eccles (alongside Bull Lane for 1¾ km) is not the most interesting and you might prefer to retrace your steps and do the main route.*

### 6. Main route (2½ km)

- a. 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. It continues between garden fences and a belt of trees, beyond which you might be able to glimpse the flooded **Aylesford Quarry**<sup>4</sup> (East Lake).
- b. At the end turn left onto a narrow lane (Mount Pleasant). In 200m the lane curves down to the right and merges with an access road for the Aylesford Lakes development. Just before it comes out onto Rochester Road **turn left** past vehicle barriers onto a signposted footpath.
- c. The path leads into the corner of a field where you **fork left**, crossing another access road and going up a short slope onto a broad grassy strip between fences. On reaching a copse follow the track up to a locked gate and turn right onto a narrow path, the continuation of the right of way.
- d. At the end of the trees the path continues between fences and emerges into the corner of **Kit's Coty Vineyard**<sup>5</sup>. Go straight ahead along a broad grassy strip between the vines and a belt of trees on your right, ignoring footpaths off to both sides.
- e. 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 out onto a residential street (Mackenders Lane) in the outskirts of Eccles.

- f. Follow this street 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.

## 7. Route via The Friars (2¼ • 3¼ km)

- a. 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.*
- b. 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.
  - After viewing the long narrow **Peace Garden** through the Gatehouse on the left, take the signposted **Rosary Walk** looping around the back of the chapel buildings and returning alongside the River Medway.
  - 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.
- c. 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**<sup>4</sup> (West and East Lakes).
- d. 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.
- e. 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 ahead on the right), **turn left** into Eccles Row.

## C. Eccles to Burham Church (2 • 4¼ km)

8. 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.
9. In front of another vehicle barrier turn right as indicated, 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.  
*This is a relatively new right of way, not shown on older OS maps.*
10. 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 historic **St Mary's**<sup>6</sup> church, which is worth a visit.  
*If you want to extend the walk with a loop alongside the River Medway, follow the directions below.*

## 11. Optional River Circuit (+2¼ km)

- a. 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.

- b. After going alongside the new road for 150m **turn left** onto a signposted footpath, joining the **Medway Valley Walk**<sup>7</sup> 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.
- c. You pass some overgrown **industrial ruins**<sup>8</sup> 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**<sup>9</sup> paper recycling plant across the river in Snodland.
- d. Just before the path turns left again there is faded information panel by a memorial stone for the **Battle of Medway**<sup>10</sup> in AD 43. After another left turn and a gentle curve round to the right, **turn left** at a waymarker onto a footpath leading back to the road junction by Burham church.
  - You could also detour ahead into **Burham Marsh**<sup>11</sup> nature reserve, returning the same way.

#### D. Burham Church to Burham Down (1¾ km)

- 12. 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.
- 13. At the top go through 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.
- 14. 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 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.

#### E. Burham Down to Blue Bell Hill (1¼ • 1¾ km)

*If you want to visit the last of the possible lunch places you will need to follow the alternative route in [16], although this bypasses a scenic stretch along the side of the downs.*

#### 15. Main route (1¾ km)

- a. **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**<sup>12</sup> nature reserve, where a narrow chalky path runs parallel to the public footpath.
- b. At the end of the nature reserve continue along the footpath, which bends left and climbs more steeply after another path merges from the right. Keep ahead at a path crossing, still climbing, then in a further 200m or so **veer right** through a wooden gate onto **Blue Bell Hill**.
- c. Take any path slanting gently uphill across the open downland. In about 100m make your way towards a wooden bench near the top of a steeply sloping patch of grassland, where you join the **North Downs Way**<sup>13</sup> (NDW) coming in from the top of the hill.
- d. Go through a wooden gate in the belt of trees to continue on a broad grassy path near the top of the downs, passing more benches with views across the Medway Valley. The path goes below a small car park where there is a **memorial stone**<sup>14</sup>.

#### 16. Route via the Robin Hood (1¾ km)

- a. Keep ahead on the byway and follow it for a further 400m to a lane (Common Road) at the top of the hill, where there is a pub sign. Go straight ahead and down a short slope to the **Robin Hood** pub.

- b. To continue the walk, retrace your steps up the slope and **turn left** onto Common Road, joining the **North Downs Way**<sup>13</sup> (NDW). In 400m ignore a byway down to the right.
- c. 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, passing a wooden bench on the right and merging with the main route.
- d. Go through a wooden gate in the belt of trees to continue on a broad grassy path near the top of the downs, passing more benches with views across the Medway Valley. The path goes below a small car park where there is a **memorial stone**<sup>14</sup>.

## F. Blue Bell Hill to Kit's Coty House (1½ km)

- 17. 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.
- 18. You have to endure some 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) for a further 250m.
- 19. Opposite a side road **turn right** at a NDW signpost to go down a flight of concrete steps. 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 visible on the right. In 175m there is a gap on the right leading out to an ancient monument guarded by high metal railings, **Kit's Coty House**<sup>15</sup>.

## G. 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).*

- 20. From Kit's Coty return to the North Downs Way and carry on downhill, eventually coming out onto a side road (**Pilgrims Way**<sup>16</sup>) 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), but if you are prepared for some very awkward road walking you could take the first detour below.

## 21. Detour to Little Kit's Coty House (+600m)

- a. The only right of way to this group of sarsen stones is 200m away to the right off Rochester Road, and obviously you need to **take great care** as there is no footway or grass verge. A signposted gap in the hedge on the left-hand side leads to **Little Kit's Coty House**<sup>17</sup> in a small enclosure.
- b. Instead of returning the same way, it is better to continue along the road for a further 50m and 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.

- 22. 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.

### 23. Detour to the White Horse Stone (+900m)

- a. 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**.
- b. 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**<sup>18</sup> on the edge of a field.
- c. 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.

### H. Wellhead to Cobtree Manor Park (1½ km)

24. 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. In 150m **veer right** at a footpath waymarker onto a short path through the trees.
25. Go out through a metal kissing gate and continue in much the same direction for about 400m on a well-defined path across several fields, negotiating 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 public byway round to the left.
26. Follow the drive between the converted farm buildings at Great Cossington. 250m after passing the last of these buildings (Oast House), and before it swings right towards houses in Pratling Street, **turn left** off the byway through a gap in the hedge. Go between concrete barriers and across a stream on a line of paving stones into a small grassy area.
27. The suggested route is to leave the public footpath, which continues across the golf course ahead (but with little or no waymarking). Instead, **turn right** onto a potentially muddy track looping around the course, with a variety of signs indicating that this forms part of a Run England route, a Horse Ride and a Tree Trail.
28. The woodland track soon curves up to the left, with glimpses from the ridge at the top across the golf course to Blue Bell Hill (and a less appealing view of an industrial estate down to the right). After going alongside a 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.
29. Follow the footpath up a slope and go 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**<sup>19</sup>.

### I. 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).*

30. Starting from the north-western corner of the **Secret Glade**, take any of the grassy paths heading roughly **SE**. After crossing the **Summer Meadows** you reach a surfaced path.
31. This path is a loop from the car park so you can go either way; both routes go past some of the park's **sculptures**<sup>20</sup>.
- Turning left will go through the **Arboretum** and past the old **Elephant House**.
  - Turning right will go through a striking **Avenue of Hornbeams**.
32. 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. This loops round to the right and returns to the surfaced path you were on earlier, allowing you to take the other route back to the car park.
33. To continue the walk, leave the park by the main vehicle entrance and turn right onto Forstal Road. At first you can use the broad grass verge, but when it is safe to do so cross over carefully to the left-hand side of the main road.
34. 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**<sup>21</sup>.
- If you are doing a Circular Walk back to Aylesford, complete the directions at §L.*



#### J. Cobtree Wharf to Whatman Park (3 km)

35. 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. After the paths rejoin you go past the large **Allington Sluice Gate**<sup>23</sup>, then pass Lock Lane on the left.
- You could detour across the weir onto the island, where the **Little Old Toll House** (a seasonal kiosk) is next to **Allington Lock**.
  - You could also detour along Lock Lane for a closer look at **Kent Life**<sup>22</sup>, a museum of rural life.
36. The main route continues along the riverside path past another refreshment place with a fine waterside setting, the **Malta Inn Beefeater**. In the next 2 km you get views of **Allington Castle**<sup>24</sup> and **Allington Marina** on the opposite bank, and squeeze past the attractive **Gibraltar House** (a former inn) on your left.
37. The river makes a long turn to the right, then swings back to the left. Eventually you come to a new footbridge and **turn sharp left** to go up its zig-zag access path (or scramble up the bank). Cross the river on Moncktons Lane Bridge into **Whatman Park**<sup>25</sup>.

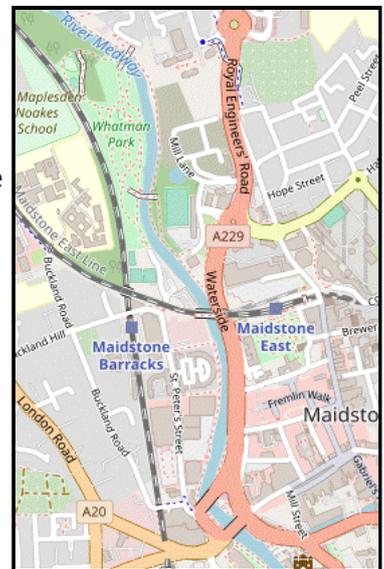
#### K. Whatman Park to Maidstone East Station (1¼ km)

38. 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.

39. 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 London). If instead you want to go directly to a station on the Medway Valley line, follow the directions below.*



#### 40. 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.

41. 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, towards Maidstone East station.

- Unless you are in a hurry it is worth nipping through an opening in the brick wall on your right into **Brenchley Gardens**<sup>26</sup>. If you are not venturing into the town centre leave the garden in its north-eastern corner, opposite the station entrance.

#### 42. 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**<sup>27</sup>. The building on the right is **Maidstone Museum**<sup>28</sup>, 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).

43. There is a side entrance directly onto Platform 1 of Maidstone East station (for trains to London) through a gap in the brick wall behind the small parking area. For the other platforms you would need to enter via the ticket hall.

#### L. Cobtree Wharf to Aylesford Station (2¾ km)

44. Turn right, away from the derelict Cobtree Wharf, and (if possible) follow the riverside path for 1¼ km into Aylesford.

- In 2020 much of this path was fenced off and a 'temporary' closure order was still in place two years later. There was a signposted alternative route back to and along Forstal Road, although you could escape some of the roadside walking by diverting into a large recreation ground on the right. If you have to take this route, keep ahead at the end into Aylesford's High Street and resume the directions at [46], where the main route comes out by the Hengist bar/restaurant.

45. On the riverside route there is an industrial estate and a new housing development on your right at first, then open fields. The path eventually 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 repeat your morning route through the other car park and along the path past the Hengist bar/restaurant.
46. The **Hengist** serves afternoon tea and two more refreshment places are nearby: **The Little Gem** pub and the **Village Pantry** tearoom (but this normally closes at 4pm). To continue the walk, turn left out of the side path onto the High Street to come to the old bridge.
47. Unless you want to visit the **Chequers Inn** (50m further along the High Street), cross the river on the pedestrianised bridge. You can see the railway line ahead at a level crossing.
  - You could reach the station (1 km away) 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.
48. The suggested route (which is slightly shorter and less risky) is to keep ahead on the main road and cross the tracks at 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

- 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.
- Aylesford Bridge** dates from the late 14<sup>th</sup>C, 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.
- 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 17<sup>th</sup>C monuments, the Banks Memorial and the Colepepper Tomb, and there is a nicely decorated organ in the North aisle.
- Aylesford Quarry** (on two sites separated by Bull Lane) was used for extracting sand and gravel for over 100 years. The eastern part of the site is being developed for housing and leisure activities under the name **Aylesford Lakes**.
- 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).
- St Mary, Burham** was built in the late Norman period and extended in the 13<sup>th</sup>C. The church was more or less abandoned when most of the population moved to the Pilgrims Way higher up the valley in the 19<sup>th</sup>C, 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 192 km route between Winchester and Canterbury, although there is no real evidence that it was used by medieval pilgrims to the shrine of Thomas Becket. The name was added to OS maps by a 19<sup>th</sup>C surveyor after 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 folklore 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 15<sup>th</sup>C. 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*. It was one of the fiercest battles of the English Civil War, 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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