



Cuxton to Halling walk

Cobham Park and the newly-restored Darnley Mausoleum, organic farms and nature reserves

Length **Main Walk:** 18 km (11.2 miles). Four hours 45 minutes walking time. For the whole excursion including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 9 hours.
Circular Walk, returning to Cuxton: 17¼ km (10.7 miles). Four hours 30 minutes walking time.
~~**Extended Walk, finishing in Snodland:** 19½ km (12.1 miles). Five hours walking time.~~

OS Map Explorer 148. Cuxton, map reference TQ714667, is in Kent, 3½ km **SW** of Rochester.

Toughness 6 out of 10.

Features This walk is in the part of the North Downs which has been breached by the River Medway. After going through a local nature reserve and across undulating farmland a steady climb takes you over the chalk grassland of **Ranscombe Farm Reserve**, a working farm managed by the charity **Plantlife**. The final part of the morning section is through **Cobham Park**, where the landscape is gradually being restored to Humphry Repton's original design (and the neo-classical **Darnley Mausoleum** is occasionally open to the public).

Lunch is in the attractive village of **Cobham**, well-known for its associations with **Charles Dickens**: the **Leather Bottle** is one of the coaching inns mentioned in *The Pickwick Papers*. The village has a fine parish church whose most striking feature is the Brooke Tomb in the chancel, although most visitors come to admire its magnificent collection of medieval brasses in the pavement in front of the tomb, an astonishing survival when so much was lost in the religious upheavals of the 16th and 17thC.

After lunch you go through the village of **Luddesdown** (pronounced *Ludsdun*) which has an equally interesting and quite different parish church, then along an open valley which is part of **Luddesdown Organic Farms**. You climb over a wooded part of the North Downs and make a gradual descent into the village of Halling (pronounced *Hauling*), with fine views across the Medway Valley. The final part of the full walk is a contrasting short loop around Halling Common on the banks of the River Medway.

There are many old chalk quarries in this landscape, but the processing and cement manufacturing plants have closed and Snodland's paper mill (now a large paper recycling plant) is the only major survivor of the area's industrial past. **Holborough Lakes** (between Halling and Snodland) is a large new housing development on some of these abandoned quarries.

Additional Notes	Two alternative (and more direct) routes between Luddesdown and Halling were researched in order to reduce this walk's overlaps with the Cuxton to Sole Street walk (#35) and the Sole Street Circular walk (2–17a), but both proved unsuitable. Intentionally or not, the public footpaths were well-concealed at the start and the routes themselves – through private woodland littered with “Keep Out” signs – were neither particularly appealing nor easy to follow.
Walk Options	<p>In 2013 a right of way was reinstated around Halling Salt Marsh, allowing you to extend the final loop alongside the Medway by a further 1 km. Conversely, you could cut out the river loop altogether and head directly for Halling station, saving about 1½ km.</p> <p>For convenience, directions are also given for a Circular Walk back to Cuxton station; this is simply the reverse of the shorter start to Walk #35. There is no riverside route from Halling to Cuxton, so you have to switch to this option earlier in the afternoon section.</p> <p>An Extended Walk to Snodland station via Holborough Marshes (a Kent Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve) was disrupted by the construction of a new Medway River Crossing in 2015/16. This has now been completed but the riverside route used (some of it on permissive paths) is no longer possible. This ending might be restored if a suitable alternative can be found.</p> <p>If you want to abandon the walk after lunch you could head for Sole Street station, 2 km from Cobham (see #35) or 1 km from Henley Street (see 2–17). There is also an infrequent bus service from Cobham to this station, Redroute 416 (Mon–Sat).</p>
Transport	<p>Cuxton, Halling and Snodland are stations on the Medway Valley line between Strood and Maidstone, with Cuxton the nearest to London. From central London it is best to travel via Strood. The fastest route is from St Pancras on the High Speed Train, taking 45-50 minutes; a Thameslink service from London Bridge via Dartford takes around 1 hour 20 minutes. There is a half-hourly service on both routes (hourly on Sundays). Buy a return to the station where you plan to finish.</p> <p>If driving, roadside parking is available near all three stations. Snodland has a small car park at the station and a larger one in the town centre (both free).</p>
Suggested Train	Take the train nearest to 10:20 from St Pancras to Cuxton (or 09:45 from London Bridge on the Thameslink route), in both cases changing at Strood .
Lunch	There are three pubs along the main street through Cobham , 7¼ km into the walk. In the order in which you pass them they are the Ship Inn (01474-814326), the Darnley Arms (01474-814218) and the Dickensian Leather Bottle (01474-

814327).

*The **Cock Inn** (01474-814208) in Henley Street used to be a later lunch option, but no longer serves food (and is closed Mon–Thu lunchtimes).*

Tea There are pubs and convenience stores near all three stations but not much else. The suggested tea place in **Halling** is the friendly **Homeward Bound** pub (01634-240743); it serves tea and coffee and has a small patio at the back. At the junction of the High Street and Ferry Road there is a convenience store and the **Five Bells** pub (01634-240523), which incorporates an Indian restaurant. **Cuxton** has the **White Hart** pub (01634-789969) at the top of Station Road, while a short detour will take you past a mini-market in the village. The **Snodland** ending goes directly to the station and you would have to make a short detour into the town centre for another refreshment stop. Its pubs are the **Bull Inn** (01634-240491) at the central crossroads and the **Monks Head** (01634-240477) at the bottom of Constitution Hill, and there are two Co-operative stores in the High Street. The **Medway Bakery** opposite the Bull Inn has a tearoom “open shop hours”, but this doesn't appear to extend beyond mid-afternoon.

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



By Car **Start** ME2 1AB **Finish** ME1 1BN

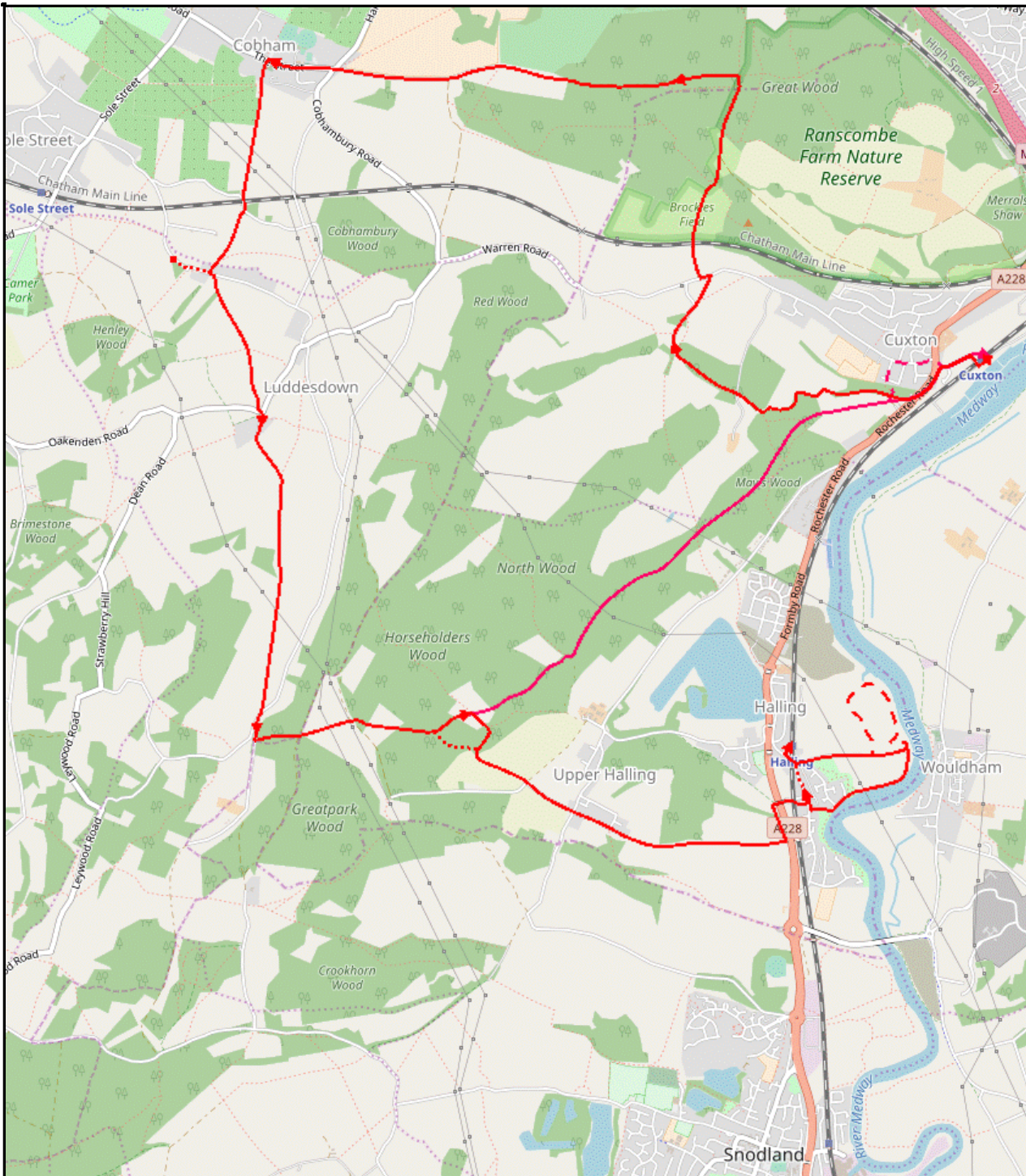
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Walk Directions

Walk Map



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Walk Options

- M. **Main Walk (18 km)**
 - a. **Circular Walk, returning to Cuxton (17¼ km)**

Walk Directions

1. Cuxton Station to Upper Bush (2½ km)

Arriving from Strood, cross the footbridge at the front of the platform and go down Station Road, heading away from a marina on the **River Medway**. Follow the road round to the left and out to the A228, passing the **White Hart** pub at the road junction. Turn left and go uphill on the main road for 200m, crossing over at some point.

At a sign for the church, **bear right** off the A228 onto a tarmac path between hedges which leads into the churchyard of **St Michael and All Angels**¹. Follow the path round to the right in front of the church and leave via a wooden gate. **Keep ahead** past a "Nature Reserve" sign to enter Six Acre Community Wood, with Cuxton village in the valley down to your right. Ignore paths off to both sides to head **W** on a level path along the wooded hillside, which in 400m leads into a large irregularly shaped field.

Turn left and follow the field edge around several corners for 500m, ignoring a footpath back into the wood at the first corner. Leave the field in its top corner, going past a footpath post onto a short path through some trees. At a path T-junction (in front of a metal fieldgate) **turn right** to go downhill on a chalky path. In 150m cross the driveway to the large new house away to your left and continue in the same direction for a further 500m, alongside or at times just inside the wood on your right, and soon with open fields on your left.

As you approach the field corner go across a grassy farm track and bear right to join a footpath coming in from the left. Follow this up a short slope and past some attractive 14thC cottages in the hamlet of Upper Bush. Just before you join a lane at a bend, a milestone on your left indicates that you are now (briefly) on the **North Downs Way**² (NDW).

2. Upper Bush to the Darnley Mausoleum (2¼ km)

Head **NE** along the lane for 200m. Where it bends left, **bear right** into a field. Leave the NDW (which goes diagonally across the field) by **taking the left-hand footpath**, along the field edge and underneath power cables. This comes out onto a lane opposite a large new house, North Downs Barn.

Turn left briefly onto the lane to pass the house and **turn right** onto a track, signposted as a public footpath. Climb uphill towards a railway line, going through several gates and under a brick bridge to enter **Ranscombe Farm Reserve**³. Continue in the same direction on a wide grassy path through a meadow, still climbing.

Near the top of the hill the path bears right and you continue briefly with a wood on your left. In the corner of the meadow bear left past a fieldgate to go through a wide gap in the trees. Continue on a clear path heading **N** for 300m across a shallow valley, keeping ahead at a path crossing at the bottom.

On the far side **fork left** just inside the wood, initially following a blue arrow. Almost immediately ignore permissive bridleways off to both sides to follow a footpath (yellow arrow) climbing gently through the wood, still heading **N**. The path eventually levels out and comes to an unsurfaced track at a break in the wood. **Turn left** onto this track to head **W** towards a metal fieldgate in front of a cattle grid.

Go through a side gate and continue in the same direction on a broad grassy path through the attractive woodland of **Cobham Park**⁴, which contains some fine old trees. In 400m you come to an imposing monument in Portland stone, the **Darnley Mausoleum**⁵.

3. The Darnley Mausoleum to Cobham (2½ km)

For the simplest route, continue past the monument and head **W** along the main path (now an unsurfaced track again) for a further 650m.

There are several tempting grassy paths away from this main path and you can explore any of them if you wish, although as you drop down from the ridge they can be boggy in places. You will need to make your way back to the main path in order to leave the parkland.

Just before you reach another gate and cattle grid you might be able to glimpse the baroque cupolas of **Cobham Hall**⁶, nestling in the trees ahead on your right. Leave the parkland through a metal side gate and continue along the track for 700m, now between tall hedges. Eventually you come to a thatched cottage at Lodge Farm and go through another metal side gate onto Lodge Lane.

Head **W** along this lane for 700m to reach a road junction on the outskirts of Cobham, with the village's War Memorial on your left and an avenue of lime trees heading back towards Cobham Hall. Continue in the same direction along The Street, passing three possible lunchtime pubs on your right in the next 400m: the **Ship Inn**, the **Darnley Arms** and finally the Dickensian **Leather Bottle**⁷.

4. Cobham to Luddesdown (2½ km)

Make your way into the churchyard of **St Mary Magdalene**⁸ (which is well worth visiting), opposite the Leather Bottle. Go past the church tower on a path heading **S**, passing the almshouses of the **New College of Cobham**⁹ (which you can also visit). In a copse ignore paths off to both sides and keep ahead through a small cemetery. On the far side go through a metal gate into the corner of a large field.

Go all the way down the right-hand field edge, with orchards behind the hedge on your right. In the corner go out onto a lane and follow it over the railway, then **turn right** onto a signposted footpath. Follow the path round to the left and then past some paddocks on your right. In the next corner bear left and go through a couple of metal gates into another paddock, dotted with trees. On the far side go through a metal gate on the right into the top corner of a large field.

Head slightly to the right down this field; if there is no clear path aim for a point about 100m to the right of the bottom left-hand corner. Continue down a short path between houses to a minor road (Henley Street).

The Cock Inn is 250m along the lane to the right, but does not serve food (and is closed Mon–Thu lunchtimes).

Turn left briefly onto the lane, then almost immediately **turn right** at a footpath sign. Go over a stile into a field and turn half-left to go diagonally uphill towards a copse. Go through this via a pair of stiles and continue in the same direction across a larger field, still climbing. As you go over the brow of the hill look for a wooden gate in the hedge ahead and go through this to emerge onto the top of another large field, with a cricket pitch in the valley below.

Go straight downhill, passing to the right of the cricket pitch and continuing up to a lane. Bear left to go along the right-hand side of a small triangular green with the Luddesdown village sign, joining the **Wealdway**¹⁰. Go up to the start of a cobbled street (shown as a Private Road but also a public footpath), with the churchyard of **Ss Peter and Paul**¹¹ on your right.

The church is worth visiting if a sign shows that it is open; a gate opposite its entrance on the far side lets you return to this cobbled street.

5. Luddesdown to Great Buckland (2 km)

Unless you are visiting the church, go straight ahead on the cobbled street. Just after it curves right and before the entrance to **Luddesdown Organic Farms**¹², **turn left** through a wooden gate. Go down a small field, then up the left-hand side of a larger one. Veer right at the top of the second field towards a stile and metal fieldgate 75m away in the hedge on your left.

Go over the stile and turn right, heading **S** along the top of a field. In 100m go over a stile and continue in the same direction for a further 400m, initially with a hedge on your right and then straight across a projecting part of the field. On the far side go over a stile and head for another one 75m away in the hedge on your left.

Go over this and continue on a clear path for 750m across two more large fields, still heading **S**. Eventually the path leads you over a stile and up a bank to a lane, where you turn right. In 30m **fork left**, leaving the Wealdway.

6. Great Buckland to Horseholders Wood (1½ km)

Continue along the lane for 150m, then **turn left** onto a signposted bridleway. Follow this steeply uphill for 300m to a byway. Go straight across this, making your way past some vehicle-blocking metal railings. Immediately **veer left** through a gap in the trees into the corner of a large field, joining the **North Downs Way**² (NDW) again.

Follow a clear track diagonally across the field, heading **NE**. On the far side follow the track briefly up and round to the right, then **go over a metal stile in the hedge on your left**. Go straight across another track and over a stile onto a woodland path, now heading **E**.

The path leads into a second large field and again you follow a clear path diagonally across it. On the far side go through a metal kissing gate, across a track and into a wood. Ignore a fork to the right (marked Private) and go through a wooden gate, still heading **E**. In 200m **fork left** at a footpath post, staying on the NDW.

Unless you are returning to Cuxton you could in fact take the right fork here, which is about 250m shorter than the suggested route. The path is quite faint and you would need to follow the yellow waymarkers carefully; it also involves a steep and slippery descent. If you do take this short cut, rejoin the directions at [•] in the next section.

On the main route the woodland path leads into a third large field. Once again you start by following a clear path diagonally across it, but this time **go up to a path junction in the middle of the field**, marked by a footpath post.

If you are doing the Circular Walk back to Cuxton, go to §9.

7. Horseholders Wood to Halling High Street (3 km)

For Halling (and Snodland) **turn right** at the path crossing, leaving the NDW and heading **SE**. The path soon swerves right to continue just inside a belt of trees. Near the corner of the field **fork right** at a footpath post and follow the path downhill and round to the right. After a steep descent down the wooded hillside for about 150m it curves left and a faint path (the short cut mentioned in the previous section) joins from the right.

[•] Continue downhill on a narrow path in a belt of trees between fields (if this is overgrown, try the field edge on your right). Eventually the path comes out onto the right-hand field and you continue up its edge to meet a minor road (Chapel Lane) at a bend, with a fine view of the **Medway River Crossing**¹³ 5 km off to the left. The footpath turns left but you **go straight ahead onto the lane** and follow it gently downhill for 350m to a crossroads in Upper Halling, with **Chapel Cottages**¹⁴ opposite a long-closed pub.

Go straight on at the crossroads into Meadow Crescent, then across a grassy area past a crescent of houses. Where the road on the far side curves left, keep ahead on Barn Meadow. At the end of this cul-de-sac simply continue on a path heading **E** for just over 1 km, mostly between hedges or fences but sometimes with an open field on your right, until you reach the A228.

Just in front of the main road **turn left** onto a track running parallel to it. This gradually climbs above the road and in 250m (where you meet a tarmac path coming from the other direction) **turn sharp right** to cross the A228 on a bridge. Follow the lane round a few bends, past a cemetery, over a railway and down to Halling¹⁵ High Street.

The final part of the full walk continues down Ferry Road, off to the right, but to break for tea at this point (or to head directly for the station) **turn left**; the **Homeward Bound** pub is on the left, 75m away.

If you are doing the Extended Walk and finishing in Snodland, go to §10.

8. Halling High Street to the Station (1¾ or 2¾ km)

The station is only 300m from the Homeward Bound. If you want to cut out the riverside loop, turn left out of the pub and continue along the High Street; the station's access road is on the right after you cross the railway.

Turn right out of the pub and retrace your steps along the High Street, passing a Community Centre and a convenience store on the left. Opposite the **Five Bells** pub **turn left** into Ferry Road, alongside the churchyard of **St John the Baptist**¹⁶ (with a surviving wall of the **Bishop's Palace**¹⁷ at the end). The road leads to a small open space overlooking the **River Medway**¹⁸.

To finish at Halling station **turn left** alongside the river, with Maximilian Drive on your left. At the end of this short riverside walk veer left across an open space towards a stile a little way in from the riverbank. Go over this onto Halling Common and continue along a low embankment for 500m, eventually going over a stile directly across the river from Wouldham church.

A right of way continues alongside the river and in 2013 a blocked footpath looping back between Halling's Salt Marsh and Fresh Marsh was reinstated after a public enquiry. This extended route in §8b is only recommended in dry conditions as the last part can be extremely muddy.

a. Main route

For the direct route, **turn left** onto a track heading **W** back to Halling. In 250m the extension rejoins from a narrow path on the right.

b. Extension around Halling Salt Marsh (+1 km)

For the longer route continue along the embankment for a further 750m. The path winds around a small inlet and then Halling Salt Marsh is on your left. Later the embankment gradually curves left, away from the river, and ends by some thick scrub where a stile takes you onto the return route, a narrow path between hedges. In 400m the path turns sharply right, then in a further 150m goes up a small bank and through a gate onto a track, where you turn right to rejoin the direct route.



Go through a wooden kissing gate to the right of a fieldgate and follow the unsurfaced lane (Marsh Road) for 400m to its junction with the High Street. You have a second chance to visit the **Homeward Bound** pub (150m away on the left), but for the station **turn right** onto the main road. Cross over the railway and in 75m **turn right** into the station's access road. Platform 1 on the near side is for trains to Strood.

9. Horseholders Wood to Cuxton Station (4 km)

For Cuxton **keep ahead** at the path junction in the middle of the field; you will be staying on the NDW for a further 2 km. In the far corner go back into woodland and fork left at a path junction, now heading **NE**.

In 400m there is a field behind the trees on your left. At the end of this keep ahead at a path crossing, then follow the NDW as it swerves right and left to head **NE** again. In a further 300m the NDW goes across a more open area under overhead cables, then back into woodland.

In 750m **keep ahead** at a staggered path junction, ignoring a footpath off to the right and finally leaving the NDW which goes down a long flight of steps on the left.

In 700m ignore a footpath on the left, and 250m later keep ahead at a path crossing. At a third path junction soon afterwards, where you can see the end of the wood ahead, **fork right**. Continue through a metal kissing gate to emerge onto the top of Church Hill, with a fine view of the **Medway River Crossing**¹³ ahead, 2 km away.

Continue downhill in the same direction, initially on an enclosed path between trees, then through a gate and down a broad grassy path towards Cuxton's church tower, just visible above some trees. Go through a wooden kissing gate into the trees and keep left, with the churchyard's low brick wall on your right. Shortly before a gate leading into the churchyard, the path forks.

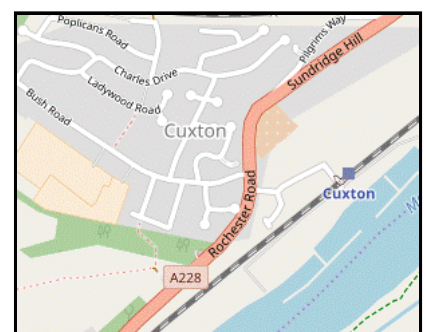
For the shortest route to the station, which also passes a pub, you can simply retrace your outward route. If you want to buy something at a convenience store in the village, take the slightly longer route in §9b.

a. Direct route

Fork right and go through the gate into the churchyard. Follow the path round to the left and out to the A228. The **White Hart** pub is 200m down the hill, at the junction with Station Road.

b. Village route (+250m)

Fork left and go straight across your outward route at the next path junction. After going down a short flight of steps and round to the left, fork right at the edge of the



wood to go down more steps and along a tarmac path to a residential street. Go across this (slightly to the left) and down Wood Street to a T-junction with Bush Road, where the Cuxton mini-market is directly opposite.

To continue the walk, head **E** along Bush Road (ie. turn left out of the shop) to reach the A228 in 300m. Cross the main road at the pedestrian traffic lights and turn right for Station Road and the **White Hart** pub.

The station is 300m from the pub, at the end of Station Road. Towards the end you can either follow the road round a sharp right-hand bend to reach it by the level crossing, or keep ahead past barriers into the old car park where a marked pedestrian route bends right and leads onto Platform 1 for trains to Strood.

10. [Halling High Street to Holborough Marshes](#) (1¼ km)
11. [Holborough Marshes to Snodland Station](#) (2 or 1½ or 2¼ km)

Walk Notes

1. The oldest parts of **St Michael and All Angels, Cuxton** are Norman, but most of the present building is the result of restoration work in 1860. It has an unusual SE-NW orientation, probably because it was built over earlier sacred buildings; Roman remains have been found on the site.
2. 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.
3. **Ranscombe Farm Reserve** is a working farm managed by **Plantlife**, "the charity that speaks up for the nation's wild plants". It contains some attractive wildflower meadows on chalk grassland and large areas of ancient woodland.
4. **Cobham Park** was landscaped by Humphry Repton for the Darnley's Cobham Hall estate.
5. The **Darnley Mausoleum** was designed by James Wyatt for the 4th Earl of Darnley. It was completed in 1786 but not consecrated and never used for interments. After the Darnley family sold Cobham Hall it became prone to vandalism and was badly damaged in an arson attack in 1980. The current restoration project began in 2001, part of a larger scheme to restore Cobham Park and its landscapes.
6. **Cobham Hall** dates from the Tudor period, with a major extension in 1771-73. The Earls of Darnley sold the house in 1957 and it is now a public school for girls.
7. **Charles Dickens** wrote some chapters of *The Pickwick Papers* while staying at the **Leather Bottle** and the coaching inn is mentioned in the novel. Unsurprisingly it makes much of its Dickensian associations.
8. **St Mary Magdalene, Cobham** dates from 1220. It is exceptionally large for a parish church, reflecting its patronage by the wealthy de Cobham family. The alabaster and black marble **Brooke Tomb** was built in 1561 (probably by Belgian craftsmen) for George Brooke (Lord Cobham) and his wife Anne, and shows their ten sons and four daughters. The church has a magnificent collection of **medieval brasses**, which were restored and relaid in the Chancel in 1837.
9. The **New College of Cobham** was built in 1362 as a home for priests. It was dissolved in the Reformation and subsequently converted to almshouses in 1598, with the hall being retained as a meeting place. It was modernised in 1981 and is still available as housing for local pensioners.
10. The **Wealdway** runs for 130 km through the Kent and Sussex Weald, from Gravesend on the Thames estuary to the outskirts of Eastbourne.
11. **Ss Peter and Paul, Luddesdowne** (spelt differently from the name of the parish) is a small medieval church decorated with some fine Victorian wall paintings. It is normally locked but is open on Saturday afternoons from July to September.
12. The adjoining Court Farm and Brookers Farm have operated as **Luddesdown Organic Farms** since 1988. Traditional crop rotation is practised and you are as likely to come across large fields of ley or red clover as wheat and other mainstream crops.
13. The **Medway River Crossing** is in fact three high-level bridges. The original motorway bridge carrying the M2 was built in 1963. Forty years later a second span was added at the same time as the bridge for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.
14. **Chapel Cottages** incorporate the remains of the 12thC chapel of St Laurence.
15. A neolithic skeleton was discovered near the station in 1912. At one time **Halling Man** was stored in the British Museum alongside the notorious hoax, Piltdown Man.
16. **St John the Baptist, Halling** has changed many times since the first stone church was built on the site in Norman times. Most of the current building dates from a major restoration in 1888.
17. The **Bishop's Palace** was an 11thC manor house used for many centuries by the bishops of Rochester.
18. At the riverside you can see where the **Halling Ferry** operated (to Wouldham on the far bank). It closed in 1964 after the new Medway Bridge opened.

19. The 35-hectare **Holborough Marshes** is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, managed by the Kent Wildlife Trust. The trust recently acquired a former arable field to the north of the original reserve and so the site is larger than it appears on older maps.
20. The May family built the first **Paper Mill** at Snodland in the 1740s. The village grew into a sizable small town in the mid-19thC when new manufacturing techniques and the coming of the Medway Valley railway greatly increased production.

» *Last updated: October 21, 2018*

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