

Main walk start last checked	Shorter start and main walk last checked	Link to Snodland to Sole Street last checked		
13 February 2021	11 January 2022	24 March 2018		
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Cuxton to Sole Street

A quiet corner of the North Downs near the Medway Towns

Length:	Main walk:	17.3km (10.7 miles)
	a) Shorter start from Cuxton	Subtract 2.3km (1.4 miles)
	b) Shorter ending	Subtract 5.6km (3.5 miles)
	c) Linking to Snodland to Sole Street	16.6km (10.3 miles) or 14.3km (8.9 miles)
	d) Extension to Snodland to Sole Street	18.7km (11.6 miles)

Toughness: 5 out of 10: some hill climbs, but none too strenuous

Maps: Landranger 178, Explorer 148

Features

This is an exploration of the very pretty and little known area of the North Downs just to the east of the Medway Towns that is covered by the Snodland to Sole Street walk. The morning is nicely contrasted, with a mix of open views and woodland, then a longer wooded ridge which has extensive bluebell woods in late April or early May. You then cross an extensive area of newly-planted organic downland vineyards, which are full of poppies and other wildflowers in June, to come to the village of Luddesdown. A walk across another scenic ridge (also part of the vineyard) brings you to Henley Street, where there is a pub (sadly no longer serving food, but a good place for a drink) and where you can finish the walk, if you wish.

In the afternoon, an optional loop takes you up to the pretty village of Cobham, where one of the three pub options is The Leather Bottle, which features (very briefly) in Charles Dicken's *Pickwick Papers*. Cobham Church also has a wonderful collection of medieval brasses and a fine carved tomb from the 16th century, and the ancient almshouse behind it is also worth a visit.

Walk options

a) Shorter start from Cuxton. This cuts **2.3km (1.4 miles)** off the main route, making a total walk of **15km (9.3 miles)**. You miss out some fine downland sections and views on the main walk, but your compensation is a lovely climb up a hill with fine views of the Medway Valley (and nice wildflowers in May). You then follow a wooded ridge for some distance to join the main walk route. There is slightly more woodland (including one continuous stretch of 4km/2.5 miles) than on the main walk route. See paragraph 28 on page 4 for directions for this option

b) Shorter ending. Once you are at the Cock Inn, Sole Street station is only 0.9km (0.6 miles away) and directions are provided to enable you to walk straight to the station at this point. This reduces the walk to **11.7km (7.3 miles)** with the normal start or **9.4km (5.9 miles)** when combined with **a) Shorter start from Cuxton** above.

c) You can use the early part of these directions as an **Alternative start to the Snodland to Sole Street Walk**, available as a download on this website. Simply follow the main walk directions to paragraph 56 on page 5, and you will then be prompted to switch to directions taking you to the lunch pub for that walk (**currently closed**). This makes a walk of **16.6km (10.3 miles)**, with 10.3km (6.8 miles) of it before lunch, or **14.3km (8.9 miles)** if you use **a) Shorter start from Cuxton**, with 8km (4.9 miles) of it before lunch,.

d) You can also use the afternoon of this walk to **Extend the Snodland to Sole Street walk**. To do this, follow the directions for the Snodland to Sole Street walk to point **[6]**, and then pick up the "continue on the main walk" directions for this walk from paragraph 89 on page 7. This adds an extra **5.6km (3.5 miles)** to the Snodland walk, making it **18.7km (11.6 miles)**.

Transport

Cuxton is on the Medway Valley line, with trains every half hour Monday to Saturday (every hour on Sunday). The quickest way to get there from London, taking just 46 minutes, is to take the **Southeastern High Speed** trains from **St Pancras** to **Strood**, changing there for the short hop to Cuxton.

A slower but cheaper option (avoiding the high speed supplement and also allowing tickets to be bought from London Transport zone boundaries if you have a season ticket) is to travel from **Charing Cross** or **London Bridge** to Strood. Journey times by this option are 1 hour 25 minutes.

Catch a train that gets you to Cuxton at about **10.30am** in order to get to lunch in time. For option **a) Shorter Start from Cuxton**, a train arriving at **11am** is fine

Trains back from Sole Street go to Victoria and take just 45 minutes

The best ticket to buy is probably a **day return to Rochester**. This will cover you both for the journey to Strood and back from Sole Street. The short Strood to Cuxton section is in theory not covered by this ticket, but it would be a hard-hearted ticket inspector who charged you for it if you explain you are doing a walk.

Lunch

A short 450 metre diversion off the main walk route (see directions in the text) is now necessary if you want to have a hot lunch. This brings you to the **Golden Lion** 01474 815644 www.thegoldenlionpub.uk, 10km/6.2 miles into the walk by the main start or 7.7km (4.8 miles) by the shorter start, which is a traditional pub with a fairly simple menu, served 12-3pm and 6-9pm Monday to Saturday and 12-5pm on Sunday. It is also open all afternoon for drinks.

The **Cock Inn**, Henley Street, 01474 814705 www.cockluddesdowne.com, 10.8km/6.7 miles into the walk, or 8.5km/5.3 miles if using the shorter start, the original lunch option for this walk, **no longer does food**, but is a very cosy and characterful pub for a drink (you could spend all afternoon just admiring all the pictures and bric-a-brac with which it is decorated).

Alternatively, if can hold back the gastric juices, it is also not impossible to carry on another 3.9km (2.4 miles) beyond the Cock Inn and have lunch at the **Leather Bottle** in Cobham, 01474 814327, a pub that featured in *The Pickwick Papers* by Charles Dickens, and which serves food all afternoon. Cobham also has two other pubs - the **Ship Inn** and the **Darnley Arms**.

On option **b) Shorter ending**, the **Railway Inn**, 01474 814375 www.railwayinnsolestreet.co.uk by Sole Street station is also a lunch option, 0.9km after the Cock Inn, serving food 12-9pm Monday to Saturday and 12 to 6pm on Sundays.

Luddesdown churchyard is an obvious **picnic** spot, but a better one - two benches with a fine view - is just a bit further on - see paragraph 86 of the walk directions.

Tea

The most atmospheric choice is the **Leather Bottle** in Cobham (see **Lunch** above), which has both a pleasant garden and a characterful interior. It serves a formal afternoon tea in its restaurant (the room facing the road) but only from 11am to 3pm: otherwise food and hot puddings are available in the bar until 9pm.

Cobham also has two other pubs - the **Ship Inn** and the **Darnley Arms**.

The **Cock Inn** (see **Lunch** above), passed a second time on the afternoon loop, also makes a very cosy tea stop. Alternatively, at the end of the walk, the **Railway Inn** by Sole Street station (see **Lunch** above) is open all afternoon and seems very popular with locals.

WALK DIRECTIONS

For a) Shorter start from Cuxton go to paragraph 28 on page 4.

Cuxton to the North Downs ridge **- main route (4.6km/2.8 miles)**

1. From platform two, the southbound platform on Cuxton station, cross over the footbridge (or exit to the left of the footbridge and use the level crossing). On the far side, keep on along a road towards houses on the hill in the distance.
2. In 40 metres turn left with the road, following the sign to the North Downs Way.
3. Follow the road for 200 metres, eventually curving right to a junction with the main road, Rochester Road (with the White Hart pub on your left).
4. Cross the main road and turn right. Stay on the main road as it curves right uphill.
5. In 230 metres, where the road straightens out, slant left off it up Pilgrims Way, a quiet residential street.
6. In 100 metres, 20 metres before Petchart Close on the left, turn left up an unsigned footpath that climbs directly uphill.
7. In 80 metres ignore a residential road to the left and keep on uphill. In 100 metres more cross a stile and the railway line.
8. Beyond the railway line keep straight on uphill through a wooded area, ignoring paths up steps to the left and right.
9. In 230 metres you emerge from the wood and the path levels out to cross an arable field, heading just to the right of a group of farm buildings (Ranscombe Farm), your direction north.
10. In 160 metres you come to a footpath post and turn left on a track.
11. In 80 metres pick up a tree boundary to the left, and in 70 metres more curve left through it with the path and then right again, with a fenced-off field to your left and the tree boundary to your right. There is a fine **view of the Medway Valley** to your left.
12. In 100 metres the path starts to descend and is soon following the top edge of a large arable field
13. In 220 metres follow the path as it curves left through a kissing gate and heads directly downhill, with a wood to your right.
14. In 120 metres more, where the wood ends, keep straight on downhill across the field, heading for a footpath post midfield.
15. In another 300 metres, having climbed to the far edge of the field, cross a railway line on a brick bridge. On the far side go right at a T-junction following the North Downs Way sign.
16. Keep to this path, ignoring ways off until in 400 metres you pass through a wooden kissing gate and come to a road.
17. Go right on the road but in 40 metres, slant half left off it across a vineyard, following the North Downs Way sign.
18. In 350 metres you come to a road and go left uphill.
19. In 200 metres, where the road curves right, keep straight on up a gravel track between cottages, following a North Downs Way sign. Follow this track between cottages.
20. In 70 metres, beyond the second cottage on the right (a half timbered one), ignore a driveway through the

gate to the right to keep straight on up a path between hedges.

21. In 100 metres, at the bottom of the hill, fork right following a path on the right-hand edge of a large field (part of which, at least, is being turned into a vineyard).
22. In 140 metres, where the trees end to your right, veer half left uphill across the field/vineyard, your direction 190 degrees.
23. In 250 metres the path enters a wood. Keep on uphill on a meandering path.
24. In another 130 metres cross a track and keep on up the path, now less steep.
25. In 120 metres more you pass over the top of the hill and start to descend. In 70 metres exit the wood through a kissing gate and carry on half right on a path between fences.
26. In 150 metres, at the bottom of the dip, pass down a path between two wire fences and then go through two kissing gates to carry on uphill on a path between wire fences.
27. In 170 metres pass through a kissing gate and carry on up steps. In 70 metres, at the top of the hill and just before a pylon, turn right on a broad path.

Now continue with the directions in paragraph 43 opposite.

Cuxton to North Down ridge - short start (2.3km/1.4 mi)

28. From platform two, the southbound platform, on Cuxton station, cross over the footbridge (or exit to the left of the footbridge and use the level crossing). On the far side, keep on along a road towards houses on the hill in the distance.
29. In 40 metres, turn left with the road, following the sign to the North Downs Way. Follow the road for 200 metres, eventually curving right to a junction with the main road, Rochester Road (with the White Hart pub on your left).
30. Cross the main road and turn left, almost immediately climbing uphill.
31. In 200 metres, level with house number 21 on the left-hand side of the road, veer right off the road up a tarmac driveway, signposted to St Michaels & All Angels Church.

32. In 80 metres ignore a concrete drive up to a wooden building to the right. In another 40 metres enter the churchyard and turn right on a concrete path uphill.
33. In 50 metres pass through a gate to leave the churchyard. **Ignore the more obvious path ahead** and immediately fork left, your direction 240 degrees.
34. In 50 metres pass through a wooden kissing gate to emerge into an open field. Turn right, directly uphill, following a line of trees/hedges to your right.
35. Keep on uphill along the line of the hedge, with increasingly fine views of the Medway Valley behind you. *In May, these meadows are a riot of wildflowers.*
36. In 250 metres pass through a metal kissing gate to the left of a beacon (a metal basket on a pole) and carry on along a fenced path between hedges.
37. In 180 metres, at the top of the hill, go through a metal kissing gate into a wood.
38. In 20 metres ignore a track forking right and in 20 metres another path to the right marked by a footpath post, to keep straight on along a clear path through the wood, your direction 230 degrees.
39. In 100 metres keep straight on at crosspaths marked by a footpath post.
40. In 270 metres ignore paths left and right at a footpath post.
41. In another 500 metres there is a fence to the left and the path levels out and descends slightly.
42. In 300 metres at the bottom of a long shallow dip, with a large electricity pylon to your left, a path joins steeply uphill from the right. This is the **North Downs Way** and is also the main walk route. *Continue with the directions in the next section.*

North Downs ridge to Great Buckland (3.2km/2 miles)

43. Follow the path uphill along the wooded top of the ridge. In 250 metres the path more or less levels off and there are fine displays of **bluebells** in season on both sides of the path.

44. In 550 metres ignore a path downhill to the right and pass two yellow metal posts to carry on through an area of young trees under a line of electricity pylons. Beyond this the path goes back into the wood, with more **bluebells** in season.
45. In 350 metres more the path turns right (*possibly a T-junction with a path coming uphill from the left, but this is not very obvious*). In another 30 metres it veers left and comes to a crosspaths, with a track coming uphill from the left. Go straight on here, following the North Downs Way.
46. Keep on this path, initially with an open space visible through the line of trees to your right and then, after 180 metres, through the middle of the woods (*though a large area to the right of the path had been recently coppiced, ie logged, in February 2021*). Again there are **bluebells** here in season.
47. In 400 metres you emerge into an open space (*with some bushes growing in it initially*), ignoring a signposted footpath to the left just before it. Carry on half right across the open space following an arrow on a post, your direction 260 degrees.
48. In 150 metres you pass over a bank (a former field boundary?) and in another 120 metres you are back into woods (recently thinned out) on a clear path (more **bluebells** here in season).
49. In 150 metres, at a footpath post, ignore a footpath to the left (which is in any case not very visible). The path bends right and straightens out, your direction now 280 degrees.
50. In 220 metres cross a track and carry on half left across an open field.
51. In 200 metres the path goes back into woods.
52. In another 120 metres cross a metal stile, a track, and another metal stile to reach another track (with an electricity pylon to your left).
53. Turn right on this track across an open field, heading towards a second line of electricity pylons, your direction 250 degrees.
54. In 150 metres, near the top of the rise, pass under the line of pylons and keep straight on towards the far corner of the open space.
55. In 150 metres more exit the field in its far corner, crossing a black metal stile. Go straight on across a track onto a narrow path between wooden posts, which goes directly downhill.
56. In 350 metres you come to a road.
- For option **c) - to join the directions for the Snodland to Sole Street walk**, turn left on the road and refer to directions in the next section.
 - **To continue with the main walk**, turn right on the road and continue with the directions in paragraph 76 on page 6.
- Great Buckland to Harvel**
(2.5km/1.5 miles)
- This is a link to the **Snodland to Sole Street** walk.*
57. Having turned left on the road, **in 5 metres turn right again** down a footpath to the right of a house. In 40 metres this brings you to another road. Turn left on this.
58. In 70 metres you pass Buckland Farmhouse on your right and the lane starts to ascend.
59. In 130 metres more, where the lane swings to the right, continue straight ahead through a kissing gate and up a path into the woods.
60. In 80 metres cross a stile to the right of a rusted metal fieldgate and carry on into more mature woodland.
61. In 80 metres more go over a stile and carry on up a fenced footpath.
62. In 250 metres the footpath enters **Luxon Wood**: keep straight ahead on a well-defined path. *This wood has a wonderful display of wood anemones in late March and early April, and some bluebells in late April and early May.*
63. In 500 metres you emerge into the top corner of a field and carry on along its upper right-hand side.
64. In 180 metres, in the right-hand corner of the field, turn right along a fenced-in car-wide track.
65. In 100 metres there is an open field on the left. In another 200 metres, as the path swings round to the right, keep straight ahead through a wooden barrier.

66. Cross a tarmac lane and go through a kissing gate. Keep straight ahead across a small field.
67. In 60 metres, on the far side of the field, cross a wooden stile and a tarmac lane and keep straight ahead up a bridleway.
68. In 80 metres, just after you pass some metal buildings on the left, the path starts to descend. *There is are wood anemones and bluebell in the wood to your right in season: see paragraph 62 for timings.*
69. In 120 metres keep straight on at a track junction.
70. In 130 metres the path emerges from the wood and curves right between two open fields.
71. In 30 metres, at the end of the fields, keep straight on uphill, ignoring the broad path to your left.
72. In 50 metres go over a stile into a field and cross it diagonally to its far left-hand corner.
73. In 250 metres leave the field through a metal kissing gate to the left of a double metal fieldgate and veer left onto a tarmac lane into the village of **Harvel**.
74. In 30 metres turn right diagonally across a green towards a bench on the far side.
75. In 100 metres, just beyond the bench, turn right on a lane, following the sign to Harvel and Meopham. In 180 metres you reach the **Amazon & Tiger** pub.

*After lunch continue the **Snodland to Sole Street** directions from one paragraph after point [4] - "After lunch turn left out of the pub..."*

Great Buckland to Henley Street (3km/1.9 miles)

This is the continuation of the main walk

76. Having turned right on the road in paragraph 56, in 100 metres a road merges from the left. 30 metres later turn left off the road down a bank following a WW (Wealdway) sign. Pass through a gate and turn half right across a vineyard.
77. In 600 metres, on the far side of the field, pass through a kissing gate and keep on in the same direction across the next field, towards a kissing gate in the fence to the left 200 metres away.
78. Beyond the gate turn right along the bottom edge of the next field, heading for a gate 30 metres to the right of the field corner.
79. In 80 metres pass through the gate and veer slightly left across the corner of the next field on a faint path.
80. In 100 metres you reach the far edge of the field and carry on along it with a line of trees to the left.
81. In 350 metres turn left through a gate in the hedgerow. Turn right beyond it towards the field corner.
82. In 60 metres turn left down the field edge, following a yellow arrow (and ignoring a gate straight ahead), towards the farm and church of **Luddesdown**, visible across the valley.
83. In 250 metres, at the far end of the field, pass through two sets of gates 30 metres apart and turn right on a cobbled track.
84. Follow this the track for 170 metres down to a road junction, passing **Luddesdown** church on your left.
85. At a road fork by a Luddesdown village sign, **you have a choice:**
 - **For lunch at the Golden Lion** (a 450 metre diversion off the main walk route) take the *right fork* (ie straight ahead) and carry on down the road: the pub is in 500 metres on the right. After lunch, come out of the pub, turn left on the road ignoring a road straight ahead, and in 100 metres, just beyond a grey barn, veer right through a kissing gate into a field. Curve right with the field edge to climb steeply uphill. In 250 metres at the top of the hill you pass two benches on the left. Turn right beyond it on a path through the bushes and resume the walk directions at paragraph 87 overleaf.
 - **To continue with the main walk** and for the **Cock Inn** (which no longer serves food) take the *left fork* past the village sign. In 30 metres cross a road and go through a kissing gate and on down a path along the right-hand edge of a vineyard. Continue with the directions in the next paragraph.

86. Follow the vineyard edge to the bottom of the dip and carry on up the path up the steep slope beyond. At the top you come to two **benches** with fine views, a possible **picnic** spot. To continue the walk keep straight on past the benches through a gap in the hedge.
87. In 20 metres pass through a kissing gate and follow a path across another vineyard field over the brow of the hill.
88. In 350 metres the path comes to a kissing gate, beyond which you go down through 20 metres of wood to cross a stile into an open field. Slant diagonally downhill across this field in more or less the same direction as before.
89. In 120 metres, at the bottom of the field, cross a stile to come to a road, the village of **Henley Street**. Here there are three choices:
- **To continue on the main walk without stopping at the Cock Inn** (at this point: you pass it again later), turn left on the road and almost immediately in 10 metres, turn right up a signposted path between wooden garden fences. Resume the directions in paragraph 90 opposite.
 - **To stop at the Cock Inn** turn left on the road to find the pub on your left in 250 metres. Afterwards, turn right out of the pub to retrace your steps along the road. In 240 metres, 10 metres beyond a house called The Old Post Office on the right, and the entrance to Luddesdown House on the left (both modern looking houses, despite their names), turn left up a signposted footpath between wooden garden fences. Resume the directions in the paragraph 90 opposite.
 - For **b) Shorter ending**, ie to go **directly to Sole Street station** from this point, turn left on the road to find the **Cock Inn** on your left in 250 metres and carry on past it (or turn left out of it after stopping there): continue with paragraph 109 on page 8.

Henley Street to Cobham **(3.9 km/2.4 miles)**

90. In 70 metres the path emerges into a field. Ignore a path going straight uphill across the field, and instead take the path that forks right towards a metal kissing gate in 80 metres, your direction 60 degrees.
91. Beyond the gate keep a wooden fence to your left to reach another kissing gate in the field corner in 70 metres. Pass through a gap in the hedge and keep on along the upper left-hand edge of the field beyond.
- Note the wonderfully mixed field boundary to your left here, which includes blackthorn, oak, wild rose, blackberry, travellers joy, hawthorn, wild cherry, wayfaring trees and hazel.*
92. In 450 metres exit the field at its far end and turn left on a road. In 25 metres turn right off the road up a footpath marked by a post onto a path with a wood to the left, and hedge and yet another section of vineyard to your right.
93. In 300 metres ignore a metal gate to the right. In a further 100 metres, the path enters into the heart of the wood.
94. 20 metres after this, at a three way junction marked by a footpath post, turn right onto a broad track into a denser area of trees, slightly downhill. *Later in this wood there are **bluebells** in season*
95. In 300 metres pass through a gate to emerge from the wood at a three-way road junction. Go left here, signposted Cobham, Gravesend, watching out for fast traffic on the road.
96. In 180 metres fork right off the road up a stony track. In 300 metres pass under a railway bridge and in 300 metres more ignore metal gates to the right and keep to the track as it veers left. In another 200 metres keep straight on through farm buildings.
97. In 150 metres more, just after a thatched house right, turn left onto a signposted byway, a broad gravel and earth track.
98. After 700 metres this brings you to a road T-junction at the outskirts of **Cobham**. Keep straight on down the main road ("The Street") through the heart of the village, passing the **Ship Inn** on your right in 130 metres, and

the **Darnley Arms** in another 200 metres. In another 50 metres on the right you find the **Leather Bottle**.

Cobham to Henley Street **(1.7km/1.1 miles)**

99. If not stopping there for tea, veer left just before the Leather Bottle into the churchyard, or after having tea in the Leather Bottle, cross the road and go up stone steps into the churchyard.
- The **church** is worth a visit for its amazing collection of medieval brasses and also for a fine 16th century carved tomb.*
100. Walk to the church door and veer right around the side of the church on a gravel path. 20 metres on ignore a minor path left to the west door of the church and keep along a path that is now tarmac.
101. In 30 metres *the entrance to an **ancient almshouse** is to your left, whose courtyard can be visited. Otherwise, **keep straight on** between walls and a post, downhill under trees on a wide tarmac path.*
102. In 80 metres keep straight on a more minor path down the left-hand side of the graveyard.
103. In 90 metres pass through a kissing gate into a huge field and keep straight on down its right-hand edge. (Look back after a while for a fine view of the church on the ridge behind)
104. In 600 metres, at the far end of the field, veer right through a car-wide gap and turn left onto a road, immediately crossing a railway bridge.
- **In winter, if you are losing the light**, you can turn right on this road. In 600 metres you merge with another lane from the left and follow that for 500 metres to a T-junction with the main road. Here turn left to reach Sole Street station in 500 metres or so.
105. Otherwise, having turned left on the road, 40 metres beyond the bridge turn right through a metal gate to the left of double metal fieldgates. Beyond, curve left around the garden of a house to follow a path down the left-hand edge of a field with a wood fence to your left, your direction 200 degrees.

106. In 150 metres, 10 metres before the end of the field, turn left through a metal gate and carry on through scrub for 20 metres to a kissing gate. Go down across the small field beyond to another kissing gate in 40 metres.
107. Slant slightly to the right across the larger field beyond, heading for the point in 170 metres where a line of mini-pylons meets its bottom edge. Here you will find a path between fences. In 70 metres this brings you to a road, where you go right.
108. In 250 metres you once again pass the **Cock Inn** on the left. Unless you are stopping here, keep straight on beyond it. *Continue with the directions in the next section.*

Henley Street to Sole Street station **(0.9km/0.6 miles)**

In winter, if you are losing the light, you can stay on this road. In 500 metres another lane merges with it from the right, and in a further 500 metres you come to a T-junction with the main road: here turn left for 500 metres to reach Sole Street station.

109. Otherwise, in 150 metres turn left off the road down a path between street signs for Henley Street and Gold Street. In 60 metres pass through a kissing gate into a large field. Keep straight ahead across this, your direction 300 degrees.
110. In 600 metres, at the far end of the field, head for a point about 80 metres to the left of a white house. Here pick up a fenced-off path with a wooden fence to the right and a barbed wire fence and a small field to the left.
111. In 100 metres this brings you to the road. On the other side is the **Railway Inn**, a possible tea stop, with the approach road to Sole Street station to the right of it.