

# Hildenborough to Hadlow or Tonbridge walk

Gentle walk through the Kentish Weald to one of the tallest follies in Britain.



**Length** **Main Walk, to Hadlow:** 13¼ km (8.2 miles). Two hours 55 minutes walking time. For the whole excursion including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 7½ hours.  
**Extended Walk, to Tonbridge:** 20¼ km (12.6 miles). Four hours 30 minutes walking time.

**OS Maps** Explorers 147 & 148 (plus 136 for the Extended Walk). Hildenborough, map reference TQ557485, is in Kent, 4 km **NW** of Tonbridge.

**Toughness** 2 out of 10 (3 for the Extended Walk).  
**S**

**Features** Despite its rural location there are no useful footpaths near Hildenborough station so there is a fair amount of roadside walking before you escape into typical Wealden countryside of fields, meadows and the occasional wood. At Shipbourne (pronounced *Shibbun*) you join the **Greensand Way** for a short section to the hamlet of Dunk's Green, then head south-east along the valley of the River Bourne to **Hadlow**. On this last stretch you find yourself heading towards one of the more peculiar sights you are likely to encounter on a Home Counties walk: a multi-tiered Gothic folly, taller than Nelson's Column.

**Hadlow Tower** was built in 1838 by William Barton May as an embellishment to his equally eccentric father's extravagant house in Strawberry Hill Gothic style ("the most singular looking thing I ever saw" according to William Cobbett). Much of **Hadlow Castle** was demolished in 1951 but fortunately the Tower was saved; after a local campaign it has now been beautifully restored.

*The Tower used to be open to visitors on summer Thursdays and the walk was designed to be short enough for walkers to reach Hadlow in time to visit it. It is now a luxury holiday rental property and although the owner is obliged to hold some open days as a condition of its restoration, visits have to be booked at least one week in advance.*

The walk route also passes Hadlow's other attraction, **Broadview Gardens** (free entry). This is a collection of small landscaped gardens designed by successive generations of horticultural students at **Hadlow College**.

Parts of the route overlap the Leigh to Sevenoaks walk (1-21) and (in reverse) the Yalding to Sevenoaks walk (#41).

### Walk Options

For a longer walk you can continue to **Tonbridge** (pronounced *Tunbridge*: see Walk Notes). From Hadlow this **Extended Walk** heads south along a quiet lane, continues across large farm fields to the **River Medway** and finishes with a long but easy stretch alongside the river.

*The route to the River Medway was changed in 2019. The old route was slightly problematic, so when the Hadlow to Tonbridge section of another walk was dropped it was transferred to this walk.*

For an even longer extension you could tack on a loop to the west of Tonbridge, either around the large **Racecourse Sportsground** (an extra 2 km) or through **Haysden Country Park** (4 to 7 km). The directions for these extra variations can be found in the Tonbridge Circular via Tudeley walk (#220).

### Transport

There is a half-hourly service (hourly on Sundays) from Charing Cross to Hildenborough, the station between Sevenoaks and Tonbridge, taking 42 minutes. Tonbridge generally has six fast trains an hour to London, reducing to four in the evenings and on Sundays. Buy a **return to Tonbridge**.

There is no station in Hadlow, but at the end of the Main Walk there is a frequent bus service along the A26 to Tonbridge: Arriva 7 runs every 20-30 minutes (Mon-Sat) and half-hourly to 5.30pm on Sundays. Earlier in the walk there is a less frequent service (Autocar 222; Mon-Sat) through Dunk's Green and Shipbourne to Tonbridge.

The Main Walk is not convenient for car drivers as you would have to return via Tonbridge, but for reference the station car park at Hildenborough costs £7.10 Mon-Fri, £3.50 Sat, £1 Sun & BH (2022).

### Suggested Train

Take the train nearest to **10:00** from **Charing Cross** to **Hildenborough**.

### Lunch

There are two possible lunch pubs on the route to Hadlow. Halfway through the Main Walk the **Chaser Inn** (01732-810360) in **Shipbourne** has a pleasant beer garden next to the churchyard and serves food all afternoon. Half an hour further on you come to the smaller and quieter **Kentish Rifleman** (01732-810727), a charming old pub in the hamlet of **Dunk's Green**. It serves homemade food up to 2pm (later at weekends) and also has an attractive back garden.

The pubs in **Hadlow** are not well placed for a late lunch, but you could carry on past The Square to the **Two Brewers** (01732-850197).

**Tea** The most convenient tea place in **Hadlow** is the **Broadview Gardens Tearoom** (01732-372856; open to 5pm Mon–Sat, 4pm Sun). At weekends a nearby alternative is the small coffee shop in **Weathered and Worn** (07715-680862; open to 5pm Tue–Sat, closed Sun & Mon), on the High Street between the Gardens and the Tower.

There are plenty of pubs, restaurants, cafés and coffee shops in **Tonbridge**. The **Extended Walk** route comes out onto the High Street opposite **The Humphrey Bean** (01732-773850), a JD Wetherspoon's pub in the old Post Office building with a beer garden overlooking the river, and continues past a café **Beyond the Grounds** (01732-667564; closed Mon) in River Walk. If you detour across Big Bridge (or alight from the Hadlow bus at the Tonbridge Castle stop) you will find **The Bakehouse at 124** (01732-360382; closed Sun) and two pubs, **Ye Olde Chequers Inn** (01732-358957) and **The Gatehouse** (01732-368529).

Some places near the end of the short route through the town are **Nancy's Tea Rooms** (01732-300401; open to 5pm Mon–Sat, closed Sun) in Lamberts Yard, a **Caffè Nero** (01732-351356; open to 6.30pm Mon–Sat, 6pm Sun) on the High Street and – the suggested tea place, serving good home-made cakes – the **Finch House Café** (01732-771775; open to 6pm Mon–Sat, 5pm Sun) at the front of the Pavilion Shopping Centre.

**Help Us!** After the walk, we would love to get your feedback

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



**By Car** **Start** TN11 8LX **Finish** Hadlow

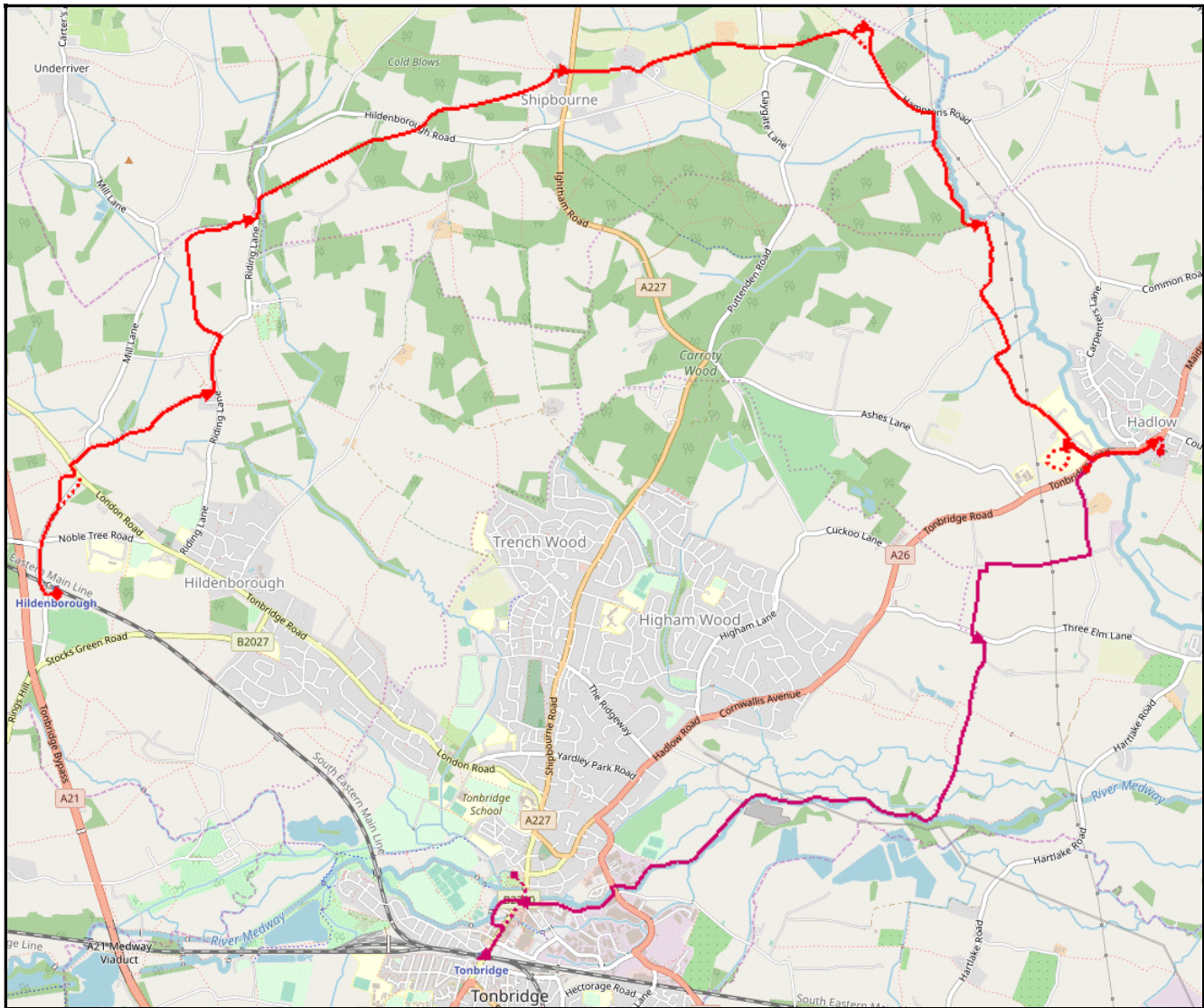
**Help** National Rail: 03457 48 49 50 • Travelline (bus times): 0871 200 22 33 (12p/min) • TFL (London) : 0343 222 1234

**Version** May-22 

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## Walk Directions

# Walk Map



All maps © OpenStreetMap contributors

## Walk Options

### M. Main Walk, to Hadlow (13¼ km)

#### i. Main Walk, plus Tonbridge town (14 km)

#### x. Extended Walk, to Tonbridge (20¼ km)

## Walk Directions

### A. Hildenborough Station to Riding Lane (2¼ km)

1. Arriving from London on Platform 2, cross the footbridge to leave by the ticket office on the far side. Turn right, go up the station approach road and turn right onto the pavement alongside a road (Rings Hill), soon crossing over the railway. Go straight ahead at a staggered junction onto Watt's Cross Road, joining the route of Walk 1-21.
2. In 300m there is a signposted footpath into the meadow on the left. At best there will only be a faint path through it, but to escape some of the road walking the suggested route is to go through the gate in the hedge onto this footpath, which heads **N** towards a large house on the B245.
  - Alternatively you could simply turn left onto the B245 at the T-junction ahead (as per the Book 1 route). If you do this, resume the directions at [4].

3. On the far side of the meadow go past a post with footpath waymarkers at the left-hand end of a wire fence and immediately **veer right** onto a faint grassy path slanting up the edge of some rough grassland towards another house. Go over a stile in front of some outbuildings and make your way between them to the main road.
4. Cross this busy road carefully, go past a garage and **turn right** into Mill Lane. Where the road curves left after 175m **turn right** onto a signposted footpath, going through a pair of metal gates into a meadow. Follow a clear grassy path curving down to its bottom corner. In the belt of trees cross a stream on a footbridge and keep ahead across a corner of the next field. Bear right to continue gently uphill alongside a wood.
5. At the top of the rise do not follow the field edge round to the left, but **keep ahead** across the next field. Make your way through a potentially muddy patch in a gap in the trees and **turn left**; the right of way cuts diagonally across this small field but most walkers appear to take the well-used path around its edge, leading to a stile in the opposite corner.
6. The next field is used by horses and you might need to unhook an electric wire to get over the stile. With no path on the ground to guide you, head **ENE** towards the left-hand end of a low fence stretching across the field, 200m away (about 50m beyond a metal fieldgate in the hedge). At this point go through a pair of metal kissing gates into a small field, with the horse training grounds of a riding school on your left.
7. Make your way to the opposite corner and leave the field through another kissing gate. Turn left briefly onto a track, but almost immediately **veer right** towards a stile with a footpath marker. Go over this and follow a grassy path to the right of another training area. Turn right in front of an outbuilding, go through a wooden gate and turn left to go out past buildings and along a driveway to Riding Lane.

## B. Riding Lane to Riding Lane (again) (1¾ km)

8. Turn left onto the road. You need to take care at first but soon you can cross over to a wide grass verge, followed by a surfaced path after passing Princess Christian's Farm. Continue past Vines Lane on the left, then in 125m go back across the road and take the signposted footpath to the right of "Woodside". Bear right off its driveway onto the footpath, a broad grassy path between garden fences.
9. At the far end go over a stile in a belt of trees into a large farm field. There is usually a clear path straight ahead, but if the field has recently been ploughed head **NNW** towards the right-hand end of a hedge 250m away. Continue alongside this hedge, then go straight across a farm track towards a line of trees on the far side of another large field.
10. Do not take a path into these trees (the Book 1 route) but **turn right** to go along the field edge. After about 300m (two-thirds of the way along) **go over a stile on the left** and across a plank bridge to resume your original direction on a fenced path on the other side of the trees. Follow this onto a driveway and out between houses to a road, Riding Lane again.

## C. Riding Lane to Shipbourne (2½ km)

11. Turn left onto the road, taking care as there is no pavement. In 150m **turn right** onto a signposted footpath along the edge of a wood, with the landscaped grounds of a new estate (Fairhill) behind a fence on your right. The path leads into the corner of a large field and you continue along a grassy path near its right-hand edge, climbing gently.
12. In 700m you reach a private road. Go straight across it onto a short track through a belt of trees, then go over a stile into the corner of a large meadow. **Turn half-left** to go diagonally across it; if there is no clear path aim for its bottom corner which comes into view as you go over a small rise.

13. Leave the meadow via a stile in the hedge and carefully cross a lane (Hildenborough Road). Go over a stile into another field and make your way up to its top right-hand corner. At the top veer right through a wide gap in the trees into a large field. You are heading for Shipbourne church, visible 800m ahead on the far side of a valley with a stream running through it, but the onward route might not be clear.
14. In the past there has sometimes been a clearly-marked field path which you could take from this point, all the way to the churchyard. If there is no such path on the ground the OS map shows the right of way as going straight ahead towards the left-hand end of a wood, continuing alongside it for about 100m and then bearing left to go down across the field (in line with a clear path sloping up the other side).
  - The alternative to walking through the crops would be to stay alongside the wood (zig-zagging right and left halfway along), then turn left at the bottom onto a clearly-marked path (which is also a public footpath) running from Hildenborough Road to the crossing point over the stream. *There is no indication that the right of way has been officially diverted to take this somewhat longer route.*
15. However you get there, cross the stream and take the path sloping up the other side. At the top bear left to go along the field edge and continue through a small grove of young trees, joining the **Greensand Way**<sup>1</sup> (GW) as you enter the churchyard. Pass to the left of **St Giles** church<sup>2</sup> and go out through its lychgate to the A227, with the beer garden of the **Chaser Inn** (the early lunch stop) on your right.

#### D. Shipbourne to Dunk's Green (2¼ km)

*In this section along the GW you will be following (in reverse) part of the route of Walk #41.*

16. Cross the A227 carefully and head **E** across Shipbourne Common (there is a clear grassy path to the left of Upper Green Road). On the far side of the common join the road and follow it briefly round to the right, then **turn left** onto a path between a hedge and a house, with a ground-level footpath marker in the hedge. Continue through a kissing gate into a large field.
17. Bear right to go down across the field, on a clear path. At the bottom cross a stream and follow a track up the right-hand side of the next field, which leads into a tarmac driveway by the buildings of Fairlawne Home Farm. Continue along the broad grassy strip to its right and follow this out to a minor road (School Lane).
18. Cross the lane and go over a stile to maintain direction across a field. On the far side go over a stile into a small wood and follow the main path down to the left. At the bottom of the wood cross a ditch and go over a stile with two footpath waymarkers.
19. Do not take the main path straight ahead but **turn half-right** onto the other footpath, cutting diagonally across the field. In its top corner go over a stile and bear right to go alongside a hedge. Continue through a metal kissing gate and down a few steps to a lane on the outskirts of Dunk's Green.
20. If you want to visit the later lunch pub **turn left** onto the lane and follow it round to the right at a road junction to come to the **Kentish Rifleman**.
  - Alternatively you can take the continuation of the footpath (just off to the right) across a meadow and turn right on the far side onto a fenced path. If you take this small short cut, resume the directions at [22] in §E.

#### E. Dunk's Green to High House Lane (1¾ km)

21. From the pub continue briefly along Roughway Lane, but almost immediately **turn right** again onto a signposted footpath, leaving the GW. This soon becomes a fenced path along the edge of a meadow. In 125m it bends left by a metal kissing gate, where the short cut joins from across the meadow.

22. The path heads **SE**, soon with a wood on the left, and comes out past a cottage onto Hamptons Road. Turn left to go gently downhill on this road for 350m, taking care as there is no pavement. Shortly after crossing a branch of the **River Bourne** and passing the entrance to a fish farm, **go over a stile on the right** onto a signposted footpath along a narrow meadow.
23. At the end of the meadow bear right to cross the stream on a wooden footbridge. Do not take the path ahead across a large farm field but **turn left** to go along its edge for 600m, with the meandering tree-lined stream always close by on your left.
24. In the far corner **fork left** onto a grassy path through a small and rather overgrown area. On the far side go over a stile and turn left down a short but potentially muddy farm track, coming out onto High House Lane at a sharp bend by a house called "Mount Pleasant".

## F. High House Lane to Broadview Gardens (2 km)

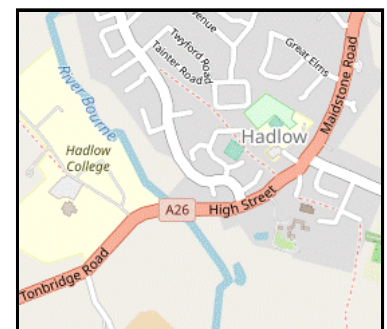
25. **Turn right** to head **S** on the lane. In 450m ignore a footpath on the left at a sharp right-hand bend and continue along the lane into the hamlet of Stallion's Green. In a further 125m, where there are signposted footpaths on both sides, **go over a stile on the left** into a large field.
26. Follow a clear path off to the right, gradually moving away from the lane and heading **SE** (slightly to the right of Hadlow Tower, 1¾ km away). Follow the path for 400m, crossing a ditch along the way. On the far side **turn right** to go along the field edge, with a tree-lined stream on your left.
27. In the field corner go through the belt of trees ahead and **turn left** onto a broad grassy track between the trees and a low hedge. Later there is a small wood on your right and you could switch to a parallel permissive path on the other side of the hedge. Either way brings you out to an area in front of some stables.
28. Keep left and go over a stile beside a metal fieldgate, passing to the left of the stables and continuing on a long driveway (which is also a public footpath) through the campus of **Hadlow College**<sup>3</sup>. About 200m before the main road which you can see ahead, **veer right** through the car park for Broadview Garden Centre.
  - The entrance to **Broadview Gardens** is to the right of the Garden Centre and its **tearoom**. A map on a large information panel shows the themed areas within the gardens, which are worth exploring if you are not pressed for time.

*If you are doing the Extended Walk (to Tonbridge), go to §H.*

## G. Broadview Gardens to Hadlow (The Square) (¾ km)

29. After visiting the tearoom and/or the gardens go back through the car park, keeping to the right. **Veer right** onto a surfaced path running parallel to the main driveway and follow this out to the A26. Cross the main road at the pedestrian lights.
  - If you want to finish the Main Walk without going into the village, the nearest bus stop for Tonbridge is just off to the right; there are other stops on the main road into the village.
30. **Turn left** onto the tarmac walkway between the wide grass verge and a hedge. After crossing the **River Bourne** you pass **Weathered and Worn** (a small coffee shop) on the right, the **Maltings**<sup>4</sup> on the left and an imposing old gateway on the right, the entrance to **Hadlow Tower**<sup>5</sup>.

*This entrance arch is one of the few surviving parts of Hadlow Castle. Note that you are only allowed to enter this private estate when accompanied by one of the Tower stewards on a public open day.*



31. Continue alongside the A26 to the centre of the village, **The Square** (or the **Two Brewers** pub a little further on if you want some refreshment before catching the bus to Tonbridge).
- A short stroll from the back of The Square to **St Mary's** church<sup>6</sup> would give you a fine view of Hadlow Tower (and the remnants of Hadlow Castle) over the churchyard wall.
- In Tonbridge the **High Street** bus stop is convenient for refreshment places and the **Quarry Hill Parade** stop is the closest to the station. However, you might like to alight earlier at the **Tonbridge Castle** stop to visit the ruins, completing the walk with the short route in S/J (or perhaps one of the extensions suggested in the Introduction).*

## H. Broadview Gardens to Hadlow Place Farm (2¼ km)

32. After visiting the tearoom and/or the gardens go back through the car park, keeping to the right. **Veer right** onto a surfaced path running parallel to the main driveway and follow this out to the A26. Cross the main road at the pedestrian lights.
- If you want to make an out-and-back detour into the village before starting the extension (along the A26 to the right), follow the directions below as far as you wish.*

## 33. Detour into Hadlow village (up to 1½ km)

- a. **Turn left** onto the tarmac walkway between the wide grass verge and a hedge. After crossing the **River Bourne** you pass **Weathered and Worn** (a small coffee shop) on the right, the **Maltings**<sup>4</sup> on the left and an imposing old gateway on the right, the entrance to **Hadlow Tower**<sup>5</sup>.
- This entrance arch is one of the few surviving parts of Hadlow Castle. Note that you are only allowed to enter this private estate when accompanied by one of the Tower stewards on a public open day.*
- b. Continue alongside the A26 to the centre of the village, **The Square** (or the **Two Brewers** pub a little further on if you want some refreshment before the final leg to Tonbridge).
- c. A short stroll from the back of The Square to **St Mary's** church<sup>6</sup> would give you a fine view of Hadlow Tower (and the remnants of Hadlow Castle) over the churchyard wall.
- d. Retrace your steps along the A26 and go past the driveway to Hadlow College.

34. Head **SW** along the A26, away from the village. After passing the Hadlow College bus stop **turn left** into Blackman's Lane. Ignore the first footpath on the right (after 300m) but **turn right** at a second, 200m later and opposite the entrance to Bourneside Farm.
35. Follow a broad grassy path heading **W** for 700m, initially with a copse on the left and then between large fields. Follow the path as it veers left and right to skirt around a large oast house conversion, then immediately **turn left** to head **S** on another broad grassy path.
36. The path curves slightly right and later goes alongside a line of trees on the left. At the end **turn left** onto a road (Three Elm Lane), taking care as there is no pavement. In 100m **turn right** into the driveway to Hadlow Place Farm, signposted as a public footpath.

## I. Hadlow Place Farm to Tonbridge (Big Bridge) (4¾ km)

37. Go along the farm drive for 150m. Where it swings round to the left **bear right** through a gate to head **S** on a broad track on the left-hand edge of a large field, with trees on your left.
38. In 350m **keep left** where the main track swings right, staying close to the trees. This takes you down a slope and round to the left, where you immediately **turn right** onto a well-defined path going straight across a large field, still heading **S**.

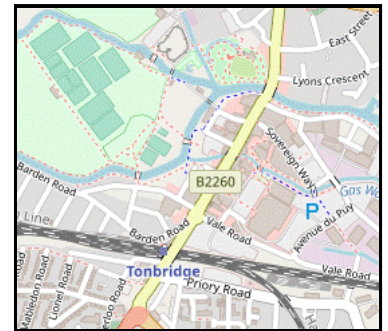


39. Continue in much the same direction across four fields for 750m, crossing a stream on a concrete bridge halfway along. Eventually you come to a footpath signpost in front of the river and **turn right**, joining both the **Wealdway**<sup>7</sup> (WW) and the **Medway Valley Walk**<sup>8</sup> (MVW) for the remainder of this section.
40. You now simply follow the riverside path all the way to Tonbridge<sup>9</sup>. You pass **Eldridge's Lock** after 800m, then in a further 700m go under a low girder bridge carrying an access road to gravel pits on the far side of the river. After a further 800m you need to **fork left** to stay close to the river (the right fork goes through a belt of trees into a playing field).
41. The path goes between the river and a high fence shielding an industrial estate for 400m, then comes out onto the A26 at Cannon Bridge. Cross over this busy main road at the traffic island and turn left. On the other side of the river **turn right** onto the continuation of the riverside path, with modern apartment blocks on both banks.
42. As you pass **Tonbridge Town Lock** you can see the town's **Big Bridge** ahead. There is no right of way along the final part of the riverside path, so to reach the High Street you need to veer left onto the adjacent street (Medway Wharf Road) at or soon after **Tonbridge Moorings**, where the riverside area has been enhanced as part of the **Medway Wharf**<sup>10</sup> redevelopment.

### J. Big Bridge to Tonbridge Station (¾ km)

*For a direct route to the station you could simply turn left and walk along the High Street, but the suggested route is not much longer and goes past some additional tea places away from the congested town centre.*

43. Cross the High Street carefully and continue on a broad pedestrian pathway (River Walk). You pass **Beyond the Grounds** (a café) and the beer garden of **The Humphrey Bean**, with a fine view of **Tonbridge Castle**<sup>11</sup> across the river. At the end keep ahead on a cycleway to the left of a modern apartment block.
44. After passing Waterside Lodge the path veers right to pass between **Tonbridge Memorial Garden**<sup>12</sup> and the river. Immediately after crossing the water channel at Buley's Weir **turn sharp left** to go down a short side street (Lamberts Yard), passing **Nancy's Tea Rooms** on the left.
45. At the end turn right onto the High Street, with some more refreshment places on the way to the station: there is a **Caffè Nero** on the right and the **Finch House Café** across the road at the front of the Pavilion Shopping Centre.
46. To complete the walk make your way onto the right-hand side of the High Street and follow it up the slope beyond the roundabout. The station entrance is at the top; trains to London usually leave from Platform 2 (down the steps on the left).



### Walk Notes

1. The **Greensand Way** follows the course of a sandstone ridge just to the south of the North Downs. It runs for 175 km from Haslemere in Surrey to Hamstreet in Kent.
2. **St Giles, Shipbourne** was built in 1881, replacing an earlier church which had fallen into disrepair.
3. **Hadlow College** of Agriculture and Horticulture was established in 1968 and runs a wide variety of land-based training courses.
4. The **Maltings** are on the site of one of Hadlow's former breweries. It was converted into flats in 1990.

5. **Hadlow Tower** is a multi-tiered Gothic folly, built in 1838. It was badly damaged in the 1987 storm and the lantern had to be removed in 1996. A two-year restoration project (including replacement of the lantern) was completed in February 2013.
6. **St Mary, Hadlow** dates from the 11<sup>th</sup>C, with the tower being added in the 13<sup>th</sup>C. Its churchyard contains the elaborate Barton May family tomb and – hidden away in the far corner – a monument to 30 hop-pickers who drowned in 1853 while trying to cross the flood-swollen River Medway at Hartlake Bridge.
7. The **Wealdway** runs for 130 km through the Kent and Sussex Weald, from Gravesend on the Thames estuary to the outskirts of Eastbourne.
8. The **Medway Valley Walk** runs alongside the river for 31 km, between Rochester and Tonbridge.
9. **Tonbridge** has always been pronounced *Tunbridge* and was often spelt that way. The 'o' spelling became standard in the late 19<sup>th</sup>C to help distinguish it from its spa neighbour Tunbridge Wells, which retained the 'u' spelling.
10. **Medway Wharf** was where barges were loaded and unloaded. The river was made navigable between Maidstone and Tonbridge in the 1740s and was profitable for 100 years, until the coming of the railways. It was claimed to be “the most irregular and worst constructed navigation in England” as it had no towpath and barges had to be hauled by teams of men.
11. **Tonbridge Castle** dates from the 13<sup>th</sup>C, with the imposing gatehouse being completed in 1260. An earlier motte and bailey castle was destroyed after a failed rebellion against William II in 1088. The site is now owned by the local council and the grounds are a public park.
12. **Tonbridge Memorial Garden** was created after World War II “in grateful memory of the men of this town who died in the service of their King and Country”.

» *Last updated: May 23, 2022*

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[saturdaywalkers@walkingclub.org.uk](mailto:saturdaywalkers@walkingclub.org.uk)

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