



Hollingbourne Circular via Hucking walk

An attractive woodland estate at the top of the North Downs and a circuit through the grounds of Leeds Castle to finish

Length	<p>Main Walk: 18 km (11.2 miles). Four hours 35 minutes walking time. For the whole excursion including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 9 hours.</p> <p>Short Walk, omitting the Hucking Estate: 13¼ km (8.2 miles). Three hours 20 minutes walking time.</p> <p>Curtailed Walk, omitting Leeds Castle: 12½ km (7.8 miles). Three hours 10 minutes walking time.</p>
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OS Map	Explorer 148. Hollingbourne, map reference TQ833551, is in Kent, 8 km E of Maidstone.
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Toughness	5 out of 10 (4 for the shorter walks).
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Features	<p>For much of the train journey you can see the North Downs ridge off to your left and from the station you are soon striding across vast farm fields towards this open downland. A fairly steep little climb then takes you straight into the Woodland Trust's Hucking Estate, an unexpected oasis of grassland and woodland in a landscape dominated by arable farming.</p> <p>The walk continues with a circuit through this attractive estate, going out along grassy rides and woodland paths to the tiny hamlet of Hucking before looping back along a wide open valley. After leaving the estate you join the North Downs Way as it slants down the hillside to Upper Street, one of the three settlements which make up Hollingbourne village.</p> <p>The walk concludes with a contrasting section on the other side of the village. After going through the deceptively peaceful Hollingbourne Meadows you have to suffer the constant roar of motorway traffic, high-speed trains thundering past and a dreary stretch alongside the busy A20. This dismal link route is the price you pay for some stunning views of a famous castle as you traverse its grounds on public rights of way.</p>
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Modestly describing itself as “the Loveliest Castle in the World”, the moated setting of [Leeds Castle](#) is certainly spectacular. Built by a Norman knight in 1119, it became a royal residence for 300 years in the Middle Ages, then a private home in Tudor times. Its last private owner was an American heiress who undertook extensive renovations and left it to a charitable trust in 1974. If you want to visit the castle buildings or deviate from the public footpaths in any way you would need to buy an entrance ticket for £26 (2019), although this is effectively an annual pass as it allows unlimited repeat visits for a year.

Additional Notes	The loop through the grounds of Leeds Castle is also in the Hollingbourne Circular via Thurnham walk (#221). A circuit through the Hucking Estate was originally an alternative route on that walk, but it had to be dropped when the Hook & Hatchet Inn (see below) closed for two years. The pub's reopening has made it feasible to reintroduce a longer section through this attractive estate as a highlight of this new walk.
Walk Options	<p>The crossover nature of the walk route means that you can easily cut out one of the loops to make a shorter and less strenuous walk.</p> <p>The Short Walk cuts out most of the section through the Hucking Estate, although you could use the map (or the Woodland Trust's leaflet) to devise your own route through the woods and valleys. This option is very similar to Walk #221a, the main difference being a slightly shorter route onto the North Downs from Broad Street.</p> <p>The Curtailed Walk omits the afternoon loop through the grounds of Leeds Castle, which you could replace with an extended stroll around Hollingbourne Meadows.</p> <p>Some minor variations are also possible. A short cut is described which bypasses the early lunch pub in Hucking (saving 1 km if you are not stopping there), and there are several places around Hollingbourne where you could break off and head straight for the station.</p>
Transport	<p>There is an hourly off-peak service from London Victoria to Hollingbourne (on the London–Maidstone–Ashford line), taking about 1 hour 5 minutes (slightly longer on Sundays).</p> <p>There is a regular bus service to Maidstone along the A20 (Stagecoach 10X), but only an infrequent service (Nu-Venture 13 Mon–Fri, Arriva 13 Sat) from Hollingbourne church through Eythorne Street.</p> <p>If driving, there is a small free car park at Hollingbourne station.</p>
Suggested Train	Take the train nearest to 09:30 from Victoria to Hollingbourne for the Main Walk , or the train an hour later for the Short Walk . The later train would also be suitable if you plan to stop at the first lunch pub (see below).
Lunch	<p>The first pub on the Main Walk (after 6 km) is the Hook & Hatchet Inn (01622-880272) in Hucking, which reopened in 2016 after being closed for nearly two years. This refurbished country pub has a particularly attractive garden and serves “simple and delicious” home-cooked food all day. It is the most convenient place on the Curtailed Walk and after a late start on the Main Walk.</p> <p>If you skip the first pub the suggested place (after 10 km on the Main Walk; 5¼ km on the Short Walk) is the Dirty Habit (01622-880880) in Upper Street (Hollingbourne). This up-market pub has a quiet patio area at the back and serves excellent though rather pricey food to 2.30pm weekdays, all day at weekends.</p>

As a final option, a short detour down the A20 before entering the grounds of Leeds Castle would take you to the [Park Gate Inn](#) (01622-880985), a Vintage Inns pub. This “country pub & dining” establishment normally serves food all day and has a large (though not quiet) beer garden.

Tea

About ten minutes before Hollingbourne station there are two pubs in **Eyhorne Street**. The [Windmill](#) (01622-889000) is an up-market pub/restaurant, while the [Sugar Loaves](#) (01622-880220) is a more traditional village pub. Both have back gardens away from the street.

There are several places inside the grounds of **Leeds Castle** but prominent notices state that walkers are not entitled to stray from the public footpaths. You should not attempt to visit the cafés or use the seating provided for castle visitors, but on quiet days the staff are unlikely to object if you pause for refreshments at one of the seasonal kiosks along the way.

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By Car

Start ME17 1TX

Help

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

Version

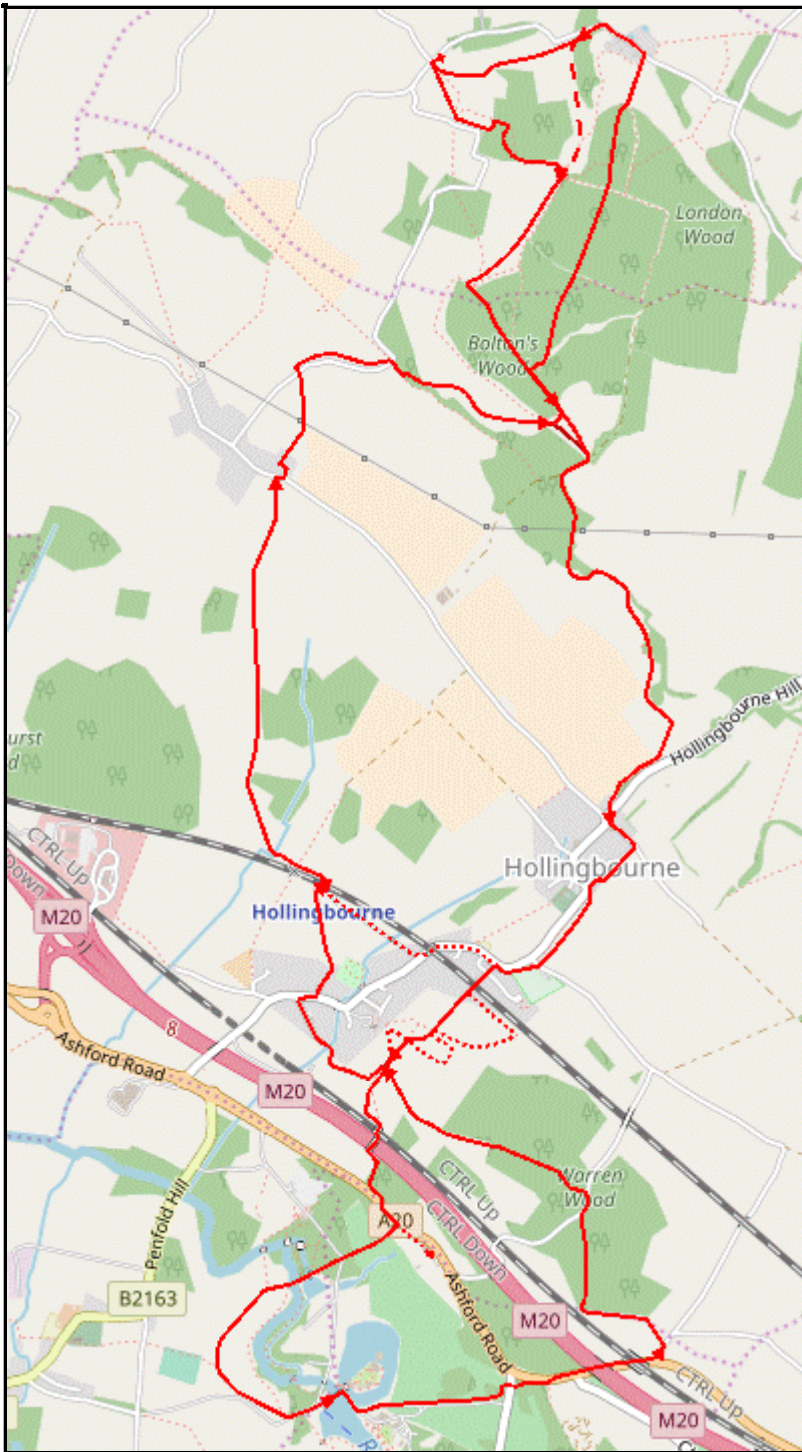
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Walk Directions

Walk Map



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Walk Options

- M. Main Walk (18 km)**
 - a. Short Walk, omitting the Hucking Estate (13¼ km)**
 - b. Curtailed Walk, omitting Leeds Castle (12½ km)**

Walk Directions

1. Hollingbourne Station to Broad Street (1¾ km)

Arriving from London on Platform 2, do not cross the footbridge to the main station exit but go through a gate by this bridge onto a new “public wayside path” going back alongside the tracks. Where this new path ends at a former crossing point (closed by Network Rail in

2019) continue in much the same direction near the field edge, ignoring a footpath across the field.

When last checked the farmland you will be crossing for the rest of this section looked very neglected and the field paths had not been marked out.

In the field corner go into the tree boundary, across a ditch on a plank footbridge and up to the right into a large irregularly-shaped field. Follow a faint path going diagonally up across this field, towards the left-hand end of a distant line of trees 250m away and heading **NNW**.

On reaching these trees bear right to head for the right-hand side of a wide gap in the trees 150m away, with the North Downs visible through the gap. As you approach this gap there is a footpath marker confirming the right of way in a clump of three trees in the field.

Carry on alongside the wood on the right of the gap. Towards the end of the trees ignore a footpath branching off to the left, but almost immediately afterwards bear slightly left across the field. The faint path peters out as you cross a field boundary but continue to head **N** and aim for the right-hand end of another wood.

At this wood bear slightly right towards the corner of a hedge 200m away. Bear right to go alongside it, then halfway along **go through a gate in the hedge** into a meadow. Turn half-right and follow a grassy path to another gate, which leads out onto a lane (**Pilgrims Way¹**) in the hamlet of Broad Street.

2. Broad Street to Bolton's Wood (1½ km)

Turn right briefly onto Pilgrims Way, then in 25m **turn left** at a footpath signpost. Go over a stile and follow a rather awkward narrow path as it zig-zags between hedges and fences for about 250m. At the end go over a stile into the bottom of a field at the foot of the downs. **Turn left** as indicated, go over another stile and continue in the same direction towards a double wooden fieldgate in a gap in the trees 200m ahead, climbing gently.

Go over a stile to the left of the fieldgate, across a lane (Broad Street Hill) and through a wooden kissing gate onto another part of the downs. **Turn right** and make your way up the side of the downs, staying fairly close to the trees and lane on your right. After climbing steadily for just over 300m (with increasingly fine views off to your left) you reach the top right-hand corner.

Go over a stile and turn right, briefly joining the **North Downs Way²** (NDW). Go back across Broad Street Hill via a few steps on each side and continue along the NDW. You soon come to a prominent three-way signpost where you **turn left** onto the signposted **North Downs Way Link**, entering the **Hucking Estate³**.

Turn right in front of a Woodland Trust information panel to go parallel to the NDW on a permitted horse ride. In 75m go through a metal kissing gate on the left and continue in much the same direction across open grassland, dotted with gorse bushes. If you stay on one of the mown paths near the right-hand side you will come to a **viewpoint** with a life-size wooden sculpture **The Shepherd⁴** gazing out over the Wealden Greensand.

Continue along the mown path, passing an information panel about the sculpture. Where the grassland narrows between two woods there is a marker post indicating that two Woodland Trust trails diverge, with the NDW Link (yellow arrow) pointing right and the Landscape Trail (green arrow) left.

- If you are doing the **Short Walk**, stay on the NDW Link: **bear right** across a smaller patch of grassland towards the exit from the estate.

Continue the Short Walk directions at §6.

3. Bolton's Wood to Hucking Bank (2 km)

For the full circuit of the Hucking Estate stay on the Landscape Trail: **bear left** to go alongside a wire fence to a metal kissing gate. Go through this and follow a grassy path into Bolton's Wood.

In 200m **turn right** at a path junction, still following the green waymarker. The path swings right and comes out into a more open area, where you **take the left-hand** of two broad grassy rides, heading **NNE**. In 350m you come to a path crossing with the second wooden

sculpture, **The Living Log**.

Go straight ahead at this junction, into Smokes Wood. In a further 350m keep ahead again at the next path crossing (with a small tree in the centre), into Stubs Wood. The woodland path swings left and right through a dip, then straightens out. The path eventually bends right and you leave the wood through a gate.

Turn left (leaving the Landscape Trail) and follow a broad grassy track towards **Hucking** church. At the end turn left onto a lane (Church Road), where **St Margaret's** church⁵ is worth a quick visit, if open.

Continue along Church Road for 200m, with glimpses of the Isle of Grain 16 km away to the right. Shortly after the lane bends left and starts to descend, **fork left** onto a track going back into the Hucking Estate, emerging in the top corner of a valley.



4. **Hucking Bank to Hucking Valley** (1½ or ½ km)

There is a choice of routes for this section. The main route loops around the north-western corner of the estate where there is a pub (and the third wooden sculpture). If you are planning to visit the later pub in Upper Street you can take the short cut in §4b.

a. Main route (1½ km)

Go straight ahead across the valley floor and up the other side, aiming for the right-hand end of the wood on the far side. At the top go around the right-hand side of the trees and along a broad strip of grassland. At the end go through a gate on the left into the corner of a grassy plateau.

Turn right and make your way across the grassland towards the right-hand corner; if you move slightly away from the edge you will pass another wooden sculpture, **The Tranchet Axe**. To visit the early lunch pub go out through a gate in the corner and turn right onto a lane for the **Hook & Hatchet Inn**.

To resume the walk, return to the plateau and go diagonally across it to the opposite corner. Ignore a gate leading out to a lane and go through another gate to its left. Continue on a potentially muddy path between a wood and a hedge, parallel to the lane on the right.

Ignore another exit to the lane and stay on the woodland path, which zig-zags left and right. Soon after this second turning, the path goes down a short flight of wooden steps to a T-junction where you **turn right**. Follow the path as it winds its way through Calves Wood, gradually turning more to the left.

In 150m you pass a large semi-cleared area on your left. At the end of this area ignore a fork to the left and go down a narrow path alongside a belt of trees. At the bottom go through a gate into a gap between two open valleys, where the walk continues to the right.

b. Short cut (½ km)

Turn left and go along the side of the grassy bank, gradually dropping down towards the valley floor. The valley curves gently to the right and leads you towards a wide gap in the trees with a double fieldgate, where the main route rejoins from the right.

5. **Hucking Valley to Bolton's Wood** (1¼ km)

There is a right of way along the enclosed path to the left of the valley (also part of the Landscape Trail), but unless the double fieldgate ahead is locked you could choose to walk along the centre of the valley. If you take the enclosed path you will need to go through a side gate into the valley after 300m, as indicated by a green waymarker.

Either way, continue along the valley floor for a further 300m, gradually curving to the right and coming to the final wooden sculpture **The Wild Boar Family** in front of a fence. **Turn left** at the sculpture and go through a gate in the corner of the valley, under a large tree.

Continue in the same direction on a long grassy path through Bolton's Wood, heading **SE**. Ignore side paths, eventually including the one on the left you took at the start of this circuit. Retrace your steps out of the wood and through the kissing gate. Go straight ahead across the open grassland towards the exit from the estate.

6. Bolton's Wood to Upper Street (2 km)

At the end of the grassland leave the Huckling Estate through a wooden side gate. Turn right onto a potentially muddy byway and follow it for 125m to a NDW Link signpost and Woodland Trust information panel.

Turn left off the byway, going through a wooden gate and rejoining the main NDW. Follow the winding grassy path through a lightly wooded area, heading roughly **SE**. In 200m the path passes under power lines and later emerges onto open downland (where you might just be able to make out Leeds Castle, nestling in the trees 3 km ahead).

Follow the NDW round to the left as indicated. In front of you there is a large wooded depression (Eden's Hole) and the NDW has to swing left to get around it, with a stretch along a fenced grassy track beside a huge farm field. The track eventually swings right to re-emerge onto the downs.

The NDW now descends gently for 250m; the right of way includes a slightly awkward stretch through a copse, but there is a well-trodden alternative path skirting around it to the right. The NDW then goes through a gate and levels off, curving round to the left. In 200m **turn right** at a footpath marker post onto a grassy path sloping down the hillside. At the bottom follow it through a belt of trees to a wooden fieldgate.

Go through a side gate and along the left-hand edge of a field, with a sunken lane (Hollingbourne Hill) down to your left. In 200m veer left to continue on a short narrow path above the lane. After joining the lane you soon come to a crossroads with Pilgrims Way, with the **Dirty Habit** pub at the top of Upper Street in the main part of **Hollingbourne**⁶.

7. Upper Street to Hollingbourne Meadows (1½ km)

From the crossroads take the narrow lane heading **SE**, passing the pub's patio garden and main car park on your right. In 125m, at the end of the houses, **turn right** onto a fenced path to the left of a driveway, signposted as a footpath and leaving the NDW. After passing some gardens this zig-zags right and left and comes out onto a driveway, bringing you back to the road at a sharp bend.

Instead of joining the road **veer left** onto a signposted footpath into the wide belt of trees alongside the road and go all the way along it. At the far end cross Greenway Court Road onto the roadside path opposite, with a school playground on your left. At the end continue along the pavement of Eyhorne Street as it goes round a right-hand bend. In 50m there is **an easily-missed alleyway** on the left with a yellow footpath waymarker.

Hollingbourne station is 750m away: if you want to abandon the walk, continue along Eyhorne Street and turn right into the long station approach road after passing under the railway bridge.

To continue the walk **turn left** into the short alleyway. Go straight across Culpeper Close onto a broad track with a footpath signpost, then through a metal kissing gate and under a railway bridge into **Hollingbourne Meadows**⁷.

You might like to meander around these meadows, especially if you are doing the Curtailed Walk. Be aware that the layout of the mown paths and other features might change in future.

For a direct route, keep ahead along a broad grassy avenue lined with memorial trees, passing a grazing enclosure (Godfrey Field) on your right. At the end of the avenue **keep ahead** through a gap in a hedge, crossing a plank bridge over a ditch into a wildflower meadow. Follow the mown path curving round to the right-hand corner.

Do not go through the gap into the next meadow but **turn left** to go up the edge of a large field, with a hedge on your right. At the top of the slope go through a gap into the corner of another meadow, with two grassy paths ahead.

- If you are doing the **Curtailed Walk** take the right-hand of these two paths, going slightly to the right across the meadow.

Complete the Curtailed Walk directions at §11.

8. Hollingbourne Meadows to the Great Water (2 km)

For the circuit around the grounds of Leeds Castle take the left-hand grassy path. Ignore a small metal gate with a yellow waymarker on the left (the return route from the castle) and continue along a broad grassy track between a fence and a hedge. Where this track swings round to the right **keep ahead** on a narrow enclosed path, with a yellow footpath marker.

At the end of this short but potentially overgrown path go over a stile and follow a faint grassy path near the left-hand edge of a small field. In the top corner go over another stile to continue along the top of a field, with the high-speed railway (HS1) behind a hedge on your right. Near the end of the field **go over a stile on the right** to cross both HS1 and the M20 motorway on footbridges.

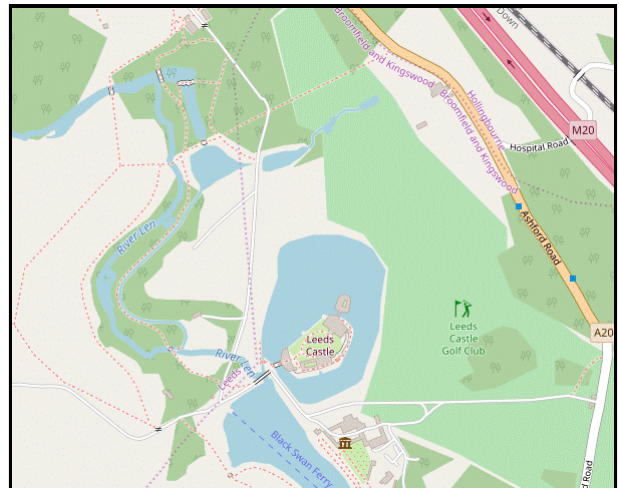
Follow the path through a small wood to the A20 and **turn left** onto the tarmac path running alongside it. At some point in the next 175m **cross this busy main road with great care** when you have a clear view in both directions. Continue along the grass verge to a signposted footpath heading **SW** into a wood. Unless you want to visit the **Park Gate Inn** (125m further along the road) go through an old gate onto this woodland path.

You should be especially careful to follow these directions (on rights of way) through the castle grounds. Leeds Castle Foundation charges for entry and you are not entitled to stray from the public footpaths.

After emerging from the trees the path continues across a golf course; take care as golfers on the first fairway you cross are playing over the brow of a hill and might not be able to see you. On the far side keep ahead through a copse, across an estate road and down a slope between rhododendrons to a tarmac path.

The main visitor entrance is 250m to the right along this tarmac path (signposted "Exit"). It is not a right of way but the staff could hardly object if you used it in order to buy an entry ticket to the castle.

To continue the walk keep ahead alongside **Cedar Pond**, with a fine view of the castle beyond it. At the next path junction bear left past a large cedar tree and go through a kissing gate into parkland. Bear right up a broad grassy path which passes to the right of a clump of trees, then curves left to head **SW** alongside a low fence. At the end of the fence keep left, now with a line of trees on your right.



On the brow of the hill **bear left** to go downhill on another broad grassy path, now heading **SE**. Shortly before this merges with a driveway coming in from the right, **fork left** to stay on the grassy path. At the far end go up a short slope and out past a wooden gate onto the driveway. Bear left and follow it downhill to the **Great Water**, with a seasonal kiosk (the **Whistle Stop Café**) at the lakeside.

9. The Great Water to Greenway Court Road (1½ km)

Go alongside the lake towards the **Gatehouse**, then round to the right between the lake and the moated castle. At the entrance to the Restaurant and other attractions **turn left** to stay alongside the moat, with increasingly fine views of the **Maiden's Tower** and other castle buildings.

Keep ahead past a "No Entry" sign onto the golf course (this is still a right of way), with an estate road on your right. Take care as you cross a fairway and continue on a broad tree-lined avenue. Just before a vehicle barrier at the edge of the grounds, **veer left** onto a path into the trees.

Follow this path past a golf green and up steps on the right to a lane (Broomfield Road), leaving the castle grounds. You will soon have to endure a fairly long stretch alongside the A20, but the footpath opposite cuts off a small part of it: cross the lane carefully to follow

this short path round the back of a golf tee and down an overgrown bank to the main road. When you have a clear view in both directions **cross the A20 with great care** and turn right onto the tarmac path running alongside it. Continue alongside the busy road for 500m, passing under the M20 and HS1, then **turn left** to go a short distance along Greenway Court Road.

10. Greenway Court Road to Hollingbourne Meadows (2 km)

At the end of the pavement **turn left** again onto a footpath across a field, heading **NW** towards Warren Wood. At the trees bear left to continue along the field edge, with the wood on your right. At the end of the field go into the trees and follow a potentially muddy woodland path for 350m.

As you approach a lane there are signs of a development and the onward route might not be clear, but make your way out to the lane (Hospital Road) and **turn right** onto it. You pass an isolated house on the left, then in 50m **turn left** onto a signposted footpath.

Once again you follow a clear woodland path for about 400m. After turning half-right and then back to the left this heads **W** in a fairly straight line. The path eventually leaves the wood past an old stile and you continue in the same direction along a field edge, with the wood on your right and later a tall hedge.

In the field corner keep ahead past a copse on the left to continue on a narrow fenced path beside a paddock. At the end go through the small metal gate you passed earlier, back into Hollingbourne Meadows. Cross over your outward route into a meadow, then almost immediately **turn left** at a path crossing to head **SW** on a mown path near the edge of the meadow.

11. Hollingbourne Meadows to Hollingbourne Station (1 km)

Follow the mown path out through a wide gap in the hedge and turn right onto a farm track. This goes down a slope and swings right and left, crossing a stream. Go through a gate and follow the track to the right of some farm buildings. Keep right to continue on a driveway, soon passing the Village Hall and then a pub car park on the right.

The two refreshment places in Eyhorne Street are on the village street ahead, but you can access both of them from this car park. The beer garden for the **Windmill** pub/restaurant is straight ahead, and off to the right a sign for the **Sugar Loaves** leads to steps down into the other pub's car park.

To complete the walk go out to the village street and take the signposted footpath on its north side, between the two pubs (nearer the Sugar Loaves and opposite the **Village Shop**). Keep right to continue on a fenced path along the side of Magnolia House.

At the end go over a stile into the corner of a field and **turn half-left**, aiming for a gap in the hedge 75m away (not in the opposite field corner). Go through the hedge and bear slightly right up a larger field, passing to the right of an isolated tree.

At the top of the field cross a farm track via a couple of awkward stiles and go down a new pathway to the station. Platform 1 on the near side is for trains to London.

Walk Notes

1. **Pilgrims Way** is a fanciful name which was added to OS maps by a 19thC surveyor. There is no real evidence that this 192 km route between Winchester and Canterbury was used by medieval pilgrims to the shrine of Thomas Becket, but the legend was embellished by Hilaire Belloc and other writers. Much of the route actually follows an ancient trackway on the southern slopes of the North Downs, linking the narrowest part of the English Channel to the sacred sites of Stonehenge and Avebury.
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. The **Hucking Estate** was bought by the Woodland Trust in 1997. They have gradually been reversing the changes to the landscape brought about by modern farming practices, restoring large areas of woodland and chalk grassland.
4. **The Shepherd, The Living Log, The Tranchet Axe and The Wild Boar Family** were designed and carved in 2012 by two local artists, Nick Speakman and Rob Dyer. They were commissioned by the Woodland Trust to illustrate the Hucking Estate's habitat and heritage.

5. **St Margaret, Huckling** dates from the 12thC, but it was substantially rebuilt in 1878 and there are few traces of the medieval church.
6. **Hollingbourne** is made up of three settlements, with the main part (around the church) being called **Upper Street** to distinguish it from **Eyhorne Street** (near the station) and **Broad Street** (on Pilgrims Way). The village is a conservation area and contains many historic properties.
7. **Hollingbourne Meadows** were bought by a local trust in 2004 to protect the village from "inappropriate or insensitive use". A large area to the east of Eyhorne Street is managed as a wildlife haven with broad grassy paths to encourage use by walkers.

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