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| Main walk last checked                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Extension last checked                   |  |  |
| 1 March 2021                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 1 March 2021                             |  |  |
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## Pluckley Circular

### The Low Weald of Kent and The Darling Buds of May

|                |                                |                    |
|----------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Length:</b> | <b>Main walk:</b>              | 11.7km (7.3 miles) |
|                | <b>With shorter extension:</b> | 14.9km (9.3 miles) |
|                | <b>With longer extension:</b>  | 17.7km (11 miles)  |

**Maps:** OS Landranger Map: 189, OS Explorer Map: 137

**Toughness:** Main walk: 1 out of 10, almost entirely flat. Extensions: 3 out of 10

### Features

This is a gentle walk in a low lying area of Kent, made famous by the writer H.E Bates, who lived in the village of Little Chart Forestal, passed on this walk. This is quiet country: there are no great landscape features, no grand houses, and yet this is a quintessentially English walk, with fields, orchards, a couple of ancient pubs (one allegedly the most haunted in England), and towards the end, a fine and unexpected view over the Kentish landscape.

The walk is at its most perfect in late April or early May when the apple blossom is out, the lanes are lined with drifts of cow parsley, and there are not infrequently vast fields of yellow oilseed rape somewhere or other on the walk. Interest on the walk is provided by the arched 'Dering windows' seen on many of the houses, which reflect the fact that this land was owned for nearly nine hundred years by the Dering family, who received it as a grant from William the Conqueror.

### Walk options

Since the main walk is quite short, two options to extend it are offered, one being a short cut of the other. The shorter version of the extension adds 3.2km (2 miles) to the walk, making a total walk of **14.9km (9.3 miles)**, while the full version adds 6km (3.7 miles), making a total walk of **17.7 km (11 miles)**. Both routes climb to a fine viewpoint on the Greensand ridge, with the longer version following the crest of the ridge for a short distance. The extensions also include pubs that are possible tea stops. To do these options, follow the main walk directions until prompted in paragraph 53 on page 5.

### Transport

Two trains an hour (one an hour on Sunday) go from London Charing Cross to Pluckley (journey time 1 hour 15 minutes). A slightly quicker, but more expensive, option is to take a Southeastern High Speed train from St Pancras, and change there to approach Pluckley from the other direction.

Take **the train nearest to 10am** to get to lunch in time. For those driving, there is a paid car park at Pluckley station.

## Lunch & tea

**Swan Inn** Little Chart (01233 840011). Located 5.8km (3.6 miles) is a possible early lunch stop on all versions of the walk. It has a riverside garden and serves food from 12-3pm Tuesday to Thursday and 6pm to 8pm Wednesday to Thursday: on Friday, Saturday and Sunday food is served all afternoon, and the pub is open all afternoon daily for drinks.

The **Black Horse** Pluckley, 7.8km (4.8 miles) into the walk, apparently reopened in September 2024 after a period of closure. It seems to have reverted to being a pub rather than a restaurant, but we have not yet had a chance to check out its food offering or opening hours. As noted in the panel on page 4, it formerly had a reputation as Britain's most haunted pub.

The **George** Egerton (1233 756 599), 11.5km (7.1 miles) into the walk via the longer version of the extension, is a smart modern pub with plenty of space inside and a few tables outside, serving a fairly classic pub menu. It is open all afternoon and evening Wednesday to Sunday (its website says Monday and Tuesday also, but staff told me different in March 2022, so check.)

The **Rose & Crown** (01233 840048) in Mundy Bois, is 14.4km (8.9 miles) into the walk via the longer version of the extension, and 11.7km (7.2 miles) via the shorter version of the extension. It is also reachable via a 1.5km (0.9 mile) diversion from the main walk route. This pub has a delightful rural location, comfortable sofas, and a garden with charming views of the fields. It is open all afternoon daily for drinks, and serves food all afternoon on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, and from 12pm-2.30pm and 6pm-9pm Monday to Thursday.

The **Dering Arms** (01233 84037) by Pluckley station is a former hunting lodge which is now an award-winning seafood restaurant. Booking is necessary to eat there, but you can have drinks in its cosy bar area and also at a few outside tables. It is open to 3pm and from 6pm Tuesday to Saturday, but only until 4pm on Sundays. Closed Mondays.

**Picnic:** Just across the road from the Swan Inn in Little Chart, there is a grassy field beside the church, which makes a good picnic spot. The churchyard at St Nicholas in Pluckley village is another good choice.

## WALK DIRECTIONS

### Pluckley station to Little Chart (5.8km/3.6 miles)

1. Exit **Pluckley** station and veer right across the small car park to follow an unmarked path straight ahead to the right of a lamp post, up the right-hand edge of a part-wooded area.
2. In 70 metres at the end of the path turn right down a gravel track.
3. In 40 metres go around double gates and down a tarmac drive to pass through a metal gate into a field in 25 metres.
4. Follow the path slightly left across the field, aiming for a tall tree on the far side, your direction 70 degrees.
5. In 130 metres pass through a metal kissing gate to the left of the tree and cross a footbridge. Turn right and head out across a large open field, your direction still 70 degrees, passing between mini-pylons in 150 metres.
6. In a further 400 metres go through a hedge in the middle of a field via a metal-railed footbridge. Continue in the same direction across the corner of the next field towards a gap in the hedge to your left, which is roughly at the left end of the trees on the far side.
7. In 150 metres pass through the gap and turn right along a tarmac lane. Continue along the lane as it veers to the left.
8. In 400 metres ignore two roads off to the right.
9. In another 300 metres ignore a road to Hothfield on your right.
10. 150 metres after this, opposite a side road on your left-hand side, turn right through a gate to Saracens Cottage.

11. In 50 metres pass to the left of a wooden hut. In 25 metres more go through a wooden gate and continue straight ahead on the left-hand edge of a field.
12. In a further 60 metres go through another wooden gate and veer right along a wire fence, following the field edge.
13. In 150 metres, where the fence turns sharply to the right, follow a track half left across the field, your direction east.
14. In 150 metres there is a wood edge to your right.
15. In a further 100 metres pass through into the next field and turn left with the track, with woodland now to your left and a field to your right.

All the land on which this walk takes place was owned for almost 900 years by the Dering family: they only sold it in 1928.

A particular feature of their estates are the arched **Dering windows** on all the houses, which were added during Victorian times in reference to a story that during the English Civil War a Dering baronet gave his Roundhead pursuers the slip by leaping to freedom through such a window.

You can also see the Dering family crest of a black horse on the cowls of the oast houses and in the south chapel of St Nicholas Church in Pluckley.

16. In 250 metres pass into the next field. In a further 350 metres, 80 metres after a fieldgate, you are passing houses on your left, including oast houses and the half-timbered **Rooting Manor**, and the lane becomes tarmac. Continue on this lane ignoring ways off.
17. In 700 metres you come to a T-junction with a road. Cross this with care and turn right.
18. In 60 metres turn left through a kissing gate and carry on down the right-hand edge of a field.
19. In 170 metres, at the very end of the field, pass through a kissing gate in the hedge on your right and beyond it follow the edge of the field around the fenced garden of an oast house.
20. In 150 metres pass through a kissing gate behind an oak tree, and turn left on a road into the village of **Little Chart Forstal**. In 150 metres on your left, just past a slit-windowed barn, is the house where the writer **H.E. Bates** lived.
21. In another 50 metres, just beyond the end of the village green, take a tarmac drive to the right, a signposted footpath, passing Forstal Farmhouse, a delightfully lopsided timber-framed house on your left.
22. In 30 metres pass a pond on your right, then another one in 20 metres on your left. Keep straight on past a thatched house and on down a track towards a fieldgate.
23. Just before the fieldgate turn left with the hedge on a grassy car-wide path.
24. In 80 metres cross a plank bridge and pass through a metal gate, and keep straight ahead on the left-hand edge of a field.
25. In 70 metres pass through a gap in a fence (a stile is missing here) and veer slightly left across a large field, your direction due west. In 100 metres, once you reach the brow of the hill, aim for a house you can see in the corner of the field below.
26. In another 200 metres pass through a gap in the fence (another stile missing) about 30 metres to the left of the house and turn right onto a road (which has faster traffic than it may at first appear) into the village of **Little Chart**.

**H E Bates** (1905–74) saw service in Royal Air Force during the Second World War, which yielded many short stories such as *Flying Officer X* as well as the novel *Fair Stood the Wind for France*. But he is perhaps best known for *The Darling Buds of May*, an affectionate tale of rural life, which was made into the popular TV series in the early 1990s.

During the Second World War, doodlebugs (German V1 flying bombs) caused much damage to Little Chart, earning the village the nickname of 'bomb alley'. **Little Chart's** medieval church was destroyed and was replaced by the 1950s-built **St Mary the Virgin** (passed in paragraph 27).

27. To avoid walking along the road, in 30 metres cross over to the churchyard and follow the grass verge parallel to the road, passing the church of **St Mary the Virgin**, re-built in 1950 (see panel on page 3).
28. In 70 metres descend steps to get back onto the road. The first of two possible lunch stops, the **Swan**, is on your right.

### **Little Chart to Pluckley village (2km/1.2 miles)**

29. Coming out of the pub, go up the steps on the opposite side of the road from the pub (**not** the ones you just descended from the churchyard, but another set about 40 metres further on) into a rough field with the church on your left. Curve right with the path in 40 metres.
30. In 100 metres cross over a faint track and enter an orchard through the gap in the corner of a line of protective trees, following a yellow Greensand Way arrow.
31. Turn right immediately, with the hedge line to your right, but **in 10 metres veer left** at another yellow arrow on a post, to **cross diagonally through the orchard** on a narrow path, your direction 230 degrees.
32. In 100 metres pass through another line of protective trees, marked by another yellow arrow on a post, and continue straight on across the orchard.
33. In another 250 metres pass between three large sweet chestnut trees (two to the right, one to the left).
34. 30 metres beyond the trees, merge with a grassy track coming from the left to pass through another protective line of trees in 50 metres, still following the Greensand Way arrows.
35. Beyond this hedge keep straight on along a wide grassy track through more fruit trees.
36. In 150 metres, at the end of the orchard, go down a short slope and on through a gap in an old stone wall. Carry on along a fenced path, with a vineyard on your right.
37. In 100 metres cross two stiles and continue straight along the right-hand edge of a field.

38. In 150 metres cross a stile and carry on with a brick wall to your right and a house garden to your left.
39. In 100 metres more cross a road to carry on up the left-hand edge of an orchard.
40. In 100 metres keep to the left of a house with arched Dering windows. Continue straight on, with a tall hedge now on your right
41. In 100 metres cross a tarmac track and carry straight on with a hedge on your right. In 70 metres pass an impressive Dering-style house with a formal garden on your right.
42. In another 150 metres go over a track and keep straight on down the left-hand side of three large orchard fields.
43. In 500 metres, at the end of the third field and a grassy strip beyond, go through a gate onto a cricket pitch. Veer half left, passing swings on your left.
44. Just beyond the swings, turn left to go through a wooden gate and in 40 metres go through a lychgate to enter **St Nicholas** churchyard.
45. Follow the path to the right. Just before the church, turn right to exit the churchyard by the double-arched gate. Continue for 40 metres down a gravel track and turn right on the road into **Pluckley** village to the **Black Horse**.

**Pluckley** makes much of its status as the most haunted village in the country, claiming at least 12 ghosts. In the past the Black Horse pub allegedly boasted a discerning poltergeist who preyed only on teetotallers, sweeping orange juices aside with an unseen hand. Whether the spook has survived the recent change in this establishment from a pub to a restaurant and back again remains to be seen. Meanwhile the churchyard of nearby **St Nicholas Church** is allegedly haunted by a red lady who sobs as she searches for the unmarked grave of her stillborn baby.

### **Pluckley village to Honey Farm (1.3km/0.8 miles)**

46. Carry on past the pub (or if coming out of the pub turn right). In 40 metres, at a T-junction, cross the road with care and turn left down Forge Hill.

47. In 50 metres turn right on a signposted bridleway, initially a tarmac driveway.
48. In 120 metres go through a metal gate to the left of a fieldgate into a field.
49. In another 100 metres pass through a wooden gate. In 10 metres pass through a metal gate into a field with fine views of the Low Weald.
50. Keep on in the same direction, diagonally downhill, heading towards a farm with an oasthouse in the distance in the valley below (not so visible in spring or summer), your direction 310 degrees.
51. In 150 metres go through a metal gate and continue across the next field in the same direction.
52. In 300 metres, at the bottom corner of the field, go through a concealed gate. Continue on the edge of the next field, your direction west initially, with a ditch to your right.
53. In 80 metres, where the field boundary turns left, a path diverges to the right through a double fieldgate.
  - **For the extensions to this walk,** take the path to the right and refer to paragraph 56 opposite.
54. **To continue with the main walk,** ignore the path to the right and veer left with the field edge, keeping the ditch to your right-hand side and heading for a house ahead (Honey Farm).
55. In 300 metres you reach the edge of the garden of Honey Farm and a yellow arrow on a post. The path here turns left and heads out across a large arable field\*\*, heading for the left corner of a wood and a house on the low ridge in the distance, your direction 140 degrees. Turn to the directions in paragraph 92 on page 7 (but see \*\*\*\* opposite).

*\*\* Farmers are legally required to restore the route of any footpath across arable fields within 14 days of ploughing, but not all do so. There have been plaintive comments in the past from walkers who got to this point and found a field of crops, which they were not prepared to cross. All I can say is that this IS a right of way, and you have as much right to walk it as a town high street. If you let farmers obstruct rights of way, they will be lost.*

***If you don't want to cross the field,*** the choices are not pleasant. You can follow the route to the Rose & Crown pub indicated below and turn left on the road (rather than right to the pub). In 800 metres go left at a road junction. From this point, sadly, you might as well finish the walk on roads, going right at a fork, then right at the next T-junction, then left up the next side road, which you follow for about a kilometre. At the end of this, at a T-junction, you turn right to come to Pluckley station. None of these roads are traffic-free and I would say that crossing the arable field is a preferable course of action.

***Alternatively, retrace your steps all the way to Pluckley Village,*** and when you emerge on the road, turn right downhill. In 500 metres look out for the Greensand Way forking left up the driveway of a house. Follow it to Pluckley station.

***\*\*\*\* From Honey Farm it is just 730 metres to the Rose & Crown pub in Mundy Bois, if you fancy a tea stop.*** To reach it, turn right along the hedge of Honey Farm (ie the exact opposite direction of the onward route across the field), to come to a road in 130 metres. Turn left on this and follow it for 550 metres to a T-junction: the Rose & Crown is 50 metres to the right on the far side of the road. After tea, retrace your steps to Honey Farm (you can use the directions in paragraph 90 on page 7 if you want).

### **Honey Farm to Greenhill Farm (1.4km/0.9 miles)**

56. Having taken the path to the right by passing through the double fieldgates in paragraph 53, turn left along a fence, heading towards a wooden fieldgate 50 metres away. Pass through the gate and keep straight on along the left-hand edge of a field
57. In 170 metres exit the field, passing a brick farmhouse with a converted oast house to the right and a barn to the left. Keep straight on for 80 metres past a second black-sided barn converted into a house on the left, to a signposted four-way junction.
58. At the junction, ignore a road left and a track right, and go straight on through a gate between double fieldgates, following the Greensand Way signpost. Keep straight on across the field, heading for white houses in

the far distance (possibly not visible in summer). Ignore any faint path slanting left.

59. In 200 metres pass through a metal kissing gate and keep on towards the left-hand end of a line of trees ahead. In 50 metres more pass through a kissing gate to the left of this line of trees and cross a footbridge, and turn right up the edge of the field beyond.
60. In 200 metres, in the corner of the field, pass through a metal kissing gate and turn right on a track. In 30 metres, 10 metres after the track turns right, turn left over a stile to the right of a rusted metal fieldgate
61. Keep to the left-hand edge of the field beyond. In 230 metres pass into the next field and in 170 metres do likewise.
62. 70 metres further on, at the end of the third field, cross a stile and veer slightly left to cross a ditch by a footpath post in 30 metres.
63. Beyond the ditch, keep straight uphill towards a large house on the hilltop, with arched Dering windows.
64. In 60 metres cross a footbridge and pass through a kissing gate, and then veer right uphill to the upper right-hand field corner to pass through a kissing gate to the right of a metal fieldgate in 50 metres.
65. You now come to a road.
  - **For the shorter version of this extension**, *turn left downhill* on this road and follow it for 1.3km to a T-junction with a larger road. Turn left and in 130 metres you come to the **Rose & Crown** on your right. Resume the directions in paragraph 89 on page 7.
  - **For the longer version of this extension**, *turn right uphill* on the road and carry on with the directions in the next section.

### **Greenhill Farm to Egerton** **(1.3km/0.8 miles)**

66. In 70 metres turn left off the road, following a Greensand Way signpost, down some steps and through a metal kissing gate into a field. Keep straight on along the right-hand edge of the field, with fine views to the left
67. In 250 metres, at the end of a field, cross a footbridge with gates either

end. In the next field keep straight on along a grassy shelf that contours around the hill.

68. In 220 metres cross a stile to the left of a wooden fieldgate and carry on down a fenced concrete track.
69. In 200 metres, just before a house on the hill, pass through another gate and turn left between houses to reach a road in 50 metres. Turn right on the road.
70. In 150 metres take the signposted path to the left, with a fenced-off field to the right, and the church and village of **Egerton** visible to the right.
71. In 250 metres this brings you out onto a housing estate. Walk forward 60 metres to a road and turn left, ignoring a brick-paved road slanting downhill to the left.
72. Follow the road you are on, as it curves right in 70 metres and brings you up to the **George**, a possible late lunch or tea stop.

### **Egerton to Mundy Bois** **(2.9km/1.8 miles)**

73. Coming out of the George, take the main road, Rock Hill Road, downhill. (If not stopping at the pub, turn left in front of it and left again onto this road.) The road has a little bit of traffic that you need to watch out for.
74. In 500 metres the road curves left and starts to climb slightly. In 70 metres more there is a signposted footpath over a stile on the right (to the left of a fieldgate). Here you have a choice:
  - If you want you can **stay on the road**: in 100 metres ignore Stone Hill Road to the left and curve right downhill with the road you are on. Now refer to paragraph 77 overleaf, except that you come to Water Villa in 250 metres rather than 150 metres.
  - Otherwise, **to get off the road**, take the footpath over the stile to the right and veer left along a garden hedge. Continue with the directions in the next paragraph.
75. In 40 metres, at a hedge corner, keep straight on for another 40 metres to another hedge corner. Then head out across the field in the same direction, heading for its far left-hand corner, beyond which is a red brick house.

76. In 150 metres pass through a kissing gate in this corner and turn right, downhill, on the road.
77. In 150 metres, just before Water Villa, a white terraced house, **ignore** a signposted path up a track to the left, but 50 metres further on, where the houses on the left finally come to an end, turn left at a green footpath signpost, onto a not very obvious footpath between a garden fence left and a hedge right.
78. In 100 metres cross a stile into a field, and keep on up its right-hand edge.
79. In 120 metres cross over a stile to the right of a metal fieldgate and keep straight on, now on the left-hand edge of a field.
80. In 300 metres cross a stile and turn left on the road beyond.
81. In 80 metres turn right up Newland Green Lane.
82. In 300 metres, just beyond a black-boarded cottage on the right, turn left up a tarmac driveway to Woodland Farm, passing a house on your right-hand side.
83. In 40 metres pass through a fieldgate into a field, following a footpath signpost. Keep to the left-hand edge of this field.
84. In 200 metres, at the far end of the field, pass through a kissing gate and cross a footbridge, and keep straight on across the next field towards a stile in its far corner.
85. In 170 metres cross this stile and keep straight on up a path into the wood, ignoring paths left and right.
86. In 50 metres cross a grassy strip under electricity wires and veer slightly left with the path.
87. In 100 metres cross a footbridge and a stile and turn right on a road - a quiet one, but cars do sometimes come along it fast, so take care.
88. In 400 metres, at a crossroads, go straight on. In 130 metres more you come to the **Rose & Crown** pub, a possible tea stop, on your right.
- Mundy Bois to Honey Farm (0.7km/0.45 miles)**
89. Coming out of the Rose & Crown turn right on the road, or carry straight on

past it if not stopping. In 50 metres turn left up Elvey Lane.

90. In another 450 metres the road curves left. 60 metres after this point, ignore the gravel driveway to Honey Farm to the right, but take the signposted footpath to the right just beyond it, along the field edge, with the garden of Honey Farm to your right.
91. In 130 metres, where the hedge ends, keep straight on across the large open field ahead, aiming for the left corner of the wood and a house on the low ridge in the distance. (***If this field is blocked by crops, see the comments in italics after paragraph 55 on page 5.***) Continue with the directions in the next section.

### **Honey Farm to Pluckley station (2.6km/1.6 miles)**

92. In 500 metres, on the far side of the field, continue in the same direction uphill along the right-hand edge of the next field.
93. In 250 metres turn right onto a residential road. Ignore roads immediately left and right, but in 80 metres turn left down Lambden Road.
94. In 300 metres ignore a footpath signposted with a green arrow to your left. However 25 metres after this, just past Spens Cottage on your right, turn right over a stile.
95. In 100 metres emerge into a field and veer left across it.
96. In 170 metres, in the far left-hand corner of the field, cross a wooden bridge and a stile, and continue uphill half right across the field beyond, heading towards two small trees whose tops are just visible on the horizon (NOT the two more fully visible trees more to the right), your direction 200 degrees.
97. Cross the field for 300 metres. As you climb, the two small tree tops become a clump of trees: head towards a stile to the left end of these.
98. When you get to the stile, cross it and continue diagonally downhill across the next field, heading to the left of a housing complex that juts out into the field, part hidden by trees (*the houses possibly not visible in summer, but the wooded area jutting out should be*).

99. In 300 metres exit the field by a stile in the corner to the left of the housing complex and turn right on the road.
100. In 300 metres you come to the **Dering Arms** on your left-hand side. Turn left on the road beside the pub and in 100 metres you come to **Pluckley Station**. Trains go on this side of the tracks to Ashford: cross the footbridge for Tonbridge and London.

**Pluckley Station** is a true original - a station building unchanged from when this line was opened in 1842. Its timber-framed, clapboard construction was presumably chosen to blend in with local Wealden architecture.

In Victorian times the staff would have been a stationmaster, two clerks, two signalmen, two porters who doubled as shunters, and a platelayer or lengthsman, who maintained the track.

There were also several goods sidings, which were situated beyond the bridge (originally a level crossing). Coal was brought in by rail and sold on to local residents by a coal merchant.

Charmingly, this business survived in the area to the left of the station entrance until as recently as 2017.