



## Penshurst Rivers and Hills

Distance: 16 km=10 miles

easy walking

Region: Kent, East Sussex

Date written: 19-may-2012

Author: Malinovka

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Refreshments: Fordcombe, famous pubs near Penshurst

Map: Explorer 147 (Tonbridge) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

*Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*Rivers, hills, views, famous pubs*

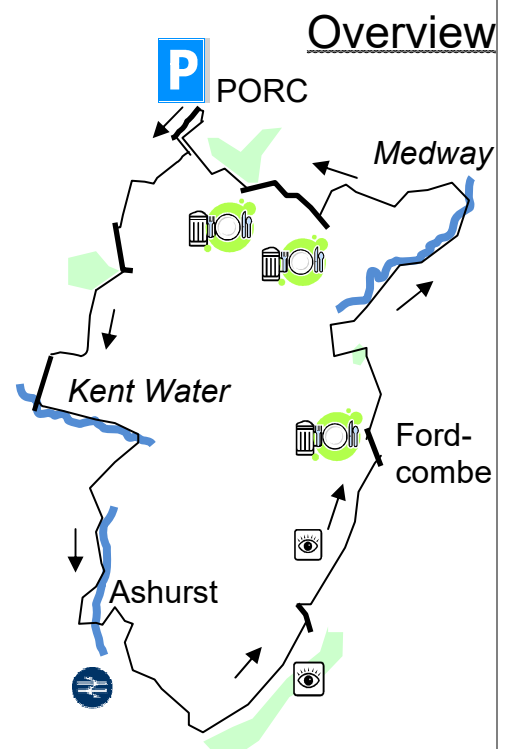
### In Brief

This walk takes you along the banks of the gentle Kent Water, then up into the hills for an enthralling and heavenly high meadow walk, then back beside the youthful Medway, calling in finally at some notable pubs. (To reserve a table at the *Spotted Dog*, ring 01892-870253. For the *Bottle House*, ring 01892-870306.)



There are not enough nettles on this walk to worry bare legs (except for the path up to the *Spotted Dog*) and any kind of attire is fine. There is usually some mud on the bridleway off Bassetts Lane and, taken with the distance, you may find boots are a comfort. Your dog can come too since nearly all the stiles have a dog gate.

The walk begins at the PORC (Penshurst Off Road Club), postcode **TN11 8DU**, in South Park Wood, just south of **Penshurst, Kent**. It is marked on the OS map with a "P" symbol although it is not strictly a public car park. However, PORC warmly welcomes ramblers. There is (2017) a sign at the entrance: *Kingdom wholefood café and coffee shop*. If coming from the east (Penshurst), be sure to take the entrance for cars which may be a little further along the road. On days of big special events, you may find the car park full, in which case you can park nearby on the roadside or in Fordcombe. *In 2017 the PORC site is reported as "sold" and this arrangement is up in the air. Parking near the pubs is another good option. Ashurst Station (postcode TN3 9TL) or the lay-by beyond the bridge at Ashurst is another starting point, ideal if you want lunch at one of the pubs. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).*

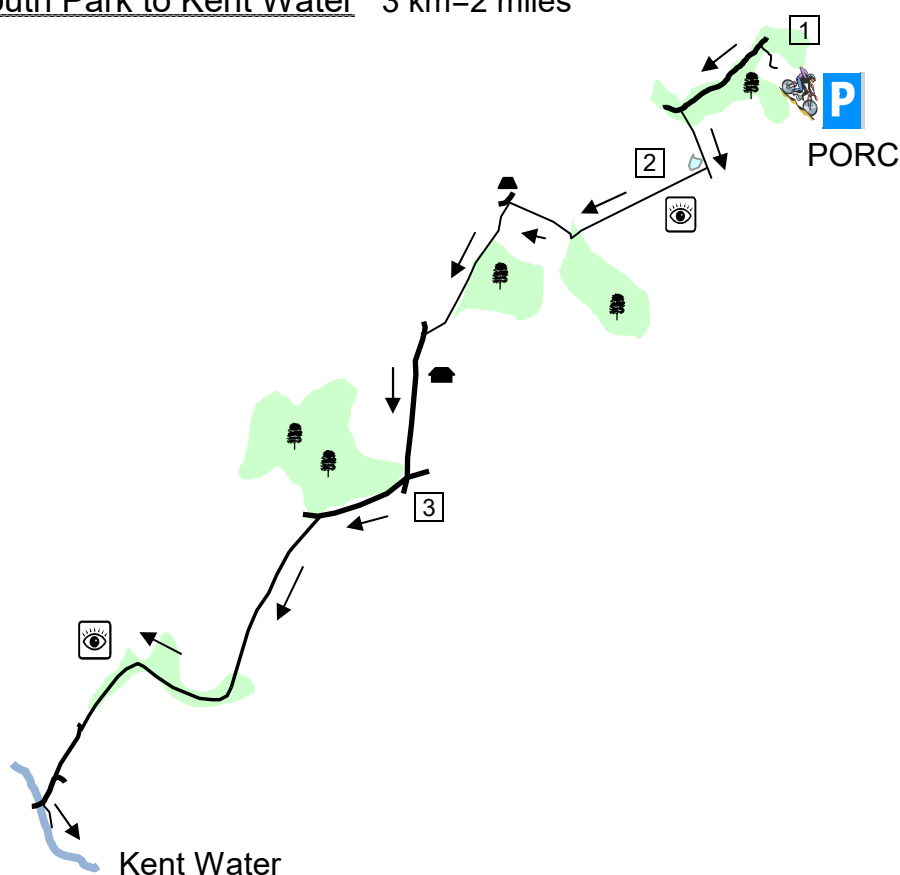


## The Walk

If you have the latest Explorer map 147, the cover picture is a scene (alas uncredited) from PORC, Penshurst Off Road Cycling. PORC is one of southern England's principal centres for mountainbike trails, incorporating Downhill, Freeride, Dirt Jumping and 4X, that has nurtured some of the great downhill bike racers in the country. The current proprietor has been doing extensive work in landscaping and re-building the clubhouse around a robust framework of tree trunks. Parking is free and visitors are welcome but, in future more facilities are provided (snacks, WC etc.), please make use of them and make a contribution.

This wood, with the adjoining field, was owned in the mid-1800s by Viscount Henry Hardinge of Penshurst. Returning amongst popular adulation from his governor-generalship of India, he built a racecourse here to entertain and outdo his society friends and rivals.

### Leg 1: South Park to Kent Water 3 km=2 miles



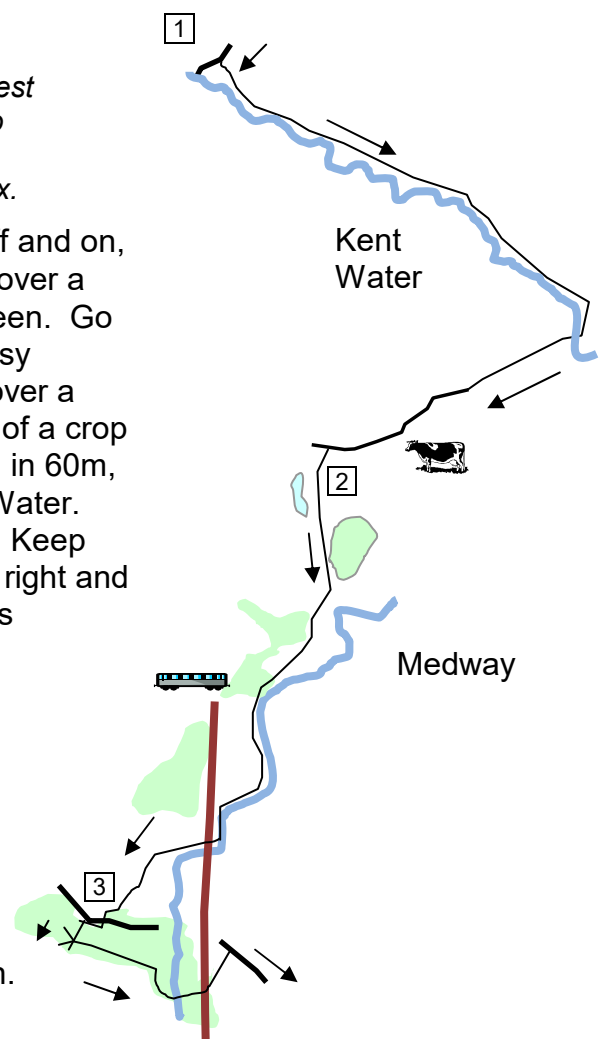
- 1 Leave PORC by the way you came in (the more *westerly* entrance): back down the track and **left** on the road. In 200m, go **left** on a signed footpath up some steps. Follow the footpath straight ahead across the centre of the field, with great high views across the Weald, until you pass a large clump of trees in a hollow on your right. Here you may need to be careful as there are several paths across the field marked by tractors and they vary according to the season. There is now a clear path (2017) with a yellow arrow on a little signpost. After passing the far corner of the hollow, walk 10m (about 15 paces) and turn **right** on a narrow path that is currently (2012) unsigned. (As confirmation, you may see footprints made by many walkers who know this path.)

- 2 The path becomes clearer as you progress. Over on your right you can see one of the great houses of this area, *Stonewall Park*. When you reach the other side, go ahead through a gap in the hedgerow and continue, a fraction right, skirting the right-hand perimeter of the next field beside a wire fence. In 20m, fork **right** so that you are aiming about 30m to the left of a low house ahead. When you reach the other side, go through a gap in the hedge to reach a road. The low house turns out to be a gatehouse for *Stonewall Park*. *Don't cross the road* but turn immediately **left** over a stile and go along the left-hand side of a meadow. In the corner, go through a gap in the fence and continue similarly in the next meadow and then the next. At the end of the last meadow, veer **right**, avoiding a stile over on your left, and go over a stile to a road. Turn **left** on the road, going past *Finches* on your left.
- 3 At a road junction, keep **right** and turn **right** on a quiet lane, signposted *Bassetts Cowden*. In 250m, turn **left** at a fingerpost on a bridleway. (This is the *only* short section of this walk where mud may be a problem. You will need to skirt it on either side.) You pass a pond on your right and the bridleway curves right at the edge of the hill with views south. Soon the bridleway suddenly bends left downhill. (A farm gate straight ahead gives you a good photo-opportunity first.) The path goes through a wooden gate and down to a tarmac drive. Turn **left** on the drive and join a road coming from the left. In 70m, turn **left** at a footpath sign by a white fence on a path leading across the sheep pasture with the Kent Water flowing beside you on the right.

## Leg 2: Kent Water to Ashurst 3 km=2 miles

*The Kent Water rises from springs somewhere west of here and meanders eastwards until it flows into the Medway nearby. It forms the boundary between Kent, on the north side, and East Sussex.*

- 1 You will be following the Sussex Border Path, off and on, for about 4 km. After the first long meadow, go over a bridge and keep to the **right** alongside a golf green. Go over a low stile and straight across another grassy meadow. The path takes you under wires and over a bridge across a minor stream to reach the edge of a crop field. Turn **right** along the edge of the field and, in 60m, just before the corner, turn **right** over the Kent Water. You are now in East Sussex for a short section. Keep ahead across the meadow, past an oak on your right and veer a fraction left to aim for some farm buildings up ahead. At the other side of the field, go over a dirt track. Pass the farm house and cow pens on your right and more buildings on your left. *Willett's Farm is a busy dairy farm, far from the chocolate box image, with heaps of machinery and productive herds. Be sure to have an **ice cream** while you are here: they make their own and they are delicious.* 70m after the last cowshed, turn **left** into a long grassy meadow, currently (2012) unsigned, still on the Sussex Border Path.

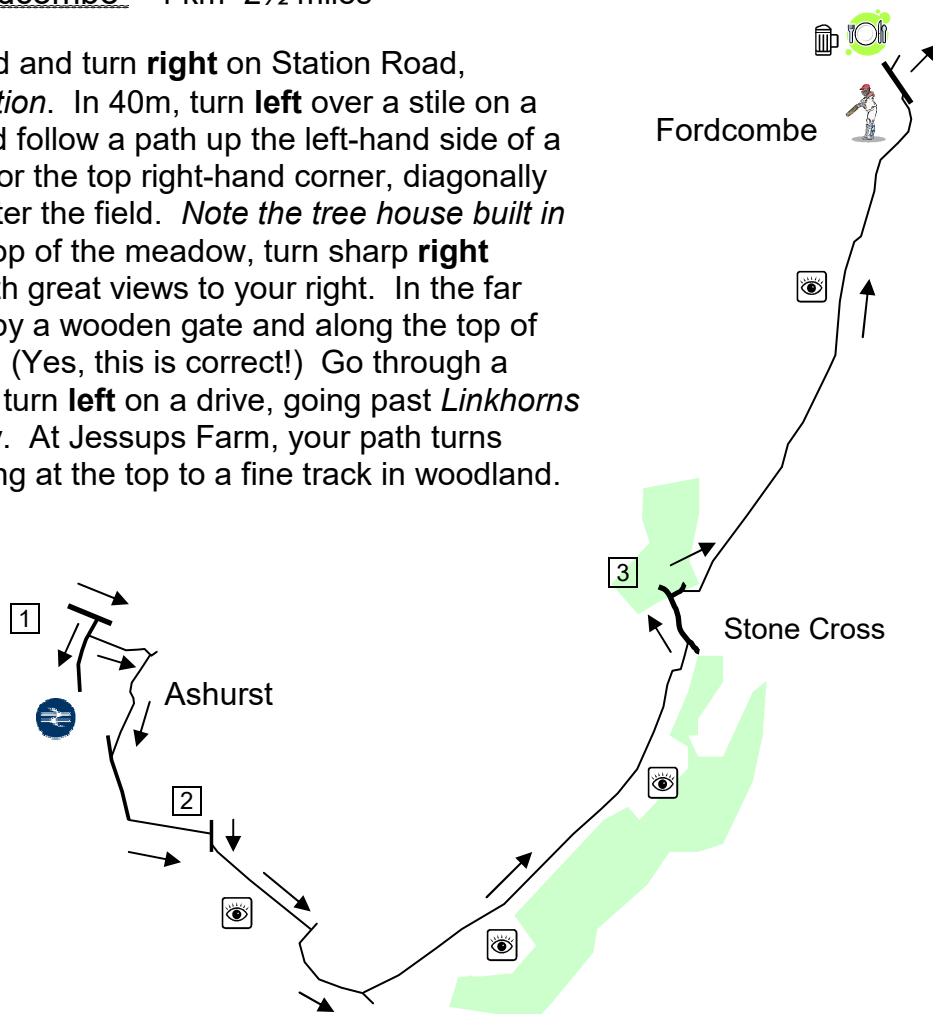


- 2 Your route passes a small (sometimes dry?) pond on your right and sunken banks on your left. At the far side, the meadow narrows with woodland on your right while, on your left, the young River Medway appears. Your path veers a fraction right, keeping the river on your left and follows the bank through a muddy willow grove by a pillbox and into another long meadow with a railway arch visible on your right. In the far corner, go through a metal gate and through some rough woodland, under a railway bridge beside the stream. Keep along the left-hand side of the next meadow and finally go over a stile to the main A264 road.
- 3 Cross straight over the road and turn **right** into a tarmac lay-by. In 25m, turn **left** over a stile by a signpost. In 25m, at a junction of five paths, turn sharp **left** on a path through a plantation of poplars and birch. Your path winds and goes over a stile towards the weir on the Medway along the left-hand side of a meadow. [Jul 2014: the path is rather overgrown so, when you pass the weir, look out carefully for the gate and bridge to cross over as it is very easy to miss it!] Go **left** through a wooden gate and across a bridge over the weir, back into Kent. Follow the path under a railway bridge and between fences out to the main road. Turn **right** through the village.

*Ashurst was once a site of pilgrimage when, some time in the 1300s, a local carpenter created a carving that the priest proclaimed to be miraculous. For several centuries, people would bequeath their jewellery to the carving and the village became quite prosperous. Whether it was carved from ash wood is not known.*

### Leg 3: Ashurst to Fordcombe 4 km=2½ miles

- 1 Ignore a residential road and turn **right** on Station Road, signposted *Ashurst Station*. In 40m, turn **left** over a stile on a signposted footpath and follow a path up the left-hand side of a flowery meadow. Aim for the top right-hand corner, diagonally opposite you as you enter the field. *Note the tree house built in the apple tree.* At the top of the meadow, turn sharp **right** alongside the hedge with great views to your right. In the far corner, go over a stile, by a wooden gate and along the top of the lawn of *Applegarth*. (Yes, this is correct!) Go through a small wooden gate and turn **left** on a drive, going past *Linkhorns* with its leaning chimney. At Jessups Farm, your path turns abruptly left uphill leading at the top to a fine track in woodland. Turn **right** on the track.



2 In 30m, turn **left** beside a large wooden gate and go along the top of a field with great views south to the South Downs, soon going through a line of oaks. At the top of the field, turn **right** on a wide path which quickly bends left. Shortly after, just before a metal gate, go **left** by a chunky 3-way fingerpost through a small metal gate beside a large one. The next short stretch is the loveliest of the walk with a high level path along the top of a grassy meadow with views of more hills, woodland and valleys down on your right: the closest thing to heaven. At the other side, go through a wooden gate (easier than the stile) and along the top of another steeply sloping meadow with Burrs Wood below. The large village of Groombridge is visible down on your right. (See the walk [A Way Through the Rocks](#) in this series.) *This route is also part of the Wealdway, a long-distance path running from Gravesend to the coast.* Go through a kissing gate and continue along another meadow. Finally you encounter a kissing gate and a fenced path widening to a grassy area full of ornamental trees. Your path goes down right by a house and a fence and out through a kissing-gate to the main road at the small community of Stone Cross.

3 Turn **left** along the main road and shortly, at a road junction, turn **right**. In only 10m, turn **right** again on a drive and veer **left** to go over a stile on your left into a sheep pasture. Keep along the right-hand side and go over a stile into a field, still keeping to the right-hand edge. Eventually, your path runs between hedgerows and finally runs beside a cricket pitch, where you may see a game in progress, and out by the pavilion to the road at Fordcombe.

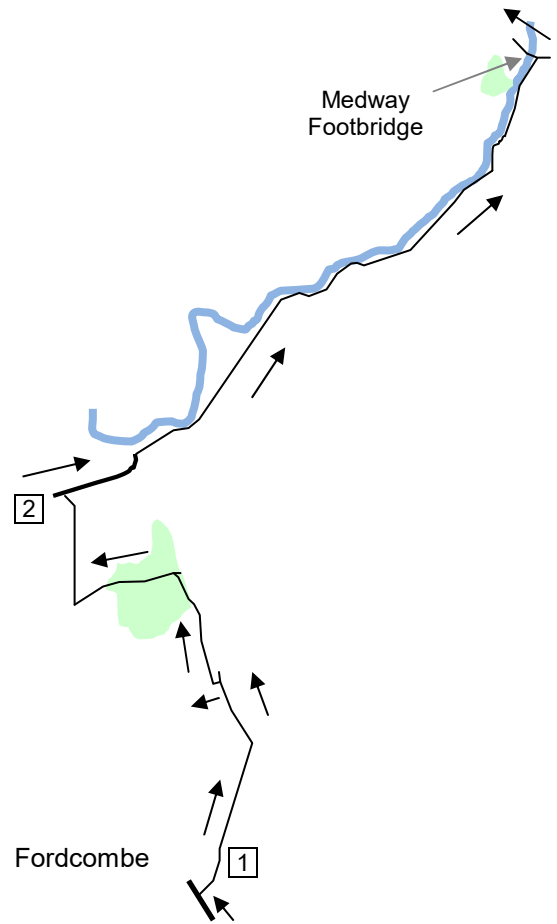


*Fordcombe owes its prosperity to the Chafford Mill, just down the hill on the Medway, which produced some of the finest paper from which, in the 1800s, Bank of England notes and postage stamps were made. The local pub, the Chafford Arms, serves several of the local brews (including Larkins) together with lunch and has a large garden with views over the Medway valley. The pub also serves coffee and fish and chips. The pub sign illustrates the "ford" in the village name.*

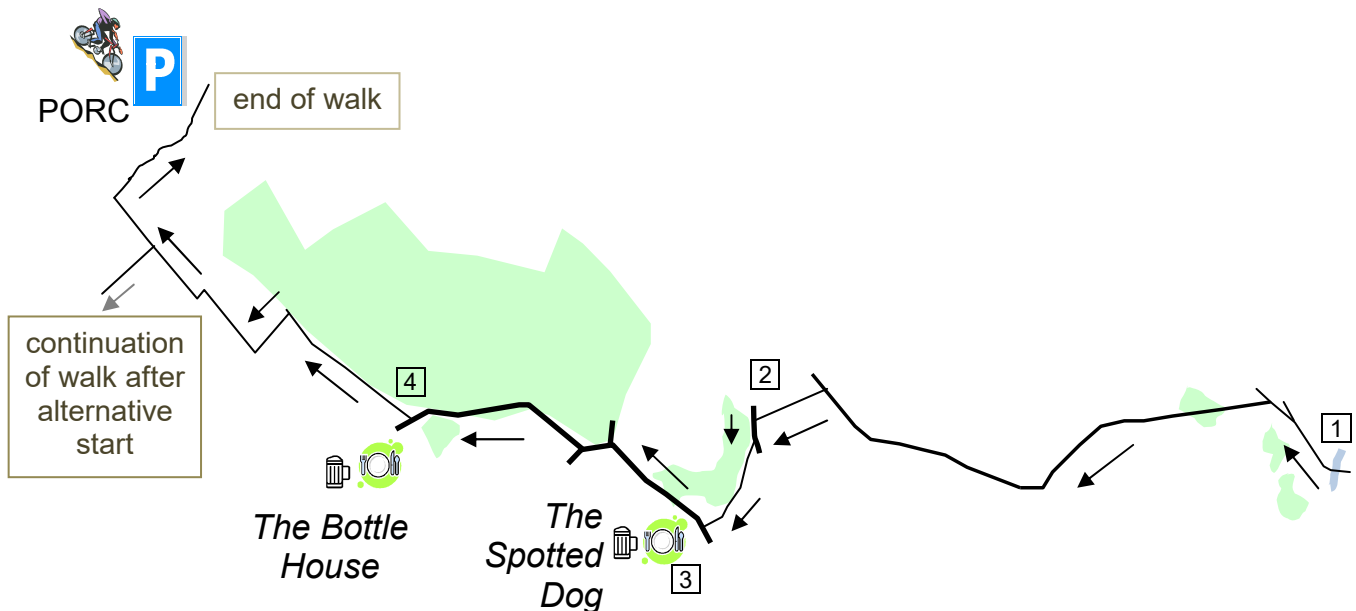
#### Leg 4: Fordcombe to the Medway Bridge 3 km=2 miles

1 **See map overleaf.** Go down the main road passing the village sign, the school and a terrace of stone houses and, immediately after, turn **right** on a footpath. *However, for refreshment, you may first want to make a short diversion down the road to the "Chafford Arms".* Follow the wide grassy path and, on entering a crop field, keep dead straight ahead across the centre. (In case this field is overgrown with rape and a little tiresome to cross, note that this is the only one on your route.) At the other side, go through a chain stile and down the left-hand side of a meadow. Penshurst Place is visible about 2½ km away just to the right (see *the other walk in this series* [Chiddingstone, Penshurst: a Hundred Oasts and Two Castles](#)). At the end of the meadow, do *not* go through the chain stile ahead but turn **left** through a kissing-gate and **right** along the right-hand edge of the adjoining field. At the bottom, go ahead into a wood and stay in the wood as the path bends sharp **left**, ignoring a chain stile on the right. Your path enters a field, keeping to the top edge, and turns **right** at the corner, going over a 2-plank bridge at the bottom to meet a very broad path.

- 2 Turn **right** on the broad path, going between fields, with a ditch on your right. The path bends **left** and **right** over a bridge with the Medway now close by on your left. Keep left in the next pasture, ignoring a metal gate visible to your right. Your path now runs very close to the Medway, going through a gap in a fence and along the left-hand side of a rather muddy meadow. You have the choice of following the river bank or keeping to the footpath which bypasses the meanderings of the river on your left by going straight ahead at an angle across the grass. You pass under low- and high-tension wires, then go over a 3-plank bridge and a chain stile to continue beside the river. Go over a bridge and through a chain stile into the next meadow, followed by another which, in season, is full of summer flowers. Next are a 3-plank bridge and a chain stile leading into a large meadow. In 150m, where a path comes in from the right, go **left** over a bridge across the Medway.



Leg 5: Medway Bridge to South Park 3 km=2 miles



- 1 Keep ahead on a path that leads away from the river, slightly right, across the meadow. As you cross the meadow, fork a fraction **left**, heading for a metal gate and stile, and avoiding the stile visible to their right. Cross the stile, avoiding a footpath to the right, and continue ahead on a wide bridleway between hedges. You pass a pond on your left and the bridleway veers left towards the buildings of Nashes Farm. Veer **right** past the sheds

on a wide track, avoiding all lesser paths off. Immediately before a house, turn **left** on a path marked by a yellow arrow, running beside a field on your left.

- 2 Approach the main road carefully, turn left on it for 30m and then go **right** up steps on a signposted footpath. Go over a stile [2015: care! the stile is broken] into a sloping meadow. Your path veers right uphill and goes steeply up a slope (which tired walkers can bypass on the left). Continue up the steepest part (which in summer may be a bit overgrown with nettles and bracken), over a stile and up to a road. Turn **right** on the road to reach the *Spotted Dog*.



*The “Spotted Dog” is one of the celebrated pubs of West Kent, housed in a 15<sup>th</sup>-century white clapboard building which started life as several cottages. There is a large terrace at the front and a smaller one at the back which affords views across the Medway valley. The menu qualifies it as a gastropub and reviews are very good. Real ales available are Larkins, Harveys plus one or two guests, such as Doom Bar and Black Cat. These can be enjoyed on the long comfortable settees, provided you mind your head on the beams. Whatever they may say, however, the “Spotted Dog” is a bit snooty about walkers who are, at the threshold, asked to leave their boots outside. The “Spotted Dog” is open from 11.30 till the evening, closed on Mondays at 3pm, except occasionally on bank holidays. Food is available whenever the pub is open.*

- 3 After possible refreshment, continue along the lane, going past the famous double sign pointing to two pubs. Ignore the right turn here and continue on the road. In 50m, avoid the road forking left and stay on the major road, now called Coldharbour Road. In 350m, you come to the *Bottle House*.



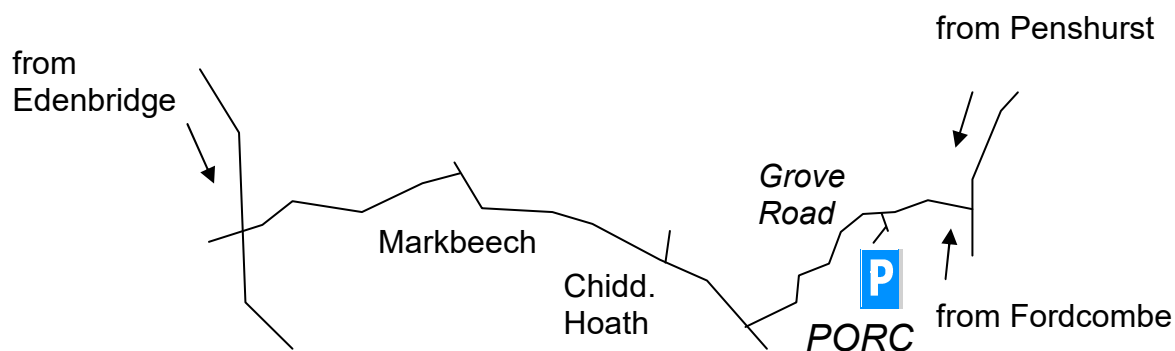
*The “Bottle House” is another ancient inn, an equal rival to the “Spotted Dog”, with a pleasant terrace, a good menu and some local ales. It was built in 1492, the year that Columbus sailed. It was one or two farm cottages until 1773 when it was first licensed. Parts of it were a baker, a shop, a farrier and a cobbler, later there was a skittle alley, a chapel with graves and their attendant ghosts who still haunt the area. The current layout dates from 1938 when the two cottages were joined again. The name “Bottle House” derives from the large number of bottles that were found in the rubble.*

- 4 Turn **right** just before the *Bottle House* going through the pub’s car park and going along the drive for *Horns Lodge*. Just before a *Private* sign attached to a fence, turn **left** as indicated on a path between fences. The path bends right, taking you **left** through a gate and **right** into a field, alongside the hedge of a garden on your right. At the corner of the hedge, keep straight on across the centre of the field, retracing your outward journey. If you did *not* begin the walk at PORC, in 80m look for a hollow ahead with a group of trees, turn **left** just 10m before the hollow on a faint footpath (unmarked in 2012) and continue the walk from section 2 of Leg 1. [June 2015: see caution near start: you may prefer to keep right round the field.] As you reach the end of the field, there is a short cut back to PORC as an alternative to descending the steps to the road. Turn **right** along the edge of the field, being careful of the crops as this is not a right of way. (There is also an unclear parallel path in the woodland on your left.) As you near the corner, look to your **left** and find a gap in the bushes and a path that takes you into the adventure area of PORC. You pass to the left of the large chestnut called the *Seven Sisters*, supposedly the largest living tree in the British Isles, before arriving back at the car parking area where the walk began.

## Getting there

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By car: if coming from the London area, west side, one attractive way is from the B2026, Kent Hatch Road; about 2½ miles south of Edenbridge turn **left** to go through Markbeeche; keep right at Chiddingstone Hoath, and in ¾ mile turn **left**, signposted *Penshurst*, into Grove Road; the car park is marked with **PORC**, on the **right** in less than 1 mile. If you decide to go through Penshurst (either from Tonbridge or Tunbridge Wells, on the Penshurst Road, or from the north on the B2176), go south on the B2188, signposted *Fordcombe*, and in about ½ mile, turn right on Grove Road, signposted *Chiddingstone, Edenbridge*; the car park is marked with **PORC**, on the **left** in just over ½ mile. Go up the earth track and turn right at the first junction. The parking area is a little further round, in rows by the clubhouse.



By train: start the walk at Ashurst station.

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