



A Tour of the “Dens” of Kent Benenden, Biddenden, Tenterden, Rolvenden

Distance: 27½ km=17 miles

easy but lengthy walking

Region: Kent

Date written: 29-jul-2013

Author: Malinovka

Last update: 16-sep-2016

Refreshments: each town

Map: 125 (Romney Marsh) and 137 (Ashford)
but the maps in this guide should be sufficient

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

Public rights are restricted to printing, copying or distributing this document exactly as seen here, complete and without any cutting or editing. See *Principles* on main webpage.

Villages, woodland, quiet country lanes, meadows, steam railway

In Brief

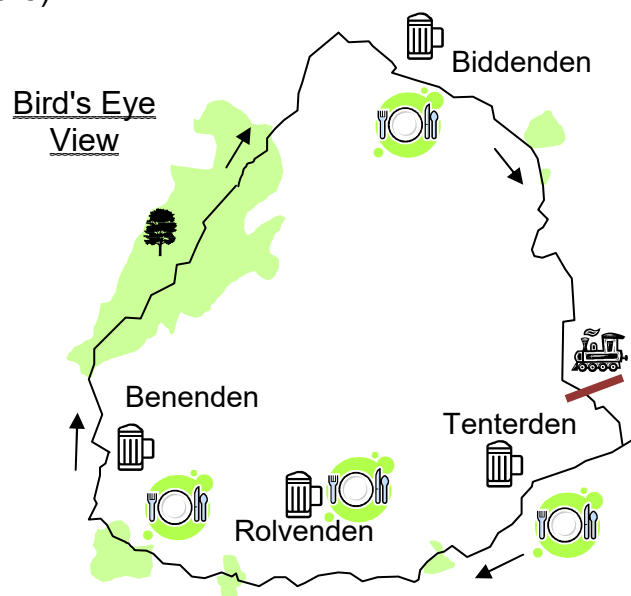
This is a whole day's walk requiring some fitness and a sense of achievement on completion.



There are nettles and brambles on this walk, so shorts are not advisable. Although the paths are generally easy, boots are recommended because of the distance. This walk is not ideal for a dog because of the stiles.

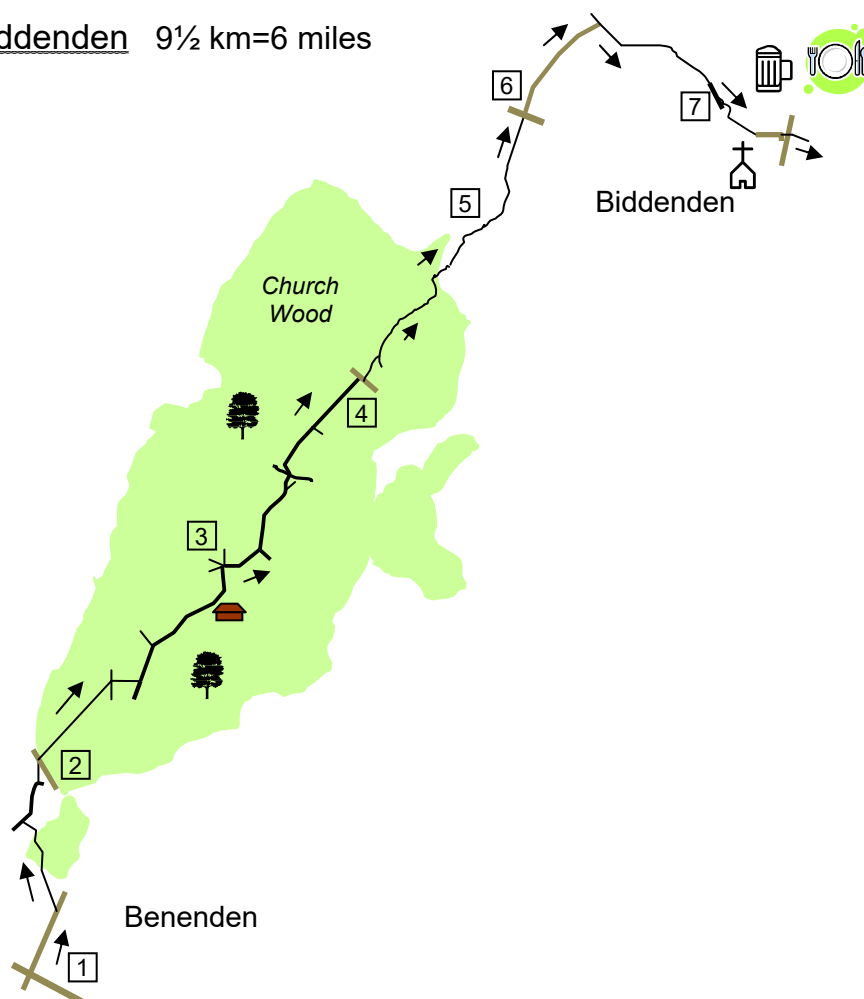
The walk begins at Benenden, Kent, **postcode TN17 4DJ**. Park on the main road between the crossroads and the village shop. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The “dens” of Kent are small clearings in what was a vast forest of Andred. Between the years 700 and 900, freemen and swineherds would return to the same clearing in the forest. This resulted in the dens becoming named after the family or household who used them. Benenden for example belonged to Bynna's family.



The Walk

Leg 1: Benenden to Biddenden 9½ km=6 miles



- 1** Go to the crossroads and take the road New Pond Road signposted *Biddenden*, *Sissinghurst*. Pass the hidden New Pond on your left and, about 400m from the crossroads, go through a wooden gate on the **left** and diagonally across a pasture, aiming for a point 20m below the top-right hand corner. The path enters trees beside a wire fence and goes through a wooden swing-gate into woods. After bracken and another swing-gate, turn **right** on a path by a small pond to another swing-gate. Keep **left**, heading for the New House of Benenden School, going past tennis courts on your right. Turn **right** on a tarmac drive in front of the building and continue for 100m or so where you join another drive converging from the left. Veer **right** on this drive and, after about 30m where the drive curves right, keep ahead on an unmarked stony track, going through an area of ornamental cedars. The footpath joins the track again at a marker post. Keep straight ahead through a metal barrier and veer **right** in front of a mock Tudor house to a road.
- 2** Cross directly over the road, a couple of metres to your left, via a wooden barrier on a clear straight rider's path through beautiful Church Wood. The path descends past a junction on your left and goes up to a 4-way junction with a wooden bench. Take the wide path that veers **right** uphill. At the top, turn **left** on a very wide surfaced track. Ignore several paths and tracks off as your track veers right and goes down into trees. Shortly after, ignore a left fork, staying on the main track. Ignore more turnings off to reach the tiny settlement of Dockenden with its ancient barn and farmhouse. Go straight on past a metal barrier on the main track which curves left through woodland.

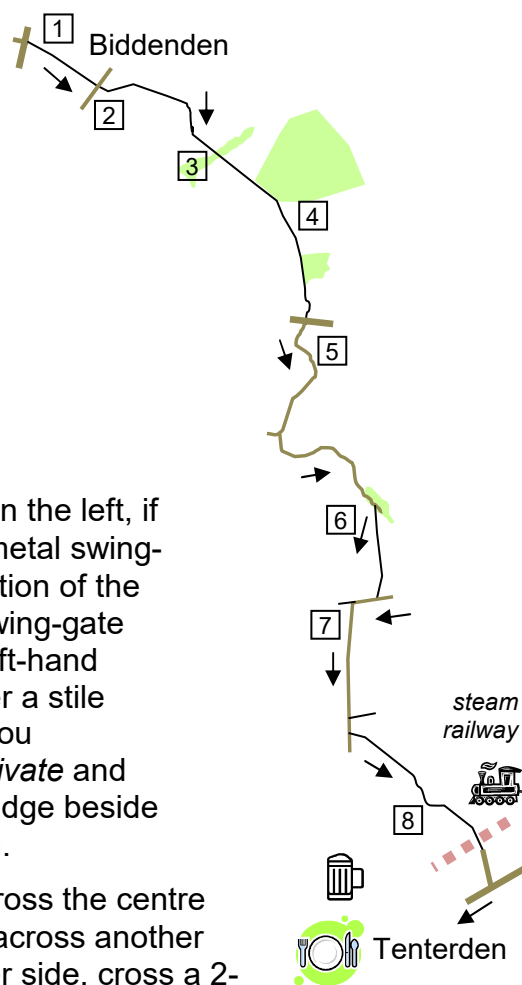
- 3 You reach a multiple junction with two tracks on your left and a narrow path straight ahead. Avoid them all and instead turn **right**, staying on the wide track. In 250m, by a pine plantation and a bench, wheel **left**, still on the main path. In over 500m you reach a triangular T-junction with a clump of trees in the centre of it. Take the **left** fork and, in 25m, veer **right**, thus keeping to your original direction. Follow this long straight track for 750m, all the way to a metal barrier and a road.
- 4 Turn **right** on the road and, in only 10m, go **left** beside a metal gate along the right-hand side of a rough meadow. About half-way down the side of the field there is a short marker post with a yellow arrow pointing **right** through a gap which takes you over a bank and a ditch onto a wide grassy path. Turn **left** on this path. You are walking between Roger's Wood (on the left) and Rogley Wood, both rich in species. At a marker post with a yellow arrow, keep ahead, avoiding the right fork. After a lovely area of scots pines, veer **left** as indicated by another marker post. Soon the path goes over three planks into a woodland of young birch. Another marker post directs you **right**.
- 5 Your path goes through brambles, over a lopsided bridge, and takes you out into a large field. Turn **left** along the edge. You pass a marker post by a jutting piece of woodland. Continue along the edge. In the far corner, veer **left** on a grassy farm track which curves right into another field. Keep **left** along the edge of this field too. In the next corner, keep straight ahead on a very narrow path into trees and, in a short distance, go over a stile. You are now in a pleasant strip of woodland between green fields on each side. Your path goes over a farm track and a stile and continues. Finally you go over a stile and reach a main road, the A262 Sissinghurst Road.
- 6 Cross straight over to a lane opposite. You pass Nimrod Farm and, in about 700m, pass between the two Ongley farms. Where the tarmac finally bends left, leave it by going **right** on a signposted footpath, a gravel drive. Keep right past cottages to a metal swing-gate beside a large gate. Go straight across a field with its hedge on our right and cross the Claybridge Stream into the next field. Turn **left** and, in 50m, veer **right** on a path across the centre of the pasture, passing a concealed pond on your left. Continue onwards to go through a swing-gate in the fence, over a small bridge and along the right-hand side of a meadow. In the far corner, go over a bridge, through a swing-gate and along a path between fences.
- 7 Another swing-gate takes you by garden fences. After a further swing-gate you reach a new housing development. Continue along the residential road in the same direction. After a short distance there is a cobbled "traffic calming" chicane. After this, on the left beyond a playground, is a grassed area bordered by short wooden posts. Fork **left** between the posts over the grass and turn **right** beyond the large tree on your right, continuing below the garden hedges, until you reach a line of cypresses. Continue **right** on a narrow path, until you reach a T-junction of paths and turn **left** through a metal barrier over a stream and between fences. Cross a residential road to a footpath opposite and follow it past a cemetery and into a churchyard. Keep ahead with the large church on your right and come out through a lichgate to the High Street in Biddenden. Continue ahead passing the *Red Lion* pub, the *Bakehouse* which serves coffees and snacks and other places to eat.



Biddenden was the "den" of the family of Bidda. Apart from its legendary beauty, the village is famous for its siamese twin sisters, born around 1100, and living for 34 years. They are pictured in the village sign.

Leg 2: Biddenden to Tenterden 8 km=5 miles

- 1 At the end of the High Street, keep left and cross the main road carefully to take a signed footpath directly opposite, next to *Avery Cottage*. This old path with flagstones leads you across a grassy clearing, by a garden fence on your left and through a small wooden gate, avoiding a stile on your left. A narrow path between hedges leads you over a stile and straight across a meadow to a stile under an oak. Keep ahead in the next meadow, shortly keeping your direction along the left-hand edge. In the far corner, go over a stile and cross a tarmac lane.
- 2 Go over a stile (avoidable by going through the gate on the left, if open). Keep ahead on a cinder drive and through a metal swing-gate into a field. Veer **left** across the field in the direction of the yellow arrow. At the other side, go through a metal swing-gate and straight ahead across a barley field, cutting the left-hand corner and heading for a group of oaks. Here, go over a stile and along the left-hand side of a large meadow. As you proceed, ignore two field gates on your left marked *private* and continue to the far corner. Here, go over a 3-plank bridge beside a line of trees and immediately turn **right** beside them.
- 3 Where the line of trees bends away right, veer **left** across the centre of the field to a metal swing-gate. Go straight ahead across another barley field, cutting off the left-hand edge. At the other side, cross a 2-plank bridge and go through a metal swing-gate in a belt of trees. Go over a 3-plank bridge and through a metal swing-gate into a large meadow. Go straight across the centre, heading for a dip in the trees ahead. Here, go through a metal gate (either one) and up the left-hand side of the next meadow. As the edge begins to curve left, veer right diagonally across the meadow, as indicated by a yellow arrow. At the far side, go diagonally through a band of trees, keeping the same direction. *They mark the route of the old dismantled railway.*
- 4 Continue diagonally across the next meadow and, at the other side, go through a metal swing-gate, over a double bridge and along the right-hand side of a square-shaped meadow. On your right is an immaculate chalet park. In the corner, continue through woods passing a small pond. Go through a large wooden gate and along the right-hand side of the next meadow. Keep left around a willow pond. In the far right-hand corner, go through a small metal gate and over a bridge and abruptly (*careful!*) to the main Tenterden Road.
- 5 Turn **right** on the road and in 20m turn **left** on a tarmac farm lane. *You will be following these very quiet lanes, hardly meeting any traffic, almost all the way to your next destination, Tenterden.* The lane bends left amongst weeping willows and passes Bugglesden. It then bends right and passes the red tiled house Haffenden Farm. After nearly 1 km on this lane you reach a T-junction. Turn **left** here on another lane, also marked as *cycle route 18*. After fruit farms and a dark wooded section, you come once again into the open. Ignore a road junction on the left by *Penhill Cottages*, shortly passing *Reader's Bridge Farm and Oast*. Your lane curves left over



a stream, then right and begins to rise gently. Here look for a small finger-post on the right. *Don't miss this turn!*

- 6 Go **right** over a 3-plank bridge and up steps. The path runs beside a wire fence and a meadow on the right. You then go through a metal swing-gate into a large meadow. *The grassy space and woods on your right are a butterfly preserve of the Kent Wildlife Trust.* Keep straight on along the left-hand side of this sloping meadow, veering a fraction right as you go to meet a metal swing-gate at the far corner under an oak. Continue along the short side of a pasture and thence immediately through trees on a path leading through a swing-gate to a lane. Turn **right** on the lane, passing a farm with Heronden Herefords.
- 7 At a 4-way junction, turn **left**, avoiding a track ahead and staying with the tarmac. In 600m, you pass *Little Chennell* on the left, then *Potts Farm and Oast* on the right. Opposite this, ignore a footpath on the left leading to Tenterden Trout Waters. 70m later, you meet signed footpaths on both sides. Turn **left** here over a stile. Keep **right** by a brick wall and go over a stile in the corner. Continue along the right-hand side of a meadow dotted with oaks and, where the wire fence ends, keep ahead in the same direction by a pond between two great oaks with white arrows on them. This is Chennell Park. Keep ahead now heading for the tower of Tenterden church. Your path descends, then crosses a broad wooden bridge (without guard rails) before climbing up a bank towards a fence.
- 8 Veer **right** along the grassy bank and, at the corner of the fence, keep straight on and down to the far corner. Go through a small metal gate under a willow, go over a bridge and through a chain stile. Turn **left** up the left-hand side of the meadow. As you approach the corner, ignore a yellow arrow visible in the hedge ahead and instead keep **left** down to a metal swing-gate into woods. Follow this banked path and veer left and right into the big car park of the Kent and East Sussex Railway.

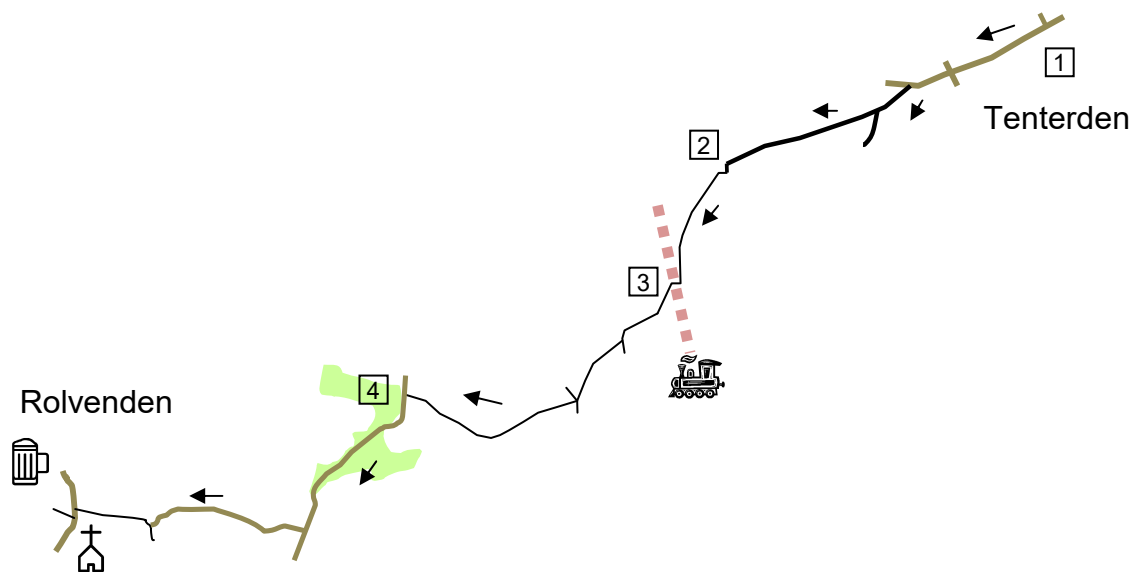
*The Kent and East Sussex Railway was built in stages from the 1840s largely by the efforts of the legendary engineer Colonel H. F. Stephens. It ran from Headcorn (on the main London-Dover route) to Robertsbridge (on the main London-Hastings route). It declined and was finally closed in 1953. Revived in the 1990s, it became a huge tourist attraction. It is also a working line which carries goods. The service runs from Tenterden to Bodiam and an extension to Robertsbridge is being planned. The service runs all year with five departures per day in the summer months. **Note:** the so-called Rolvenden Station is far from Rolvenden and cannot be used to shorten this journey.*

Keep ahead, going out by the "Exit" and passing the Museum. Go over a level crossing and continue straight on up Station Road to reach the main street in Tenterden. Your route is **right** along the terrace and shops but you will first want to go left to see the church and the rest of this fine town.

Tenterden is without a doubt one of the most charming towns in the SouthEast. A good way to enjoy the town is to follow the Heritage Trail that takes in the museums, historic churches, the Elizabethan, Georgian and Victorian buildings and Town Hall. St Mildred's Church dates from the 1100s and was enlarged in stages until 1461 when the distinctive tower was built. The many restaurants vie with lines of antique shops for your attention. The "Vine Inn" (Shepherd Neame) serves food all day every day. The "White Lion" is also in the centre. The town is a pleasure to stroll through, especially in summer when the lime trees' scent wafts in the air.



Leg 3: Tenterden to Rolvenden 5 km=3 miles



- 1 After a tour of the town and a possible breather and refreshment, turn **right** along the main street (or, if you turned left to see the church and town centre, return to the junction with Station Road and keep straight on). It is best to keep to the right-hand pavement where there are many attractive shops and more places to eat. You pass the *William Caxton* pub on the left (a tribute to one famous son), then a junction on the left and an entrance to Heronden Hall. In another 250m, where the road curves right, cross it and fork **left** on a side road, also signed as a footpath. In nearly 200m, leave the main drive which curves left uphill and keep ahead on a concrete track with a Care Centre on your left. You reach the settlement of Cold Harbour with its farmhouse and oast.
- 2 Turn **left** in front of the farm buildings and, in only 30m, turn **right** beside a row of stables and through a large metal gate into a sheep field. Go diagonally **left** down the field, aiming to join the hedge on the left, about 20m to the right of a large metal gate. Keep the same direction beside the hedge, heading to the left of a large water treatment plant. Go over a stile and alongside a fence next to the works. *This path is rather choked with nettles but it is happily quite short and it ends in a green meadow.* Go diagonally across the field, aiming for a point in the hedge on the left-hand side, about 20m back from the railway. Follow the arrow over a bridge with sides and turn right over a stile (or through a large metal gate) to cross the railway. *If you are lucky, a steam train may be passing, giving a photo opportunity and the chance to wave.*
- 3 Follow a wide track ahead across a field. Your path curves right over a canal near a wind vane. Keep straight on, in the same direction that you crossed the bridge, along the right-hand side of a field with a drainage ditch to your right for a short distance. In 120m, the edge bends **left**. Only 30m after this, regain your previous direction by turning **right** through a gap and proceeding along the right-hand side of another field, with a dense hedge-row on your right. In 300m, at the end of this field, you meet a metal 4-way fingerpost. One finger points straight on. Follow the **next** finger round to the right, aiming for a gap in the hedge with a flimsy stile about 40m away.

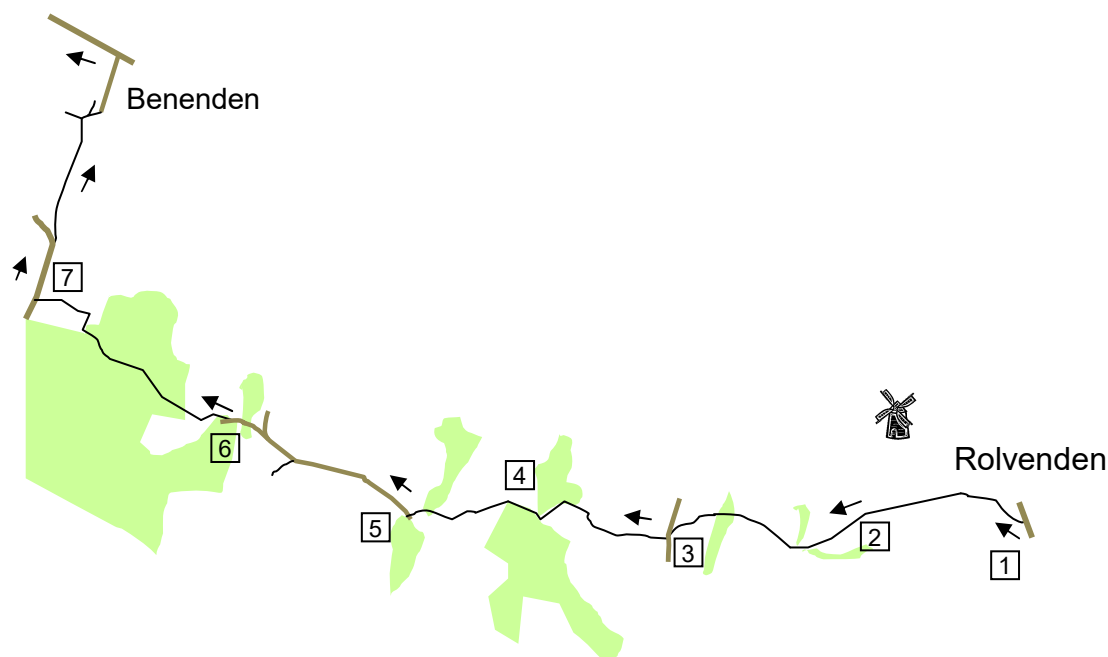
Now keep along the right-hand side of this attractive long meadow, passing under a long line of oaks. The edge curves right. After about 500m from the stile, your path goes through an open metal gate to continue along the right-hand side of the next, smaller, meadow. In the far corner, go over a stile to reach a tarmac lane, Mounts Lane.

- 4 Turn **left** on the lane which bends right and goes uphill through a fine oak wood. After 600m on the lane, as you approach the hamlet of Upper Woolwich, ignore a footpath on the right. You pass the charming timbered and tile-hung *Pix's Cottages* on the left, followed by a converted barn and oast. At a junction opposite, turn **right** on Pix's Lane, passing a rustic wooden bench. Stay on the tarmac lane for 600m to reach a major road at a bend. Carefully cross the road veering slightly to the right to reach a pavement on the opposite side, and then keep straight on towards Rolvenden Church. After passing an estate of retirement bungalows and a detached house on the left you reach the hedged churchyard which can be accessed via a wooden gate. Head across the churchyard between the gravestones until you reach a tiled path. Turn **right** onto the path which will take you down the left hand-side of the church, exiting down a drive with a row of attractive cottages on the left (Church Row) and a grassed area on the right, to the main road.

*Rolvenden is especially known for its clear white weatherboard houses. St Mary's Church was built in the 1200s and finished in 1300s. The famous architect Sir Edwin Lutyens lived at nearby Great Maytham and designed a small memorial in the church and a war memorial outside. The pillars in the nave mirror those in Canterbury Cathedral. One elevated pew is still owned by the occupants of nearby Hole Park. By the south door is an inscription, originally outside, about a heroic rescue. The church sometimes offers teas in the churchyard. The "Bull Inn" pub is a short distance **right** along the main road. It has had excellent reviews and its food menu offers a wide range.*



Leg 4: Rolvenden to Benenden 5½ km=3½ miles



- 1 Cross straight over the main road opposite the church to a track and go through a metal swing-gate into a recreation ground. Follow the yellow arrow by going diagonally **left** across the grass, aiming for a marker post, not obvious first, about 30m to the right of the far opposite corner. *Note that*

you are on the High Weald Landscape Trail (HWLT), a long-distance path running from Rye to Horsham. You will be following the HWLT almost to the end. The path goes through dark bushes and curves left. As you come out into a wheat field, proceed along the left-hand side until you reach a marker post about halfway down the field which points to a position about midway along the hedgerow in front of you. [June 2016: the gap in the hedge was barely discernible until you got very close, and the hedge had to be chopped back with a walking pole in order to reach the stile beyond.] Go over a stile and straight across the centre of a meadow. After another stile, your path follows the right-hand side of the next pasture. As you pass level with farm buildings on your right, you will also see the Rolvenden Windmill.

The original Rolvenden windmill was built around 1580 and last ground flour in 1885. After years of dereliction, a restoration was paid for by Mr & Mrs Barham in memory of their son John, killed in a road accident. The mill is a post mill with four Common sails, winded by a tailpole (mill enthusiasts please note).

- 2 At this point, veer **left** across the pasture, heading for the far left corner. Here, go through a metal gate, ignoring a footpath on the left, and keep ahead with the hedge on your left. Go over a stile and along the left-hand side of a sheep pasture. In the corner, go over a stile into a rather pitted area under trees. Keep ahead across this space, down to a 1-plank bridge and up over a stile into another sheep pasture. Keep ahead along the left-hand side and, as you reach the fence corner, keep ahead across the centre, passing to the left of a solitary tree in the centre. As you go, steer a course somewhat to the **left**, aiming for a swing-gate in the hedge opposite. This gate is hard to see at first – it is just before an electricity pole, a good 100m to the left of the point directly opposite. *Be sure to fasten the gate: sheep can get through!*
- 3 Cross a tarmac lane and go through a swing-gate into a meadow, keeping along the left-hand side. In the corner, go through a wooden swing-gate and hence straight ahead along the left-hand side of an orchard. At a marker post, keep straight ahead as indicated by a yellow arrow, ignoring the gap on your left. (The route has been diverted so that it does not cut across the orchard, but the next waymarker is missing.) Soon the edge of the orchard bends right and, immediately after, there is a second gap in the hedge. Go **left** through this gap into another orchard. Turn **right** along the edge and immediately **left** in the corner. At a marker post, ignore a gap on your right and keep straight ahead. Your path curves left round the corner. In the next corner, at a yellow arrow, go **right** past an unneeded stile.
- 4 Go down through a short section of woodland, over a bridge and through a small metal gate into a large meadow. Keep ahead along the left-hand side beside some woodland on your left. At the corner of the woodland, turn diagonally **left** across the centre of the meadow, heading for the far corner. As you go, pay no attention to a stile in the wire fence on your right. When you reach the corner, go over a stile and continue on a grassy farm track. Follow this pleasant path past a pond on your left, passing a tennis court and veering first left, then right over a concrete bridge to a T-junction with a track. Turn **right** on the track, passing Dingledden Farm with its oasts and then more houses.
- 5 The track becomes tarmac and runs between trees. *Within 100m, there is an ancient timber-and-daub barn on the left, belonging to an equally age-old house.* Ignore a footpath on your right and, at *Barn Hill Cottage*, ignore a footpath forking left, staying on the tarmac. Shortly, a lane joins you from the left. Where the main lane shortly curves right uphill 50m later, leave it by continuing straight on along a minor lane. As the lane goes down into trees,

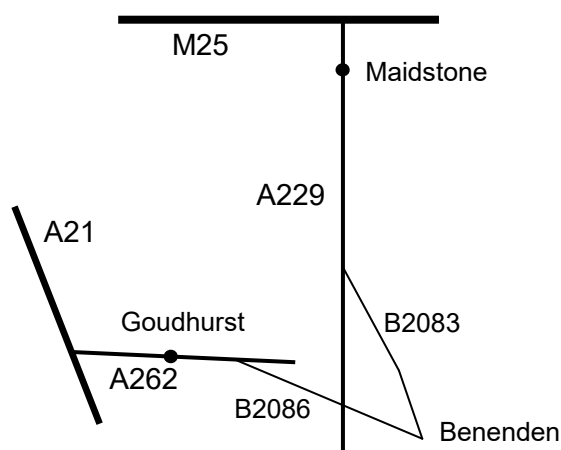
avoid a footpath on the right leading up to a small metal gate, thus leaving the HWLT. 30m further, fork **right** to go over a stile by a large metal gate.

- 6 This narrow path runs by a wire fence with a horse pasture on your right. You pass farm gates on both sides and a barn on the right and go over a stile into woods. Stay on this main sandy, rather chunky path uphill through the wood. The path flattens out a bit and you come to an unsigned junction of paths. Ignore both paths on the left and take the right fork, the wider option, passing some arrows on a tree on your right. In another 50m, you come to another junction of paths, this time with yellow markers. Avoid the path straight on and the path on the right and take the **middle** path, forking a fraction right. This path goes through attractive woodland and down to a metal swing-gate, over a bridge. Turn **right** in the meadow and turn **left** in the corner. Where the fence bends right, keep straight ahead across the sheep meadow to a stile on the other side. This stile is in the corner just to the right of a jutting piece of woodland. Go over it to a road.
- 7 Turn **right** on the road using the footway. Ignore a footpath by a drive for *Woodside* but 50m later, by the entrance to *Benenden Place*, keep straight ahead through a wooden gate on a narrow tarmac path uphill. The path takes you through another wooden gate, alongside a meadow on your left, through another wooden gate and along a path by a fence. Turn **right** where you meet a cinder track and fork **right** across the grass to go up some steps and through a gate into the churchyard of St George, Benenden. Keep ahead and exit by the lichgate. Continue down the left-hand side of the Green (or the right-hand side if you would like to visit *The Bull*), past the old school building to the main road. *For final refreshments, the "Bull Inn" is nearby on the right.* Turn **left** on the road, passing the *Old Sweet Shop*, to the point where the walk began.



Getting there

By car: Benenden can be reached via the M25, A21 and Goudhurst, or from Maidstone and the A229 (fork **left** on the B2083 at Cranbrook Common).



By bus/train: bus 297, 292 or 299 from Tunbridge Wells or Tonbridge. Check the timetables.

fancy more free walks? www.fancyfreewalks.org

www.fancyfreewalks.org