



Detling and the North Downs

Distance: 9 km=5¾ miles

moderate to challenging walking

Region: Kent

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Refreshments: Detling, Thurnham

Map: Explorer 148 (Maidstone) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Villages, high hills and valleys, views, woodland, easy field paths

In Brief

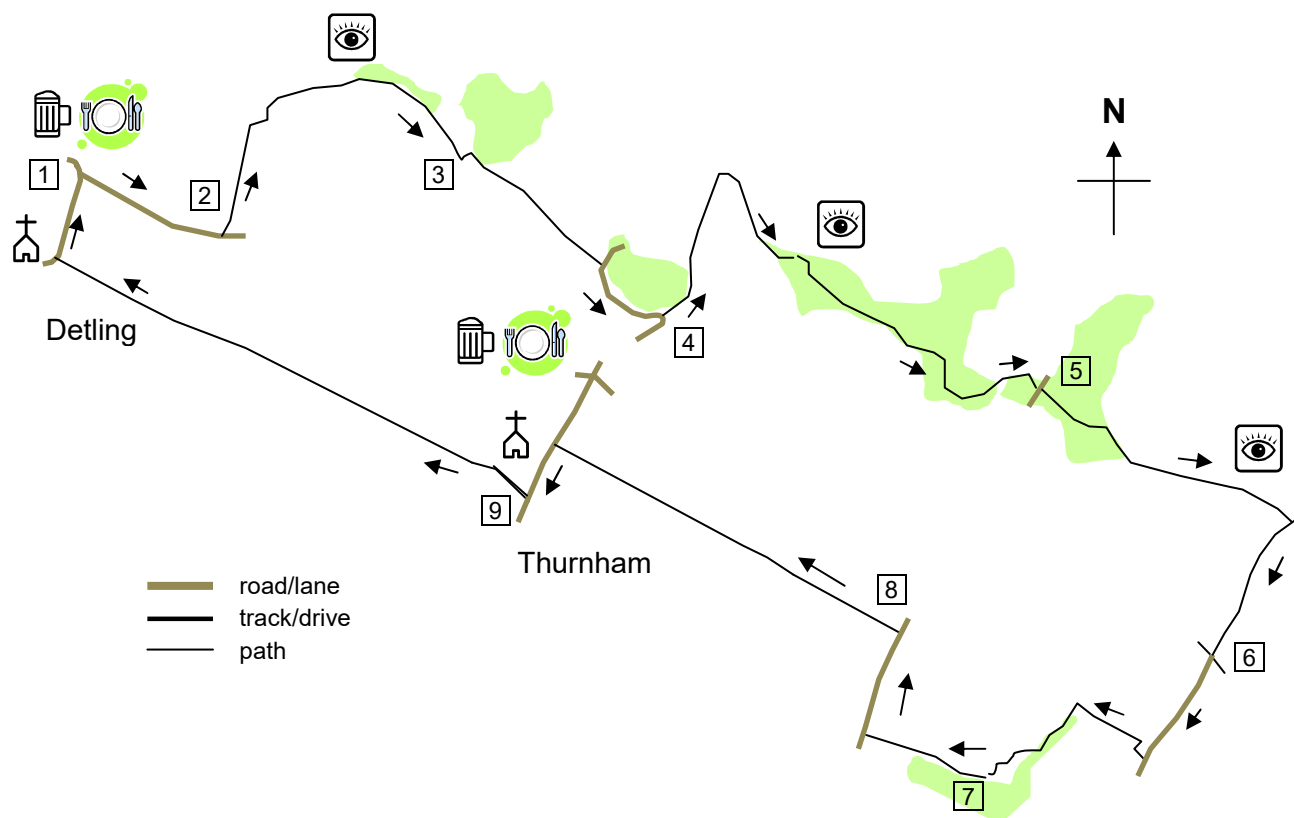
This walk along the North Downs is assessed as “moderate to challenging” because of the frequent ascents and descents which can test your fitness. However, there is no actual scrambling and the steeper sections always have flights of steps. The ascents are rewarded by some great views. The return leg is completely level, giving you time to recover before returning to Detling (via Thurnham) for refreshments in the *Cock Horse* or the *Black Horse*.



At the time of writing, there were few nettles to worry anyone wearing shorts. But one or two sections on the downs and just one short section in the return leg (after the farm) might become overgrown in late summer, so keeping legs covered might always be a good option. Cover your head in case of overhanging brambles! Despite the hills, this walk can be done quite comfortably in trainers, etc. Most serious walkers will probably wear boots as usual. Be careful in wet or wintry conditions as the descents can be quite slippery, when a pole is useful. This walk is probably not ideal for your dog.

The walk begins in the village of **Detling**, Kent, near Maidstone, postcode **ME14 3JT**. Park on the roadside, just off the A249, near the huge pedestrian overpass, not far from the *Cock Horse* pub. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1** Turn **right** round the corner of the *Cock Horse*, cross the road and take a narrow road opposite, Pilgrims Way, next to a timbered property. *On your left is a Tudor gateway, believed to be an entrance to a “domus hospitum”, a flophouse for Pilgrims.* You are also on part of the North Downs Way (NDW) and will be following it as far as Cat's Mount. In 350m, you pass the Detling Cricket Club. Immediately after the Club, opposite a signpost, turn **left** up four steps on a narrow footpath, still on the NDW. *(Don't miss this hidden turning!)*
- 2** The path runs uphill beside a cereal field on your right. It bends right along the top of the field. Shortly, at the familiar *acorn* symbol, your path goes **left** through a wooden swing-gate and uphill, through shrubbery (described as “overgrown but manageable”) and along a fringe of wildflowers. As the path levels out, ignore a stile on the left. *This south-facing slope may yield the first blackberries of summer.* The path rises again and you pass a swing-gate (not on your route) which is used by families coming across the nature reserve to enjoy the views, with Thurnham church visible in the valley. You now descend a long flight of steps (the longest but not the only one on this walk) and come through a modern kissing-gate onto the hillside.
- 3** Your path now leads up steps, passing group of trees on your right. You arrive at the top of Thurnham Castle Hill. *This is one of the sites used by the Dover and Folkestone Hang Gliding Club and you may arrive on a day when the flyers are hovering and swooping.* Your path rises to meet the wire fence and finally emerges through a kissing-gate to a tarmac lane. *To your left here is a gate leading to White Horse Wood Country Park; although it is not on your route, it is worth visiting for its sculpture, teashop, landscape and views.* Turn **right** on the lane, downhill. Where the lane hairpins in 250m, go **left** through a kissing-gate by a sign for *Thurnham Castle* and the Country Park.

4 This level path runs through trees and comes out through a kissing-gate. *As a rewarding excursion, a path to the Castle is on your left.* [Jan 2022: A large tree had fallen across the next section of footpath. You can get round it to the left.] Your path runs gently uphill beside a wire fence and **right** through a kissing-gate at the top. Immediately take a path that runs between wire fences. You come through another kissing-gate with a crop field on your left. A few steps down are now followed by a lot of steps up. The path runs through woodland for a stretch before descending again down a long flight of steps (shallow enough to make them optional) and up again on a long ascent. The good news is that that was the *last very long* flight of steps: there are still a few ups and downs before Cat's Mount but more scenic and less taxing. You come to a junction where a footpath joins from the left. Turn **right** here on what is now a nice level woodland path. Slip past a metal barrier, ignoring a footpath on your right, descending via a (broken) stile to a tarmac lane.

5 Cross straight over the lane, past a metal barrier, rising, running level, rising through a yew glade, through thick undergrowth and overhanging brambles, finally reaching the top of the Downs at Cat's Mount with a crop field on your left. You come down a flight of steps and through a kissing-gate to be greeted by the best view of this walk. Go straight ahead across a sheep meadow to a wooden swing-gate. Turn **right** here on a narrow path (optimistically labelled as a byway), thus leaving the NDW. The path leads through shrubbery, past a crop field on your right, down to a road.

6 Cross straight over the road, a fraction left, onto White Hall Road. Just after a set of farm buildings, ignore a small wooden gate on your right (the old footpath before it was diverted) and walk a further 40m to the start of a sheep pasture. Turn **right** here on a grass path. It bends right and left, taking you up steps and **left** on a slightly raised sheltered path between wire fences. Your path zigzags, goes through a kissing-gate, down onto a path under high ash trees and out onto a horse pasture which has been divided into smaller paddocks. Enter the first paddock, exiting it by lifting and replacing two handles on the wire fence (more handles may appear at times and they are often moved around). Keep **left**, veering **right** in the corner. Go immediately **left** and diagonally **right** across the paddock. Enter the next ragwort-infested paddock, via two handles (you can become quite adept at this). Cross it to the corner to leave the compound.

7 You come through a kissing-gate into a pasture. Your route will be straight ahead, always on the left-hand side. Cross to a kissing-gate and keep ahead to another kissing-gate leading into a large green meadow. Keep ahead through a small wooden gate and out finally through a kissing-gate to a tarmac lane, Water Lane. Ignoring the steps opposite, turn **right** on the lane to arrive shortly at *Cobham Manor and Oast*.

8 Opposite the tarmac driveway of the Oast, go **left** at a footpath sign [Jan 2022: gone] through a gap in the hedge (*don't miss!*). Your path runs along the side of a fenced-off vineyard. Finally your path leads you straight ahead to a tarmac drive, through a rider's gate, and onto a rough track leading directly to a straight tarmac drive. Follow the drive passing the double *Thurnham Oast* and ignore a stile and footpath on your right just after a house. Finally, you come out to a road in the village of Thurnham. Your route is **left** on the road. *However, the highly-rated Black Horse Inn is only 200m on your right. It is a famous country inn in case you feel like staying*



over. The menu is short and well-considered, suggesting fresh ingredients, and there are usually “specials” on the chalkboards.

9



Having turned left on the road, just after a whiteboard bungalow, opposite a signpost, turn **right** on a tarmac path to St Mary's Church. *This treasure of a church, dating from the 1100s was modernised in the early 1600s! If you are fortunate enough to find it unlocked it is a must-see for its many rare features.*

Pass the church on your right and keep ahead through a small wooden gate. Cross a tarmac drive, through a wooden swing-gate into a crop field, now (2020-22) a vineyard. Take a wide clear path between the vines. *To relieve the tedium of a long field path, if you are walking in high summer, one good idea is to take stock of the many wildflower species under your feet as you pass.*

At the other side, go through a kissing-gate and straight across a large grassy meadow. Another kissing-gate takes you on a narrow path beside an orchard. After a garden fence, you come out to a road in Detling. *Note the Detling millennium sculpture straight over the road, portraying a badger and a woodpecker with a cockerel emerging through the “D” at the top – the most expensive village sign in the UK, so it's said.* Detling church is also straight ahead.



Your route, however, is **right** on the road, rapidly leading back to the *Cock Horse* where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Detling is very easy to reach from the M20 motorway, near Maidstone.

Come off at Junction 7 (A249 *Sheerness, Maidstone*). Follow the A249 North as for *Ramsgate, Canterbury, Sheerness*. In **only ½ mile**, filter **right** for *Detling*.

Follow the road through the village, turning **left** at the pub, and park shortly on the roadside on the left. At the end of the day, simply continue and turn **left** on the A249.

By bus/train: bus 334 from Maidstone, including weekends. Check the timetables.

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