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## Hever and Cowden

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Distance: 21km=13 miles, or 2 walks of 15km=9 miles & 17km=10 miles  
easy walking

Region: Kent

Author: Malinovka *comments please to [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

Refreshments: Cowden, Hever

Map: Explorer 147 (Sevenoaks)

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*Flowery meadows, summer pasture, woodland, streams, villages*

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### In Brief

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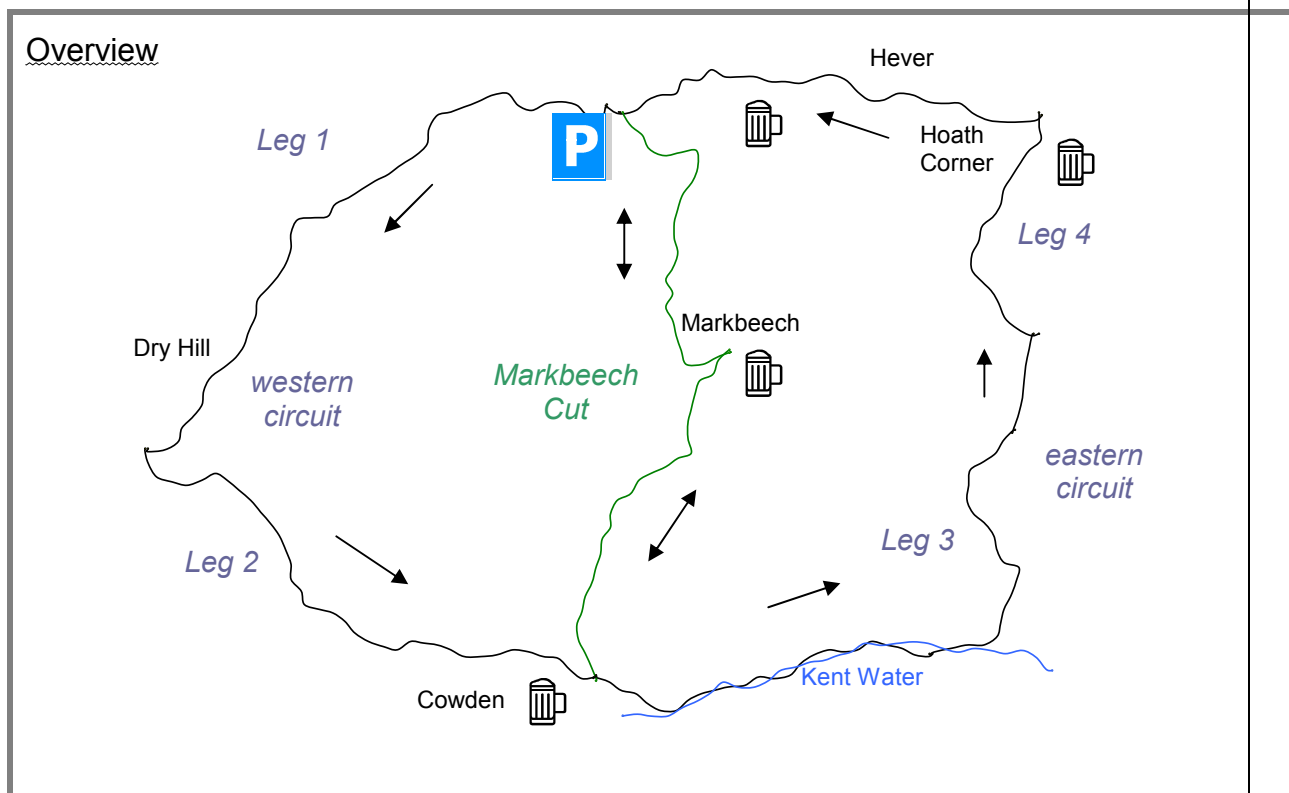


This is the perfect long circular summer walk in West Kent, close to the East Sussex border.



There are one or two patches of nettles, so long trousers are necessary. Most of the paths are pleasant, grassy and easy, so any strong footwear is fine but you need boots after damp weather. The stile count is high and this also makes the walk impractical with a dog.

For shorter options, the walk can be split into two halves using the **Markbeech Cut** described at the end.

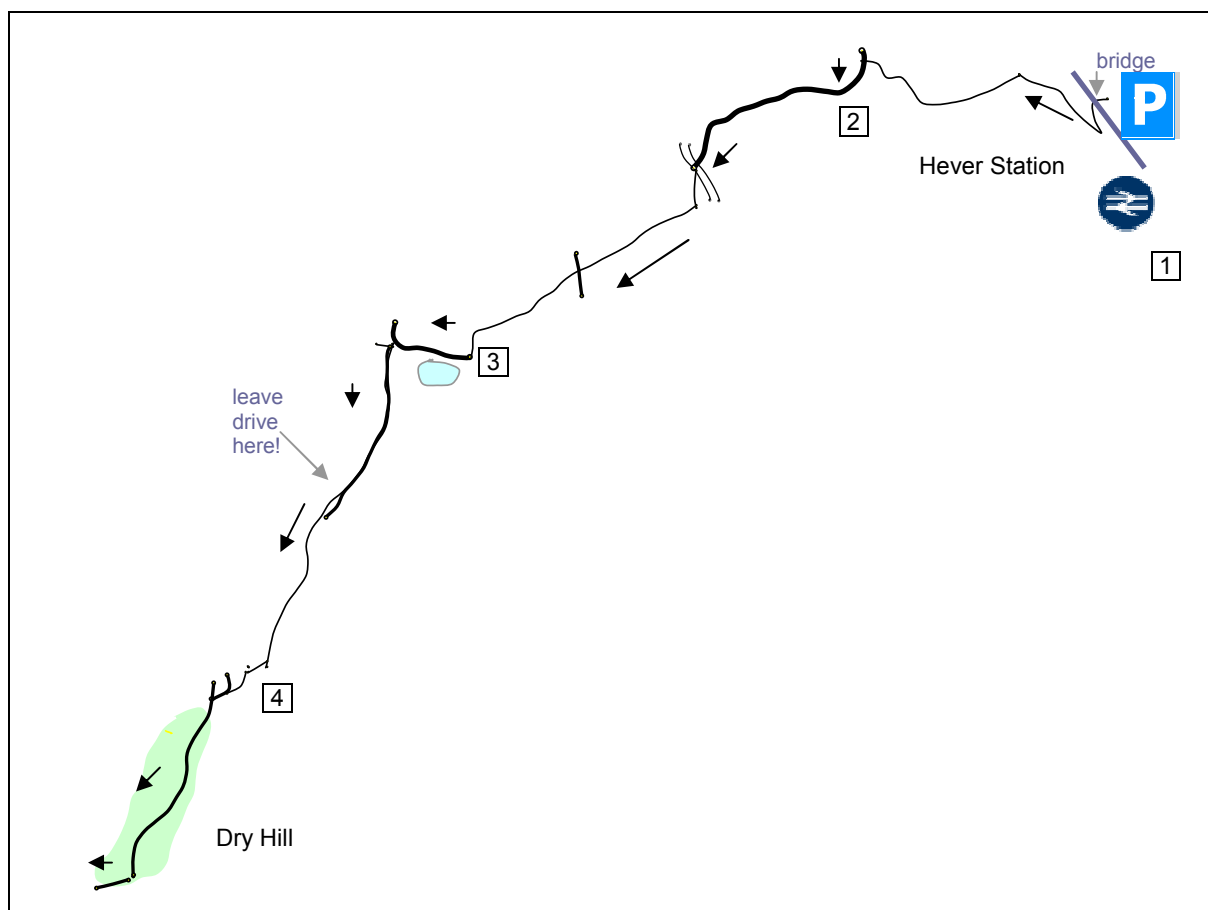


The walk begins at **Hever Station**, Kent. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

## The Walk

**Decision point.** If you would like to get to Cowden by a shorter route by doing just the *Eastern Circuit*, you need to start with the *Markbeech Cut South*, described near the **end** of this text.

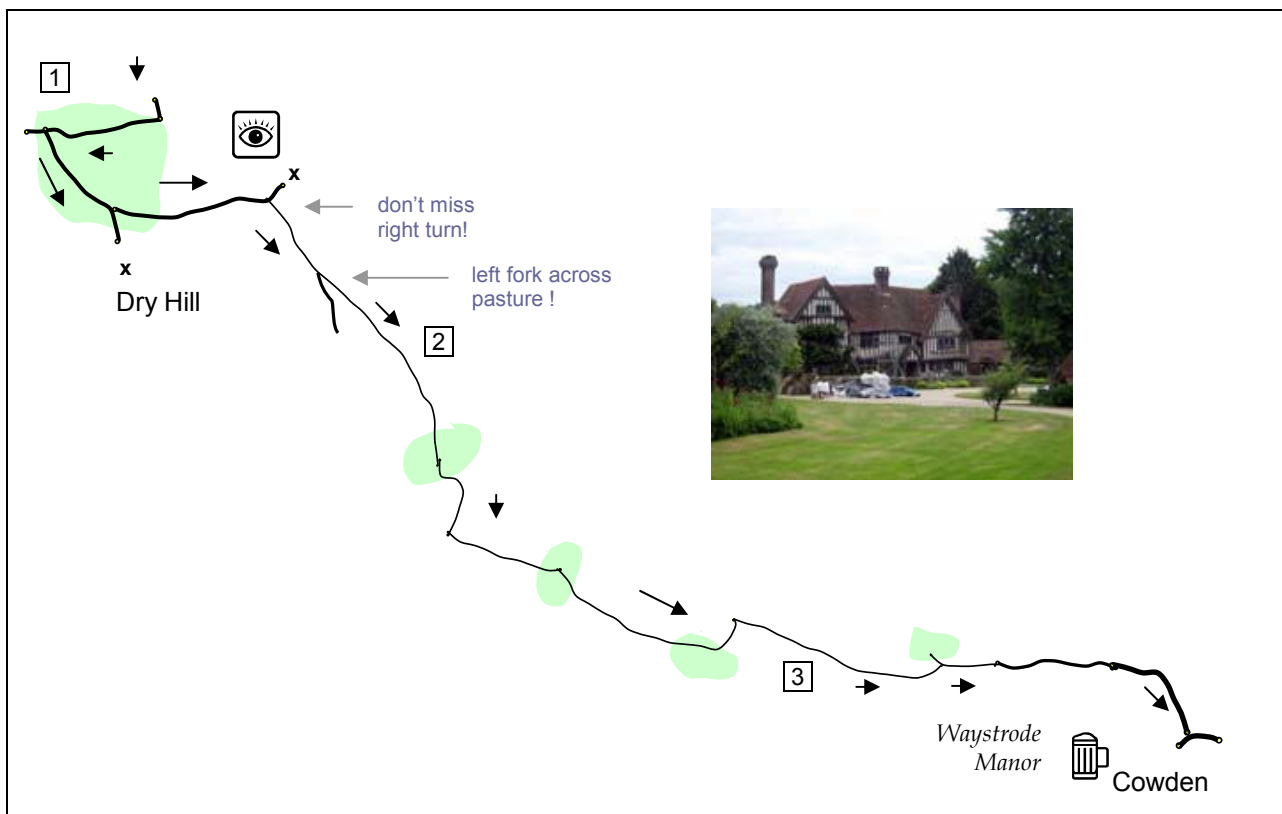
### Leg 1: Hever Station to Dry Hill 5km (3 miles)



- 1 Cross the railway line by means of the footbridge and take a rising path on the other side. At the top, turn sharp **right**. *This walk takes in part of the Eden Valley Walk, a 24km (15 mile) route from near Haxted to Tonbridge Castle.* The path goes through a swing gate into a pasture. Veer away from the right-hand side of the field to the left-hand corner of a small wood ahead. From here, go diagonally **left** across the pasture heading for another small wood that turns out to conceal a pond. Keep left round the fence. Go over a stile (the first of many) and over another by a metal gate, **right** into the Lyden's Farm and **left** on a track beside the barn. *Sometimes there are lambs in the little field on the right which may be pets because they are happy to be petted.* In a few metres, at a post with a yellow arrow, turn **left** on a grassy path and go through a gate into a private garden. (Yes, this *is* the footpath!) Turn **right** on a gravel path beside a converted barn and follow it out to a road. Turn **left** on the road.

- 2 Ignore footpath signs left and right. On reaching a major road, go straight over, a fraction left, to a narrow footpath. The footpath runs by a wire fence and there are some nettles to avoid. Go over a stile into a meadow and turn **right** in it and keep on the right-hand side of the meadow but in a straight line and go through a gate (usually open) in the tree line. On the other side, go over a stile, across a drive and through a swing gate. Continue along the right-hand side of two meadows, over another stile and along the right-hand side of another meadow, avoiding a footpath sharp right. Finally go over a stile and out to a lane. Turn **right** on the lane.
- 3 Pass *Christmas Mill* pond on the left. Where the lane turns right, turn **left** on a concrete drive and continue through a large wooden gate. About 30m before another gate into the grounds of the house ahead, *Clatfields*, fork **right** over the grass to a yellow arrow just visible on an electricity pole. The path goes over a bridge, up some makeshift steps, and veers left over a small meadow. It then goes over a stile in the hedge, down to a crossing path where you should ignore the path right, up steps and over another stile into a hayfield. Turn **left** round the field to regain your direction. Soon you meet a wire fence that separates the hayfield from a sloping strip of grass on the left. Keep to the left of the fence but do not descend. At the end, go over a stile and keep ahead down a grassy slope to a stile and up a bank, always aiming for the left-hand side of Greybury Farm.
- 4 Go over a stile in the corner, through a small gate and turn **left** on a track. Go through a large gate and join a track coming from the right. In 80m, at a 3-way fingerpost, fork **right**. The track rises for some distance through the gathering forest. Finally, at the top, turn **right** with the main path in the direction of the blue arrow. *On the other side of this hill is Dry Hill, one of a series of iron age forts in this hilly landscape.*

Leg 2: Dry Hill to Cowden 4½ km (2¾ miles)



1 In 50m, at a post with blue arrows, turn **left**. After 350m, at a 3-way junction, keep straight ahead on a level path, ignoring the right fork. *You may have noticed that you are on the Sussex Border Path (SBP) which runs from Rye in the east to Emsworth in the west. You will be following this path through Cowden and along the Kent Water.* The track comes out of the woods with fine views left to the North Downs. Just after the track bends left round the side of a field, turn **right** at a blue arrow onto a pleasant path into the woods. *Don't miss this turn.* The path runs between woodland on the right and a lovely meadow of wild flowers on the left. The path then runs through a fine riders' gate into another meadow. Here, leave the bridleway by forking **left** across the grass in the direction of the footpath. The rather vague path becomes clearer as you near the target, the far left corner.

2 Go over a stile by a metal gate, along the left-hand side of a meadow, through a swing gate, over a rather muddy horse track and through another swing gate into woodland. Exit the wood through a swing gate and turn **right** as indicated by the yellow arrow. In the corner, turn **left** along the long side of the meadow. Ignore a gate half way along on the right leading into another meadow as this is not a footpath. Finally, in the corner, go over a stile beside a metal gate. At the next corner, go over a stile on the **left** and continue direction along the right-hand side of the next meadow. Go through a band of trees and along the left-hand side of the next meadow as indicated by the yellow arrow. The path now enters woodland, curves **right** at the next post with a yellow arrow and goes along the centre of a lovely long meadow which in early summer is a carpet of natural bloom.

3 The path goes through a line of trees, straight across the next meadow, over a stream and into woodland. At a T-junction, turn **right**, go up steps in woodland and come out of the woods via a gate onto a drive ahead, with Waystrode Manor on your right.

*Waystrode Manor is a magnificent large half-timbered Tudor manor house, with distinctive crooked beams that show its antiquity. Ownership was originally granted in 1208 by King John and the early owners of the manor, named Waystrode, continued in possession until the reign of Henry VI. For many years Waystrode was called Westwood or simply The Wood. The garden, which incidentally lies across the route of the Roman London-Lewes road, is open to the public on certain days each summer.*

Go over a cattle grid, ignoring a footpath right, and keep ahead on the road which bends right and comes to a T-junction in the centre of Cowden village. *On the right 'The Fountain' (Harveys) is a friendly pub-restaurant with a big garden.* After possibly having a stroll around the village, turn **left** to the church of St Mary Magdalene.



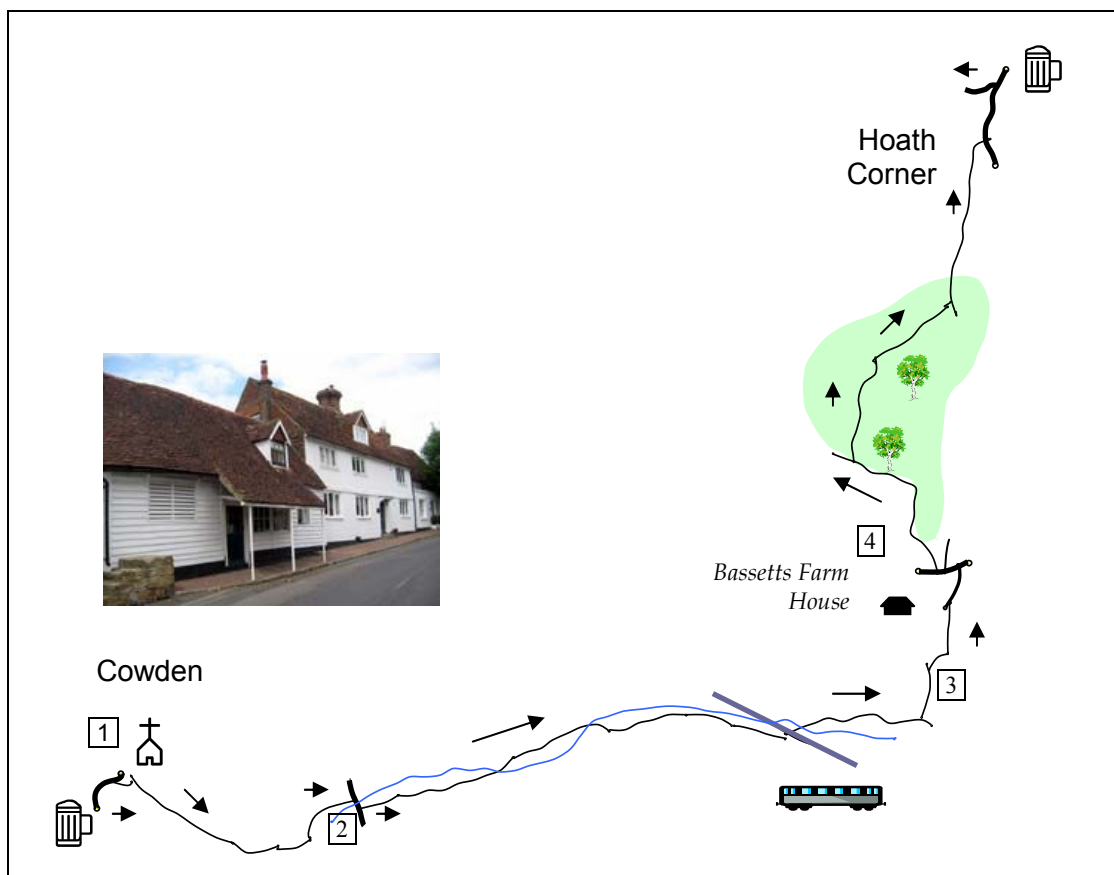
*If you feel you are in a rare out-of-the way lost gem of a village, this is in a sense what Cowden always was. Even in the more rural middle ages, Cowden was little known because of its situation in 'a deep soil of clay, very wet and miry'. In these modern times it is away from the main roads and is probably best known from its remote railway station and the fatal crash of 1994. The 13th-century church of St Mary Magdalene (much altered in Victorian times) has a slender wooden shingle spire, damaged during World War II and later replaced. If it seems to*



you that the spire is slightly out of perpendicular, this is not a result of that extra pint in 'The Fountain', but really is so. Inside is a board listing rules for bellringers, including practice times and a ban on alcoholic drink. (In many churches, bellringers were a species that followed their own lore and even had to be pulled out of the pub to attend the services after their function was complete.)

**Decision point.** If you would like to return by a shorter route to Hever by doing just the *Western Circuit*, take the *Markbeech Cut North*, described near the **end** of this text.

### Leg 3: Cowden to Hoath Corner 6km (4 miles)



- 1 Go **right** through the churchyard and out opposite another burial ground. Here, turn **right** at a crossing path. The path goes through a small wooden gate, down a meadow, over a stile by a wooden gate, over a concrete bridge and across the corner of another meadow. Ignore the stile and wooden gate on your right and keep straight ahead in a long meadow with the Kent Water, partially hidden, possibly audible, on your right. Gradually switch to the left-hand edge of the meadow to go through a large wooden gate (preferable to the adjoining stile), go along the next meadow and finally exit through a metal gate to a road. Turn **right** on the road, stepping into East Sussex.
- 2 In 20m, turn **left** over a stile into a yard and then over another stile into an area with equestrian apparatus. There are two more stiles but they are easily bypassed. Go over another stile and **left** over a gated bridge, then **right** along the Kent side. You now continue to follow the SBP and the Kent Water for some distance. Eventually there is a wooden gate, then

another, then a latched gate and a bridge taking you into East Sussex once again. Keep ahead at a crossing path by an unneeded stile and go along the left-hand side of a large meadow, then an overgrown path by a fence, two small bridges over feeder streams, then along the left-hand side of a rather rough pasture and over another bridge. On your left now is the railway line. Turn **left** through the arch and go diagonally **right** across the field and continue along the left-hand edge of this and the next field. The path goes right-left round the edge of the field, over a stile into a meadow and **left** over a bridge back into Kent.

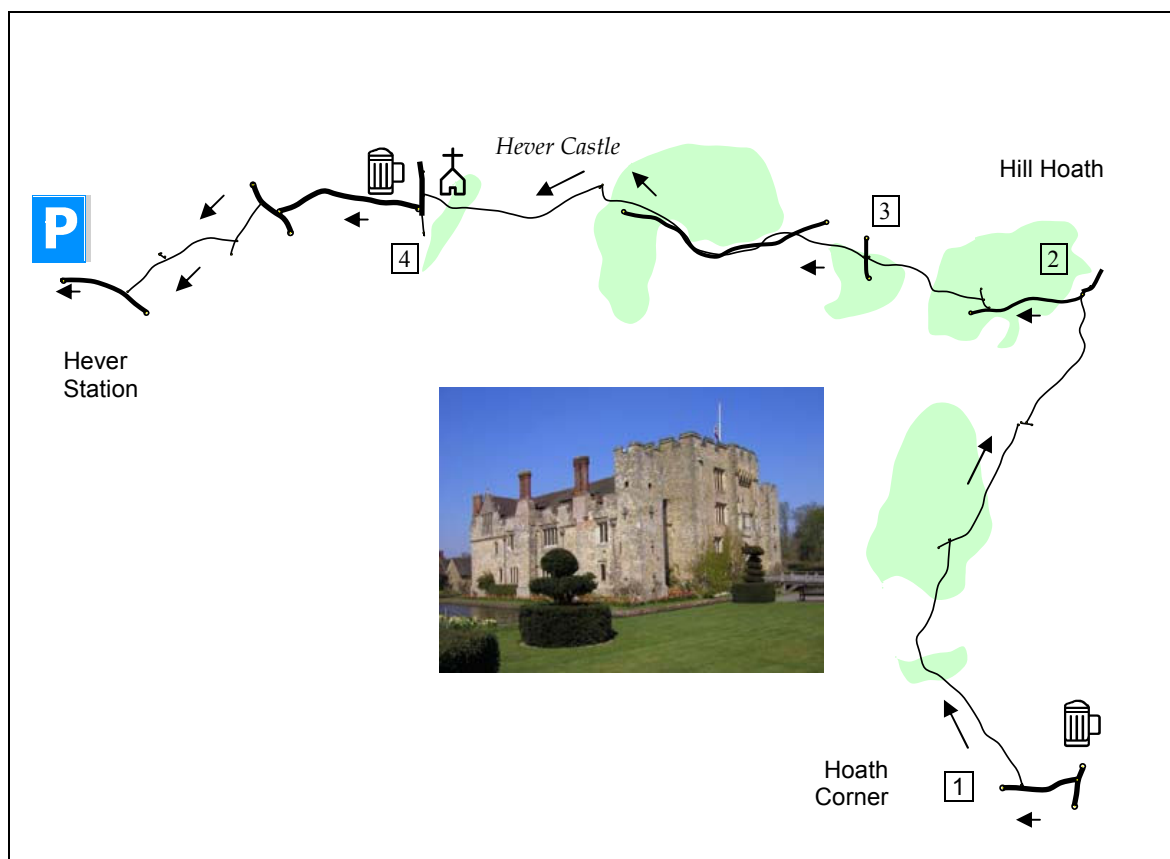
3 Leave the Kent Water here by going straight ahead up the meadow. As it narrows, avoid a path through a gap in the trees on the left and keep ahead to a stile at the end of the meadow. Go uphill to a hedge and turn **right** in front of it for 15m, ignoring an opening on the left despite the yellow arrow on the other side. Turn **left** through a small metal gate and continue through a similar gate, joining the drive coming from the enchanting half-timbered *Prinkham*. Go out through a gate to the road in the tiny hamlet of Bassetts, a cluster of historic houses. On the right is *Bassetts Mill*, worth a peep. Turn **left** on the road and avoid a tempting footpath right beside a barn. Just ahead is the historic *Bassetts Farm House*. Just after the road goes over a stream, and before reaching the farm house, go over a stile on the **right**. As you progress along the right-hand side of the meadow, it is worth looking back one last time at *Bassetts*.

4 Follow the path over a broken fence in woodland, over a bridge across a merry stream and along a path under tall poplars. Go over a stile straight ahead into a meadow, go diagonally **right** over the brow of the hill and pick up a path downhill going past interesting rock formations on your left and through a gap into another, very long, meadow. 50m from the start of the long meadow, veer **right** away from the path and go over a stile on the right-hand edge. The path leads down, through wild garlic and bluebells in late spring, over boards and a bridge, joins a path coming from the right and passes some of the few conifers on this walk. It then goes through a metal gate (better than the adjoining stile) into pasture and up the right-hand side. At the top, 5m after a gate, go over a stile onto a narrow path through woodland, then over another stile, along the right-hand side of a meadow and over a stile to a road. Go straight over into woodland, staying close to the fence on the right. At a yellow arrow, turn **left** away from the fence and go between fields. At the end of the field, turn **right** and **left** at the road. Continue between rocks on each side to arrive at the hamlet of Hoath Corner. Continue ahead to *The Rock* pub.



*'The Rock' is well known for the stark pub sign featuring an unclothed lady, possibly based on the idea of the Lorelei, although remote from the original Rhenish setting. The obverse side is equally alluring. Another asset of 'The Rock' is the matchless Larkins ale. 'The Rock' is now thankfully open on Sundays.*

#### Leg 4: Hoath Corner to Hever Station 6½ km (4 miles)



- 1 Retrace your steps to the road junction and turn **right**, signposted to *Markbeech*, etc. (This would have been a *left* turn without the visit to *The Rock*.) Shortly after passing the very fine *Cares Cross*, turn right down some steps on a narrow path, over a little bridge by some pig pens and along the right-hand side of two meadows. The footpath then runs by a fence, through a woodland glade by a gill and up into a meadow. Go along the right-hand side and at a corner continue straight ahead across the centre of the meadow, under some fine beeches and then through an atmospheric woodland of young tall birches. At a T-junction, turn **right** onto a fine woodland path. The path then runs between fences. At the end of the fenced section, go over a stile on the right and continue in the **same** direction on the other side of the fence. Follow the path down the full length of this lovely long meadow. At the end, go over a stile beside a metal gate and over another stile similarly. (If you are in a group, you can avoid this last stile by letting one person go ahead. You will see a short cut on the left through a gap in the hedge used for horses.)
- 2 The hamlet of Hill Hoath is just ahead, with its charming houses. However, the route is **sharp left** before the dirt road, almost going back on yourself, on a path marked with a blue arrow. This dark path takes a dramatic route past trees growing out of the rocks. After 300m, you come to a post with two arrows. Take the **right** fork, the footpath. Note that you are back on the *Eden Valley Walk*. Follow the yellow arrow **left** into trees, cross a track used as a course for horse trials, down some shallow steps, over a bridge with a stile, along an enclosed path and over another stile. The footpath bends left and reaches a road. Cross the road to a footpath on the other side.

- 3 The path is fenced and there are eggs for sale on the right. Cross a dirt road by houses obliquely to a grassy path that runs parallel to the drive on the left. Eventually the path joins the drive. After a right curve, the grassy footpath diverges to the right away from the drive again. *Don't miss this turn.* It then crosses a long wooden bridge over a track where the instinct is always, if you are in a group, not to overload it. The path now runs parallel to the track and Hever Castle grounds are on your right.

*Hever Castle is famous as the birthplace of a certain Anna Bullen, better known as Anne Boleyn, cause of Henry VIII's rift with Rome and mother of Queen Elizabeth I. The oldest part of the castle dates from 1270. The Bullen family bought the castle in the early 1500s and built a Tudor dwelling within its walls. Ownership later passed to Henry's fourth wife, Anne of Cleves. The most recent private owner, William Waldorf Astor, restored and comfortably refurbished the castle and reshaped the grounds according to his profligate, even licentious, fantasies. The castle is now owned by a private company and is open to the public. It houses historic 16th-century Tudor portraits, furniture and tapestries and two magnificent Books of Hours (prayer books), inscribed by Anne Boleyn.*

Follow the fenced path all the way to Hever Church and exit the churchyard to the road.

*Hever is both a parish and a village on the River Eden. The church of St Peter is mid-13th-century, replacing an earlier Norman church. The tomb of Sir Thomas Bullen, father of Anna (and therefore grandfather of Queen Elizabeth I) is inside. The Henry VIII pub is a mid-17th-century characterful spot with an award-winning large garden.*



- 4 Continue ahead on the road with the *Henry VIII* on your right. The road bends left and reaches a T-junction. Turn **right** on Hever Road. In 50m, turn **left** by an unneeded stile onto a narrow footpath. Just before the meadow on the left ends, turn **right** up steps through a swing-gate and go straight ahead across a meadow. Just after a wooden gate, turn **left** through a swing-gate, across another sheep meadow and through another swing-gate. The enclosed path runs past a pond on the right. Ignore a footpath on the right after the pond. At the end, turn **right** on a road. In 40m, turn **left** on the access road for Hever Station.

### The Markbeeche Cut: South 5¾ km (3½ miles)

This shortcut runs direct from Hever Station to Cowden. It can be used to shorten the walk, reducing the full walk to just the **Eastern Circuit**.

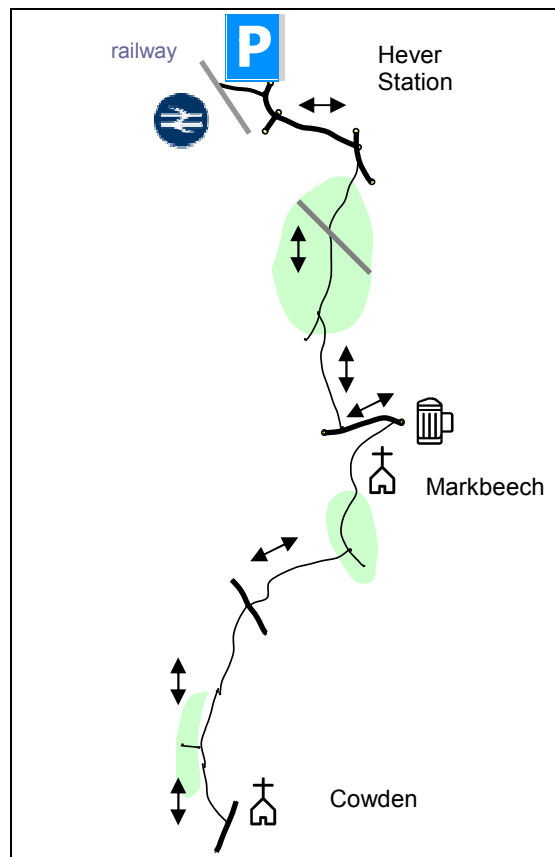
**See map overleaf.** Leave the station by the approach road, past thatched *Sandfield Cottage* and turn right on a lane. Avoid a right turn at a road junction. Finally the road comes to a T-junction. Turn **right**. In 80m, fork **right** on a narrow footpath between fences. The path runs through woodland and then under one of the tall railway arches. It then runs for some distance through forest plantations and mixed woodland. Eventually there is a meadow on the left. After the first meadow, turn **left** between meadows. *Don't miss this turn.* The fenced path goes uphill and passes *Bramsells Farm* and comes out to a road. Turn **left** and in a short distance you reach Markbeeche. The Holy Trinity church and the *Kentish Horse* pub (a free house) are on the right.



*Markbeeche, situated on the High Weald, is the highest point between the Chart Hills and Ashdown Forest. There has been a settlement at Markbeeche at least since the Iron Age. The immediate population of Markbeeche is only in the region of 100.*

Go through the churchyard and go out through a gate on the west side, over a track and straight across a meadow and, at the corner on the left, continue along the left-hand side. Half way down, go over a stile on the **left** by a metal gate and continue on the other side of the fence, downhill. Go over a stile into dark woodland. You reach a drive by a picturesque house on the right. Immediately, at 3-way junction under a tall beech, turn **right**. At the end of the track, turn **left** and, after a house and garden, turn **right** by *Pylegate Farm* to a main road.

Cross straight over the road into *Harnett Claydene Farm* via a wood-and-metal gate. Zig-zag left-right around a barn, go over a stile on the right and go ahead in the pasture keeping to the left-hand side. In the near corner, go **left** over a rickety stile. Go across the centre of a large meadow, at first not far from the right-hand side and then down to the lowest left-hand corner. Go over a stile and a long bridge and along the left-hand side of a meadow. At the end, go **left** with the path where it curves alongside the wood, ignoring a path going right into the tall poplars and pines. Eventually the path goes past a black-and-white bungalow and a small residents' car park. Keep to the left-hand side here and go over a stile into a meadow. Head straight over, soon keeping the big oaks on your right, and go out through a wooden swing-gate to a road. Turn **right** and reach Cowden and its church in 50m.



### The Markbeebech Cut: North 5¾ km (3½ miles)

This shortcut runs direct from Cowden to Hever Station. It can be used to shorten the walk, reducing the full walk to just the **Western Circuit**.

Go north out of the village past the church on the right and in 50m take a footpath **left** through a wooden swing-gate. Head straight over, initially with the big oaks on your left, and then across the middle and go over a stile on the opposite side. Keep to the right-hand side as the path goes past a black-and-white bungalow and a small residents' car park. The path then runs alongside the wood on the left. Eventually the path enters a pasture. Turn right along the right-hand side and, at the end, go over a long bridge and a stile. Go up the centre of a large meadow. If the path is not clear, aim just to the left of a hedge visible on the horizon. At the top, go **left** over a rickety stile, along the top of a pasture and round the right towards the farm buildings. Go over a stile in the corner beside the black metal barn, zig-zag left-right around the barn, and leave *Harnett Claydene Farm* via a wood-and-metal gate to the main road.

Go straight over the road onto a track beside *Pylegate Farm* and turn **left** and then **right** on the main track. After some distance, ignore a track left for *The Grove* and immediately after, at 3-way junction under a tall

beech, turn **left**. You pass a picturesque house on the left, go through some dark woodland and then over a stile into a meadow. Go uphill and go over a stile on the **left** by a metal gate and continue on the other side of the fence, on the right-hand side of a large meadow. On reaching a corner, continue ahead to Markbeech church, cross a track and go over a stile into the churchyard. Go out through the lychgate to the lane by the *Kentish Horse* pub (a free house). See the note on Markbeech above in the text for the South route.

Turn **left** along the road and in 300m, just before gate for *Bramsells*, turn right onto an enclosed path. The path eventually reaches a T-junction in woodland. Turn **right** here. The path runs for some distance through mixed woodland and forest plantations. It then runs under one of the tall railway arches. After more woodland, it becomes enclosed and reaches a road. Turn **left** on the road and in 80m, turn **left** on a road at a junction, signposted to Hever Station. Continue on the road, passing between more rock formations, avoiding a left turn, until you reach on the **left** the approach road for Hever Station. Go past thatched *Sandfield Cottage* to reach the station and car park.

## Getting there

By car or train: begin at Hever Station. At the time of writing there is no charge at this pleasant little private station, although recently (2011) the public is expected to park in the dusty overflow car park; check locally and, if necessary, park elsewhere. To get there from the **South**, take the B2026 towards Edenbridge and, after passing the right turn for Markbeech, at a left bend, fork right onto the Hart Field Road by a telephone box and follow the signs. To get there from the **North**, a good route is to take the **third** left turn after Edenbridge. A pleasant scenic way is through Crockham Hill, via The Limpsfield Chart or Westerham, on the B2026. After Edenbridge, ignore the first signposted left turn for Hever and a minor left turn and take a **sharp left** turn before a telephone box. The signs are clear from here.

