



Hever and Cowden

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

Region: Kent

Author: Malinovka

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Refreshments: Cowden, Hever

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

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Flowery meadows, summer pasture, woodland, streams, villages

In Brief

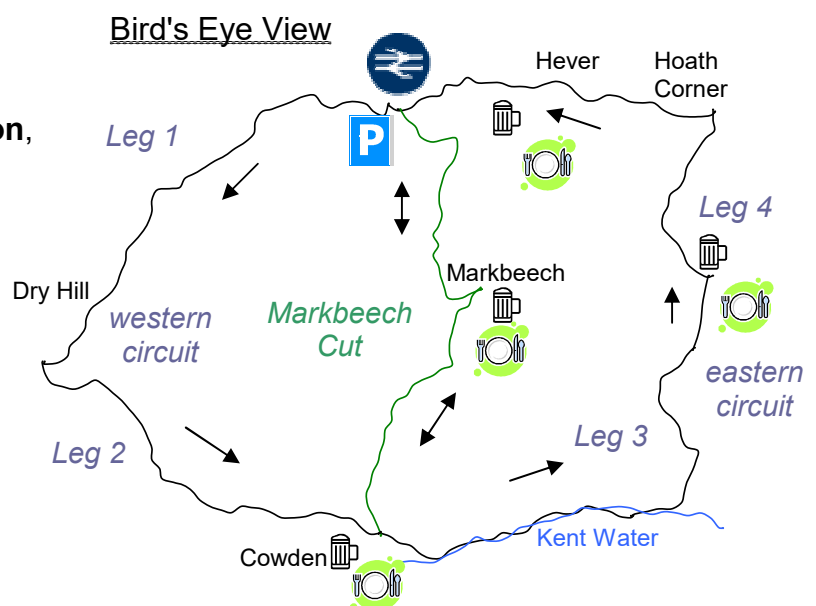
This is the perfect long circular summer walk in West Kent, close to the East Sussex border. The beauty of the ever-varying countryside is truly breathtaking, with wildflower meadows, streams, bridges, small enchanting woods, pretty houses, churches, rocks, views.



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

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

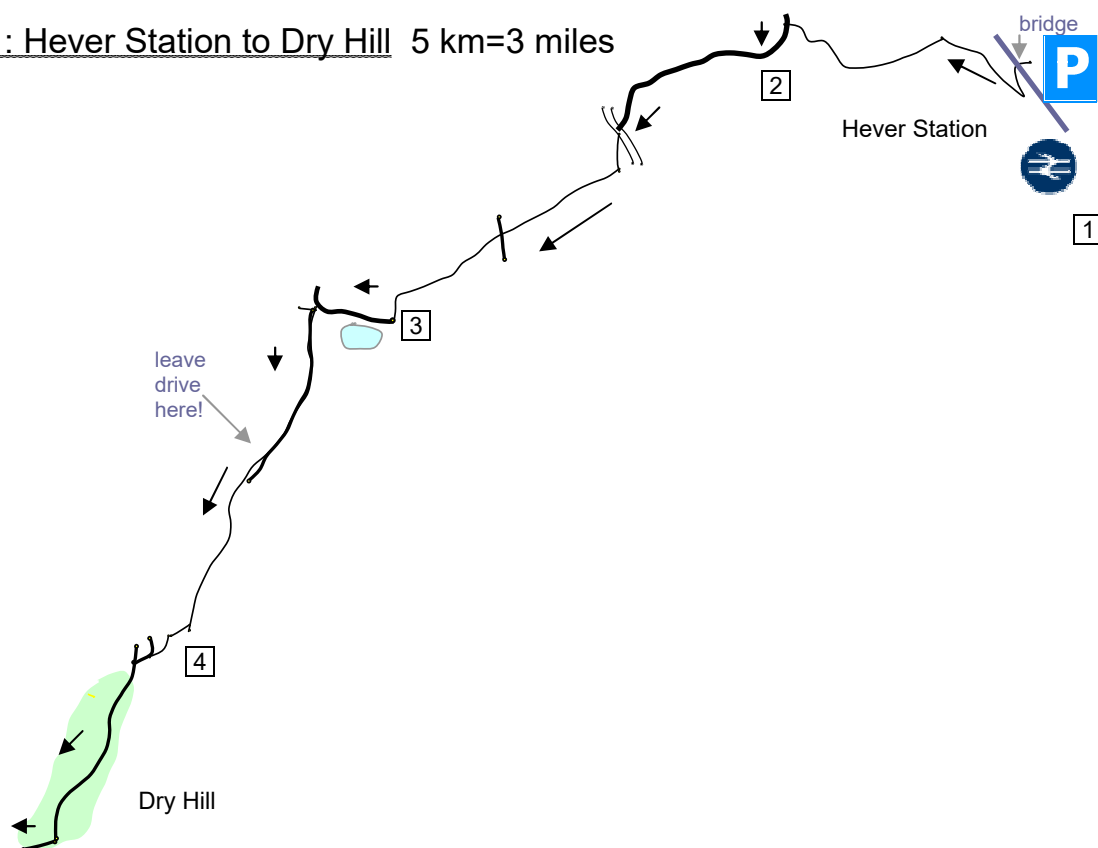
The walk begins at **Hever Station**, Kent, **postcode TN8 7ER**. Charge £2.50 (as 2018) using mobile phone. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



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 5 km=3 miles

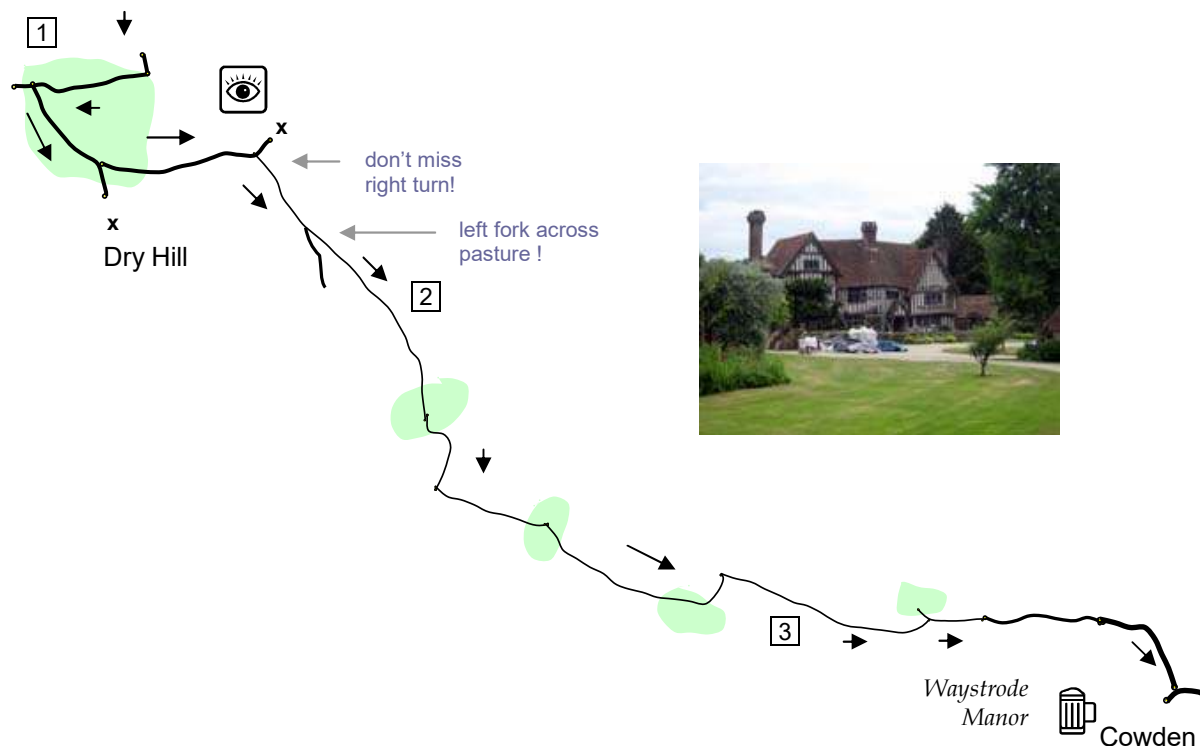


- 1 Cross the railway line by means of the footbridge and take a rising path on the other side (rather overgrown in summer but this will not persist). At the top, turn sharp **right**. This walk takes in part of the *Eden Valley Walk*, a 24km=15 mile route from near Haxted to Tonbridge Castle. The path 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, keep the same direction, i.e. a fraction **left**, across the large pasture, aiming for another small wood 300m ahead. Keep **left** round the fence beside the wood (which conceals a pond). Go over a stile and over another by a metal gate (scattering the heifers if necessary), **right** into the Lyden's Farm and **left** on a track beside a barn. The little field on the right sometimes has friendly lambs which are happy to be petted. 30m from the barn, 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 a pair of oasts and follow it out to a road. Turn **left** on the road.
- 2 Follow the road, ignoring footpath signs right and left, for 700m to a major road. Go straight over, a fraction left, on a wide shingle footpath. Go over a stile into a meadow, turn **right** in it, keeping to the right-hand edge. In the tree line, by a redundant stile, keep ahead on a wide track. At the other side, go over a stile, across a drive and through a kissing-gate. Continue along the right-hand side of a meadow and through a (probably unneeded) kissing-gate. Proceed beside another meadow, over a stile and by some

woodland along the right-hand side of another meadow, avoiding a footpath sharp right. Finally go over a stile, or through a large wooden gate, and out to a lane. Turn **right** on the lane.

- 3 Pass *Christmas Mill* pond on the left. Note the “dragon” sculpture. Where, after 250m, the lane turns right, turn **left** on a concrete drive and continue through a large wooden gate, passing a small house on your left. About 30m **before** you reach a (private) gate into the grounds of the big old house ahead, *Clatfields*, look for a yellow arrow on a wooden post on your right and go **right** here over the grass. 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 and up steps, ignoring a sunken path, over another stile into a small meadow, then over a stile into a crop field. Turn **left** and **right** round the crops to regain your direction. Soon you are walking along a wide grass verge with the crops on your right and woodland down below on your left. Ignore a small gate visible down by the woodland and go up a grassy bank, continuing on a faint path, always aiming just to the left of the farm buildings ahead.
- 4 In the far corner, go over a stile, through a small wooden gate and turn **left** on a cinder track. Go through a large gate to join a track coming from Greybury Farm on your right. After 80m, choose the **right** fork, a rising path. This wide path track continues uphill for 600m through the gathering forest. At the top, keep straight ahead following the blue arrow, ignoring an unmarked path on your right. *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 60m, at a T-junction and a post with blue arrows, turn **left** on a wider path. 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. Soon, the track comes out of the woods with fine views left to the North Downs. 200m later, 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 yellow footpath arrow. This rather vague path becomes clearer as you near the target, the far left corner.

2 Go over a stile or through a large metal gate, along the left-hand side of a meadow, through a kissing gate, over a rather muddy horse track and through another kissing gate into woodland. Exit the wood through a kissing gate and turn **right** in a meadow, 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 or through a metal gate. At the next corner, go over a stile on the **left** (or through a metal gate) and continue direction along the right-hand side of the next meadow. Go over a stile, through a band of trees into a small meadow. Avoid an obvious path straight ahead and instead go along the **left**-hand side of the meadow as indicated by the yellow arrow. The path now enters woodland at a rustic marker post, curves **right** at the next post with a yellow arrow and goes along the centre of a long meadow.

3 The path goes through a line of trees, straight across the next meadow and into woodland, over a long bridge across a stream. Ignore a minor path on your right and continue uphill through the woods. 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 veer **right** 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.

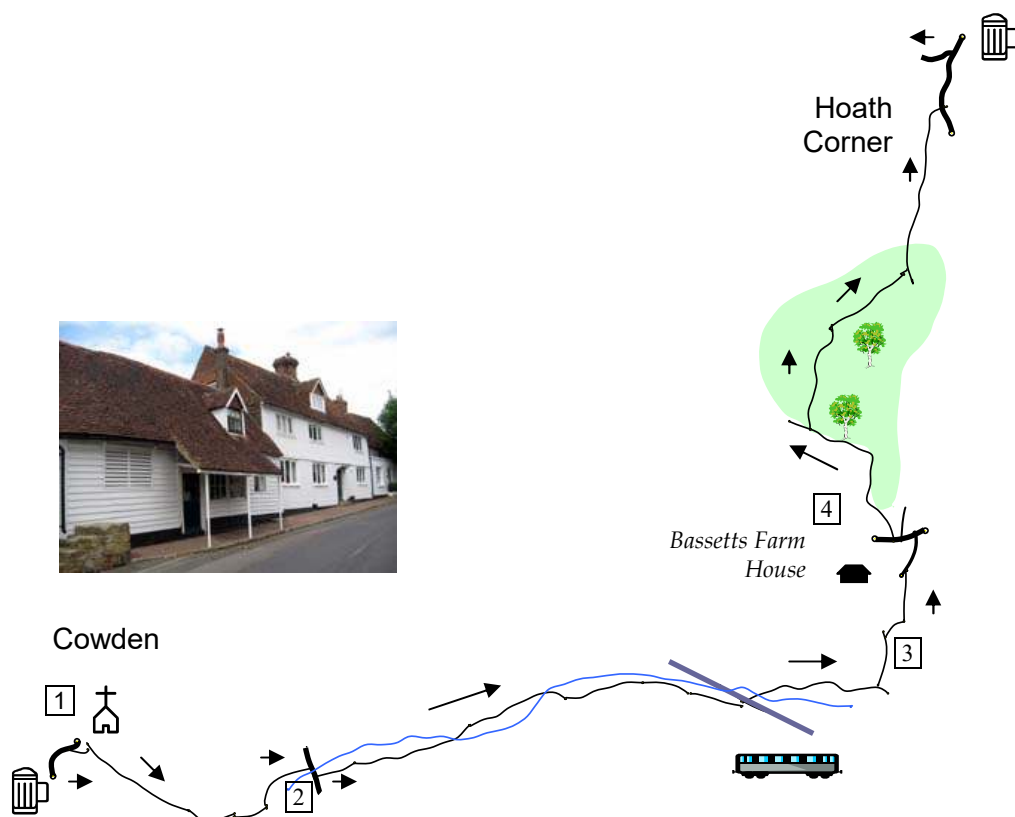


If you feel you are in a rare out-of-the way lost gem of a village, this is in a sense what Cowden always was. Even in the more rural middle ages, Cowden was little known because of its situation in 'a deep soil of clay, very wet and miry'. In these modern times it is away from the main roads and is 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 6 km=4 miles



- 1 Go **right** through the churchyard and out in the far corner. Here, turn **right** on a path with a second burial ground on your left. The path goes through a small wooden gate, down a long field, over a stile by a wooden gate, over a concrete bridge and across the corner of a meadow. Ignore a stile and wooden gate on your right and keep straight ahead in the long meadow, under a line of wires, 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 overgrown 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 (or through a small metal gate) into an area with equestrian apparatus. There are two more stiles but they are easily bypassed. Go over a see-saw stile and **left** over a gated bridge, then **right** along the Kent side. You will be following the SBP and the Kent Water for some distance. As you walk beside the sheep fields on your left, there is soon a wooden gate, then another, then a latched gate and a bridge taking you into East Sussex once again. Zigzag left-right over a crossing path and go along the left-hand side of a large meadow, then on an overgrown path near the stream on your left. Your path goes over two small bridges over feeder streams, with an awkward "stile", then along the left-hand side of a crop field and over another bridge. On your left now is the railway line. Turn **left** through the arch and go diagonally **right** across the centre of the field. Your path

follows a tortuous course round the left-hand edge of two fields and finally over a stile into a rough pasture and **left** over a bridge back into Kent.

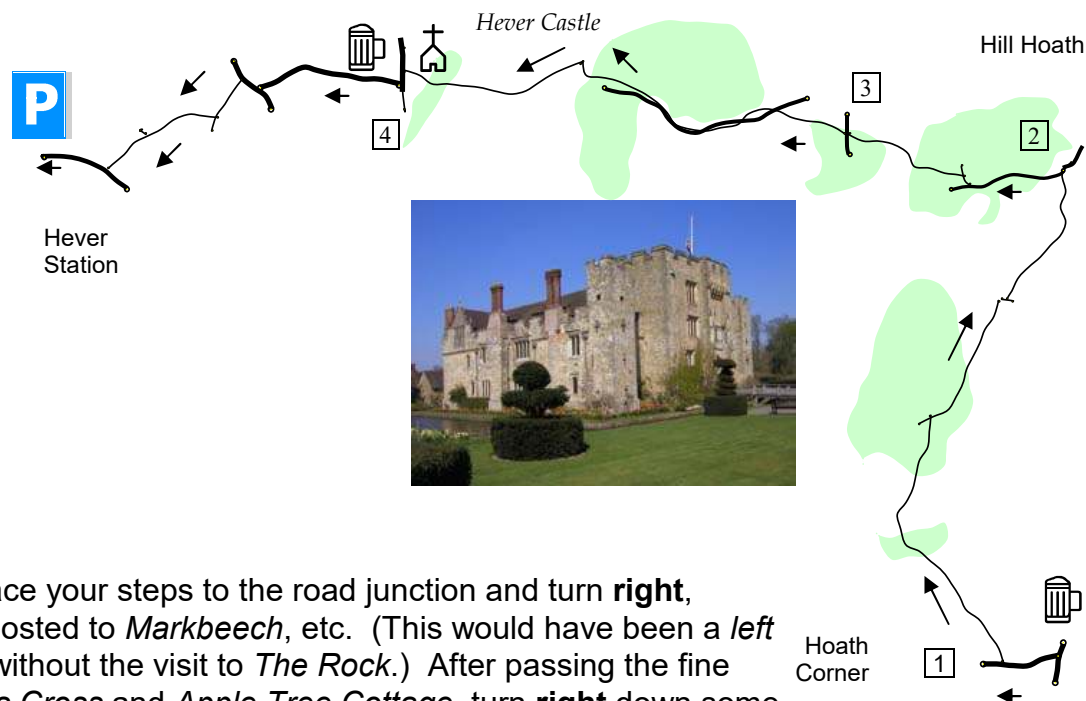
- 3 Say goodbye to the Kent Water here by going straight up ahead towards the far left corner of the meadow. As it narrows, avoid a path through a gap in the trees on the left and keep ahead to go over a stile at the end of the meadow. Turn **left** in a crop field, turning **right** in the corner. In 25m, turn **left** through a small metal gate, follow a narrow path initially beside a wattle fence, joining the tarmac 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, turn **right** on a footpath. 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 into 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** skimming the brow of the hill and pick up a path downhill going past interesting rock formations on your left and through a gap into a beautiful long meadow. **But**, only 50m from the start of the meadow, veer **right** away from the path and go sharp **right** over a stile into the adjoining woods. The path leads down, through wild garlic and bluebells in late spring, over a long bridge and boards, runs uphill, joins a wide 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, turn **left** and, 5m after a gate, go **right** through a kissing gate onto a narrow path through woodland, then over another stile, along the right-hand side of a meadow and through a kissing gate to a road. Cross straight over into woodland, staying close to the fence on the right. By an electricity pole, turn **left** away from the fence, passing a yellow arrow and go between fields. At the end of the field, turn **right** to a road and turn **left** on it. 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*.) After passing the fine *Cares Cross* and *Apple Tree Cottage*, turn **right** down some steps on a narrow path, over a little bridge, along a fences path and along the right-hand side of two flowery meadows. The footpath then runs by a fence, which you need to squeeze past, 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, ending under some fine beeches, and then through an atmospheric woodland of young tall birches. At a T-junction by a rustic marker post, turn **right** onto a wide path through Stock Wood. The path then runs between fences. At the end of the fenced section, go through a kissing gate 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, passing a small enclosure on your left. At the end, go through a swing gate beside a metal gate and go straight over a grassy crossing path to a 4-way junction.
- 2 The hamlet of Hill Hoath, with its charming houses, is on your right. Straight ahead is private. Your route is **left** on a very dark path marked with a blue arrow. You are still on the *Eden Valley Walk*. This 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. Follow a yellow arrow **left** by an unneeded kissing gate into trees, cross a track used as a course for horse trials, go down some shallow steps, over a bridge, along an enclosed path and over a stile. The footpath bends left and reaches a road through a small metal gate. Cross the road to a footpath on the other side.
- 3 The path is shortly fenced. You pass coops and a pigsty on a path fringed by camellias and honeysuckle and there are eggs for sale on the right. Veer right across a dirt road by houses to a grassy path that turns left and runs parallel to the drive on your left. Eventually the path joins the drive. In 150m, after a right curve, the grassy footpath diverges to the right away from the drive again. It then crosses a long wooden bridge over a track where the wisdom 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, soon turning left, all the way to Hever Church, sometimes over bricks and a boardwalk, into the churchyard. 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

Turn **left** on the road and continue ahead with the *Henry VIII* on your right, soon passing a large free car park on your right. The road bends left and, after 400m, reaches a T-junction. Turn **right** on Hever Road. In 50m, turn **left** by an avoidable stile onto a narrow footpath. Just before the meadow on the left ends, turn **right** up steps through a swing-gate. *Don't miss this turn!* Go straight ahead across a meadow, keeping near the left-hand side and passing a jutting corner. In 100m, just after a gap, turn **left** through a swing-gate, through a band of trees and another swing gate, across a sheep meadow and through another swing-gate that you can see ahead in the corner by a line of trees. 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 where the walk began.

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The Markbeece 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**.*

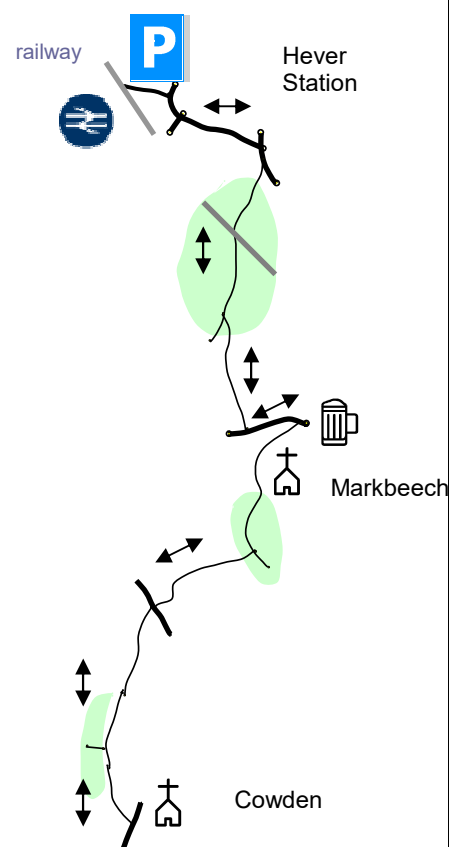
See map overleaf. Leave the station by the approach road, past thatched *Sandfield Cottage* and turn **right** on Chippens Lane, passing some rock formations. In 250m, avoid a right turn at a junction with Hever Lane. In another 450m, turn **right** at a T-junction with a major road. In 80m, next to *Wedgwood*, fork **right** on a narrow footpath between fences. Follow the path through woodland and under one of the tall railway arches, keeping left. The path runs for 800m through forest plantations and mixed woodland where you may see deer. After passing a meadow on your left, visible through a band of trees, your path veers **left** uphill between meadows. *Don't miss this turn.* The fenced path passes *Bramsells Farm* and comes out through a little white gate to a road. Turn **left** and in a short distance you reach Markbeece. The Holy Trinity church and the *Kentish Horse* pub (a free house) are on the right.



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

Go through the churchyard and go out over a stile on the west side, opposite a bench seat, over a track and straight across a meadow. As you pass a jutting corner on the left, continue down 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 hedge, downhill. At the bottom, go over a stile into dark woodland. You reach a drive by a quaint house on the right. In 50m, at 3-way junction under a tall beech, turn **right**. In ½ km, at the end of the track, turn **left**, passing a house and garden and turn **right** by *Pylegate Farm* to the main road.

Cross straight over the road through an old wood-and-metal gate into Harnett Claydene Farm. Keep ahead and zig-zag left-right around a barn. Go over a stile in the right-hand corner and go ahead in the pasture keeping close to the left-hand side. As you go **left** round the first corner, you pass a redundant small metal gate. Now veer **right** down the whole length of a large meadow, at first not far from the right-hand side and then down to the lowest left-hand corner, ignoring a small metal gate you can see on the left. Go over a stile and a long bridge and straight ahead up the left-hand side of a meadow. At the top, keep **left** with the path where it curves alongside the wood, and almost immediately ignore a path into the woods on the right. In 250m, [2016: ducking under a fallen oak branch] the path goes past a black-and-white bungalow and a small residents' car park. Keep to the left here to go over a (broken) stile into a horse pasture. Head straight across, keeping the big oaks on your right, and go out through a wooden swing-gate to a road. Turn **right** to reach Cowden and its church in 50m.



The Markbeech 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**.

See map above. Leave the village, passing the church on your right, and, in 50m, take a footpath **left** through a wooden swing-gate into a horse pasture. Keep left in the pasture, passing the big oaks on your left, and then cut **right** across the middle to the opposite side and over a (broken) stile. Keep to the **right** as the path goes past a black-and-white bungalow and a small residents' car park. The path then runs alongside a wood on the left [2016: ducking under a fallen oak branch]. In 250m, the path enters a pasture. Keep **right** down the right-hand side. At the bottom, go straight on over a long bridge and a stile into a large meadow. Go up the centre, heading for a large black barn visible at the top of the slope. At the top, keep **left**, past a redundant small metal gate, and along the top of a pasture. Look for a hidden small metal gate which is just past the second large metal gate. Turn **right** through this small gate beside the black metal barn, zig-zag left-right around the barn, and leave Harnett Claydene Farm via an old wood-and-metal gate to the main road.

Go straight over the road onto a track beside Pylegate Farm. Keep right, passing a converted barn on your left, then turn **left** and **right** on the main track. In nearly ½ km, ignore a track on your left for *The Grove* and shortly after, at 3-way junction under a tall beech, turn **left**. Fork **right** as you pass a quaint little house on the left. After some dark woodland, in about 100m, keep **right** to go over a stile into a meadow. Keep left, steeply uphill and, in about 100m, opposite a group of oaks in the centre of the meadow, go **left** over a stile next to a metal gate and continue **right** on the other side of the hedge, up 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 lichgate 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 main road and in 300m, just before *Bramsells*, turn **right** through a little white gate onto a path between fences. In 250m, the path descends into woodland. Veer **right** here and follow the path for about 800m through mixed woodland and forest plantations. After passing under one of the tall railway arches, keep **right** on the main wide path. After more woodland, the path runs between gardens and reaches a road. Turn **left** on the road and, in 80m, turn **left** on a tarmac lane. Follow the lane for 450m and avoid a left turn at Hever Lane. Continue, passing between some rock formations, to reach, in 250m on the **left**, the approach road for Hever Station. Go past thatched *Sandfield Cottage* to reach the station and car park.

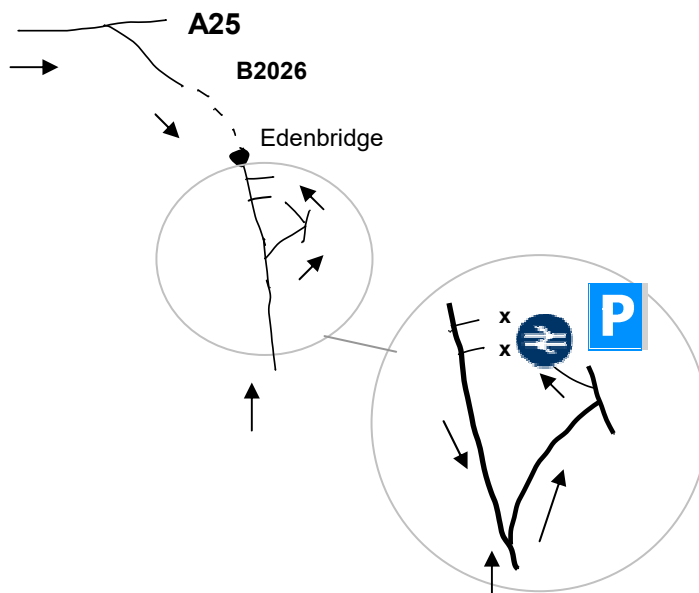
Getting there

By car or train: begin at Hever Station.

There is now a small charge (£2.50 for the day in 2018 by mobile phone only) and recently the public is expected to park in the dusty overflow car park; check locally and, if necessary, park on local roads somewhere along the route.

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. Turn left twice to reach the station.



By bus: bus 234 from Tunbridge Wells, not Sunday.