



Hever and Cowden

Distance: 22 km=13½ miles

or 2 walks of 15 km=9½ miles & 18 km=11 miles easy walking

Region: Kent

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Date written: 20-jun-2010

Refreshments: Cowden, Hever

Date revised: 16-oct-2016

Map: Explorer 147 (Sevenoaks)

Last update: 2-apr-2024

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.



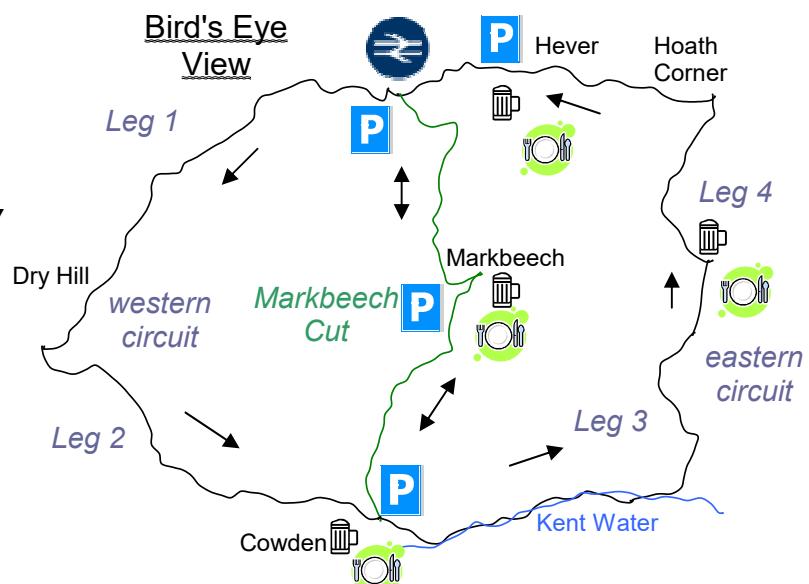
There are several patches of nettles and brambles (especially north of Markbeech), so long trousers are necessary. Most of the paths are pleasant, grassy and easy, so any strong footwear is fine, but boots are essential after damp weather or in the more wintry seasons. The stile count is high and this 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. If you come by car, there is a charge of £2.50 (as 2018) using a smart-phone app (Reddit). *This applies at weekends too. Don't default for any reason as they have inspectors!*



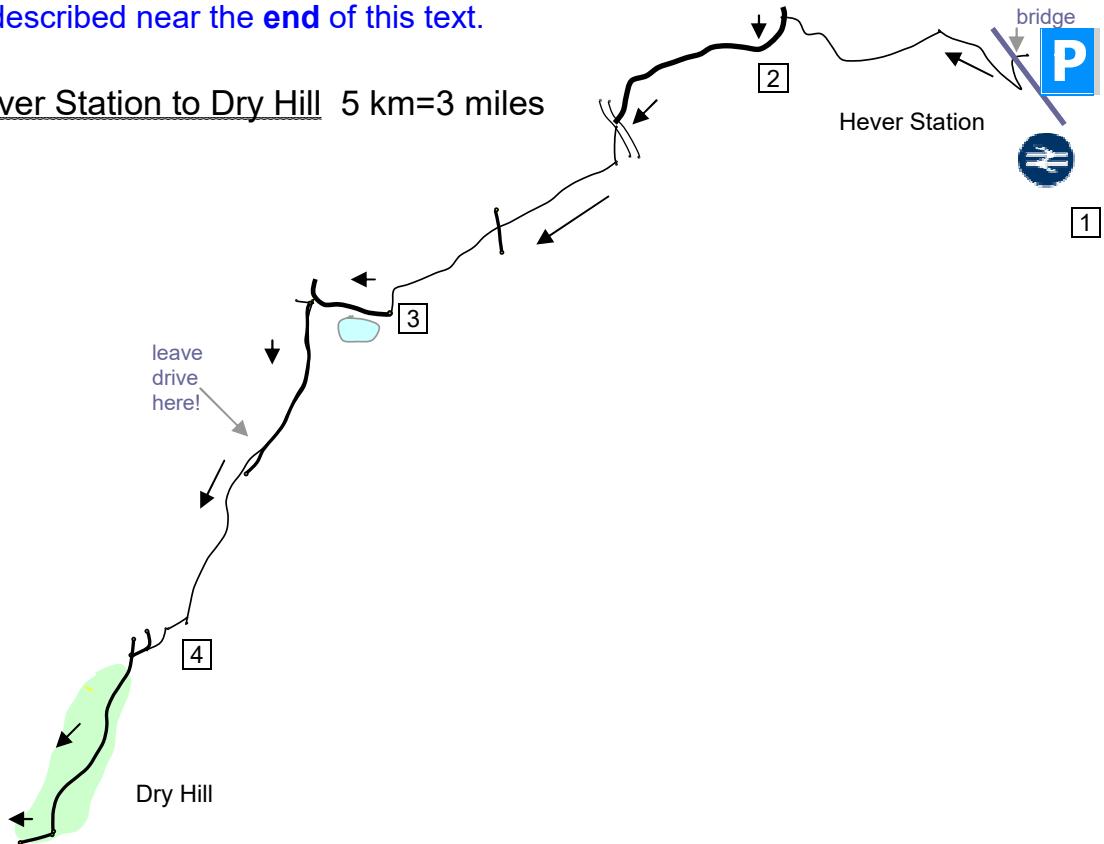
Consequently, we now suggest you might park somewhere else along the route, e.g. in **Cowden** (e.g. off Spode Lane) or in **Markbeech**. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



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.

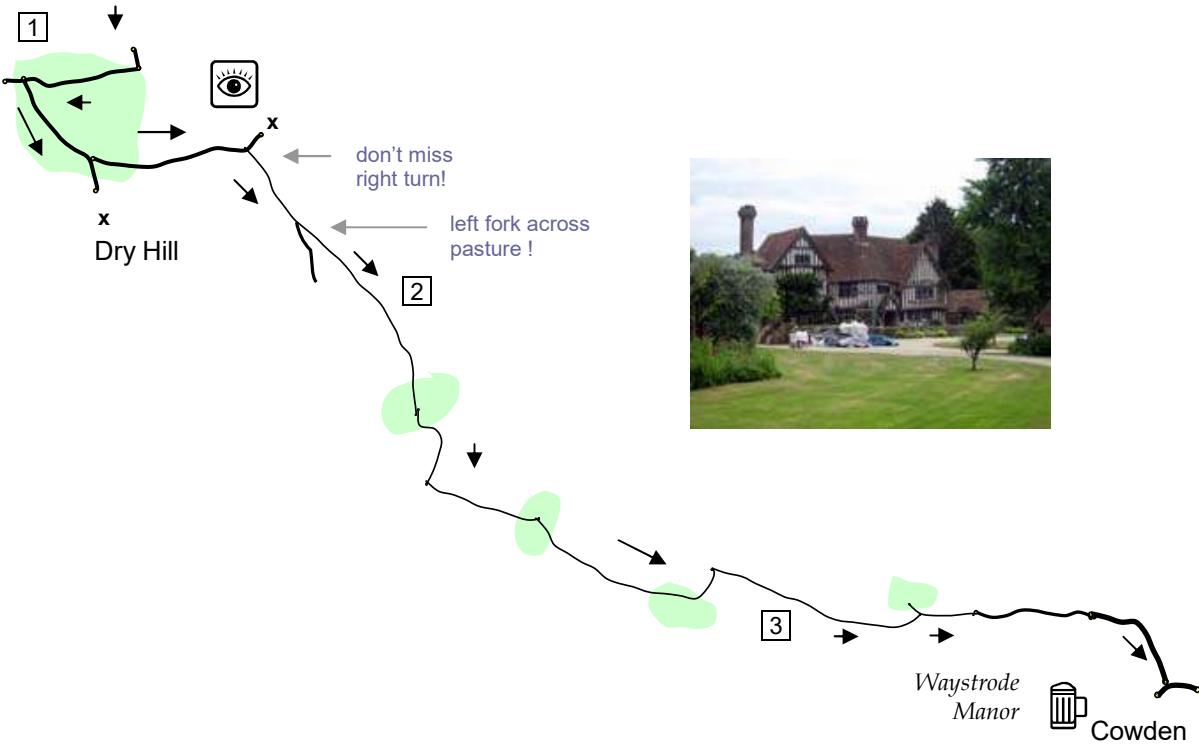
Leg 1: Hever Station to Dry Hill 5 km=3 miles



- 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, turn **left** across the large pasture, aiming for the left side of another wood with a rounded appearance about 300m ahead. Continue across the pasture. (You may see a flag flying on a flagpole by some buildings ahead: if so, aim for that.) On reaching the far edge of the pasture you will find a new gate with a sign. Pass through it, cross the track and go through another signed gate. Go down along the right-hand side of a small field to another gate. Pass through it onto the road and turn **left**.
- 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 grassy/shingly 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 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 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 short makeshift post with a “footpath” sign 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 (bypassable) stile in the hedge, down and up steps, ignoring a sunken path, over another stile into a small meadow, then through a metal gate 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 an unneeded 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=3 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 meadow on the left where wild flowers grow if the horses are absent. (You may brush against nettles and brambles in high summer, but the path is quite walkable.) Another small wooden gate leads into another meadow where you see two coloured blue arrows. Ignore the blue arrow which points straight ahead along the edge and instead follow the **yellow** arrow which directs you diagonally **left** across the centre of the pasture. In the far left-hand corner, go over a wooden stile into the next meadow. Keep ahead along the left-hand side and through a metal kissing gate to find a marker post and a grassy diagonal crossing path. Cross straight over through a similar kissing gate into a patch of woodland, passing a pond on your right. At the end of the woodland path, go through a metal kissing gate out into a large grassy meadow which has a copse in its centre.

-  [2] Take a diagonal path across the meadow, going through the copse, passing two lovely ponds, continuing in the same direction across the meadow to the far corner. Here, go through a small metal gate beside a large gate, taking you into the next meadow. Go down the left-hand side, with good views ahead and go left through another small metal gate beside a large gate. Continue down the right-hand side of next meadow. In 80m, ignore a signed path on your right. Go through the next metal gate beside a large gate into the next field. ([2018: A soil management project has carved out new tracks round the fields here.](#)) Follow a newly-made wide track down the left-hand side of the field and, in 150m, stay with the track as it bends **left** through trees. In about 50m, look to your **right** for a marker post and turn **right** through a patch of scrub to a small metal gate leading into a large meadow.
- [3] Cut across the middle of this open grassy field, down towards a gap in the trees at the bottom, where you can see a large new metal gate. When you reach it, go through an adjacent kissing gate and down the centre of the next grassy meadow, with the rooftop of Waystrode Manor visible ahead. Aim for a marker post about 40m from the bottom right-hand corner where a pathway leads you into the woods. Your path crosses a smart new wooden bridge, across a small stream, and leads up through woodland. At a T-junction, turn **right** on a path which may be familiar from your outward journey. Go up a few steps and through a wooden gate with a yellow arrow. Go up the driveway, 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.



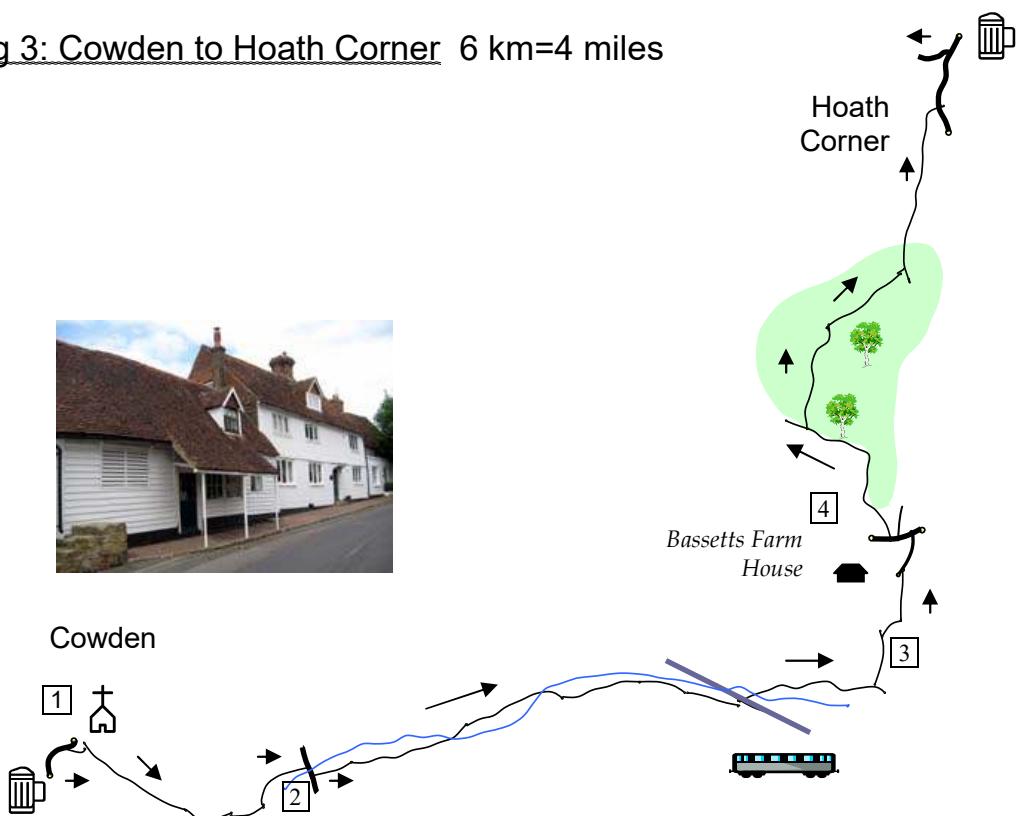
Continue on the tarmac, ignoring a footpath right, and veer **right** on the road which bends right and comes to a T-junction in the centre of Cowden village. *On the right 'The Fountain' (Harveys) is a friendly pub-restaurant with a big garden.* After possibly having a stroll around the village, turn **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



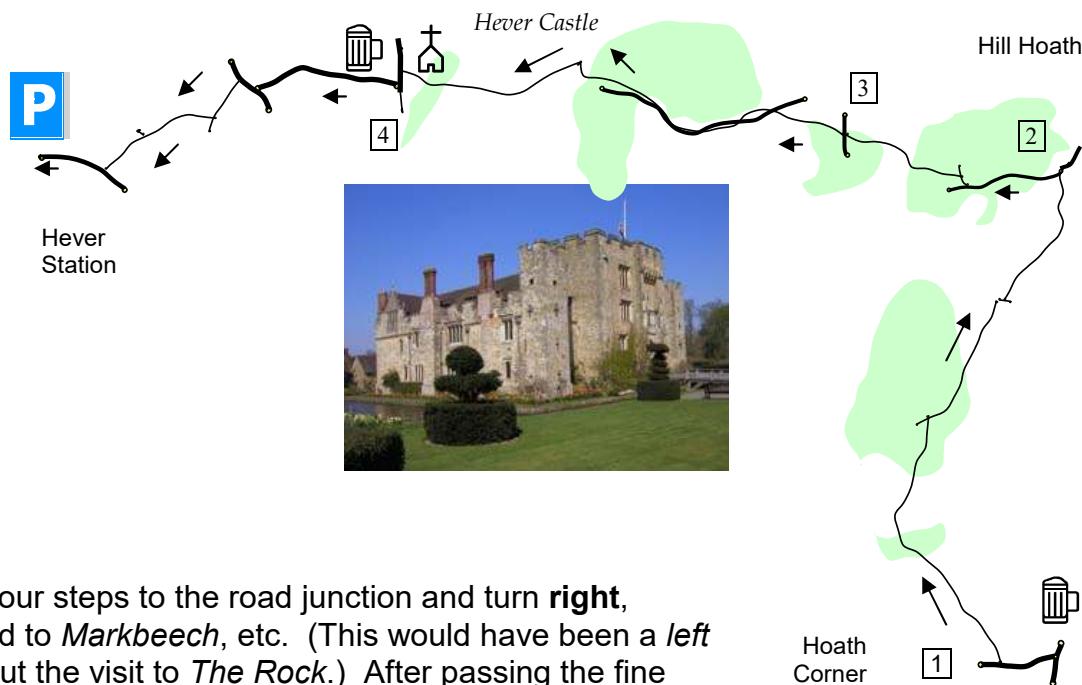
- [1] Go **right** through the churchyard and out in the far corner. Here, turn **right** on a path with a second burial ground on your left. The path goes through a small wooden gate, down a long field, over a stile by a wooden gate, over a concrete bridge and across the corner of a meadow. Ignore a 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 **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. (This path is very difficult to find. In 2019 there was no marker post and the entry to the path is obscured by an abundance of Himalayan balsam. The entry is just where the left side of the field hedge takes a bend to the right and begins to ascend.) 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 Bassettts, a cluster of historic houses. On the right is *Bassettts Mill*, worth a peep. Turn **left** on the road and avoid a tempting footpath right, beside a barn. Just ahead is the historic *Bassettts 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 *Bassettts*.
- 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 super extra-long bridge, 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. **You have a terrific view at this point – worthy of a pause to stand and stare.** 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” used to depict an unclothed lady, possibly based on the idea of the Lorelei, but she has been replaced by a man with a shotgun with more of the hunting theme inside – swapping to an even more controversial mores. One asset of “The Rock” is the matchless Larkins ale. “The Rock” is now thankfully open on Sundays and the staff are “friendly and welcoming”.

Leg 4: Hoath Corner to Hever Station 6½ km=3½ 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 a narrow path, over a little bridge, along a fenced 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 or hedge-rows. At the end of this section, go through a kissing gate on the right and continue in the **same** direction on the other side of the hedgerow. Follow the path down the full length of this lovely long meadow. At the end, go through a kissing 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 dark bridleway marked with a blue arrow (on a post facing you). 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. Go **left** through a kissing gate into trees (some bearing splashes of red paint as a waymarker), 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 an alpaca enclosure on the right. Veer **right** across a dirt road by *Bothy Cottage* 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, ignore the grassy footpath to the right, which has been diverted, and stay on the drive, soon arriving at the grounds of Hever Castle 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. A magnet for families is the famous jousting tournament.

Follow a 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. The road bends left and, after 400m, reaches a T-junction. Turn **right** on Hever Road. In 50m, turn **left** onto a narrow footpath. Just before the meadow on the left ends, by a *National Rail* marker post, turn **right** up steps through a swing-gate. 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.

The Markbeech Cut: South 5½ 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**.

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 (very overgrown) 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 Markbeech. 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 through a metal gate on the west side, opposite a bench seat, over a track and straight across a crop field. 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 $\frac{1}{2}$ km, at the end of the track, turn **left**, passing a house and garden and turn **right** by Pylegate Farm to the main road.

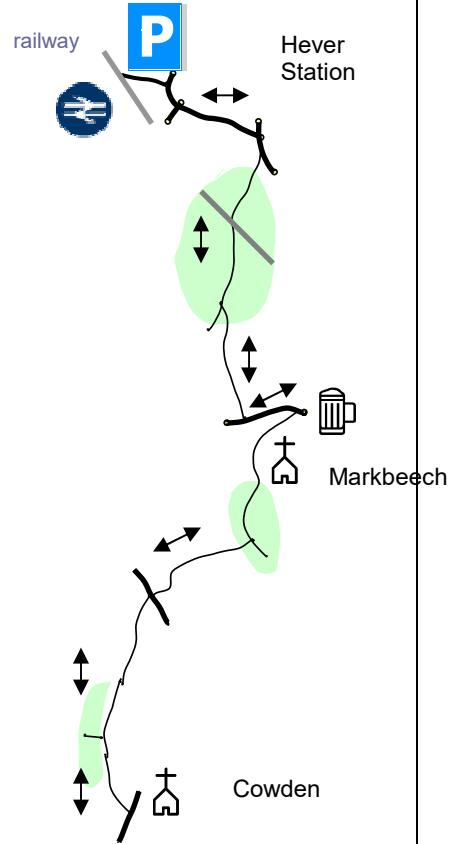
Cross straight over the road through an old wood-and-metal gate into a site of housing development where Harnett Claydene Farm used to stand. [2027: instead of the prescribed text below, follow the signs which direct you round the fenced-off section.] Keep ahead and zig-zag left-right around a barn. 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 $5\frac{3}{4}$ 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 through a metal kissing gate. 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. 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**, passing through a 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 the (now deserted) *Harnett Claydene Farm* via metal gates 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 $\frac{1}{2}$ 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 train: begin at **Hever Station**.

By car: There is now a small charge (£2.50 for the day in 2018 by smartphone app only) and recently the public is expected to park in the dusty overflow car park; *don't default!* Check locally and, if necessary, **park on local roads** anywhere 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 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. Or continue to the village.

Cowden and **Markbeech** are signposted from the B2026 south of Edenbridge.

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

