



Hollingbourne

Distance: 9 km=5½ miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Kent

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Refreshments: Hollingbourne

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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Easy field paths, woodland, views, historic house

In Brief

This is a stimulating circular walk on the North Downs, beginning in the delightful village of Hollingbourne, near Maidstone, Kent. You will be walking on the Pilgrims Way for part of the route, giving you a sense of what medieval travellers must have felt and seen whilst tramping on these hills.

This walk takes in a really excellent pub at the start or finish, noted for its food (if you decide to partake). On a popular weekend you almost certainly need to book at the *Dirty Habit*: ring 01622-880-880.



There are some nettles and brambles in the woodland, making shorts unwise. Unless conditions are very dry, you will encounter two brief stretches of mud on the bridleway, making boots necessary. With only two stiles, no main roads and no livestock, this walk should be fine for your dog too.

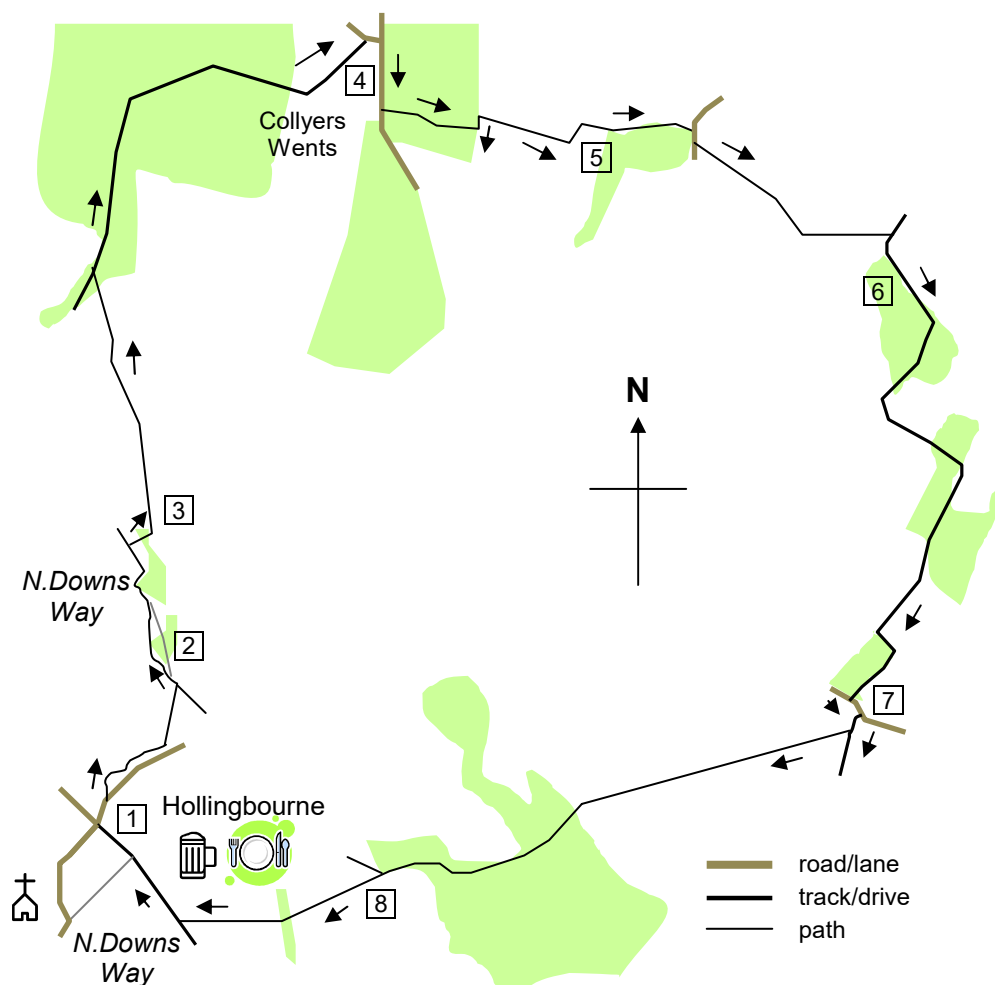
Part of the return leg of this walk was badly churned up by off-road vehicles (section [6](#)).

The walk begins in the village of **Hollingbourne**, near Maidstone, Kent, postcode **ME17 1UW**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

The name "Hollingbourne" means "the stream of the people living in the hollow" (or possibly "Hola" was the name of a chief). It was best known in history as the seat of that rich and powerful Kentish family, the Culpepers (see the walk "Offham, Old Soar Manor, Platt" in this series). Theirs was the great Tudor Hollingbourne Manor which you may have seen on the road between the church and the pub. Hollingbourne is divided into two villages by the railway, with, on the south side, the charming Eyhorne Street with two pubs, the "Windmill" and the "Sugar Loaves".

The imposing, wide, Hollingbourne Church of All Saints was Norman but it was rebuilt in 1382 after an "earthquake" destroyed it. George Gilbert Scott Junior restored the church in 1876.



- 1 Starting at the *Dirty Habit* in Hollingbourne, start going uphill along the main road. In 30m, at a national speed limit sign, turn **left** up some steps onto a path above the road. The path quickly runs along the right-hand side of a field. You have good views of the North Downs and your route ahead. Behind you is the village of Leeds (see the "Leeds Castle" walk in this series). You are on part of the North Downs Way, a long-distance route from Farnham to Dover. At the top of the field, go through a wooden swing-gate and fork **left** in the direction of the acorn symbol on a narrow path through bushes, ignoring a path on the left beside a fence. Keep going straight up the grassy hillside, heading for a post visible ahead. At the top, turn **left** on a path along the contour with great views. The white golf ball shaped thing visible ahead above the trees is an antenna of RAF Detling.

- 2 Your path curves right through a wooden swing-gate (or a large wooden gate) and continues uphill towards a post and trees. At a fork, fork **left**, thus leaving the official footpath which goes up to a post and into trees. [This is for your comfort! the waymarked footpath leads through a dense thicket with overhanging thorny branches on a rather cumbersome twisty path.](#) Keep the thicket tight on your right and follow the perimeter round to meet the official path once again as it emerges from the shrubs, and turn **left** on it. In 80m you reach another marker post just in front of a small space encircled by thorn trees. Turn **right** into this space and take a narrow path through bushes up to a wooden swing-gate leading into a crop field [\[Apr 2020: ploughed up with no path visible\]](#).
- 3 Take a path diagonally **left**, heading straight for a pylon. (As a guide, this is the *second* pylon from the left – not the pylon beside a gate.) When you reach it, the path bends a fraction left. On the other side, go over a farm track, through a wide gap in the trees, and continue in the same direction across a green strip and across the next field. At the other side, take a very narrow path between trees and quickly through a wooden barrier onto a wide track. Turn **right** on the track. [You will be following this wide way for nearly 1 km. The good surfacing suggests this was a major route in centuries past.](#) Bolton's Wood is on your left, Chitt's Wood on your right, part of the Hucking Estate, managed by the Woodland Trust. After 350m, you enter a more open area. Ignore some gates on your left, 100m later, after which the track curves right. You now pass fields on your right and you reach a house in the hamlet of Colyers Wents. Turn **right** here on a tarmac lane.
- 4 Follow the lane as it bends right. In 200m, turn **left** through a high wooden barrier into woods. In 40m you meet a 3-way electricity pole and your path continues ahead in a clearing under wires. [Care! the next turn is easy to miss.](#) In another 60m your paths veers **right** into the bluebell wood and runs parallel to the wires. (As a guide, the turning is about 30m before the next electricity pole.) In a little over 100m, you come out into a field. Go straight across the field in the direction of a marker post, ignoring a path which veers off the the right. (You may need to force a way through a short strip of maize.) Once you have a clear view, head for Cooper's Farm with its little white turret, keeping just a handstretch to the left of the wires.
- 5 At the far side, **turn left** on a wide grassy margin along the edge of the field. Your route bends right at the next corner. [There is a parallel path in the woods on your right, possibly the official path, but very overgrown; in bluebell time you can sidle into it at some suitable point.](#) In the far corner, keep straight ahead through trees on an ill-defined path, leading to a road. Cross the road to a wide track opposite. The track becomes concrete and dips down between fields. Just before it rises again, fork **left** across the grass to a signpost visible in the hedge. Go over a stile here into a meadow [\[Apr 20: care! broken\]](#). Go diagonally across the centre to the far corner where there is a group of three oaks. Here, go **right** over an unusual stile and turn **right** on a wide track along the edge of a field.
- 6 Stay with the track as it curves left in the corner. In 200m or so, your track bends **right** into woods. Keep straight ahead, avoiding a track on your right. [This area can be very muddy in wet seasons and you may need to give it a wide berth.](#) Keep straight ahead at a junction of tracks, on a sheltered track running between fields. The track descends through trees by another muddy area, this time avoidable using a narrow path through the trees on your right. After nearly 1 km, you pass a long metal barrier in the fields on

each side, after which your track bends left and right and reaches a road. Turn **left** on the road.

- 7 In 40m, turn **right** at a signpost on another byway. After only 50m, turn **right** to pass through a gap. Cut through a fallen tree trunk, cross over a ditch and walk straight ahead for only about 10m. Almost magically, a crop field appears in front of you with a path visible ahead across its centre. Follow this path, passing to the left of a solitary, withered old tree. At the far side, follow the path down into woodland, going over a superfluous crossing path. In 150m you enter the most attractive part of the wood under tall beeches. In a short distance, you come to a large wooden gate and a wonderful view opens out. As well as the nearby hills, the distant hills of the South Downs are visible with the Weald of Kent and very few habitations on show in between. Follow a path under trees beside a meadow and a barbed-wire fence on your right. A swing-gate leads onto a wide forest path. Keep straight ahead through the wood. A wooden swing-gate beside a large wooden gate takes you onto a large sloping field covering the hillside.
- 8 Take a narrow straight path that cuts across the corner of the field. [2018: the path is cut off 40m from the hedge, making the entry into the hedge hard to spot. If you can't see the entry, you could go left towards a steel gate and a tarmac drive, then right into the village.] At the far side, go through the hedge on a rather hidden, very steep, path where you need to take care. It takes you through trees steeply down steps, then more steps. At the bottom, go over a track and through a wooden swing-gate. Take a wide path diagonally across the next field. At the other side, go through a gap in the hedge and turn **right** on a tarmac drive, another section of the North Downs Way. Follow the drive for 350m back to the centre of Hollingbourne and the *Dirty Habit* where the walk began.



The Dirty Habit, previously known as the Pilgrims Rest and the Kings Head, was part of a monastery in the 11th century and became an inn in the 13th century, making it surely one of the oldest in England. Standing on the Pilgrim's Way it was an essential watering hole on the way to Canterbury. But today's pilgrims are more likely to be in search of a gastronomic experience, for this pub has many foody accolades. Start with devilled lamb's kidneys, move on to crab and crayfish linguine, or partridge with bacon and chestnut sauce, and finish with apple and orange tart, all eaten in the beautiful period room. For the spit-and-sawdust brigade, just a drink and a bar snack are also right-on.

Getting there

By car: Hollingbourne is close to the **M20** motorway, just 1 hour from London, 7 miles east of Maidstone. Come off at Junction 8. Follow signs as for *Leeds Castle* but after $\frac{1}{3}$ mile on the A20, at the first roundabout, turn **left** at a sign for Hollingbourne. Go through the first village and under the railway on a very twisty road. After $\frac{1}{2}$ mile, look for a space to park on the roadside on your right, just before the pub. You can also park at the church, giving you a slightly longer walk to the pub and the start.

By train: start at **Hollingbourne station** which has regular daily service, 1 mile from the walk. The extra walk through the village is interesting but there is also a bus service, probably not running on Sunday.

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