**Coldrum Stones and Luddesdown**

Distance: 20½ km=13 miles  
Region: Kent  
Author: Malinovka  
Refreshments: Harvel, Luddesdown, Birling  
Map: Explorer 148 (Maidstone)  
Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org  

In Brief

This walk takes you to a Neolithic site, over the North Downs by an easy route and through gentle woods and meadows to the luscious green valleys that flank the organic farming area of Luddesdown. This walk is another tribute to the Adventurous Walks books and follows a roughly similar route to one of them.

Three good pubs are present along the route but please note only the Golden Lion in Luddesdown is open on Mondays.

There are just a few small patches of nettles, easily avoided. Boots are best if only because of the one-mile stretch along the byway up to Holly Hill. It should also be fine for your dog and he will be pampered in the pubs.

The walk begins at the village of **Birling, postcode ME19 5JW**. There is a large car park behind the church down a dirt track at the side. For more details, see at the end of this text (⇒ Getting There).
The Walk

Birling Church of All Saints, built in the 1300s, is visible from all around because of its tower and its position on a mound above the village. Inside, the most remarkable part is the Nevill's chancel, painted in medieval colours and with ceiling beams slanted, it is said, in imitation of the slant of Jesus' head on the Cross. The Nevills have owned – and still own – a large part of Birling since the Manor came into the family by marriage in 1435. (See also "A Way Through the Rocks", another walk on this website.) They originally came to England with the Conqueror and took the title Marquesses of Abergavenny. Their most famous son was Richard Nevill, Earl of Warwick, who became known as "the Kingmaker" when his nephew emerged after the War of the Roses as King Edward IV. Birling Manor was built by one of the Nevills in the 1830s but burned down in 1917. The village inn (of which more at the finish) also bears their name. Margaret Collins' book "Birling, A Backward Glance" gives a memorable portrait of the village and its characters, including the Hon Rev E.V. Bligh, vicar of Birling, who sold the "Birling Cure for rabies" at 3s 6d a bottle, put out of business by Louis Pasteur's more scientific anti-rabies vaccine in 1864.

Leg 1: Birling to Trottiscliffe  (4 km=2½ miles)

1 Leave the carpark via the entrance road and turn left. You soon pass the Nevill Bull pub, heading in the direction of Ryarsh, as given by the signpost, and continue uphill passing, on your right, Frindale Cottage, as well as other charming houses. After 650m in total, opposite the last house Charlton House, go right at a footpath sign up a bank and through a small metal gate. Go diagonally left across a small pasture and through a wooden gate, then along the left-hand side of a pasture. Go over a stile in the far right-hand corner and along the right-hand side of a hayfield. As you reach the corner, continue across the centre. The path now takes you through a new kissing gate, along an enclosed path and along the left-hand side of a crop field. When you reach a garden fence, ignore a path on the right and follow the track out to a lane. Turn right on the lane.

2 The lane immediately bends left. Avoid footpaths on the right at the bend and later on the left and stay on the lane all the way to a T-junction with Park Farm Road. Go straight ahead through a swing-gate into woods whose enveloping dark immediately makes a strong contrast with the earlier terrain. The path goes over two wooden bridges, past an unneeded stile and onto a grassy path. The path meets a crossing track where it zigzags right-left into luscious open mixed woodland. Continue straight ahead, ignoring the wide farm track on your left. The path finally exits the wood through a modern kissing gate to run beside a fence on the right with great views of the North Downs. This very wide grassy path takes you between
pastures and through another modern kissing gate. Keep right here, joining the Wealdway which comes in from your left. The Wealdway is a long-distance path running from Gravesend on the Thames Estuary to near Eastbourne.

3 In just 30m, you come to a wide opening. Turn right here onto a narrow path and, where you reach a concrete track a short distance ahead, turn slightly right and continue along this concrete track. Soon on your left is a stile leading to the Coldrum Stones. You can go over this stile, all the way round the site and down the other side and over a stile to rejoin the track.

Coldrum Longbarrow is the best-preserved megalithic longbarrow in Kent. The name may be derived from the old Celtic word "Galdrum" meaning "place of enchantments". The 3000-year-old burial chamber is the only one in the Medway Valley to be virtually intact. It measures 30m x 18m and comprises a circle of fifteen sarsen stones on a raised earth bank. During an excavation in the early 1900s, the bones of twenty-two people were discovered. To the west, the remains of the ancient field systems can still be seen.

Where the track bends right, leave it be continuing ahead on a path. At a post with coloured arrows, turn left uphill and go along the left-hand side of a field. The path goes through bushes, joins a drive, passes the Coldrum visitors' car park and comes out to a lane by bungalows. Cross straight over the lane to a path across the field heading for Trottiscliffe church whose tower is just visible in the dip. At the end, go down by a fence to a lane and turn right to the church. (The village is about 1 km away, down the footpath to the left and along the road. It has two pubs, the florid George at the end of School Lane and the Plough which boasts "great food" and entries in the Good Beer Guide. But the distance and the fact that this is early in the walk probably rule out such a diversion.)

Trottiscliffe church, dedicated to St. Peter & St. Paul, is in a memorable spot, by the North Downs and the Pilgrims Way. The village is pronounced "Trosley" and is sometimes incorrectly written the same way as the Country Park.

Leg 2: Trottiscliffe to Harvel (4 km=2½ miles) See map overleaf

1 Go straight ahead through gates, ignoring a footpath left, and through farm buildings. Before the last barn, turn right towards two large fields, heading for the North Downs visible invitingly ahead. Eventually, follow a (rather overgrown) enclosed path between hedges, leading out via a drive to a lane. Go up steps immediately opposite. Go through the swing-gate ahead and up onto the open hillside. You are now in Trosley Country Park, run by Kent CC, a historic grazing area and now a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) because of its rich wildlife.

2 The route here is designed to give you a nice gentle ascent: there are more direct and steeper ways! Almost immediately, turn right at a marker post with a yellow arrow onto a level path across the open downland. As a check, this path runs roughly 10m parallel to the wires on your right. As you near the end of the path, go down through a swing-gate next to a large metal gate. Turn here very sharp left, through another swing-gate, almost doubling back. This path is marked with a sign for the B Walk. Ignore minor paths right and stay on the path with a fence on your left. (Note that you are walking parallel to an older sunken trackway on your right.) The path climbs steeply. Eventually it goes through a swing-gate and finally the gradient
gets easier with fine views. Just before a graffiti-covered ruin, turn right through a metal kissing gate, up some steps and through yew trees. At a fork, bear right and go up more shallow steps to meet a wide level crossing track. This is the North Downs Way (NDW), a long-distance trail running from Farnham to Dover. Turn right on the NDW, also marked as the Red or C Walk.

3 After 500m, you will notice two marker posts on your left, one of them indicating the Red Walk. Turn left here, up some steps, thus leaving the broad NDW. Soon the path comes out into a kind of open scrubland. Follow the path until you meet a wide crossing path by more posts. Turn right on this path, thus leaving the Red Walk. Shortly go by a metal one-bar gate and turn left on a wide rutted major track, which is incidentally marked as on the A Walk. You pass Erskine Road, a residential road on your left. Just 30m after, turn right at a signpost onto a footpath into the woods. Don't miss this turn! Don't take the path that runs close to the fence but take the path that veers left a fraction away from the fence. [2014-16: with so many awkward fallen trees, you need to keep your eyes peeled so you don’t miss a turning.] In a short distance, the path meets a semi-tarmac path. Veer left on this path. The path soon bends right. 100m after the bend you reach a very narrow and overgrown path which meets you from the left. Turn left here. (Don't miss this turning!). At the end of the path, go over a track and a stile opposite into the playing fields of Vigo RFC.

4 Cross the fields diagonally (or round two sides if there is a match in progress) to an unneeded stile in the far corner, and out to a road. Turn right on the road, soon reaching the delectable thatched Swanswood Farm, a grade II listed building. Almost immediately, turn left at a signpost onto a footpath through trees. The path leads out to a field and goes across the centre. At the corner by a marker post, bear left along the right-hand side of the field. The field edge bends slightly left and, 30m later, go through a metal gate on your right. [Jan 2020: a walker was mudbound due to rain and stomping cattle and suggests you ignore the gate on the right and continue on the left-hand side of the fence to reach Harvel Lane and turn right on it, continuing as below.] Your route is diagonally on a faint path across the pasture, aiming for a large metal gate in the far left corner. (There are two fields before the farm with the tall white silo. At the time of writing, the more distant field is a sheep pasture. Be sure to aim for the far corner of the first field where there is a small house. This is far to the left of the farm buildings.) Turn right along the quiet Harvel Lane passing the pleasant timbered Barncote and a farm shop, and ignoring footpaths on the left. Continue to a T-junction in front of the Amazon and Tiger pub. Welcome to Harvel!

The "Amazon and Tiger" is the beating heart of Harvel village, so when you enter you really become one of the villagers for a time. The name came from the 1500s when the pub was in the adjoining timbered building. The landlord was a fearful man and was called the "tiger" but his wife was respected and was referred to as the "amazon". This very friendly free house welcomes dogs, has a garden and offers four real ales and B&B. You may arrive when the Harvel Hash
House Harriers have a meet. They are a drinking club who also run cross-country from one pub to the next, but based at the “A&T”. Each hash has a special dress code: one weekend it might be red full-length cotton dresses.

Leg 3: Harvel to Luddesdown  (5 km=3 miles)

1 Turn right on the lane in front of the pub, going past some more attractive timbered buildings. By a sunken duckpond, turn left on a lane signposted Luddesdown. Soon, on the left, is an unusual house with a series of flint oasts that have been reshaped to points. After nearly 300m on the lane, just after a metal gate on the right, go left over a stile at a signpost. Go diagonally across the pasture, under wires, in the direction of the finger, to the far corner. Here, go through a small metal gate beside a larger one and keep right on a track. On entering a small meadow, keep right by the trees, go through a metal kissing gate and turn left down into the valley. At the bottom, do not go through the kissing gate ahead, but stay in the meadow and turn right along its long side. (Some walkers cut the corner.) Keep to the left-hand side of this long meadow along the contour as it curves gradually left with fine views. At the far end, go through a metal kissing gate and continue along the left-hand side of a large field, ignoring the farm track which soon turns left. Walk straight ahead to the far corner. Turn left here onto a farm track and, in just 5m, turn right on a very indistinct path that runs between trees soon continuing along the left-hand side of the next field. In the far corner, go through a metal kissing gate into woodland and follow the path down to a lane.

2 Cross the lane to a stony track opposite, uphill. In 60m, the track bends left. Leave the track here by taking a footpath sharp right downhill, leading to a clearing of wild flowers. Very soon, the path divides into two. Take the right-hand, i.e. lower and narrower path, leading through hawthorns with an old wire and wooden ranch fence on the left. The path winds through mixed forest, chiefly on the contour, and eventually rises up to a fence. Turn right at the fence, going through more woods. Soon the path goes through a wooden swing-gate into a small meadow. Keep straight ahead and through another swing-gate. The path now leads along the left-hand side of another flowery meadow sparsely sewn with ash trees. Go through another swing-gate into woods, walking alongside a new tall wooden fence. Soon you reach a post with yellow arrows.
Keep straight ahead, ignoring the right fork. Soon you reach another swing-gate and the path joins a stony drive which soon has a comfortable grassy strip in the middle. Where the drive bends left, leave it by going through a kissing gate into a large wild meadow. Take the right-hand of two paths leading across the meadow. Luddesdown church is now in view. You are in a high meadow with a valley on each side. The path exits in the far corner under a tall ash tree, through a new metal gate to a road. Turn left on the road. In under 100m, turn right at a stone marker through a metal kissing-gate onto a footpath and turn left along the left-hand side of a large field. Go over a stile with a yellow arrow and along the right-hand side of a pasture, then through a wooden swing-gate and along the right-hand side of the next field. At the end of the field, turn left with the track and right at the next corner. Go through a new metal kissing-gate and down steps to a lane next to the welcome board for Luddesdown church. Turn sharp right and right again on a track leading round to the church.

Luddesdown's small church of St Peter and St Paul was built in the 1200s during the reign of the pious king Henry III. It is especially well-known for its magnificent Victorian wall paintings but it still contains several relics of its birth in medieval times. The church is now open Saturday afternoons but, rather perversely, closed on Sundays.

Go round to the side entrance and, hopefully having visited the church, go through the small wooden gate opposite the entrance onto a track where you can view several characteristic buildings of this community. Turn left on the cobbled path and left again and exit the way you came, going between the stone gate posts.

Luddesdown (pronounced "Ludsd'n") is a rather scattered parish. The “upper” village is dominated by the church and by the Organic Farm which practically surrounds it. The crop fields here use only natural fertilizer and they are allowed to “rest” while clover grows as a “green” fertilizer. Simmental, Aberdeen Angus and Beef Shorthorn breeds are used for organic beef and there is also pork and chicken. Many nearby households receive the Luddesdown weekly organic vegetable box. Lower Luddesdown is a short distance away and contains the pub and scattered houses. In Saxon times, the name was written “Hludes duna” meaning "Hlud’s hill".

**Decision point.** If you do not need refreshment and would like to skip the pub, turn right immediately after the stone gates past a noticeboard onto an enclosed woodland path; follow the path downhill, exiting through a wooden swing gate into a field. Turn left. After about 30m, turn left through another wooden swing-gate and re-join the enclosed path as it goes uphill. When you emerge into a field, turn right; now continue from the next leg of this walk.

Continue ahead back to the road junction and follow the lane downhill. Go past the Old Rectory and some isolated houses, eventually reaching the Golden Lion pub. This is a no-nonsense locals' pub offering a welcome rest, drinks such as T.E.A., and some basic cooked food; there is a garden with birdsong or the bar and nice eating area with Radio 1. Just after the pub, turn right, signposted Great Buckland. Ignore a turning left and continue round to the right, uphill. Just after reaching the top, fork right on a footpath. (Take care not to miss this turning as the signpost is hidden behind a bush.) The path goes along the left-hand side, across the middle and along the right-hand side of the same field, where young vines are now being grown, with some red poppies visible in summer.

Here the shortcut rejoins the main walk.
Leg 4: Luddesdown to Birling  (7½ km=5 miles)

1  Ignore a path running diagonally left across
the field.  20m later, at a post, ignore a
footpath right and continue ahead along the
right-hand side of a large field, down into a
shallow valley and up again. Finally, at the
end, go out through a gap by a metal gate
to a lane. Cross the lane over to a track
opposite marked as a byway. This rough
track climbs steadily for some distance. At
the top, you meet a field on the left. (If you
encounter mud on this part of the track, this is
due mainly to 4x4s that occasionally use it and
leave their indelible mark. Rest assured that
this mud will soon clear.) After a while, the
track forks. Turn right here. The track
bends right, then sharp left under high-
tension lines. After another short distance
you reach a post with several coloured
arrows. Keep straight ahead here. You
have rejoined the North Downs Way.
There is more mud now, but again this will
clear. Eventually, you come to a T-junction.
Veer left on a track slightly uphill which
morphs into a tarmac lane. This is Holly
Hill and the House is on your left.

2  Pass footpaths on either side and a small house and meet the drive coming
from Holly Hill House. You now have fine views north east towards
Rochester. On the right is the Holly Hill open space. Soon, you pass Holly
Hill car park on the right. Stay on this quiet lane for some distance until
eventually you reach a T-junction with Birling Hill and White Horse Road.
Cross straight over to a footpath opposite, through a new metal kissing
gate. Immediately, you go over a crossing path. It is worth pausing here to
step first to the left and then to the right to admire some magnificent views
in two different directions. After possibly taking in the views, keep ahead
downhill on a path between bushes. This path becomes quite steep and
care may be needed in damp conditions. The path bends to the right at the
bottom of the hill, with a field on your left, and shortly turns left to go
between two fields  Cross a track by a post with arrows, thus leaving the
NDW and continue through a new metal kissing gate.

3  You are on a pleasant grassy path along the left-hand side of a field.
Birling church, your final destination, is visible ahead. At the end of the
field, go over a concrete track and continue on another grassy path
between a fence and a hedge. Cross a farm track and continue along the
right-hand side of a field. A footpath joins from the right. The path passes
a house and converted barn. Go through a metal kissing gate and along
the right-hand side of a meadow, then through a metal kissing gate on the
right and down steps to the church in Birling where the walk began.

For final refreshments, the Nevill Bull serves freshly-cooked (no “Ping!”) food
every day, including a hog roast on Sundays, as well as three brews that have
put them in the 2014 CAMRA Good Beer Guide. This traditional and quirky pub
changed its name from the “Bull” to the “Nevill Bull” in 1953 in memory of
Michael Nevill who was killed in the Second World War. Lt Nevill was serving in Africa with the 1st Battalion Scots Guards when he died on 28th April and he is buried in Massicault War Cemetery. Alternatively, if you have a car, it may be worth driving half a mile to the "Duke of Wellington" in Ryarsh, a friendly open-style pub that serves four real ales.

Getting there

By car: Birling is near exit 4 of the M20. Follow the A228 south signposted Tonbridge, West Malling, but only as far as the first big roundabout. Leave the A228 here by going one exit further to a sign for Birling. Turn right a few metres to the church when you reach the village.

By bus/train: bus 58 from Maidstone station. Check the timetables.

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