



Meopham Green, Stansted and the Sweet Mile Ridley, Fairseat, Hodsoll Street

Distance: 14½ km=9 miles or 9½ km=6 miles easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Kent

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Refreshments: Stansted, Hodsoll Street, Meopham Green

Map: Explorer 148 (Maidstone) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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Windmill, open meadows, woodland, villages, quiet lanes, bluebells in spring

In Brief

Of course, there are really *nine* sweet miles on this walk, but the particular section referred to is between Stanstead and Fairseat, where little patches of woodland alternate with small grassy meadows. What makes this walk so comfortable for the more seasoned walkers are the many metal kissing-gates along the route, with correspondingly very few wooden stiles (a big cheer for Kent C.C. – other counties, please note!) Despite the glorious varied and undulating country, you will meet few people on this walk, making it a well-hidden secret.

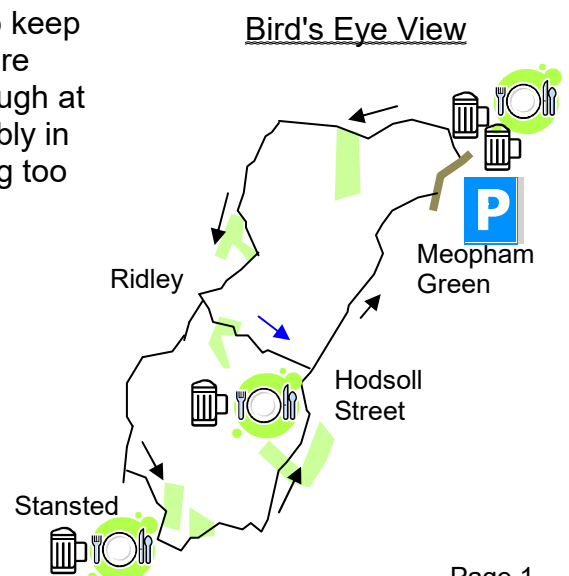


You will encounter two perfect country inns along the route, as well as a choice at the start and finish. In case you need further details or a booking: for the *Black Horse* at Stansted, ring 01732-822355; for the *Green Man* at Hodsoll Street, ring 01732-823575. The *Green Man* is the only inn that is open on **Mondays**.



There were no nettles or brambles when this route was walked in a dry April, but in high summer it is wise to keep your legs covered because of undergrowth. Boots are recommended because of the woodland trails, although at the time of writing it could have been done comfortably in trainers. This walk would be a good one for your dog too because of the predominance of metal gates.

The walk begins at **Meopham Green**, Kent, postcode **DA13 0QA**, near the Windmill. There is plenty of parking space around the Green. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

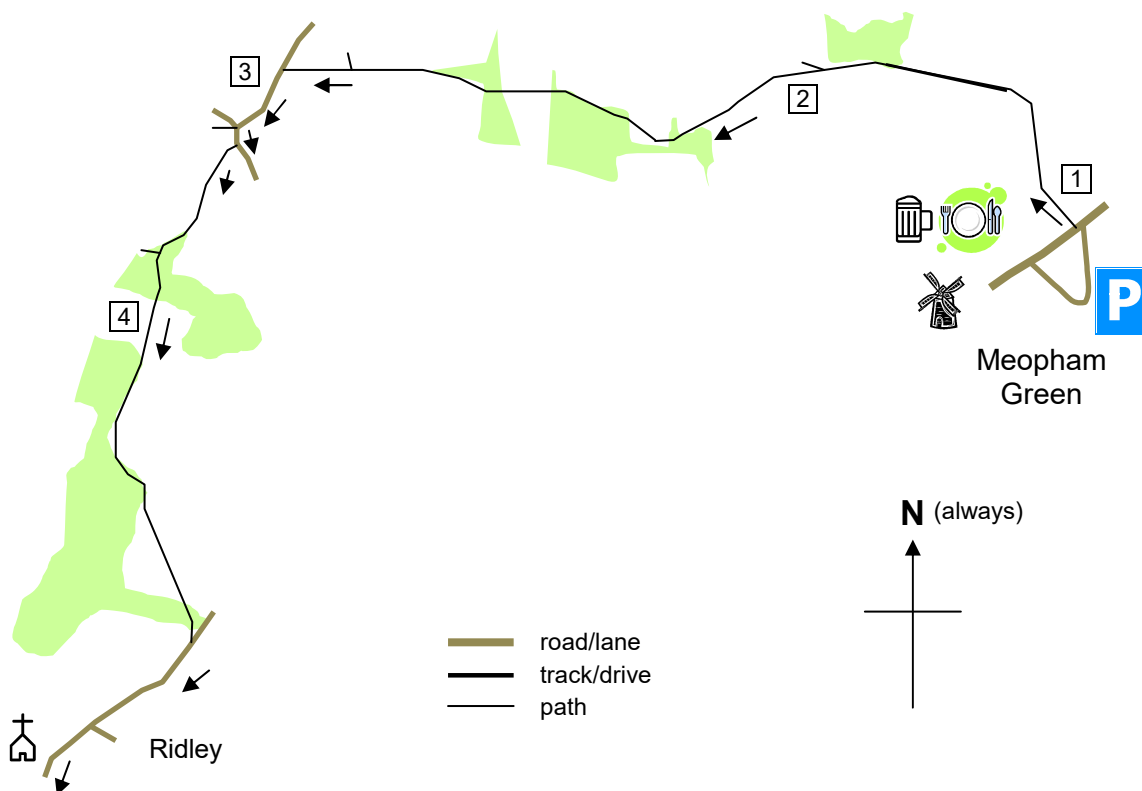


The Walk

Leg 1: Meopham Green to Ridley 4¾ km=3 miles

Meopham has been spelt "Mepham" and this is how it is pronounced, or you will risk ripples of laughter from the inhabitants. Meapa, whose village it was, probably came from Jutland (compare the "East Meon" walk in Hampshire). The village was known as early as 788 during the reign of Offa, King of Mercia. Being on a high spot, Meopham made its living from milling and the current Windmill is the last remaining of at least eight. The mill is properly known as "Killick's Mill" from the family that ran it in the 1800s. It is a typical smock mill with a hexagonal upper storey above an external floor. It is now owned by Kent C.C. and is used as HQ by the village council. Present-day inhabitants of Meopham include the great theatrical maestro Sir Michael Gambon.

Meopham Green is blessed with two pubs. The "Kings Arms" is now mainly a restaurant with a good line in tapas. The "Cricketers Inn" is a pub/restaurant which also serves ciabattas and sandwiches.



- 1 Walk along the main road, or across the green, with the windmill and the *Cricketers Inn* on your left, until you reach the far corner of the green. Just before the war memorial, turn **left** at a footpath sign on a path which runs beside a little green and between a fence and a wall. At the end, go through a small metal gate into a large grassy meadow. Take a diagonal path to the opposite corner. Go through a modern kissing-gate and bear **left** on a track that runs between two meadows with a dividing fence on your right. At the far end, continue straight ahead with woodland on your right. You come out into a hilly meadow with views of the Thames Estuary to your right. Avoid a path that forks right diagonally and stay on the left-hand side.

- 2 The track descends into a valley and ascends the other side, up the left-hand side of the meadow. You come through trees into another meadow. Bear **right** here to cut the left-hand corner, heading for the right-hand end of the wood ahead. Here, keep left beside the wood. In the next corner, the path descends through a metal gate into a crop field. Take a path straight down the centre of the field. At the other side, go up a bank over a (bypassable) stile and up into another crop field. Follow a path along the right-hand edge with a strip of woodland on your right. Ignore a stile in the fence half way along and continue over a stile to a tarmac lane, Idleigh Court Road. [Sep 2018: the stile was hard to see and reach; walkers climbed the metal gate.]

On certain Saturdays, you may hear an incessant roar coming from Brands Hatch, the famous racing circuit, which is three miles from here. The owners provide free entrance tickets to nearby residents to pacify them, although perhaps a free "awayday" ticket would be more appropriate!

- 3 Turn **left** on the lane to reach a T-junction with another lane, New Street Road, in 200m. Ignore some steps opposite* and turn **left** on the lane for only 50m. [* Sep 2018: some walkers recommend taking these steps: go through a kissing gate, diagonally **left** for 20m and **right** to join the route referred to.] Here, opposite a house, go **right** through a kissing-gate into a large sloping meadow. Follow the left-hand edge for 200m to reach a wide opening on your left. Avoid the opening and keep straight ahead downhill in the same direction, but on the **left** of a wire fence. This path takes you down to a kissing-gate leading into woodland. Follow a narrow path through this charming little wood and, in 150m, ignore a kissing-gate on your right, keeping **left** on a path through the centre of the wood. At the other side of the wood, a kissing-gate leads you out into a landscape of undulating fields. Head straight down the centre, aiming for the left-hand corner of some woodland ahead.

- 4 Just to the left of a farm gate [Sep 2018: now missing, leaving only a gap], go through a kissing-gate and up the right-hand side of a pasture. In the top corner, ignore a wide track on the right and turn **left** along the top of the meadow. (Strictly, the official footpath cuts directly across diagonally and you can take this route instead, maybe making a choice to avoid livestock.) In 50m, ignore a metal gate on the right and continue to the next blunt corner (another 50m or so). Here you will find a metal kissing-gate taking you into a wide band of woodland. Another kissing-gate leads into a new meadow. Take a diagonal path across the meadow, heading for the **left** end of the woods ahead, passing a redbrick house with a small converted oast over to your left. A kissing-gate leads into trees and a metal gate takes you to a tarmac lane, Rectory Road. Turn **right** on the lane, passing the Old Rectory, ignoring a stile into the pasture on your left. You pass a side road on your left (Bunkers Hill) and, after a large farmyard, you reach the tiny village of Ridley with its little church.

Ridley has no village, so you haven't missed it, except for its little scattered collection of houses and this gem of a church, St Peter's, which always seems to be open. The window in the far wall is by Leonard Walker in remembrance of the artist Tom Hennell and his brothers. Hennell was engaged as an illustrator during WW2 to record country scenes in case of future war damage. The churchyard is also a Commonwealth war grave. The church draws visitors from outside the parish and you may see a billing for a harp recital. Opposite the church is the Ridley Angel, made from scrap. It unites three religions in a circle and a plaque at its base bears a light-hearted poem. Next to it is the thatched Bowdlers Well from 1810.

Continue along the lane, ignoring a stile and field on your left. Follow the road gently downhill for 300m, passing a house and woodland, till you see a signpost for a public bridleway. Turn sharp **left** on the bridleway. In only 70m, you will see a narrow path on your right leading down to a chain gate.

Decision point. If you are doing the shorter 9½ km=6 mile walk, omitting Stansted, skip to near the end of this guide and do the section called the **Hodsoll Express**. However, you will miss some of the prettiest landscape on this walk.

Leg 2: Ridley to Stansted 2¼ km=1½ miles

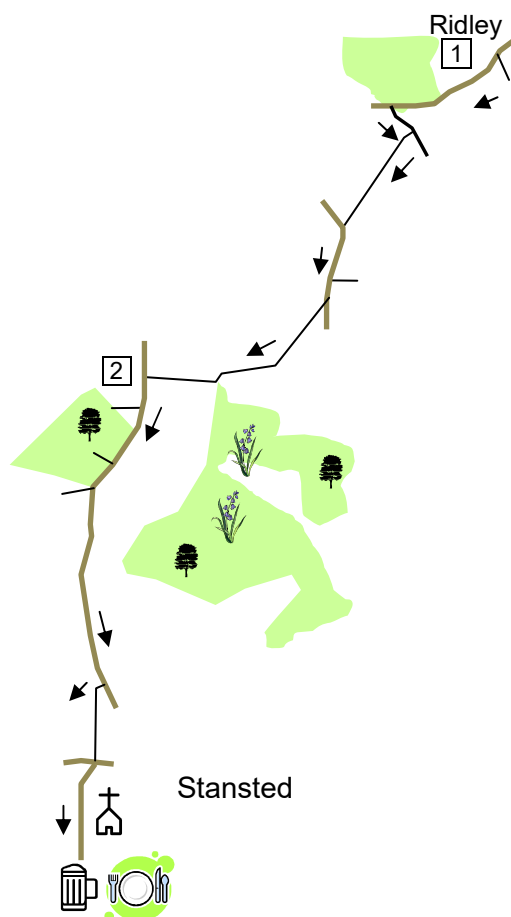
- 1 Turn **right** on the narrow path, through the chain gate, over a flimsy stile, onto a clear path across the centre of a crop field. After a stretch of grass, a redundant kissing-gate leads to a lane, Haven Hill. Turn **left** on the lane and follow it uphill. In 150m, just past a house, ignore a footpath on your left but, 50m later, go **right** up three steps and take a clear path across the centre of a crop field. As you reach the corner of a fence, your path elbows **right** to continue down the centre. It brings you to a kissing-gate roughly half way up the far side, leading into a sloping meadow. *The Wrotham Transmitter, from which you receive your BBC FM broadcasts, is visible on the hill in the distance.* Go **right** and walk straight down the hillside.



During bluebell time, there is a pleasant woodland excursion here. Instead of turning right down the hillside, turn immediately **left** on a woodland path. In 100m, where the path divides near a field on your left, take the **left** fork. In 100m, your path suddenly turns right. You reach a deep ravine on your right. Soon you see a metal kissing-gate on your left. Ignore the kissing-gate and turn **right** away from it on a public footpath. This path leads back into the meadow where you began. You need to turn **right** along the top and **left** at the other side (or cut the corner).

Your route is down towards a metal gate and a road, between a brown bungalow on your left and a light brown house on your right. Go through a kissing-gate here and turn **left** on the lane, Malthouse Road.

- 2 You have 750m to walk along this quiet lane to the outskirts of Stansted. You pass regardless steps and a stile on your right, followed by the *Old Malt House* from which the lane gets its name. On your right soon you pass some woodland. Ignore a footpath here on the right, followed by another just after the wood. As you pass the first house of Stansted, go **right** into a small parking area used for a sports pavilion and turn diagonally left up the grass, heading for the top corner, passing a children's play area. Go out through a small wooden gate at the top and cross a tarmac lane to Tumblefield Road opposite. On your left is an entrance to St Mary's Church (unfortunately usually closed) and on your right is the *Black Horse* inn.



Stansted (“Stone Place”) is Anglosaxon in origin. It was once confused by British Airways with the other Stansted (where the airport is) although, most importantly, **not** for the purpose of landing. On a lighter side, the Stansted Morris Men claim credit for a revival of that dance tradition as early as 1934. Stansted’s ancient church was rebuilt in the 1300s and restored by the Victorians in 1883.

The Black Horse is a large, recently refurbished, inn. The pub sign is a tribute to the cavalry rather than the animal itself. Inside, the good-sized restaurant provides pub classics as well as more adventurous dishes, with a roast on Sunday. Note that there is **no food here on a Monday**. As a freehouse, the inn serves a number of real ales.

Leg 3: Stansted to Hodsoll Street 4½ km=2¾ miles

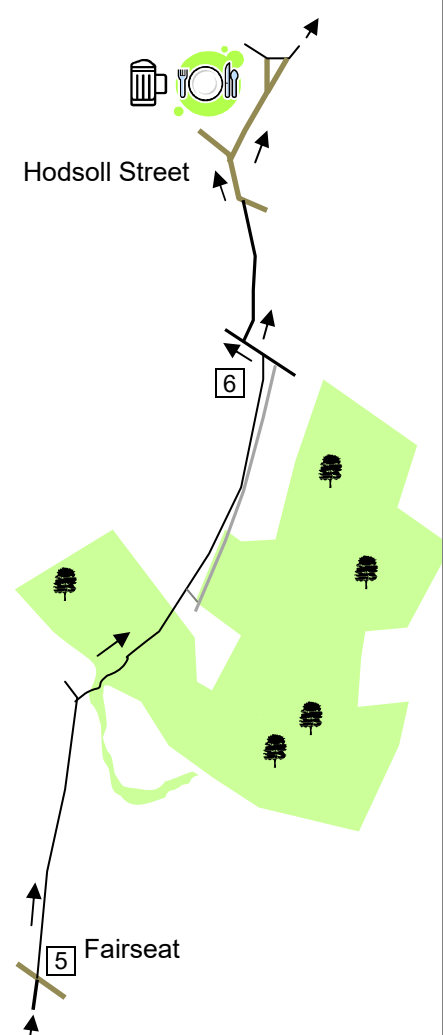


1 With the *Black Horse* on your right, continue along the lane, uphill past houses. In 200m, after a courtyard with maisonettes, turn **left** on a signposted footpath running down the side of a house. The path narrows to take you through a small kissing-gate. Keep ahead along the top of a long meadow. At the other side, go through a small metal kissing-gate and down steps through a band of woodland. You come through a kissing-gate into a crop field. Take a path diagonally **right** across the field. At the other side, go through a kissing-gate and straight up the grassy slope in the same direction on a faint path. Another kissing-gate leads you into Mingram Wood. *Mingram Wood is notable in late spring for its bluebells.*

2 The next two sections cover what the author named the “Sweet Mile” because of its alternating little woods and green meadows. Follow the woodland path for 250m where it leads you through trees between two meadows. You come through a small metal gate to approach *Coldharbour Farmhouse*, a delightful timbered house dating from the 1500s, Grade II listed. Turn **left** before the house, passing it on your right. Go past a line of trees on a lovely grassy space, heading for the far right-hand corner where there is a small unneeded metal gate. A band of trees leads into a sloping meadow. Keep to the right-hand side, leading into a dark band of thorn trees. Another kissing-gate brings you into a fine long sloping meadow, extending left and right. Cut straight across, up the other side, heading for a large metal gate. Turn **left** just before the gate and follow a level path with a wire fence on your right.

The path runs between brambles and takes you through a black kissing-gate into Wessells Wood, another haven for bluebells.

- 3 Carefully follow the path which snakes its way through the woodland and bears right to run close to a meadow where the path is quite constricted in places. After 100m beside the meadow, ignore a small metal gate on your right and stay on the path as it curves **left** into the wood again. This nice clear path takes you down through the best part of the wood and out through another black kissing-gate into a meadow. Go down the left-hand side and, where the edge bends left, keep straight on across the centre. You come through two small metal gates into another sloping pasture. Go straight ahead on a faint path, heading for a wide gap ahead.
- 4 The gap turns out to hold a large metal gate, which is usually open, with a kissing-gate available if needed. *Looking back here, you have an excellent view of Stansted Church.* Keep straight ahead on a grassy track to the next kissing-gate which you can see ahead. After this gate, turn **left** in the meadow as directed by a waymarker and turn **right** in the corner. In the next corner, turn **left** on a track to Court House Farm, via a small metal gate which is usually redundant because of an open farm gate. Go through a large metal gate and through the farmyard using their tarmac drive. You come out to a lane in the tiny village of Fairseat. *On your left before the road a lichgate leads to the Fairseat Chapel of the Holy Innocents, donated by one of the Waterlow family who resided in Fairseat.*
- 5 Cross over the lane, passing the pond on your right, and take a footpath on the other side. Go through a metal kissing-gate into a meadow. Veer left to approach a holly hedge and go through a kissing-gate in the corner. Now keep the same direction straight across the next meadow, heading for a gap in the line of trees. *You have another great view on your left to the Thames Estuary.* Still in the same direction, head across the next meadow for a kissing-gate which you can see on the edge of the wood ahead. Immediately you enter the wood, turn **right** and follow a path through the centre of the wood. You emerge in 150m into a large crop field. Keep straight ahead along the very generous grass verge on the right edge of the field. *In 100m, there is a plank bridge on your right from which you can turn left on a wide woodland path which becomes a bridleway between hedges. Unfortunately, this latter section is totally overgrown. If you want to try this option, it is possible to escape left through a hole in the hedge back onto the path.* Follow the field edge for 500m, heading for the modern steel barns of Pettings Court Farm.
- 6 When you reach the farm, go over a flimsy stile (one of the few on this walk) and turn **left** on a path, through the lesser of two metal gates, into the farmyard. In only 20m, go **right** through another similar gate on a farm track leading into the village of Hodsoll Street. Keep ahead on a tarmac lane and, where it curves left, turn **right** on another lane by a sign for the pub. Follow this lane, ignoring a footpath on the right, a short distance to the little green in the centre of the village, with the *Green Man* on the left.



Leg 4: Hodsoll Street to Meopham Green 3 km=1¾ miles

Hodsoll Street is one of the hamlets of Ash-cum-Ridley to the west. The Hodsolls were a family dating back to before the Normans. The name may be spelt "Hadsell" and is probably Norse in origin, meaning "head" ("chief") "seal" ("authority"). The historic charm is unchanged, with the white doves fluttering above Holywell Cottage, one of several houses around the green.

The "Green Man" is the pride of the village and a rare gem. Menus, both mains and specials, are written on slats which hang on the wall, and may be enjoyed in the back garden. Ales are typically Timothy Taylor, Harveys and Whitstable. The pub is open all day Fri, Sat, Sun, other days closed in afternoon.



1

After a breather and possible refreshment, cross the green opposite the pub and take a footpath beside *Holywell Cottage*, through a white gate. Note the tribute to the current Lord Hodsoll. In 40m, as you pass a large wooden gate, **ignore** a stone step and footpath sign on your right and go straight ahead into a large meadow. Stay on the left-hand side, rounding a fenced-off farm enclosure on your left. Now keep the same direction, cutting the left-hand corner, heading for a large metal gate in the hedge. Go through a kissing-gate here, cross a tarmac drive and go through a rather dilapidated old kissing-gate into a large horse pasture. Go diagonally **right** to a small stile in the fence opposite which may be hard to see at first. Go over the stile (with a strong insulating sleeve) and keep the same direction across the next horse pasture. Keep to the right of a muddy pond and head for a house with a red roof and two chimneys. At the far side, go out to a road junction.

Hodsoll Street



1

2

Cross straight over onto narrow New Street opposite. In only 50m, look **right** for a chain gate leading between storage units and round a new rather ungainly building belonging to Dittle House Farm, a great hacking centre. Follow the waymarker arrows attached to new gate posts or other fixtures through the yard to the corner of the paddock and another chain gate. Cross a track, a fraction right, to another chain gate and go diagonally across the paddock to the far right corner. Come through yet another chain gate here (this time avoidable) and continue under hollies to a kissing-gate. In the next meadow, follow a line that diverges a little from the left-hand side to reach another kissing-gate. Go across another meadow (used as a playing field) to go over a stile on the far side to a major junction of paths.

3

You have reached the start of Ifield Road, an old byway, still the preserve of farm wagons and horses. Ignore a stile on your right and a track on your left and cross straight over on this wide track. (You will notice a stone sign indicating *Meopham*.) This leafy sheltered country highway will lead you direct to Meopham in just over 1 km. In about ½ km, it makes a definite right bend, going past sheep fields and through woodland glades. It becomes rather rutted as you pass West Lodge Farm, running uphill. It is

Meopham Green



Ifield
"Road"



3

2

surfaced as you pass the first house. Ignore a track on your left as you near the houses of Meopham Green with the Windmill visible. At the main road, turn **left**, quickly reaching the Green where the walk began.

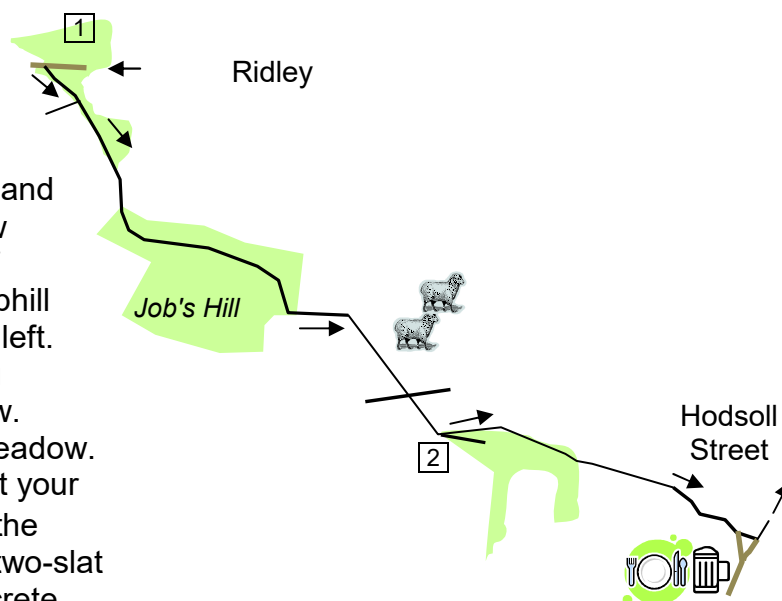
Hodsoll Express 1½ km=1 mile

Take this route if you are doing the shorter (9½ km=6 mile) version of the walk, omitting Stansted.

- 1 Ignore the narrow path on the right and stay on the bridleway. You are now entering the wonderful woodland of Job's Hill. Your path curves right uphill as it meets a path coming from the left. It turns left at the top and takes you through a metal gate into a meadow. Take a diagonal path across the meadow. On your left is a long box-hedge but your target is about 40m to the right* of the hedge where you will soon meet a two-slat wooden fence which shields a concrete drive. [* Sep 2018: some walkers found it much easier and simpler to keep straight on, over the concrete drive, and forward on the wide path between the long box-hedge (on the left) and the two-slat fence (on the right) for about 30m, until the kissing-gate referred to at the end was reached.] Here you will see a small metal gate (in a rather muddy patch where horses tend to gather). Go through the gate, across the drive and through another gate. Cross the next pasture to the far left-hand corner and go through a kissing-gate.

- 2 Immediately go through a second kissing-gate, ignoring a fenced path on its right, and follow the right-hand edge of a meadow. In 100m or so, ignore a stile on the right and stay in the meadow, going down over a stile into another meadow. Keep the same direction but veer a little away from the right-hand edge to aim for a cedar and willow where there is a large wooden gate. Go through the gate to join a tarmac drive and follow it past sheds and cottages, soon reaching the little green in Hodsoll Street, with the *Green Man* on your right.

Now re-join the main walk at Leg 4.



Getting there

By car: coming from the M25 (south west), take the **right** filter as you approach Sevenoaks onto the **M26**. After nearly 8 miles on the M26, look for a turnoff for **Wrotham, Paddock Wood, Gravesend** (exit 2a). Follow signs for **Gravesend** (A227), going over several roundabouts, including one after you cross the M25. Meopham Green is another 4 miles after this last roundabout. It is completely unmistakable because of the famous Windmill. Immediately after the Windmill, turn right and park in any suitable spot around the Green.

You can also come from the north/east and the **M20**, turning off as for **Gravesend**. Or you can take the **M2** to Gravesend and turn off as for Meopham, approaching Meopham Green from the north (with the windmill on your right).

By bus/train: Meopham Station is a good 2 miles from the walk, but the 306/308 bus will take you from there to Meopham Green (not Sun). It also runs from Gravesend Station. Check the timetables.

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