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## Speldhurst

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Distance: 11 km=7½ miles

moderate walking with easier sections

Region: Kent

Date written: 18-apr-2016

Author: Malinovka

Last update: 26-aug-2021

Refreshments: Speldhurst

Map: Explorer 147 (Tonbridge) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

*Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*Village, woodland, [bluebells in spring](#), views, green meadows*

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### In Brief

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Speldhurst is a Kentish spa town, even older than neighbouring Tunbridge Wells, surrounded on all sides by perfect undulating country, with a maze of tantalising footpaths to explore. This walk takes a winding course through stream valleys with some long stretches in woodland. This walk is one of the best for bluebells, generally at their best in late April. At other times, there are summer colours and autumn shades. Walkers report wild garlic, nuthatches and an occasional goldcrest. At the start and finish, there is one of West Kent's best pubs (to enquire at the *George and Dragon*, ring 01892-863125).

Because this route avoids farmland, there are no nettles and very little scratchy undergrowth. In April and May, you will encounter some mud in the early stages but it can generally be avoided easily by keeping to the margins or finding paths through the trees. For this reason, boots are recommended. Your dog can take part in this adventure as all the stiles have either a gap or a raisable doggy gate.



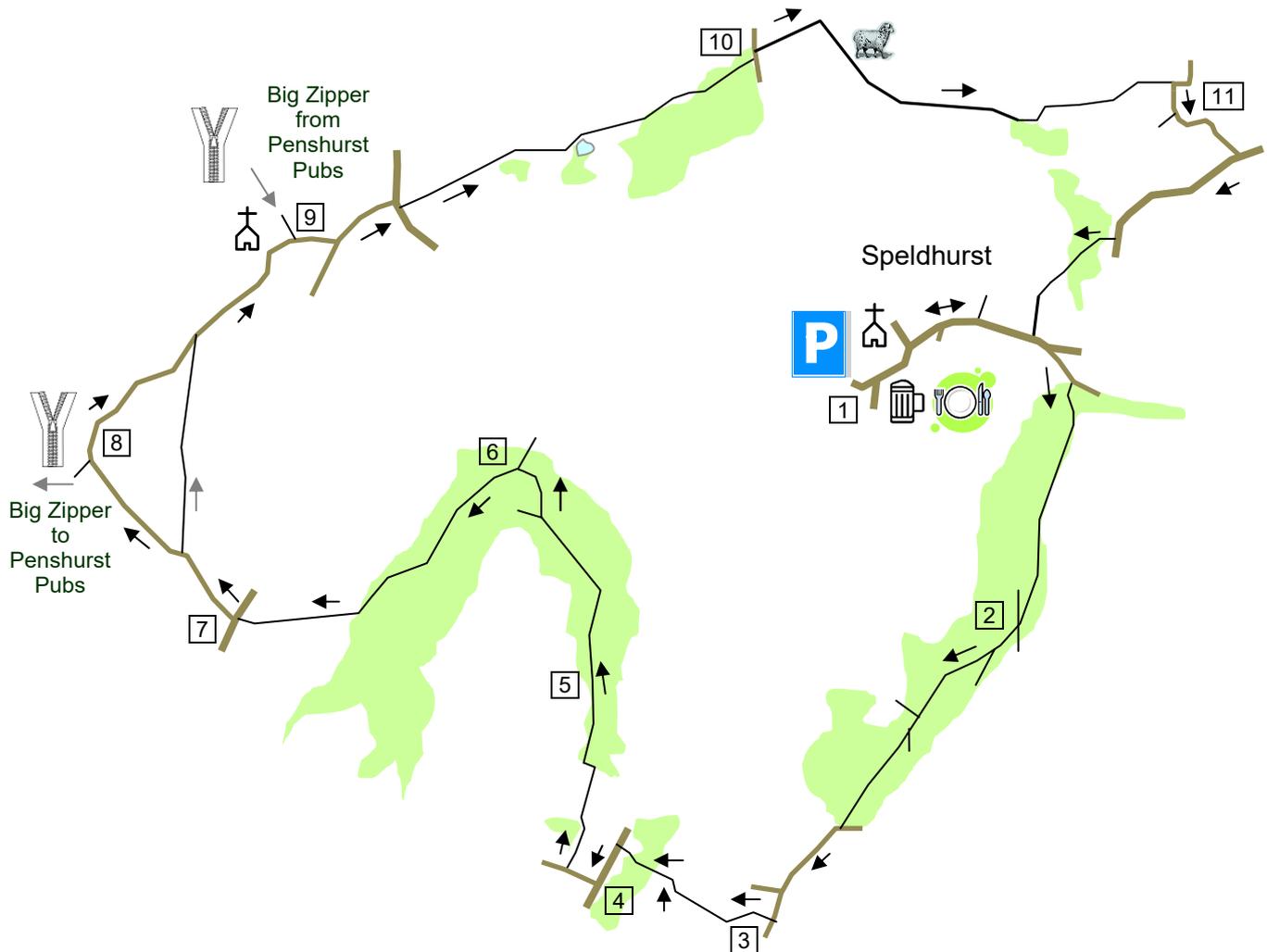
For a longer (10 miles=16 km) walk with two more excellent pubs, this walk can be zipped up with the adjoining *Penshurst Pubs* walk. Zip points will be found at all the relevant junctions.

The walk begins in the village of Speldhurst, near Tunbridge Wells, Kent, postcode **TN3 0NN**. Park on the roadside, such as in Langton Road by the school, or further up Penshurst Road in a side road or in Wallers, a cul-de-sac half way up Speldhurst Hill on the left (postcode **TN3 0NH**). You could also park at any intermediate point on the walk with a mid-journey break in Speldhurst. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

## The Walk

Welcome to Speldhurst Spa! The “spa” goes back to 1606, when Lord North tasted the water of a roadside spring and was so impressed by the curative powers of its iron salts that the news spread through the Stuart court. A thousand years earlier, the Anglosaxons had named the village “Speldhurst” means roughly “slatted wooded hill”. The village sits on a vast slab of sandstone that spans the whole area stretching east and west into East Sussex. The sandstone pops up in places as you see on Speldhurst Hill. Famous local names start with Joan of Kent known as the Fair Maid of Kent for her legendary beauty. Later the Wallers were the main landowners and in 1412, during the Hundred Years War, Richard took charge of the young Charles, Duke of Orleans, one of the many French noblemen wounded in the Battle of Agincourt. Obviously his young hostage loved England as he stayed for 24 years and even contributed to the Wallers’ coat of arms. Charles returned home speaking better English than French, wrote five hundred poems and sired a future French king (Louis XII).

Speldhurst church has a woeful history, lasting from 1239 to 1791 when it was totally destroyed by fire from a lightning bolt. The new Gothic Revival church is famous for its Morris windows.



1 From the centre of Speldhurst, walk past the pub and church, down Speldhurst Hill. (If you like, you can go for part of the way through the churchyard parallel to the road and down steps at the end.) Avoid a junction on the left and continue down the hill, using the footway. Ignore two signposted footpaths on your left. Shortly after them, turn **right** on a lane, Lower Green Road. In 100m, turn **right** on a signposted bridleway. *If you come in late spring, you will now catch your first glimpse of the bluebells which will form a magnificent display for much of this walk. There may be some mud on this path after a wet season, but you will find dry margins and some drier narrow parallel paths on your left.*



2 Ignore a diagonal crossing path marked by yellow arrows. Shortly after, about 700m from the start of the bridleway, you reach a fork. Take the **right** fork, going past a wooden post [Aug 2021: grounded]. You now have a short boardwalk, whilst a stream runs audibly on your right, then a second boardwalk. Ignore a little bridge and footpath on your right and a path on your left, and continue straight on. About ½ km from the fork, your path takes you over a stile into a more open landscape with a horse pasture on your left. You now go over a wooden bridge followed by another stile and up the sloping green hillside. A stile takes you onto a lane: veer **right** on the lane to keep your direction. In 250m, ignore a road junction on your right. 30m after the junction, turn **right** over a stile onto a signed footpath.

3 The footpath leads you down and over a stream by a footbridge with those annoying horizontal bars. You come out into an attractive meadow. Go straight up the centre to the brow of the hill and then continue upwards, keeping to the right-hand edge of the meadow. As the field flattens out, continue with the field edge of trees and bushes on your right, as far as the right-hand corner where there is a wide gap in the hedge. Go **right** through the gap into the adjoining meadow and bear **left** to take an unclear path straight across the narrowest part of the meadow. *(Care! some walkers go wrong here.)* Aim for a gap in the trees on the opposite side. Here you will find a broad path which leads through a wide band of trees and out into a smaller meadow. Veer **right** and **left** through a rather muddy section to a stile, leading out to a road.

4 Turn **left** on the road and, in 100m, turn **right** on a lane, Leggs Lane. In 100m, turn **right** through a new black metal gate, set back from the path, onto a footpath. *This path is part of the High Weald Landscape Trail, a long-distance path running from Horsham to Rye.* Your path goes over a plank bridge into a new tree plantation. Keep **left** along the edge. At a yellow arrow, your path goes left-right onto a path between fences, where you may have to straddle some mud in wetter seasons. Go over a stile, across a tarmac drive, then over a stump stile or through a gate slightly to the left behind a tree marked with a yellow sign. Follow the right-hand edge of the meadow for 200m as far as a marker post [May 2021: grounded].

5 Keep **right** at the marker post [Jan 2000: grounded] on a path into the woods. A stile (or a large metal gate) takes you onto a wide woodland path which in late spring has a fine show of bluebells. In nearly 300m, at a marker post, bear **left** where a path joins you from the right. The next marker post, 100m further on, directs you to fork left but you can also take the right fork (which may be drier) as both branches quickly join up again. At the next marker post, 150m further on, you meet a post with arrows pointing right on footpath WT75. Keep **right** here, avoiding a wide unmarked path on your left. *(This left-hand path runs along the left-hand side of the stream valley and a right fork after ½ km will take you across the stream to re-join the route.)* Continue down this rooty narrow path\* over a new plank bridge across a stream, amidst wild



garlic, and up steps. At the top, ignore a right turn towards a house and continue downhill. (\* If the path is muddy, take a newer walker-created less rooty parallel path slightly to the left.)

 **6** The path goes down steps, wheeling right, over the stream via a new bridge with a rail, up steeply over tree roots. You now ascend on a drier path in an area once more garlanded with bluebells. After 300m, keep to the main path as it forks right uphill. After a short climb, the path runs through woodland with a large meadow on your right. It emerges from the trees into another meadow. Take a path diagonally across the centre, through a new kissing-gate and diagonally across a smaller meadow. A new kissing-gate, a short earthy woodland stretch between two ponds and the remains of a stile take you to the road Poundsbridge Hill.

**7** Cross over the road and follow narrow quiet Coopers Lane, passing a footpath on the right after 200m or so. Walkers *not* going to the Penshurst pubs can take this footpath as an option in dry weather. It leads diagonally across three fields to re-join the lane. But this guide stays on the quiet lane because the fields were very claggy during research in April. Nearly 400m further on along the lane, just before a group of bungalows, you will see a track sharp on your left.

 **Decision point.** If you are doing Big Zipper walk to the Penshurst pubs, turn sharp **left** on this track and follow the Penshurst Pubs walk where indicated by the “zipper” sign. Some walkers compromise by taking this track down to the Medway and taking the footpath there, looping back to Poundsbridge.

**8** Continue on the lane, passing the grey wooden bungalows on a right bend, followed by an oast, a farm and some period houses. 300m after the houses, on your left is a track with a wooden gate leading into the churchyard of All Souls Chapel Poundsbridge, a worthy short diversion. *Although the chapel is usually closed, the cemetery garden here is a perfect place to rest on one of the to bench seats and take in the view. This “chapel of ease” serves as a kind of overflow for Penshurst churchyard which was overpopulated.*

 The Big Zipper walk from the Penshurst pubs joins here.

**9** Continue on the lane and shortly, at a T-junction with the lane Poundsbridge Hill, turn **left**. In 200m you come to a T-junction with a road and a the corner is a remarkable building.

*This oak timber-framed Poundsbridge Manor, known as “The Picture House”, was built in 1593 (the year Shakespeare began his sonnets) by John and Brian Durnall for their father William, Rector of Penshurst. It bears the inscription “1593 WD ETA 69” etched into stucco inside the beams, where the letter D looks like an inverted Q. “WD” are the initials of William Durnell. “ETA 69” shows his age (ETA is a mistake for “aet” i.e. “aetatis suae”). At one time the house was divided in two and one part became an inn. The same family firm who built it, R. Durnell & Sons, were still in business till June 2019 in Brasted (see the Brasted walk in this series) and when the house suffered bomb damage in WW2 they stepped in to repair it.*

Turn **right** on the road and, in 30m, go **left** up some steps, through a somewhat overgrown gap in the hedge, past a broken stile and up the right-hand side of a field, passing a reedy pond. Go over a chain gate, along the right-hand edge of a sloping meadow, then straight through a new metal gate. Continue beside a pond on your right, go over a stile and up the right-hand side of a field. Your path now goes down, over a small bridge and up again in the next meadow. Ahead are Bardenmill and Bardenmill Furnace Farms whilst on your right is Furzefield Wood. At the bottom, go past a broken stile,

follow a fenced-off path and continue ahead on a tarmac drive to the Barden Road. (Turning **right** here would lead you into Speldhurst in 1 km, but by a rather dull route.)

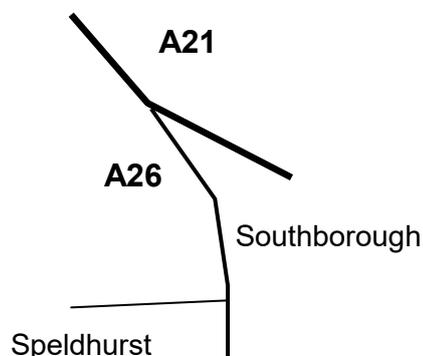
- 10 Turn **left** on the road and, in 25m, go **right** on a track past houses. Go over a stile and follow a concrete path which bends right into the verdant countryside. Your track takes you through a temporary gate (lift the blue rope latch), bends left-right over a stream and runs uphill with a large sheep pasture on your left. Soon Speldhurst, your next destination, is visible down to your right, but the closeness is deceptive. *Bidborough Windmill (now just a tower) is soon visible ahead to your left.* After the grey sheds of Scriventon, go over a concrete step stile, across a concrete yard and through a new metal gate into a meadow. Keep to the top right-hand side of the meadow for 100m to go through another new metal gate in the wire fence. Veer **left** on a path which wheels right to skirt the box-hedge garden of the house ahead and go over a stile to a lane, Frank's Hollow Road.
- 11 Turn **right** on the lane and follow it as it bends left, avoiding a footpath on your right (an alternative but rather contorted route into Speldhurst). At a T-junction turn **right** on Stockland Green Road. Follow the road for 400m, passing the drive for *Birchwood House* and reaching *Forge House*. Here, go through the entrance to the side of the black metal gates of the house, cross the driveway and down a narrow path (there is a stone public footpath marker on the ground, easily overlooked.) A redundant stile leads down through woodland. Go down steps, over a stile (or through a large metal gate) and take the metal fenced route through a new housing development. Continue past a large metal gate onto a tarmac lane, follow it to the main road, Speldhurst Hill. Turn **right** up the hill to reach the centre of the village where the walk began.



*For end-of-walk refreshments, the (dog-)friendly George and Dragon is one of the best foodie pubs in the region – and excellent for drink, being a Brakspear pub, a rarity in Kent. The tabled area outside is well spaced for these times. The menu is relatively adventurous, with much local sourcing. The G&D is supposedly the second oldest pub in the country, maybe a bit of hyperbole, but the honey-coloured stone, the locally sourced oak and the open fires seem to date from Tudor times.*

## Getting there

By car: Speldhurst is near Tunbridge Wells. If coming on the A21, come off at the A26 *Southboro Tun.Wells* exit. Follow the road through Southborough. Just after the centre, ignore one set of traffic lights, for the Industrial Centre on the left, and continue to the next set of traffic lights. You will see here a very small signpost pointing to Speldhurst. Turn **right** here and follow the road for 1½ miles into Speldhurst. You can also come by a long scenic route through Edenbridge and Penshurst.



By bus/train: buses 282 and 285 run from Tunbridge Wells station to Speldhurst, not Sundays. Check the timetables.

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