



Markbeech

Distance: 8½ km=5½ miles

easy walking with short exertions

Region: Kent

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Refreshments: Markbeech, Hoath Corner

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

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Woodland, views, green meadows, bluebells in spring

In Brief

This is an easy circular walk from Markbeech and around the gentle countryside of this part of Kent, incorporating woodland and green meadows. *In bluebell time, there is an optional extension.* The *Kentish Horse* pub is located at the start/end and the *Rock* pub along the way. (To reserve at the *Rock*, ring 01892-870296; for the *Kentish Horse*, ring 01342-850493.)



? There are no nettles on this walk. In the drier seasons there is only a little mud near the start. But in wetter conditions you will need good boots. Your dog can also come on this adventure.



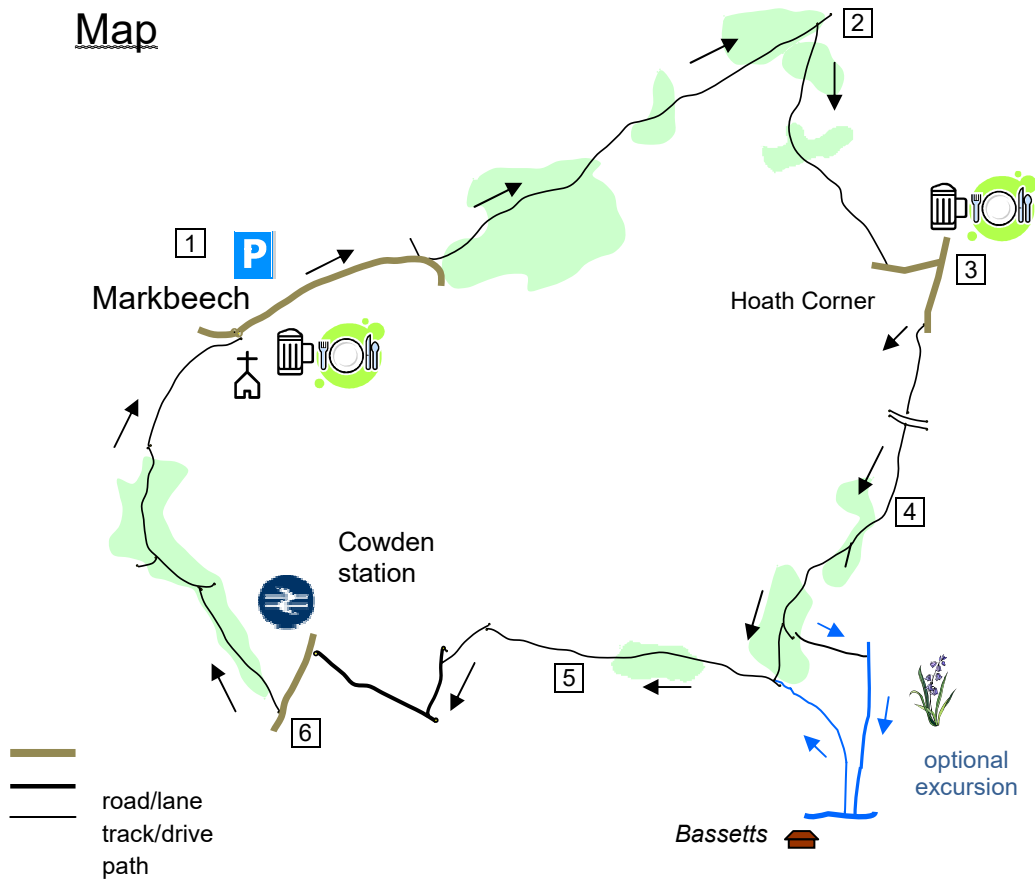
The walk begins in the centre of **Markbeech, Kent**, near Edenbridge, post-code **TN8 5NT**, www.w3w.co/weep.dish.codes. There is roadside parking but, provided that you will be a customer of the *Kentish Horse*, you can use its excellent large car park, with views of the countryside where you will be walking. You can also begin the walk at **Cowden Railway Station** (start at section 6). For more details see at the end of this text (→ Getting There).



The Walk

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. The church of the Holy Trinity was built in 1851, financed by the local Talbot family. Its ornate decoration testifies to its "Anglo-Catholic" style.

Map



- 1 Go **east** along the main road, signposted *Chiddingstone Hoath, Penshurst*, passing several distinctive houses. After 700m, where the main road bends sharp right at a junction, keep straight ahead by a metal gate onto a track into Newtye Hurst wood, a conservation area. *(If you find it muddy here, there's a dry path through the woods about 5m beyond the shallow ditch to your left: but after one more patch, this walk is generally dry.)* The woodland here is mixed, with some coppice. Note the Wendy House as you pass. Your path narrows as it has pasture on either side, passes a metal gate and widens again to become an irregular farm track, crossing another track along the way. At the last open field, with a line of pines ahead, your path goes straight across the centre, passes a 2-arm fingerpost and heads for a metal gate on the edge of the trees. The gate leads you into Stock Wood, another conservation area, with silver birch, first on the left and then on both sides. Over 300m into the wood, you come to a waymarker post with yellow arrows [Apr 2024; grounded in the middle of the path and easy to miss!] Turn sharp **right** here. *(Don't miss this turn: if you reach a gate with a yellow arrow on a post, you have gone too far!)*
- 2 Your path is now much narrower, winding its way through the birch wood. When you reach a large grassy meadow, continue straight ahead to the right-hand side of a jutting piece of woodland. The path goes down into the wood by a fingerpost with yellow arrows. When you reach a wire fence, your route ascends, slightly precariously, between a fence and a bank. The path now runs along the left-hand side of two landscaped meadows, with a pond and garden on your right, over a sturdy wooden bridge with a hand rail and past a pond further to the left. When it comes up to a road, turn **left**. At a T-junction of roads in Hoath Corner, your route is **right**. However, you may like to turn left briefly to visit *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".

- 3 The road goes between some interesting rock formations, common in this part of Kent. At the top, where the road comes out into the light, turn **right** on a track, passing a large metal gate and, in 20m, turn **left** across the centre of a field. At the end of the field, avoid a path left, go straight ahead through scrub and holly to a fence and turn **right** parallel to a private drive, down to a tarmac lane. Cross the lane directly, through a modern kissing gate, to a path opposite that runs along the left-hand side of a large pasture. Near the end, ignore a metal gate directly ahead and instead fork **right** through another kissing gate on a narrower high path into hollies. The path goes through another kissing gate into a large beautiful sloping meadow. *2023: a sign has been posted giving an alternative path which you can take in case you want to avoid cows and their calves; the text below describes the standard route.*
- 4 Steering round a cattle feeding station and possibly some slurry, keep to the **left** and go **left** over a stile in the new wire fence (*don't miss!*), then follow the edge of the meadow beside a recently-built fence line to go over a stile in the fence onto a narrow path. Go through a metal gate and follow a pleasant level woodland path through an area known as Birchcove Shaw. *In late spring, this area is dense with bluebells and wild garlic.* After 170m, you reach a fork in the path, with the right fork leading downhill. *If you would like to see more bluebells, with a quick visit to the immaculate timbered Bassetts, ignore the rest of this paragraph, skip to the end of this text and do the **Excursion with Bluebells**.* Leave the level path by forking **right** on a narrower path downhill. The path goes over a long wooden bridge and comes up to a stile. After the stile, turn **right** in a long grassy meadow.
- 5 After going through a wide gap, shift to the left-hand side of the next meadow and, at the end, go over a stile into woodland. *In spring the wood is thick on the ground with bluebells and there are several badger sets nearby from which the cubs sometimes emerge in the evening.* After the wood, you come out, via a stile, into more hilly pasture. Continue steeply up the middle of the meadow to go past a marker post near the top. Continue in the same direction using a metal gate, a narrow track for less than 5m and another metal gate as far as the border hedge. Bear **right** alongside the hedge for about 20m to locate a short metal 4-way fingerpost (sometimes obscured by summer undergrowth). Go through an old metal gate in the hedge and keep **left** across the next small meadow, heading to the left of some red tile-hung semi-detached cottages. Pass through a metal gate in a fence which is in line with the cottages and turn **left** on the stony track. At the bottom, at a fingerpost, turn **right** on a quiet lane, Wickens Lane. At the end, turn **left** on a main road. You pass two service roads for Cowden Station and go under a railway bridge.
- 6 Immediately after the railway bridge, at a fingerpost, turn **right** over a stile onto a footpath through thick woodland beside a stream. After 500m, ignore a path right, which incidentally passes over the entrance to the tunnel that runs under Markbeech (a "fantastic piece of Victorian construction" say visitors, worth a short detour). Keep straight on, soon



forking **right** uphill past a red tiled wooden building. *The quaint isolated cottage on your left looks top-heavy. Locals report that it is available for short rent.* Keep right on the good path through the dusky woods to approach a meadow after 100m or so. Go over a (somewhat hidden) nearby stile into the meadow (which may be a little squelchy at first). Go up the left-hand side and, after around 300m, turn **left** through a metal kissing-gate. Turn **right** to continue uphill along the right-hand side of a large meadow. On reaching a corner, continue ahead to Markbeech church, cross a track and go through a metal gate into the churchyard. Go out through the lichgate to the lane by the *Kentish Horse* pub where the walk began.



*The Kentish Horse in Cow Lane is a privately-owned friendly freehouse and the perfect place to lounge after a good walk, admiring the views from the garden or enjoying the traditional interior. Amongst the ales available are Harvey and the matchless Larkins, brewed two miles away in Chiddingstone. One huge benefit of the Kentish Horse is that it is **open every day** from 12 noon. Food is served Mon-Sat 12-2.30 and Sun 12-3, plus Tue-Sat evenings 6.30-9.30. For reservations, ring 01342-850493.*

Excursion with Bluebells

This is a short delightful extension, partly on a permissive rider's path, to see more of the spring colours of Birchcope Shaw with a visit to a remarkable timbered farm house.

Ignore the right fork and stay on the level path, passing a rock on your left. After more than 300m, dense with bluebells in late spring, you come to a T-junction with a wooden stable block on your left. Turn **right** on a permissive horse track. *This track is maintained by TROT, a charitable trust that provides off-road horseriding routes. It seems to be fully open to two-legged walkers too; if at any time in the future this route should be restricted, you will need to retrace your steps and take that right fork (i.e. sharp left).* After more than 400m through the woods, this track emerges, via a large wooden gate, to a lane in the hamlet of Bassetts. Turn **right** on the lane and, in 20m, turn **right** by a redundant stile on a signposted footpath. *First, however, you will want to go a few more metres to view the perfect Tudor barn and farmstead of Bassetts, the whole scene seemingly unchanged from the late 1500s when it was built.*

Having turned right as indicated, go along the right-hand side of a meadow, over a bridge and into woods. After the woods, go over a stile into a sloping meadow. Head straight up the grass, veering slightly right at the top on a faint track into the right-hand corner, passing rocks on your left. Keep going along this narrow part of the meadow. In 100m, ignore a stile over on the right by the edge of the forest. This stile is used by the main walk where comes in to join you in the meadow. Resume the walk now from section **5**.

Getting there

By car: park in the village. The village is signposted at a crossroads on the B2026, 3 miles south of Edenbridge.

By train: begin the walk at Cowden Station (section **6**).