Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

Bredhurst

Distance: 9 km=5¾ miles — easy walking

Region: Kent — Date written: 22-jul-2019

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Refreshments: Bredhurst

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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Village, long woodland trails, wide field paths, views, quiet lanes

In Brief

The Hurst which gives this “Broad Hurst” village its name is a vast forested space offering endless woodland adventures in one of Kent's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This walk gives you an introduction to these woods, including one or two further afield in the parish of Detling.

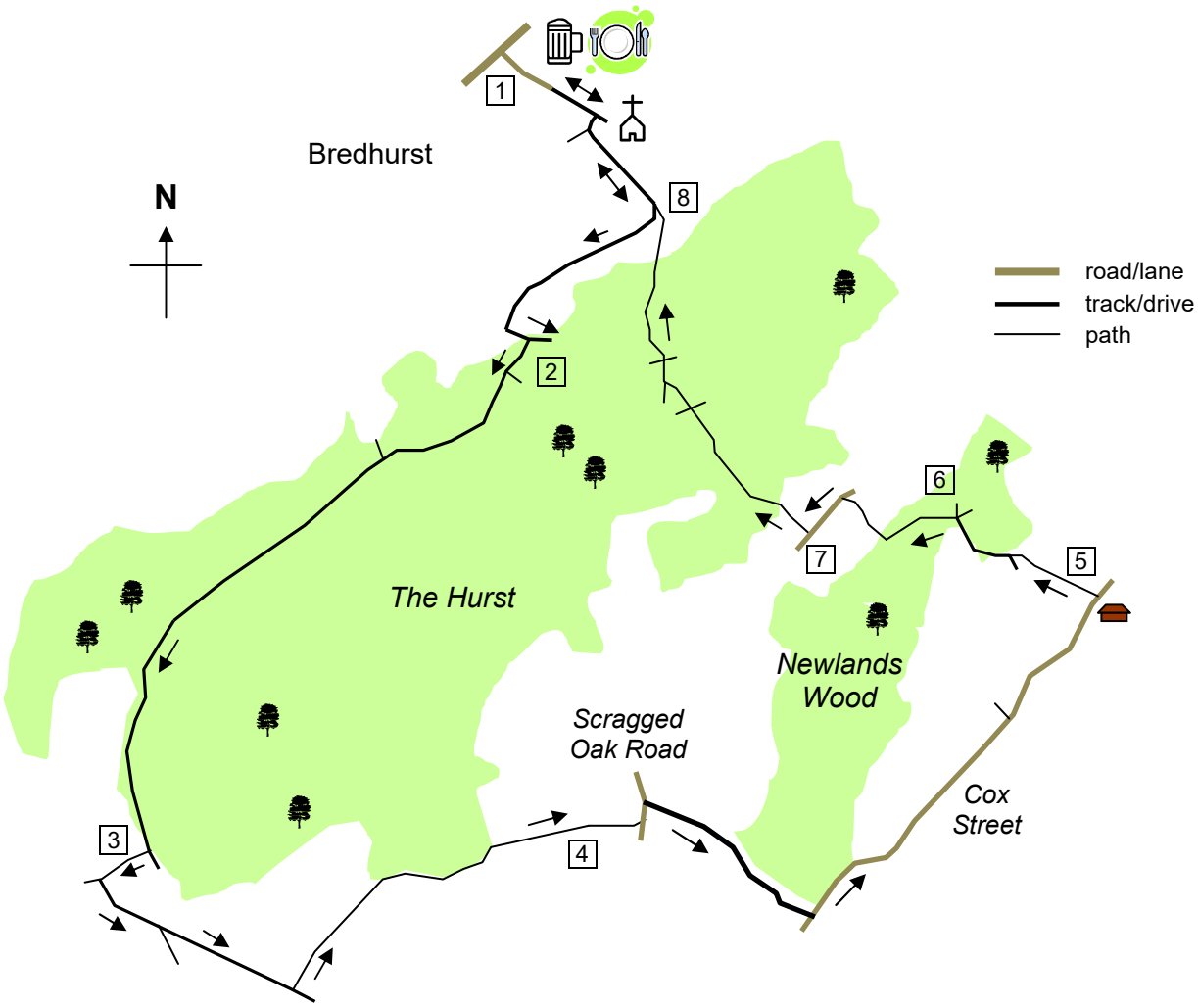
The village of Bredhurst is blessed with a good pub (to enquire at the *Bell*, ring 01634-239239).

There are some places with nettles and other undergrowth along the path, making shorts inadvisable. Underfoot the route is generally firm, with wide grass paths, quiet tarmac and forest tracks. But, due to a recent lengthy and wide stretch of coppicing, waterproof boots are highly recommended in wintry and wet conditions.. This walk should be fine for your dog.

The walk begins in the village of **Bredhurst**, near Maidstone, Kent, post-code **ME7 3JY**, w3w:guitar.disbelief.present. There are a few spaces offroad beside the pub and roadside parking in the side road leading to the church. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Bredhurst's AngloSaxon name (the "Bred" is pronounced as written, i.e. as "bread") means "broad woodland settlement". After the Normans, it was owned either by the king (as all earthly things were ultimately) or by one of his powerful courtiers. There was one secret to becoming a power to the throne in those days: be a ***falconer*** *– and this region of Kent with its high Downs was perfect for hawking. A falconer to Edward I (d. 1307) would often be knighted, given a second horse, robes of striped cloth and extra pay. There were families where every generation was a falconer. The de Bikenores of Bredhurst were one of these "hawking families". Sir Thomas travelled everywhere with the king and ran up considerable debts (he had to mortgage his own Bicknor Manor and rent it from the powerful de Northwood family). Bredhurst also had its manor, the first owner being John of Gaunt in 1379. The next owner, in 1384, was Simon de Burley. He lost the manor as a result of a trumped up charge of corruption and abuse of office during the Peasants Revolt. In fact the manor house of Bredhurst was in ruins in 1569 and got swallowed up by the woodland, but not forgotten. It was only in the 1900s that the site was found (though not on your walk) during woodland clearance. Modern Bredhurst is a much quieter place with, it is said, more animals than people.*



1 Opposite the *Bell* pub, take the side lane, Hurstwood Road, towards the church. After houses, the lane narrows to a driveway. Just before the church, go **right** over a low barrier or through a metal gate onto a wide gravel track. Stay on the track as it bends left, running between grassy

meadows on each side. The track becomes stony and descends, soon reaching a marker post and a modern kissing gate where the track bends right. Ignore the kissing gate (it will appear on the return section) and keep **right** to stay on the track. Your track runs through woodland until, after 350m, it runs in the open, crossing under power lines. You soon arrive at a junction in front of some large private metal gates. Turn **left** here on a stony track uphill.

2 In only 50m, you reach a major junction which has a marker post and a low barrier gate. Turn **right** here on a wide, level path which shortly leads onto a recent, lengthy track through Monkdown Wood, also known as the "Hurst", now heavily coppiced (trees cut down almost to their roots). (In 2025 this recent coppicing has made walking uncomfortable and muddy in wet conditions, nearly throughout the wood, especially at lower levels; we hope this situation will gradually improve.) In 100m, at a marker post, ignore the pink arrow pointing left and keep straight on. Soon the path runs downhill, zigzagging. On your right is a footpath (not on your route) hidden by debris, coming from the village down overgrown steps and through a kissing gate which is just visible. The footpath ascends gently with private woodland on either side, rich in bluebells in late spring. It curves left imperceptibly and comes into a lighter area with a meadow on your right. In the best part of 1 km further you pass a house on your right and immediately reach a 3-way fingerpost.

3 Turn **right** at the fingerpost through an old metal gate into the precincts of *Monkdown House*. *Note the sculpture of a horse made from bits of old bikes.* In 100m, just after a house, turn **left**, as a yellow arrow, on a footpath which soon elbows left and runs as a wide "gallop" between large cereal fields. In 100m or so, ignore a right fork across the field and stay on the wide grassy path. In a further 400m, as you come level with the start of some narrow woodland on your left, look for a yellow arrow on an electricity pole and turn **left**. After the path passes the narrow woodland, as the track bends right, **leave** the track by keeping straight on on a wide path across the cereal crop. Some cereal stalks may have accidentally re-seeded along the cleared strip but it's perfectly ok to tread on them. At the far side, veer **right** along the edge of the field, soon passing quite close to the wood on your left. After 300m, the edge of the wood makes a sharp left turn: turn **right** here on a similar straight wide path through the cereal crop.

4 (The route here has been restored with a new waymarker and gate after a blockage in 2019.) At the other side, follow the path to meet a new way-marker. Go through a kissing-gate here into a meadow. Cross the meadow, slightly to the right of a small clump of trees / bushes, to the other side where there is a small concrete footpath marker where you can exit the meadow on a tarmac lane, Scragged Oak Road. Turn **left** and after only 10m turn **right** on (unsigned) Court Lane. In 500m, you reach a T-junction with a tarmac lane, Cox Street. Turn **left** on it. You will be following this quiet, beautifully surfaced lane for about 1km. After 600m, ignore a nearly-hidden stile on your left [it leads to a short cut into Newlands Wood but the path into the wood is blocked by brambles (Kent C.C. taking action); the route chosen here is more interesting anyway]. You pass a large house and business centre. In a further 300m, a valley opens on your right and suddenly you reach a historical gem, *Park Valley House*, on your right. *Park Valley House is a survivor from the 1400s, Grade II listed, with ancient brick, plaster, roof and exposed timbering.*

5 Immediately opposite the old house, turn **left** onto the private shingle drive of Lower Cox Street Farm, marked as a footpath. After a patch of lawn, go through a wooden swing-gate into a horse pasture. [Jun 2026: walkers diverted to avoid the field and stile because of a "fence"; it looked "electric" but it may have been strings between "polyposts" which you can step over or press down; no further details are known but if the fence is a complete barrier it is illegal and has been reported to Kent C.C.] Cross the centre to a new stile, and continue straight on to a second new stile. In the bottom left corner, go **left** through a modern kissing-gate to meet a semi-tarmac drive coming down from the left. Keep straight ahead on this drive and stay on it as it curves right beside a green sloping meadow, going down into Newlands Wood.

6 There are *three* possible ways ahead. Ignore the wide path on your right and the path ahead under a weeping willow. Instead choose the narrower path on your **left**, aiming for a tall electricity pole with a yellow plaque. You come through a forest of tall trees – an ancient coppice. You cross under wires and reach a fence at a junction of paths. Turn **left** here for 10m and then go **right** through a modern kissing-gate and up the left-hand side of an open pasture. In the top corner, go over a stile. Continue up the left-hand side of this field and, in the top corner, go over another stile out onto a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane for just over 100m where you pass a house, *Denne Hill Cottage*, and its garden.

7 After passing the garden, go **right** over a stile. Your path goes along the edge of the garden, over a simple stile and along a route between low fences. An unnecessary stile leads you down into the woods of the Hurst. Your path is fairly steep as it descends the valley, rising up the other side by a flight of steps made from logs. At a wide crossing path go straight over. After more lofty forest, at a marker post, a path joins you from the left. You meet another crossing path by a "classroom" made from a circle of wooden "toadstools". Go straight over. Your path runs downhill and veers right under a cathedral-like canopy of tall oaks and beeches. A kissing-gate leads up a grassy hillside, going under power lines. A band of shrubbery leads past a notice by BWAG (the Bredhurst Woodland Action Group) to a kissing-gate.

8 Bear **right** on a wide stony track uphill, familiar from your outward journey. After an uphill stretch, your track runs between meadows. Keep **right**, ignoring a footpath on the left, coming out, via a low barrier or metal gate, to a narrow tarmac lane. The village where you began the walk is on your **left** but it is worth turning **right** first to look at Bredhurst church.

Bredhurst church of St Peter dates from the 1200s, built from typical downland flint. During the Reformation, the church's golden treasures were hidden and never found. Except for one: the Bredhurst ornamental platen (a small dish), which is in the V&A. In 2018 the church entered the news headlines when the vicar banned mourners from leaving tributes such as teddy bears, balloons and plastic flowers in the churchyard. His ruling was upheld by a judge.

Turning **left** on the lane quickly leads out to the village and the *Bell* pub where the walk began.

The Bell pub looks modest from the front, but the lively villagers and visitors normally go in at the back where there is a charming garden / patio. As a Greene King pub, it delivers reliable ales. The long menu of traditional pub fare is well received and, rather condescendingly, there is a "seniors' menu".

Getting there

By car: Bredhurst lies just off the M2 motorway but you have to perform a little "loop". Come off at Junction 4 (*Gillingham*). Turn **left** at the roundabout, as for *Gillingham*. In ½ mile, at a roundabout, turn **right** as for *Wigmore, Parkwood*. At a T-junction turn **right** on Wigmore Road, keeping straight on at a mini-roundabout. At a major junction, turn **right** under the main road following the first sign for *Bredhurst*. The road crosses the motorway and quickly delivers you into the village. The M2 can be reached from London or the M25. It can also be approached from the M20, coming off at Junction 6 (*Maidstone*), following the A229, to join the M2 (east) at Junction 3.

By bus/train: bus 130 or 131 from Maidstone, not Sat, Sun or Bank Hol. Check the timetables.

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