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

Horsmonden

Distance: 9 km = 5½ miles — easy walking

Region: Kent — Date written: 4-jul-2022

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Refreshments: picnic

Map: Explorer 136 (The Weald) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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Village, lakes, history, parkland, fruit and hop farms

In Brief

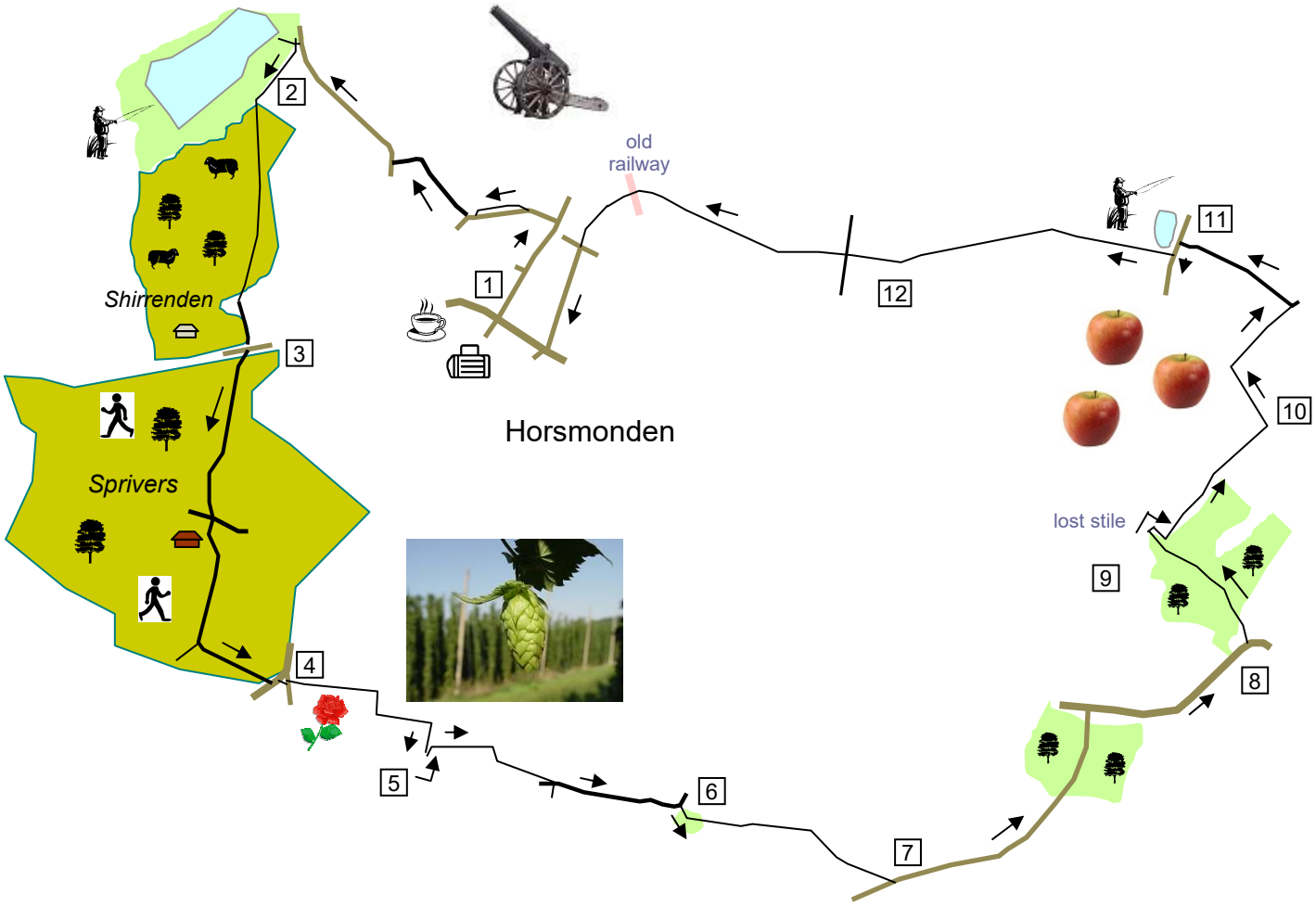
In centuries past, this part of the Garden of England used to be the industrial hub of the country, with names like Furnace Lane, Brick Kiln Lane and the Gun Inn. This walk shows how this has all changed to perfect tranquility and what you see now is parkland and rows upon rows of fruit trees and hop vines. Because of the very wide paths between them, this walk is easy to stride along, enjoying the views. It is easy to take the wrong turning in the plantations but the directions here are extremely precise, so you won't get lost. In just two places the woodland paths are narrower. One path is quite mysterious, seeming like a dead end until suddenly you are out into an apple orchard. This walk takes a completely different route from other walks around this village.

Horsmonden is ideal for walkers who like a good long leisurely stroll, centred on a legendary village, with a shop-cum-café – all explained in the history section below. The renowned *Gun and Spitroast* pub suddenly closed in 2026 when the owners simply closed up without warning. Various voices in the village are talking about a future re-opening. The nearest excellent pub is the *Halfway House* in Brenchley. Some walkers have worked out a wide diversion to this walk to take in Brenchley (GPX available on application).

There are some nettles along one of the paths, making shorts inadvisable. In summer, the whole area was dry and boots felt superfluous. But in the wetter months, good boots as a minimum will be needed and walking poles are a boon. Your dog is probably best left at home because of the fruit farms.

The walk begins anywhere around the village green ("The Heath") in the village of **Horsmonden**, Kent, w3w:clasping.tender.bulge, postcode **TN12 8HT**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



Horsmonden is another of those "dens" of Kent (see that walk in this series). It used to be called Horsbundenne, indicating a stream (cf German "Brunnen") but the connection with horses has faded into history. Most notable in its past was the iron industry, especially the manufacture of guns, as you will see. Now hops and fruit are a huge business and this walk features easy walking through the plantations in this part of the "Garden of England".

The great pride of the village is the large green, known as the "Heath". At one end are the two spots that have almost legendary status. The "Gun and Spitroast" (now tragically closed) used to be called the "Gun Inn" (for historic reasons) and was universally acclaimed for its food and drink and atmosphere. The "Heath Stores" (open Sun 8.30 to 12, Sat 8-5pm, other days all day), with its open-air stalls and big interior, is an eccentric delight and the linchpin of the village; it also serves coffee and snacks (try the scotch eggs!).

If you hear a clock chime, this is not the parish church (which is two miles outside the village) or even the more central Methodist church. It comes from the little tower of the Victorian Social Club, built in 1887, which has always been important to the life of everyone in the village.

*St Margaret's Church is just off Brick Kiln Lane. It dates from the 1300s but part of it was reconstructed in the mid-1800s by architect James Wyatt whose handiwork appears so often on these walks. The walls are sandstone and the buttressed tower dates from the 1400s. A wall plaque tells the story of Simon Willard, who went to America and founded the city/colony of Concord, Massachusetts. The church's setting is gorgeous, amidst a tiny cluster of houses and a group of four oast houses, making it well worth a visit after the walk if you have a car: set your navigator to **TN12 8JU**.*

1 With your back to the *Heath Stores*, cross the main road and walk along the Maidstone Road with the big village green, known as *"The Heath"*, on your right. On your left you pass the *Town House* and a house which used to be a pub. After 250m, you see a kindergarten on your right. Immediately turn **left** here on Gibbet Lane, a road of quiet housing. As you go, make use of a sheltered tarmac footway which forks right, crosses a side road and passes more houses before turning **left** through a metal barrier and **right** to re-join Gibbet Lane. Immediately now fork **right** on a quiet tarmac drive. Much has been changing in the village and you will notice new houses on your left - even this lane might well become more built-up in the future. The drive bends left and right and ends at a minor road (called Furnace Lane for reasons you will shortly see). Turn **right** on this lane, coming out into open country. In 300m, just after the road bends right downhill, look left for a signposted drive to *Lake Cottage*.

2 Turn **left** on this drive. Your route is immediately **left** again on a narrow shingle path beside a tall fence. But first, it's worth continuing straight on, over a sluice bridge, for a good view of the big Furnace Pond.

> *You are in the heart of the Kentish armaments industry! If you had done this walk in the early 1600s, you would have been deafened by the pounding of a giant hammer and dazzled by flames which were visible up to 10 miles away. It was powered by the head of water from the damming of the stream. This was the iron forge of John Browne, nicknamed "The King's Gunfounder". His cannons were sent all over the world. In 1645 he and Browne junior were placed in "safe custody" because they were suspected of arming the Royalists. (It was "only business" – he sold guns to the Dutch too at a time when they were at war with England.) St Margaret's Church (see above) has a large slab dedicated to his wife, but where is John Browne himself? A mystery.*

Having turned **left** on the narrow shingle path, after the fence continue on a path through woodland, avoiding side paths used by anglers. *Note that you are walking on part of the High Weald Landscape Trail (HWLT), a 90-mile walking route between Rye and Horsham.* Your path now goes between fences: one is an electrified rope and the other a rickety old ranch fence. On your right is landscaped parkland dotted with trees, belonging to *Shirrenden*, the large cream Georgian house visible ahead to your right. Your path joins a track, goes through a large wooden gate, and runs under trees, finally rounding a metal gate to reach a road.

3 Cross straight over the road, going through the smaller of two wooden gates, into the grounds of *Sprivers*. A notice board gives you information, including a map of the grounds.

> *Sprivers is a mansion built in 1756. It is now owned by the National Trust. The grounds allow free access every day of the year but the house can only be seen on one or two special days, or if you get married there. It is run by the same people that run Scotney Castle (see that walk). The estate includes a kitchen garden, a walled garden, a lot of late 17th-century parkland and several orchards.*

The route described in this text is basically straight ahead. You are free to choose a more roundabout route (or maybe make a future visit). In this case, looking at the map on the notice board, your exit will be the path in the bottom left, opposite the "compass" symbol. Take the wide path straight ahead. The terrain is open at first, then thickly wooded. You reach an oblique crossing path by a marker post. Ignore a path sharp right but fork **right**, thus keeping your direction. Avoid a brick house (a former stable block or storehouse) by

keeping **left** on the driveway, past sheep-grazed parkland on your left. The house is shortly visible on your right. At a bend in the drive, avoid a kissing-gate by turning **left**, staying on the drive. You come out to a main road.

4 Cross the road, a fraction left, to a road junction. Go straight over a branch road to a sign leading you along a narrow footpath. *You are still on the HWLT.* The path leads up to run between a fence and a hedge full of red roses. It leads straight into a hop field where, in the height of the season, the hop vines form a kind of sabre arch as you walk beneath them. In 100m, at the other side, turn **right** as directed. In 60m, turn **left** on another path through the plantation *(don't miss this turn! the marker post is hidden beside a tree but there is a yellow footpath roundel on a hop pole)*. Walk for 130m, through two sections of crops, to the boundary hedge and turn **right** as directed. *The next turning is even more obscure!* Walk 50m and look for a gap in the hedge on your left. There is a post here with an irrelevant yellow arrow. Turn **left** through the gap into another crop field.

5 Turn **left** on a boundary track and immediately **right** on a wide grassy path beside a hedge on your right, with more fruit on your left. In 150m you meet a wide crossing path. Go **straight over** into an apple orchard, turn **immediately right**, walk 20m to the corner, and turn **left** on a path with the orchard on your left and an open grass space on your right. In 150m you meet the boundary hedge. Go **left and immediately right** through a narrow gap in the hedge arriving at a junction of tarmac drives. Cross directly over the junction to a tarmac drive opposite, thus leaving the HWLT. As a guide, the drive is marked *Hammonds*, *Hilltop*, *Twin Valleys*. Follow the drive for 300m, passing a tennis court.

6 Just before the drive bends left to the last of those three properties, **leave** the drive by turning **right** on a signed footpath through a patch of woodland. The path bends left over a stile, and a small metal gate leads you into an open meadow with views ahead to Goudhurst. Cross the meadow to go through a similar metal gate and follow the right-hand side of another wild meadow. About 10m before the end of the meadow, look for a small stile on your right *(easily missed!)*. Turn **right** over this stile and take a path diagonally **left** down the meadow. Your path runs through tall grass but the way is clear, thanks to the tramping of many feet. A new wooden gate leads into another field, planted with fruit bushes. At the end, go over a stile [Feb 2024: care! wobbly] onto a lane, soon to be revealed as Brick Kiln Lane. *(Horsmonden church is **right** on this lane, but at 1 mile distance too far to reach without your car.)*

7 Turn **left** on this quiet lane. You pass a driveway to Share Farm and an irrelevant footpath on your right just before you pass the venerable buildings of the *Mill House* with its twin oasts. The lane ends at the busier Goudhurst Road. Turn **right** on it, making use of a grass verge part-way. After 200m, the road bends left and leads in a further 200m up to a brick road bridge over the river Teise. The pasture on your right sometimes shows alpacas grazing. Just before the bridge, turn **left** on a signed path and immediately, before a metal gate, turn **left** again on a narrow footpath.

8 You need to be alert along this short section because the path is little-used and there is a certain amount of undergrowth and woodland debris. The path goes through rough vegetation for a short distance and curves left in front of a bramble bank. Soon you enter trees where the path is clearer, although there are some thin fallen branches to step over. You cross a stream via a

long wooden bridge-with-rails. After about 150m, the path narrows, becoming straighter and clearer as it runs up through hollies. The path abruptly ends at a gap on the right with a misleading yellow arrow and a sign for "private land". Go **right** through the gap leading into the huge Grovehurst Fruit Farm.

9 Most waymarkers have disappeared in the fruit farm and the mapped route is no longer valid. Thanks to the wide paths, the farm management seem to be relaxed about the route you take. The following route works well. Turn immediately sharp **right** downhill along the edge of the apple plantation, staying next to the woodland on your right. In 50m, in the corner, turn **left**, still with the wood on your right. In 200m, where the wood ends, continue straight on, now between rows of apple trees. Shortly, on your right, you see an open field of grass (which could change in the future) and, after that, on your left a very tall dense green hedge which separates two orchards. Only 20m further on, you reach one end of a similar tall hedge on your right.

10 Immediately opposite the hedge, turn **left** on a wide path uphill between more apple trees. Stay on the very wide path, avoiding narrower paths that fork off to the left. In 150m, near the top of the rise, you meet a wide, partly sandy, crossing path. Turn **right** here, keeping to the right of a hedge. In 200m you reach a patch of concrete just before a house. Cross straight over the concrete, onto a wide semi-tarmac path heading gently uphill. You pass several wooden huts and other farm buildings before coming out to a road.

11 Turn **left** on the road, passing one of the Orchard Lakes, a popular angler's haunt. In 30m, turn **right** beside a standing stone onto a track. You come over a stile beside a sturdy new wooden gate. Keep **left** on a narrow path running under trees, next to a wire fence. After a small metal gate, keep **left** up the centre of a meadow of tall grass. Another small metal gate and a new 3-plank bridge-with-rail lead into a crop field. Follow a path straight ahead through the middle of the field. After a gap in the trees, another path leads similarly across the next crop field.

12 At the other side of the field, continue on a path between tall hedges. Your route goes straight over a wide crossing path and runs between more tall hedges. Go through the smaller of the two metal gates. You have now joined a track, passing the first houses of Horsmonden, going over the course of the dismantled railway. As you come into the village, keep straight on along a residential road. At the main road, turn **right**, reaching the *Gun Inn* and the green where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Horsmonden is 2½ miles from the A21. It lies on the B2162 Lamberhurst Road, which means you can go to the big new roundabout just outside Lamberhurst and turn **left** (or right if coming from the Hastings direction) at a sign *Goudhurst A262, Horsmonden (B2162)*. Fork **left** in under 100 yds. There is plenty of roadside parking. However, your navigator will probably encourage you to fork left onto a set of narrow roads just after the big roundabout by the filling station just before the long single-carriageway section of the A21.

By bus/train: bus 297 from Tunbridge Wells station.. Check the timetables.

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