



Coldrum Stones and Luddesdown

Distance: 20½ km=13 miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Kent

Date written: 3-jul-2011

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Refreshments: Harvel, Luddesdown, Birling

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

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

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Hills, woodland, meadows, prehistoric site

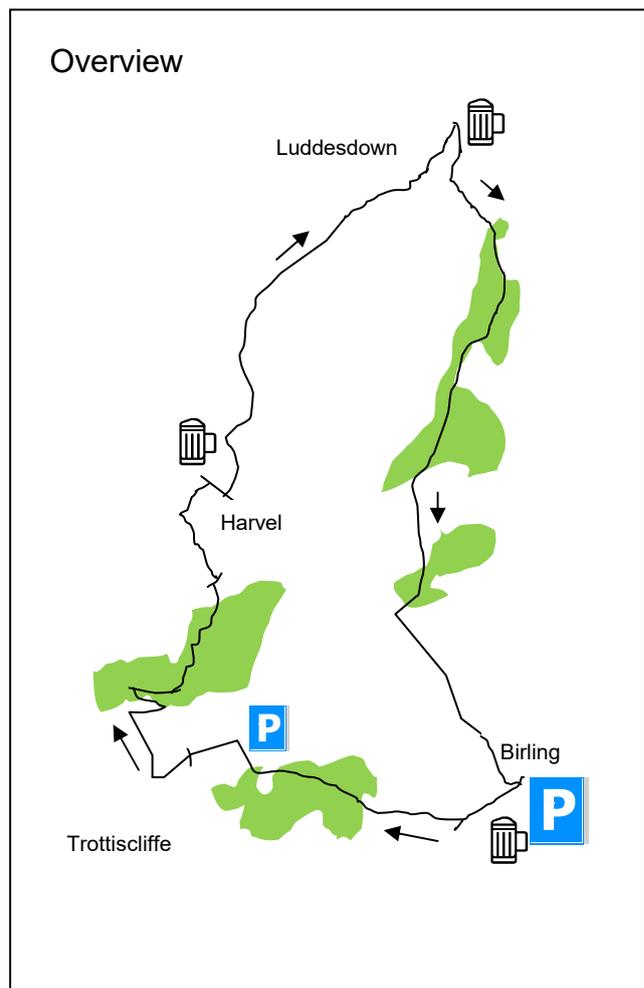
In Brief

This walk takes you to a Neolithic site, over the North Downs by an easy route and through gentle woods and meadows to the luscious green valleys that flank the organic farming area of Luddesdown. This walk is another tribute to the *Adventurous Walks* books and follows a roughly similar route to one of them.

Three good pubs are present along the route but please note only the *Golden Lion* in Luddesdown is open on Mondays.

There are just a few small patches of nettles, easily avoided. Boots are best if only because of the one-mile stretch along the byway up to Holly Hill. It should also be fine for your dog and he will be pampered in the pubs.

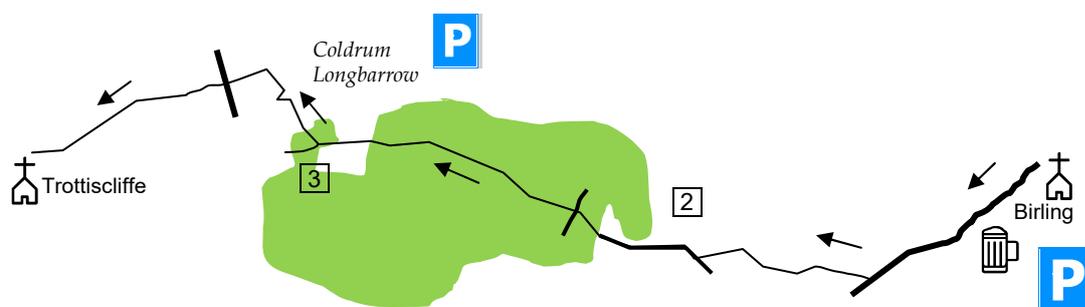
The walk begins at the village of **Birling, postcode ME19 5JW**. There is a large car park behind the church down a dirt track at the side. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk

Birling Church of All Saints, built in the 1300s, is visible from all around because of its tower and its position on a mound above the village. Inside, the most remarkable part is the Nevill's chancel, painted in medieval colours and with ceiling beams slanted, it is said, in imitation of the slant of Jesus' head on the Cross. The Nevills have owned – and still own – a large part of Birling since the Manor came into the family by marriage in 1435. (See also "A Way Through the Rocks", another walk on this website.) They originally came to England with the Conqueror and took the title Marquesses of Abergavenny. Their most famous son was Richard Nevill, Earl of Warwick, who became known as "the Kingmaker" when his nephew emerged after the War of the Roses as King Edward IV. Birling Manor was built by the one of the Nevills in the 1830s but burned down in 1917. The village inn (of which more at the finish) also bears their name. Margaret Collins' book "Birling, A Backward Glance" gives a memorable portrait of the village and its characters, including the Hon Rev E.V. Bligh, vicar of Birling, who sold the "Birling Cure for rabies" at 3s 6d a bottle, put out of business by Louis Pasteur's more scientific anti-rabies vaccine in 1864.

Leg 1: Birling to Trottiscliffe (4 km=2½ miles)



- 1 Leave the carpark via the entrance road and turn **left**. You soon pass the *Nevill Bull* pub, heading in the direction of Ryarsh, as given by the signpost, and continue uphill passing, on your right, *Frindale Cottage*, as well as other charming houses. After 650m in total, opposite the last house *Charlton House*, go **right** at a footpath sign up a bank and through a small metal gate. Go diagonally **left** across a small pasture and through a wooden gate, then along the left-hand side of a pasture. Go over a stile in the far right-hand corner and along the right-hand side of a hayfield. As you reach the corner, continue across the centre. The path now takes you through a new kissing gate, along an enclosed path and along the left-hand side of a crop field. When you reach a garden fence, ignore a path on the right and follow the track out to a lane. Turn **right** on the lane.
- 2 The lane immediately bends left. Avoid footpaths on the right at the bend and later on the left and stay on the lane all the way to a T-junction with Park Farm Road. Go straight ahead through a swing-gate into woods whose enveloping dark immediately makes a strong contrast with the earlier terrain. The path goes over two wooden bridges, past an unneeded stile and onto a grassy path. The path meets a crossing track where it zigzags right-left into luscious open mixed woodland. Continue straight ahead, ignoring the wide farm track on your left. The path finally exits the wood through a modern kissing gate to run beside a fence on the right with great views of the North Downs. This very wide grassy path takes you between

pastures and through another modern kissing gate. Keep **right** here, joining the Wealdway which comes in from your left. *The Wealdway is a long-distance path running from Gravesend on the Thames Estuary to near Eastbourne.*

- 3 In just 30m, you come to a wide opening. Turn **right** here onto a narrow path and, where you reach a concrete track a short distance ahead, turn slightly **right** and continue along this concrete track. Soon on your left is a stile leading to the Coldrum Stones. You can go over this stile, all the way round the site and down the other side and over a stile to rejoin the track.

Coldrum Longbarrow is the best-preserved megalithic longbarrow in Kent. The name may be derived from the old Celtic word "Galdrum" meaning "place of enchantments". The 3000-year-old burial chamber is the only one in the Medway Valley to be virtually intact. It measures 30m x 18m and comprises a circle of fifteen sarsen stones on a raised earth bank. During an excavation in the early 1900s, the bones of twenty-two people were discovered. To the west, the remains of the ancient field systems can still be seen.

Where the track bends right, leave it by continuing ahead on a path. At a post with coloured arrows, turn **left** uphill and go along the left-hand side of a field. The path goes through bushes, joins a drive, passes the Coldrum visitors' car park and comes out to a lane by bungalows. Cross straight over the lane to a path across the field heading for Trottiscliffe church whose tower is just visible in the dip. At the end, go down by a fence to a lane and turn **right** to the church. (The village is about 1 km away, down the footpath to the left and along the road. It has two pubs, the florid *George* at the end of School Lane and the *Plough* which boasts "great food" and entries in the Good Beer Guide. But the distance and the fact that this is early in the walk probably rule out such a diversion.)

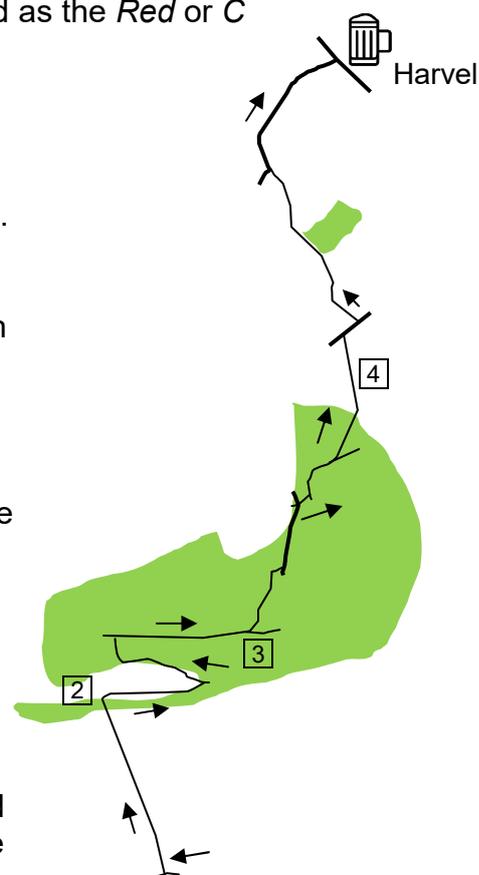
Trottiscliffe church, dedicated to St. Peter & St. Paul, is in a memorable spot, by the North Downs and the Pilgrims Way. The village is pronounced "Trosley" and is sometimes incorrectly written the same way as the Country Park.

Leg 2: Trottiscliffe to Harvel (4 km=2½ miles) **See map overleaf**

- 1 Go straight ahead through gates, ignoring a footpath left, and through farm buildings. Before the last barn, turn **right** towards two large fields, heading for the North Downs visible invitingly ahead. Eventually, follow a (rather overgrown) enclosed path between hedges, leading out via a drive to a lane. Go up steps immediately opposite. Go through the swing-gate ahead and up onto the open hillside. You are now in Trosley Country Park, run by Kent CC, a historic grazing area and now a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) because of its rich wildlife.
- 2 The route here is designed to give you a nice gentle ascent: there are more direct and steeper ways! Almost immediately, turn **right** at a marker post with a yellow arrow onto a level path across the open downland. As a check, this path runs roughly 10m parallel to the wires on your right. As you near the end of the path, go down through a swing-gate next to a large metal gate. Turn here very sharp **left**, through another swing-gate, almost doubling back. This path is marked with a sign for the *B Walk*. Ignore minor paths right and stay on the path with a fence on your left. (Note that you are walking parallel to an older sunken trackway on your right.) The path climbs steeply. Eventually it goes through a swing-gate and finally the gradient

gets easier with fine views. Just before a graffiti-covered ruin, turn **right** through a metal kissing gate, up some steps and through yew trees. At a fork, bear **right** and go up more shallow steps to meet a wide level crossing track. *This is the North Downs Way (NDW), a long-distance trail running from Farnham to Dover.* Turn **right** on the NDW, also marked as the *Red or C Walk*.

- 3 After 500m, you will notice two marker posts on your left, one of them indicating the *Red Walk*. Turn **left** here, up some steps, thus leaving the broad NDW. Soon the path comes out into a kind of open scrubland. Follow the path until you meet a wide crossing path by more posts. Turn **right** on this path, thus leaving the *Red Walk*. Shortly go by a metal one-bar gate and turn **left** on a wide rutted major track, which is incidentally marked as on the *A Walk*. You pass Erskine Road, a residential road on your left. Just 30m after, turn **right** at a signpost onto a footpath into the woods. *Don't miss this turn!* Don't take the path that runs close to the fence but take the path that veers **left** a fraction away from the fence. [2014-16: with so many awkward fallen trees, you need to keep your eyes peeled so you don't miss a turning.] In a short distance, the path meets a semi-tarmac path. Veer **left** on this path. The path soon bends right. 100m after the bend you reach a very narrow and overgrown path which meets you from the left. Turn **left** here. (*Don't miss this turning!*). At the end of the path, go over a track and a stile opposite into the playing fields of Vigo RFC.



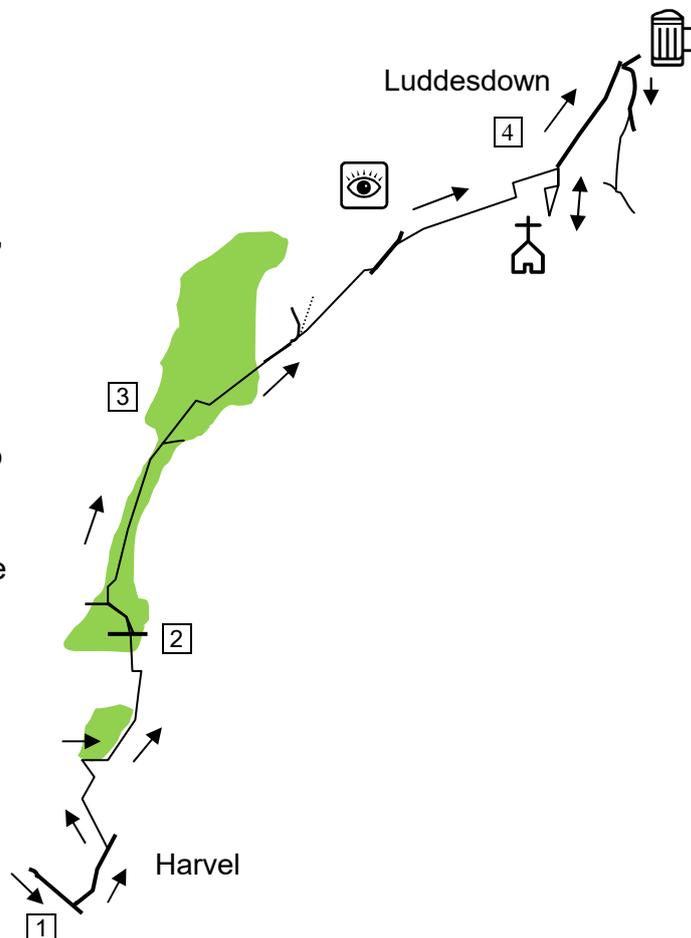
- 4 Cross the fields diagonally (or round two sides if there is a match in progress) to an unneeded stile in the far corner, and out to a road. Turn **right** on the road, soon reaching the delectable thatched *Swanswood Farm*, a grade II listed building. Almost immediately, turn **left** at a signpost onto a footpath through trees. The path leads out to a field and goes across the centre. At the corner by a marker post, bear **left** along the right-hand side of the field. The field edge bends slightly left and, 30m later, go through a metal gate on your right. [Jan 2020: a walker was mudbound due to rain and stomping cattle and suggests you ignore the gate on the right and continue on the left-hand side of the fence to reach Harvel Lane and turn **right** on it, continuing as below.] Your route is diagonally on a faint path across the pasture, aiming for a large metal gate in the far left corner. (There are two fields before the farm with the tall white silo. At the time of writing, the more distant field is a sheep pasture. Be sure to aim for the far corner of the first field where there is a small house. This is far to the left of the farm buildings.) Turn **right** along the quiet Harvel Lane passing the pleasant timbered *Barncote* and a farm shop, and ignoring footpaths on the left. Continue to a T-junction in front of a house called the *Amazon and Tiger*, once a pub. Welcome to Harvel !

The "Amazon and Tiger" is still the home of Mick and Angie after they closed the pub in 2021. The name came from the 1500s when the pub was in the adjoining timbered building. The landlord was a fearful man and was called the "tiger" but his wife was respected and was referred to as the "amazon".

You may arrive in Harvel when the Hash House Harriers “a drinking club with a running problem” have a meet. They run cross-country from one pub to the next, now not including the “A&T” unfortunately. Each hash has a special dress code: one weekend it might be red full-length cotton dresses.

Leg 3: Harvel to Luddesdown (5 km=3 miles)

- 1 Turn **right** on the lane in front of the pub, going past some more attractive timbered buildings. By a sunken duckpond, turn **left** on a lane signposted *Luddesdown*. Soon, on the left, is an unusual house with a series of flint oasts that have been reshaped to points. After nearly 300m on the lane, just after a metal gate on the right, go **left** over a stile at a signpost. Go diagonally across the pasture, under wires, in the direction of the finger, to the far corner. Here, go through a small metal gate beside a larger one and keep **right** on a track. On entering a small meadow, keep **right** by the trees, go through a metal kissing gate and turn **left** down into the valley. At the bottom, do not go through the kissing gate ahead, but stay in the meadow and turn **right** along its long side. (Some walkers cut the corner.) Keep to the left-hand side of this long meadow along the contour as it curves gradually left with fine views. At the far end, go through a metal kissing gate and continue along the left-hand side of a large field, ignoring the farm track which soon turns left. Walk straight ahead to the far corner. Turn **left** here onto a farm track and, in just 5m, turn **right** on a very indistinct path that runs between trees soon continuing along the left-hand side of the next field. In the far corner, go through a metal kissing gate into woodland and follow the path down to a lane.



- 2 Cross the lane to a stony track opposite, uphill. In 60m, the track bends left. Leave the track here by taking a footpath sharp **right** downhill, leading to a clearing of wild flowers. The way bends left onto a flat area of scrub and hawthorns and then continues on the narrow but well-defined path, soon meeting an old wire and wooden ranch fence on your left. The path winds through mixed forest, chiefly on the contour, and eventually rises up to a fence. Turn **right** at the fence, going through more woods. Soon the path goes through a wooden swing-gate into a small meadow. Keep straight ahead and through another swing-gate. The path now leads along the left-hand side of another flowery meadow sparsely sown with ash trees. Go through another swing-gate into woods, walking alongside a new tall wooden fence. Soon you reach a post with yellow arrows.

- 3 Keep straight ahead, ignoring the right fork. Soon you reach another swing-gate and the path joins a stony drive which soon has a comfortable grassy strip in the middle. Where the drive bends left, leave it by going through a kissing gate into a large wild meadow. Take the **right**-hand of two paths leading across the meadow. Luddesdown church is now in view. You are in a high meadow with a valley on each side. The path exits in the far corner under a tall ash tree, through a new metal gate to a road. Turn **left** on the road. In under 100m, turn **right** at a stone marker through a metal kissing-gate onto a footpath and turn **left** along the left-hand side of a large field. Go over a stile with a yellow arrow and along the right-hand side of a pasture, then through a wooden swing-gate and along the right-hand side of the next field. At the end of the field, turn **left** with the track and **right** at the next corner. Go through a new metal kissing-gate and down steps to a lane next to the welcome board for Luddesdown church. Turn sharp **right** and **right** again on a track leading round to the church.

Luddesdown's small church of St Peter and St Paul was built in the 1200s during the reign of the pious king Henry III. It is especially well-known for its magnificent Victorian wall paintings but it still contains several relics of its birth in medieval times. The church is now open Saturday afternoons but, rather perversely, closed on Sundays.

Go round to the side entrance and, hopefully having visited the church, go through the small wooden gate opposite the entrance onto a track where you can view several characteristic buildings of this community. Turn **left** on the cobbled path and **left** again and exit the way you came, going between the stone gate posts.

Luddesdown (pronounced "Ludsd'n") is a rather scattered parish. The "upper" village is dominated by the church and by the Organic Farm which practically surrounds it. The crop fields here use only natural fertilizer and they are allowed to "rest" while clover grows as a "green" fertilizer. Simmental, Aberdeen Angus and Beef Shorthorn breeds are used for organic beef and there is also pork and chicken. Many nearby households receive the Luddesdown weekly organic vegetable box. Lower Luddesdown is a short distance away and contains the pub and scattered houses. In Saxon times, the name was written "Hludes duna" meaning "Hlud's hill".

Decision point. If you do not need refreshment and would like to skip the pub, turn **right** immediately after the stone gates past a noticeboard onto an enclosed woodland path; follow the path downhill, exiting through a wooden swing gate into a field. Turn **left**. After about 30m, turn **left** through another wooden swing-gate and re-join the enclosed path as it goes uphill. When you emerge into a field, turn **right**; now continue from the next leg of this walk.

- 4 Continue ahead back to the road junction and follow the lane downhill. Go past the *Old Rectory* and some isolated houses, eventually reaching the *Golden Lion* pub. *This is a no-nonsense locals' pub offering a welcome rest, drinks such as T.E.A., and some basic cooked food; there is a garden with birdsong or the bar and nice eating area with Radio 1.* Just after the pub, turn **right**, signposted *Great Buckland*. Ignore a turning left and continue round to the right, uphill. Just after reaching the top, fork **right** on a footpath. (Take care not to miss this turning as the signpost is hidden behind a bush.) The path goes along the left-hand side, across the middle and along the right-hand side of the same field, where young vines are now being grown, with some red poppies visible in summer.



[Here the shortcut rejoins the main walk.](#)

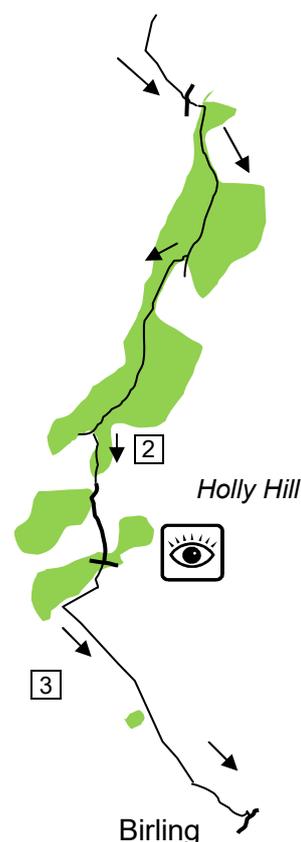
Leg 4: Luddesdown to Birling (7½ km=5 miles)

- 1 Ignore a path running diagonally left across the field. 20m later, at a post, ignore a footpath right and continue ahead along the right-hand side of a large field, down into a shallow valley and up again. Finally, at the end, go out through a gap by a metal gate to a lane. Cross the lane over to a track opposite marked as a byway.

After heavy rain, especially at weekends, there may be a lot of mud on the track, churned up by 4x4s and scrambler bikes. To avoid this mud, do *not* take the track marked as a byway but instead turn **right** along the quiet lane overlooking vineyards on the right. Continue along the lane for about 1.5km, ignoring a lane going downhill to the right. 100m after passing a sign for *Matthew Down House and Winnats Farm* on the right turn **left** up a wide roughly made track, which climbs steeply. At the top you will see a rough track (the NDW) and a gate with a low bar on the left. Ignore this and continue ahead. You have now rejoined the main route at point * below.

This rough track climbs steadily for some distance. At the top, you meet a field on the left. After a while, the track forks. Turn **right** here. The track bends right, then sharp left under high-tension lines. After another short distance you reach a post with several coloured arrows. Keep straight ahead here. You have rejoined the North Downs Way. There is more mud now, but again this will clear. Eventually, you come to a T-junction.* Veer **left** on a track slightly uphill which morphs into a tarmac lane. This is Holly Hill and the House is on your left.

- 2 Pass footpaths on either side and a small house and meet the drive coming from *Holly Hill House*. You now have fine views north east towards Rochester. On the right is the Holly Hill open space. Soon, you pass Holly Hill car park on the right. Stay on this quiet lane for some distance until eventually you reach a T-junction with Birling Hill and White Horse Road. Cross straight over to a footpath opposite, through a new metal kissing gate. Immediately, you go over a crossing path. *It is worth pausing here to step first to the left and then to the right to admire some magnificent views in two different directions.* After possibly taking in the views, keep ahead downhill on a path between bushes. This path becomes quite steep and care may be needed in damp conditions. The path bends to the right at the bottom of the hill, with a field on your left, and shortly turns left to go between two fields. Cross a track by a post with arrows, thus leaving the NDW and continue through a new metal kissing gate.
- 3 You are on a pleasant grassy path along the left-hand side of a field. Birling church, your final destination, is visible ahead. At the end of the



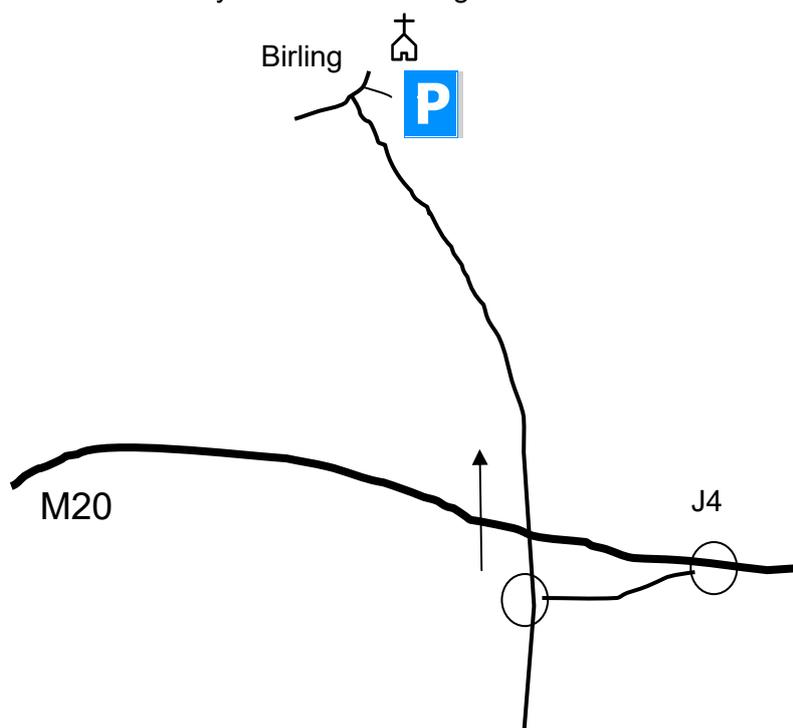
field, go over a concrete track and continue on another grassy path between a fence and a hedge. Cross a farm track and continue along the right-hand side of a field. A footpath joins from the right. The path passes a house and converted barn. Go through a metal kissing gate and along the right-hand side of a meadow, then through a metal kissing gate on the **right** and down steps to the church in Birling where the walk began.



For final refreshments, the Nevill Bull serves freshly-cooked (no "Ping!") food every day, including a hog roast on Sundays, as well as three brews that have put them in the 2014 CAMRA Good Beer Guide. This traditional and quirky pub changed its name from the "Bull" to the "Nevill Bull" in 1953 in memory of Michael Nevill who was killed in the Second World War. Lt Nevill was serving in Africa with the 1st Battalion Scots Guards when he died on 28th April and he is buried in Massicault War Cemetery. Alternatively, if you have a car, it may be worth driving half a mile to the "Duke of Wellington" in Ryarsh, a friendly open-style pub that serves four real ales.

Getting there

By car: Birling is near exit 4 of the M20. Follow the A228 south signposted *Tonbridge, West Malling*, but only as far as the first big roundabout. Leave the A228 here by going one exit further to a sign for Birling. Turn **right** a few metres to the church when you reach the village.



By bus/train: bus 58 from Maidstone station. Check the timetables.

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