Fancy Free Walks

point your feet on a new path

Pluckley

Distance: 5¾ km=3¾ miles — easy walking

Region: Kent — Date written: 5-aug-2019

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Refreshments: Pluckley

Map: Explorer 137 (Ashford) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Apple orchards, country houses, views, easy field paths, pub, ghosts

In Brief

This walk shows you the Garden of England in all its grandeur. In between the extensive views, you see orchards and wildflower meadows. The last kilometer is an ascent into the village up a long slope of waving grass, a route cherished by the local people. The village (supposedly haunted by twelve ghosts) is a charmer, being set around a small square, with the church and one of the best foodie pubs in this area (to enquire at the *Black Horse*, ring 01233-840668).

There is just one very short brambly section at the bottom of the large field but probably not enough to deter wearers of shorts (it can be bypassed). There is one walk through a wheatfield, made enjoyable by the wide path across it. Otherwise, all the paths are tarmac, concrete, or wide and grassy, making boots unnecessary. This walk would be fine for your dog, with a lead of course because of the (very quiet) lanes.

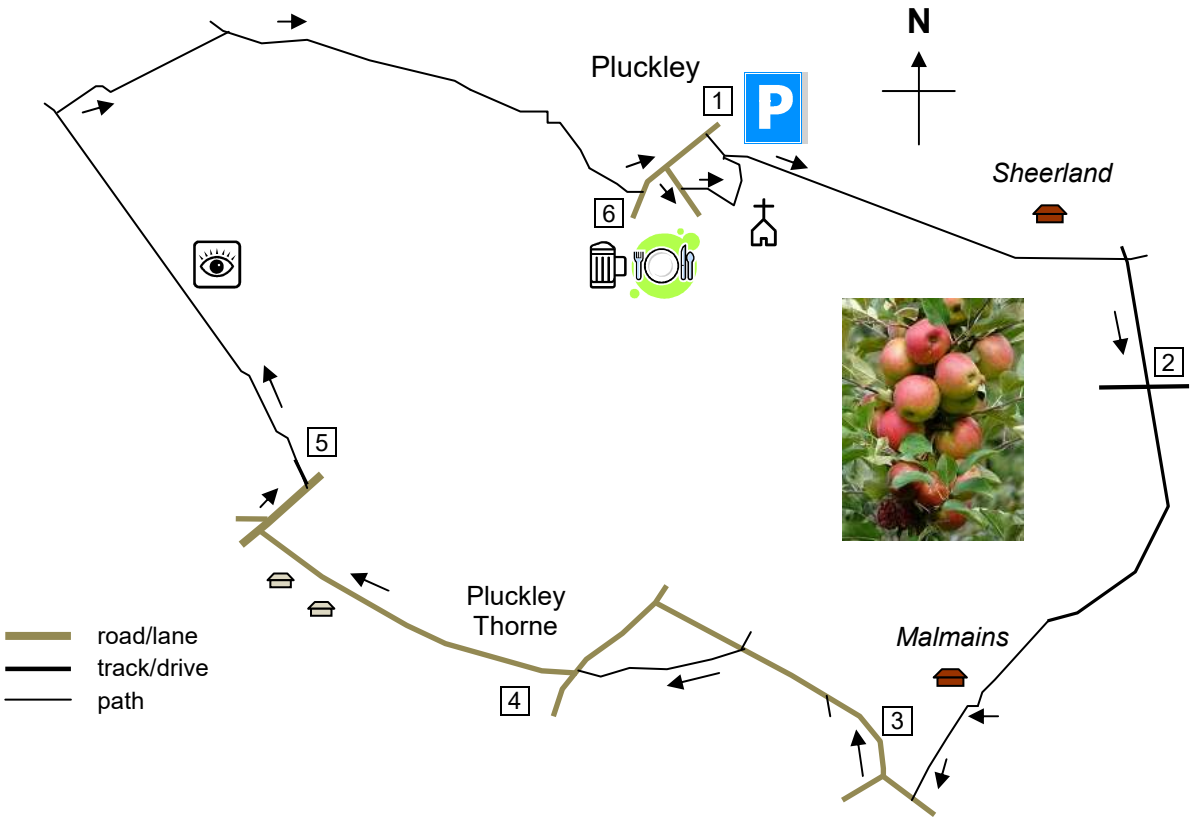
The walk begins in the village of **Pluckley**, near Ashford, Kent, postcode **TN27 0QS**, w3w:turned.cabbages.skinning. Park in the free car park which is by the playing field just on the north side of the village centre. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

*Pluckley's name comes from the original Saxon lord, Plucca or Pluke (spellings were not standard in those days). The village has great pride in its history and sense of community. In the middle ages, Pluckley was larger than Ashford. Before the apple orchards, sheep were the mainstay of wealth in the village. You may see that several of the old houses have high ceilings: this was to accommodate the weavers' looms. In 1450 many of the villagers looted London as part of Jack Cade's revolt against government corruption. We know the extent of Pluckley's contribution because no less than 50 pardons were issued! (The number **not** pardoned is not recorded.) A century later, the Wyatt Rebellion (against Mary Tudor's marriage to Philip of Spain) came to the village and more blood was spilt. Nowadays, the village is peaceful unless you happen to be a ghoul…*

*Pluckley revels in the title "Kent's most haunted village". There are **twelve** principal ghosts or mysterious events. The "Coach and Horses", the "Colonel of Parkwood", the "Highwayman" at Fright Corner (with a clash of swords and agonised screams), the "Miller", the "Monk" at Greystones, the "Red Lady" a sorrowing ghost who searches the graveyard for her baby, the "Schoolmaster" (no one knows why he hanged himself), the "Screaming Man" (really a dis-embodied sound), the "Tudor Lady" (calling her dogs, also a suicide). There are a half dozen other haunted spots around the village.*

The church of St Nicholas dates from the 1100s and is light and spacious with four columns of wooden box pews. The church, unsurprisingly, is also haunted. Several gravestones outside are tilted at an angle, as though the inhabitants had beome restless.



1 From the car park in Pluckley, go out through the small wooden gate at the far end of the car park, passing a dilapidated hut and a kids' playground on your right. Go through a large wooden swing-gate and take a path across a ragged, partly cultivated, meadow. Suddenly you are beside a great explosion of apple trees whose orchards dominate the landscape of this Garden of England. Keep straight ahead on a wide path across two orchards, after which you cross a track dedicated to off-road horseriding. After a belt of tall trees and a marker post with a yellow arrow, there is a cypress hedge on your left and suddenly it gives way to a rose garden with *Sheerland Farm House* beyond. *The Highwood family (Charles and James) own the farm and 180 ha of land, exactly half of which is fruit. As well as the main crop of Cox's, the farm is renowned for Victoria plums and Rainier cherries.* You shortly reach a crossing with a tarmac drive. Turn **right** on the drive.

2 You cross a magnificent tree-lined driveway, in fact a decommissioned road. The drive, now a mere track, runs between Vineyards. The track curves right, giving you a view of the receding Kentish countryside. Now grass, it runs beside an orchard on your right, with a vast crop field sweeping away to your left. Soon, on your right, you can see the oasts of Grade-II listed 18th-century L-shaped *Malmains*. *Malmains was a manor, going back to Henry III's reign when Henry Malmaines was Sheriff in the 1400s; it has been delightfully renovated.* Your path takes you through some long grass and out into a crop field. Immediately on your **right** you see a path through the undergrowth leading to a stile. Take this route and keep **left** in the meadow beyond with a better view of *Malmains*. (Some walkers are put off by the undergrowth, staying on the edge of the field, turning **left** in the corner to a gap, and **right** on the lane; but the standard route given here is more attractive.) *You pass on your right a quite stupendous holm oak with a perfectly shaped crown.* At the end of the meadow, go over a stile and turn **right** on a tarmac lane.

3 Ignore a road junction on your left and follow the lane for a further 350m, ignoring a footpath on the left just before a dip. As the lane begins to rise out of the dip, at a double signpost, go **left** through a gap beside a large metal gate (overgrown but perfectly passable) and take a diagonal path across the field [Nov 2019 obscured by crops; walkers turned **right** around two sides; you can also stay on the lane and turn left]. At the far end, go over a stile and straight across a small meadow. After another stile, veer **right** on a drive and out via the smaller of two wooden gates to a road. Cross over the major road, a fraction left, to a side road, Lambden Road.

4 It begins as a quiet country road with some scattered houses and rolling sheep pastures on your right. New houses are intermingled with dwellings of a greater age. Ignore footpaths on both sides. Most notably, on your left are *Lambden House*, *Victoria Cottages* and *Lambden Cottage* sitting under two large apple trees. This is the desirable neighbourhood of Pluckley Thorne, with rail connections to Ashford and London (Pluckley station being only 1 mile away). At a major road, turn **right**, go past a road junction (the house opposite used to be a pub), cross the road and, at the start of a small car parking area, go **left** on a signed footpath.

5 The path leads into a crop field. Go down the left-hand side, marvelling at the views. As you come into a large field, take a path straight across the centre. At the end, just before a house, turn **right** on a wide path. The path zigzags, bends right, and joins a bridleway which takes you through a wooden gate* into a sloping pasture. (*Just before the gate on the left there

lies a memorial slab celebrating the wartime airfield.) Your imminent snaking route up through the waving long grass is visible ahead. At the top of the first slope, go through a metal gate and continue ahead, aiming for the far corner where you can see a wooden seat. The seat turns out to be just a wooden beam but the views are terrific. Go through two small metal gates and then keep to the right-hand side of the grass, going through the smaller of two metal gates. A driveway leads out to the main road in Pluckley.

6 Turn **left** up the hill and immediately go **right** on *The Street* into the village square. This is the beating heart of the village, with the *Black Horse* pub and the church.

Sited in a large brick mansion, the Black Horse Inn dominates the square. It is also billed as a restaurant. However, ales are predictable rather than local. The inn sells the "Haunted Pluckley" book and also organises tours.

After possible refreshment, take a gravel path towards the church, going through a small wooden gate. After visiting the church, go **left** across the cemetery and through the wooden lichgate. You cross a small grassy quadrangle containing a grass labyrinth. Continue through a small wooden gate and turn **left**, arriving back at the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Pluckley is well signed off the A20 road at Charing. If coming from the M25 / M20, come off come off at junction 8 (*Leeds Castle*). Take the A20 for 9 miles to the big roundabout just before Charing. Keep **right** here, staying on the A20, signposted *Ashford*. In only 500 yds, there is a **right** turn for Pluckley. The village is in 3 miles. Park in the designated car park on the **left** immediately before the village centre.

By bus/train: train to Pluckley station, 1 mile away from the route; local bus or extend the walk. Check the timetables.

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