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

Shipbourne, Dene Park and Oxon Hoath

Distance: 13½ km=8½ miles or 9½ km=6 miles easy walking

Region: Kent Date written: 12-jun-2017

Author: Malinovka Last update: 11-nov-2026

Refreshments: Dunk's Green, Shipbourne

Map: Explorer 147 (Sevenoaks) & 148 (Maidstone)
but the maps in this guide should be sufficient

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

Public rights are restricted to printing, copying or distributing this document exactly as seen here, complete and without any cutting or editing. See *Principles* on main webpage.

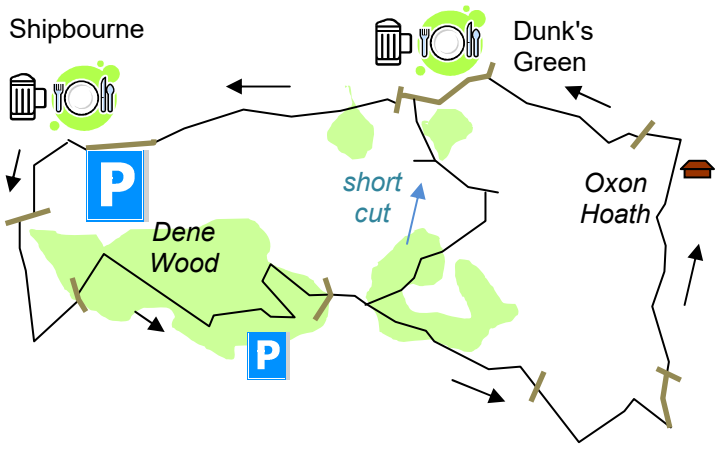
Sheep meadows, woodland, parkland, views, orchards, historic house

In Brief

This walk shows you the great variety of the wonders of the Garden of England. As well as flowery meadows, orchards and oast houses, you will see some features you might not expect in Kent, such as a huge dense forest and a vast swathe of grassland. There are two good places for refreshment, one a typical village pub (for the *Kentish Rifleman*, ring 01732-810727) and the other a large roadside establishment with accommodation and many facilities (for the *Chaser Inn*, ring 01732-810360).

There are nettles and brambles on some of the paths along this walk, making shorts inadvisable. Paths are generally well-made, so the going is easy, although in the wetter months, boots are recommended. The stiles always have a gap for your dog, so he can come along.

The walk begins at the car park in **Upper Green Road**, opposite the church in **Shipbourne**, near Tonbridge, Kent, postcode **TN11 9PE**, w3w:shade.spray.issues. You could also start at the **Dene Wood** car park, nearest postcode **TN11 9RJ**, which is 100m from the walk (see the second mini-map) For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

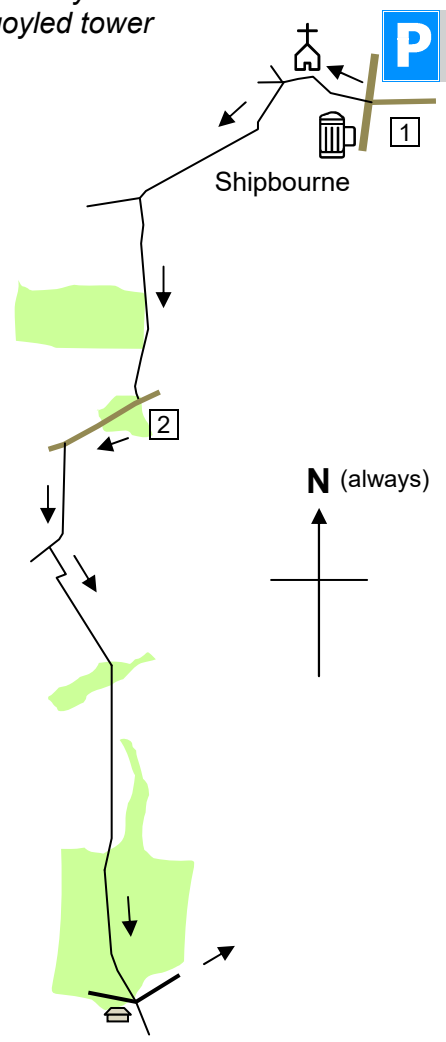


Bird's Eye View

The Walk

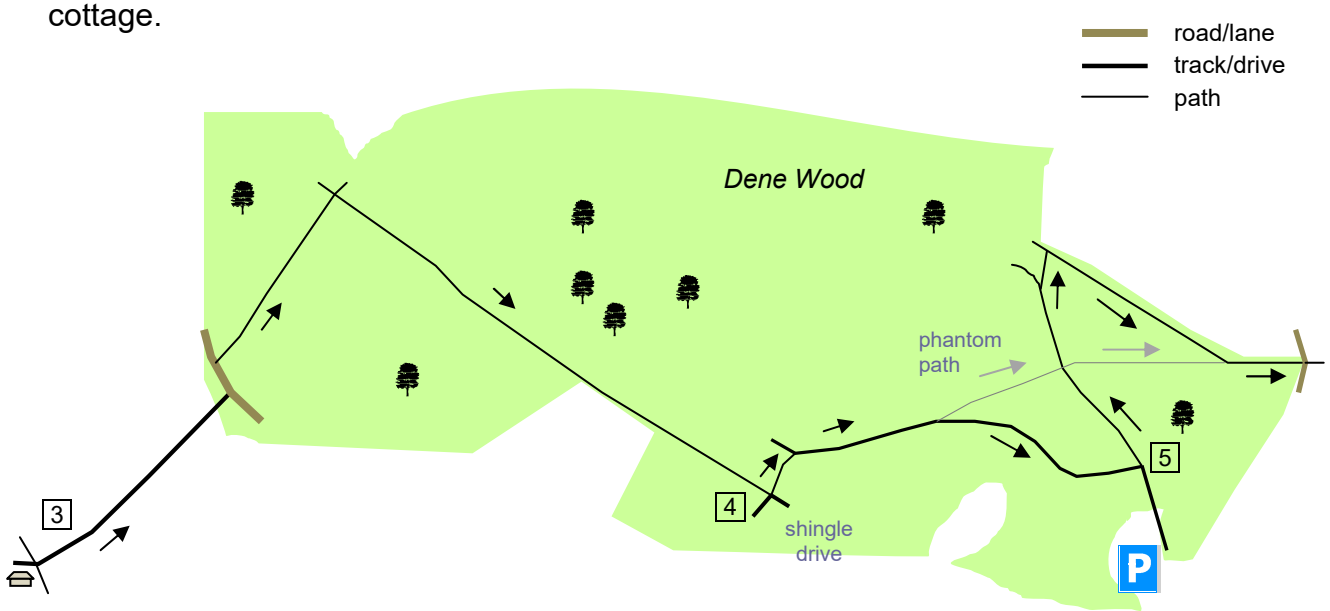
Leg 1: Shipbourne to Dene Park 5 km=3 miles

Shipbourne is pronounced "shibbun", a name that comes from the many sheep you see here and from the Bourne river which you will be crossing. The "Chaser Inn" was refurbished in 2003 as an open-air family-friendly pub that provides several real ales and good food. St Giles church was built by Edward Cazalet of Fairlawne and opened for worship in 1881. The gargoyled tower contains six bells.



1 Walk to the entrance to St Giles Church, with the *Chaser Inn* on your left, and take a footpath through the lichgate. Go round the church and go out of the churchyard on the other side through a small wooden gate set in a round wall. Immediately **ignore** a path straight ahead and a stile on your right and instead turn **left** on a path into trees. Your path runs beside a crop field on your right and shortly runs diagonally right across it. At the other side of the field, you come to a line of recently planted willows. Cross over the bridge and immediately turn **left** along the line of willows. In 15m your path veers **right** across the middle of the crops. You pass an oak wood on your right. At the end of the field pass to the **right** of a large, padlocked wooden gate, to a road.

2 Turn **right** on the road, using the wide grass fringe. In just over 120m, at a signpost, turn **left** across the road and go through a gap in a hedge onto a path between fences. Your path meets a wire fence and bends right to reach a junction of paths with a clipped hedge straight ahead. Turn **left** here through a tall metal gate into a meadow. In only 10m, go **right** through a tall wooden gate into the adjoining meadow and **left** along the edge. At the end, keep straight ahead past a barn, following a wire fence on your right. At the end of the meadow, go through a tall metal gate and continue ahead on a wide grassy strip beside woodland on your left. You reach a junction of tracks in front of a large cottage.



3 Turn sharp **left** past a marker post on a wide track leading into woods. You pass a gate on your right leading to *Valley House*. After a total of 400m, you reach the main Tonbridge Road. Turn **left** on the road and, in 50m, go **right** at a signpost on a bridleway into Kiln Wood. After 300m on this forest path, you reach a junction with a wooden barrier ahead. Turn **right** here before the barrier on another wide woodland path. Follow this path for nearly 800m avoiding all side turnings. Soon there is a grassy meadow visible close by on your right and a pond on your left before the path re-enters the deep forest. In another 200m you pass a metal barrier just before a shingle drive coming from the right and turning straight ahead.

4 Do *not* join the shingle drive but turn **left** at the junction past a wooden barrier on a wide path. In 50m, at a T-junction, veer **right**. This path soon goes through a lighter area dominated by chestnut and ash. In just over 200m further you may notice an unclear path forking away left. Ignore it and stay on the main path, forking a fraction right. (The *left* fork would take you directly to the Puttenden Road, going straight over a crossing path after 200m. But it is a "phantom path" eerily difficult to navigate unless you have a clear sense of direction. The *given route* sticks to the easily navigable wide paths.) In another 100m or so, the path distinctly curves right and left. You come to a junction by a doggie waste bin with a metal barrier visible in the distance on your right. Turning right here, not on this route, would take you to the Dene Park car park, an alternative start (see mini-map).

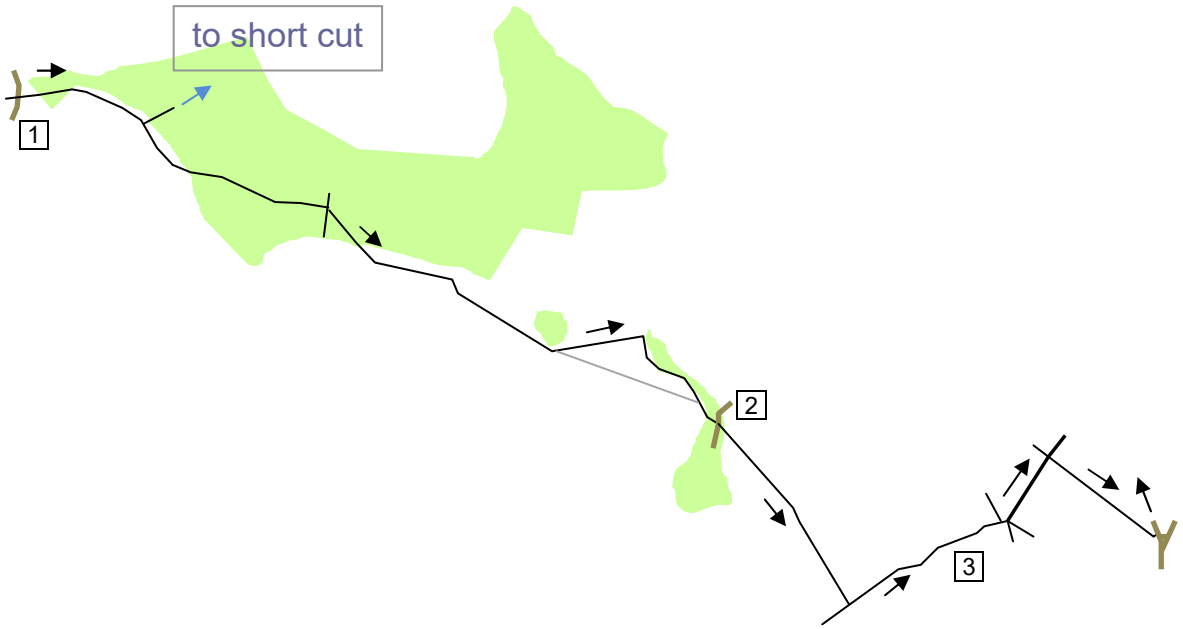
5 [Jun 2026: disruption from forestry work: see "Dene Park Problem" near end.] Turn very sharp **left** at the junction on a slightly narrower path. In 200m, go straight over a narrow crossing path (the phantom path). Your path is now narrow and sandy. In 120m, just after your path curves left, look to your right for a path leading down towards a green meadow. Turn **right** here and follow the path to the corner of the meadow. Now turn sharp **right** on a path which runs close to the meadow on your left. This path runs for more than 400m, over some fallen tree trunks, always staying within sight of the meadow. After 400m or so, you come down a bank to the Puttenden Road. Cross the road directly to a (broken) wooden barrier and a signposted footpath. (If there is a large pool of deep water here, you can use the narrow bank on your left – watch out for tree branches!) This path takes you past a pond and a crop field on your right, with small meadows and woodland on your left. At the end of a wire fence on your left, you reach a marker post indicating a choice between a left fork and straight on.

> **Decision point.** If you are doing the shorter 9½ km=6 mile walk and eager to reach the *Kentish Rifleman* pub, whilst missing Oxon Hoath, skip to the section called **Dunk's Green Express** near the end of this guide. Otherwise …

Leg 2: Dene Park to Oxon Hoath 4½ km=3 miles

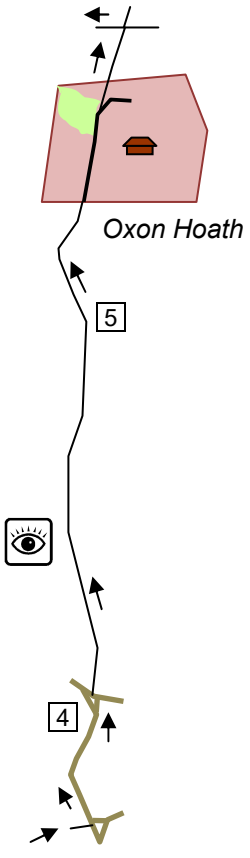
1 **See mini-map overleaf.** Ignore the left fork and continue straight on. Your path veers left away from the meadowside and leads you on a pleasant wide woodland walk through a coppice. After 300m, you reach a T-junction with a wide track. Turn **right** and immediately fork **left** back on the footpath which soon runs close to a crop field on your right. The path comes out into the open and runs beside the field. In 200m, in the next field, the footpath officially keeps dead straight across the field, cutting the left-hand corner. But, in practice, there are often crops planted over the field: in this case, veer a fraction

left to keep to the left-hand side of the field, zigzagging right-left round corners. At the end, go over a stile beside a large metal gate onto a tarmac lane.



2 Go straight over the lane, over a stile, on a signposted path across the centre of a crop field. (Care! this field is periodically ploughed over and the path obliterated.) Ahead, you can see *Hadlow Tower*, looking rather like Rapunzel's fairytale tower: you should be heading in that direction. *(See the other walk "Medway Ramble".)* Your path descends to go over a stream in 200m, then up into the next field. In another 200m, you reach a T-junction with some large oaks on your right. Turn abruptly **left** here on a grassy path. At the far side, go straight over a sturdy stile beside a large metal gate, ignoring a footpath on your right. Keep ahead over a flat bridge across the River Bourne and take a grassy path across the meadow, heading for a pair of large metal gates.

3 Go over a stile beside the metal gates and go another 50m to reach a junction of paths. There is a stile on your right and a faint path beside a hedge on your right. Avoid both and instead keep straight ahead on a wide farm track between fields (an informal route used by the village dog owners). (Care! The fields left and right are periodically ploughed over and the paths obliterated; you could walk further down the farm track and follow overhead wires towards a house: the kissing-gate gate mentioned in the text is just past a wooden farm gate on the left; **or** you could follow the farm track to the far end and turn **right** on the road to the T-junction.) In 150m, you reach a narrow path crossing the crops at right angles. Turn **right** here and follow this straight path all the way to a small metal kissing-gate in the hedge at the far side, onto a tarmac lane. Turn immediately **left** on the lane, in the direction *Plaxtol, Shipbourne*.



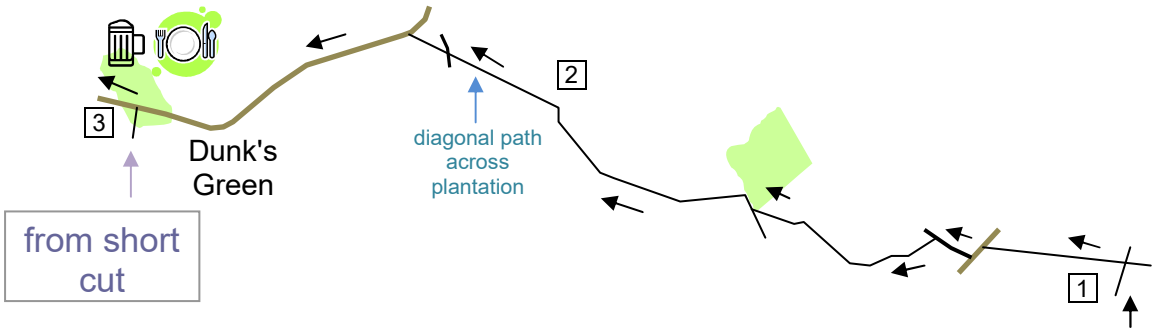
4 Where the road bends left, fork **right** to a T-junction. Go straight across the road, a fraction left, through a small metal kissing-gate into a large grassy meadow. Go straight ahead on a faint path across the grass and through a metal kissing gate in a line of trees. Now keep ahead beside a wire fence on your right. You can now take in the vastness of this great sweep of grassland known as Oxon Hoath Park, designed in the 1300s as a deer park (plus oxen, no doubt). After 650m with widening views, you come through a kissing gate, leading straight on to a memorial bench seat for a welcome breather.

5 Continue on the path across the grass, catching a glimpse of *Oxon Hoath House* on your right. Your path winds to the right to reach the gateway columns into the garden. (To avoid the cattle grid here, there is an ingeniously weighted little metal gate on your left.) Follow the wide driveway under cedars of all kinds, passing the garden, the *Dower House* and the walled garden.

Oxon Hoath was built in 1372 by Sir John Culpeper, a family which appears so often in any context of wealth and power in Kent and East Sussex. (This site has half-a-dozen references.) The estate then passed through the hands of a succession of knighted owners, until in 1846 the architect Anthony Salvin re-modelled it in the French château style. Oxon Hoath is now a retreat, hosting weddings and other events. The walled kitchen garden is justly celebrated.

Leave the estate through similar gateway columns but leave the drive as it bends right, by keeping straight ahead on a rustic track. In nearly 200m, in the middle of a fruit farm, you reach a crosspaths where you meet the Greensand Way (GW) long-distance path. Turn **left** here, passing rows of cultivated fruit. You will now be following the GW symbols all the way back to Shipbourne.

Leg 3: Oxon Hoath to Shipbourne 4 km=2½ miles



1 In the far corner, follow a narrow path beside a garden fence and down steps to a lane. Turn **left** on the lane and, in 20m, turn **right** on a footpath. An unusual angle-stepped stile leads you onto a drive. Just before a large wooden gate, turn **left** on a grassy path. This is an especially attractive part of the walk, with the oasts of *Egypt Farm* on your left and views of Mere-worth Woods on your right. *(See another walk in this series, "Offham, Old Soar Manor, Platt".)* Your path bends right under a large oak to run beside a stream bed. It zigzags left-right opposite a large wooden gate, across the stream, over a stile to a T-junction with a narrow path. Turn **right** on the path for only 20m into trees and, at a marker post, turn **left** through a forest of cottonwood poplars, still on the GW. Once out of the wood, continue on a path across the centre of a crop field. In the next field, veer **right** up the right-hand side. You arrive at the corner of an apple plantation.

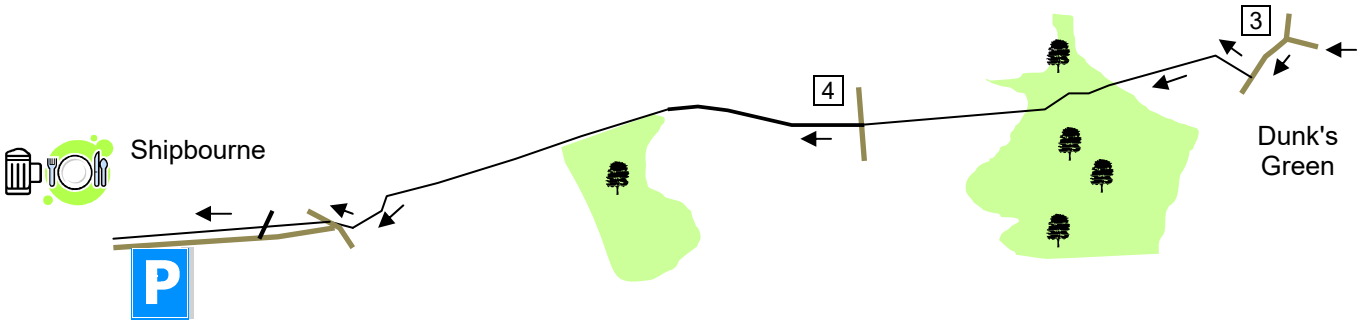
2 Keep right along the edge of the apple trees and, in 15m, go **diagonally left** on a path through the plantation. At the other side, go through a small gap in the hedge and keep the same direction across a crop field. You meet a track coming down from the left. Now keep **left** across the grass towards a pond. Go over a new unusual stile to the tarmacked Roughway Lane and turn **left** on it, still on the GW. You pass *Parchal Place* with its cartwheel gates and exotic fowl and cross the Bourne River. Avoid a

footpath on the right and follow the lane as it veers right uphill past three houses. A footpath joins you from the left.

At this point the Dunk's Green Express short cut re-joins the main walk.

In a few seconds you reach little Dunk's Green with an extraordinary carved seat, loganberries for sale, opposite the welcoming *Kentish Rifleman* pub.

Mr Dunk was a wealthy local merchant who built his family home, now called the "Roses", in about 1550. The pub in Dunk's Green was built a few years later and has been an ale-house and tavern ever since. It was called the "Red Lyon" until 1867 when it was changed to the "Kentish Rifleman", probably to boost its image as a militia recruitment post. Two Winchester carbines still hang from the ceiling. The pub serves lunch during "normal" times but you can also order a ciabatta or ploughmans. Beers are typically a local Tonbridge brew, Westerham's British Bulldog, Whitstable and the ubiquitous Harveys. This pub is so popular ("excellent food fine beer") that it is often packed out at lunchtime and you may need to book.

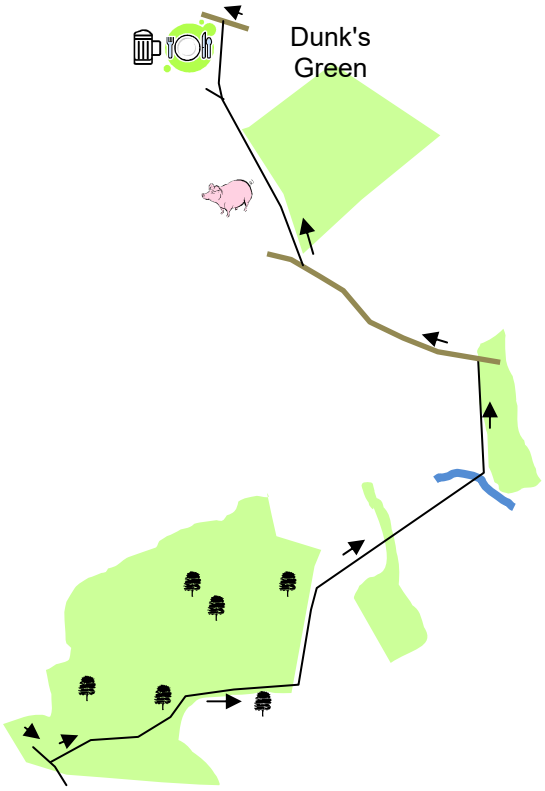


3 After possible refreshment, at a junction by the pub, turn **left** on the major road, signposted *Shipbourne*. In 100m, at a fingerpost, turn **right** up a step through a kissing-gate and straight ahead along the left-hand side of a pasture, still on the GW. Go over *Sarah Simpson's Favourite Stile* on the left and cross a field diagonally on a wide path. (Care! This field is periodically ploughed up and the path obliterated. If the ground is heavy, it should be possible to follow the left-hand edge and turn right in the corner.) *Hadlow Tower is visible on your left.* At the other side, go over a nice firm stile into woods. Your path runs uphill through the bluebell wood. You come out, over a stile (or through a large wooden gate) and straight ahead on a path across a crop field. At the other side, go over a stile to a tarmac lane.

4 Cross straight over the lane to a tarmac drive leading to Fairlawne Home Farm. Go through a wooden gate or stile. You can approach the farm via a stile or a small wooden gate down the slope on your left - or simply stay on the tarmac drive. Go past the farm buildings on the driveway and at a marker post continue ahead onto a farm track. Follow it down beside a field, then up again through the centre of the next field. At the end, a grassy path veers left to take you through a (rather tight) wooden swing-gate. It leads onwards to reach a tarmac lane, Upper Green Road. Turn **right** on the lane and, as it curves left, turn **left** on a parallel grassy path running just to the right of the road. The path crosses a tarmac drive and passes a Shipbourne village sign. Soon you arrive at the car park on your left, where the walk began.

For final refreshments, the Chaser Inn is on the other side of the main road. It serves a variety of beers, sandwiches and pub favourites.

Dunk's Green Express 2 km=1¼ miles



Take this short cut if you want to go direct to Dunk's Green and the pub, missing Oxon Hoath.

1 Fork **left** at the marker post. The path runs through light woodland and comes out after 300m at the corner of a crop field. Keep straight ahead past a marker post on a path through the wood, running close to the field on your right. Where the wood ends in 200m, turn **left** beside the field. The hillside opposite, with its various oast houses, will be part of your return route. In 200m, after the crops come to an end, turn diagonally **right** on a faint path across the grass. After a marker post and by-passable stile (in a band of trees), continue across the next crop field. At the other side, go over a bridge across the River Bourne, in an attractive spot, and turn **left** in a meadow planted with maple, apple and copper beech, passing a pylon. A by-passable stile next to a large wooden gate takes you onto a tarmac lane.

2 Turn **left** on the lane. After 350m, as the field on your right ends, turn **right** onto a driveway for Popes Villa Farm. Take a narrow grassy path between the farm entrance and a large wooden gate. On your left there was once a drove of fine pedigree pigs - now replaced with only rubbish and old farm apparatus. As you pass a flowery meadow on your left, avoid a kissing-gate and keep straight on. On reaching a tarmac lane, turn **left** to the *Kentish Rifleman* pub.

The adventure continues at **Leg 3 section** 3 of the main walk.

Dene Park Problem

This section covers a problem discovered by walkers near the Dene Park car park, which can (temporarily?) affect all walkers. Some heavy forestry work has resulted in a wide road for vehicles leading from the Dene Park car park. If you follow directions as best you can (given the drastic changes to the landscape, you will reach the Puttenden Road. Turn **left** on the road, using the parallel footpath in the adjoining wood, to find the "(broken wooden barrier" and footpath sign mentioned in the text.

Getting there

By car: Shipbourne is on the main **A227** road. If you use a navigator, coming from the south or west London Area, it will probably direct you along the A21, as far as the *Sevenoaks Weald* exit, and then on a complex scenic route along lanes direct to Shipbourne. You can also come from Tonbridge, going north on the Shipbourne Road, or from the A25, or M20 or M26, through Borough Green and Igtham. Another good way is from the A25 at Seal, just east of Sevenoaks. Turn south as for *Godden Green* but very shortly fork **left** as for *Stone Street*. This road eventually zigzags right-left through Ivy Hatch and meets the A227 just north of Shipbourne.

By bus/train: bus 222 from Tonbridge Station, not weekends. Check the timetables.