

Goudhurst Walk

10 miles (16 kms) allow 5 hours



A Walk Through Time



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A walk through ancient woodland and iconic Wealden landscape leads to the picturesque village of Goudhurst, standing on a ridge affording glorious views, north and south. The village has plenty of character, featuring the 12th century St Mary's church, and rows of weavers' cottages, built using local tile and stone from an industry that made the village prosperous in the 14th century.

The return journey towards Cranbrook goes through the splendour of 500-year-old Old Park Wood, with its carpets of bluebells in the spring.





A History of Goudhurst

Originally a clearing in the forest that covered the south east, the village of Goudhurst established itself on high ground around St Mary's Church. The building was dedicated in 1119, although it is likely that a church has occupied the site since Saxon times. Improvements were made over the next two centuries. In 1637, the church spire was struck by lightning and burnt down. Inside you'll find some fine features – and walkers who recall Thomas Hardy's Mellstock Quire can look for the singing gallery - built in 1769.

The village grew in prosperity in the 1330s, as Flemish weavers expanded from their base in Cranbrook to create the Kentish broadcloth industry. Their preference for drinking hopped beer, rather than the existing ale, led to the establishment of the Kentish hop industry, which shaped the agricultural landscape around the village, and provided a great many livelihoods in the area.



Fly Agaric





Majestic oak near Glassenbury



Pheasant, Glassenbury Estate



St Mary's churchyard

Iron was another local industry that was important to Goudhurst. It flourished from Tudor times until production moved to the Midlands. With its decline came the rise of smuggling as a means of supplementing income in hard times. The infamous Hawkhurst Gang were well known in the area, before eventually being disbanded after fighting a pitched battle against a militia of Goudhurst residents around the churchyard, in April 1747. The Star and Eagle Inn, and Spyways in the village, were renowned haunts of the Hawkhurst Gang.



Guelder Rose





Walking Notes

This ten-mile circular walk follows the High Weald Landscape Trail (HWLT), from Cranbrook to Goudhurst, and includes a long, gentle climb up to the village. The remainder uses the extensive network of footpaths through fields, orchards and woods and over the rolling landscape. Refreshment half-way round can be sought at various shops in the village, or at the Star and Eagle Inn (offering great views from the terrace), and The Vine Inn. The Peacock Inn at Iden Green is about three-quarter way round, and can be reached by taking a short detour.

The walk begins and ends at Cranbrook, where free parking is available in the large car park by the Co-op supermarket off the High Street.

✚ From the Weald Information Centre, head up the High Street towards Hartley, admiring the character buildings either side of the road as you go.

✚ Pass Wheatfield Drive on the right hand side and turn into New Road, and follow the path to the road (A229). Cross the road into Angley Woods, following the HWLT, and ignoring other tracks. The path leads downhill and over a stream before rising, following a wide track. Follow the trail right, off the track and over a stream, bearing left up the hill to a surfaced track and past a woodshed on the left. Follow the track and bear left round the field edge leading to the Hartley to Iden Green road (B2085).

✚ Cross the road and follow the field edge past Glassenbury House on the right.

The Glassenbury Estate was gifted by Henry 1 to its first owner in 1103. It passed by marriage to the Roberts family in 1377, who owned it for the next 300 years. The present moated house was built in the Tudor period on the site of the original building. Family memorials can be found in St Dunstan's Church, Cranbrook.

✚ Follow the path on the edge of the fields, through a gate and onto a driveway passing houses and following waymarkers out to the open fields again. Turn left at the marker, then right, staying on the track leading past the duck ponds and ancient field boundaries, noting the magnificent ancient oak and historic hornbeam field banks as you go.

✚ Follow the path past Smugley Farm on the left – a property that was involved in smuggling, as its name suggests. An underground passage was reputed to run from it to Triggs Farm, just below Goudhurst, and to the right of the path.

✚ Continue across a field and over a bridge, then up towards Goudhurst, keeping to the right of the field. Walk along a track with houses on your left, go over a stile into a field which leads into a disused ménage. Come back onto the track and carry on until you reach a lane. Turn right and go up the lane until you reach Tiddymotts Lane, then double back on yourself until you see the path on the right, leading up to the church.



St Mary's Church



Star and Eagle Inn

Next to the churchyard is the Star and Eagle Inn. The front is mock Tudor, as originally it had an open entrance for stage coaches, however parts of the building date back to the 14th century. The Vine Inn down the road was also a coaching inn, where the London to Tenterden stage-coach, The Flower of Kent, would stop to change horses after the long pull up Clay Hill. The horses were watered in the village pond, that still exists opposite the inn.

✚ Walk through the churchyard and out onto Back Lane, opposite the weavers' cottages.

✚ Walk along the pavement next to the main road towards Cranbrook, turn left down Tattlebury Lane, and bear left down a lane with a no-entry sign at the top. Cross the road and walk down Ladham Road opposite, sign posted to Curtisden Green. Take the footpath down the driveway to Ladham House, taking in the wonderful views towards Horsmonden on your left.



Weavers' cottages



In the 14th century, skilled Flemish weavers were invited to improve the local woollen industry, and in 1337 a proclamation was issued by King Edward III to protect foreign weavers from mistreatment by English tradesmen who felt threatened by the competition. The cottages opposite the churchyard would have belonged to journeymen weavers, and The Master Weaver's House (now called Church House), is opposite The Star and Eagle Inn.

† Continue down the drive past Ladham house and look for a stile on the right, leading into an old orchard. Head for the right-hand side of the houses and you will reach a lane, going straight over into a driveway. The footpath drops away to the left of a hedge opposite the house and leads into young woodland. Follow the path between the wood edge and hedge as it leads into woodland, then over a stream. Walk up round the perimeter of a garden until you reach a road. Go straight over the road, down the right side of a field and orchard, past a house on the left, and continue up into Old Park Wood. Follow the path up through the wood and onto a track that leads to a cottage in the woods. If you are in need of refreshment, follow the track up to the road and the Peacock Inn is just over the other side. You will need to retrace your steps to return to the walk.

The Hawkhurst Gang

The Hawkhurst gang was a notorious bunch of smugglers and thieves who operated throughout south east England from 1734 to 1749. Led by George Gray, the gang terrorised south-coast communities from Dorset to Kent as they collected their contraband, including brandy, rum and tea, from the unguarded beaches and coves along the English Channel coast. Many houses, pubs and secret locations in woods were used as meeting places, and to store goods. References to smuggling, such as Tubslake and Smugley, are common throughout the High Weald.

Although many local people were connected to and supported the smugglers, in 1747 the people of Goudhurst had enough of the violence and extortion, following a series of gruesome deaths at the hands of the Gang. The locals formed a militia to meet the gang head on. A fierce battle took place around the churchyard on 21 April 1747, in which three gang members were killed, and the rest forced to retreat. Gray was caught a year later, and executed at Tyburn in May 1748.

Otherwise, turn left past the cottage and follow the footpath through chestnut coppice and a pine plantation until you reach a road. Notice the information panel about the wildlife of the wood just before you reach the gate onto the road.

† Turn left and walk down the lane, an old drove road, towards Collier's Green School. Turn right, go over a stile below the school and walk along the bottom of the school grounds to reach another lane. Cross over to the footpath opposite, go through the hedge and follow it through a field, into a wood, eventually emerging into a field. Head for the gap between the lakes in front of you and walk up the slope, through the gap in the hedge, and into a field. Follow the field boundary towards the cottages at Hazleden Farm.



Hazleden Farm

An archaeological survey of the Oast House at Hazleden Farm dates the building to the 17th century – see the website www.walkthroughtime.co.uk for further information. The site also contains Hopper Huts, where hop-picking families from London stayed during the picking season in Kent every September. These huts were usually built using corrugated iron cladding around a wooden frame, but wealthier farmers constructed them of brick as seen here.

Woodland banks



Throughout this series of Cranbrook Walks, the observant walker will notice trees growing on banks which are either multi-stemmed or show signs of layering. The banks were borders of field or woodland ownership, many dating back to medieval times. Trees were retained, or planted on these banks, to reinforce the boundary. The trees indicate past management through coppicing to produce multiple stems rising from a root base, or layering, where stems have been partially cut and bent over on top of the bank, to produce old horizontal stems with vertical shoots growing from them. Both these management practices were designed to maintain the boundary through regenerated growth, and to exclude or retain stock.

† Turn right and walk down the driveway to the road. Cross the road and go down the drive towards the house (The Cheery). Turn left at a gap in the hedge and follow the enclosed footpath until you reach the road (A262). Cross straight over the road and follow the track down towards a stream and bridge, leading up through the wood. Note the pits that remain from quarrying in Gravel Pit Wood. Carry straight on, eventually leaving the wood with paddocks on your right and a fence on the left. You will then reach a driveway that leads onto the road (A229). Cross to the footpath opposite, go through a gate and up through a field onto a path between playing fields on the left, and Cranbrook Primary school on the right. At the end of the path, bear left through a gate and continue into the churchyard and so back to the place where you started the walk.





Image courtesy of Fotolia

Beer comes to Kent

The Flemish weavers who came to Kent in the 14th century preferred hopped beer to English ale, and brought with them not only the experience of brewing, but also several varieties of hops. Starting with a few small hop gardens, their passion for producing bitter brews grew into an industry in the 16th century. By the 1880s, the area of Kent covered by hop gardens had reached 43,000 acres. The industry also supported coppice workers and charcoal makers, field workers and kiln-makers, who in turn employed the skills of tile-makers and bricklayers. Hundreds of oast houses dotted the landscape – specially-designed, often circular, buildings used to dry and pack the hop flowers. Their distinctive white cowls which capped the roofs were built by local coopers and carpenters, designed to rotate with the prevailing wind, creating the right draught conditions to dry the hops inside.



Image courtesy of Fotolia



The 'Walk Through Time' walking guides have been produced by Cranbrook In Bloom in partnership with the Kent High Weald Partnership.

For more information visit www.walkthroughtime.co.uk

Walks available in this series:

- Bedgebury
- Benenden
- Cranbrook
- Goudhurst
- Sissinghurst

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- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people



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