

A coppice is a wood where the trees are grown for coppicing which means cutting the trees down to a low level and allowing multi-stems to regrow to provide a continuing supply of timber. Sweet chestnut coppice was primarily planted for hop poles and the fencing trades because the timber grew quick and straight.

10 At the end of this recently coppiced area turn left so the open field is on your right and woodland (Clay Pond Wood) is on your left. Follow the footpath around the edge of the field. Go past a gate and then past another turning along a grassed path on your left. Just before you head uphill you will see a path through woodland (Head Barn Wood) on your left. Follow this path which starts to veer round to the right.

11 On leaving the woodland turn left down the field edge. You will shortly come to a junction with another footpath coming from Strood. Turn right and head up this footpath taking you across the middle of the field away from the motorway. Follow this path for 500 metres then cross the road leading to houses and continue straight on at the crossroads. This path now becomes the North Downs Way.

12 Take the next footpath on your left towards Longhoes Wood leaving the North Downs Way. Follow this downhill into the wooded area and towards the railway line. Take great care crossing over the stile on either side and when crossing the railway line itself. Follow this path to its end and turn right on to the road it joins (Pilgrims Way).

Longhoes Wood is a rare type of mixed broadleaved coppice woodland and in early spring, the woodland floor is a carpet of blue from the mass of bluebells.

13 Walk downhill where the Pilgrims Way will merge with the pavement alongside the main road. You are heading towards the traffic lights a little further downhill. Cross over Bush Road and then cross over the main road at the traffic lights. Take the next road on the left and follow this back to Cuxton train station.

Distance: 5 miles / 8km.

Time: 3 hours approximately.

Terrain: Paths can become muddy and some uphill walking. Two stiles, some gates and one train line crossing. One flight of five steps.

Start/end point: Cuxton train station.

OS Explorer Map: 148.

Coppice & Corncockle

Cuxton

A 5 mile / 8km circular walk through stunning chalk downland and farmland of Ranscombe Farm, past the impressive Darnley Mausoleum and through the village of Cuxton.



Ranscombe Farm poppies (Andy Vidler)



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This walk is endorsed by Explore Kent.

Photo credits cover: Bluebells (Andy Vidler www.andyvidler.co.uk)
Poppy and corncockle, Upper Bush sign and Darnley Mausoleum (Valley of Visions)



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Ranscombe Farm is the focus for this walk; a combined nature reserve and working farm in the beautiful Kent Downs landscape, nationally renowned for its rare arable wildflowers. Marvel at the impressive and recently restored Darnley Mausoleum and enjoy the panoramic views offered from this site.

1 From Cuxton train station follow Station Road to the junction with the main road (Cuxton Road). Cross over Cuxton Road at the traffic lights then turn left into Bush Road to lead you into Cuxton.

2 Just before Cuxton Junior School cross over Bush Road and take the footpath on your right up Tartank Lane. Head uphill and cross over the road you come to (Ladywood Road). Head straight on into White Leaves Rise then take the next left into Poplicans Road.

3 Follow Poplicans Road uphill and before you reach a left hand corner at the top of the hill, take the footpath between house numbers 82 and 86 (it looks like a driveway but soon turns into a footpath). Follow this path for 200 metres until you reach a bridge over the railway. Take this footpath over the bridge into Ranscombe Farm.

Ranscombe Farm is a combined nature reserve and working farm occupying 560 acres (227 hectares). It lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with much of the woodland being protected Ancient Woodland. With over 10 km of footpaths it offers a great opportunity to explore a classic landscape of woodland, arable fields and grassland with a rich diversity of wildlife. Its natural features have changed remarkably little since the 18th century and the site is nationally renowned for its arable wildflowers.

4 After crossing over the railway bridge turn left following this path all the way to its end.

Enjoy the stunning views of Bush Valley below along this footpath through the woodland of Mill Hill.

5 Continue up the five steps at the end of the footpath which takes you to an open field known as the Brockles. Turn right and follow the footpath around the corner of the field until you reach a crossroads with another path on the corner of the field.

The Brockles is a 57 acre chalk grassland field, last cultivated around 1995. It has since self-regenerated to a wonderful native wildflower, orchid-rich chalk grassland with ground nesting birds and the occasional fallow deer. The field is periodically grazed with cattle therefore dogs must be kept under strict control.

6 Turn right and head downhill across the middle of the next field.

This field, known as Kitchen Field, is of national importance being home to one of the largest assemblages of rare arable wildflowers including corncockle and broad-leaved cudweed. Changes to make farming practices more efficient over past decades have caused a widespread decline in arable plants.

7 When you reach the crossroads in the middle of the field turn left heading to the woodland in front of you. Continue along this footpath into the woodland which takes you round to the left and begins to climb uphill. Take the footpath on your right just before you reach an interpretation board. Follow this path all the way to the Darnley Mausoleum.

Designed in the neo-classical style by James Wyatt for the 4th Earl of Darnley, the Darnley Mausoleum exhibited the highest standards of architecture, engineering and craftsmanship of the time. Built in 1783 from Portland stone, it was designed to represent wealth and cost £9,000 – a huge sum at the time equivalent to £1 million today. However the Bishop of Rochester felt it unsuitable as a religious building and never used it as a mausoleum!

8 Go through the gate and walk past the Mausoleum on your left. Follow the main track to the right back into the northern section of Ranscombe Farm. This path is also part of the Ranscombe Farm 'chestnut trail'. Stay on this main track for approx 1.5km.



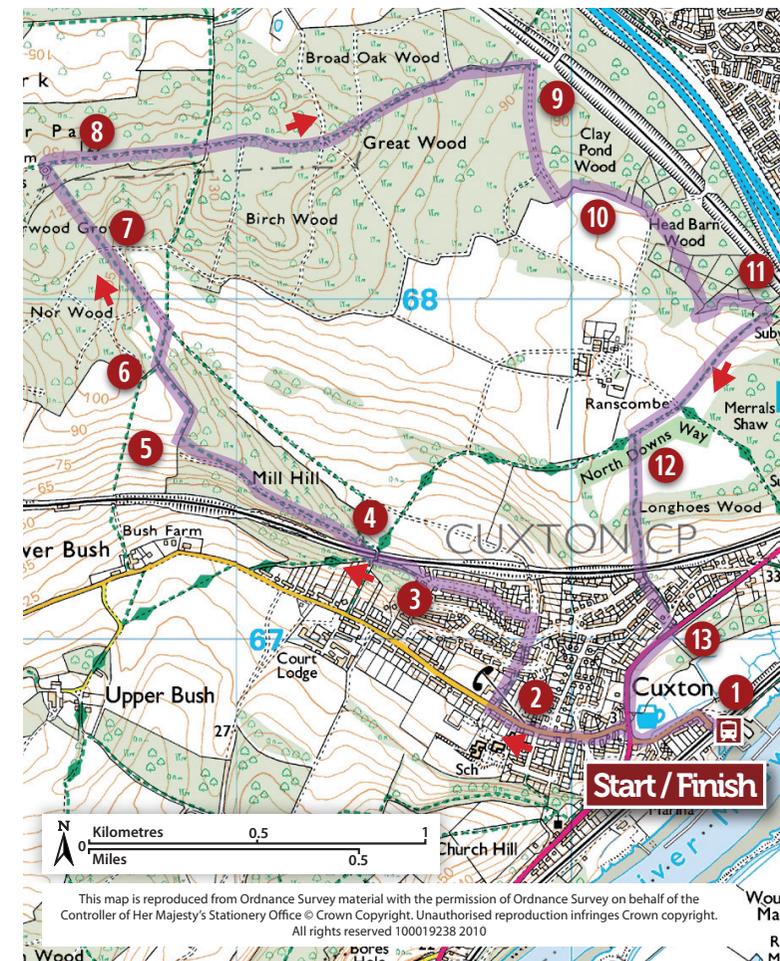
Corncockle (VOV)

Brockles field (VOV)

Coppice woodland (VOV)

Mature hornbeams, occasional oaks and sweet chestnut trees align this beautiful avenue known as Town Road and were probably planted 200 years ago.

9 When you get to the CTRL, turn right down a logging path into an area of coppiced woodland.



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