

and after 200 metres you will see a sign on the left to the monument. Take care as there is no pavement along Rochester Road).

**9** Continue along the North Downs Way for 500 metres until you reach a junction with the A229 main road (Blue Bell Hill). When you reach this point turn right and then go over the stile to take the next footpath on your right, across an open field towards woodland. You now leave the North Downs Way.

**10** Follow the path crossing through the woodland. Turn left after the kissing gate taking you across the field towards another kissing gate. Go through this and straight on to a third kissing gate at the bottom of the field, across a small stream. Follow the path towards the farm houses past the pond on your right. Follow the path (which turns into a driveway) around to the right between the houses.

*In 1879 the farm was developed as a "model farm" with a rectangular yard surrounded by barns. These are now converted into houses. You can still see the unusual structure of the main barn with cast iron pillars above the stone walls to allow ventilation to the hay and straw stored there.*

**11** Follow this for 400 metres then take the footpath on your left across a stream and then into Cobtree Manor golf course. Follow the public footpath in a straight line across the fairway heading for a gap in the woodland. Watch out for flying golf balls! Enter the woodland and go straight ahead up the short steep path. You are now in Cobtree Manor Park.

**12** Follow the path around to the right which takes you through stunning woodland on the way to the main entrance to the park and car park.

*Admire the veteran trees and the beautiful woodland setting of this section of the walk, part of the park's woodland trail. Cobtree Manor Park is the site of the former Maidstone Zoo!*

**13** Turn right along the main road. After 1km you will come to a junction where you need to turn right towards Aylesford village. Turn left at the mini roundabout and then just after the traffic lights turn left across the old bridge. Turn right after the bridge to follow the riverside path once again back to Aylesford train station.

**Distance:** 7.1 miles / 11.5km.

**Time:** 4 hours approximately.

**Terrain:** Parts of the walk are quite challenging due to uphill walking and paths can become muddy. One stile, two flights of steps (13 and 38 steps) and some gates. One train line crossing.

**Start/end point:** Aylesford train station.

**OS Explorer Map:** 148.

# Pits & Pilgrims

## Aylesford

A 7.1 mile / 11.5km circular walk through the beautiful landscape of the Kent Downs, with remnants of a rich Neolithic and industrial past dotted along the way.



Kit's Coty (johnmillerphotography.com)



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This walk is endorsed by Explore Kent.

Photo credits cover: Aylesford panorama and Tottington vineyard (johnmillerphotography.com) Hawthorn blossom and Kingfisher (Andy Vidler www.andyvidler.co.uk)



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This walk takes you through the picturesque village of Aylesford, across farmland and up through the scarp-top woodlands of the Kent Downs. Marvel at the disused quarries of the former cement industry, now reclaimed by nature and admire the impressive 6,000 year old Neolithic burial chamber, Kit's Coty.

**1** Turn left out of Aylesford train station then take the next road on your left (Mill Hill) and cross over the train tracks. Continue straight ahead crossing over Friars Way. When you reach the river turn right along the riverside footpath keeping the river on your left hand side.

*Look across the river and admire the stunning Carmelite priory; The Friars. Keep your eyes peeled for kingfishers that can sometimes be seen along the river here.*

**2** At the end of the footpath cross over the 14th century old bridge spanning the River Medway. After the bridge turn right then left across the village square and up Mount Pleasant. Follow this road to the end taking extra care as there is no pavement and the one way road brings traffic towards you.

*The stone doorway on your right at the top of the hill is medieval and was moved from the church during restoration in Victorian times. It was used by the priest to go from the church to take services at the Alms Houses (attendance used to be compulsory).*

**3** Just before you reach the main road take the footpath on your left alongside a stream. Follow the path with the stream on your right until you reach an open field then turn left uphill.

*From this path you have a good view of Aylesford sand pit. Folkestone Sand has been dug from here for at least 1000 years and the pit now extends westwards for more than a kilometre and down well below the water table. Cormorants, great crested grebes and a variety of ducks, geese and gulls use the resulting lake.*

**4** Continue along this path as it turns right and passes through a small woodland (shaw) then a kissing gate. Continue straight on through another kissing gate where you will have the woodland on your right.

Follow this path towards the houses and into the village of Eccles along Mackenders Way passing the vines on your right. At the end of Mackenders Way with the junction of the main road (Bull Lane), turn right and follow this for 500 metres.

*You have the opportunity to explore the village of Eccles from here should you wish by turning left along Bull Lane. Why not visit 'Dream Towers'; the sculpture installed in the recreation ground in 2011 as part of the Aylesford Community Trail project.*

**5** At the end of Bull Lane cross over Pilgrims Way and after 30 metres, turn right up the bridleway directly to the left of the cottage. Take care crossing this busy road as there is no pavement. Follow this path for 1.5 km to its end (which gets quite steep for the last section).

*When you get to a short section of wooden fencing on your right, peer over the hedge to look into Lower Culand Pit below; a former chalk quarry from the cement industry that the area is well known for. Continuing straight ahead you will see the sheer chalk cliff face of Greater Culand Pit in front of you. Both pits are now of great importance to wildlife and for the geological formations they support.*

**6** Once up the short flight of steps at the end of the bridleway turn right and follow this path downhill. You are now on the North Downs Way which you will follow for just under 2km. Take care here alongside the busy roads.

*The North Downs Way is one of currently 19 National Trails in the UK and runs for 153 miles from Farnham in Surrey to Dover in Kent. It passes through the Medway Valley hugging the sides and top of the beautiful Kent Downs.*

**7** You will come to a North Downs Way sign on your right towards Kit's Coty House. Follow this taking care on the steep steps as you go. After 300 metres you will see a gap in the hedge with Kit's Coty directly in front of you. Continue on the North Downs Way to the road junction at the bottom of the hill.



Aylesford Priory (John Miller)

Beech Mast (Andy Vidler)

Aylesford village (John Miller)

*Kit's Coty is one a group of Neolithic monuments known as the Medway Megaliths. It is a burial chamber built nearly 6,000 years ago that once stood at the end of a long barrow measuring 84 metres long.*

**8** Cross diagonally over the road continuing along the North Downs Way. (There is an option to detour to Little Kit's Coty Neolithic monument here. Head down Rochester Road



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