

This trail is part of the Valley of Visions Community Trails project, encouraging people to enjoy, explore and learn about their local area and surrounding countryside. Why not explore one of the other community trails in the Medway Gap? Visit www.valleyofvisions.org.uk for further information.

For more information about Aylesford visit www.aylesfordpc.kentparishes.gov.uk

You can find out more about the wildlife and nature reserves of the area at www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk



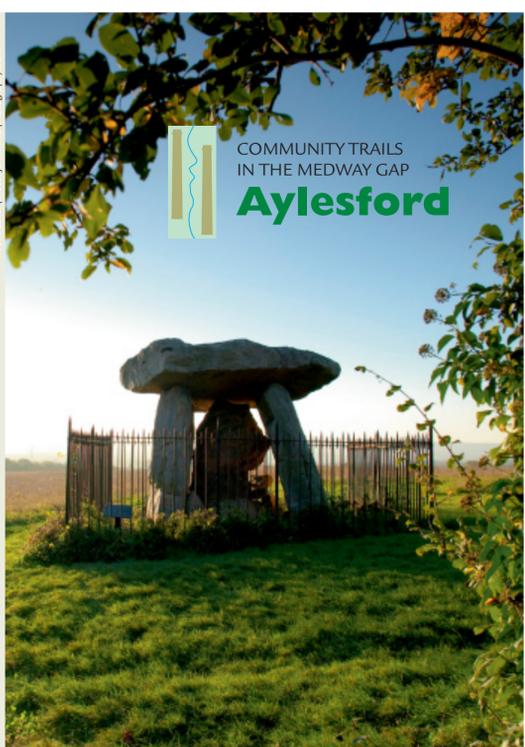
Aylesford Community Trail



There are many other Public Rights of Way in this area that you can use to plan your own walks, or perhaps just to put in a loop or a short cut on these walks.

The Ordnance Survey 'Explorer' series of maps show Rights of Way in green. Sheet 148 covers this area.

Front cover photo: johnmillerphotography.com



COMMUNITY TRAILS IN THE MEDWAY GAP
Aylesford

Aylesford

Allow 2-3 hours for this 9km (6 mile) walk. The route is mostly on tracks across farmed land with some steps down. There are glimpses of a variety of historic properties, and of past and present industrial activity.

● **Either from Aylesford Railway Station.** Leave the station and turn left. Turn left again and cross the railway track, continue ahead to the river then turn right and follow the path with the River Medway on your left.

You can see the Carmelite priory – The Friars – across the river and further along the disused wharf of Aylesford sand pit. Kingfishers can sometimes be seen here.

After 1km you will reach Aylesford Old Bridge.

● **Or from Aylesford Car Park.** Leave the car park and turn towards the new bridge over the River Medway.

From the new bridge you can look right to see the view of Aylesford that appears on many calendars, photographs and paintings.

Cross the river and follow the road round to the right. The approach to the old bridge is on your right.

The attractive stone building on the other side of the road is the Brassey Rooms. This was built as a school in 1853 by Edward Betts who lived at Preston Hall (just out of sight beyond the railway and motorway). Edward Betts and Thomas Brassey were both important builders of railways in the UK and abroad. Both Edward Betts and Thomas' son Henry Brassey (who lived at Preston Hall from 1870 until 1906) were significant benefactors of Aylesford. Aylesford's old bridge is now closed to motorised traffic. The bridge is late 14th century, the central arch was widened in 1824 to allow larger boats to pass.

Cross the old bridge, turn right and then left across the village square and up Mount Pleasant (leave the Coronation Gardens on your left).

The stone doorway on your right at the top of the hill is medieval, it 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). The pretty half timbered cottages on Mount Pleasant are Victorian. The lane is on a steep sided ridge of sandstone.

Just before you reach the main road, turn left into a footpath, with a stream on your right. Follow the path until you reach an open field then turn left.

From this path you have a good view of Aylesford sand pit. Folkestone Sand has been dug from here for at least 1000 years, 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.

Stay on this path as it turns right and passes through a little wood and then a kissing gate.

On the left now the Gault Clay (which overlies the sand) is extracted for brick making. Looking ahead you can see the chalk (which overlies the Gault Clay). The white cliffs show where chalk was formerly taken for making cement. After the second kissing gate along this path you will find narrow strips of woodland on your right. These are called "shaws" and are typical of the area. Most of the trees are Ash and show evidence of having been coppiced or pollarded in the past – for firewood or other timber products.

Where the path forks, take the right hand branch.

On your left are vines planted in 2008 for wine. If you look through the wide gap in the hedge on the right, you can see Preston Hall (just right of the green tower in the sand pit). If you look ahead up the track you may see a stand of Copper Beech trees on the hillside. These are said to have been planted by Henry Brassey to enhance his view from Preston Hall.

Continue up the hill.



This is called Windmill Hill, no evidence of the mill now, but good views all round. Close by to the east is Great Tottington Farm and the source of the stream which flows through Aylesford. In 1858 Edward Betts arranged for water to be piped from this spring to Preston Hall with supplies also being laid to local properties and Aylesford village at his expense.

Continue north eastwards down the hill and then straight ahead on the path between the vines.

On your right there is a large sarsen stone, laid flat, this is the Coffin Stone (history unknown). On top is another large sarsen, this was added by farm workers to get it out of the way for ploughing the field! (Sarsen – probably from Saracen, in this context meaning non-Christian).

When you reach the edge of the vineyard, cross the track and find the gap in the hedge a little to your right. TAKE GREAT CARE crossing the road! Look and listen! The road here is a dual carriageway and

traffic travels very fast. Look right to cross the first lane, climb the bank and then look left to cross the second lane.

This is the Pilgrims Way, the ancient route from Winchester to Canterbury. The lower road was made during the Second World War to ease the passage of military traffic.

Having crossed the Pilgrims Way, walk straight ahead through another "shaw" then along the side of a grass field.

In the trees on your left is a "hollow way" probably another ancient route.

Leave the field going almost straight ahead, pass through a little wood, turn left on the track, then, after about 10 metres, turn right just before a hedge.

This area is Kit's Coty Estate. Plots of land were sold off here in 1908. Many now have recently built houses but a few retain the original buildings.

When the track reaches a paved road (Salisbury Road) turn right. At the junction with Kingswood Road, Brassey's Copper Beeches are on the bank above you. When you reach the busy A229 turn right, do not cross the roads but follow the footway until you find a footpath on your right marked North Downs Way. Descend the steep steps and continue down hill for about 200 metres.

Look out for a gap in the hedge on the right which will lead you to Kit's Coty House, the remains of a Neolithic Chambered Tomb, and a wonderful view across the Weald. It is said that on a clear day you can see Crowborough Beacon.

Return to the path and walk down hill.

You will enter the other end of the shaw you crossed earlier, it is unusual as the trees are mostly Beech and Norwegian Maple, the Maples are multi-stemmed showing that they have been coppiced.

TAKE GREAT CARE when you reach the road. This is the junction of the Pilgrims Way and the Rochester Road from Aylesford. Turn left and cross the road into the Pilgrims Way which is a trackway here and marked North Downs Way (NDW).

After you have crossed the road, if you look to your right you can see a jumble of sarsen stones – Little Kit's Coty House – a fallen megalith.

Continue east along the Pilgrims Way, the track here is much as it must have been for hundreds of years. When you reach a paved lane turn right. When the lane reaches a farm gate, divert left off the footpath on to a little path along the wide verge of the A229 road.

This does not sound attractive and is indeed noisy, but often worth it for the wild flowers. The verge is maintained by Kent Wildlife Trust, in spring there are primroses, in early summer several types of orchids and through until autumn a variety of more common wild flowers.

The end of the path rises steeply on to the entrance lane to Cobtree Manor Park Golf Club. Follow this lane to the right.

If you are not visiting Tyland Barn, take the track on your right to Cossington Farm. To visit Tyland Barn, (Kent Wildlife Trust's visitor centre) cross over the A229 using the footbridge.

You can buy refreshments here and a variety of books, maps and wildlife related items. The centre is open on Tuesday to Friday 10am to 5pm, and weekends 11am to 4pm.

To continue your walk return across the bridge, and to the lane. Turn right and then left in to the track to Cossington Farm. Follow the track through the farm.

You can see the ruins of the old manor on the right as you walk down the hill. 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.

At the end of the track you will reach Pratling Street, bear left and walk along this lane. TAKE CARE, it can be busy with traffic and there is not much footway. After you have passed Waitrose's ware-houses turn left on to a bridgeway. Where the trees start, turn right.

Gravel was extracted from the low area on the left, it is now a wet wood with a variety of trees including three or four species of willow.

Follow the path round the old pit until you reach the Aylesford Recreation Ground, turn left beside the oak fence then go in through the gate.

On the other side of the playing field you can see Plane trees, more commonly associated with London.

Bear right across the Recreation Ground, walking towards the play ground, and leave by the main gate. Either turn right to explore Aylesford village where you can find a variety of places for refreshments and toilets, or cross the road and walk ahead to the car park or to retrace your steps to the railway station.

Introduction

The Aylesford Community Trail is an opportunity for walkers to explore the countryside in and around the villages of Aylesford, Blue Bell Hill and Eccles. The Trail also links the woodlands of Walderslade with the woodlands and countryside south of the M2. The Trail comprises four individual "loops": the Walderslade, Blue Bell Hill, Eccles and Aylesford loops. Each loop can either be enjoyed as a separate circular walk in its own right or as part of a longer walk covering more of – or the whole of – the Trail.

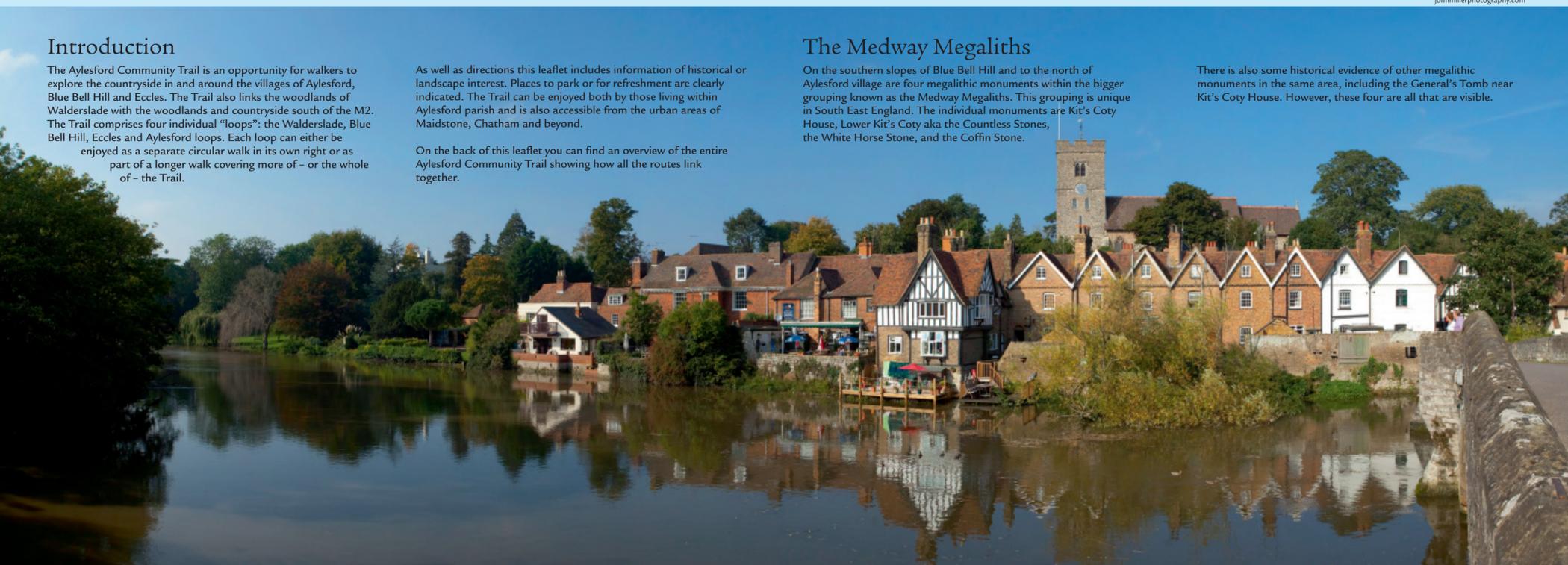
As well as directions this leaflet includes information of historical or landscape interest. Places to park or for refreshment are clearly indicated. The Trail can be enjoyed both by those living within Aylesford parish and is also accessible from the urban areas of Maidstone, Chatham and beyond.

On the back of this leaflet you can find an overview of the entire Aylesford Community Trail showing how all the routes link together.

The Medway Megaliths

On the southern slopes of Blue Bell Hill and to the north of Aylesford village are four megalithic monuments within the bigger grouping known as the Medway Megaliths. This grouping is unique in South East England. The individual monuments are Kit's Coty House, Lower Kit's Coty aka the Countless Stones, the White Horse Stone, and the Coffin Stone.

There is also some historical evidence of other megalithic monuments in the same area, including the General's Tomb near Kit's Coty House. However, these four are all that are visible.



johnmillerphotography.com

Eccles

This walk will take about 1 hour, it is 3km (about 2 miles) long. The walk combines the interesting village streets of Eccles and the farmland to the south. There are kissing gates but no steep slopes. There is limited parking on Bull Lane in Eccles village. The mosaic seat and sculpture on the recreation ground was commissioned by the Valley of Visions.

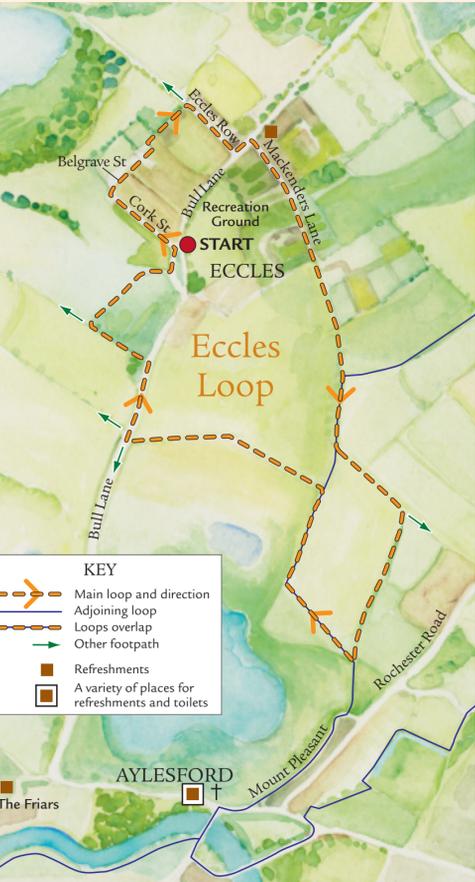
Start the walk at the junction of Bull Lane and Cork Street. Walk along Cork Street.

The terraced houses were built from about 1860, to house workers who moved in to this previously tiny hamlet when the brick, and later cement, industries started. The local river mud, Gault Clay and chalk were used, and this part of the Medway valley was transformed into what was then a dirty and noisy industrial area.

Turn right at the end of Cork Street. At the end of Belgrave Street keep straight on, on a tarmac footpath, follow this round to the left, then turn right at the T-junction of paths.

A variety of poultry is usually visible on the left of this path.

When you reach the next street – Eccles Row – turn right and walk past much newer houses.



At the road (Bull Lane again) turn left then right into Mackenders Lane (the Red Bull pub is on your left). The houses in Mackenders Lane range from the very old – probably Tudor – through Victorian to modern.

When the lane ends take the footpath into the field, with the hedge on your left.

The tall chimney straight ahead is the Allington Waste Incinerator.

Continue almost straight ahead towards a wood, with the vines (planted in 2008 for wine) on your left, then leave the narrow strip of wood on your left.



These narrow woods are called "shaws" and are typical of the area. Most of the trees here are Ash and show evidence of having been coppiced or pollarded in the past for firewood or other timber products.

Turn left into a footpath through a wide gap in the shaw and go through a kissing gate (beside a farm gate). Walk along the grassy track until you see another grassy path on the right. Follow this path between fences and through another kissing gate. Continue to the end of the field then turn right.

From this path you have a good view of Aylesford sand pit. Folkestone Sand has been dug from here for at least 1000 years, 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 feed on the resulting lake.

Stay on this path as it turns right and passes through a little wood and a kissing gate.

On the left now the Gault Clay (which overlies the sand) is extracted for brick making. Looking ahead you can see the chalk (which overlies the Gault Clay), the white cliffs show where chalk was formerly taken for making cement.

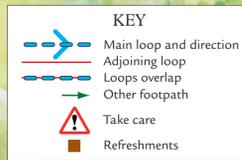
As soon as you have passed through a second kissing gate, turn left along a footpath with a ditch on the left side.

Ahead and slightly to the left you can see the chimneys of Aylesford Paper Mill, where newsprint is made using large quantities of recycled paper.

Continue until you reach a road (Bull Lane). Turn right, follow the footway until it becomes narrow and then cross the road with care and walk on the other side until you come to a Restricted Byway on the left. Follow this and then take the first path on the right. At the end of this path you will arrive at Bull Lane near the start of the walk.



Great crested grebe



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Walderslade

A 3km (about 2 miles) walk which takes about one and a quarter hours. No steep slopes, some steps down. Some of the paths can be muddy. The route passes through Walderslade Woods and Impton Wood.

Start at the Tunbury car park off Catkin Close. This is usually open during the day and is closed at dusk. At other times it is usually possible to park in the road outside the Church in Catkin Close. From Catkin Close, cross Tunbury Avenue, turn left and head slightly downhill until the junction with Marlow Copse where you turn sharp right along a spur of Tunbury Avenue. At the end of this spur the road turns into a track downhill into Tunbury Woods and there is a wooden signpost on the left saying "Welcome to Walderslade Woodlands".



Sarsen Stones in Tunbury Woods

Follow the steps down into Tunbury Woods. This is a peaceful wooded valley, despite being on the edge of Medway. At the bottom of the valley there is a crossroad of paths.

The trail turns to the right but you should not miss the opportunity of a brief detour to the left to look at a jumble of sarsen stones which look for all the world like a smaller version of "Little Kit's Coty". There are no known legendary or historical implications for these stones but their antiquity is suggested by their continued use as boundary stones for Aylesford parish. There are also numerous "cup and ring" marks on the stones, which are another indicator of antiquity.

Return to the trail. Where the path forks, take the right fork.

Look out for the historic boundary stone between Aylesford and Boxley parish. The boundary stone is clearly marked A for Aylesford in a distinctively 18th century type. This is also the part of the woods where an Me109 German fighter plane crashed during the Battle of Britain.

Where the path comes out of the woods at Tunbury Avenue, turn left and then left again along the Walderslade Woods road for about 50 metres, until you see a footpath finger post on the other side of the road. Cross the road here, with care as it can be busy.

Once at the beginning of the footpath you will be rewarded with the rare sight of a pollarded beech directly ahead.

Follow this footpath past the beech turning right through the woods with the M2 motorway on the left and the Walderslade Woods road on the right, keeping to the left where there is a choice of paths, until you come to the pedestrian underpass under the M2. Once through the underpass head into the woods a few metres until you come to a crossroad of paths where you turn right.

A few steps after this turning you will be able to see an overgrown but very deep chalk pit to your right.

Continue along this path through the woods. After the 2nd chicane you may meet ponies in the woods. In summer the paddock on the left is full of wild flowers. The grounds on the right are part of Medway Crematorium. The path then passes by some stables on the left and Podkin Meadow on the right. Where the path reaches the junction of Warren Road and Mill Lane, you will see a kissing gate, field gate and a sign for "Podkin Meadow". Turn right through the kissing gate into Podkin Meadow and follow the path through the meadow to the kissing gate at the far end.

Podkin Meadow is a natural area and open space owned by Aylesford Parish Council. The name dates back to at least the 18th century and may be derived from one William Bodkin, a former landowner. The sites of former dewponds are still marked by depressions just south of the entrance to Podkin Meadow by the side of Warren Road and within the Meadow itself, just within the tree line on the eastern boundary with the Medway Crematorium. The route of the former roman road to Rochester is just outside the western boundary in a continuation of the line of Warren Road. A bronze axe was found at the northern edge of the meadow.

Continue through the kissing gate at the far end of the meadow and pass by gardens to the left.

Where the path meets Robin Hood Lane there are, on a clear day, distant views north into the Hoo Peninsula, the Thames Estuary and Essex.

Turn right past the Crematorium entrance, over the M2 road bridge and the footbridge over the Walderslade Woods road. On the far side, turn right along the surfaced path and follow the curve to the left until you reach the underpass under Fostington Way. Go through the underpass, up the steps on the left into the Recreation Ground, walk diagonally across the grass to the gate at the far corner which leads to the car park and the end of the Trail.

Blue Bell Hill

A walk of about 6.5km (4 miles). Allow 2 to 2½ hours. There are steep steps up and down, woodland glades, historic tracks, megaliths and extensive views.

From Blue Bell Hill Picnic Site walk on to Common Road and turn right. Cross over Blue Bell Hill main street and continue along Mill Lane.

The building on the right is the old Upper Bell public house.

Walk along Mill Lane until a sharp bend to the right.

The road to the right (Warren Road) is on the route of a Roman road, on the left is Podkin Meadow, a natural area belonging to the Parish Council.

Continue straight ahead on to a footpath, when the path becomes unfenced, walk within the edge of the wood. There may be horses grazing here. Keep walking ahead, after the horses' field the path runs parallel and quite close to the M2 motorway. Newly planted mixed woodland borders the path. When the path reaches a T-junction (with a bridge over the motorway to the left) turn right and walk between the yards of Cossington Fields and straight on between arable fields.

Cross over Bell Lane, go through a kissing gate, and walk straight ahead on a footpath across an arable field. At the edge of the wood turn right, then at the next field corner, turn left into the wood over an unusual stile made of big stones.

The first part of the wood is mixed species, mostly hazel with some fine big Oak trees.

As the path begins to descend Yew trees predominate. On the right many fallen trees are the result of the 1987 "hurricane" most did not die but have grown new upright shoots.

Where the path forks, take the right hand branch. The path winds downwards with many steps.

This is the scarp face of the chalk. Nearer the bottom of the hill yew trees give way to beeches.

The path eventually meets a track – the North Downs Way (NDW), turn right here.

The track is the Pilgrims Way. A few yards along on the right is the White Horse Stone, this is said to be where Horsa mustered his troops before defeating Vortigern at the battle of Aylesford in 455, it may be the remains of a 4000 year old tomb.

Very soon the track crosses the cutting of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.



Little Kit's Coty



During construction of the railway in 2000 much evidence of prehistoric occupation was discovered indicating perhaps the ancient significance of this crossing of the track now called the Pilgrims Way and a north – south route that was "improved" by the Romans and now has become the A229.

After passing over the railway, leave the petrol station on your left and walk down hill (on NDW) to pass under the A229 road. Turn left and then very soon turn right to rejoin the Pilgrims Way (marked NDW).

Just before you reach the next road you can look left and see a jumble of big stones – another fallen megalith. This is Little Kit's Coty, also known as the Countless Stones. These big stones are known as "Sarsens" probably from Saracens, in this context meaning non-Christian.



Pyramidal orchid

When you reach the road (Rochester Road north of Aylesford) cross over with great care and walk up the track on the right (North Downs Way).

You walk through a strip of woodland, these long narrow woods are called "shaws" locally. This one is unusual as the trees are mainly Beech and Norwegian Maple, the maples are multi-stemmed, showing that they have been coppiced to produce firewood and other timber products. After about 150 metres you can go through a gap in the hedge in the left, here you will find Kit's Coty House, and a wonderful view across the Weald, it is said that on a clear day you can see Crowborough Beacon.

Return to the path and continue up hill and then up some steep steps. When you reach the road turn left and walk on the footway until you pass under a footbridge then cross one side road (Salisbury Road). Continue beside the busy road (the A229 again) until the old road branches off on the left. Follow the old road. After a short while this becomes a footpath which runs parallel to and below the main road with extensive views to the west.

The path ends at Common Road, turn left and Blue Bell Hill Picnic Site is on your left.



White Horse Stone