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Sandling to Wye on the North Downs Way

Length: 20.5 km (12.8 miles)

Toughness: 6 out of 10

Maps: OS Landranger 179 **or** 189 (*ie, **either** map has the whole walk route*)
OS Explorer 137 and 138 (*ie, you need **both** these maps*)

Features

This lovely walk follows one of the finest sections of the North Downs Way – in many ways it feels more like the South Downs - with fine views for nearly the whole walk. There is just one 3km (1.8 mile) section mid afternoon when you are away from the escarpment edge.

While the North Downs Way is waymarked, it is not always comprehensively so, and in places the waymarks are confusing or missing. The path is not always as obvious as one might expect from such a major long distance footpath. Hence these directions. The creation of access land has also opened up some escarpment sections that were formerly off limits to walkers, and where these improve the walk they have been included in the walk directions.

While downland can be relatively dry in winter, this walk does have several sections on shady tracks that look potentially very muddy between November and March. In late spring there can be intense displays of buttercups.

Transport

Sandling is served by hourly direct trains from **Charing Cross** and **London Bridge** via Ashford, (journey time 1 hour 31 minutes from Charing Cross), but you can reduce that to 53 minutes by taking a Southeastern high speed train from **St Pancras International** to Ashford (small supplement payable and no London boundary zone tickets allowed), changing there for Sandling.

Returning from **Wye**, there is either an hourly train to Charing Cross (two an hour in rush hours) taking 1 hour 29 minutes, or you can change at Ashford for St Pancras (1 hour 4 minutes).

Lunch

The **Tiger Inn** (01303 862130) in Stowting, 9.3km (5.8 miles) into the walk, is a charming and friendly pub on a quiet country lane, which has a substantial dining area, as well as outside tables.

Food is served 12-2.30pm Monday to Friday, 12-3pm Saturday, and 12-7pm Sunday, as well as Monday to Saturday evenings from 6pm to 9pm. The pub is open all afternoon daily for drinks

If the Tiger Inn is full, there is an alternative pub 2.2km (1.4 miles) further up the road – the **Five Bells Inn** (01303 813334) in Brabourne, a charmingly quirky, cosy pub with plenty of seating both inside and outside. It serves food 12-3pm Monday to Saturday and to 5pm Sunday and bank holidays, along with 5-9pm Monday to Saturday, and is open all afternoon daily for drinks. This requires a detour off the walk, however, which adds 800 metres (0.5 miles) to the walk length. See paragraph 44 of the walk directions on page 5 for details.

For **picnics**, the morning part of the walk offers many fine vantage points at which to eat, but perhaps the best is the lovely hill mentioned in paragraph 37 of the directions on page 4 (so long as you don't mind eating surrounded by sheep).

Tea

It is 10.8km (6.7 miles) after lunch in Stowting to Wye. There is a cafe in the village - the **Wye Coffee Shop and Kitchen** - but this closes too early for our purposes, at 4pm Tuesday to Saturday, and 3pm on Sunday and Monday.

Nearby in Church Street, the **Kings Head** (01233 812418) is open Thursday to Monday (*ie not Tuesday and Wednesday*). It serves food in the late afternoon and early evening on Sunday and Monday, but annoying not between 4pm and 6pm Thursday to Saturday. On Sundays in spring and summer, when the Tickled Trout is doing live music in its garden (see below), it is pretty much the only tea stop, however.

Otherwise the **Tickled Trout** pub (01233 812227) down by the river, and just across the bridge from Wye station, is an excellent tea stop, with a garden by the shallow River Stour in which weary walkers can paddle their feet in summer. It serves food from 5pm onwards Monday to Saturday and all afternoon to 7pm on Sundays, and in the past has had cakes on offer as well as hot drinks. *However, on Sundays from April to September it hosts live music from 5.30pm in its riverside garden, and sometimes it seems to hold functions on Saturday evening too, at which times it is basically ruled out as a quiet tea or drinks stop.*

WALK DIRECTIONS

Sandling station to Tolsford Hill **(3.4km/2.1 miles)**

1. From the platform at Sandling station that you alight at if coming from Ashford, cross the footbridge to the opposite platform.
2. Pass through or around the station building. On the far side you can find a disused platform with a metal railing along its far edge. Turn left along this, through a metal gate, and carry on off the end of the platform, past a decayed metal gate, onto the track of the old railway line, now a footpath.
(If this way is blocked, go into the station car park on this side of the station, and turn left: a gate at the far end leads onto the old railway line).
3. Follow this for 400 metres until you see an old tunnel (concealed by vegetation in spring and summer) about 80 metres ahead. Here veer slightly left up steps (ie leaving the old

trackbed and climbing up to the left of the tunnel).

4. At the top of the steps follow a gravel path which in 30 metres merges with an earth track coming from a gate to the left. After another 40 metres on this track, you come to a path T-junction, where you go left onto a car-wide path.
5. In 300 metres merge with a tarmac drive coming from the right and keep straight on down that.
6. In 200 metres you come to a minor road junction: keep straight on here, slightly uphill.
7. In 150 metres cross a bridge over the railway (the high speed line to the Channel Tunnel) and beyond that cross a footbridge over the M2 motorway. Keep straight on down a minor road beyond.
8. In 150 metres cross a larger road and turn left. In 20 metres turn right through a gate to the right of a

fieldgate (*ignoring another fieldgate to its right, which is the driveway of a house*) and take the left-hand of two footpaths, the one that veers half left diagonally across a field towards a point about halfway up its left-hand side.

(If this path is not clear or is obscured by crops, stay on the road for another 70 metres and turn right at the next footpath sign up a tarmac track. In 250 metres you pass a house left, and 100 metres later you can resume the directions at paragraph 11 below.)

9. In 150 metres the path converges with the field edge and carries on up its left-hand side.
10. In 200 metres more, 30 metres before the end of the field, turn left through the field boundary and a kissing gate and turn right on a tarmac track.
11. In 200 metres pass a house on the left (*if following the directions in italics in paragraph 8, this is another house, not the one mentioned there.*) 30 metres beyond this, where the tracks fork at a fieldgate, take the right fork, an earth track with a field to the right.
12. Keep on this track, ignoring ways off, all the way to the top of the hill in 600 metres.
13. When the path levels out you emerge onto a grassy plateau. Keep straight on across this towards a telecommunications mast surrounded by a fence.
14. In 300 metres turn left along this fence to skirt around the complex on a concrete track.
15. In 150 metres go through a fieldgate (or over the stile to its right) and keep to the right-hand side of a patch of scrub and grass as you pass two smaller masts on your left.
16. In 40 metres cross a stile and turn left onto a fenced footpath, You are now on the **North Downs Way**, and will remain on it (with two short exceptions) until the end of the walk. (*However the waymarking soon lets you down, as the next section shows....*)

Tolsford Hill to Farthing Common (3.7km/2.3 miles)

17. In 50 metres you pass through a kissing gate and find yourself on a big

open hillside. The way is not obvious here, but keep straight on along the top of the hill, heading roughly for the centre of a big wood you can see on the ridge in the distance.

18. At first you are only going very gently downhill across the top of the hill. But in 200 metres you start to descend more steeply, slanting slightly to the right of the ridge. Aim for a farm in the valley ahead below the big wood mentioned in the last paragraph, with electricity pylons to the right of it and behind it.
19. Ultimately you will exit the field by a kissing gate 100 metres to the left of the farm (**not the more obvious metal fieldgate just to the left of it, though there is a rusted and not very visible metal fieldgate to the left of the kissing gate**). When you pass through this kissing gate in 500 metres, veer right 10 metres to a road.
20. Cross the road and go through a kissing gate into a field, ignoring a minor road to the left. Immediately turn left along the field boundary (*path not at all distinct here*).
21. In 170 metres cross a very faint earth track leading from double metal fieldgates to the left, and keep on along the field edge, now slightly uphill.
22. In 150 metres more you come to a field corner (ie a fence and a double metal fieldgate blocks the way ahead): go right uphill just before the fence, following a yellow arrow on a post.
23. In 170 metres, at the top of the field, pass through a kissing gate to the left of a metal fieldgate, and turn left, slanting uphill away from the field edge towards a mini-pylon in front of a clump of trees on the ridge ahead.
24. In 250 metres, at the top corner of the field, pass through a kissing gate and turn left along the edge of the field beyond, with a wood edge to your left.
25. In 250 metres, at the end of the field, go through a kissing gate and turn right along the crest of the escarpment, with a fence to your right, **ignoring** a NDW post 30 metres down the hill. (*The route of the NDW pointlessly descends the hill here, but access land now makes it possible to stay on the top of the escarpment.*)

26. In 130 metres turn *left* with the fence, still at the top of the escarpment. Keep to the fence, turning *right* with it in 300 metres, then *left* in another 120 metres, then *right* again in another 100 metres, passing under electricity pylons, and then in another 80 metres *left*, still on the edge of the escarpment.
27. In another 300 metres you approach a dead end with bushes about 50 metres ahead: here **veer left downhill** on a broad path. In 70 metres, when you get to the valley floor, slant right uphill along it.
28. In 50 metres more pass through a metal gate to the right of two fieldgates (hidden by a bush till the last minute) and keep to the right-hand edge of the field beyond. You are now back on the North Downs Way.
29. In 150 metres pass through a kissing gate (or the double fieldgates next to it) and keep on up the right-hand edge of the next field.
30. In 200 metres turn right with the field boundary. (*Old maps show the NDW going straight ahead here, but ignore that as the route has changed.*)
31. In 300 metres you come to a road. **Cross this road with care** as traffic comes fast along it, and go half left on the far side on a path that curves right into the trees. 20 metres after you enter the trees, turn left at a T-junction following a North Downs Way arrow.
32. In 100 metres you emerge into a small car park. Cross to its far right-hand corner.

Farthing Common to the Tiger Inn (2.2km/1.4 miles)

33. Cross the busy road beyond with care, and turn right through a kissing gate on its far side. You are now walking along an escarpment, with fine views to the left and the road your immediate right.
34. In 500 metres pass through a kissing gate and cross a minor road, to keep on down the right-hand edge of the next field (whose farmer does not always maintain a sufficient boundary for the path).
35. In 400 metres, at the end of this field, turn left along its far edge, going away from the road.
36. In 200 metres pass through a gap in the far corner of the field and keep on down the right-hand edge of the next field.
37. In 300 metres cross a stile, with a magnificent view of the village of Stowting and its environs below you (a nice **picnic** spot, maybe), and keep straight on down the hill with a decayed fence to your left (*just a slight earth embankment in its upper reaches as of June 2023*).
38. In 170 metres keep to the right of a tree boundary to find a stile concealed in the bottom left-hand corner of the field in 80 metres.
39. Cross the stile and descend 10 metres to a road. Veer left across it to find a path downhill under trees.
40. In 70 metres this brings you to another road, where you turn right.
41. Stay on this road all the way into the village of Stowting. **Take care of occasional fast traffic on this road**, as drivers hereabouts don't expect to find pedestrians. **The Tiger Inn**, the recommended lunch pub, is on the right in 600 metres. (*See paragraph 44 for an alternative lunch stop if this pub is full*).

The Tiger Inn to Brabourne Downs (2.6km/1.6 miles)

42. Coming out of the pub, turn right – or carry on past it if not stopping. In 70 metres ignore a signposted footpath the right, and in 200 metres ignore a road to the right.
 - An **alternative** to the above is to pass through the gate opposite the pub and turn right along the field edge. This is the official North Downs Way, which parallels the road just beyond the hedge. It passes through three more gates at the end of three fields, and then you have two stiles and a field between them to cross before you are returned to the road 100 metres before the turning described in paragraph 43 below.
43. In 300 metres more, at the top of a hill, ignore a road to Monks Horton and Sellindge to the left.
44. In another 300 metres you pass stables on the left and the road is now climbing more steeply. 150 metres after this point, just as you pass under

a line of pylons, veer right uphill on a track, signposted North Downs Way. (For the main walk route carry on with the directions in paragraph 46 below.)

- For the **alternative lunch pub in Brabourne**, the **Five Bells**, ignore this turning and stay on the road: in 600 metres turn left downhill at a diagonal crossroads and in 400 metres turn right with the road to come to the pub in another 450 metres. After lunch come out of the main entrance of the pub and take the path on the other side of the road that goes up steps into a field. Cross the field, heading directly for the downs and a red-roofed house. In 200 metres pass through a hedge, cross a road, and go on up the drive of a house named Longwood. In 60 metres, just after the tarmac ends, cross a well-hidden stile in the hedge corner to the right and immediately turn left uphill, diagonally across a field. In 80 metres cross a stile and shortly after another and keep uphill until you come to the tree line. Here cross a stile and turn left on a clear path, the North Downs Way: resume the walk directions at paragraph 47 below.
 - **You can also reach the pub** by taking the path to the minor path to the left mentioned in paragraph 46, though this involves an extra ascent and descent of the ridge. The path goes straight downhill to the pub, which is visible in the valley below, crossing a minor road and then a large field.
- 45.** After 600 metres cross a road and keep on along the track, now with an open field and a fine view to the left. There is a bench in 250 metres if you want to sit and enjoy it.
- 46.** Otherwise, stay on the track, with the fence and view to the left, ignoring a minor path to the left 250 metres after the bench.
- 47.** In another 100 metres (ie 350 metres after the bench), where the field to the left ends, the track enters a wood. (A fine display of **wood anemones** here in late March and early April, and **wild garlic** in early May.)
- 48.** In 300 metres you emerge from the wood through a fieldgate and keep on down the left-hand edge of a field.

- 49.** In 200 metres pass through a fieldgate and turn right uphill on a road.

Brabourne Downs to Cold Blow Farm (3.2km/2 miles)

- 50.** In 150 metres the road turns right at the crest of the hill, still gently climbing, with huge open fields left and right.
- 51.** In 400 metres, where the field to the left ends, turn left along a track between hedges. Keep to the track in 300 metres as it kinks left to resume its former direction on the edge of a wood.
- 52.** In 800 metres the track ends at a road, where you go left (ie straight on).
- 53.** In 700 metres, at a road T-junction, go right, signposted to Waltham and Canterbury. **Take care** on this road, which has some fast cars.
- 54.** In 400 metres, about 80 metres after the wood boundary gives way to hedges on your right, **go left** through a signposted but overgrown and **easily missed** metal gate into a field.
- 55.** Go straight across the field to another kissing gate in 120 metres. When you get to the gate, you can see it is not one gate, but two. Turn right through the **right-hand** one to continue on the North Downs Way down the left-hand side of a field, with the escarpment visible about 100 metres to your left.
- 56.** In 350 metres pass through a kissing gate and carry on along the left-hand edge of a farmyard.

Cold Blow Farm to Wye Crown (2.6km/1.6 miles)

- 57.** In 60 metres, at the end of the farmyard, go through a kissing gate 10 metres to the left of a double fieldgate and carry on down a gravel track along the right-hand edge of a field.
- 58.** In 130 metres the gravel track ends at two fieldgates. Pass through a kissing gate to the right of the left-hand one, to emerge into a large field and carry on up its right-hand side on a fenced strip.
- 59.** In 230 metres, at the end of the field, pass through a kissing gate and turn left on an enclosed path with a chain link fence to the right.

60. In 80 metres the path turns right and in another 100 metres emerges through a kissing gate into a field. Keep on along its left-hand edge.
61. Ignore a fieldgate forking left in 120 metres to carry on along the field boundary. In 200 metres, at the top of the hill - by which time a fine view has opened up to the left - pass through a kissing gate into the next field.
62. Keep along the escarpment, at first with the fence to the left, and then curving around the head of a steep-sided valley in about 400 metres.
63. On the far side of the valley rejoin the fence once more. Ignore a kissing gate by a fieldgate to the left, and instead carry on uphill, away from the valley edge, with the fence to your left.
64. In 40 metres pass through another kissing gate and carry on down the edge of a field with trees and a fence to the left.
65. In 100 metres veer half left through a gate signposted Nature Trail, and on downhill on a path into the trees.
66. In 150 metres **ignore** a path to the left signposted Nature Trail, and instead carry on 30 metres to a kissing gate.
67. Pass through the kissing gate and cross a road, following the North Downs Way sign. Go up the tarmac side-road on its far side.
68. In 20 metres turn left through a gap, following the North Downs Way sign, and carry on up a path with a fenced-off arable field to your right. In 30 metres go through a gate onto open downland.
69. For the next 1km directions are unnecessary – simply follow the escarpment, ignoring ways off.
70. Eventually you pass through a metal kissing gate and carry on over a hummocky hilltop. 120 metres later you pass a curved stone bench below to the left, below which is the **Wye Crown** cut into the hillside.
- Wye Crown to Wye station**
(2.8km/1.8 miles)
71. Wye village is visible in the valley below. To get to it, keep along the escarpment following a fence. In 130 metres go through a kissing gate into a wood. (*This is a short cut on the NDW, which goes right just before the woods to a road, and rejoins our route in as indicated the paragrag 73.*)
72. Follow this clear path down through the woods. In 50 metres fork left (though the paths actually rejoin anyway).
73. In another 350 metres, at another fork (*sometimes rather indistinct*), keep left and in 40 metres more you come to a gap in a fence, beyond which is another path, the North Downs Way, though not signposted here. Turn left downhill on this.
74. In 200 metres the path emerges from the wood and carries on down the right-hand edge of a field.
75. In 300 metres cross a road and keep on down a track on the left-hand edge of a field.
76. In 700 metres the track ends at a fieldgate. Keep straight on down the road beyond.
77. In 400 metres cross a road onto a driveway, but **in 20 metres more**, just before a fieldgate and cattle grid, **veer left** up an earth track on the far side of the hedge (and so parallel to the driveway).
78. In 60 metres, just before a fieldgate, turn left up a path, with a hedge to your left and allotments to the right.
79. In 150 metres you find yourself in a churchyard. Follow the path slightly to the right past the church, exiting onto the road at the far end.
80. Keep straight on down the main street of **Wye**, with fine old houses either side, passing the **Kings Head** pub on the right in 70 metres.
81. In another 100 metres you come to a T-junction. On the corner on the right is the **Wye Coffee Shop & Kitchen**. Otherwise, for the station and Tickled Trout pub turn right at the T-junction.
82. In 500 metres the **Tickled Trout** pub is on your right, with the station 100 metres further on over the bridge. Trains to Ashford and London leave from this side.