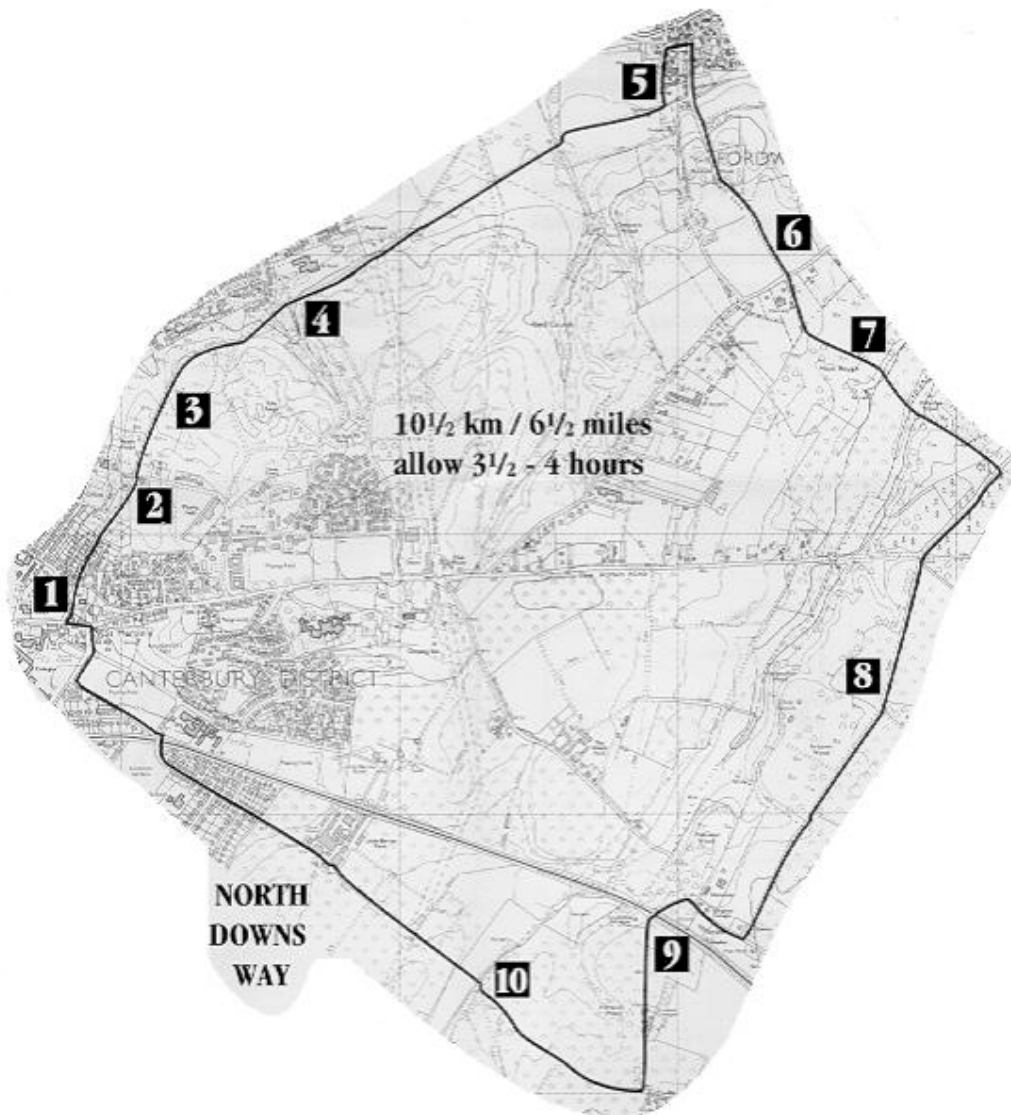


NORTH DOWNS WAY WALKS

Canterbury and Fordwich



The circular walk starts at St. Martin's, east of Canterbury city centre, and includes a variety of town and country surroundings. In addition to the historic buildings at Canterbury and Fordwich it enables the walker to experience the woodland, orchards and open countryside of East Kent. The route uses some sections of minor road open to motor vehicles and due care must be exercised when walking along these roads.

St Martin's is about 1 mile (2km) from both Canterbury East and Canterbury West railway stations. It is easily found by following the A257 road eastwards from the City Centre. St. Martin's church is then on the left off St Martin's Avenue; the North Downs Way is on the right.

Limited on-street parking may be found in the area. For information on bus services telephone Public Transport Information on 0870 6082 608.

1. St Martin's is a long established suburb of Canterbury with a number of historic buildings including the Church of St Martin, which is the oldest parish church in Britain. Much of the present building dates from the 7th Century or earlier, and there was a church here in the mid-6th Century where Queen Bertha, Christian wife of the pagan King Ethelbert, came to pray in the years before the arrival from Rome of the missionary St Augustine.

Nearby on the south side of St Martin's Hill is John Smith's Hospital, a single storey row of almshouses dated 1657. The remnants of St Augustine's Abbey are on the north side of the road, a little closer to the city centre.

From the church the route follows the Stour Valley Walk to Fordwich. Look out for the distinctive waymarking.

2. The linear walk runs for 35 miles (56km) along the valley of the Great Stour River between Ashford and Sandwich. A guidebook, the Stour Valley Walk (price £2.45) is available from bookshops, libraries, tourist information centres and from the Countryside Group, Kent County Council at the address on the back of this leaflet.

As you leave the built up area, with Chaucer Barracks on the left a view of Canterbury Cathedral can be had by looking back towards the city centre.

Follow the path between houses, cross Chaucer Road, and continue through scrub and bushes.

3. Although not as rich in wildlife as ancient woodland, the areas of tall scrub through which you are passing are of great value for birds and other animals. Resident birds include chaffinch, bullfinch, blackbird and song thrush, joined in spring and summer by migrants such as chiffchaff, willow warbler, blackcap, garden warbler, whitethroat and lesser whitethroat. They may often be difficult to see, but their presence is revealed by their songs. Occasionally a fox may be glimpsed making its way through the trees.

A little further on the tree cover thins out and the scene becomes more open. The soils are rather acidic, and this encourages plants such as bracken (a species of fern) and the yellow-flowered gorse and broom to flourish.

4. Fringed by reeds and other aquatic plants, this pond attracts some interesting wildlife. If you wait quietly you may see a swimming water vole (not a rat) perhaps collecting pieces of reed for a nest. Moorhens and mallard can sometimes be found here, and in summer red warblers breed in the reedbeds. Kingfishers are seen regularly.

Continue to follow the Stour Valley Walk passing through small wooded areas and crossing a golf course; turn left as you approach the houses at Fordwich and join King Street.

5. In the Middle Ages Fordwich was a prosperous port and a member of the Cinque Ports Confederation. This important status arose because the River Stour was navigable from Sandwich to Fordwich, which became the port for Canterbury. The old Town Hall, which dates from the 12th Century, is the smallest in Kent. Fordwich's importance as a port gradually declined and the Corporation was disbanded in 1876. The Church of St. Mary is of great interest and contains the Fordwich Stone, possibly part of a Norman stone tomb. The circular walk leaves the Stour Valley Walk at Fordwich.

Walk down the High Street, which runs south from King Street. Where the main road bears right (becoming Moat Lane) continue straight ahead along a minor road.

6. Although generally quiet the lane carries vehicular traffic and care must be taken, it is a one-way road and traffic will be coming from behind you. At first the lane runs between steep banks on which there are trees of several species, including oak, hazel, beech and sweet chestnut. Later it emerges into grazing land before meeting Stodmarsh Road.

Cross Stodmarsh Road and take the path almost opposite, near the entrance to a nursery.

7. The path passes through sweet chestnut coppice with some standard trees. There is also broom and bracken in this area. In the autumn the colourful but poisonous Fly Agaric toadstool may be seen. After leaving the woodland the path goes across a pasture (head for the electricity poles) and crosses a stream by a small bridge, then proceeds through further woodland.

At the road turn right. When you reach Littlebourne Road cross with care and proceed straight over onto a track which enters orchards.

8. The production of top fruit, including apples, pears and cherries is an important part of the rural economy of Kent. Orchards vary greatly, from traditional widely-spaced trees with grazing sheep to the more modern dwarf varieties. In either case they are a major feature in the landscape. As you follow the path southwards the orchards on the right give way to sweet chestnut trees.

When the path meets the road, turn right and proceed until the road begins to descent a hill. Turn left onto a lane through trees and continue to the bridge over the railway line.

9. From the bridge cross the Canterbury to Dover railway line it may just be possible to see the top of the towers of Canterbury Cathedral above the trees.

Follow the path until you meet the North Downs Way just west of Hode Farm. Turn right.

10. To the east the northern loop of the North Downs Way runs down to the coast at Dover. To the west, beyond Canterbury, it joins the southern route at Boughton Lees, continuing from there to Farnham to Surrey.

In this area the National Trail passes through a mixture of orchards and fields growing soft fruits, mainly strawberries. Hode Farm has buildings dating back to 1674.

Continue to follow the North Downs Way towards Canterbury, entering the city via Pilgrim's Way. There are good views of the Cathedral ahead. Cross the railway, turn left (still on Pilgrim's Way) and take a path which emerges opposite a school playing field. Bear right and return to St. Martin's.

Remember to wear appropriate clothing and footwear and please follow the Country Code

This walk can be found on OS Explorer 150 starting at GR 158577