

# Birds, Boats and Countryside Trail

**5.4 miles (8.7km) allow 2 hours, suitable for all fitness levels & dogs**

A truly stunning rural walk with breath-taking vistas of both coast and countryside. Every step leads to something special – open fields with scenic views, salt marsh and estuary birdlife, wharfs and Thames barges, woodland glades with bluebells in season, ancient churches, quiet country lanes, traditional country pubs and village life. This walk truly has it all, making it one of the most stunning walks in Kent.



## How to get there:

Use the free journey planner on the Kent Connected app to find the best route to the Birds, Boats and Countryside Trail, whether by train, bus, cycling, walking or driving.

|   |               |   |
|---|---------------|---|
|   | Start/Finish  | ME9 7LB   |
|  | what3words    | indicated.flushed.removers  |
|  | Kissing Gates | 26  |
|  | Steps         | 1   |
|  | Terrain       | Fields, paddocks, unmade paths, country lanes.                          |
|  | Views         | Estuary and rolling countryside   |
|  | Refreshments  | The Crown, Upchurch, Oh My Cod, Upchurch, The Three Tuns, Lower Halstow |

## Step-by-step Guide:

You are free to start your walk at any point on the map: as this is a circular walk, you'll always return to where you began. To help you plan your walk we've flagged where you'll find a pub, restaurant or coffee shop along the way – for a little break during your walk or to reward yourself with a welcome treat once you've finished!

We've provided a Step-by-Step guide to help you navigate the route, in addition to the map, and to highlight some points of interest along the way. Remember you don't need to start at No. 1 – you can start the walk at any point. Your walk, your choice!

### ► NEWINGTON - UPCHURCH

1. From the offset crossroads at the bottom of Church Lane in **Newington** follow the road along School Lane passed Newington Primary School. Just after the school where the road splits, take the left-hand fork and continue uphill along a country lane.
2. Take the public footpath (ZR38) on your right after the horse stables and paddock on your right-hand side, through a kissing gate and walk between two fields. Go through another kissing gate and head straight on diagonally across the fields. There are glorious views of the countryside. Turn round and look at the view of St Mary's Church in Newington too. At the end of the field keep walking forwards into the next field. Keep straight on, keeping the hedgerow to your left.
3. At the end of a small field turn right down the track towards the farm and immediately left along the public footpath (ZR38) running along the edge of a fruit orchard (with fruit trees on your right, paddocks to your left). At the end of orchard turn right still walking along the edge of the orchard and go through the kissing gate on your left. Continue across the open field towards the kissing gate diagonally in front of you. Pass through this gate into the next field. Head diagonally across this field towards the next kissing gate beyond the pylon. Come out of this field through the gate in the bottom right-hand corner

onto the road and take the road opposite (slightly to your left) towards **Upchurch**, along Holywell Lane. Take care as this country lane has no footpaths. Pass fields and Dippy Egg Farm (free range eggs) where the road bends round to your right. Continue forwards with paddocks on your left and right.

4. Take the public footpath (ZR23) on your left-hand side through a gap in the hedge (keep dogs on leads as you walk alongside and through horse paddocks). Walk up the hill in front of you, along the fence line alongside the paddock on your right-hand side, towards the top right-hand corner. Go through the kissing gate at the top and turn right and through a wooden gap and head towards the telegraph pole in the distance across the field. Go through the gate at the end and turn right through the next kissing gate. Turn left and immediately walk through another kissing gate. Keep going forwards diagonally across the field and then turn right at the kissing gate on your right-hand side, alongside horse paddocks. Walk through another kissing gate into a field with horses in. Keep to the edge of this paddock with the fence on your right to avoid disturbing the horses. Go through the next kissing gate into a field with ponies. At the bottom corner walk through the kissing gate next to a pig enclosure. Go through the kissing gate ahead into a field and head along the right-hand boundary towards **Upchurch**.
5. Come out of the kissing gate at end of the field diagonally in front of you and turn right down Chaffe's Lane. Children's playground on the left-hand side and picnic benches (The Paddock, The Street). At the T-junction, turn right down Oak Lane into The Street (there are a couple of local shops here to buy a snack). Pass **St Mary the Virgin**, Upchurch on your left with its unusual steeple and continue along The Street taking the left-hand fork in the road to the local pub **The Crown** at Upchurch. If you are ready for a break, this is a great place to rest your feet and refuel. Continue along The Street and down the country lane leading out of the village (no footpaths) towards the **Swale Estuary**.

### ► UPCHURCH - LOWER HALSTOW

6. Continue passed Poot Lane and take the public footpath (ZR6) shortly after on the right at Street Farm walking down the track and immediately on your left through a wooden gap in the fence into a field. Turn right and walk along the perimeter of this field with Street Farm on your right towards the barns in front of you. In front of the barns turn left and walk along the line of telegraph poles through the field. At the last telegraph pole (about 2/3 across the field) take the track (ZR5) to your right through the field towards houses.
7. Exit the field onto a country road with fruit orchards in front of you. Turn left and immediately right (basically straight on!) along Susans Lane running alongside the fruit orchards on your right-hand side. Take the road on your left-hand side towards Twinney Wharf and go through a kissing gate. Head down the track with open fields to your right and orchards to your left, round a bend in the track to your right to the sea wall and **Swale Estuary** ahead.
8. Turn right along the sea wall (ZR33) - you are now on the Saxon Shore Way. It is very muddy along the sea wall when wet. You now have awe inspiring views of salt marshes on your left hand side out across the **Swale Estuary**. Look out for the wind turbines and small islands with huge numbers of wetland birds. Go through the kissing gate and follow the sea wall heading towards the boats and marina in the distance. Go through another kissing gate and look out for the pond with rushes on your right-hand side inland. As you come into Lower Halstow take time to look at the Edith May Thames Barge (which sometimes sells teas, coffees and light lunches) moored at the wharf of the former brickworks.
9. Come out of the kissing gate at the end and turn left, crossing a small bridge and you will pass the beautiful, church of St Margaret of Antioch on your left, situated on the banks of the river Medway. The church is usually locked, but there are benches outside for a rest in the churchyard overlooking the wharf and creek. Pass Church House along Church

Path and turn right at the end and head down the road into the village. At the bend in the road, cross the road and take the left-hand fork down Vicarage Lane, signposted Newington (or turn right here for a short detour and head down The Street into **Lower Halstow** for a break at **The Three Tuns** pub. Take care it is a busy road and no footpaths).

► **LOWER HALSTOW - NEWINGTON**

10. Walk down Vicarage Lane passed houses, paddocks and open fields with sheep on your left. Turn left down the country Lane signposted to Elm Farm (signed as a dead end). Walk past fields on your left and Elm Farm on your right. Keep straight on as the lane turns into a track (ZR51) running between open fields and fruit orchards.
11. Turn right through a kissing gate on your right over the dyke into a field. Head forwards across the field and through a kissing gate at the top and follow along the fence line on your right. After a short distance, go through another kissing gate and at a fork in the footpath take the path (ZR50) to your left, walking alongside the field with the fence on your left-hand side. There are usually sheep in this field so keep dogs on leads.  
You are walking now alongside woodland on your left for quite a while. These woods are bathed in a sea of bluebells in the spring. A glorious sight!  
Go through a kissing gate at the top of the field and head towards your left. The path then bends round to the right, walking alongside the woodland on your left with sweet chestnut coppice. Continue straight ahead along an enclosed path with open fields to your right and woodland on your left. This can get overgrown in summer. Look out for birds of prey including buzzards. Go through a kissing gate, with glorious views over rolling countryside, towards the country road.
12. Exit the fields through a kissing gate at the end and go down the steps on to the road, turn left down the lane (Wardwell Lane) back to Newington. Continue along this road (no footpaths) until you reach the offset crossroad in Newington. If you would like to

visit the ancient Grade 1 listed 12th Century St Mary the Virgin Church, Newington turn left here along Church Lane towards Iwade. Take the turning on your left just after the Oast Houses. The church is often locked, but has a large, peaceful churchyard. Look out for Devil's Stone, which is said to bear the Devil's footprint.

This walk through undulating fields, paddocks and orchards, over unmade paths and down country lanes, explores the rich variety of the estuary landscape. Here are some of the things you will discover along the way.

**Upchurch** – A small village on the creeks of the Medway centred around its ancient church and traditional village pub. The village lays on a pre-Roman trackway and was occupied by the Romans who built up a community of ex-soldiers here wanting to settle in England. Evidence of their occupation were the discovery of a Roman cemetery, several Roman pottery works and Roman coins.

**St Mary the Virgin, Upchurch** – A beautiful Grade I listed 14th century church with a very unusual 'candle-snuffer' steeple where an octagonal pyramid appears to have been stacked on top of a square one resembling a couple of inverted ice-cream cones! It is believed that the distinctive shape served as a navigational aid for shipping on The River Thames. Sir Francis Drake's father was vicar here in the sixteenth century.

Under the church is a small crypt (a charnel house) where bones were kept when the churchyard was full. It was discovered in 1877 and the bones re-interred. Both north and south chapels contain fragments of medieval glass while in the north chapel you may find a collection of medieval tiles, including one that shows a hunched figure with a staff and hat - possibly representing a pilgrim.

Visitors: The church is usually open during the day and there are benches outside for a rest and quiet reflection in the churchyard.

**Newington** – A large village located beside the A2 road (originally a Roman road), with a station on the mainline between London and the Kent coast, surrounded by Kentish countryside, orchards and home to the national collection of Witch Hazel.

**Lower Halstow** – A marshland village inhabited in the Roman times and possibly dating back to the Iron Age due to its natural resources of flints, clay and water. Being so close to the water, Lower Halstow has (until recently) been a village that has made its living from the water – in one way or another. Whether it be ancient pottery making, ancient fishing, or in the 19th and 20th century brickmaking, the water has been the lifeblood of the village.

The **Swale Estuary** is a nationally important site for wildfowl and waders. In winter, thousands of birds flock to this unique habitat in search of food exposed by the receding tide. As the sea comes in and goes out, it creates a variety of changing habitats, from open sandbanks, where seals haul out, to vast mudflats, attracting flocks of birds. The estuary is home to waders, such as curlews, oystercatchers and redshanks, which constantly probe the mud for molluscs, worms and crustaceans. On the open water, you can see hundreds of pintail, widgeon, teal and other duck species. Common sightings along our walk also include sandlings, godwits, dunlin, lapwing, grey plover, black headed gull, common gull, black-tailed godwit, Brent geese, avocets, turnstone, ringed plover and marsh harriers. Bring your binoculars!

We have taken all responsible steps to ensure that this route is safe and achievable by people with a reasonable level of fitness and skill. However, all outdoor activities involve a degree of risk. To the extent permitted by law, Swale Borough Council accepts no responsibility for any accidents or injury resulting from following this route. Walking routes change over time. Weather conditions and other users may also affect the route. Please use your own judgement when using the route, based upon the weather and your ability, experience and confidence levels.

