



Royal
Geographical
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From hops to lavender

A self guided walk in Kent's Darent Valley



Explore a landscape described as an 'earthly paradise'

Visit spectacular lavender fields and a Roman villa

Find out how the land has been used for generations of farming

Discover how crops grown here fed the nation and clothed the Queen

www.discoveringbritain.org

the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks





This booklet is to be used alongside the audio commentary for this walk

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Cover image: Lavender field at sunset © William Alexander

From hops to lavender

Discover an 'earthly paradise' in Kent's Darent Valley

The Darent Valley was described by landscape artist, Samuel Palmer, as an 'earthly paradise'.

This is also a productive farming landscape where wheat, hops, lavender, apples and grapes are grown. Cattle, sheep and goats graze the meadows.

On this five mile walk between Shoreham and Eynsford you will find out how the lie of the land – its slopes, rivers and the rocks beneath your feet – influences what can be grown here.



Lavender harvesting
© William Alexander



Cattle grazing in buttercups at Castle Farm
© William Alexander

Discover how farming practices have changed over the generations through the personal stories of a local farmer.

Find out how this landscape fed a nation during the Second World War, where the robes for the Queen's coronation were made and a crop that might help you sleep.

This Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is just a stone's throw from London and is a delightful place to explore.

Route overview



Practical information

Location	Shoreham to Eynsford, Kent, Southeast England
Getting there	<p>Train - Shoreham is served by direct trains from London Blackfriars.</p> <p>Car - Easily accessible from the M25 Junction 3 (Swanley) or Junction 4 (Orpington). There is free parking at Shoreham station. A larger car park is available on Filston Road near the village school.</p> <p>Bus - There is a limited service to Shoreham from Monday to Saturday. Go Coach route 421 runs along the A225 between Swanley and Sevenoaks stopping at Eynsford and Shoreham railway stations.</p>
Start point	Shoreham railway station, TN14 7RT
Finish point	Eynsford Bridge, DA4 0AE
Onward journey	If you want to return to Shoreham at the end of the walk you can go on foot or by train (see Directions 21).
Distance	5 miles
Need a shorter route?	You can end the walk at Lullingstone Villa (Stop 17) and cut across to Eynsford station from there (see Directions 17).
Level	Moderate – the route is mostly flat following the River Darent. The climb up from Shoreham village is steep but a flat alternative is offered in Directions 4.

Conditions

The route can get muddy after rain so take appropriate footwear.

Suitable for

Families – lots to interest children, including farm animals and the lavender fields. The route is not suitable for buggies.

Dogs – keep on a lead by roads and on grazing land

Refreshments

There a range of places on the route for refreshments including:

- Shoreham station cafe (Stop 1)
- The Hop Shop (Stop 13)
- Lullingstone Visitor Centre cafe (Stop 15)
- Pubs in Shoreham and Eynsford villages

There are also many ideal places for a picnic

Facilities

Public toilets at Lullingstone Visitor Centre halfway along the route (Stop 15)

Other info

The best time to see the lavender fields in full bloom is early July.

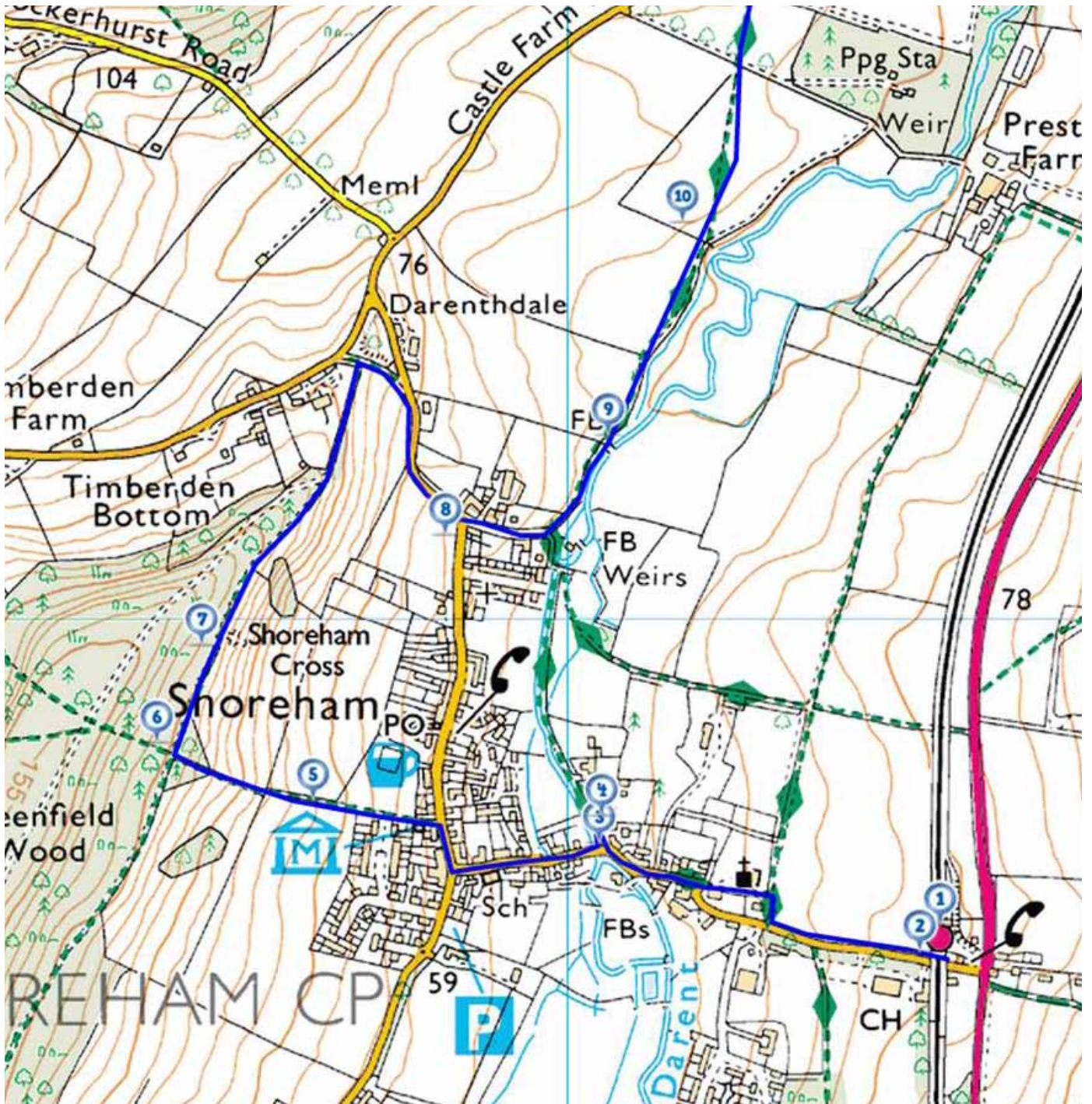
The Hop Shop at Castle Farm is open daily from 9am to 5pm Mon to Sat and 10am to 5pm on Sundays (Tel: 01959 523219)

Lullingstone Castle is open April to Sept. Adult tickets £7, children £4, concs £6.50. (Tel: 01322 862114)

Lullingstone Roman Villa is run by English Heritage. Adult tickets £6, children £3.60, concs £5.40. Opening times vary so please check in advance. (Tel: 01322 863467)

Eynsford Castle is run by English Heritage. Free entry from 10am daily.

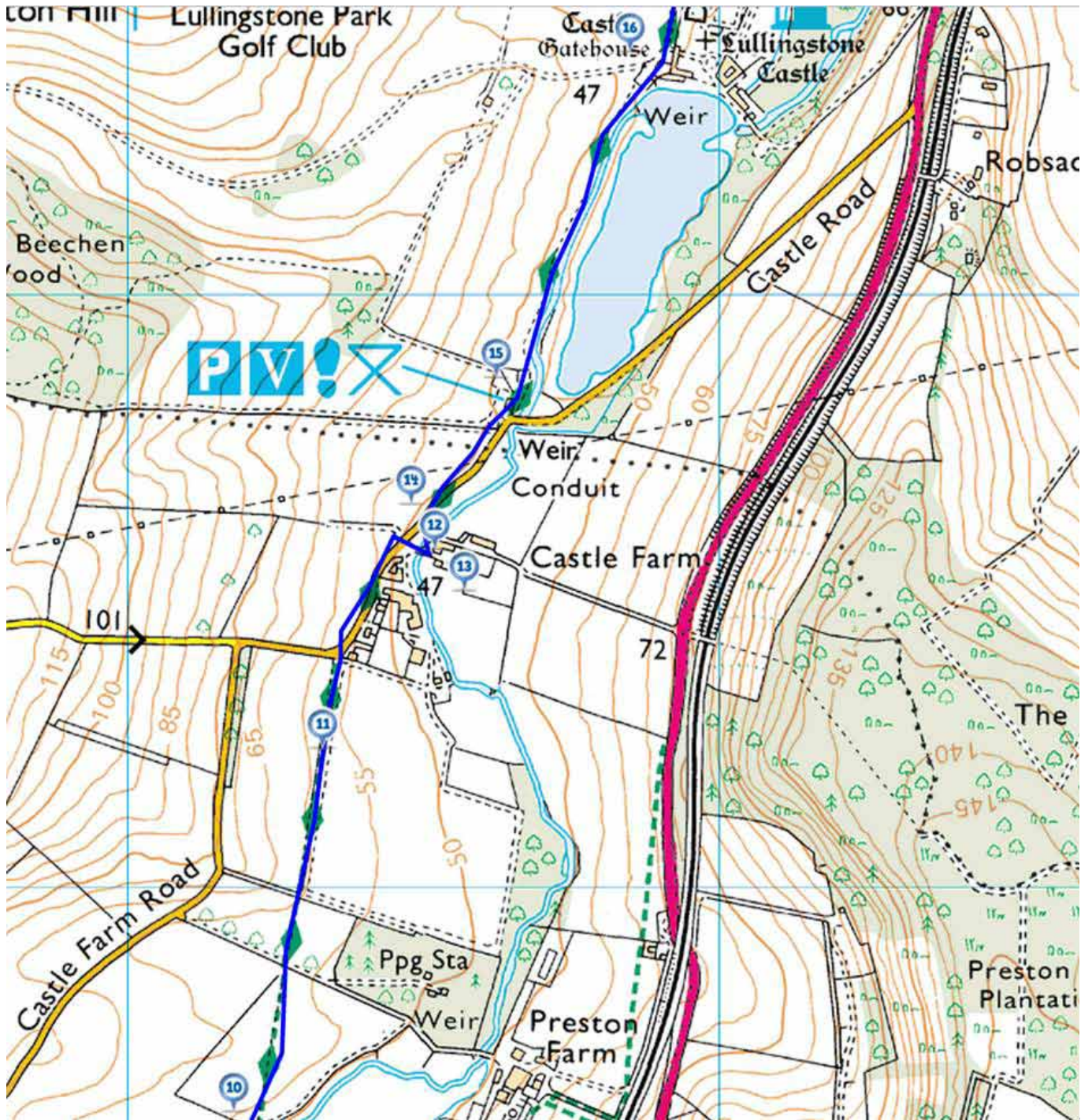
Detail of the first section of the route



Stopping points

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Shoreham railway station | 6. Meenfield Wood |
| 2. Gateway into field on Station Road | 7. Chalk cross |
| 3. Shoreham bridge | 8. Corner of Mill Lane |
| 4. Water House | 9. Riverside path |
| 5. Stile to Meenfield Wood | 10. Arable field |

Detail of the middle section of the route

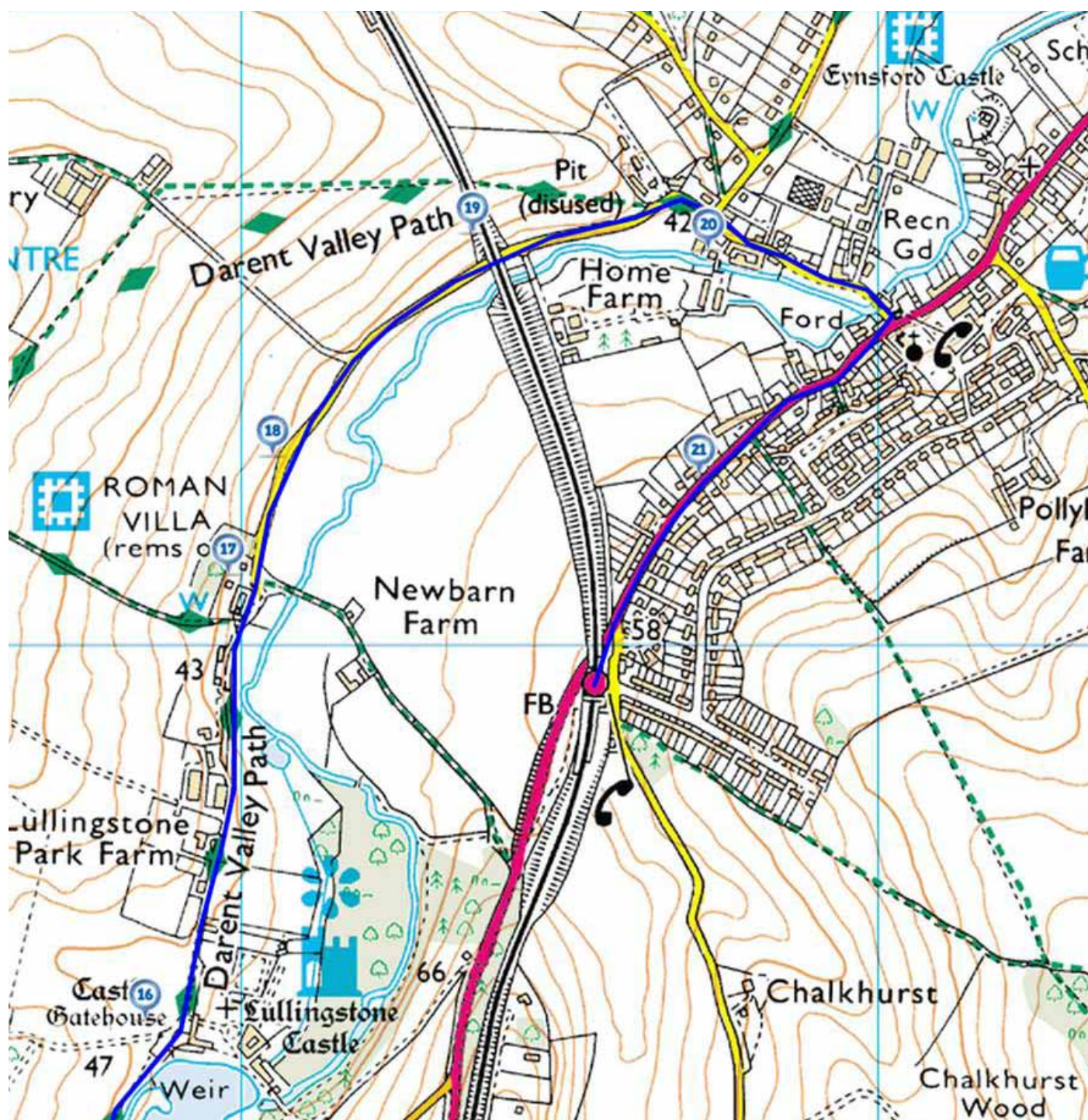


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Stopping points

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| 11. Hop garden | 14. Lavender field |
| 12. Castle Farm | 15. Lullingstone Visitor Centre |
| 13. The Hop Shop | 16. Lullingstone Castle gatehouse |

Detail of the last section of the route



Stopping points

- 17.** Lullingstone Roman Villa
- 18.** Lullingstone Lane
- 19.** Eynsford Viaduct
- 20.** Eynsford Bridge
- 21.** Eynsford Bridge

Directions

These directions are for use with the Darent Valley walk audio commentary. Listen to each track then read the directions below to get to the next stop.

1. A farming family

Shoreham railway station

Directions 1

Turn right immediately outside the railway station and go down the flight of steps. Turn right at the road and walk downhill. Stop at the first field gateway on the right immediately after the railway bridge and listen to Track 2.

2. This green and pleasant land

Gateway into field on Station Road

Directions 2

Walk down the road. Just before the first house on the right, turn right onto the field track (signposted as Footpath). After 50 metres turn left into the churchyard through the kissing gate in the flint wall (N.B. a kissing gate is a hinged gate with a small enclosure through which people but not animals can pass).

An avenue of clipped yews leads you past St Peter & St Paul's Church with its splendid fifteenth century porch. Walk on through the lych-gate to rejoin the road opposite The George pub. Keep walking until you reach the River Darent. Just before the bridge bear right into Darent Way. Stop at the stone war memorial by the riverside and listen to Track 3.

3. From source to sea

Shoreham bridge

Directions 3

Walk about 20 metres downstream. Stop outside the gates of a large white house called Water House and listen to Track 4.

4. Painter of paradise

Water House

Directions 4

Return to the bridge, cross the river and walk along Church Street. At the T-junction turn right into the High Street. After 100 metres turn left onto an unsurfaced lane signed 'The Landway'.

Follow the footpath up past the playing field and beneath mature beech trees. Continue to follow it upwards between two hedges. Stop when you emerge at a stile into a field. Look right to take in a good view of the Chalk Cross on the hill.

Note: For a level route that avoids the climb continue along the High Street through the village for about 500 metres. Where the road bends to the left turn right into Mill Lane and resume at Stop 8.

5. Geology underfoot

Stile on footpath up to Meenfield Wood

Directions 5

Continue up through the field towards a gate in the trees. Here you may need a breather, so stop and turn to look back over the village in the valley below.

When you are ready, go through the kissing gate and up the final steep climb until you reach a wide track, known locally as the Terrace. Stop at the sign for Meenfield Wood and listen to Track 6.

6. A productive woodland

Meenfield Wood

Directions 6

Walk along the Terrace track with the trees on your left and the valley on your right. Stop when you reach the chalk cross and listen to Track 7. You may wish to take advantage of the bench.

7. Reading the valley

Chalk cross

Directions 7

Continue along the Terrace as it slopes downhill. Just after the second barrier turn right down to a stile that leads into the field. Follow the footpath down alongside the hedge to another stile. Continue downhill until you meet the road. Look at the flint house at the top of Mill Lane and listen to Track 8.

8. Finding the flint

Flint house on corner of Mill Lane

Directions 8

At the bottom of Mill Lane turn left to pick up the Darent Valley footpath along the side of the river. Stop after about 200 metres when you reach a gate into a field and listen to Track 9.

9. Riverside ramble

Riverside path

Directions 9

Stop at the field gate to look across at the view. Listen to Track 10.

10. Landscape mosaic

Fields between Shoreham and Castle Farm

Directions 10

Continue on the footpath for about another 700 metres, crossing through three fields towards the line of tall poplar trees on the horizon. Go through a metal gate between the trees to walk on a slightly elevated track beside a row of juvenile lime trees. Stop when you have a good view of the hop poles and wires on the right. Listen to Track 11.

11. Let's go hopping

Hop garden

Directions 11

Continue past the hop field and houses until you reach a road. Carefully cross the road and take the steps slightly up to the left onto the permissive footpath. Follow it round to the right alongside an elm hedge until you see a sign to The Hop Shop. Cross the bridge into Castle Farm and listen to Track 12.

12. Cattle and apples

Castle Farm

Directions 12

Find somewhere comfortable to sit to listen to Track 13.

13. Changing with the times

The Hop Shop

Directions 13

From The Hop Shop retrace your route back over the bridge, across the lane and onto the field footpath. Turn right to continue along the path bounded by a fence on your left and the road on your right. Stop on the footpath at the bottom of a lavender field and listen to Track 14.

14. Purple haze

Lavender field

Directions 14

Continue along the footpath at the bottom of the lavender field. Leave the field via the corner stile which brings you to Lullingstone Visitor Centre. Stop here and listen to Track 15. Refreshments and toilets are available here.

15. From private estate to country park

Lullingstone Visitor Centre

Directions 15

From the Visitor Centre take the the footpath alongside the river signposted Darent Valley Path. Stop when you reach the gatehouse of Lullingstone Castle and listen to Track 16.

16. Royal robes

Lullingstone Castle gatehouse

Directions 16

Continue on along the road. Stop when you reach Lullingstone Roman Villa and listen to Track 17.

17. Enter some Romans

Lullingstone Roman Villa

Directions 17

From the Roman Villa continue straight along the road. Stop where you have a good view of the River Darent.

Note: If you wish to shorten the walk, there is an option for a shortcut from Lullingstone Roman Villa back to Eynsford station. Turn right in front of the Villa then cross over the steel framed bridge. Follow the unsurfaced road, which is a public footpath, up to the main A225 road. Here turn left to walk along the grass verge, under the bridge before turning right up to Eynsford station.

18. Wooing wildlife

Lullingstone Lane

Directions 18

Continue along the lane. Stop by the viaduct and listen to Track 19.

19. Lucky escapes

Eynsford Viaduct

Directions 19

Continue along the lane into Eynsford village. Stop near the bridge and ford and listen to Track 20.

20. Picture postcard

Eynsford Bridge

Directions 20

Remain at Eynsford Bridge and listen to Track 21.

21. From hops to lavender

Eynsford Bridge

Directions 20

To return to the railway station cross over the river then turn right onto the main A225 road in front of the church. Follow the pavements up to Eynsford station at the top of the hill. You can catch a train back to Shoreham or towards London. Alternatively you can walk back to Shoreham.



Scenes from around Castle Farm
© William Alexander

Credits

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing this Discovering Britain walk:

- **William Alexander** and **Caroline Alexander** for creating the walk
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Discovering Britain is an exciting series of geographically-themed walks that aim to bring these stories alive and inspire everyone to explore and learn more about Britain. Each walk looks at a particular landscape, finding out about how forces of nature, people, events and the economy have created what you see today.

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