

Medway Valley Orchards

East Farleigh station - Kettle Corner - Farleigh Green - Buston Manor - Yalding - Yalding station

Length: 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles (10.9km)

Underfoot: Generally, this is a walk on good paths, well-drained fields and minor roads. There may be a couple of short sections of mud after Farleigh Green and just before Yalding station.

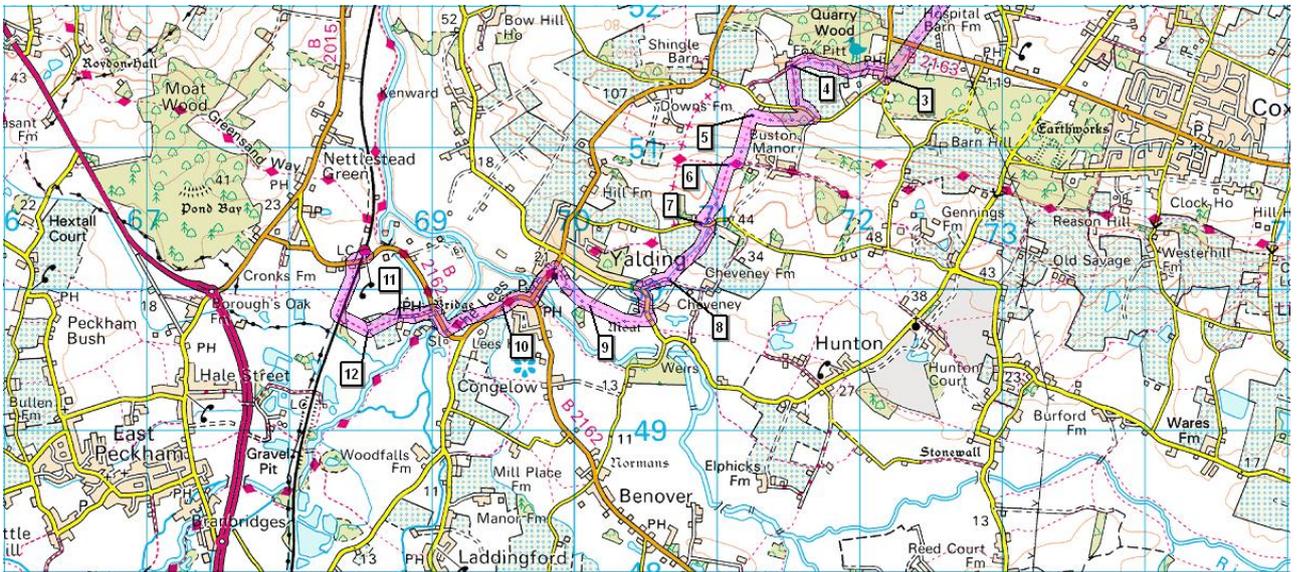
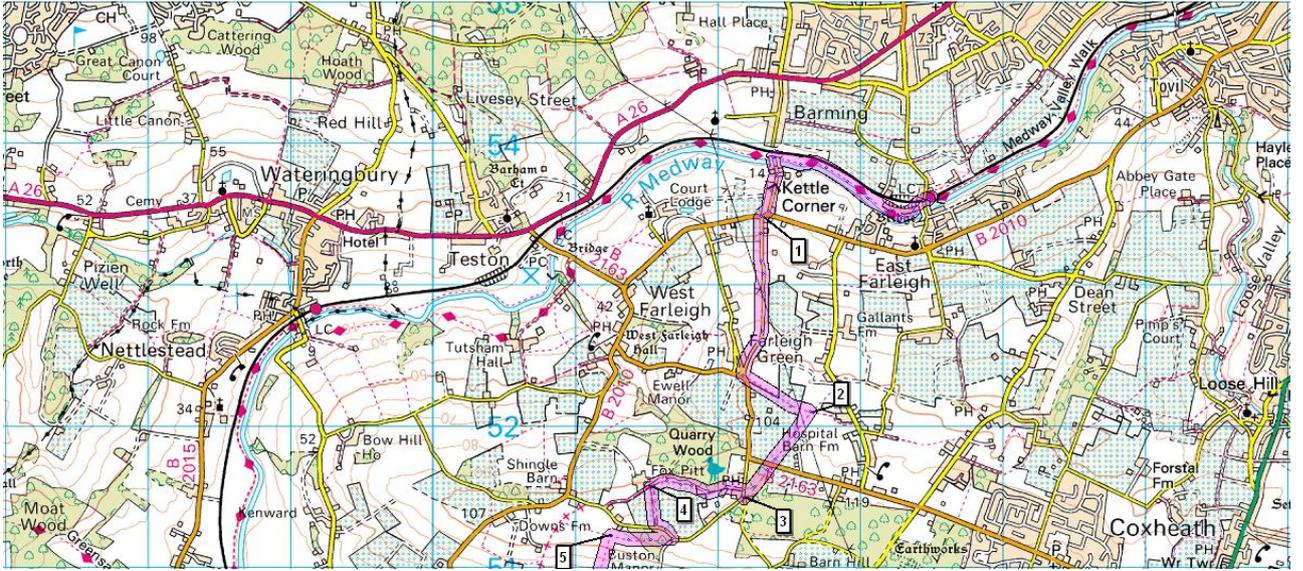
Terrain: There is one long, steady climb, from Barming Bridge to Farleigh Green and a corresponding descent from Greybury Wood to Yalding, but the gradients are not taxing.

Maps: 1:50,000 Landranger 188 Maidstone & Royal Tunbridge Wells; 1:25,000 Explorer 148 Maidstone & the Medway Towns (*note that a couple of short sections are on neighbouring map 136 High Weald. However, the maps and descriptions on this site should be sufficient for these sections*).

Getting there: East Farleigh is on the Medway Valley line, a secondary line that runs hourly between Tonbridge and Strood, so requires a change of trains to get there from London. Take a Southeastern service from Charing Cross to Tonbridge (42 mins), via Waterloo East, London Bridge (34 mins) and Orpington (19 mins) *for connections from London Victoria* and change for a Medway Valley train. Total journey time is around 71 mins via this route.

Getting home: Yalding is on the same line as East Farleigh, so again you need to take the hourly service to Tonbridge (15 mins) for frequent services to Charing Cross (47 mins) via London Bridge and Waterloo East.

Fares: Purchase a off-peak day return to East Farleigh for £19.40 (child £9.70, railcard £12.90), which will cover both journeys.



Route description

Little has changed about East Farleigh's pretty station since it was opened in the 1840s. Built on a tight curve, the two platforms are separated by a level crossing, controlled by a gatekeeper from his box on the Tonbridge-bound platform. With increased road traffic, the crossing is now almost as much of a bottleneck as the single-track medieval bridge below. When the Medway Valley line first opened, it was the only route to Maidstone, a branch of the original mainline to Dover - necessitating a roundabout journey from London via Croydon, Redhill and Tonbridge. Today it is a pleasant, bustling secondary line, looping its way up the attractive valley.

- Arriving at East Farleigh from Tonbridge, cross the footbridge over the lines, avoiding the busy level crossing. Head downhill on the road, but almost immediately turn right on the side road next to the 19th century Maidstone Waterworks building. After 100m, follow a footpath sign left to the riverbank, lined with moored boats. Look back to admire East Farleigh's fine 4-arch bridge, with the village church is perched above the river ahead of you.

The first of several fine medieval bridges on this walk, East Farleigh bridge probably dates from the 14th century, and still carries traffic from Maidstone to the main village of East Farleigh on the south bank. As well as the four arches over the river, a fifth was added to span the towpath on the northern bank. At the time of its listing as a grade 1 monument in 1960, it was described as 'probably the finest medieval bridge in the south of England.'

- Turn right along the riverside path. Before too long you leave the caravan sites and moorings behind you, the excellent path following the bucolic, willow-lined Medway, with the railway to the right, and Barming's church spire ahead.
- Around a bend, Barming Bridge comes into view and upon reaching it, cross the river.

Barming Bridge, a modern metal footbridge resting on older parapets, is somewhat more utilitarian than East Farleigh's, though it also has an interesting history. A bridge on this site was originally constructed in 1740, when work to make the Medway navigable removed the historic ford. The bridge has collapsed twice, including when a 10-tonne traction engine caused the collapse of the wooden structure, replaced in 1996 by today's bridge. Barming Bridge is known locally as 'Kettle Bridge', probably a derivation of cattle, as this would have been on the droving route from Romney Marsh to London.

- Keep straight ahead on the steep road on the other bank, climbing past cottages to reach the B2010 at Kettle Corner. Turn very briefly right and then cross with care to head left up tiny Kettle Lane **[1]**.
- This road climbs steadily between hedges - at one point, glancing left, you get a glimpse of the tower blocks of Maidstone, nestling incongruously in a curve of the Medway valley.
- About 1km on from Kettle Corner, you reach the houses of Farleigh Green and emerge at a road junction. The attractive hilltop green, with the Good Intent pub beside it, is immediately to the right. Otherwise, follow the footpath sign left through a kissing gate.
- The path follows a field boundary to enter an orchard. Keep straight ahead, following the windbreak on the left. At the end of the orchard, under a pylon line, keep ahead into an open field, with a huge view to the North Downs escarpment.

- At the far side of the field, you reach a waymark post **[2]**. Follow the path marked sharply right, crossing back over the field (there is no clear path on the ground) to another waymark post. Back through the hedge you re-enter orchards. Follow the diagonal route cut through the young trees (following yellow posts).
- Pass through a windbreak and into a newly planted section, the path keeping straight ahead under the supporting wires. Through one more windbreak and you again follow yellow posts through what is, at time of writing, a grubbed up orchard, to rejoin the B2163.
- Cross and take the track opposite (bridleway sign) through cleared woodland to reach a road junction. **[3]**
- Turn right to the rustic White House pub, and turn left at the BW sign beside it, passing through the car park and following the track SA, passing pétanque courts. Beyond a bungalow, the route becomes a broad path along the edge of Quarry Wood, potentially a little muddy in places. You eventually emerge into an orchard and follow the woodland edge towards the buildings of Fox Pitt.
- At end of the wood, keep straight ahead to reach a concrete track. Do not join this, but take the unsurfaced track climbing slightly to the left (no sign) **[4]**. By a small barn, this becomes tarmaced and continues to join a small road.
- Turn left for about 150m. Immediately before the drive to Buston Manor Farm, turn right at a footpath sign onto a pleasant path cutting through Greybury Wood. The path emerges from the wood onto an open hillside with extensive views south across the plain. Continue straight ahead on a faint path across the field.
- At the hedgeline ahead, follow a waymark left **[5]**, heading downhill beside it. Descend past a small coniferous plantation and some tennis courts to reach a crossing track.
- Head right very briefly to reach a waymark post where you turn left **[6]**, following a clear path descending. Cross a tiny stream at the bottom and then follow the left hand hedge to reach Lughorse Lane **[7]**.
- Turn left, and at the bend ahead, right on a footpath between a stream and a garden. Into fields, the path continues to follow the stream.
- Reaching a tarmac drive **[8]**, turn right and follow it past pleasant houses to a road.
- Head left, passing Cheveney with its ornamental clock tower on the L and a mansion surrounded by a much older moat on the right. Just after the bend to the left, follow a footpath sign right on a small track.
- This soon becomes a fenced path, running between fields and woodland, emerging onto playing fields. Keep ahead along the right hand edge of the football pitch to a small car parking area **[9]**.
- Follow the footpath sign ahead on a clear path which curves right and runs between fences to emerge beside Yalding's overspill cemetery. Through a gate ahead, a tiny road leads past more graves to emerge on the high street, lined with fine mansions and cottages.

Yalding has a long heritage, largely due to its strategic position at the junction of the Beult and Medway rivers, with crossing points over both. Its basis was a Saxon border fort called Gaeling, settled in around 400AD, with the village becoming prosperous thanks to the Wealden iron industry. Following the decline of the industry, continued economic success came from a reversion to growing fruit - as we have seen - with the Medway serving as an important transport route for local produce.

- Turn left, past the smithy and set-back church, to cross the spectacular long stone bridge over the twin channels of the Beult.

This is Town Bridge, and like East Farleigh's bridge, dates from the 15th century. At 450ft long, it is the longest remaining medieval bridge in Kent and is mainly in its original state, albeit widened somewhat to allow for modern traffic. In 1643, Town Bridge was the site of a skirmish in the Civil War, when Royalist soldiers marched south from Aylesford and sought to use the bridge to reach Tonbridge. However, they were intercepted here by Parliamentarian forces, who after bombardment forced the Cavalier forces to surrender, capturing around 300 and the remainder melting away into the Weald.

- On the far side, the George pub is just to the left. Otherwise turn right (signed to station). Beyond the last house, veer right at the footpath sign **[10]** to follow the clear path edging away from the road across The Lees towards the humped shape of Twyford Bridge. The path crosses a little footbridge over a small stream and eventually reaches Twyford Bridge.

'Twyford', a common name in the southeast, means 'twin ford', referring to the junction of the Medway and the Teise. Like East Farleigh bridge, it has four arches, and dates from the 14th century, the funds for its construction and maintenance coming from a number of medieval bequests.

- Cross the narrow and busy bridge with extreme care. Just beyond the bridge, turn left over the swing bridge across the canal channel, passing the Anchor Inn.

This canal channel represents part of the works undertaken from 1746 onwards to make the upper section of the Medway into a navigable waterway, bypassing the weir alongside Twyford Bridge, as well as cutting off the bend of the river west of Yalding. These works enabled barges of up to 41 tonnes to travel as far up river as Tonbridge (Maidstone was previously the head of the navigation), with further work in 1828 to extend navigation to Leigh, 19 miles above Maidstone. Inevitably, the main sources of cargo were agricultural products, but stone from Wealden quarries was also important.

- Follow the waymark along the private road ahead. By The Lodge **[11]**, cross the stile to the right and beyond the house swing left to a second stile into a pleasant orchard. Follow the waymark along a clear avenue between the trees.
- A stile leads to a secluded wildlife pond **[12]** and you turn right around its edge. By a viewing platform, take the clear path heading away from the pond, following a fence.
- After a short distance, the path crosses a stile to reach the railway line. Cross with care - visibility is good in both directions. Beyond the railway, the path heads right, paralleling the line. There is a short muddy section through boggy woodland before you emerge into drier fields.
- Ignore the path waymarked right and keep ahead, beside the railway. Continue to follow the hedge to pass between two houses to reach the road. Turn right, over the level crossing to reach the station entrance. Trains for Tonbridge leave from the platform you emerge onto.