

THE WALK

The Four Pits Walk visits the sites of the former collieries at Tilmanstone, Snowdown, Chislet and Betteshanger, and some of the villages which served them. The idea stemmed from the Three Pits Walk, taking in the Tilmanstone, Snowdown and Betteshanger sites, which I started leading for the White Cliffs Ramblers in 1990, a year after the closure of Betteshanger, the last remaining pit in the Kent Coalfield.

The Three Pits Walk – which can be walked with a simple amendment of the route description below (see note marked * and **) – is 18 miles. Turning it into a Four Pits Walk was always going to involve lots of extra mileage, due to the crossing and re-crossing of the River Stour. Members of Kent Group of the LDWA first completed the Four Pits Walk in 2007, and it became an Anytime Challenge in 2010.

Many thanks to Kent LDWA members Michael Headley and Wendy Thurrell for walking this route and checking it, and to Sarah Smith, for designing the certificate and badge.

The route description was updated in March 2017, but with the passage of time, it is inevitable that some parts of the route will require modifying and more updating. Please send any suggested changes to me at Ardrol, Scotsburn Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1PR , or e-mail to grahamsmith53@btinternet.com

Certificates will be sent by contacting me at the above address and email address. Badges can be purchased for £2 (cheques payable to LDWA Kent Group).

The OS maps required are: Explorer 150 (Canterbury & the Isle of Thanet) – a tiny part of the route goes into the area covered by Explorer 138 (Dover, Folkestone & Hythe) but there is no real need to purchase this map for the walk; or Landranger 179 (Canterbury & East Kent).

Enjoy the walk.

Graham Smith, LDWA

THE ROUTE

Start:

Northbourne car park, off The Drove near the Northbourne beacon (GR TR334523).

NORTHBOURNE-TILMANSTONE.

1. FROM car park turn left onto road and follow to T-junction. Turn right on road and in 15 yards turn half left on tarmac footpath (bearing 280°). Follow footpath, and at end go half left on road (bearing 270°). At junction turn left, and in 10 yards turn right on bridle path, following it around edge of field before turning right on track. Ignore a left turn just past power lines and all side turns until track swings left, then bear right. Enter field ahead and follow field boundary with hedge on right. Go through trees for 50 yards and bear right at fork into denser wood. At end of wood cross field (bearing 260°) to track at Betteshanger, by Northbourne Park School.

2. TURN left, and at end of hedge bear right on bridle path across field (bearing 250°). Pass seat under large tree on left. Ahead across field and at house on left take bridle path ahead (bearing 210°). Go straight on through trees. Bridle path eventually bears right then left. At end of trees, bear left. Go through gate to cross bridge over A256 on right. Ahead to cross road, follow St Mary's Grove, turn left at T-junction and follow road ahead to Tilmanstone.

3. AT war memorial, swing left with road and in 20 yards turn right on track (Vicarage Lane), passing houses. When track bends right, go straight on towards trees. Pass under power lines and in 25 yards turn right onto concealed path through trees (bearing 165°). Follow path, later passing through gap in fence. Emerge from trees, turn left, and follow faint path, with low fence on right. Eventually turn right with low fence, and in 20 yards turn left, then turn right and follow bridle path, with power lines on left, to road (GR TR292509).

TILMANSTONE-SNOWDOWN

1. TURN left on road, and pass transfer station on left. In another 100 yards, at road junction, bear right across road at footpath sign. Take path past posts and follow wire fence on left. Follow path for 550 yards, turning left and immediately right (leaving fence – do NOT go straight on here) to emerge at Elvington. At end of path turn right on road, pass Milner Road on left and take next left (Fairview Road). Pass play area on right and turn right at T-junction

to pass Elvington Community Centre on right. Cross Chaucer Road and follow St John's Road to end as it swings left. Turn right across grass area to cross road. At Miners' Way sign take footpath across field to cross stile and turn left on road. Follow road for 1300 yards (GREAT CARE – traffic) to T-junction. Take bridle path ahead and follow to Nonington.

2. Turn left on road, and in 60 yards turn left on cycle path by village hall. At end of cycle path turn left on road past the Royal Oak and out of the village, taking care when pavement ends. Reach crossroads and in 10 yards turn right up steps to follow permissive footpath parallel to road. Just before site of Snowdown colliery (GR TR247513) walk on pavement to pass disused pit buildings.

SNOWDOWN-CHISLET

1. AT station turn right into Aylesham Road and follow for 1300 yards to Aylesham. Stay on this road (now Ackholt Road), passing *Payday at Snowdown Colliery* sculpture by Miners Way Business Park. Follow road as it swings right, then just before railway bridge cross road and turn left by station. Cross common for 100 yards , keeping fence on right, and go through kissing gate, passing large green post. At end turn left on road and follow cycleway (Ratling Road) out of village.

2. STAY on Ratling Road, ignoring three footpaths on left, and immediately past Timberwell take footpath on left to cross field (bearing 280°) to gap in hedge. Follow footpath to road, cross with

care and follow bridle path ahead. (*If path is overgrown at hedge, go around hedge on right.*) Cross minor road and ahead on track to street in Adisham. Turn left, then take first right (cycleway – Woodlands Road). After 400 yards, bear right onto footpath at farm buildings. Ignore turning on right and go straight on, keeping left to follow field edge. Continue on path as it bends through wooded strip, then follow wide path ahead (bearing 320°) for one mile, past trig. point, with good views on right. Join driveway and continue ahead to cross road and take bridle path ahead. Ignore footpath on left and follow bridle path until it joins minor road from left. Turn right at footpath sign to road at Bekesbourne.

3. CROSS to Aerodrome Road and follow this ahead and then left. At end of Aerodrome Road cross railway bridge to go through gate. Follow footpath across meadow to go through another gate, then cross field to go through gate by house. Go ahead on metalled track, keeping straight on, with farm buildings on right, to cross cattle grid. At junction, bear right through gate. At T-junction, by oast house, turn left, and follow farm road as it swings right. Follow farm road straight on, then bear left after cattle grid. Follow farm road over low bridge to cattle grid by road. Turn right on road and follow, with care, to Littlebourne.

4. Turn left and follow road. Go past pub on right, and at 50mph signs turn right and immediately turn left to follow footpath through wood (280°). Footpath swings right and left. At cross-track, at waymark post, go straight on through wood. At end of wood turn

left at fence, turning right after 50 yards to go between fences. At cross-track go straight on through wood. Cross road and continue through wood. Straight on across open area (285°). At No Horses sign bear right to follow footpath downhill through wood. Cross footbridge and near right to cross field (3000°) to wood. Follow footpath through wood, and at waymark post go past paddocks, then allotments, on left. Go past gate to road. Turn right and immediately turn left on road (No Entry sign). Follow road (Well Lane), later going downhill, to Fordwich. Go straight on along pavement and turn left into King Street (care) following Stour Valley Walk. Follow road as it swings right, leaving SVW.

5. Cross first bridge and after second bridge turn right onto riverside path. Follow riverside path for 1.25 miles, ignoring any turnings left. Turn left Westbere Marshes sign (on left) with Westbere Lake on the left. Turn right at Westbere Heritage Trail information board. Turn right and go between fences and cross railway line, with great care, at next gate, turning left. After next gate turn right on road. At junction turn right and follow Bushy Hill Road uphill to main A28 road. Turn right, and follow road for 1400 yards, passing village of Hersden. Two hundred yards after Chopsticks Chinese Restaurant on left, turn right immediately after house and squeeze past gate which is slightly set back from road. Follow old miners' track to open ground. Bear left to follow path for 150 yards to where it ends at dip. Below is the site of Chislet pit (GR TR211620).

CHISLET-BETTESHANGER

1. RETRACE steps to main road and turn right. In 300 yards, cross road, with care, at footpath sign, to Chislet Business Park. Carry on along minor road after business park and follow it left at buildings. Turn right on track to follow line of trees on left. Ignore bridle path on left and follow track ahead, with trees and bushes on right at first and then on both sides. Follow footpath left at T-junction, and swing right and then left at large tree. Go past gate and after 10 yards cross narrow footbridge on left, to follow footpath ahead through trees and then right. Follow enclosed footpath, overgrown in places, between fields. Follow footpath straight through to turn right on road. At T-junction go straight on and follow road, with care, to Chislet.

2. FOLLOW road as it swings left by school to go past church on right. Turn right onto Chitty Lane immediately past farm buildings. At end of Chitty Lane turn right on Saxon Shore Way. As track joins from right, ahead through double gates and follow track (bearing 160°). Cross footbridge at Sarre Penn and turn right, following SSW and Wantsum Walk. In 300 yards, at SSW/WW waymark, turn left to cross field (bearing 140°). Follow footpath ahead and climb steps. Turn right and follow footpath along field edge, turning left at SSW/WW sign to cross field. Cross A28 with care, and cross next field (bearing 180°) to reach other side of field by power lines. Go down steps to turn left at road. Cross railway

and then bridge at Grove Ferry. Immediately after bridge cross road, with care, turn left and follow road for 50 yards to turn right into Stodmarsh Nature Reserve on Stour Valley Walk.

3. FOLLOW riverside path, ignoring turnings left. After 1.25 miles the path swings left, leaving river. After bird observatory and information board, as path swings left again, the site of Chislet colliery (now Canterbury Industrial Park) can be seen to the right, with Hersden beyond. Follow path, with lake on right. Path swings right, with more views on the right across the lake to the site of Chislet pit. Keep following path (Stour Valley Walk) to the end of the nature reserve, ignoring turnings left and right. 150 yards past gate, bear right on metalled track by car park (where toilets available). Metalled track becomes a minor road, turn left on it at Stodmarsh village green. Follow road as it swings right past church. When road swings left, just past turning to the left, take footpath across field (bearing 195°). At end of field cross two roads and follow footpath across next field (on the same bearing) to line of trees. Turn left, with trees on left. Turn right at path junction and turn left on track by large containers and follow to farmyard. Cross farmyard and go through kissing gate to cross small field diagonally. Go through next kissing gate, cross road with care and take minor road ahead (The List). When this road turns right, go straight on and in 10 yards turn right on path in front of Pear Tree Cottage. Follow this to road. Turn left on road and follow as it swings right, ignoring footpaths to the right and left. Follow road past Mill End, ignoring another footpath left. By

Seatonfields House take footpath on right and cross field (bearing 160°) to minor road. Cross road and ahead on path (bearing 130°). Follow straight ahead for 1.25 miles, crossing a minor road and three footbridges, to Wingham.

4. TURN left on pavement to church. Carry on along pavement and cross main road – with great care – as it swings left, and take footpath ahead by Lloyds TSB Bank. Follow footpath straight on and then turn right to cul-de-sac. Turn left, and at end of cul-de-sac bear right on footpath between hedges. In 20 yards turn right on footpath in front of house No. 9, and follow between fences to road. Turn right, and in 25 yards turn sharp left on Goodnestone Road. Go straight on, past playing field, tennis courts and open field on right. At paddock on right (opposite Popsal Lane), go through kissing gate and cross to go through gate. Cross three more paddocks, then turn left before gate and turn right through kissing gate. Cross small field to another gate and take footpath ahead, with fence on right. At driveway turn left and in 15 yards turn left uphill on road. Immediately past thatched cottage, turn right on footpath. Follow footpath, with fence on right, to trees. Cross path and go through trees. Bear right (bearing 165°) to cross field towards next clump of trees. Turn left on grassy track in front of them and follow this to road at Goodnestone. Turn right, and just past village stores turn right into The Street.

5. TWENTY yards past school, turn left on footpath.** Through kissing gate and bear left to pass through another kissing gate in

trees. Go straight on past clump of trees to kissing gate by road. Turn right and bear left at junction (Rowling, Eastry). Cross next junction and keep following road straight ahead, with Chillenden windmill over on right. Bear left at next junction (Lower Rowling) and stay on road, ignoring footpaths left and right. Turn left at next junction and follow road as it swings right. Carry on, ignoring footpath on left, to pass quarry. Turn left on road, and immediately turn right on byway (Rowling) and follow for 1.2 miles to Eastry, ignoring any turnings on the right.

6. AT end of byway bear left on Mill Lane. Follow this to the end, past former mill, disused church and fire station. Cross road, with care, and turn left into Church Street. Turn right through churchyard and go through kissing gate. Bear left across field. Turn right on metalled track and turn left on road. Follow road as it swings right to cross bridge over Eastry bypass. Follow road straight ahead, past the Blazing Donkey on left, ignoring road on left and bridle path on right, to T-junction. Cross field (bearing 120°) on footpath. At trees bear slightly right, with trees on left, and follow right of way through garden, with house on left.

7. CROSS road and go straight on, with fence on left. At end of fence bear left across field (90°), go under power line and turn right in front of line of trees. In field corner cross kissing gate on left and turn right between fences. Cross kissing gate and turn right on road to Finglesham. Ignore turning on right and go straight on, and 70 yards before pub turn left on footpath between houses. Go straight on between fences and follow footpath straight on, bearing right through kissing gate. Go past waymark post, cross footbridge on right, turn left and cross another footbridge. Go straight on (90°) passing under power lines to third footbridge. Turn right over bridge, turn left and follow path to emerge at main Deal-Sandwich A256 road by pub.

8. CROSS road with great care, turn right and follow pavement and grassy track alongside road to statue of Waiting Miner by entrance to Betteshanger Country Park
(Originally called Fowlmead, the country park was opened in

2007. It was built on the site of Betteshanger colliery, the last Kent pit the close, in 1989. The Waiting Miner statue, originally sited outside Richborough Power Station, was moved to Dover seafront but was taken to Fowlmead in 2010 after a campaign by ex-miners).

9. TURN right to cross main road at island, with great care, and follow Betteshanger Road for 700 yards. Bear right at roundabout, staying on Betteshanger Road, and go past Almond House, to reach the former pit village of Betteshanger. Turn left on footpath to pass play area and Betteshanger Social Club. Take former miners' track between club and fence, go through kissing gate and follow track for 800 yards. Turn left on road and turn right into Northbourne car park.

WELL DONE!

THREE PITS WALK

The following is for people walking the Three Pits Walk (Tilmanstone, Snowdown and Betteshanger. At * on route description (Snowdown-Chislet section – paragraph 2, first line) above ...

Keep following Ratling Road, going over railway line and past Ratling Club. Road swings left then goes straight on. Take first turning right (signposted Goodnestone, Ash and Sandwich) as road swings left again. At Ratling House through kissing gate and take footpath across field (110°) to edge of small wood ahead. Bear slightly left (75°) to cross field. Cross two stiles and go up field, with trees on left. Go over another stile, by gate, cross field to

go through two gates by houses. Go straight on, crossing minor road, to track. Follow track to Goodnestone, go straight on through village, and 30 yards past Fitzwalter Arms turn right on footpath, and pick up route description at ** (Chislet-Betteshanger section, paragraph 5, first line)

THE KENT COALFIELD

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KENT'S Garden of England label depicts views of hop fields, lush green countryside and orchards in blossom.

Colliery headgear and spoil heaps are not usually included in the vision, yet the industrial scenes played an important part in the county's history.

Thousands of men worked in the pits and the four big collieries at Chislet, Tilmanstone, Snowdown and Betteshanger produced a wealth of coal for the nation.

The coalfield has left a rich legacy for Kent , from the music of a brass band or male voice choir to a variety of sports clubs, churches and community halls.

Production ended in August 1989, almost a century since the existence of the coalfield was proved, although geologists had previously recognised its presence.

When early borings were made at Shakespeare Cliff at Dover for a Channel Tunnel, the equipment was borrowed and coal measures were struck 1,155ft from the surface.

When various other exploratory bore holes were put down, companies were unsuccessfully set up to exploit the underground riches and several shafts were established and abandoned. It was not until 1913 that the first economic quantities of coal were raised from the Snowdown pit. Wingham, Woodnesborough and Stonehall at Lydden were abandoned in 1921.

The First World War interrupted any developments of a future coalfield, but the four main collieries of Betteshanger, Snowdown, Tilmanstone and Chislet started life within two years of peace returning to Kent .

Pearson and Dorman Young owned Betteshanger and Snowdown, the Tilmanstone (Kent) Collieries ran its namesake pit and the fourth pit was owned by Chislet Colliery Limited.

By 1930 the four employed 4,964 men, whose output in the same year totalled 1,329,500 tons.

By the mid-1930s the labour force rose to 7,284 and production topped the 2 million mark.

A decade later it was estimated the coalfield reserves stood at an estimated 1,000 million to 3,000 million tons – an impressive statistic.

Despite the huge amounts of fuel underground, the four collieries could only satisfy about one tenth of the demands of South East England.

In those days the bulk of production was used locally, with 40 per cent going to industry in cement and paper works, about 20 per cent for Southern Railways and seven per cent for gas making.

“The growth of the field is assured,” quoted the Ministry of Fuel and Power’s regional survey report into the Kent Coalfield. The same official document, on sale in 1945 for ninepence, also investigated the housing available for mineworkers. In those days between 5,000 and 6,000 workers lived in the coalfield area, with almost threequarters in mining villages close to the four pits.

The remainder were in Deal, Dover, Canterbury, Ramsgate, Herne Bay and Folkestone.

A huge milestone in the coalfield’s history was achieved on New Year’s Day in 1947, when the mining industry was brought into public ownership. Celebrations were held at the Kent pits and many spirited speeches were made welcoming the dawn of a new era.

Although the four collieries collectively made the country’s smallest National Coal Board area, it had an annual turnover of £3 million and the future looked good.

The four main collieries continued to produce fuel and the decades passed with boys leaving school to follow their fathers and grandfathers into the industry.

Output carried on rising, but production started to slump at Chislet in the mid 1960s and in July 1969 the coal board shut the pit, filled the mining gear with rubble and were left with three working collieries.

In 1973 the Kent Coalfield suffered its heaviest loss since nationalisation and in the year ended March 31 lost the record sum

of almost £5 million.

Every ton of coal raised from the three pits came to the surface with a loss of almost £5 and the NCB declared Kent coal was the most expensive coal in the country to mine.

Ironically, production continued to soar, output per manshift went up and the market for the coal was going to the British Steel Corporation.

The NCB became British Coal, which decided in 1986 it would no longer fight against the worsening geological conditions at Tilmanstone. Kent's second pit closed in 1986.

Kent's shrinking coal industry suffered another blow the following year, when it was announced Snowdown pit faced closure. British Coal said the move was to cut costs, reported to be running at more than £20,000 a day.

From late 1987 Betteshanger, with 700 men, was the remaining colliery. It stayed open for another two years and its end came on August 24 1989, when the final shift of men came up from underground.

The Kent Coalfield became history.