

# Cranbrook & Benenden



Welcome to the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty an unspoilt medieval landscape. A pleasant walk through a Kentish section of the High Weald AONB with gently rolling hills and lovely views.

*Our thanks go to Kent Ramblers for permission to use this walk.*

<b>Distance and duration</b>	9 miles
	5 hours
<b>Start point</b>	Cranbrook. Start outside the tourist information office at the corner of the High Street and Stone Street.
<b>Map reference</b>	Start at TQ774358
<b>Other information</b>	OS Map: Explorer 136, 137 & 125 There is a large, free public car park by the Coop supermarket and a smaller one at the bottom of The Hill.

## I-Spy - Things to look out for in the landscape



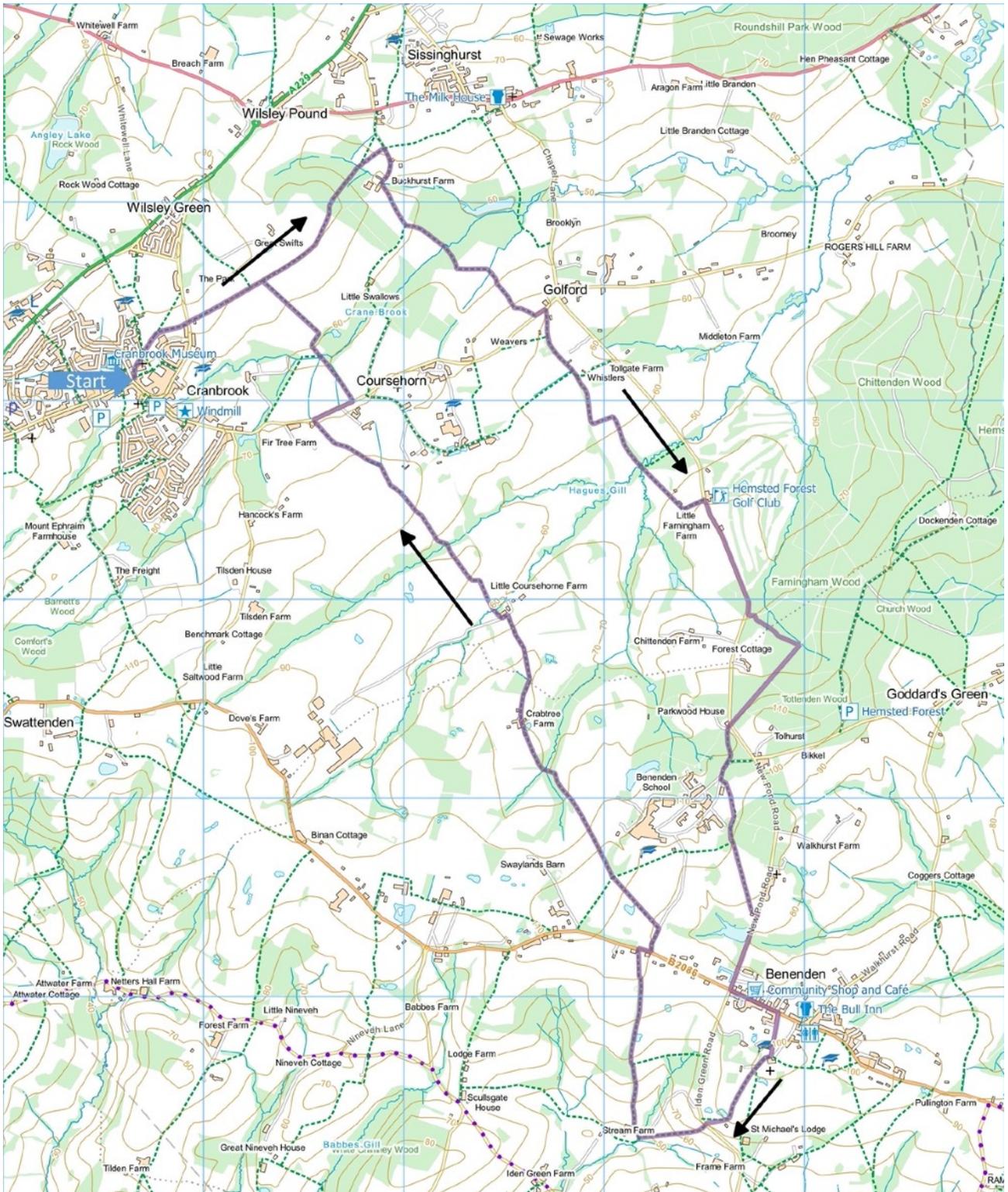
### **Cranbrook**

The smallest “town” in Kent achieved prosperity in the 14th to 16th centuries through the cloth trade. Often called the “capital of the Weald” it retains great charm and is dominated by a fine smock windmill built in 1814 for Henry Dobell.

### **Great Swifts**

There has been a house on this site at least since the 15th century when a dwelling was sold by a Stephen Swift. This presumably accounts for the many earlier names of the house and the estate incorporating the name “Swift” or “Swifts”. From 1770 to 1820 the house was owned by the Austen family, relatives of Jane Austen. The present house was built in 1937 by Major Victor Cazalet, MP for Chippenham. He died in an air crash in 1943 after which the house was first let and then sold to the exiled Queen Maria of Yugoslavia

and her sons. The house was renamed “Oak Hill Manor” in around 1995 and may recently have reverted to the former name of “Great Swifts.”



## The Walk - route directions

(1). Begin at the junction of High Street and Stone Street, facing towards St Dunstan's Church. Go up the steps, passing the church on your right. Follow the path through the churchyard. Continue straight ahead, then veer right to follow hedge along the right edge of the sports field. Continue to a road; cross and join the footpath opposite.

(2). Follow path; ignore HWLT turning on right. Continue ahead on concrete path till you reach a kissing gate to enter a wood. Follow path downhill. Exit wood via a kissing gate to enter a sloping field. Bear slightly right uphill to a kissing gate on tree line. Descend steps to sunken lane.

(3). Turn right. Follow lane to bottom of slope to enter **Buckhurst Farm**. Just before first building on left, join path on left. Go uphill; through a gate; cross field to kissing gate. Bear slightly left; go downhill along left edge of field. At bottom corner, cross footbridge into woodland; go uphill. Cross broader track and continue to edge of wood.

(4). Cross stile into field. Bear slightly left downhill to stile by gate. Go along right edge of field to stile. Take path between fences to road. Turn left and take first track (restricted byway) on right. Follow, passing a house, ignoring side turns until path goes through a gap in hedge on left. Turn right along edge of field. Turn left onto broad track to reach opposite edge of field.

(5). Turn right: Follow left edge of field to bottom, through narrow strip of woodland. Continue through field, slightly uphill, turning left around a hedged property. Turn left through gap in hedge to reach drive. Turn right; follow to road. Turn right; follow road several hundred yards to entrance to **Hemsted Forest** on left. Go past barrier and take first path on right.

(6). Follow narrow windy path to T-junction. Turn right; follow to road. Cross road, entering grounds of **Benenden School**. Turn left along broad track. Where track joins main drive to school, continue ahead. Where drive forks, bear left then join a path on left. After open scrubland pass through wood. Emerge into open parkland and head left down to a hedge beside a road. Follow hedge (right) to a gate and join the road.

(7). Turn right. Follow to crossroads. Turn left; follow to extensive village green, where there are benches and a pub (should you be interested!). Go

to the church at the top of the green. Head right along a track. Where track divides, go ahead over a stile, then cross a field to the next stile. Cross another field to the far right corner to cross a stile beside a gate.

**(8).** Head diagonally down field to cross a stile and a narrow road. Join a narrow sunken path immediately opposite. Descend to bottom of slope, reaching drive to a farm. Go through small gate on right. Cross bridge; up steps; enter a large field and follow left edge up slope. At top of slope join fenced path and follow to road.

**(9).** Turn right and take first left along the grand approach drive of **Benenden School**. At a footpath sign, head left uphill, with fine views of the school to your right. At top go straight ahead through kissing gate; continue along edge of sports field through a kissing gate. At the end of the rough path from the school head right through a large gap. Head to bottom left corner of large field and enter woodland.

**(10).** Cross footbridge and climb to a stile. Head across field to a gate behind a pole. Follow track past a tile-hung house on right with very large pond. Turn right onto main track. Follow to a large barn at the bottom of the slope. Turn left and then right to go round the barn. Descend to a footbridge.

**(11).** Cross field to jutting hedge; follow hedge to corner of field. Descend into ghyll, cross footbridge and climb steep steps to kissing gate. Follow hedge on left to kissing gate, then follow hedge on right to corner of field. Cross next field to kissing gate; follow left edge of fields to kissing gate. Follow path past orchard on your left, then past a fenced drive to road.

**(12).** Turn right; follow couple of hundred yards and join footpath on left. Cross field; look for gap in hedge on left. Cross stream; follow right edge of field; cross another stream. At field, head right along edge; then turn left at finger post. Follow path along a line of trees. At T-junction, turn left to re-join the outward route and re-trace back to start.