

6 Turn right onto the bridleway. Lower Fullingpits Wood, a section of ancient woodland, is on your right. Follow the path for 200 metres until you meet Bearsted Road. Turn left and cross the road when opposite the hotel. Turn right after the hotel onto the footpath. This path runs past the hotel and across Sittingbourne Road. After the road the path continues on your left and runs straight for 500 metres through the ancient woodland of Heath Wood.

7 When out of the wood continue straight on past the picnic and play area. Cross Sandy Lane and walk diagonally left across the recreation ground at Penenden Heath heading for the top left corner near the road junction.

Penenden Heath used to be a meeting place in the Middle Ages. The Domesday Book listed it as Pinnedenna and it was noted as a place where landowners of Kent could gather for administrative purposes. For hundreds of years as well as a gathering place, the site was also used for executions. It is most famous for its connection to the Peasants Revolt of 1381. This was a direct revolt against wage freezes and the poll tax. During an earlier skirmish, Wat Tyler moved a mob of protestors from Penenden Heath down to Union Street and into Maidstone. In 1881 part of Penenden Heath was given to the people of Maidstone by the Earl of Romney for recreational use and is how it remains today.

8 At the clock tower turn left and cross Penenden Heath Road. Go up the steps and take the footpath at the corner. Follow the footpath between the houses and over Heathfield Road for just under a mile. When you come to the corner of Curzon Street and Park Avenue continue straight ahead on the latter and then continue onto Wheeler Street. Turn right onto Well Road and immediately cross over and turn left down County Road. Maidstone Prison is on your right.

Maidstone Prison was constructed using Kentish ragstone and was originally built for just over 500 prisoners, the first of which arrived in 1819.

9 County Road will lead you to Sessions House Square with County Hall (the headquarters of Kent County Council) on your right.

10 Turn left and either walk down Station Road to Maidstone East train station or follow the road to your left and around to the right. Ahead you'll see the original footpath to take you back across the River Medway and back to Maidstone Barracks train station.

Distance: 4 miles / 6.5km.

Time: 2 hours approximately.

Terrain: Some steps, narrow paths and town walking. No stiles and two flights of steps (50 and six steps).

Start/end point: Maidstone Barracks train station.

OS Explorer Map: 148.

Reptiles & Rebellion

Maidstone Barracks

A 4 mile / 6.5km circular route from the middle of Maidstone through the town centre, Vinters Valley Nature Reserve and woodland.



Canada Geese (Vinters Valley Park Trust)



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This walk is endorsed by Explore Kent.

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Starting and finishing in the centre of Maidstone, visit Maidstone Museum to discover more about the history of the local area. The walk takes you through the local oasis of Vinters Valley Nature Reserve, through ancient woodlands and on to the historic suburb of Penenden Heath.

1 On leaving Maidstone Barracks train station turn right onto Buckland Hill. On the left is a footpath signed to Maidstone East station. Take this path and continue along it as it bridges the River Medway and the main road.

Just before you reach the buildings when Maidstone East station is on your left you'll see a gap in the wall on your right. This leads you into gardens. Pass the war memorial and the church on your left and leave the gardens by turning right onto Station Road. Follow the road around to the right until you are at Maidstone Museum.

Maidstone Museum and Art Gallery was established in 1858 and is situated within the 16th century Chillington Manor House. Entry is free and the museum holds many exhibitions on archaeology, geology and biology and also has a section on the local flora and fauna of Kent.

2 From the museum turn left and cross over the road and walk up St Faiths Street. When you are at the shops turn right and then left into Union Street. Follow Union Street for just over 1km. At the main road (A249) cross over, turn left and then bear right to walk towards Vinters Road. Turn right and continue along Vinters Road for 300 metres. When you see the school in front of you turn left and immediately right onto the footpath.

3 Keeping the metal railings and the school on your right, follow the footpath for 200 metres. Just after the school turn left through the metal gate then go right to continue along the path. You are now in Vinters Valley Nature Reserve.

Roman remains have been found at Vinters Park in the past but the first recorded history on the site was when Roger de Vinter bought the land in 1343 and built the first house. He also created the park and gave his name to the property, the remains of which can still be seen in the east sections of the park.

4 Follow the path as it bears left and when the path forks take the lower left path which leads you past the large lake. As well as waterfowl this lake is a great place to watch out for broad-bodied chasers, common darters and other dragonflies. This area is also a haven for local amphibians especially common toads which use the lake to breed in the spring.

At the lake you may also be lucky enough to see a grass snake swimming as it hunts for small amphibians and fish. While in the park keep your eyes peeled for slow worms (legless lizards) and viviparous lizards too. Recently Vinters Park has become a receptor site for reptile relocation and several releases of slow worms have taken place here.



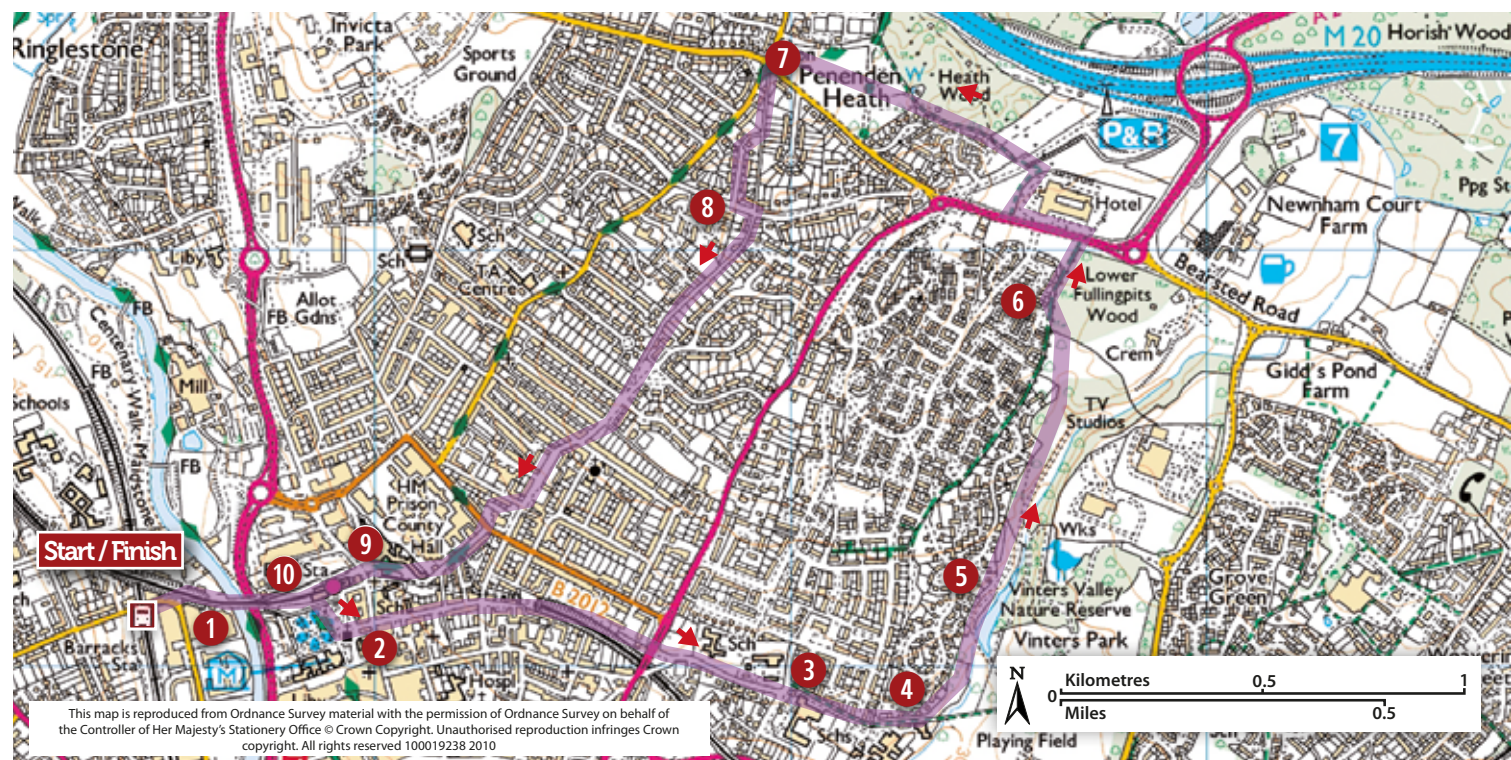
White-legged Damselfly (VWPT)

Tree (VWPT)

Slow Worm (VWPT)

5 With the lake on your right follow the path through the woodland and straight through the park. This path is known as the 'blue tit route' for reasons which should hopefully become apparent. After approximately 600 metres you'll reach a fence and gate. Turn left and walk up the steps.

At the top go straight on and follow the path as it bears right then left (with the fence to Vinters Crematorium on the right). The path then bears left (note the bird feeding station on the right). At the path junction turn right and exit the park opposite Nutley Close.



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