

- 5 The grassy track finally levels off by a stile where there is a path junction. Turn left over the stile (the path to the right leads to Shoreham). Follow an enclosed path to another junction and turn right on a path that runs between fields. This leads to a wider track which you cross into a field via a stile, ignoring a bridleway that forks right. Walk along the left side of the field to cross another stile and follow the right boundary of the next field to a corner where the path drops down to a lane opposite a house.
- 6 Turn left and then immediately right to cross a stile into another field. Two routes are signposted here; bear right to follow the side boundary of the adjoining garden before maintaining direction across the field when the boundary fence curves away. At the far side of the field, a stile leads into a fairly narrow belt of woodland through which the path descends and emerge onto open downland; Magpie Bottom.

*Magpie Bottom is the upper part of the Austin Lodge valley (seen earlier). The valley here is smaller with a more enclosed and intimate feel, still with fine views across and down the valley to the right. Magpie Bottom is managed by Kent Wildlife Trust and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), primarily for its chalkland plants such as orchids.*

- 7 The path drops steeply down to the valley bottom and then climbs more gently up the far side, passing through a gate into woodland. Ascend through the mainly beech wood and exit through another gate. Continue to ascend fairly gently along the edge of a field then through a gate onto a level enclosed path leading to a lane (Fackenden Lane).
- 8 Turn right and follow it for about 100 metres until the lane turns right. Fork left here through a kissing gate onto a track which soon enters more woodland. The track emerges onto open downland – with superb views – then follow a grassy path

that bears left, down and across the slope to a kissing gate, then turn right onto a path.

*This is Fackenden Down, an area of chalk downland also designated as a SSSI and managed as a nature reserve by Kent Wildlife Trust. It is a great place to spot butterflies and chalkland plants in the summer months.*

- 9 Follow the path past a bench and then downhill through a small patch of woodland to reach another viewpoint, this time oriented more directly across the Darent Valley to the west. The route continues straight ahead down the hillside to the main road (A225). Take extra care here as this is a busy road with no pavement for the first 100 metres. It is best to cross temporarily to the far side of the road where there is a narrow verge, until the pavement starts on the left at the junction of Greenhill Road. Otford station is about 500 metres along the road on the left.



The Darent Valley Rail Trails have been created by the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme. DVLPS is led by the Kent Downs AONB, working throughout the Darent Valley to conserve the area's rich heritage landscapes and encourage people to enjoy, explore and connect to them [www.darent-valley.org.uk](http://www.darent-valley.org.uk)

A selection of the Rail Trails are available to use on the Darent Valley Trails app, available free of charge on the App Store and Google Play. With special thanks to Alan Dyer for devising this route.



EUROPEAN UNION



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# Chalk and Pilcher

**A 6 mile walk between Eynsford and Otford with a dry valley, superb views, heritage monument and former golf course reverting to nature to discover in this nationally protected landscape.**



Photo credit - John Miller photography.com and Andy Viler

**Start point:** Eynsford station

**End point:** Otford station

**Length:** 6 miles / 9.7km

**Terrain:** Undulating paths / tracks across fields. Some steep slopes up and down. Some lane walking and one busy road crossing

**Accessibility:** There are stiles on this walk

**Toilets / refreshments:** Available at Eynsford and Otford stations (during opening hours)

**What3Words:** ///hands.unit.help

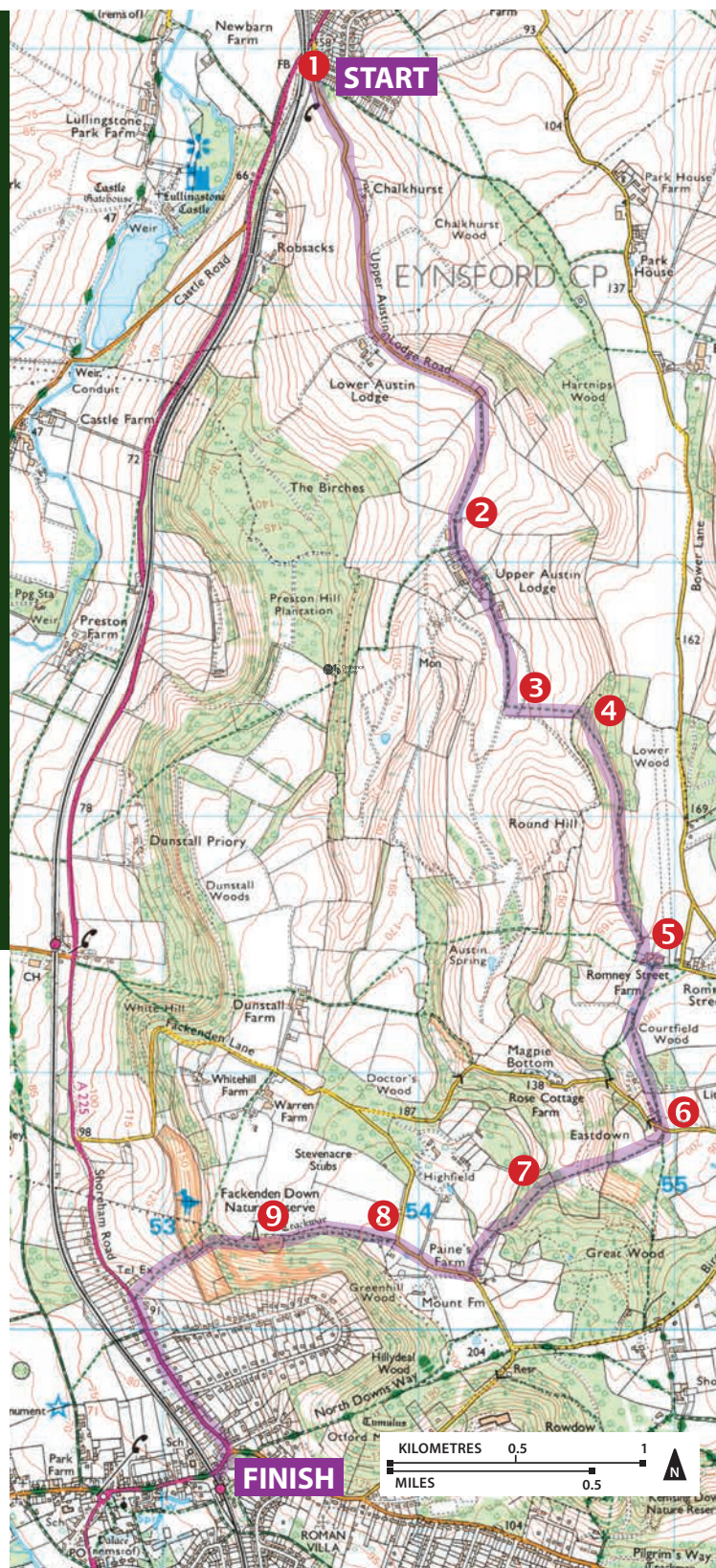
**OS Explorer map:** 147

## On The Way

- Walk up a dry valley that cuts across the Downs
- See an abandoned golf course reverting back to nature
- A chance to visit a monument to the aviation pioneer, Percy Pilcher
- Visit two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Enjoy spectacular views from the Downs above Otford

**1** Leave Eynsford station and turn right onto Austin Lodge Road. Follow this quiet lane for 1.5 miles past Austin Lodge and on to its end at Upper Austin Lodge. The lane leads into the Austin Lodge dry valley that is followed for much of the route.

*Chalk dry valleys are landforms left over from the ice age. Chalk is a permeable rock which means that water drains through it, but in the ice age, the ground froze into permafrost that was impermeable. During the summer months, meltwater would carve a valley while the underlying ground remained frozen and water couldn't go through it. After the ice age, the permafrost melted and the chalk became permeable again so the surface water drained away leaving a water-carved valley that is now dry.*



**2** Arriving at Upper Austin Lodge ignore a driveway forking right and pass a mixture of houses and converted farm buildings. At a junction of driveways bear left and then right to where the road ends and continues as a track. The valley has divided and is now narrower with steeper sides. After about 200 metres, look out for an enclosed path on the right signposted "Pilcher Monument". It is a five minute uphill walk to the monument where there is a stone plaque and an information board including historic pictures and a great viewpoint.

*Percy Pilcher was an early aviation pioneer who flew hang gliders from this valley in 1896/7. He built a powered triplane but was killed in an accident in 1899 before it could fly. If he had lived to fly the triplane, the history of powered flight could have been different because the Wright Brothers first flight in America was not until 1903.*

**3** Back on the main track, continue for another 200 metres to a path junction where the way ahead is marked private and the only option is to turn left.

*This area forms part of the former Austin Lodge Golf Course which closed in 2014 and has since been gradually reverting to nature. It is still possible to see former features of the golf course in some places such as bunkers.*

**4** The path runs through a corridor of hazel and starts to climb up the valley side, which itself is a branch off the main valley. Bear right onto open ground where a bench offers a spot for a break. The route temporarily enters woodland and then emerges with a short descent before continuing upwards following field boundaries to the head of the valley. Turn right by a farm gate, on the other side of which is an airstrip identifiable by a windsock in the distance.

*Enjoy the extensive views looking down the valley.*