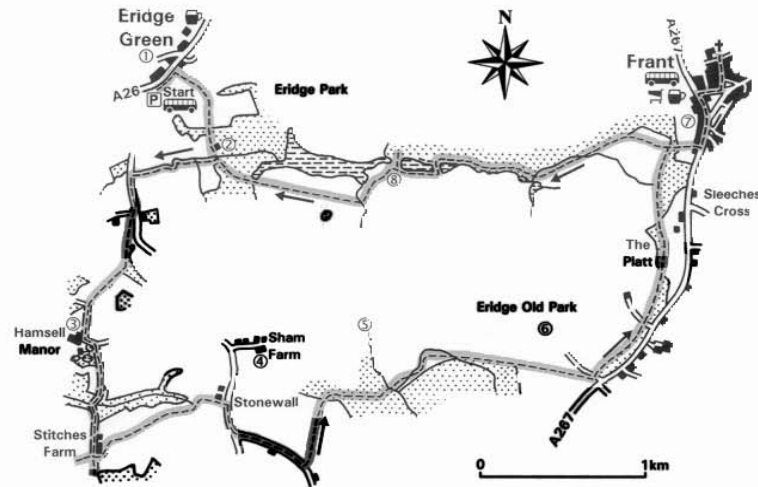




# "The Lords and the YEOMAN"

*The Neville/Abergavenny family dominates the history of the northern end of Rotherfield parish. Each house in the estate village of Eridge carries the family coat of arms, whilst surrounding the family home of Eridge Castle is one of England's biggest and oldest deer parks. However, this park was continually "looked down upon" at its eastern end by the independent yeoman and small craftsmen of the hilltop village of Frant. This walk shows you both sides of this divide.*



**Length 7½ Miles = 12 Kilometres**

**Approximately 5 hours – Grade 3**

**START –** Eridge Green car park, Eridge Green  
(O.S. Explorer 18 – NGR 556355)

**ACCESS –** Car – Eridge Green car park (accessed from A26)  
Bus – 225, 228, 229, 252 and 729  
Train – Eridge station (½ mile)

**PUBLIC TOILETS –** Nil

**REFRESHMENTS –** Pubs at Eridge Green and Frant Village shop at Frant

**CAUTION –** This walk involves two crossings of the A267

7½  
Miles



# "The Lords and the YEOMAN"

- 1 Visitors to Eridge Green today may look in vain for the non-existent village green. In the 18th century the 2nd Earl of Abergavenny carried out a wholesale rebuilding of his estates. The old village was destroyed and a new "model" village built out of his sight on the main road. Houses, church and pub were all provided in a uniform style, with all buildings carrying the "A" badge of the Abergavennies and with all tenants living there totally at the will of their lord in "tied" cottages.
- 2 Having temporarily left the Eridge estate, just visible on the left in Mill Wood is a fine example of a half-timbered, Wealden hall house – or is it? The property is a modern reconstruction, but gives a fine impression of a prosperous, independent, yeoman farmer's house of about 1450.
- 3 The name Hamsell means "the river holding amongst willows" and indicates the Hamsell valley was one of the earliest settlements in the area, despite the problems of making a living from such waterlogged ground. The present house dates from the 16th century.
- 4 During the estate remodelling, the 2nd Earl ordered the building of a crenellated wall around Hickpits Farm so that it would not be visible from his new mansion. The derisive nickname Sham Farm, given at the time, has lasted until the present day and has, indeed, outlived the original name.
- 5 The walk has now re-entered the Eridge estate. As the fashion for "taking the waters" grew in the 18th century the

family might have taken advantage of the Chalybeate spring in their park, where iron-rich water issued from the earth. An iron cup and bowl were provided for

consumption of the water which was said to cure a wide variety of diseases.

However, the family had no wish to see all and sundry crossing their estate, and chose instead to develop another spring about 3 miles away at the extreme edge of their land. This eventually grew to become Tunbridge Wells.

- 6 Eridge Park is said to be the oldest hunting park in the county, dating from Saxon times. More definite mention comes in 1420 when the wooden boundary fence enclosed imported fallow deer, which were less likely to escape than native species. In the 16th century it became an ironworks and in the 17th and 18th, a landscaped park. Today the wheel has turned full circle as works are carried out to restore the fences and so allow deer and free-range pigs to use the park.
- 7 On leaving the estate again, contrast Frant village with Eridge. The green is still a predominant feature in the settlement. Houses of many periods cluster around it, yet there is no manor house and only a simple church, reflecting its origins as a village of many small, independent, freehold landowners. The height of the village provided a means for these yeomen to literally "look down upon" their richer neighbour's estate and still gives a magnificent view today.
- 8 Now landscaped into the park, the lakes originated as part of the private ironworks set up by the estate in the mid 16th century, large enough to employ its own specialist workforce. Guns and cannonballs were produced at this location. For hundreds of years afterwards an ancient gun, made of strips of metal held together with loops, like a barrel, was fired on fair days or days of celebration. "The people...collect money to put in gunpowder to throw the shell to a hill about a mile distant. The weight of the shell sinks it so deep in the earth, that it costs no little pains to dig it out after each discharge, which is repeated as long as the money lasts." Today's pub name, the "Neville Crest and Gun", commemorates both the family and this activity.

7½  
Miles

