

A photograph of a stone church with a wooden steeple, surrounded by greenery and flowers. The church has a steeply pitched roof and a small porch. The steeple is made of wood and has a cross on top. The church is surrounded by lush green plants and flowers, including tall red flowers in the foreground. The sky is clear and blue.

# Explore the Explore the Lower Lower Stour by Bike

You know that feel-good rhythm as your bike's wheels go round and round and refreshing scenery glides by? It's yours for the taking in this special corner of Kent.



Littlebourne Mill on the Little Stour

©Brian Maxted



Grove Ferry



Downland Cycles in Canterbury has made things easy by producing a number of routes you can follow: ranging from a gentle 6.5- mile ride through Fordwich and Stodmarsh, to a more challenging 50-mile jaunt along the coast and a three-day expedition around much of Natural East Kent.

To explore the Lower Stour Valley, try their circular route entitled '**The Vineyard**'. On the outward trip you wander at a leisurely pace along the sides of the Little Stour, passing through Bekesbourne, Littlebourne, Wickhambreaux, Grove, Preston, Elmstone and Barnsole Vineyard at Staple. On the return journey you pass through Wingham, Wingham Well and Bramling, while the approach to Patrixbourne gives you commanding views of the downs before you head into Canterbury.

This is a fairly easy ride with few hills but please note it suits experienced cyclists who are confident enough to include some sections of busy roads on their itinerary. Download the full route description from the Downland Cycles website, and it is also worth discussing the trail with their staff when hiring your bikes.

Book accommodation en route and you can break this 25.5-mile (42.5km) ride over two days, giving time to look around the villages you pass through, their pubs, ancient churches and other sites of interest. Check our accommodation listings for details of b&bs, guest houses and hotels.

Here's a taster of what you can see along the way.



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## Day One – Canterbury to Wickhambreaux/Grove

### 1) Howletts Wild Animal Park

Head out of Canterbury to Bekesbourne where you will come to [Howletts Wild Animal Park](#).

Now, you could spend pretty much the whole day in Howletts' 90 acres of beautiful ancient parkland, watching the many rare and endangered species from around the world. While here and depending how long you stay, treat yourself to a late/second breakfast, light lunch or afternoon tea at [Mama Feelgoods](#) and shop in their delicatessen. If you don't mind a few things to carry, buy some hop garlands from their neighbours, [Essentially Hops](#). Both are located at Chalk Pit Farm.

Another good lunch stop option is [the Unicorn](#), close to the railway station and serving fresh locally sourced food. And if you fancy stretching your legs (without wheels!) for a while, the Unicorn can provide you with details of walks around Bekesbourne.



### 2) Littlebourne and Wickhambreaux

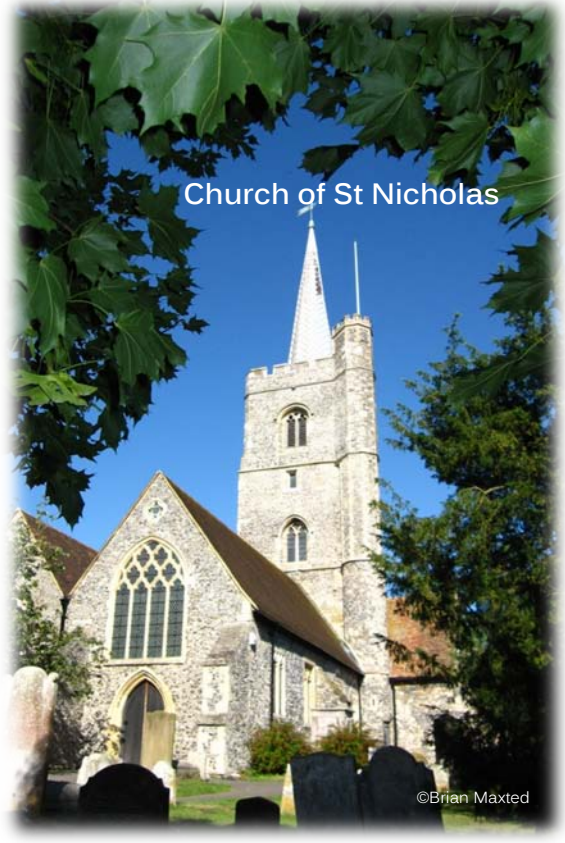
From here, pedal on to Littlebourne and then to Wickhambreaux. If you have spent most of the day at Howletts, then dinner at the [Rose Inn](#) on the Green is a great idea.

### 3) Stodmarsh National Nature Reserve

Alternatively, carry on to Grove, where you can park your bikes at the [Grove Ferry](#) and chill out in [Stodmarsh National Nature Reserve](#). The Grove Ferry also provides boutique accommodation, offering another convenient stopover point and a place for dinner.



Stodmarsh National Nature Reserve



## Day Two – Grove to Canterbury

### 1) Preston

Up and ready for more, breeze from Grove into the village of Preston, past the Half Moon and Seven Stars and the Preston Village Stores. [Preston Nursery](#), voted by *The Independent* as one of the 50 top garden centres, is well worth a mosey. Open seven days a week, it has a café, too – maybe pause for a breather.

### 2) Elmstone and Ash

Then continue on through the tiny village of Elmstone with its pretty church, to Ash – also known as Ash-Next-Sandwich. Break again for a drink or lunch at the [Chequer Inn](#) and visit the imposing church of [St. Nicholas](#).

### 3) Staple

[Staple](#) is not far from Ash and here you will find the family-run [Barnsole Vineyard](#), producers of red and white wines from Rondo, Regent, Pinot Noir, Reichensteiner and Huxelrebe grapes. Do make time for a tasting – just a tiny tittle – and tour (check their website for admission details).

Staple is also home to the [Black Pig pub](#) and the [Three Tuns](#), plus two more inspiring garden centres: [Summerfield Nurseries](#) is a family business renowned for its annual poinsettia walks, while neighbouring [Layham Garden Centre & Nursery](#) is famed for its beautiful roses.



#### 4) Wingham and Wingham Well

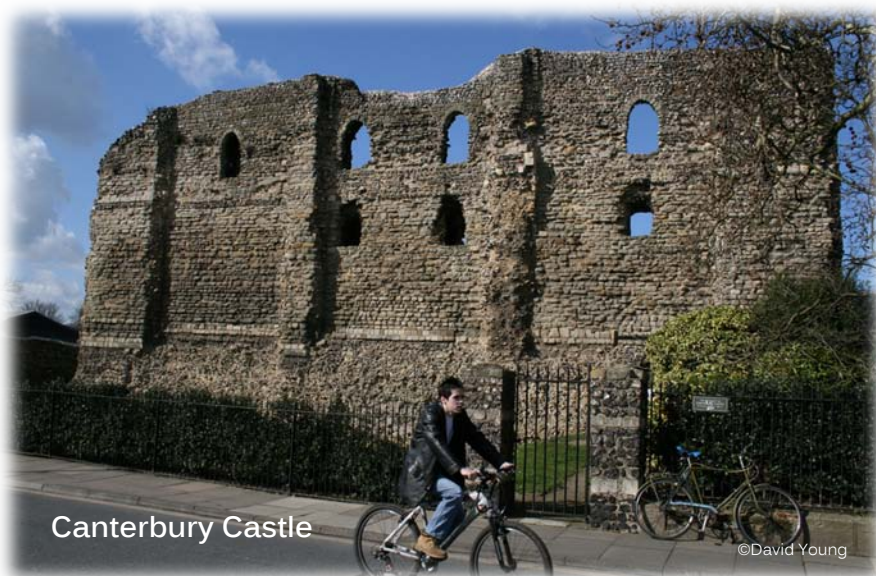
After your vineyard interlude, spin on to Wingham, a charming and busy village still with many shops and services. There's refreshment aplenty: at the Red Lion, the Anchor, the Indian restaurant Salma and the Whistle Stop Café at the Little Stour Farm Shop. Before you leave, peruse the variety of historic village architecture, from timbered Tudor to modern.

Descend into Wingham Well and on to Bramling where the Haywain serves food (check opening times).

#### 5) Patixbourne

Then the final leg of your journey opens up wonderful views of the Kent Downs as you head towards Patixbourne – a huddle of beautiful cottages built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for employees on the Bifrons estate. The Church of St. Mary's has unusual 16th and 17th-century Swiss pictorial stained glass and is part of the Bridge Benefice.

From Patixbourne you now have just over three miles to travel before reaching Canterbury. How about a long, deep, relaxing soak in a bath?



Business	Telephone	Web address	Opening Times	Address
<b>Downland Cycles</b>	+44 (0) 1227 479643	<a href="http://www.downlandcycles.co.uk/">http://www.downlandcycles.co.uk/</a>	Monday-Saturday 9.30 - 17:30	Downland Cycles, The Malthouse, St Stephens Road, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7JA
<b>Howletts Wild Animal Park</b>	+44 (0) 1227 721286	<a href="http://www.totallywild.net/howletts">http://www.totallywild.net/howletts</a>	Summer 10:00-18:00 (last admission 16.30) Winter 10:00-17:00pm (last admission 15.30)	Howletts Wild Animal Park, Bekesbourne, Nr. Canterbury, Kent, CT4 5EL
<b>Mama Feelgoods</b>	+44 (0) 1227 830830	<a href="http://mamafeelgoods.com/">http://mamafeelgoods.com/</a>	Monday to Saturday 9:30 to 17:00, Sunday 10:30 to 16:00	Chalkpit Farm, School Lane, Bekesbourne, Canterbury, Kent, CT4 5EU
<b>Essentially Hops</b>	+44 (0) 1227 830666	<a href="http://www.essentiallyhops.co.uk/">http://www.essentiallyhops.co.uk/</a>	Monday to Saturday 9.00 - 17.00, Sunday 10.30am - 16.00	Chalkpit Farm, School Lane, Bekesbourne Nr. Howletts Zoo, Canterbury, Kent, CT4 5EU
<b>The Rose Inn</b>	+44 (0) 1227 721763	<a href="http://theroseinnwickhambreaux.co.uk/">http://theroseinnwickhambreaux.co.uk/</a>	Monday to Saturday 12:00- 23:00, Sunday 12:00 - 22.30	The Rose Inn, The Green, Wickhambreaux, Kent, CT3 1RQ
<b>The Grove Ferry</b>	+44 (0) 1227 860302	<a href="http://www.thegroveferry.co.uk/home.html">http://www.thegroveferry.co.uk/home.html</a>	Monday- Thursday 10:00 -23:00, Friday & Saturday 9:00- 00:00, Sunday 9:00- 22:30	The Grove Ferry, Upstreet, Nr. Canterbury, Kent, CT3 4BP
<b>Preston Nursery</b>	+44 (0) 1227 722250	<a href="http://www.prestonnursery.co.uk/">http://www.prestonnursery.co.uk/</a>	Everyday 10:00-17:00	Preston Nursery, The Street, Preston, Nr Wingham, Canterbury, Kent, CT3 1ED
<b>The Chequer Inn</b>	+44 (0) 1304 813918	<a href="http://thechequerinnash.co.uk/">http://thechequerinnash.co.uk/</a>	Check website alternatively phone	4 Chequer Lane, Ash, Canterbury, Kent, CT3 2ET
<b>The Black Pig</b>	+44 (0) 1304 813000	<a href="http://www.theblackpig.co.uk/">http://www.theblackpig.co.uk/</a>	Check website alternatively phone	Barnsole Road, Staple, Nr. Canterbury,

				Kent, CT3 1LE
<b>The Three Tuns</b>	+44 (0) 1304 812317	<a href="http://www.thethreetunsstaple.co.uk/">http://www.thethreetunsstaple.co.uk/</a>	Check website alternatively phone	<b>The Three Tuns, The Street, Staple, Canterbury, Kent, CT3 1LN</b>
<b>Summerfield Nurseries</b>	+44 (0) 1304 812549	<a href="http://www.summerfieldnurseries.co.uk/">http://www.summerfieldnurseries.co.uk/</a>	Check website alternatively phone	Summerfield Nurseries , Staple, Nr. Canterbury, Kent, CT3 1LD
<b>Layham Garden Centre and Nursery</b>	+44 (0) 1304 813267	<a href="http://www.layhamgardencentre.co.uk">http://www.layhamgardencentre.co.uk</a>	Monday - Sunday 9:00 – 17:00	Layham Garden Centre and Nursery, Lower Road, Staple, Canterbury, Kent, CT3 1LH
<b>The Red Lion</b>	+44 (0) 1227 720 217	<a href="http://www.redlionwingham.co.uk">http://www.redlionwingham.co.uk</a>	Check website alternatively phone	The Red Lion Inn, Canterbury Road, Wingham, Canterbury, Kent, CT3 1BB
<b>The Little Stour Farm Shop</b>	+44 (0) 1227 721199	<a href="http://www.thelittlestourfarmshop.com">http://www.thelittlestourfarmshop.com</a>	Check website alternatively phone	<b>The Little Stour Farm Shop,</b> Canterbury Rd, Wingham, Canterbury, Kent, CT3 1NH

With thanks to the Church of St Nicholas for photographs