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Sevenoaks Circular

Length: 15.4km (9.6 miles)

Toughness: 4: some gentle climbs but also good long flat sections

Walk notes

This is an absolute favourite Sunday outing of mine, particularly in late autumn and early spring, though it is nice at any time of the year. It reverses parts of walk 36 – Borough Green to Sevenoaks - in Time Out Country Walks book one, going past the National Trust-run Knole House and its deer park and then into an area of fields, woods and orchards that is the very best of English scenery.

In early April this part of the route has one or two lovely wood anemone woods, and a little later on, around Stone Street, you can see apple blossom in early May. You then descend through newly coppiced woodland (which should in time produce wonderful early spring flowers, including bluebells) to Ightham Mote (a rare moated manor house, also owned by the National Trust).

The real glory of the walk comes next, however: a wonderful stretch of the Greensand Way which slowly climbs the escarpment of the Kent Downs with superb views over the Weald to the south. This is especially enchanting in late April when it has many fine bluebell woods (particularly around One Tree Hill) and one extensive wild garlic wood too.

Finally the walk finishes through Knole Park, following the route at the very end of walk 21 – Sevenoaks to Leigh - in Time Out Country Walks book one.

In late October or early November, the walk also offers lovely leaf colour, with plenty of golden beeches and a wide range of other trees. Particularly common in this area

are sweet chestnuts, whose leaves turn a lovely yellowy-gold and whose nuts litter the ground in late October.

Because it links Ightham Mote to Knole Park, the Greensand Way between these two points can also be used as an **alternative for the central section of the Borough Green to Sevenoaks walk**. (This also produces a total walk of 15.4km (9.6 miles).

Transport

There are always several trains an hour from Charing Cross, Waterloo East and London Bridge to Sevenoaks: aim to **start the walk** at 10.30am (ie, getting a 10.00am train from Charing Cross) to get to Stone Street or Ightham Mote comfortably in time for lunch. In spring and summer, it is also possible to start an hour later, and have lunch in Godden Green and then tea at Ightham Mote

Lunch and Tea Places

For the **Sevenoaks Circular** walk, there are early lunch options at the Knole House tea room, and at at the **Bucks Head** (01732 761330) in Godden Green (3.6km, 2.3 miles into the walk). More centrally placed are the usual Borough Green to Sevenoaks lunch stops (the **Snail** at Stone Street or the **Padwell Arms** which is these days thought better: these are about 6km, 4 miles into the walk).

Also a good choice, when it is open, is the National Trust-run **self service restaurant at Ightham Mote** (8km, 5 miles into the walk). Curiously, this is closed on Saturdays and Tuesdays from March to October, but open other days of the week. Meanwhile from November to February, the restaurant is open Thursdays to Sundays (including Saturdays). There are also reports that on Saturdays in summer a "Simple Food" kiosk is open in the site's car park.

If using the Greensand Way section as an alternative on the Borough Green to Sevenoaks walk, this route by-passes the lunch pub at Stone Street. If Ightham Mote is not open, there is a **pub down the hill in Plaxtol**: before you get to Ightham Mote on the book walk. At point [7] in those directions when you come to the centre of the village, with the church (and the onward walk route) uphill to the right, go downhill to the left instead, and then in 100 metres or so, left again, down a long hill with houses either side: the pub is about half way down on the right.

On either walk, the National Trust **Knole House tea room** is recommended for tea if it is open (year round at weekends: Weds to Sun and bank holiday Mondays from early March to late October. Closing at 4pm November to end February: otherwise 5pm). Otherwise Sevenoaks has a **Caffe Nero** on its main street which stays open until at least 6pm and maybe 7pm; the pedestrianised back streets on the other side of the main road from this also have one or two cafes.

Walk Options

If lunching at the Padwell Arms, an interesting alternative route from there to Ightham Mote has been devised by Sean, which avoids doubling back on yourself. See the special section at the end of the main directions.

Walk Directions

I am grateful to Sean for the early part of these directions, which provide a delightful way into Knole Park.

Coming out of Sevenoaks station, cross the main road with care, and turn right, uphill.

In 100 metres, turn left into St Botolphs Road. In 600 metres, at the end of this long wide road, continue ahead past the War Memorial, and across the A225. Bear left around the edge of the cricket pitch beyond.

In 100 metres, at the far end of this, turn left onto a lane. In 50 metres turn right at a crossroads to go steeply downhill. In another 50 metres, at the bottom of the hill, cross the B2019 (*some fast traffic on this road*) and turn left along the far side.

[!] In 200 metres look out for a small wooden door in the stone wall to the right (marked "Knole Estate"). Pass through this to enter **Knole Park**

Go straight ahead for 30 metres to come to an estate road. You can simply turn left and follow this road as it curves right along the valley floor, but a nicer route (which is actually the line of the public footpath) is to carry straight on across the grass, on a broad shelf of the hill.

In 100 metres, where the shelf seems about to come to an end, fork right uphill on another sloping shelf amidst trees and bracken (no bracken in winter!). Follow this shelf with the estate road visible below to your left.

In 200 metres, you come to a corner of a wire-fenced enclosure to your right. Keep straight on at this point, gradually descending along the edge of the shelf on a very faint path, and

then in 100 metres dropping more steeply to rejoin the estate road in another 40 metres.

Stay on the road as it climbs up the other side of the valley and curves left through a wood.

In 400 metres, you emerge from trees into an open space, with the turrets of **Knole House** visible ahead. **[!]** Here turn left off the estate road, on a grassy path that heads slightly downhill. In 70 metres, this passes to the right five enormous oak and beech trees and descends a bit more steeply. In 250 metres this brings you to a car-wide gravel track, where you turn left, crossing a golf fairway in a dip.

*(If you get lost in the above paragraph, or if you want to have a closer look at Knole House, or visit its tea room at this stage in the walk, simply keep on down the estate road for 300 metres to the house. The tea room is clearly signposted down the left hand side of the house, and your onward route is to the tarmac and gravel drive lined with trees to the left at this point – that is running away from the house, in line with its facade, roughly north east. This is marked **Duchess Walk** on the Explorer map, but not so marked on the ground. Carry on down this for 400 metres until it emerges from the avenue of trees to cross a golf fairway at the bottom of a dip.)*

Follow the track across the golf fairway at the bottom of a dip, and then keep on it as it curves right up the hill the other side to come to the gates of the park in about 500 metres

Leave the park by the gates and walk on down a car-wide track. In 550 metres **[!]** an easily missed and

unmarked grassy footpath forks right off the track to exit the woods by a bungalow in 100 metres, cross a car-wide track with some cottages left, and go over through a metal gate and to the right of some stables to emerge in 120 metres on the green space of **Godden Green**.

(This path should not be confused with various other side paths off to the right earlier on: the footpath described is broader than these other paths, and goes off at a slant. If you miss the footpath, or are not sure you can identify it correctly, don't worry: simply carry on down the car-wide track from the park gates for another 150 metres, that is 700 metres from the exit gate to Knole Park, and you come to a car road. Turn right on this, taking care of possible fast oncoming traffic, for 60 metres reach Godden Green.

Whichever way you have come, you now pass the **Bucks Head**, a possible early lunch stop on your right hand side.

40 metres beyond the pub, veer left off the road up a tarmac driveway signposted to Cygnet Hospital (which is in fact a bridleway).

You essentially keep straight on along this bridleway all the way to Stone Street: but in more detail:

In 250 metres, it passes to the right of the entrance to Cygnet Hospital (aka Medlars Mead Lodge), and becomes an earth and gravel track.

In another 250 metres, it leaves the houses behind and curves left, but is still a track passable by cars: ignore signposted footpaths off to the right into the woods here.

In another 400 metres, you come to one last house and after this the track descends a steep hill impassable to

cars, and becomes a normal bridleway in open country.

You now keep on this bridleway for nearly 1km, passing some woods which in late March and early April have fine displays of wood anemones, and slowly climbing uphill.

Eventually, you pass a house on the left and come to a road. Cross the road and go straight up the signposted footpath beyond, initially fenced, but then across an open field to a road.

*The **Snail** at Stone Street, a possible lunch stop, is to the left about 400 metres up this road (keep to the right fork). But as this pub has now become a restaurant, an alternative is the **Padwell Arms**: to get to this, do not cross the road, but turn back on yourself up the car wide track along the edge of an orchard to your left. After 400 meters the path passes a farm building, and veers to the right. In a further 250 meters you come to the pub. Retrace your steps to this point after lunch or see the alternative route in the **Walk Options** section at the end of the main directions.*

If not stopping at either pub, go straight across the road and up a farm road between high hedges on the far side, a signposted bridleway. Follow this all the way past apple orchards until in 700 metres it descends steeply downhill and into a wood.

(This wood has been recently coppiced by the National Trust and now shows the various stages of a coppiced wood, giving one a glimpse of how woods in England looked for centuries until medieval wood management was abandoned in the 19th century).

In 300 metres, at the bottom of the hill, go left at a T-junction (which is the main path anyway) and stay on the track for 650 metres all the way to a road.

At the road go right, and in 200 metres you have a clear view of the garden and house of **Ightham Mote** on your left. In another 100 metres, you pass some old cottages on the left.

50 metres beyond the cottages, you pass a tarmac track on the right, just in front of the buildings of Mote Farm. *If not stopping at Ightham Mote, you can turn right here and pick up the directions at [*] below.*

Otherwise, keep straight on, and in another 60 metres, turn sharp left through brick pillars down a driveway which brings you in 60 metres to the front of Ightham Mote house.

Walk round to the right along the moated front of the house, and ignoring the National Trust shop just beyond it, climb a short rise and then turn left up through a car park for 50 metres to find the entrance to the **National Trust self service restaurant** (if it is open), on your left, just by the entrance to the lavatories. *You do not need to pay the house entrance fee to use the restaurant.*

After lunch, return to the bottom edge of the house, and at its far end, veer left up through the black metal gates to the road. Here turn sharp right onto the road, and in 60 metres, left up a farm track, a signposted bridleway.

[*] You are now on the well-waymarked **Greensand Way** and can follow it all the way to Knole House: but in more detail:

Follow the track past the farm, and right uphill. In 350 metres, ignore a track to the left leading to a field gate, and keep on uphill. 50 metres later the track starts to level out.

In another 200 metres, at the end of the level section, ignore a track forking

to the right, and instead follow the Greensand Way arrow slightly to the left, on a track which goes downhill for a while before climbing again.

In 500 metres this passes a house on the right and beyond it turns right up some steps, following an arrow on a post, and becoming a footpath. In 40 metres, the path turns left again to resume its former direction. In another 150 metres ignore a signposted path uphill to the right and keep straight on.

In another 750 metres you pass a wooden barn to the left, after which you come to a tarmac lane. Turn right uphill. In 100 metres, where the tarmac lane ends, turn sharp left up some steps, still following the Greensand Way arrows.

There is then a steep climb for 80 metres or so, until the path levels out, with a steep wooded escarpment to the left.

A delightful section of path now follows, with increasingly extensive bluebells in season. In 300 metres you come to a stile and a National Trust sign for **One Tree Hill** (surely the most badly named hill in the country...).

Turn right immediately beyond the stile and then left in 5 metres immediately onto a level car-wide bridleway. [!] 80 metres beyond this, fork left onto an unmarked path (which actually is still the Greensand Way) which closely follows the edge of the ridge. In season, this is an absolute bluebell wonderland, with them stretching away down the slope to your left as far as the eye can see.

(This path is more obvious in bluebell season than at other times of the year, though it is quite wide, clear and well-used, and if you keep to the escarpment edge, you cannot miss it.

If you do miss it, however, after 90 metres more on the main path you reach a small open area. Go left here for 30 metres through a gap in the trees to the viewpoint with the bench mentioned in the next paragraph.)

After 150 metres of on the bluebell path along the escarpment, you come to an open space, with a fine view over the Weald to the left and a bench to the right. On the far side of this open space (*that is, following the line of the ridge and having just passed the bench on your right*), veer left for 10 metres to keep to the waymarked Greensand Way as it slants left, slightly downhill.

In 200 metres, fork left to keep on slightly downhill. In 80 metres, this brings you to a road.

Turn left downhill on the road, and in 60 metres fork right up the driveway of a house (Shepherd's Mead). In 25 metres, turn right up the signposted Greensand Way signposted along a fenced-in footpath.

Another fine section of path, with open views to the left, and an unbroken bluebell wood to the right, brings you in 500 metres to a junction with a bridleway, climbing the hill from the left in a deep muddy cutting. You may recognise this as the top of the steep climb on the Leigh to Sevenoaks walk

Turn right on this bridleway and in five metres fork half left off it up a slope and over a stile to the right of a metal gate into a field, still following the Greensand Way.

The path route is not well signposted here, but follows the left hand edge of the field, along the line of the escarpment, to its far corner, and then turns right along the far field edge. **[!]** In 100 metres or so, the path veers left over an easily missed stile into the

wood, once again signposted as the Greensand Way.

Carry on through the wood for 200 metres to a road, and go straight across it through the gate in the deer fence into **Knole Park**. Keep straight on to a junction of tarmac drives in 100 metres, where you carry straight on.

For the next 100 metres, the track passes between two deer fenced enclosures right and left which gradually approach the track. The land then opens out to the right, however.

From this point you can stay on the tarmac drive for another 500 metres or so, until it comes to a junction and the point marked **[*]** below

Alternatively, you can veer to the right through the bracken, which should bring you in 120 metres or so to a grassy path, running roughly parallel to the tarmac drive you have left.

Follow this grassy path gently downhill for 200 metres, and then across a shallow dip and gently uphill for another 250 metres until you come to the edge of a large open space.

[*] Whichever way you have come, you should now find yourself to the left of a complex of buildings surrounded by a **wooden** fence (immediately to the left if you took the bracken option above: about 150 metres to the left and at a track junction if you stayed on the track)

Here you can see 250 metres away in the distance the **stone walled** gardens of **Knole House** (*from the grassy path route this may appear like a line of trees, but carry on up the gentle open hill ahead of you and you will see the wall*).

Veer **RIGHT** (*not the route suggested in book one*) to pass to the right of

this walled garden, and pick up the tarmac drive that runs down the right hand side of the garden, with its wall to your left. In a yard on the left at the far end of the wall is the National Trust **tea room**.

Coming out of the tea room, turn left to resume your former direction, and cross the car park and walk up to the cluster of ancient (ie, somewhat decaying) trees at the very top of the hill beyond (*NOT the newer clump of trees to the right, slightly down the slope of the hill*).

Once at the ancient trees, turn half left to head between three trees 70 metres away. Beyond these, you should pick up a broad grassy path going downhill through the bracken, which crosses a tarmac drive in 80 metres, and then carries on downhill to a pedestrian gate to the park in another 150 metres.

(If you get lost here, just follow the car road out from the car park: this comes out further up Sevenoaks High Street: turn right on it and take the left fork where the road splits and follow it to the station, or take the right fork to find Caffè Nero below).

Otherwise, coming up the path from the pedestrian gate to Knole Park, in 200 metres there is a car park to your right, and in another 80 metres, at the end of the car park, you are on a tiled path with the backs of houses to your right.

In another 80 metres, cross a road with the entrance to the Waitrose car park left, and go up a passageway to the right of the toilets on the far side. In 70 metres, this brings you to the main shopping street of **Sevenoaks**, where you turn right,

Caffè Nero is in 90 metres on the right, and the pedestrian alleyways

with other tea options across the main road from it.

Beyond Caffè Nero (*or turning right when you come out of it*), cross Buckhurst Lane to the right in 30 metres. In another 40 metres, ten metres beyond the pedestrian lights, turn left off the main road up the pedestrian passageway of Brewery Lane.

At the end of this, turn right and then left again, with the car park to your right, to find a pedestrian passageway leading to another main road.

Turn right downhill and you get to the station in 1km at the bottom of the hill.

Walk Options

Alternative route from the Padwell Arms to Ightham Mote

This route avoids having to retrace your steps after visiting the pub. It goes through an attractive beech wood and along a pleasant wooded path at the top of a ridge (above what appears to be a long-abandoned quarry). This path can be muddy, and the descent from the ridge is very steep, so it may not be such a good idea in wet weather. It's slightly longer than the published route.

Turn left out of the pub to head south-east along the road (take care as there's no pavement). In 100m turn left up the driveway to St Lawrence Vicarage and Stone House, with a concrete Public Footpath marker. In 30m continue up a narrow path between the gates to these houses.

In 150 metres, where the fences end, you enter the beech woods proper. Here, at a footpath post, ignore a path to the left and continue ahead, now climbing more steeply. In 200 metres,

near the top, bear right to come out on Church Road and turn right.

Follow this minor road past St Lawrence church in 80 metres, and the primary school beyond. Just beyond the school, fork left on a bridleway into the woods.

Follow this path along a wooded ridge, with occasional fine views out to the right. The path is potentially muddy but it's easy to walk alongside it through the trees - but mind the very steep drop on the right!

Ignore a bridleway on the left after just 80 metres, but keep a sharp eye out for another bridleway on the left in a further 600 metres (it is marked by a footpath post). **[!]** Fork **right** here onto an unmarked path which initially runs alongside the main path but then veers off to the right. Follow it alongside a wire fence for 100m until you come to a warning sign to horse riders about a very steep descent—also tricky on foot, though there are some steps initially. Go down carefully, cross the road at the bottom and continue on the bridleway opposite, soon with apple orchards visible through the trees.

This path continues gently downhill for 600m, then curves left and descends more steeply. After more twists and turns it emerges on a minor road opposite Mote Hill Cottage. Turn right onto the road, in 125m passing a bridleway on the right (the main walk route). Continue along the road past the grounds of Ightham Mote, *etc, as per the main directions.*