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Knockholt to Otford

Length: 12.5 (7.9 miles)

Toughness: 7 out of ten: two steep hill climbs: otherwise not over-hilly

Transport: Knockholt is on the Sevenoaks line out of Charing Cross and London Bridge. Otford is on the line from Sevenoaks back to Bromley South and Victoria. A day return to Sevenoaks should therefore cover you both out and back, but as Knockholt is within London Transport zone six, you can also buy a zone six travelcard (with a Network Card this costs just £4.80 on weekends and bank holidays) and then pay the excess from Otford to zone six on the return leg

Suggested train: Catch the nearest train to 10.00 am

Map: Explorer 147, Landranger 188

Walk notes This walk was born out of engineering works in November 2007. Unable to do the walk I had planned, I took a train to Knockholt (one of the few places that seemed to have a normal train service that day) and set out to walk to Shoreham and Otford.

The result is a walk – that after a slightly awkward start by a noisy road junction – comes to the familiar territory of Shoreham in Kent (see the Otford Round and Otford to Eynsford walks in Time Out Country Walks Book One) from an unfamiliar angle. It then reverses the morning of the Otford Round walk, though with one interesting twist that introduces a lovely hidden valley.

The walk is wonderful when the leaves are turning in autumn, with lots of beech and sweet chestnut woods to give plenty of colour, but it is also quite suitable for muddy winter: several sections are on quiet tarmac lanes, and while some woodland paths are muddy, the walk is not over-afflicted with it. The descent into Shoreham could be slippery in the wet, however. The walk has several nice bluebell woods, particularly

(but not exclusively) in the latter part of the walk, and the hill after Magpie Bottom has fine flowers in high summer

LUNCH AND TEA PLACES

The **Kings Arms** (01959 523 100) and the **George Inn** (01959 522017) in Shoreham are both good lunch options. The **Crown**, slightly off the route, is more homely, but a very friendly pub

In **Oxford**, there is a **tea room**, some 70 metres beyond the roundabout on the left. Under the sign of "Hospices of Hope", it is open till 5pm year round on Saturdays, as well as on Monday to Friday from April to October: and 4pm Monday to Friday from November to March.

Oxford also has several pubs, of which the most cosy looking is **The Bull**, 150 metres beyond the roundabout.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Exit Knockholt station down its station approach, and turn left on the road.

Almost immediately, turn left up a signposted bridleway, a car wide track. Where this opens up into a patch of waste ground, keep on along the concrete track as it curves slightly left, and crosses over a busy A road on a footbridge.

Beyond the footbridge, you should come to a path T-junction, and go right for 150 metres or so, before forking left across the open space. But there is currently (Nov 2007) some kind of construction work going on here, and the path route has been obscured: if no other route is indicated, turn right after the bridge and follow the right hand edge of the space, until at its far end you are able to curve left to another busy A road.

You should emerge onto this road near a roundabout, which leads onto the M25. Cross this road with great care, watching out especially for traffic coming off the roundabout, and turn right along its far side. Here you will find a minor road leading left off the roundabout. On the far side of this, you should be able to see a signposted footpath leading into the bushes.

Follow this path, which initially runs parallel to the motorway slip road, and then in 70 metres turns left over a stile into a long field. Keep roughly up the right hand edge of this field all the way uphill to its top end (the top of the hill ahead). Aim slightly to the right of the houses on the hill, and you will find two stiles: cross these and walk for 40 metres through a small field, to exit through a broken gate onto a minor road.

Turn right on this road. In 700 metres it passes under the motorway slip road

and in another 1km under the motorway itself (a long, tunnel-like bridge).

(There are open access woods owned by the Woodland Trust to the left along this road, if you feel like exploring, but personally I found the road very pleasant and traffic free. There are bluebells in these woods in late April)

Beyond the motorway, carry on steadily downhill on the road for another 800 metres until it meets another coming down from the right.

In another 150 metres or so, opposite a house on the left, turn right over a stile onto a signposted footpath. This crosses a small field, goes over a stile, up some steps and across another stile. You are then climbing fairly steeply up across a field, towards a line of beech trees. Once at the beech trees, cross another stile and keep on uphill into Meenfield Wood.

At the top of the hill (more bluebells in season), go straight on at a crosspaths, and over the brow of the ridge and directly down the other side. You can soon see Shoreham below you. About half way down the hill, cross a car-wide path and keep on downhill. A slightly slippery path brings you into open fields, and you keep on down the left hand side of a field. At the bottom, a stile takes you onto a fenced in path, which brings you down to the village.

Turn right on a road here **[*]**, and then after a short while, left down Church Street. This takes you past the **Kings Arms** right at the bottom of the hill, and later, after curving right to cross a stream, uphill to the Church, with the **George Inn** opposite.

To reach the **Crown**, an alternative lunch pub, turn **left** on the road indicated at the point marked [*****] in the para above. The pub is about 500 metres along on the right, past another earlier pub on the right.

Another way to get to the Crown is to turn left on the car-wide path that you cross on the way down into Shoreham (just before the "slightly slippery path"): follow this to a track T-junction, and turn right downhill to a road, where again you turn right, or take a permissive path along the field parallel with the road, which comes out near the Crown: after lunch, continue on along the road in the same direction to find the turning on the left into Church Road, and follow the directions in the paragraph above to the George. You can also take a riverside path from the bottom of the side lane by the Crown to get to the stream mentioned in the para above.

Beyond the George, keep on up the road (you can also detour into the churchyard if you like, and exit along the path at its far end, turning left onto the road). In 300 metres the road passes the railway station left, and then shortly afterwards comes to a T-junction with a very busy main road.

Cross this with care, and go on up a car-wide bridleway on the far side. In about 300 metres, when a chain link fence ends left and you come out into the wooded hillside, ignore a bridleway directly uphill, and instead fork left onto a broad path that initially contours the hill. In 150 metres the path climbs gently and in 300 metres or so climbs very steeply up wood-supported steps to the top of the ridge.

Here keep straight on at a path crossroads, now more gently uphill. In 70 metres, you emerge into a field. Keep straight on across this towards a farm (Dunstall Farm) about 200 metres away. Pass to the left of a

green barn and in 30 metres turn right around the far end of it. In 15 metres, turn left to pass to the right of an open-sided barn with a curved roof in another 40 metres, and exit the farmyard on a car-wide track.

The track goes down into a dip and up the other side. Beyond this, keep on down the left hand edge of two fields, until you come to a wood. Follow the path as it curves right and downhill into this wood. In 100 metres cross a stile and bear slightly left for 20 metres and down some steps. At the bottom of the steps, turn right to follow a faint path, with a fence to the left, through a lightly wooded area.

In 300 metres, this brings you to a quiet lane, where you go left. In 250 metres you find yourself in a steep sided valley (Magpie Bottom) passing farm buildings. In another 170 metres, 30 metres after the buildings end to the left, turn right through a kissing gate onto a permissive footpath along the broad bottom of the valley

In 150 metres or so you pass through into another field. The official path is to follow the the valley bottom for another 150 metres, and then turn left steeply uphill on a grassy footpath for another 100 metres. However, a faint path also slants left up the hillside, cutting off the corner, and (if legal...) this also makes a pleasant way to climb the hill. Either way, you get a fine view back down the valley from the top.

After admiring the view, follow the official path up through a wooded area for some 30 metres and over a stile into an open field.

[!] Paths are a bit confusing here. Ignore a faint path to the right as you enter the field, but carry straight on towards a wood ahead on the far side of the field, your direction 120 degrees. Skirt round to the left of this

(that is, with the wood on your immediate right), and then curve right to follow the wood edge. Follow the edge of the wood for another 200 metres until you come back to the lip of the valley. There should be a stile here: cross this and walk diagonally down across the valley beyond, on a grassy path, heading for its lower left hand corner.

In 250 metres, cross a stile and go straight up a broad path into **Great Wood**. The path climbs steadily uphill under beech and chestnut trees (there are also wonderful bluebells here in late April) for 500 metres to a road.

Turn left on the road, and then in 70 metres or so, go right down Shore Hill Lane. In 300 metres, just by a house to the left, note a signposted turning onto the North Downs Way to your right. It is about 800 metres shorter and navigationally easier to follow this all the way into Otford. However, for a view from the North Downs escarpment, ignore this path and keep on down the road.

80 metres after the NDW turning, fork left up a driveway to Oak Hall. In 60 metres, just before the brick pillared entrance to the hall, fork right over a stile.

Beyond the stile, follow a footpath separated from an open field to the left by a barbed wire fence. Follow this path as it turns this way and that around the edge of the field, and along its bottom. The path then starts to slant downhill into the wood, and later goes directly downhill on some steps.

At the bottom of the steps, at crosspaths marked by a footpath post, turn right. *But first go straight on downhill for another 30 metres to emerge into an open space with a fine view.* It is tempting to turn right on a clear footpath along the top of the open space, but sadly this path

eventually leads you downhill to a point a long way from Otford station, and offers no obvious way back to the wooded path: so you must return to the footpath post and the wooded path, and go left on it (if coming up from the viewpoint: right if coming down from the steps).

Follow this wooded path along the edge of the ridge, with the drop to your left (frustratingly, it offers no more views, but there are loads of bluebells here in season to compensate). In about 200 metres, at a footpath post, take the right fork and in 30 metres, follow this broad path as it turns right uphill. In 40 metres, the path curves left again and levels out along the line of the hill.

In 60 metres pass through a staggered wooden barrier, to cross a car-wide bridleway descending the hill, and keep on through another staggered wooden barrier, on a wooded path along the line of the ridge as before.

This is level for 400 metres, then slants downhill for 100 metres, then levels out along the line of the ridge again for another 300 metres and finally comes to a road.

Turn right up the road. In 100 metres at a triangular road junction, go left, and then in 10 metres left through a gate, signposted North Downs Way.

You now follow the North Downs Way down the left hand side of a field and into woods, and then gradually downhill into Otford, a distance of 1.2km. The route is never in doubt.

Eventually, this brings you down to a busy road, where you go right for 100 metres, and then at a T-junction with an even busier road, left for 100 metres to cross the railway bridge. At the far end of the railway bridge, the footpath entrance to **Otford station** is to your left.

For tea, continue on down the main road for 500 metres to the roundabout with a pond in it at the heart of the village. *(A nicer way to get to this roundabout is indicated at the start of the Otford to Eysnford walk in Time Out Country Walks Book One).*

Keep straight on at the roundabout down the main street of Otford: the **Hospices of Hope tea room** is in 70 metres on the left, and **The Bull** pub in another 80 metres on the same side.