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Knockholt to Otford

Hidden valleys and villages in the North Downs

Length: **Main walk:** 12.9km (8 miles)

Knockholt to Shoreham: 5.9km (3.7 miles)

Toughness: 7 out of 10: two big hill climbs and several lesser ones

Maps: Explorer 147, Landranger 188

Features

This walk approaches the familiar walking territory around Shoreham and Otford in Kent from an unfamiliar angle, passing at first over wooded hills, then climbing up and over a steep ridge to get down to Shoreham. In the first 3km (2 miles) of the walk there is some traffic noise from the M25, but how much depends on the way the winds are blowing and other atmospheric factors. As you approach Shoreham this fades.

In the afternoon the route goes into a lovely hilly area of woodland and fields, passing through the lovely hidden valley of Magpie Bottom, a nature reserve, with fine downland flowers and butterflies in the summer.

The walk also has several nice bluebell woods, particularly (but not exclusively) in the latter part of the walk, and in autumn there are lots of beech and sweet chestnut woods to provide colour. In winter the walk is not over-afflicted with mud, but the descents into Shoreham and Otford can be a bit slippery.

Walk options

Just after lunch – **5.9km (3.7 miles)** from the start - this walk passes **Shoreham station**, which is on the line from Otford to London and is a possible place to finish or start the walk.

To **extend the walk**, you could use the afternoon of the Eynsford Circular via Otford walk on this website. It has a shorter and longer route from Otford to Shoreham, which would add **3.1km (1.9 miles)** or **7.5km (4.7 miles)** to the walk respectively. You could even use the shorter afternoon route to walk all the way to Eynsford, adding **10.1km (6.3 miles)**.

Transport

Knockholt is on the Sevenoaks line out of Charing Cross and London Bridge, with trains every half hour. Catch **the nearest train to 10am** from London to get to lunch in Shoreham in time.

Otford is on line from Sevenoaks to Bromley South, with twice hourly Thameslink trains to **Blackfriars**, as well as hourly faster direct trains to **Victoria** Monday to Sunday and an hourly fast train to **London Bridge** and **Charing Cross** Monday to Saturday.

Rail planners also sometimes show a faster return journey from Otford to London by taking a Thameslink train to Sevenoaks and connecting there with one of the very regular fast services to London Bridge and Charing Cross, which is a permitted route if you have a day return to Sevenoaks (*see below*).

Shoreham (Kent) is the stop after Otford on the Thameslink services to London: changing at **Swanley** or **Bromley South** sometimes gives you access to faster trains to Victoria, London Bridge or Charing Cross.

A **day return to Sevenoaks** covers you out and back on both lines (and is the same price as a day return to Otford): this also covers you for travel back from Shoreham. Alternatively you can use **Oyster** or **contactless** to get to Knockholt station as it is in **London Transport zone six**: but coming back you then need to buy a single from Otford to Swanley (zone eight) or St Mary Cray (zone six) and, if you do not have a travelcard or a pass, get out and touch in there with your Oyster or contactless card (possible on Thameslink trains, which stop there, but not always on Victoria trains).

Lunch

Shoreham, 5.3km (3.3 miles) into the walk, has three possible lunch pubs. Serving more standard pub fare (and also being on the walk route) is the **Kings Arms** (01959 523100), with the more upmarket **Samuel Palmer** (01959 525442) just up the road. Both have some outside seating, but for a more tranquil garden the **Crown** (01959 522903) is recommended, reached by a small diversion off the walk route and also serving standard pub fare.

The village also has the **Shoreham Aircraft Museum**, open 10am-4pm on weekends year round, which has a tea room set in a pleasant garden, while the **Mount Vineyard** (01959 524008) in the heart of the village has a restaurant (booking advised) serving pizza.

Tea

Probably the best tea room in Otford, if you can get to it in time, is the one at the rear of the the **Hospices of Hope** charity shop, which is open till 4pm Monday to Saturday, but only 3.30pm on Sunday. Almost opposite it is **Sally's Cake Emporium**, open to 4pm Tuesday to Sunday, which has an excellent selection of cakes.

Otford also has two pubs, the first one you pass being the more basic **Woodman** by the roundabout, with the **Bull**, a cosy chain pub, 150 metres beyond the roundabout on the left.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Knockholt station to Timberden Bottom (4km/2.5 miles)

1. Exit Knockholt station down its station approach and turn left on the road.
2. Almost immediately - in 5 metres or so - turn left up a track, signposted as a public footpath.
3. In 100 metres ignore a gate to the left and keep straight on uphill on the track.
4. 50 metres beyond the dual carriageway you emerge into an open space (a golf course, though that is not evident from this angle). Here **ignore** a broad grassy track going uphill ahead and instead **go sharp right** on a path through brambles, parallel to the road audible to your right.

In another 100 metres cross over a dual carriageway on a footbridge.

5. In 120 metres follow the path as it slants left up the hill. At the top of the hill curve left around a golf green. On the far side of it descend 50 metres to another road.
 6. Cross this busy road with care, taking special care of fast traffic coming from the roundabout to the right, and turn right along the far side of the road.
 7. In 120 metres you come to the roundabout. Pass round to the left of it, crossing a side road in another 30 metres. Beyond this side road keep straight ahead up a signposted footpath to Wells Hill, which runs through scrub parallel to the motorway slip road.
 8. In 100 metres turn left over a broken stile into a long field. Keep up the middle of this field.
 9. In 180 metres cross a stile in the middle of a wooden fence and carry uphill across the next field, aiming for a stile midway along a hedge on its top edge, 30 metres to the left of the crest of the hill.
 10. In 170 metres cross this stile and then veer left across a small field for 60 metres, to exit it over a hidden stile 10 metres to the left of a broken gate. Turn right on the minor road beyond.
 - *The original route of the walk carried on down this road, passing under one motorway in 700 metres and the M25 in a big tunnel in another kilometre, bringing you to paragraph 19 opposite. This is a quiet and pleasant walk except when paintballing is taking place in the woods to the right (which should be audible by now, if it is happening), but most walkers will prefer the route described below, which takes you off the tarmac into the woods.*
 11. In 120 metres, at the bottom of a dip, turn left up a permissive bridleway marked by a Woodland Trust sign. Follow this as it curves gently uphill into the woods (mainly coppiced sweet chestnut, with some **bluebells** in spring).
 12. 300 metres after the road, at the top of the hill, keep straight on at a crosspaths, now descending quite sharply.
 13. In 100 metres more, at the bottom of the hill, turn left at a T-junction with a car-wide path. Almost immediately, in 20 metres, this path curves right uphill.
 14. In 300 metres you come to the top of the hill and a bench next to an electricity pylon. Here go right at a T-junction on a gravel track.
 15. In 100 metres you pass a telecommunications mast on your right. The path then veers left and descends for 200 metres to a footbridge across a feeder road to the M25.
 16. Cross the bridge and 20 metres beyond its far edge turn left downhill at a T-junction. Follow this path (somewhat indistinct in winter) as it meanders down through the wood.
 17. In 180 metres you can see the corner of an area of young trees (once a field) ahead, and hear the M25. Here ignore an apparent path to the left and instead keep to the main path, which turns right.
 18. In 180 metres pass through a horse-blocking barrier and descend a bank to turn left on a road. In 250 metres pass under the M25 in a long tunnel.
 19. Beyond the motorway carry on steadily downhill on the road for another 800 metres until it meets another road coming from the right.
 20. In another 150 metres, opposite a house on the left, turn right through a kissing gate onto a signposted footpath. Veer slightly left across the field, heading for its upper corner.
- Timberden Bottom to Shoreham (1.3km/0.8 miles)**
21. In 100 metres go 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.
 22. In 200 metres, once at the beech trees, cross another stile and keep on uphill into **Meenfield Wood**.
 23. In 300 metres, at the very top of the hill (more **bluebells** in season), go straight on at a crosspaths over the brow of the ridge and directly (and quite steeply) down the other side.
 24. About halfway down the hill, in 200 metres or so, cross a car-wide path and keep on downhill. A slightly slippery path brings you in 80 metres into an open field: keep on down its left-hand side.
 25. In another 100 metres, at the bottom of the field, a kissing gate takes you onto a

fenced in path. In 350 metres this brings you down to the road running through the centre of **Shoreham** village (30 metres before which on the right is the **Shoreham Aircraft Museum**, a possible weekend tea stop).

26. Here you have a choice:

- For lunch at the **Crown** pub, turn **left** on the road to find the pub in 400 metres on the right. After lunch, either retrace your steps through the village or (prettier) turn right on the road out of the pub, resuming your former direction, and then in 100 metres turn right down Mill Lane. In 170 metres, at the bottom of the lane, turn right on a path that soon crosses a river on a footbridge. Follow this path along the river for 400 metres until it emerges onto a road and then turn left uphill to find the Samuel Palmer pub in 180 metres. Resume the walk directions at paragraph 27 below.
- For the **Kings Arms, Samuel Palmer** and **Mount Vineyard**, and **to continue the walk**, turn **right** on the road through the village. In 90 metres turn left down Church Street. In 170 metres you pass the Kings Arms at the bottom of the hill and 250 metres later (after crossing a stream and carrying on uphill on the road) the entrance to the Mount Vineyard is on the left, with the Samuel Palmer just beyond it on your right.

Shoreham to Magpie Bottom
(2.9km/1.8 miles)

- 27. Beyond the Samuel Palmer** keep straight on up the path into the churchyard (an avenue of yews).
- 28.** At the top end of the churchyard, emerge into a field and turn right along its bottom edge.
- 29.** In 40 metres turn left up the far edge of the field on a fenced path.
- 30.** In 220 metres turn right to come to a road and then turn left to pass under a railway bridge.
- Immediately to the left just after the bridge is the entrance to **Shoreham station** if you want to end the walk here.
- 31.** 60 metres after the bridge you come to a T-junction with a busy main road.
- Cross this with care and go on up a car-wide bridleway on the far side.
- 32.** In 200 metres, at a corner in the fence, you come out onto a wooded hillside. Here **ignore** a bridleway directly uphill, and instead **fork left** onto a broad path that is initially more or less level, then climbs gently.
- 33.** In 300 metres the path climbs steeply up wood-supported steps to the top of the ridge.
- 34.** 30 metres after the top of the steps, keep straight on at a path crossroads (with a few more steps before it), now more gently uphill.
- 35.** In 70 metres you emerge into a field. Veer slightly left across this towards the barns of Dunstall Farm 170 metres away.
- 36.** Once at the farm pass between an oblong barn right and a circular one left. Turn right around the far end of the oblong barn, and in 20 metres turn left between other barns to exit the farmyard on a track.
- 37.** The track goes down into a dip and up the other side. In 200 metres, at the top of the slope, **ignore** a path forking left diagonally across a field and instead keep to track along the left-hand edge of the field you are in.
- 38.** In 150 metres pass into another field, still on a track on its left-hand edge.
- 39.** In 120 metres, at the end of this second field, **veer left through a gap in the field corner** into a wood.
- 40.** Follow the path as it veers right into the wood for 20 metres and then winds left and right to cross a stile in another 70 metres.
- 41.** 10 metres beyond the stile descend a short bank on steps and turn right with the path, gently downhill across the slope, with a valley (a former golf course) visible 30 metres through the trees to your left.
- 42.** In 250 metres the footpath merges with a grassy track coming up from the left. 30 metres later cross a stile and turn left down a quiet lane.
- 43.** In 250 metres you find yourself in a steep sided valley passing houses on the left.
- 44.** In another 170 metres, 40 metres after the buildings end, turn right through a

kissing gate onto a permissive footpath along the broad bottom of the valley

Magpie Bottom to Otford station (4.7km/2.9 miles)

45. In 200 metres you pass through into another field. Fork slightly left here on a path that gently climbs up across the slope, ignoring any path forking right along the valley bottom.
46. In 170 metres, just before the path you are on starts to descend, turn **sharp left** onto a grassy path going directly uphill. In 80 metres, at the top of the hill, **turn around** for a **fine view** back down the valley.
47. After admiring the view, follow the path up through a wooded area for 50 metres and through a kissing gate into a field.
48. Take the path that goes straight ahead across the field. The right of way goes to the **left-hand side** of the field in 200 metres just beyond some pine trees: you then have to turn **sharp right** and come back to a point just beyond the clump of trees that can be seen jutting out on the **right-hand** side of the field. *Unofficial paths cutting off this corner are **not rights of way**.*
49. When you get to the clump of trees, pass along the left-hand side of it, with its fence to your right. *(As seen from the start of the field in the previous paragraph you are turning right **just beyond** the clump of trees).* Carry on (no clear path) through a gap in a line of trees 40 metres further on, with the wood edge still to your right.
50. In 100 metres more, in the far right-hand corner of the field, cross a well-hidden stile to the left of a fieldgate (which is often open and so just appears to be a wide gap into the next field).
51. Walk diagonally down across the valley beyond on a grassy path, heading for its far (lower) corner.
52. In 200 metres cross a stile and go straight up a broad path into **Great Wood** that climbs steadily uphill (**bluebells** here in late April/early May).
53. In 400 metres you come to a road, where you turn left.
54. In another 70 metres go right down Shorehill Lane.
55. In 300 metres, just by a half tiled house to the left, ignore a turning onto the **North Downs Way** to your right. *It is about 800 metres shorter to follow this all the way into Otford but the route below is more scenic.*
56. 70 metres after the NDW turning, fork left up a driveway to Oak Hall. In 30 metres, just before the brick pillared entrance to the hall, fork right through a metal gate up a footpath separated from an open field to the left by a barbed wire fence.
57. Follow this path as it turns this way and that around the edge of the field, eventually slanting downhill, and then going directly downhill into a wood on some steps.
58. Halfway down the steps ignore a broad path to the right, to carry on down hill. In 40 metres more pass through a kissing gate. There is a fine **escarpment view** here.
59. Beyond the gate turn right on a path across the slope, with a fence uphill to your right.
60. In 100 metres pass through a kissing gate. In another 30 metres **leave the main path** (which veers slightly left downhill across the slope) and instead **keep to the fence** to find a kissing gate on your right in 20 metres.
61. Turn right uphill through this kissing gate and follow the path initially around to the right for 15 metres and then left directly uphill.
62. In 60 metres more, at a T-junction with a bench ahead, turn left along a clear level path along the wooded top of the ridge.
63. In 150 metres, **take the right fork at a footpath post**.
64. In 30 metres follow this path as it **turns right uphill**. In 50 metres the path turns left again and levels out along the line of the hill.
65. In 70 metres pass through a staggered wooden barrier, ignoring a metal fieldgate to its right, to cross a car-wide bridleway. Keep on along on a wooded path along the line of the ridge (**bluebells** here in season).
66. This is level for 400 metres, then slants downhill for 150 metres, then levels out along the line of the ridge again for 300 metres and finally comes to a road.
67. Turn right up the road. In 100 metres at a triangular road junction go left, and

then in 10 metres left again through a gate, signposted North Downs Way.

- 68.** 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 just over 1km. The route is never in doubt.
- 69.** Eventually this brings you down to a busy road, where you go right.
- 70.** In another 100 metres, at a T-junction, go left for 120 metres across a railway bridge. At its far end the entrance to **Otford station** is to your left.
- 71. For tea,** continue on down the main road for 400 metres to a roundabout with a pond in it. On your right just before this is the **Woodman** pub. Carrying straight on beyond the roundabout into the centre of the village you come to **Sally's Cake Emporium** in 60 metres on the right and 10 metres beyond it on the left the **Hospices of Hope** shop with its tea room. 80 metres beyond this on the same side is the **Bull** pub.
- 72.** After tea, for **a more pleasant route back to the station**, veer right at the roundabout and enter the churchyard. Pass to the right of the church and then keep to the left-hand side of the graveyard on a path. This later passes between fences and comes to **Otford station** in 400 metres.