

Morning last checked	Afternoon last checked		
27 December 2016	27 December 2016		
	Document last updated: 30 December 2016		
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## SWC Walk 37: Knockholt to Otford

### Hidden valleys and villages in the North Downs

**Length:**                      **Main walk:**                      12.7km (7.9 miles)

**Knockholt to Shoreham:**                      5.8km (3.6 miles)

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

**Map:** 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 largely reverses the morning of the Otford Circular walk (Book 1, walk 43 on this website), though with one twist that introduces the lovely hidden valley of Maggie Bottom, now 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 – **5.8km (3.6 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.

It is also possible to vary the ending by walking from Shoreham to Eynsford, a distance of **7.5km (4.6 miles)**: see SWC walk 56, Eynsford Circular for details.

## Transport

Knockholt is on the Sevenoaks line out of Charing Cross and London Bridge. Catch the nearest train to 10am to get to lunch in Shoreham in time.

Otford is on the line from Sevenoaks back to Bromley South, Victoria and Blackfriars, with the Victoria trains being faster.

A day return to Sevenoaks covers you out and back on both lines (and is the same price as a day return to Otford).

Alternatively you can use Oyster 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 and touch in there (possible on Thameslink trains, which stop there, but not always on Victoria trains)

## Lunch

Shoreham, 5.1km (3.2 miles) into the walk, has four possible lunch pubs:

Serving more standard pub fare (and also being on the walk route) are the **Kings Arms** (01959 52310), the **George Inn** (01959 522017).

Alternatively a very short diversion off the walk route gets you to the somewhat more upmarket (but not over-pricey) **Two Brewers** (01959 522800) and the **Crown** (01959 522903).

## Tea

In Otford, the most obvious tea option is the **Pond View Cafe** (10959 522150) on the roundabout, generally open until 4.30pm or so.

In another 70 metres on the left the **Hospices of Hope** charity shop also has a tea room at its rear, which 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.

Otford also has several pubs, the first one you pass being **The Woodman** on the right on the roundabout. On the far side of the roundabout is **The Rising Sun**, but perhaps the most cosy-looking of all is **The Bull**, 150 metres beyond the roundabout on the left.

## WALK DIRECTIONS

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 car-wide track (*which should be signposted as a bridleway but currently is not*).
3. In 100 metres this emerges onto a patch of wasteground and in another 100 metres crosses over a dual carriageway on a footbridge.
4. 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** along the hedgerow, parallel to the road audible to your right.
5. In 100 metres follow the path as it slants left up the hill past a footpath post. At the top of the hill curve around a golf green. On the far side of it descend 40 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 stile into a long field. Keep up the middle of this field.
9. In 180 metres cross a stile 40 metres to the right of two fieldgates in a wooden fence and carry uphill across the next field, aiming for a stile midway along its

top edge (roughly at the crest of the hill).

10. Beyond the stile cross 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 below. 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 100 metres, at the bottom of a dip, turn left up a permissive bridleway marked by a blue Woodland Trust arrow. 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 parallel to the field edge (possibly less visible in summer).
18. In 170 metres pass through a horse-blocking barrier and descend a bank to turn left on a road. In 200 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 over a stile onto a signposted footpath. Cross the small field ahead
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 250 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 of 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 stile takes you onto a fenced in path, which in 250 brings you down to the road running through the centre of **Shoreham** village.
26. Here **you have a choice**:
  - For lunch at the **Two Brewers** or **Crown** pubs, turn **left** on the road. The Two Brewers is in 100 metres, and the Crown 300 metres further on, both on the right. After lunch, either retrace your steps or (from the Crown) descend the side lane by the pub and turn right on the riverside path at its bottom. Follow this for 400 metres until it emerges onto a road and then turn left uphill to find the George Inn in 150 metres. Resume the walk directions at paragraph 27 below.
  - For the **Kings Arms** and **George Inn**, 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 George Inn on your right, with the church ahead.

27. **Beyond the George** 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 60 metres pass to the right of a fieldgate and turn left uphill on a road.
30. In 270 metres pass under a railway bridge.
  - Immediately to the left just after the bridge is the entrance to **Shoreham station** if you want to end here.
31. 70 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 350 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 is initially level.
33. In 150 metres the path climbs gently and in 300 metres or so more climbs steeply up wood-supported steps to the top of the ridge.
34. Here keep straight on at a path crossroads, now more gently uphill. In 70 metres you emerge into a field. Veer slightly left across this towards the barns of Dunstall Farm about 170 metres away.
35. 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 car-wide track.
36. The track goes down into a dip and up the other side. Beyond this keep on the track down the left-hand edge of two fields.
37. **[!]** At the end of the second field, where the track (now grassy) turns right along the far field edge, veer slightly left past a redundant stile in the field corner into a wood.
38. 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.
39. 10 metres beyond the stile descend a short bank on steps and veer right downhill, with a wire fence to your left initially.
40. In 25 metres the path veers right, with open fields (a former golf course) visible 30 metres down the bank to your left. *(The area you are passing through, currently lightly wooded, was being grazed by longhorn cattle in winter 2016 and is possibly being cleared for conservation purposes.)*
41. 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.
42. In 300 metres you find yourself in a steep sided valley (**Magpie Bottom**) passing buildings on the left.
43. In another 130 metres, 40 metres after the buildings end, turn right through a kissing gate onto a permissive footpath along the broad bottom of the valley
44. 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.
45. In 150 metres turn **sharp left** onto a grassy path going directly uphill. In 50 metres, at the top of the hill, **turn around** for a **fine view** back down the valley.
46. After admiring the view, follow the path up through a wooded area for 40 metres and through a kissing gate into an open field.
47. 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**.*
48. When you get to the clump of trees, pass along the far side of it (*ie keeping the clump on your **right** if coming from the pine trees: as seen from the start of the field as described in the previous paragraph you are turning right **just beyond** the clump of trees*). In 15 metres there is a footpath post on the right. Beyond this, carry on (no clear path) through a gap in a line of trees 30 metres further on, with the wood edge to your right.
49. 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).

50. Walk diagonally down across the valley beyond on a grassy path, heading for its lower left-hand corner.
51. In 180 metres cross a stile and go straight up a broad path into **Great Wood**. The path climbs steadily uphill under beech and chestnut trees (**bluebells** here in late April/early May).
52. In 400 metres you come to a road, where you turn left.
53. In 80 metres go right down Shorehill Lane.
54. 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.
55. 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 up a footpath separated from an open field to the left by a barbed wire fence.
56. Follow this path as it turns this way and that around the edge of the field. The path then starts to slant downhill into the wood, and later goes directly downhill on some steps.
57. Two thirds of the way down the steps there is a broad path to the right, which is your onward route. But first carry on down the steps for 40 metres more to a kissing gate, where there is a **fine escarpment view** (*though it is becoming more overgrown each year...*)
58. After admiring the view retrace your steps 40 metres up the steps and take the broad path to the left (the one that was to the right when you came down).
59. Follow this path along the edge of the ridge, with the drop to your left. Once this area wooded but there has been some clearance of trees recently: currently there is no view from this path, though.
60. In about 300 metres, where the newly cleared part ends, **take the right fork at a footpath post**.
61. In 30 metres follow this broad path as it **turns right uphill**. In 50 metres the path turns left again and levels out along the line of the hill.
62. In 60 metres pass through a staggered wooden barrier, ignoring a metal fieldgate to its right, to cross a car-wide bridleway descending the hill. Keep on along on a wooded path along the line of the ridge as before (more **bluebells** here in season).
63. 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.
64. 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.
65. 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.
66. Eventually this brings you down to a busy road, where you go right.
67. In another 100 metres, at a T-junction with an even busier road, go 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.
68. **For tea**, continue on down the main road for 400 metres to the roundabout with a pond in it at the heart of the village.
69. Overlooking the roundabout on your right is (in order) the **Woodman** pub, the **Pond View Café** and then the **Rising Sun** pub. Carrying on down the main street of Otford beyond the roundabout you come to the **Hospices of Hope** shop with its tea room in 70 metres on the left. 80 metres beyond this on the same side is **The Bull** pub.
70. After tea, for a **more pleasant route back to the station**, veer right at the roundabout and enter the churchyard on its far side. 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.