

Main walk last checked	Loop to Shipbourne last checked		
18 November 2021	18 November 2021		
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Sevenoaks Circular

Two National Trust houses and a view from the Greensand ridge

Length:

Main walk	16.3km (10.1 miles)
With extension to Shipbourne	18.5km (11.5 miles)

Toughness: 3 out of 10: gentle gradients

Maps: OS Explorer 147, OS Landranger 188

Features

This walk goes through a lovely slice of Kentish countryside, starting by passing through the deer park of the National Trust owned Knole House (the house can be visited at either the start or the end of the walk) and then carrying on into a gentle area of fields and woods. There are currently some lavender fields at the end of this section (in flower late June to July).

You then descend through newly coppiced woodland to Ightham Mote (*pronounced "I-tam"*), a rare moated manor house, also owned by the National Trust, whose self-service restaurant is an option for lunch or tea.

The real glory of the walk comes next: 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 wild garlic wood too. Finally the walk finishes by passing through Knole Park once again

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. In winter many paths on this walk have relatively firm surfaces, though there is inevitably some mud.

Walk options

The Padwell Arms and the Snail in Stone Street were formerly pub lunch options on this walk, but both have now permanently closed. An optional extra loop has therefore been added to the walk taking you to the wonderful Chaser Inn in Shipbourne for lunch, which adds **2.2km (1.4 miles)** to

the walk length, making a total circular walk from Sevenoaks of **18.5km (11.5 miles)**. Since this crosses some low-lying fields, it is muddier in winter than the rest of the walk. Towards the end of the loop there is fairly steep but scenic climb up onto the escarpment.

A fairly regular **bus** – the 222 – leaves outside The Chaser Inn on Monday to Fridays (eight departures) and Saturday (five departures). There is no service on Sunday or bank holidays. The buses run to Tonbridge station in one direction and in the other to Borough Green station, which is on the Maidstone to Victoria line.

Transport

There are several fast trains an hour from **Charing Cross, Waterloo East** and **London Bridge** to Sevenoaks. You can also get to Sevenoaks on slower Thameslink services from **Blackfriars** via **Bromley South**.

Either way aim to **start the walk** at **10.45am** to get to Ightham Mote or the Chaser Inn comfortably in time for lunch. In spring and summer it is also possible to start an hour later, and have lunch in at the Bucks Head in Godden Green and then tea at Ightham Mote.

Lunch and Tea

There are early lunch options at the National Trust-run **Brewhouse Cafe** at **Knole House**, 2.6km (1.6 miles) into the walk, and at the **Bucks Head** (01732 761 330) in Godden Green, 3.9km (2.4 miles) into the walk: the latter serves food until 12-2pm Wednesday to Friday, 12-2.30pm on Saturday and 12-3pm Sundays.

More centrally placed is the National Trust-run self service restaurant at **Ightham Mote** (8.4km/5.2 miles into the walk), which these days is open year round till 5pm (4pm November to early February) and does hot dishes and soup from 12pm to 2.30pm.

Two other former pub lunch options on this walk - **The Padwell** and the **Snail** at Stone Street - have permanently closed, but an optional extra loop to the walk (see **Walk options** on page 1) takes you to the excellent **Chaser Inn** in Shipbourne (01732 810360), 9.7km (6 miles) into the walk, which serves food all afternoon and evening daily. This is a large pub with a range of different seating areas including outside tables in summer in a garden next to the church: however it is also popular and booking might not be a bad idea.

For **tea** the **Brewhouse Cafe** at Knole House is recommended. It is open till 5pm daily (4pm November to early February). Otherwise Sevenoaks has several cafes including a **Starbucks** open until 6pm Monday to Saturday and 5pm Sundays. The **Chequers** is one of its many pubs.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Sevenoaks station to Knole House (2.2km/1.4 miles)

1. Coming out of Sevenoaks station, cross the main road at the pedestrian lights, and turn right, uphill.
2. In 60 metres turn left into St Botolphs Road.
3. In 600 metres, at the end of this long wide road, cross two roads with a war memorial in between them and beyond keep left around the edge of the cricket pitch.
4. In 150 metres, in the far left-hand corner of the cricket pitch, turn left onto a lane. In 40 metres turn right at a crossroads to go steeply downhill.
5. In another 50 metres, at the bottom of the hill, **cross the road with care** (*fast traffic*) and turn left along the far side.
6. In 200 metres, just before the pavement ends, **go through a small wooden door** in the stone wall to the right to enter **Knole Park** through a gate.
7. Go straight ahead for 30 metres to an estate road and turn left along this. Follow it as it curves right along the valley floor.
8. In 450 metres stay on the road as it climbs up out of the valley and in another 100 metres curves left up through trees.
9. In 300 metres more the road curves right and you emerge from trees into an

open space, with the turrets of **Knole House** visible ahead. Here **turn left off the estate road**, onto a grassy path and continue with the directions in paragraph 10.

- **If you miss this turning**, or if you want to have **a closer look at Knole House** or visit its **Brewhouse Cafe** at this stage in the walk, simply keep on down the estate road for 300 metres to the house. Your **onward route** is then on the tarmac and gravel drive lined with trees that runs leftwards away from the house, in line with its facade, roughly north east. This is marked **Duchess Walk** on the Explorer map. Carry on down this for 400 metres until it crosses a golf fairway at the bottom of a dip and continue with the directions in paragraph 11 below.

Knole House to Godden Green (1.6km/1 mile)

10. Having turned left off the estate road onto the grassy path, in 50 metres it starts to go downhill. In 80 metres more it merges with a grassy path coming from the right. In another 80 metres you come to a gravel track at the bottom of the valley, where you turn left, crossing a golf fairway.
11. Follow the track across the golf fairway at the bottom of a dip, and then keep on it as it curves uphill to come to the gates of the park in 500 metres
12. Leave the park by the gates and carry on down a track into the woods.
13. Ignore minor paths to the right, but in 500 metres, after a gentle descent and when you can see a house 150 metres ahead along the path, **fork right** up a broad path signposted to Godden Green.
 - **If you miss this turning**, do not worry. Keep straight on along the track to the road and turn right on it until you come to the Bucks Head pub: walk past it and continue with paragraph 16.
14. In 80 metres the path runs alongside garden fences. In 40 metres cross a track with a line of cottages to the right, and go through a metal gate and on up a track to the right of some stables.
15. In 150 metres you come out onto the green of **Godden Green**, where you turn right, passing the **Bucks Head**, a possible early lunch stop, on your right.

Godden Green to Stone Street (2.3km/1.4 miles)

16. 40 metres beyond the pub veer left off the road up a tarmac driveway (which is also a bridleway) signposted to Cygnet Hospital.
17. *You essentially keep straight on along this bridleway all the way to Stone Street: but in more detail:*

The driveway is initially tarmac, passing houses and the entrance to a private hospital to the left, but in 250 metres becomes earth and gravel.
18. In another 650 metres you pass one last house and after this the track descends a steep hill impassable to cars and becomes a normal bridleway in open country.
19. You now keep on this bridleway for 800 metres, passing some woods which in late March and early April have fine displays of wood anemones, and slowly climbing uphill.
20. At the end of the 800 metres you pass a house on the left and in 100 metres more come to a road.
21. Cross the road and go straight up the signposted footpath beyond. Initially you have a line of shrubs to the left and a fenced field to the right, but in 120 metres you are crossing an open field, though with a line of newly planted trees on either side.
22. In 250 metres more you come to a fieldgate, with a road beyond it.

Stone Street to Ightham Mote (2.3km/1.4 miles)

23. Go straight across the road (actually two, a road forking) and up a farm road between hedges on the far side, a signposted bridleway.
24. In 230 metres, where the hedges end, keep straight on with arable fields either side.

Until the 1960s the area would have been covered in hop fields, a very different kind of landscape to the one you see now. It was then replanted with apple orchards, which were grubbed up in 2011. But new crops have taken their place - some of the fields have now been replanted with lavender (in flower late June to July) and later on the left there is a plantation of cobnuts (hazelnuts).

25. In 400 metres the path starts to descend steeply, soon entering an area of young trees.

Once a conventional wood, this whole area is now being managed through traditional coppicing by the National Trust, giving a glimpse of how woods in England looked for centuries until medieval wood management was abandoned in the 19th century.

26. In another 300 metres, at the bottom of the hill, go left at a T-junction onto a level track.
27. In 650 metres you come to a road. Turn right on this.

*The path through a fieldgate on the far side of the road is slight shortcut into **Ightham Mote** via its car park: climbing the hill on a wooded path, you emerge in 150 metres next to the car park entrance. But unless you are in a hurry to get to the tea room, the way described below is more scenic.*

28. In 200 metres you have a clear view of the garden and house on your left. In another 100 metres you pass some old cottages on the left. 50 metres beyond the cottages there is a tarmac track on the right, just in front of the buildings of Mote Farm.

- **If NOT stopping at Ightham Mote and NOT planning to do the extra loop to Shipbourne**, you can turn right here and pick up the directions paragraph 32 opposite.

29. Otherwise, keep straight on. In another 60 metres there is a driveway **sharp left**, an entrance to **Ightham Mote**.

- **If you want to carry on to Shipbourne** from this point, **NOT stopping at Ightham Mote**, ignore this entrance and keep straight on down the road. Continue with paragraph 36 opposite.

- **To visit Ightham Mote**, turn left onto the driveway, to come to the house in 60 metres. Walk round to the right along its moated front and, ignoring the National Trust shop just beyond it, climb a short rise and turn left up through a car park for 50 metres to find the entrance to the **self service restaurant**, on your left, just by the entrance to the toilets.

30. **After lunch**, exit past the toilets and turn right downhill. In 50 metres turn right again along the moated front of

the house. At its far end veer left up the driveway to the road.

- **To continue on to Shipbourne**, turn left on the road and continue with paragraph 36 below.
- **To omit the loop to Shipbourne**, turn sharp right onto the road, and continue with paragraph 31 below.

Ightham Mote to Wilmot Cottage (1.5km/0.93 miles)

31. Having turned sharp right out of the driveway from Ightham Mote, in 60 metres left up a farm track, a signposted bridleway.
32. *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 then to the right uphill.*
33. 350 metres after the farm, ignore a track to the left leading to a fieldgate, and keep on uphill.
34. 100 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. (*Ramsons or wild garlic flower to the left and right of this path in late April and early May*).
35. In 500 metres the track passes a house on the right and beyond it turns right up some steps, following an arrow on a post.

Now continue with the directions in paragraph 60 on page 5.

Ightham Mote to Shipbourne (1.5km/0.9 miles)

36. 100 metres beyond the Ightham Mote entrance, go straight ahead across a stile into a field to continue parallel to the road along a field edge, with a hedge to your right.
37. In 120 metres exit the field in its bottom right-hand corner and carry on up a path with a fenced-off field to your right and a wood edge to your left.
38. In 100 metres cross a stile and carry on up a fenced path through the wood. *There are some **bluebells** towards the end of this wood in late April and early May.*

39. In 300 metres cross a stile to leave the wood and carry on down the left-hand side of a field, with Shipbourne church visible ahead.
40. In 70 metres turn left with the fence to go along a broad grassy strip along a field edge.
41. In 250 metres cross a track and go over a stile to the left of double fieldgates, veering right up the small field beyond.
42. In 50 metres go through a gate to the right of a fieldgate and carry on up a fenced path.
43. In 200 metres cross a stile and 15 metres later another, turning left along a field edge after the second stile.
44. In 170 metres, just in front of Shipbourne church, cross a stile in the right-hand field corner and then turn left to pass through a gate into the churchyard.
45. Follow the path around to the left of the church (ignoring a path forking left to a gate by its main door) to come round the far end of the church. A driveway leads down to a road and the **Chaser Inn** is to your right.

Shipbourne to Wilmot Cottage (2.4km/1.5 miles)

46. Coming out of the Chaser Inn, go back up the drive to the churchyard, and pass round to the right of the church.
47. Exit the churchyard by the gate into the field on its far side (the one you came in by before lunch, **not** the one at the end of the path leading to the right from the main door of the church) and, ignoring the stile to the right, keep straight on, with a hedge to your right. There are some newly planted trees to your left initially but you are soon on the edge of an arable field.
48. In 220 metres pass through a gap and keep straight on across an even larger arable field, heading for a wood corner 500 metres ahead. *(There are nice backward views of Shipbourne church as you cross this field)*
49. When you get to the wood corner, cross a stile and go up a path into the wood, which soon becomes car-wide.
50. In 250 metres, at the top of the rise and just past a fieldgate to the right, **ignore** a broad grassy path straight ahead, but instead **fork left uphill** on a broad path.
51. In 100 metres, at the top of the hill, ignore a grassy ride to the right to continue straight on down a descending path that in 20 metres veers right.
52. In 400 metres cross a stile by a house and turn right on a road.
53. In 25 metres go left over a stile with a National Trust Ightham Mote sign. **Turn right and then left** after the stile to carry on up **the far side of the hedge** (with the hedge to your left), going directly away from the road.
54. In 220 metres, where the hedge ends, veer right with the field edge.
55. In 100 metres pass through a gap in the hedge, hidden until you come up close to it, to cross a footbridge and carry on uphill across another field.
56. In 130 metres, in the top corner of the field, carry on up a path fenced off from another field.
57. In 170 metres, in the top corner of the field, pass through a kissing gate and carry on up a rougher grassy hillside, aiming for a house above.
58. In 120 metres pass through a kissing gate in front of the house and turn left on a stony track. *(There is a fine view of Shipbourne church from this point).*
59. In 50 metres, just beyond the house, turn right up steps. Continue with the directions below.

Wilmot Cottage to One Tree Hill (1.4km/0.9 miles)

60. In 40 metres the path turns left again to roughly contour the hill (climbing slightly).
61. Ignore ways off to keep straight on along this path. In 750 metres you pass two barns to the left, after which you come to a tarmac lane. Turn right uphill on this.
62. In 100 metres, 10 metres before the tarmac lane ends, turn sharp left up some steps, following a Greensand Way sign.
63. There is a steep climb for 100 metres or so, until the path levels out, with a wooded escarpment to the left.
*There are **bluebells** on the next section in late April and early May.*
64. In 250 metres notice three majestic beech trees growing together on the left - possibly a tree coppiced many eons

ago that has grown out, or maybe just three saplings that have spent decades competing with each other for light.

65. In 100 metres more you come to a stile and a National Trust sign for **One Tree Hill** (surely the most badly named hill in the country). Five metres beyond the stile veer left onto a level car-wide bridleway.
66. 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, the slopes to your left are covered in bluebells.
 - **If you miss this turning**, 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.
67. After 150 metres 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.

One Tree Hill to Knole House **(2.9km/1.8 miles)**

68. On the far side of the open space (*that is, following the line of the ridge and having just passed the bench on your right*), keep straight on along the waymarked Greensand Way as it slants left, slightly downhill.
69. In 200 metres ignore a path to the right at a footpath post, to keep on slightly downhill.
70. In 120 metres this brings you to a road. Turn left downhill on this.
71. In 70 metres fork right up the driveway of a house (Shepherd's Mead). In 25 metres turn right up the signposted Greensand Way along a fenced-in footpath.
72. There is a fine **bluebell** wood to the right for the whole next section in late April and early May. For a while a garden to the left and its hedge and fence block the view, but in 250 metres pleasant vistas to the south start to open up.
73. In another 300 metres you come to a junction with a bridleway climbing the hill from the left. Turn right on this and then in 8 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.
74. Carry on along the left-hand edge of the field along the line of the escarpment, and then in 120 metres, in its far corner, turns right along the far field edge.
75. Once on the far edge, in 100 metres the path **veers left into the wood** over an easily-missed stile.
76. Follow a clear path through the wood. In 200 metres you come to a road. Go straight across this and through the gate in the deer fence into **Knole Park**, and straight ahead on a grassy path.
77. In 100 metres go straight across a junction of tarmac drives.
78. You are now on a track that in 100 metres passes between two clumps of trees. Beyond the right-hand clump the land to the right opens out. **Here there you have a choice:**
 - **The easiest route** is to stay on the track you are on. It does down into a dip (where a track merges from the left) and up the other side, and eventually, in 500 metres, comes to a T-junction with a gravel track, slightly concealed by a line of trees that seem to block your way. Turn right on this track, emerging in 70 metres into an open space, on the far **left-hand** side of which you can see the stone garden wall of **Knole House**. (In summer this can appear like a line of bushes). Keep ahead on the track and in 120 metres you pass a house right and a track merges from the right. In another 80 metres you merge with a track coming from the house and veer left with it. Continue with the directions in paragraph 79 overleaf.
 - **A more scenic route** is to veer right off the track after the right-hand clump of trees. In 120 metres or so you come to a grassy path, running roughly parallel to the tarmac drive you have left. Follow this gently downhill for 200 metres, and then across a shallow dip and gently uphill for another 100 metres until you come to the edge of an open space, with a brick wall and a house surrounded by a wooden fence ahead. Turn left along the edge of the open space and in 100 metres more you come out into larger open space, with what looks like a line of trees ahead on its far side - actually

the stone garden wall of Knole House. Veer slightly right here on an earth and grass track which starts in front of a house to your right. In 80 metres this merges with a larger gravel track, with the Knole House garden wall now clearly visible 120 metres to your left. In 80 metres more merge with a track coming from the right and curve left with it. Continue with the directions in the next paragraph.

79. In 150 metres the stone wall of Knole House garden is to your left. Keep on down the track alongside the wall. In 400 metres you come to the entrance to the National Trust **Brewhouse Cafe** on your left.

Knole House to Sevenoaks station (2.1km/1.3 miles)

80. Carry on past the cafe entrance (or turn left if coming out of it) and cross the car park. Walk up the hill beyond to the cluster of trees at its top (*a group of seven trees: **not** the much larger clump 100 metres to the right*).
81. keep straight on towards three trees 70 metres away.
82. 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 200 metres.
- **If you can't follow the directions above**, 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 to go direct to the station without stopping for tea, or take the right fork to find the **Chequers** pub on the left or **Starbucks** on the right.
83. Otherwise, coming up the path from the pedestrian gate to Knole Park, in 200 metres there is a row of houses to your right and then a multistorey car park. In another 70 metres you are on a tarmac path between houses.
84. In another 100 metres cross a road with the entrance to the Waitrose car park left, and turn right for 20 metres and then left go up a brick-surfaced side road.

85. In 70 metres this brings you to the main shopping street of **Sevenoaks**. **Here you have a choice:**

- For **Starbucks** turn right when you first emerge onto the main shopping street to find the cafe on the right in 100 metres. After tea come out of the cafe, cross the road and go up the pedestrianised Bank Street on the far side. In 100 metres turn right downhill on a main road.
 - **If not stopping at Starbucks**, simply cross the shopping street when you first get to it. The **Chequers** pub is just to the left here, but to continue the walk keep to the right-hand side of the small piazza and up a pedestrian alleyway beyond, to come in 60 metres to a main road. Turn right downhill.
86. Either way carry on downhill on the main road to find **Sevenoaks station** in 1km at the bottom of the hill.