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Yalding to Sevenoaks via the Greensand Way

Length: 21.2km (13.2 miles)

Toughness: 5 out of 10: undulating throughout, but with gentle hill climbs

Maps: OS Landranger 188, OS Explorer 147 & 148

Features

This walk follows the Greensand Way all the way from Yalding to Sevenoaks. The route is fairly well waymarked, and so you may find that for whole sections you can dispense with these directions altogether. Note that some signposts can get overgrown by vegetation in summer, however, and at whatever time of year, the waymarking disappears for crucial sections.

In late April and early May the walk passes a series of bluebell woods, and also a couple of commercial apple orchards near Hill Hoath that blossom around the same time. Otherwise you follow the Greensand Way across undulating Kent farmland for the first half of the walk. There are no less than three lunch pubs on this section.

Later the way becomes hillier and the Greensand Way climbs up to the lovely moated manor house of Ightham Mote (pronounced "Eye-tam"), a National Trust property whose tea room can be accessed without paying the entrance fee. From there you embark on a particularly lovely section of the Greensand Way, which climbs slowly up the escarpment. The final stretch is across the deer park of Knole House, another fine National Trust property with a tea room.

Greensand, incidentally, is a type of sandstone, that forms a ridge to south of the North Downs and north of the Weald. Some of the greensand rocks actually do have a greenish tinge, though others are a more predictable brownish red. The soil produced is particularly suitable for growing fruit, which is why this part of Kent was a traditional area for growing apples and hops (for making beer), though none of the latter are in evidence now.

Transport

Yalding is on the Medway Valley line. Trains for this branch now start from **Tonbridge**, which is reached by trains from **Charing Cross** and **London Bridge**. That being said, it can actually be easier to change at **Paddock Wood** (next stop on the line from Tonbridge to Ashford), as the Yalding train leaves from the same platform as the London-originating trains there, whereas at Tonbridge you have to cross the footbridge. (This option is not shown in the online timetable,

however: it usually involves taking a train five minutes earlier from Charing Cross). Since the outward route passes through Sevenoaks, a day return to Yalding covers your return journey too.

Get the first train after **9am** from Charing Cross if you want to get to the Kentish Rifleman in time for lunch. If lunching at the Swan, a train an hour later would be fine, though you would then have most of the walk (15.5km or 9.6 miles) to do after lunch: there are plenty of further refreshment stops en route to sustain you, however.

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.

Lunch

There are three excellent pubs in the central section of this walk, with the last of them conveniently serving food all afternoon.

The Swan in West Peckham (01622 812 271), www.swan-on-the-green.co.uk, 5.7km (3.5 miles) into the walk, is festooned with plaudits from good pub guides, Les Routiers and even the Michelin guide; it also brews its own beer. That means it can get booked up for lunch, but on sunny days it seems happy to serve food at outside tables, or to customers sitting on the village green. Food is served from 12pm to 2pm, but it is open for drinks later: till 3pm Monday to Friday, 4pm Saturday and 5pm Sunday.

The Kentish Rifleman in Dunks Green (01732 810 727), 9.9km (6.1 miles) into the walk is a charming and characterful old pub with a menu of simple favourites given a new twist. Restored after a March 2007 fire, it has both cosy inside rooms and a pleasant garden (see www.thekentishrifleman.co.uk which has photos). It serves food from 12pm to 2.30pm Monday to Saturday and to 4pm on Sunday, but the bar is open all afternoon at weekends.

Should either of the above options fail you, it is only 2.1km (1.3 miles) further on from the Kentish Rifleman to **The Chaser Inn** in Shipbourne (01732 810 360) www.thechaser.co.uk, (which is thus 12km/7.5 miles from the start of the walk). This is also a very pleasant option for lunch – a large and elegant pub which has the advantage on sunny but cold days of having a covered internal courtyard, as well as some outside tables overlooking the church. The menu is inventive too, and - best of all for our purposes - **it serves food all afternoon**, every day, until 9.30 pm Monday to Saturday and 9pm on Sundays. It might also make a good tea stop, but it is worth noting that Ightham Mote and its National Trust tea room (see below) is only 1.5km (0.9 mile) further on at this point.

Tea

Though it is too close to The Chaser Inn (and maybe even The Kentish Rifleman), the self-service restaurant at the National Trust-run **Ightham Mote** (13.5km/8.4 miles into the walk) is a wonderful place to stop for tea, not just for its nice cakes, but because you then will not have to rush the next section of the walk, which is worth lingering over. The restaurant is open daily till 5pm (4pm from November to early February).

Otherwise, it is 5.6km (3.5 miles) further on from Ightham Mote to the **Brewhouse Cafe**, the National Trust tea room at **Knole House**, which is thus 19.1km (11.9 miles) into the walk. It is open till 5pm daily (4pm from November to early February).

Later options in Sevenoaks include the **Malabar** cafe, open till 6pm daily, and a **Caffe Nero** on the main street open till 6.30pm Monday to Saturday (5.30pm on Sunday). The **Chequers** is one of several Sevenoaks pubs.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Yalding station to St Michael's Church (3.7km/2.3 miles)

1. Coming off the train at Yalding, cross the footbridge to exit the station, and turn left on the main road beyond.
2. In 120 metres, where the road curves right, veer left off the road towards the river, passing through the gate to Hampstead Lock & Slipway and following the Greensand Way sign (but ignoring the sign pointing right, which is for the Greensand Way in the opposite direction).
3. In 20 metres turn left onto the riverside path, with a brick wall soon to your left.
4. In 50 metres the wall becomes concrete and in another 70 metres, at a fork, go left to leave the riverside on a path between green chainlink fences.
5. In 40 metres follow the path as it curves right along the railway line, and in 70 metres turn left over a stile to cross the railway line.
6. Go up the steps on the far side and over a stile, to veer half right across the field ahead.
7. In 300 metres, at far end of the field, cross a stile between a hedge left and a line of trees right and **turn left** along the edge of the next field, with a wire fence to your left, towards some houses.
8. In 200 metres, at the end of the field cross a stile and a road and carry on up a driveway to pass to the left of a white wood-sided house and emerge into a field. Keep on up the left-hand side of this.
9. At the top corner of the field cross a stile (not visible till you come to it). Turn right over the stile (that is, continue in the same direction as when you were coming up across the previous field) to cross an open field towards the corner of a wood in 100 metres.
10. Past the corner keep straight on, with the wood edge to your right (**bluebells** here in season).
11. In another 100 metres, at the far corner of the field, veer right up a track between two sections of wood to enter a large open field in another 50 metres.
12. Keep on directly up the centre of this field. In 400 metres, at its far end, enter the woods and follow a clear path through it, with a high wire fence to your left (**bluebells** here).
13. In 400 metres exit the wood and walk uphill with a wire fence to your right.
14. In 50 metres pass through a gate in a deer fence, cross a track, and then go through another deer fence gate. Carry on up a gravel drive between wire fences
15. In 300 metres more, at the top of a rise, near where the track curves left to a red brick cottage (and the left-hand fence veers left with it), **veer right off the track** and in 60 metres **pass through a gap in the trees** to go straight on into a lightly wooded area, ignoring a yellow arrow pointing right.
16. Follow this path for 100 metres to a lane and turn right on it.
17. In 250 metres, opposite the entrance to Royden Hall right (with a brick lodge next to it), turn left through a kissing gate following a Greensand Way arrow. Once through that gate turn right uphill, heading for the left-hand end of a black fence and the right-hand end of a line of tall trees.
18. In 80 metres carry on up a path with a wood fence left and the black metal fence right.
19. Follow this path which later turns left and right, and then pass through a kissing gate and across a stile into a field. Keep to the right-hand side of this and then in 150 metres, where the field edge veers right, veer left across the field towards the church.

St Michael's Church to West Peckham (2km/1.2 miles)

20. Pass through the churchyard keeping to the left of the church (with a fine panorama of the Medway Valley to the left) and then beyond it curve right up a grassy path to a stile in the far right-hand corner.
21. Cross this, descend some steps to a road and veer half right (not sharp right) along this, with an open field to the left and a bluebell wood to the right, following a Greensand Way sign.

22. In 180 metres ignore a signposted path to the right and carry on down the lane towards a main road.
23. In 130 metres **cross the main road with great care** and go over another stile and down a signposted bridleway (actually, an old tarmac road, but almost entirely taken over by nature now).
24. In 250 metres you come out onto another main road. Turn right along its verge for 40 metres and then **cross the road with care** to walk down a tarmac lane between houses.
25. In 60 metres, 20 metres beyond the last house on the right, ignore a car-wide gravel track downhill and instead veer right into an open field, following the Greensand Way arrow.
26. Walk along the left-hand edge of this field for 150 metres to find a somewhat hidden metal gate in its bottom right-hand corner.
27. Pass through this gate and cross a footbridge, and keep on uphill along the right-hand edge of a field.
28. In another 200 metres ignore a car-wide gap to the right, but veer left at this point, diagonally across the field, towards an ancient half-beam house on its far side (**Dukes Place**).
29. In 200 metres, at the corner of the field, turn right up a gravel track, and in 30 metres turn right up a concrete lane, passing Dukes Place on your left. In 100 metres turn left on a road.
30. In 250 metres, at the sign for **West Peckham Village**, keep straight on, ignoring Forge Lane to the right.
31. In 200 metres you are level with the church to your right, with the village green beyond. To the left here is a possible lunch stop, **The Swan**.
- West Peckham to Dunk's Green (4.2km/2.6 miles)**
32. Whether passing or coming out of the pub, veer slightly right across the green towards its far right-hand corner. Here pass through a black metal gate and carry on down a car-wide tarmac path with a hedge to the right.
33. In 250 metres, at a T-junction just before a white bungalow, go right and in 10 metres veer left through a metal kissing gate. Turn right to keep to the right-hand edge of a field, as it climbs uphill with a hedge to the right.
34. In 150 metres, at the top of the field, ignore a stile ahead and turn left along the top edge of the field.
35. In 100 metres, **70 metres before the end of the field**, exit the field by a kissing gate in the hedge to the right and carry on along a path between hedges/scrub.
36. In 100 metres this comes down to a road: curve left past a house and 20 metres beyond it turn right up a signposted footpath through a metal car-blocking barrier up a track.
37. Keep on this track, climbing gently. In 500 metres, where the track levels out and at the end of the large field to the right, ignore a double gated opening to the right, but 10 metres further on **veer right off the track** (passing a footpath sign which does not quite point the right way) into an orchard. Keep to the left-hand edge of this (ie parallel with the track) following a line of mini pylons.
38. In 300 metres you curve left to come to a junction with a track. The Greensand Way is to the right here (ie in the same direction as you were walking down the edge of the orchard) but a **suggested diversion** is to go straight on, directly downhill, on a grass path (or track) towards a mini-pylon pole 70 metres away, your direction 200 degrees.
- (Technically the right of way veers left beyond the pole and then merges with a path on the left-hand edge of the open space, to run down under scrub to the stone pillars of a formal gateway you see 120 metres ahead. But in April 2018 there was no signposting for this path, and the route in normal use seemed to be as described in the paragraph above.)*
39. Whatever, once you pass through stone pillars keep on down the track, passing the grand **Oxon Hoath** house on your left in 100 metres.
40. In another 150 metres exit through another set of stone pillars and turn right with the track. In 300 metres this brings out out past a lodge onto a road.
41. Go straight across the road and up a gravel track on the other side. **In 5 metres turn left up steps** to go

across a stile and follow a path parallel to the track, with an open field to your left.

42. Follow this path as it curves left downhill after 100 metres, and in another 80 metres comes to a stile. Cross this and turn right along a fenced path. In 100 metres cross a stile and turn right onto a road.
43. After 100 metres on this, level with "Artichoke Barn" to the right, turn left pass a decayed stile (somewhat overgrown in summer).
44. Walk right around the edge of the field beyond on a fenced-in path. After 300 metres of twists and turns this brings you out onto a fenced-in path between two fields. Carry on downhill on this.
45. In 80 metres ignore a stile to the right (which is the Greensand Way rejoining you). In another 20 metres turn right and left and across a stream into a wood.
46. Here ignore a path forking right, and instead fork left down under trees. In 60 metres curve left with the path alongside a stream and in another 60 metres turn right across the stream to head out across an open field towards a gap in its far left-hand corner.
47. In 120 metres pass through this gap and turn right up the field edge beyond.
48. In another 80 metres, at the top of the hill, pass through a gap and on along the right-hand edge of an orchard.
49. In 30 metres, 10 metres after a footpath post on the right, and where the tree boundary ends to the right, **veer left diagonally across the orchard** on an easily missed path, your direction 300 degrees.
50. In 120 metres you pass through a windbreak hedge and carry on across a field (once an orchard), heading for a tree corner in 100 metres marked by a footpath post.
51. Beyond the corner, keep on down the left-hand side of a small field. In 100 metres you come to a road, where you go left.
52. In 200 metres the road crosses a stream and in another 200 metres curves right uphill by three houses. In another 170 metres, at the top of the hill, you come to the **Kentish**

Rifleman pub on the left, another possible lunchstop.

Dunk's Green to Shipbourne **(2.1km/1.3 miles)**

53. Carrying on past the pub (or turning left as you come out of it) you come to a road T-junction where you go left.
54. In another 80 metres go right up a signposted footpath through a kissing gate ([!] apparently somewhat hard to find in summer, when its hidden by undergrowth), and on up the left-hand edge of a field.
55. In 70 metres cross a stile on the left-hand edge of the field and go diagonally down across the next field, your direction 250 degrees.
56. In 200 metres cross a stile into a wood. Ignore a path to the left and keep straight on up a path that crosses a stream and curves right uphill (a lovely **bluebell** wood here in season).
57. Ignoring ways off you come in 200 metres to the top of the hill and cross a stile. Carry straight on across an open field, aiming to the left of a line of trees on the horizon, your direction west.
58. In 200 metres cross a stile and the road beyond and keep on up a grassy strip to the left of the drive to **Fairlawne Home Farm**, passing through a gate in 40 metres.
59. In 170 metres more, level with the start of the farm complex, pass through a wooden gate and keep straight on.
60. Where the farm buildings end, veer right onto the drive passing a footpath post and keep on downhill on a track along the left-hand edge of a field.
61. In 200 metres, at the bottom of the dip, keep straight on up across an arable field.
62. In 200 metres more, where houses start to the left, keep straight on with gardens to your left.
63. In 60 metres, at the corner of the field, go left through a kissing gate and up a grassy path between house gardens for 70 metres to a road.
64. Turn right on the road and then follow it around to the left onto **Shipbourne Common**: keep straight on across it,

with the road to your left, heading towards the church.

- 65.** In 500 metres you come to a T-junction with a main road just in front of the church. The **Chaser Inn** is the the left of the church, the third of the possible lunch stops.
- The **bus stops** on the left and right just before you come to the main road are the ones for the 222 bus to Tonbridge and Borough Green: see **Transport** at the start of this document.

Shipbourne to Ightham Mote (1.5km/0.9 miles)

- 66.** To continue the walk, go up the track to enter the churchyard and fork right around the church on a sandy gravel path.
- 67.** Exit the churchyard at the far end through a kissing gate. **Just after the gate, turn right over a stile** hidden in the hedge, ignoring a path straight on and to the left.
- 68.** Keep to the right-hand edge of the green space beyond, heading downhill between newly planted trees.
- 69.** In 170 metres, in the far corner of the green space, cross a stile and in 15 metres another and carry on between fences.
- 70.** In 200 metres pass through a gate and carry on across a small field
- 71.** In 50 metres cross a stile in the far corner of the field and cross a track to carry on up a broad grassy strip on the left-hand edge of a field, with a wire fence to your right.
- 72.** Ignore a private path slanting left in 50 metres to keep on along the line of trees.
- 73.** In 200 metres more, at a field corner marked by a yellow post, turn right uphill with the fence towards a stile into the woods, also marked with a yellow post.
- 74.** In 80 metres cross this stile and carry on up a fenced path into the woods (**bluebells** at the start of it and later at the top of the hill). This takes you up over the hill and down the other side.
- 75.** In 300 metres cross a stile to leave the woods and keep to the right-hand edge of the field beyond.
- 76.** In 80 metres carry on into the next field and keep up its left-hand edge. In 120 metres you cross a stile and keep uphill on a road.
- 77.** In 100 metres you come to the brick pillared driveway to **Ightham Mote** on your right
- **If you do not want to stop at Ightham Mote** ignore this driveway, and stay on the road. In 60 metres turn left up a farm track, signposted Greensand Way and resume the directions at paragraph 81 below.
- 78.** **To stop for tea, or even just to quickly see the house** (the view from the outside is worth it even if you don't stop for tea), fork right through the pillars which brings you in 60 metres to the front of the house.
- 79.** For tea, 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** on your left, just by the entrance to the lavatories. You do not need to pay the house entrance fee to use the restaurant.
- 80.** After tea 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.

Ightham Mote to One Tree Hill (2.7km/1.7 miles)

- 81.** Follow the track past the farm and then 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 more or less levels out.
- 82.** 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, passing a fine display of **ramsons (wild garlic)** on the left and later right in late April or early May, before climbing again.
- 83.** In 500 metres the track passes a house on the right and 50 metres 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 roughly contour the hill (climbing slightly).

84. Ignore ways off to keep straight 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.
85. In 100 metres, 10 metres before the tarmac lane ends, turn sharp left up some steps, still following the Greensand Way signpost.
86. There is then a steep climb with a wooded escarpment to the left until in 80 metres the path levels out.
87. In another 80 metres or so you come to an area that was coppiced in 2017.
*Coppicing - cutting the trees down to the stump to encourage regrowth - looks drastic, but is an important way to regenerate the wood and encourage biodiversity. In particular it encourages the **bluebells**, which are a nice feature of the next section in late April and early May. (Just presently, however, it seems to be encouraging lots of brambles and foxgloves too...)*
88. In another 120 metres notice three majestic beech trees growing together on the left - possibly tree coppiced many eons ago that has grown out, or maybe just three saplings that have spent decades competing with each other for light.
89. In another 100 metres you come to a stile and a National Trust sign for **One Tree Hill** (surely the most badly named hill in the country). Beyond the stile veer left onto a level car-wide bridleway.
90. 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.

91. After 150 metres of 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)

92. On the far side of the open space (that is, if 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.
93. In 180 metres ignore a path to the right to keep on, slightly downhill.
94. In 100 metres this brings you to a road. Turn left downhill on this.
95. In 60 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.
96. There is a fine bluebell wood to the right for the whole next section in late April and early May. To the left to begin with there are a garden hedge and fence blocking views, but in 200 metres pleasant vistas to the south open up.
97. 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.
98. 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, turn right along the far field edge.
99. After 100 metres or so on this far edge the **path veers left into the wood** over an easily-missed stile.
100. Follow a clear path through the wood. In 200 metres you come to a road. Go straight across it through the gate in the deer fence into **Knole Park**. Once in the park keep straight on
101. In 100 metres, at a junction of tarmac drives, keep straight on.
102. 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 from a distance like a line of bushes). Keep ahead on the track and in 120 metres you are level with a house to the right. In 60 metres merge with a track from the right and curve left with it. In 150 metres the stone wall of Knole House garden is to your left. Continue with the directions in paragraph 101 below.
 - **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 250 metres until you come to the edge of a large open space, with a complex of buildings surrounded by a wooden fence to your right. Ahead of you on the far side of the open space you can see the stone garden wall of **Knole House**. (In summer this can appear from a distance like a line of bushes but cross the space a bit and you can see the wall). Aim for the right-hand end of this, to pick up a track going slightly downhill, with the wall of the garden to your left. Continue with the directions in the next paragraph.
- 103.** Keep on down the track alongside the stone 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)

- 104.** Carry on past the cafe entrance (or turn left if coming out of it) and cross the car park. Walk up the hill 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*).

- 105.** Once at the ancient trees, turn half left to head between three trees 70 metres away.
- 106.** Beyond these you should pick up a broad grassy path going downhill through the bracken, which crosses a tarmac drive in 100 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 to go direct to the station without stopping for tea, or take the right fork to find the Malabar Cafe on the left or Caffe Nero on the right.**
- 107.** Otherwise, coming up the path from the pedestrian gate to Knole Park, in 200 metres there is a building site to your right, and in another 80 metres you are on a paved path with the backs of houses to your right.
- 108.** 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 some parking spaces on the far side.
- 109.** In 70 metres this brings you to the main shopping street of **Sevenoaks**.
- For the **Malabar Cafe** cross the road. The cafe is on the right-hand side of the small piazza on the far side, just behind Lloyd's Bank. After tea turn **right** out of the cafe for 30 metres to come to a main road and turn right downhill.
 - For **Caffe Nero** 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.
- 110.** Either way carry on downhill on the main road to find **Sevenoaks station** in 1km at the bottom of the hill.