



Crockham Hill Common Chartwell Heights, Mariners Hill, Darent Valley

Distance: 6 km=4 miles

easy walking

Region: Kent

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Refreshments: Crockham Hill, Westerham or picnic

Map: Explorer 147 (Sevenoaks) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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Woodland, views, nature trails, river valley, bluebells in spring

In Brief

This crazy little looping walk takes in a variety of landscapes: the gorse hillside above Chartwell (with a wonderful yellow glow in spring); the dense but rather elusive bluebells on Crockham Hill (or Crockhamhill) Common; the stark heath by Goodley Stock; the sudden open verdant Darent valley. The area between Goodley Stock Road, Kent Hatch Road and Chartwell is an area of extensive wild forest with many unmapped paths and several surprises. The lack of local car parks means that most walkers see only a small section of the commons in passing and always retain a fleeting vivid impression. This walk takes some unexpected turns to find dry paths and the best of the natural scenery.



Since this is all natural woodland, there are no nettles and very little undergrowth. Boots were needed when the walk was done in March because of a few muddy patches, although these were nowhere near deep enough to spoil the walk in any way. It is a fine walk for your dog too. There is one spot where some creativity is needed because of a huge fallen tree (2016).


The walk begins in the car park at a bend in the Hosey Common Road, near Westerham, Kent, postcode **TN16 1PR**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 Take the path leading out of the back of the car park by a large wooden gate and follow the path uphill through a birch wood. In 120m, you reach a clear fork in the path. Take the **left** fork. The path follows a course through beech woods, with a drop on your left. In nearly 150m, you pass side paths with yellow arrows on both sides. Avoid these branch-offs and keep straight ahead on your original path. The path runs for another 200m through the woods, sometimes a little obscure as it skirts fallen trees. (There was also fallen debris strewn on the path after the storms of March 2016, throughout the walk, although this presented no obstacle.) Finally your path makes a definite **right** just before a large fallen tree and in 20m reaches a T-junction with another woodland path. This rather modest muddy path is in fact part of the Greensand Way (GW) long-distance footpath.
- 2 Turn **left** on the GW. Keep left, ignoring a path sharp right and some minor paths and go downhill for another 50m to a marker post, just before a steeper section. You may be aware of the car park of Chartwell down below. Do *not* descend any further but turn sharp **right** on an excellent level path, passing a small green National Trust (NT) notice. You are on one of the NT's landscaped walks and no doubt Sir Winston must have

known this path well, although visitors to Chartwell are completely unaware of it. In late spring, the gorse bushes show a vivid yellow. You have views to your left down to the house and wide views ahead across the Kentish Weald. (*For more information on Chartwell, see the other walk in this series, "Chart, Churchill and Quebec".*) Soon the Chartwell oasts can be seen. After 400m of pleasant walking, your path veers right into woods and begins to descend. The path comes down to a crosspaths. Ahead is a permissive path belonging to the Squerrys Estate, but this is not on your route.

-  **3** Turn **right** at the crosspaths on a bridleway gently uphill, still on the NT trail, also the *Octavia Hill* walk, named in honour of its founder. In late spring, you now have your first spread of bluebells, first on the left, then on the right. After nearly 200m, you meet a crossing path by a marker post. Turn **left** here, still on the NT and *Octavia Hill* walks. This path takes you out of the woods suddenly onto the open part of Mariners Hill with terrific views over the Weald and a bench from which to gaze out.



Mariners Hill, owned by the National Trust, was one of three hills overlooking the Weald which Octavia Hill saved from developers (the others being Toys Hill and Ide Hill).

- 4** Follow the path beside a wire fence, still with great views, until you reach another, rather chunky, seat. Immediately after the seat, turn **right** up six steps. (*The signposted route is left, right at a crossing path and across a meadow via two stiles; but, typical of these guides, you find an easier route.*) Turn **right** at the top of the steps and follow a path between two meadows, heading towards a new-fangled chalet-bungalow. Just before the path enters woodland ahead, turn **left**, staying by the edge of the meadow. In 150m, at the far corner, ignore a path on the left and keep straight ahead downhill through a bluebell wood. Go over a crossing path, down stone steps and **right** at the bottom to the Hosey Common Road.
- 5** Cross the road carefully to a signposted footpath on the other side. The path leads up into woodland and, in 100m, reaches a junction with a marker post: keep **left** here in the direction of the blue arrow. The path runs between mossy banks, with more bluebells in spring. You pass a line of tall beeches and a railing on your left. Finally, 350m from the last waymarker, you reach a shingle drive coming from a property on your left with an ornamental gate. Veer **right** on the drive, passing more properties, to meet the GW which joins you from the right just before a multiple signpost by a new bench seat.
- 6** Turn **right** next to the seat on a bridleway which immediately wheels left. Now turn **right** again on a straight stony uphill path, thus leaving the GW. (*The GW carries on straight ahead and is very muddy: your route will be much drier.*) In 130m you reach a 5-way junction with a marker post. Turn **left** on another wide path. (*Keeping straight on would lead you to Hunters Lodge and, bearing right, to the stile just before Crockham Hill House at section **9**, but you would miss the best part of this walk.*) In 25m, you come to a fork of two wide paths. Take the **right** fork. Your path winds through a rather bleak area of birch scrub of Goodley Stock. In 250m or so, your path reaches a cleared area used for forestry and a wide driveway leading to *Hunters Lodge*. Cross straight over the driveway onto an unmarked path directly opposite, being careful *not* to drift to the right where there are two other paths near the sign for *Hunters Lodge*. Your path now resumes its winding course

across the heath of stunted birch and gorse, heading for a house with red-brown tiles.

- 7 Immediately before the fence of the house, turn **right** on a track, leading to a small metal gate beside a kissing-gate (both unneeded). You immediately come to a fork of two wide forest paths. Take the **right** fork, the straighter, more level of the two paths. (The left fork, the official footpath, is a somewhat longer loop around Squerrys Park which few local people take.) This pleasant walk along a wooded valley ends in 600m at a long narrow meadow, part of Squerrys Park. [Apr 2017: now ploughed – keep to the right-hand edge.] Avoid the path to the right along the fringe of the wood which is very clammy and instead go straight ahead into the meadow, taking a well-used path near the right-hand edge. In 230m, curving right, you come to a 4-way crossing before two meadows. Ahead is the valley of the River Darent, much visited by other walks in this series (see *the Otford, Brasted and Westerham walks*). Beyond the river is the well-named dome-shaped Tower Wood.
- 8 Turn **right** at the crossing, over a stile beside a large metal gate, onto a wide footpath which runs close to the woods on your right, with more views to your left of the Darent valley. After 350m, you pass a redundant stile, after which your path runs down into the valley. It ends at a metal gate kissing-gate near the picturesque *Crockham House*¹ with its grade-II listed oast house. Go through the gate onto a wide track with a wooden fence on your left.
- 9 (Most walkers would turn left here on the wide track running beside the fence, which you could also do, but, to avoid some deep mud and, in spring, to get the best of the bluebells, you will find a much better route.) Turn **right** on the wide track and immediately **left** on a steep path uphill. You need to navigate carefully for this short stretch. Your path curves slightly left through yew trees. In only 70m, as the gradient gets a little easier, the path goes under a yew tree, overhanging like an arch. Go another 15-20m and look to your **left** for a narrow, very obscure path [jul 2018: next to an uprooted tree]. Take this path, curving right on a level course between more yews. At first you will be relying on an instinctive sense of direction through the trees but the path gets clearer as you go, soon being joined by another path coming down from the right. In late spring this is a little-known secret glade rich in bluebells. The path gradually descends and you can see the main wide track running parallel down on your left, before the path passes a junction on the left [jul 2018: stepping over a fallen tree] and ascends again. In another 250m, your path merges with the main track. Keep ahead along the track for another 100m. You will now see a grassy meadow and a wooden fence ahead in the distance. Now look to your left for a clear but unsigned footpath.
- 10 Turn sharp **left** on this path and follow it along a valley floor which is carpeted with bluebells in season [2018: going round a fallen tree in this section]. In 250m, at a post with a yellow arrow, fork **right** uphill, quickly reaching a few steps up to the Hosey Common Road. Cross the road carefully to a signposted footpath directly opposite. The path immediately veers left. In 100m, you reach a crossing path by a yellow arrow. Turn **left** here and follow the path quickly returning to the Hosey Common Road car park where the walk began.



¹ mentioned in a 2016 BBC *Panorama* programme relating to a “hot money” purchase in the 1980s



For end-of-walk refreshments, the nearby “Royal Oak” in Crockham Hill village [2018: “closed for a short period while completing the process of appointing a new tenant”], serves excellent home-cooked food and ales from Westerham Brewery. The town of Westerham also has a range of pubs and eateries.

Getting there

By car: to easiest approach is through **Crockham Hill**, especially if you are coming from the west side. Come off the M25 at Junction 6, turn **right** onto the A22 and **left** at a roundabout onto the A25 through Oxted and Limpsfield and, after some traffic lights, fork **right** onto the B269 Kent Hatch Road, signposted *Edenbridge*. As you come down into Crockham Hill village, turn **left** on the Hosey Common Road, signposted *Westerham* and *Chartwell*. The car park is in 1 mile=1½ km on a sharp right bend. *Be careful on exiting!*

If coming from the A25 at **Westerham**, take the turning at the east side of the town, signposted Edenbridge B2026. Follow the road (Hosey Hill or Hosey Common Road), avoiding three junctions on your left, for 1.4 miles=2.2 km. The car park is on a sharp left bend.

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