



Caterham and the North Downs Way

Distance: 9½ km=6 miles

easy walking with one short climb

Region: Surrey

Date written: 3-dec-2016

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Refreshments: Caterham

Map: Explorer 146 (Dorking) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Country town, woodland, hills, views

In Brief

A Surrey walks website must include the stretch of the North Downs that runs just south of Caterham where there are some glorious views and a fine high path. To make a circular walk, this route loops round through the town itself, to include the old hilltop village with its two churches. This being leafy Surrey, the route is open and green for the most part, and incorporates some local secrets. There is one long remote stretch on the North Downs Way (also part of the Pilgrims Way). But, apart from this, you will not be far from the innumerable houses, gardens and horse paddocks belonging to this typical commuter belt, which are perfectly attractive. Because one km of the Pilgrims Way is tarmac and because of the urban spread between the town centre and the Downs, there is more road walking than these walks usually require.



A stone's throw from the Pilgrims Way, there is a first-class historic country inn (to enquire at the *Harrow*, ring 01883-343-260). There are also numerous eating places in the town.



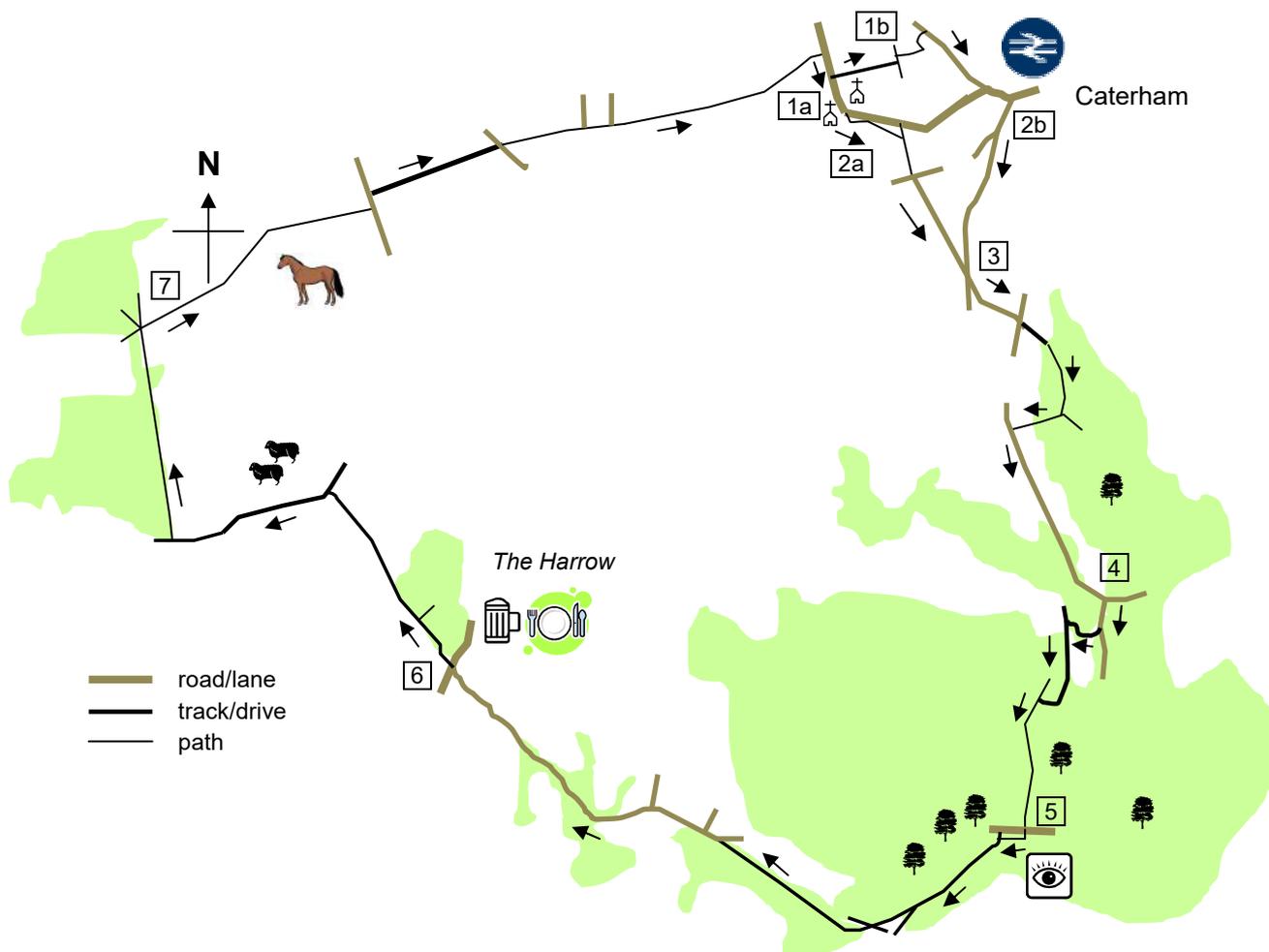
There are no nettles and very little undergrowth on this walk. Apart from one short stretch after Willey Park Farm, the paths, tracks and lanes used on this walk are all easy and firm underfoot. Because of the roads, this walk is not ideal for your dog.



The walk begins at **Caterham Railway Station** or in the car park of St Mary's Church, Caterham, www.w3w.co/ropes.nerve.energy, postcode **CR3 5RA**. The car park is for general use as well as for churchgoers. In case it is full, there is plenty of space on the roadside on many of the roads used in this walk, especially on the roads on the hilly section after the town centre. If you want to park by the *Harrow* pub, you can use a dirt strip on the route, just 50m from the pub. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Caterham began modestly as a small manor in Anglosaxon times and as a hill village, now known as “Caterham-on-the-Hill”. The part in the valley – the modern town – really only grew much later with the coming of the railway. The “Cater” part of the name possibly comes from an early British word similar to Welsh “cader” or “caer”, meaning “hill-fort”, as in “Cardiff”. (There was a medieval camp on the Downs by War Coppice road which you will pass.) The manor passed out of monastic possession to William Sackville (of that powerful Sussex-Kent family) in 1544 during the Dissolution. In 1609 it passed to the Evelyn family, including the famous diarist and horticulturist Sir John Evelyn.



If you are beginning this walk at **Caterham Station**, skip down this text to begin at Section **2b**.

Starting at the church

For walkers arriving by car, there is a **choice** of starting route. The **Skirting the Town** route avoids the town centre and is therefore a little shorter. The **Through the Town** route takes in the town centre with an opportunity to pick up groceries and meet the populace of this commuter town. You need to take this route if you are returning to the station.

Skirting the Town

- 1a Go out of the church car park beside the church and turn **left** on the main road downhill. Once round the corner, carefully look for a chance to cross the road to the right-hand side (they seem to take an agnostic view of the 30mph limit in Caterham which is lamentably lacking in crossings). Shortly on your right you will see a steel-tube fence.
- 2a Veer **right** through a gap in the fence and follow a path downhill across the grass, ignoring some steps on your right, passing a new bench on your left. Turn **right** down a long flight of steps and continue to cross a road. Go up Colburn Avenue on the other side and, at the top, cross straight over, athwart another road, and up Grange Road.

Now join the main walk at Section [3](#).

Through the Town

- 1b From the back of the church car park, take the main path straight ahead through the cemetery. At a T-junction, turn **left** and immediately **right**. At the bottom, turn **left** and, in 15m, go **right** down a flight of steps and turn **right** downhill on sunken Waller Lane. At the end, turn **left** into the town centre where you will find shops, refreshments and the **Railway Station**.

Starting at the Station

- 2b Coming out of the station into the main busy Station Avenue, turn **left**, cross the road by the pedestrian lights, **double back** on the other side for 80m and turn **left** on Harestone Valley Road, heading for the redbrick United Reformed Church. Fork **left** before this church on Harestone Hill. After ½ km, at a slanting junction, fork **left** uphill on Grange Road.
- 3 At the top of Grange Road, cross straight over Tupwood Lane onto a wide tarmac drive. At the end of the drive, go past a large metal gate and continue straight ahead. *For much of this section, you will notice the scent of wild garlic.* Follow this wide path through an area where extensive tree clearance was carried out in 2022-23. In 200m the path narrows and reaches a fork. Take the **right** fork which sweeps uphill between garden fences on both sides and finally leads up to the road. Turn **left** on the road, using the footway on the other side. After 200m, you lose the footway and the road becomes a quiet country lane. After another 300m, you reach a 3-way road junction by a triangle of grass and a *Surrey Hills* sign.
- 4 Turn **right** at the road junction, in the direction *Gatwick, Redhill* (for bikes!). Just before the first house on your right, turn **right** down a rough track, Upper Harestone, marked as a bridleway. In 100m, at a 3-way junction, turn sharp **left** onto a tarmac lane. In 250m follow the lane, which has now become a rough track, round a wide loop to the right. At the end of a garden fence, at a T-junction, turn **left** on a path beside the fence. The path widens as it enters woodland and then runs straight uphill to meet a road opposite a wide grassy space with sudden terrific views. *This is a favourite vantage point for visitors to the North Downs, as you see from the several seats; you have views left into the Kentish Weald, right to Reigate Hill and straight ahead to the South Downs in the distance, all the subject of other walks on this site.*



- 5 Cross the road, a rather deep ditch (careful!) and the grassy space and turn **right** along the edge. In the corner, take a path through yews and veer **left** onto a broader path. *This is the North Downs Way (NDW), a national trail running from Farnham to Dover; it coincides with the Pilgrims Way here; in the Middle Ages, the pilgrims were afraid of getting lost, so they planted yews along the route.* Stay on this fine level path, with steep woodland falling away on your left. In 300m, at a fork, take the **right** fork, slightly uphill, still signed as the NDW. In another 130m, you reach a 4-way junction with a fingerpost. Keep straight ahead by taking the **left** fork, a level path which drops down below the NDW path. After another ½ km or so of splendid woodland walking, you come out to a road, opposite a junction with Weald Way. Ignore a bridleway on the left here and keep straight on along the road, War Coppice Road. *It's inevitable that the Pilgrims Way was tarmacked over in certain sections and you have a 1-km trek to the next junction, the one compensation being a nice easy surface.* The road rises to a high point with more views and you pass the well-named Tower Farm and come to a T-junction with a major road. Your route is straight across, but first you will want to turn **right** on the road to reach the *Harrow* inn in a mere 50m.



The Harrow has stood here as a pilgrim's inn for four centuries. The pub was originally one cottage and an outhouse, later joined together. During WW2, the pub was the HQ of the local Home Guard. In the garden, a huge canopy protects a series of tables and seats, even when it's raining. Food is high-end restaurant standard and craft beers are on tap. Note that the inn also provides coffee (and presumably accompaniments).

- 6 Having crossed straight over the road at the T-junction (that is, turning **right** if you are coming back from the pub), follow the tarmac farm track downhill. At the bottom of the dip, avoid a signposted footpath on your right and stay on the track. *There are pleasant rolling sheep pastures on your right and a distant view of London.* You reach a junction with a tarmac lane at a 3-way fingerpost. Veer **left** on the lane, still on the NDW, and follow it past the buildings of Willey Park Farm, ignoring a junction on your left opposite a signpost. Your path leads you between open fields and hedgerows. In 350m after that last junction, look for a fingerpost and turn **right** on a narrower path. *[2019: don't miss this obscure and easily-overlooked turning! the fingerpost is on the left and set far back in the hedgerow, usually in a puddle; if you reach some cottages on your right, you've come too far and need to retrace your steps.]* Your path runs beside a horse pasture on your right and then beside a garden fence. A short stretch between fields again leads to a quite perfect 5-way fingerpost.



- 7 Take the **first** path on the **right**, as for *Caterham*, a tarmac drive known as Birchwood Lane. Keep straight on, passing houses and bungalows plus horse fields, until finally you reach a T-junction with a road. Turn **left** on the road for 30m and **right** on a private road called The Heath, signed as a footpath. Making use of the grass verge, you pass houses, some grand, some lowly, and come down to a road, Roffes Lane. Cross it to a steep concrete path opposite. *The green field on your right, a haven for horses, is the subject of a fierce campaign to thwart building of new houses (still prevailing in 2020).* At a tarmac lane, Wood Lane, continue ahead, with playing fields on your right. Keep direction along a footpath, re-joining a residential road and entering Queens Park, a large recreation ground. Keep to the right-hand edge, following a path past a tennis court and keeping **right** on a path between fences. At the end, turn **right** on the main road, quickly leading to the old church of St Lawrence and, on the other side, crossing carefully, St

Mary's where the walk began. Or, if you began this walk at **Caterham Station**, skip to near the top of this text and resume at Section **1b**.

The little church of St Lawrence was built in the 1100s of local stone and brick but it is now sadly dilapidated, overshadowed by trees and overgrown with ivy. Inside, it is possible to see the structure of the simple old church before it was extended. So many original features remain, from mouldings and chamfered arches, tracery and niches, but to list them all would be unkind since the church is usually locked. Outside there is a rare wooden grave and also a small labyrinth on the lawn, used for contemplation rather than bemusement.

Getting there

By car: Caterham is easily reached from Croydon and the A22 or the M25 motorway. If coming from the Croydon area, take the A22 through Purley as far as a large roundabout and take the third exit, signposted *Caterham*. At the roundabout with the clock tower in the centre of the town, turn **right** past Morrisons and the station, and follow the main road up the hill for nearly ½ mile to the church on the **right**.

If arriving on the M25, come off at the exit for A22 *Eastbourne, Godstone, Caterham* and turn in the direction of *Caterham*. Filter left after 1¼ miles for *Caterham*. At the roundabout with the clock tower in the centre of the town, turn **left** past Morrisons and the station, and follow the main road up the hill for nearly ½ mile to the church on the **right**.

The author arrived via Merstham and Rockshaw Road.

By train: begin at Caterham railway station: frequent trains from London Victoria, London Bridge and East Croydon, including Sunday. Check the timetables.

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