



Ockley and Leith Hill

Distance 11km=7 miles easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Surrey

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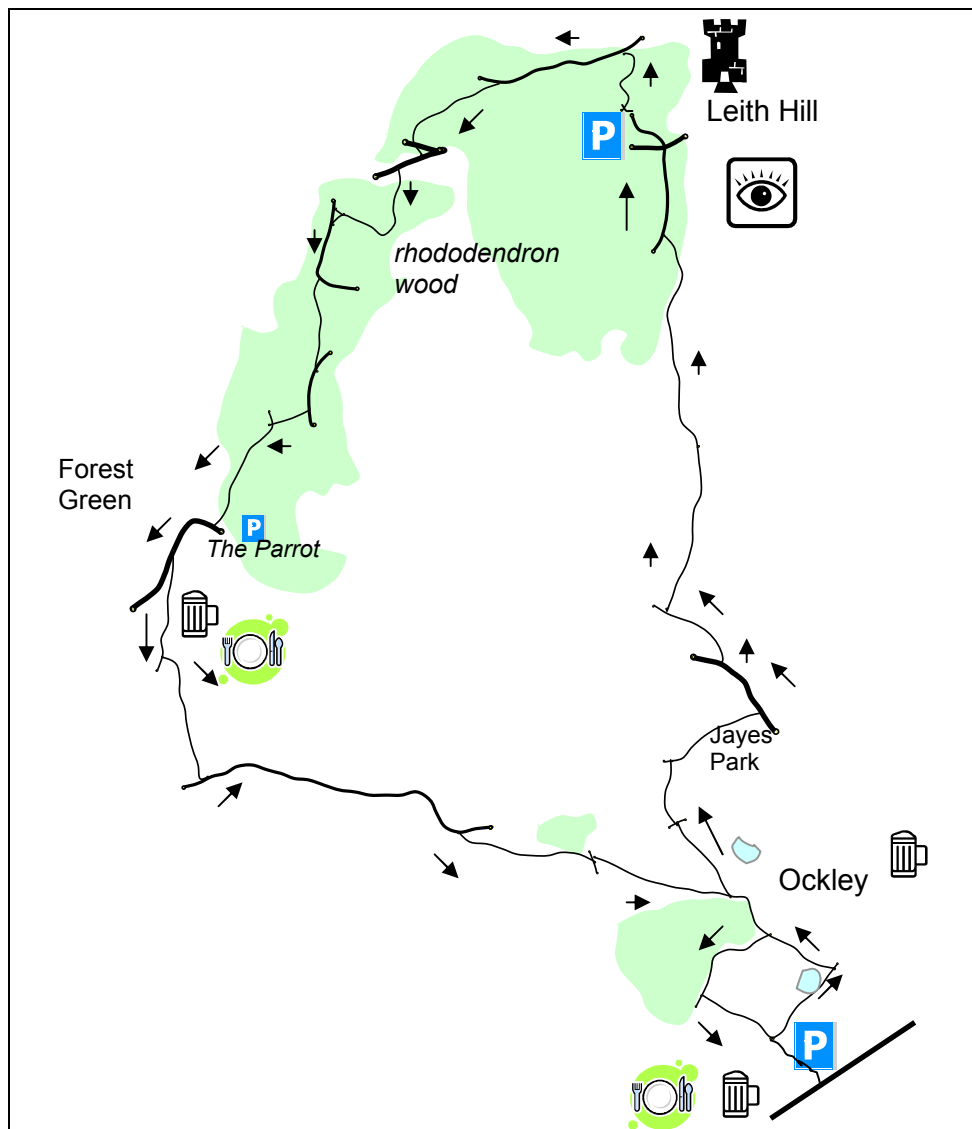
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Refreshments: Forest Green, Ockley

Map: Explorer 146 (Dorking)

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Lake, village, woodland, water, river, hills, heath



In Brief

An ascent of Leith Hill from the steeper south side! This excursion to the South East's highest spot is really a delightful stroll on green meadows past historic cottages with some well-made steps to assist you at the end of the ascent. Coming back, it calls in at the famous rhododendron wood and finds a perfect location for a refreshment break.



There are no nettles. Boots are recommended because of the large meadows. It seems fine for a small or medium-sized dog, with a few stiles near the end that don't have a gap.

This walk could be combined with the *Vann Lake* walk in this series, since both walks begin at the same location and both are relatively short.

The walk begins off the A29 in **Ockley**. If there is no cricket in progress, park in School Lane (postcode RH5 5TR, grid ref 146399) opposite the cricket pavilion or the school. Otherwise, there are some spaces in the close by the Cricketers Arms. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

Ockley is believed to be the same as Aclea, the site of the defeat of the Danes by the Saxon Ethelwulf in a great battle in 851, as recorded in the Saxon chronicle. William Camden puts it thus: "Aethelwolp the sonne of Egbert, who having beene professed in the holy orders and released by the Popes authority, when hee had possession of his fathers kingdome by right of inheritance, joined battaile with the Danes, fought with good successe, and slew all the valiantest men among them." It lies either side on Stane Street, the long straight Roman road to Noviomagus Reginorum (Chichester).

Leg 1: Ockley to Leith Hill

- 1 From School Lane, follow the wide track across the Green with the cricket pitch on your right. On your left as you go is an amazing series of period cottages, some four centuries old and oak beamed, others tile hung, others fantasy Victorian. Continue with the pond on your left and, after the pond, turn **left** over a bridge. There is another interesting cottage on your right. The path veers immediately **left** over the pasture away from the cottage, heading for the corner of a wood in the distance. You may need to hop over a very low sheep fence. As you approach the corner, Leith Hill and its tower will be visible, giving you sight of your first destination. At the corner of the wood, there is a 4-way fingerpost. Keep ahead, staying in the pasture next to the wood on your left.
- 2 Soon you reach a pond. Turn **left** before the pond, as indicated by the fingerpost. Continue ahead over a long wooden bridge ending in a stile and a signed fork in the path. Take the **right** fork, going up the large meadow with its solitary oaks. The neo-regency façade of Jayes Park dominates the horizon. Aim for the top left-hand corner. On reaching it, continue ahead on a concrete track which soon bears right towards farm buildings. At the circular wall end, veer **right** going between the various buildings of Jayes Park, with their Tudor-style chimneys, finials, walled gardens, eighteenth-century building and forge. The premises are now mainly let as business

units. Continue along the tarmac drive. (Soon, a small wooden gate on the left leads conveniently across the meadow to another wooden gate exactly opposite the next junction, thus cutting out the small section of road, but we must unfortunately assume it is not available to visitors.) Follow the drive to the B2126 Lake Road and turn **left**.

3 In 200m, just after a bend, turn **right** on a drive to *Sheep Green*. You pass a double cottage, 400-years old and hardly changed from its original condition. Just before a large barn, turn **right** on a track, heading for the hill. After passing a few field boundaries, you reach the corner of a small private woodland plantation. Go past the corner and veer **right** across the grass. The footpath bisects the angle between the track you were on (which leads to historic Hindhurst Farm) and the edge of the plantation. Head to the left of an electricity pole and to the right of an oak that juts out into the meadow. Go past the oak, where you meet a crossing path, and then gently uphill on the left-hand side of this large meadow. A glance back gives you a fine view over the Weald of Sussex to the South Downs. Finally, in the top corner, go over a stile by a National Trust sign for Leith Hill Place.

4 You are now in woodland where, in spring, bluebells are plentiful. The path leads over a bridge and to a fingerpost. Turn **right** here on a wide track. At the top, on a road by a house, turn **left** for just 40m and turn **right** into the Windy Gap car park. The easiest way for your final ascent really is by the steepest route straight ahead, made easy by the excellent steps recently repaired by the Young Farmers. There are 200 steps with a few level sections and finally you reach the summit and Leith Hill Tower.



Leith Hill is the highest point in the south-east corner of England at 294m = 965 feet. The tower was built in 1766 as a dwelling by Richard Hull of Leith Hill Place, who is buried under the tower. It was measured so as to raise the height to the symbolic 1000 feet. It later fell into disuse until 1864 when the side-tower staircase was built and it was fully restored by the National Trust in 1984. At weekends there are refreshments and nice homemade cakes. (This extends to Fridays from April to October.) You can ascend the tower where there is a view all round with miles of seeming wilderness.

Leg 2: Leith Hill to Forest Green

1 From the Tower, retrace your steps westwards and continue past a notice-board on the main wide track. About 200m from the Tower, you will see a wooden sign “footpath to car park”. Fork **left** onto a narrower path here. This path simply runs parallel to the main track and soon rejoins it. Stay on the main track, avoiding a small path opposite that has another “footpath to car park” sign. The track soon zigzags right-left. Before the zigzag, leave the track by forking **left** by an orange-topped post through a low barrier on a narrower path. This path eventually bends left, descends more steeply by a wall and comes down to a road near a road junction.

2 Cross the road, go down some steps and turn **right** on another road, following another orange-topped post. (You will be following these orange-tops for some distance, with some purple-tops at the end.) In about 100m, turn **left** at another orange-top into the Rhododendron Wood, proudly identified by its National Trust sign.

Leith Hill Rhododendron Wood was planted by Caroline, wife of Josiah Wedgwood of pottery fame who moved there in 1847. The wood is a blaze of colour in late spring. Their home Leith Hill Place, also home to their grandson, composer Ralph Vaughan Williams is nearby.

It is worth while extending the walk a little by taking in the side paths, left and right, that criss-cross the wood and give you a better chance to admire the blossoms and mature trees. Keep ahead downhill on a wide path. Soon the orange-top walk bends right by a farm gate. Continue on the grassy path with a small pond on the left. At a T-junction, turn **left**. Shortly, at another T-junction, turn **left** again on a path along the edge of the wood.

- 3 Eventually, at the bottom of the wood, the orange-top walk bends left. Leave it here by continuing directly ahead on a rougher path. The path joins a wide sandy track coming from the left at a purple-topped post. The track zigzags and then runs straight for 100m before coming to a junction. Ignore the purple arrow that forks left here and turn **right** with the main sandy track. In 50m, where the main track bends left, leave the track by continuing straight ahead on a wide grassy path. A minor path joins from the right. The path bends left, crosses a bridge over a picturesque and animated stream. It finally joins a wide sandy track coming from the left and immediately reaches a gate, noticeboard, small car park and road. Turn **right** on the road. Pass Collins Farm and shortly approach Forest Green. Cross the road to the left-hand grass verge and keep ahead till, in 100m, you reach the Parrot Inn.



The Parrot Inn, about 300 years old, is now a notable gastropub with a farm shop and a new butcher's hall attached. The pub has a number of real ales poured direct from casks on the counter. The restaurant is eclectic with a modern touch and it uses the home-grown produce in its dishes. Some walkers find the service a bit brusque.

Leg 3: Forest Green to Ockley

- 1 Continue from the *Parrot* along the grass verge. Just after a converted chapel, turn **left** at a fingerpost. Follow the track round to the right and continue past a bungalow. Go over an avoidable stile and continue along the edge of a field. At the next corner, go over a stile and along the left-hand side of a horse pasture. Cross another stile into the next meadow and go **left** over a stile into woodland. Ford the stream ahead and ascend the path that seems to follow the stream bed. At the top, turn **left** on a tarmac farm drive.
- 2 Follow this drive for all the way to historic Gosterwood Manor Farm. The drive bends right round a barn. Where it bends left again, leave it by taking a narrow footpath straight ahead. Go over a stile and along the right-hand side of a field. Turn **left** at the field corner and, in 30m, turn **right** over two planks and under a bar (easier than the stile) and then **left** to resume your direction in a narrow wood. Cross a drive and continue on a path and over a stile. Continue past a farm on a track, passing the attractive oak-beamed *Volvens Cottage*, and onwards to a road.
- 3 Cross the road onto a path via an avoidable stile. Keep to the right-hand side of the wood, eventually going over a stile and a wide bridge over a meandering stream. Next, turn half **right** at a fingerpost next to a super-fluous stile. Go diagonally across a large meadow, aiming for a stile in the

fence near the far corner. Once over the stile, if you started in Ockley, the next large meadow will be familiar as part of the outward route. Keep ahead over the stile-and-bridge past the lake on the left. Turn **right** at the corner of the field and follow the edge of the wood on the right until you reach a 4-way fingerpost.

- 4 The final return leg to Ockley is different. However, you can retrace the outward route if you like. Turn sharp **right** at the fingerpost. The bridleway goes through a metal gate and over a bridge and then curves right and left by the hedge bordering a meadow. When you reach the end of the first meadow, turn **left** over a stile into the meadow and keep ahead, aiming for the left-hand corner of a cemetery on your right which juts into the meadow. At the far end, go through a wooden gate on the **right** and turn **left** over a bridge across the stream, through two small iron gates. Bear **left** past houses which seem to be a converted church. You are now back beside the Green where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Ockley is on the main A29 (Bognor Road) between Dorking and Billingshurst.

By bus/train: bus Arriva 50 from Horsham station. Check the timetables. Ockley station is far from the village and does not appear to have a bus service.

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