



Okewood Hill Pub Walk

Church-in-the-Woods, Stane Street

Distance: 6 km=3¾ miles or 2¾ km=1¾ miles easy walking

Region: Surrey, W.Sussex

Date written: 20-apr-2015

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Refreshments: Okewood Hill

Map: Explorer 134 (Horsham) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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

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Pub, woodland, hidden church, meadows, ancient trackways

In Brief

This is a walk with a secret – although you could include the pub as a *second* secret as it is in one of those tucked-away Surrey villages where the picturesque old inn, made from two cottages, with its low beams, is a true delight. The *Punchbowl* in Okewood Hill is now a freehouse and it serves *Surrey Hills, Ringwood, Hophead, Hogs Back, Firebird and Carlow* amongst many other brews. The big success though has been the kitchen and the wide-ranging menu which seem to attract visitors from afar. So you may need to book before you come by ringing Becky on 01306-627249. Food is from a lengthy menu of standards, plus bar favourites. By all appearances, they have solved the problem of dining room space by taking over the bar as well. So if you just want a drink you have to greet the diners with a *bon appetit!* or a *Mahlzeit!* and be drawn into conversation possibly. There are tables outside, so that counts as *four* little eating areas. This inn also serves teas and proper coffee.



What about that *first* secret? Well, you probably know about the hidden *church-in-the-woods*, a gem of Surrey: see the potted history below.

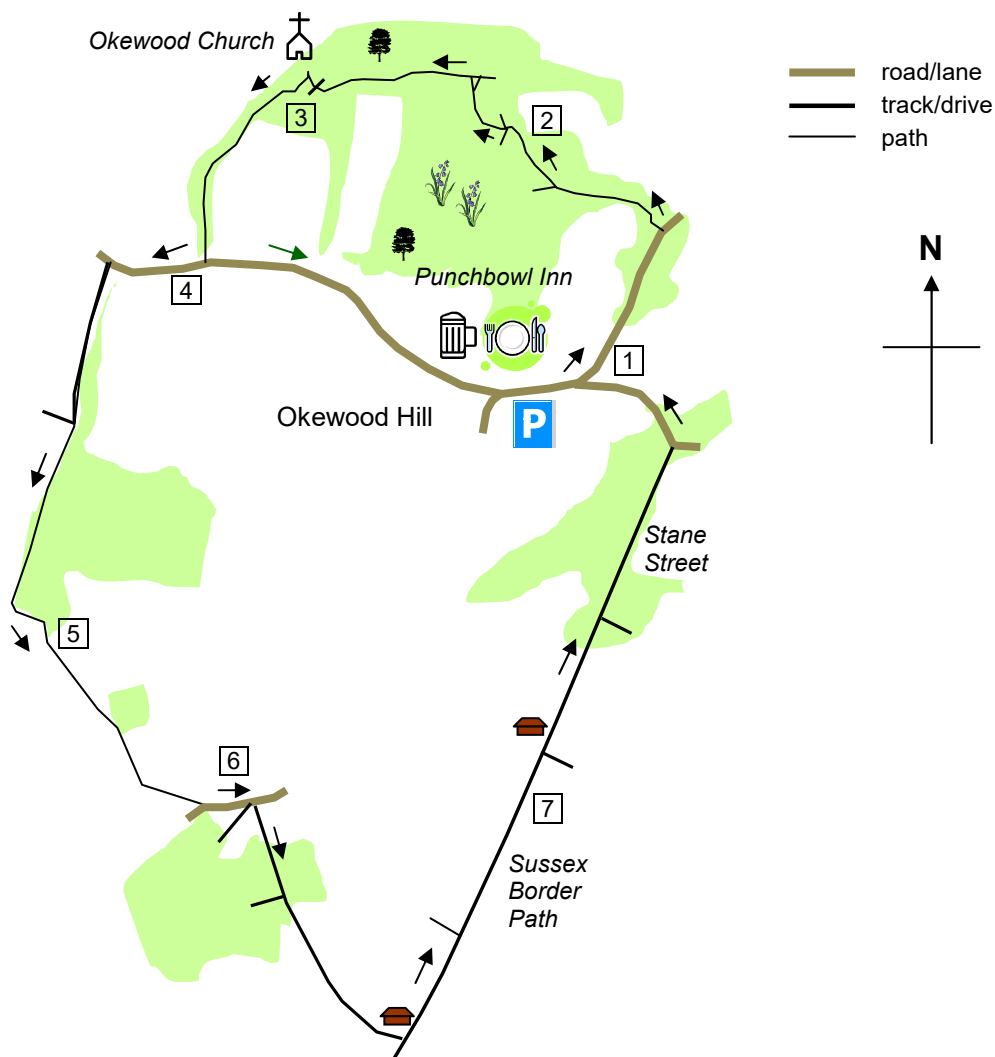
This walk is best in spring or summer, when the paths are dry. In spring especially, you have both the woodland flowers, such as bluebells, but also an amazing display of daffodils on Stane Street just before the end.



There were no nettles or brambles in April but in summer they may shoot up with a vengeance, especially in the farmland near the start. There is a long dry stretch on the lanes and the old Roman road, but the farm land and the woods can be muddy in parts, depending on the season, so it *may* be wise to wear boots, except in very dry conditions. Your dog will also enjoy this walk if he is not too large to be lifted over a couple of the stiles and he is welcome in the *Punchbowl*.

The walk begins in the lay-by opposite the **Punchbowl Inn at Okewood Hill**, Surrey (also often spelt Oakwoodhill), postcode **RH5 5PU**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1 With your back to the pub, turn **left** along the road and stay on it as it curves left, ignoring a minor right turn, passing various houses and cottages. Follow the road all the way down. Just before a bridge, turn **left** at a fingerpost on a footpath. **In winter the main path can be rather muddy – but your route will now skip most of it.** In 30m, take a narrow path up a bank on your right running parallel to the main path, but far drier and pleasanter. In spring, the floor will be carpeted by flowers, with bluebells prominent but also white wood anemones in profusion and little blue violets. Your path goes down into a valley, over a trickling stream where you follow the crazed meanderings of the stream, until until you reach a crossing path (your original path). Turn **right** on this path to come immediately to a fork [2017: the right fork is partially hidden due to fallen branches]. Take either fork, uphill, until after 100m you reach another distinct fork. Take the **right** fork, the much wider option, slightly uphill, with a yellow arrow on a post visible just ahead.
- 2 A meadow comes into view on your right. 150m after the fork, you come to a junction of paths by a post with yellow arrows. Keep **straight on** here, ignoring a footpath to the right of the post and avoiding a very narrow path that forks off to the left. This good wide path soon leads you past a brush-wood barrier designed to discourage riders and, 50m later, you come to a fork with a major path ahead. Keep **left** at the fork and turn **left** at the T-

junction. Follow this prominent path gradually uphill, passing a meadow on your left. In no time, you reach the *church-in-the-woods*. As you approach the church, bear **right** to go straight over a driveway and between two red-wood trees. Your route is now **sharp left** by a bench at the corner of the church on a tarmac path. But first you will want to bide a while to have a look at the church of St John the Baptist. [2015: there is some restoration work in progress around the west porch.]

“A gem in a perfect setting”, but Okewood church was not always hidden away in a forest of oak, beech and hazel. It was once on a major highway near Stane Street (the old Roman road which you follow soon). It is only in recent years with new main roads taking the traffic away that it has become one of the most isolated churches in the South East. It was built about 1220, reputedly on the site of a Roman villa where earlier a Druidic temple had stood. In 1431 a local man Edward de la Hale endowed the church generously. Legend has it that once, on a boar hunt with his son, the lad fell from his horse and was about to be gored by an enraged boar when, as if from Heaven, an arrow whizzed through the air and slew the animal. In 1547, the church was wrongly classified as a chantry chapel, i.e. one that says occasional masses for the dead rather than a proper church, and was seized along with the monasteries during the reign of Henry VIII. Restored by petition and decree, it later became a full parish church in 1853. Inside are many items of interest, including the de la Hale Brass showing a man-at-arms with the badge of the House of Lancaster, some wall paintings – survivors from a much larger set – and some ancient glass in the lancet windows.



- 3 Having taken that sharp left turn, passing a large mourning angel on your right, head for a small redbrick building which serves as a church hall. Just before another wooden bench, turn **right** on a very narrow path, through what remains of an old kissing-gate, following a yellow arrow. A meadow comes into view on your right and your path widens. It now goes along the right-hand side of a meadow. As you near huts belonging to Chapel House Farm, ignore a private gate on your right and stay in the meadow. Soon you are walking parallel to a tarmac drive on your right. Finally, at the top, a small wooden gate takes you out to a road. *Behind you is a good view of Leith Hill with its Tower (see the many other walks in this series).*

Decision point. For a very short walk of 2¾ km=1¾ miles, turn **left** on the road for 750m, passing the historic houses of Okewood Hill such as *Upper Sent*, keeping **left** at a junction, to return to the pub.

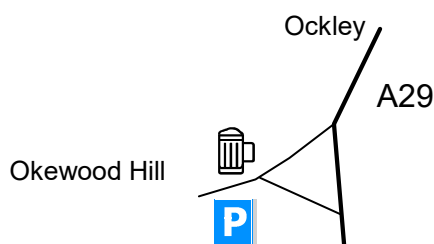
- 4 Turn **right** on the road. In 200m, just before a house, go **left** at a fingerpost on a bridleway signed *Rosehill Farm*. Follow the track through various farm clutter and continue along the left-hand side of a long rough meadow. Your path goes through a strip of hawthorn and along the left-hand side of the next field. At the corner, ignore a bridleway right and continue ahead on a footpath. You pass woodland on your left. At the corner, by a fingerpost, turn **left**. The path curves round left rather haphazardly to meet a wooden fence. Cross over the stile, which has an insulated electric wire, and follow the path around to the **left**.
- 5 Cross this awkward stile carefully. [Aug 2017: this stile is a problem if you have a large dog or if you have short legs, because of the wire fence and the badly-insulated barbed wire at the top; please be very careful !] Your path now zigzags a fraction right-left to go up the left-hand side of a large meadow,

past a somewhat smaller horse pasture on your left. When you pass the end of the horse pasture, go over a wide concrete bridge and a stile and straight into another meadow. Cross the meadow diagonally **left**, heading for a wide exit gate on the other side. Here, go over another stile [June 2015: also awkward for a dog] to a road.

- 6 Turn **left** on the road and, in nearly 100m, go **right** by a red-tiled gatehouse. Avoid the first footpath sharp right by *Tanglewood* and take the **second** path, a tarmac lane, signed as a bridleway to *Monks Farm and Honeybush Farm*. You are now on part of the *Sussex Border Path (SBP)*, a 150-mile long-distance path. At a 3-way fingerpost, ignore a bridleway on the right and continue ahead beside a rather swanky wooden gate for Monks Farm. You are now entering *West Sussex for a short section*. Follow the tarmac drive. When you reach the big red-tiled farmhouse, turn **left** at a T-junction on a byway. *This long straight course is the Roman road Stane Street, running from London to Chichester*. After a small gate, ignore a footpath on the left and stay on the nice wide dry path, going gently uphill.
- 7 A more robust gate leads to a farm drive at a bend: keep straight on, passing a house *Ruckmans* on the left, with great views right. The drive passes some older buildings and descends through a beautiful forest of holly and yew. Ignore a footpath right, thus leaving the SBP, now back in Surrey. *In spring, the woods are full of daffodils, and the banks of celandine and primroses*. You pass along an avenue of trees, which leads you finally through open wooden gates to a road. Turn **left** on the road and, at a junction, turn **left** back to the *Punchbowl Inn* where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Okewood Hill is signposted off the A29 (Bognor Road), just over 1 mile south of Ockley, about 8 miles south of Dorking. (On the sign it has its alternate spelling *Oakwoodhill*.) The pub is reached in half a mile. Park in the lay-by opposite.



By bus: bus E573 from Horsham? Check the timetables (or ring the pub).

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