



## Pilgrims Way & Mole Villages

Distance 20½ km (13 miles), moderate walking

Region: Surrey

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Refreshments: Brockham, Skimmington

Map: Explorer 146 (Dorking)

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*High hills, villages, river, pubs*

### In Brief

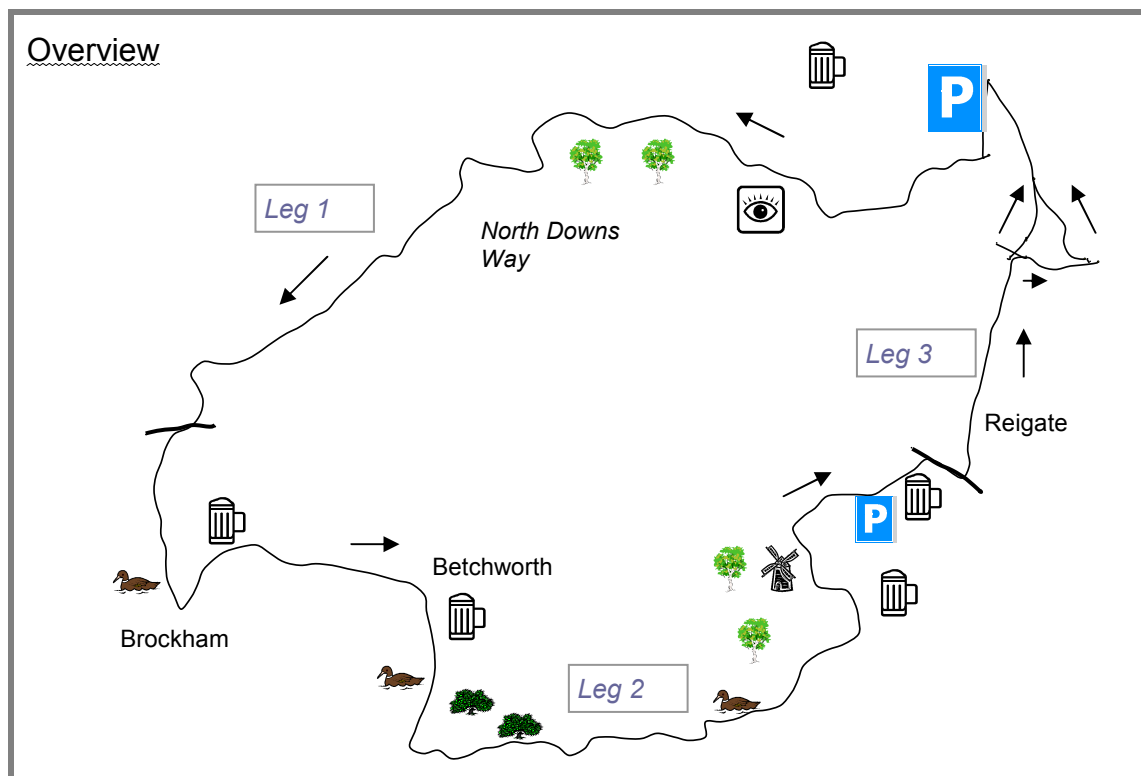
This is an invigorating walk in two parts: the hills of the North Downs with fine views and then the villages, oaks and gentle meanders of the River Mole.



There is a steep section at the very end of this walk, but good walking shoes are adequate. There is one short stretch with nettles, but it can easily be bypassed. Dogs seem to be welcome.




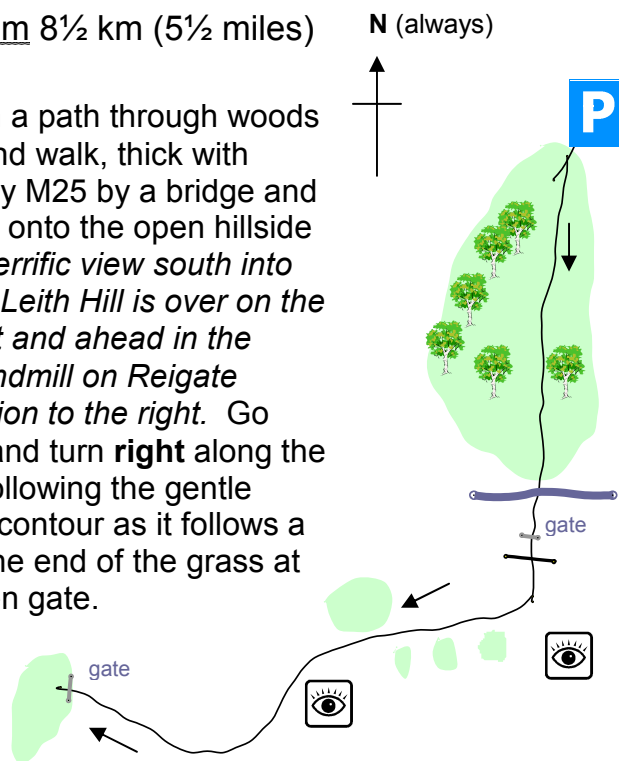
The walk begins at the National Trust **Margery Wood** car park off the A217 near the M25. For more details and for alternative transport and starting points see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



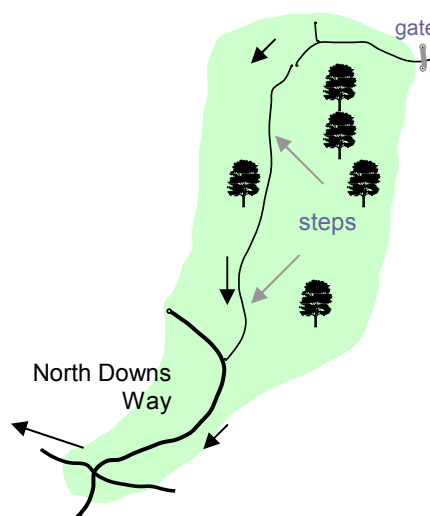
## The Walk

### Leg 1: Margery Wood to Brockham 8½ km (5½ miles)

- 1  Begin at the back of the car park on a path through woods by the noticeboard. After a woodland walk, thick with bluebells in May, you cross the noisy M25 by a bridge and immediately emerge through a gate onto the open hillside of Colley Hill. *At once you have a terrific view south into Sussex and west to the other hills. Leith Hill is over on the right, the town of Reigate on the left and ahead in the distance the South Downs. The windmill on Reigate Heath is visible in the valley, a fraction to the right.* Go forward to the very edge of the hill and turn **right** along the grass, staying on the sharp edge, following the gentle downward slope but staying on the contour as it follows a wide curve. Eventually you reach the end of the grass at a tree line and reach a small wooden gate.



- 2 Go through the gate and take a steeply descending path through the woods using a long series of steps. *Much care is needed, especially if the surface is damp.* Eventually you reach a track at a U-bend. This is the North Downs Way (NDW) which soon coincides in this area with the ancient Pilgrims Way. You will be following this route for some distance. Follow the track downhill. At the bottom, at a fingerpost, turn **right** through railings, following the sign for the NDW.



- 3 **See map overleaf.** Follow the NDW first through woods, then across open hillside, then through thorn bushes. You pass some steps on the right at a crossing path. At the next fingerpost, turn **left** as indicated for the NDW, follow it through more bushy terrain and finally go down a few steps and turn **right** at a T-junction. Half way up a gentle rise, take a **left** fork with the NDW (don't miss this!). The NDW now takes you **left** at a T-junction, between fields, through a gate into a pleasant grassy meadow and **right** over a stile. Follow this pleasant woodland path until you reach a road. Turn **left** on the road.



The Borough Bridge on the left that carries the road is a single carriageway bridge, built in 1737 by Richard and Thomas Skilton and strengthened in 1991 by Surrey County Council. This is a noted site for pipistrelle bats which swoop over the river at dusk.

Continue into Brockham village green where a fine vista opens out.

Brockham, originally named 'Brook Ham', was a stop-off for travellers between Dorking and Reigate, and stayed a small hamlet for many years, occupied first by farm workers and servants to the many large houses in the area (Wonham Manor, Betchworth House, Betchworth Castle and the Deepdene Estate in Dorking), then by workers for the nearby limeworks and brickworks. The new roads spurred growth in the 1920s and, despite the 1980s housing boom, Brockham has retained its small rural community charm.

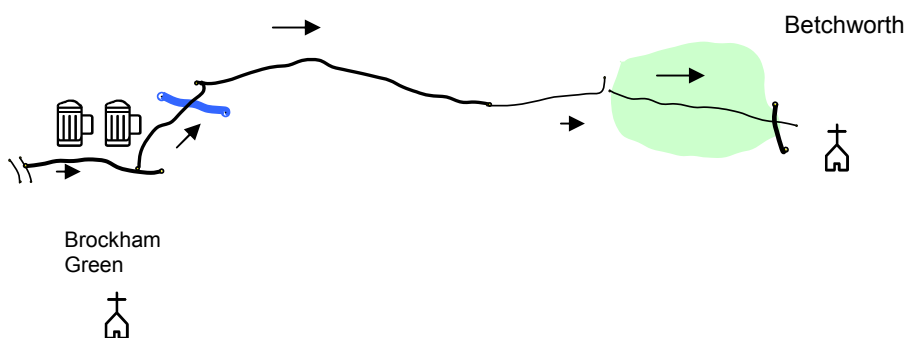
Brockham church is relatively new, the architect being Benjamin Ferris, an associate of Augustus Pugin who designed the Houses of Parliament.

A circuit of the Green will show you the many different architectural styles that were installed by the prosperous settlers at various stages, most made from local materials. The village surrounds the Green with its two pubs (the Royal Oak and the Duke's Head – both Friary) and its local shop. It is bordered to the north by the River Mole. Brockham is famous throughout the South East for its annual Guy Fawkes Night.



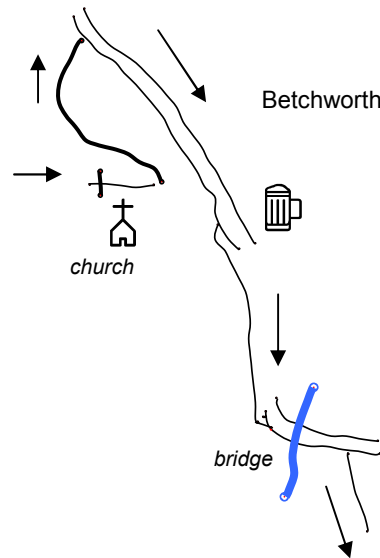
## Leg 2: Brockham to Skimmington 7 km (4 miles)

- 1 Take the lane past the pubs. On the right is The Pound where grazing animals were impounded pending a fine on the owners, as only poultry were allowed to browse the Green. Immediately after a white gate, turn **left** and go over a small brick bridge and then a bridge over the Mole. Follow the track round and, at a fingerpost, veer **right** on a path above the river, going past houses, including an aviary and a 1960s-style box-shaped house. Follow the path through a metal gate and beside fields. At a field corner by a fingerpost, go straight ahead on an enclosed path and over a drive, arriving at St Michael's Church Betchworth.

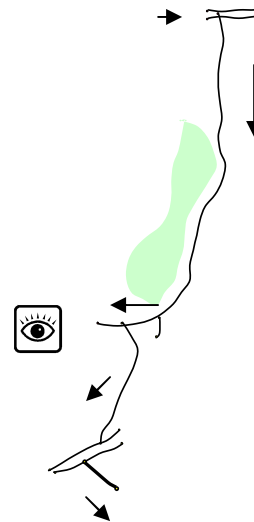


Betchworth church dates back to at least Norman times. Some lancet windows, pillars and arcades are 13<sup>th</sup> century. It once served Brockham as well as Betchworth, hence its size. Inside are many fascinating and marvellous artefacts, which accounts for the church usually being closed. Betchworth itself is an L-shaped cluster of houses, the south part extending round the church with Betchworth House and the River Mole at the far end. Betchworth Castle (not on this walk) is further west, a romantic ruin.

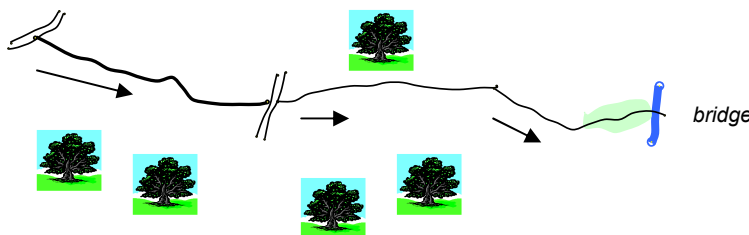
- 2 Take the path through the Lychgate to the **left** of the church. After passing several interesting cottages (which you would have missed without this small diversion), turn **right** at the main road opposite the fine *Old House*, and pass *The Dolphin*, a Youngs pub which welcomes walkers and dogs. Take the footpath running close to the wall on the right – it begins by the entrance to the churchyard. *This is the wall of Betchworth House, a large estate with a garden landscaped by Humphrey Repton.* Soon you cross the Mole via Betchworth Bridge which dates from 1842. Immediately turn **right** through a swing-gate on a path across fields.



- 3 The path enters woodland where you go over a bridge and comes to a meadow with fine oak trees. Keep to the right-hand edge, ignoring a fingerpost and reach a fine viewpoint where you have sight of the River Mole and the North Downs beyond. Here, at a fingerpost, turn sharp **left** to another fingerpost at the edge of the meadow, where you turn **right**, parallel to a road. (Locals tend to cut this corner.) Just before a clump of trees, exit **left** via a stile, turn **right** on the road for 30m, then **left** over a stile onto a track.



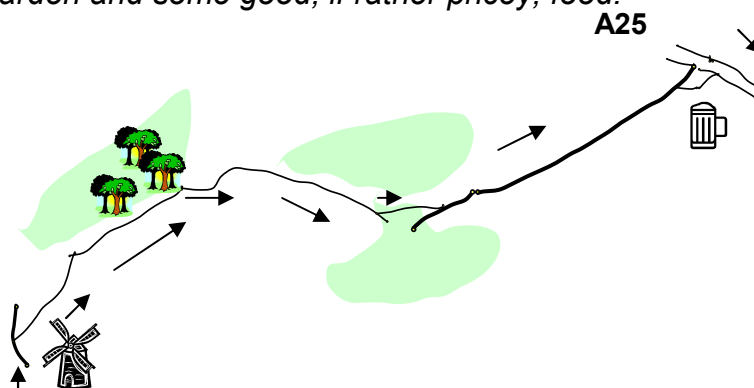
- 4 You are now in a land of oak trees. They line all the fields like guardsmen as far as you can see and give this area a memorable atmosphere. Cross a road and continue on a path the other side across a grassy meadow. Go over a double stile in the corner (one of them can be squeezed past) and continue on the left-hand side of the meadow. After another oak-lined field, look out for a fingerpost indicating that you have to veer **right** across the centre of the next field. Just before the far edge of the field, the path veers **left** to an unneeded stile into a small strip of woodland. At the end of the woodland, cross the Mole via a concrete bridge.



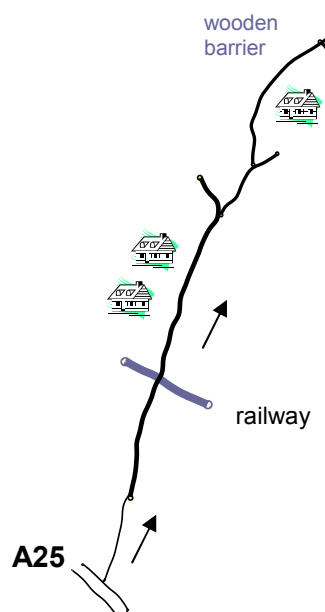


*Reigate Windmill is a post mill which is used as a chapel, probably the only consecrated windmill in the country. (So that couple who said they got married in a windmill were not pulling your leg after all!) It was built around 1765, bought in 1900 by the golf club and is now owned by Reigate Borough Council.*

- 2 In the middle distance, you can see a long wide green open space ahead with a path running along its left-hand side by the tree-line. You need to go down to take this path and you have a choice of various small golfers' paths. If you keep straight ahead, you can go *very carefully* round the edge of two rectangular golf tees, down some steps and over a junction to join the path. When you reach a corner under oak trees where the wide green space curves to the left to distant pines, keep straight ahead, crossing the green space and joining a wide path on the other side running between more oaks. The path curves right and goes over a heather-strewn clearing, crossing several paths. It then runs past a bench and several large conifers. Soon a car park comes into view (an alternative starting point). Just before the car park, turn **left**, go through trees and veer **left** to join a track that runs along the right of the cricket green towards a line of houses. On nearing the A25 main road, fork **right** to a minor cul-de-sac and turn **right** on the A25, past the Black Horse pub. *The Black Horse has a pleasant garden and some good, if rather pricey, food.*



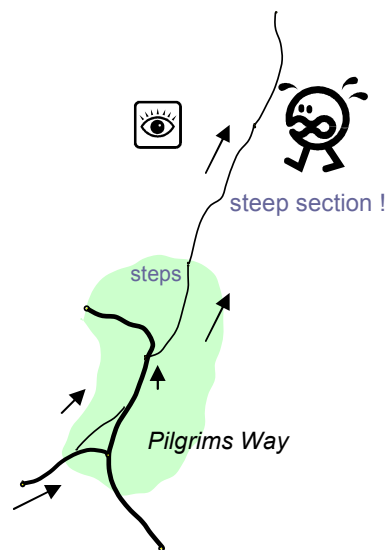
- 3 Cross the busy main A25 road at any opportunity. In nearly 200m, opposite the last of the modern bungalows (no. 71), turn **left** on a narrow signposted footpath. The footpath reaches a residential road (Coppice Lane), which goes over a railway bridge and past properties. Eventually, where the road bends left, leave it by continuing ahead on a narrower lane uphill. At the entry to a private drive, fork **left** on a stony path between railings. The path goes past houses on the right and through a wooden barrier. *You must have been aware for some time of the steep slope of Colley Hill ahead and have been wondering how you would get up there. You have a choice for the return stretch.*



#### 4-1 Short, steep and a bit crazy

*This route is steep, although you can do it with dignity provided you are fit and don't have dodgy knees. It is the most direct route and has the advantage of a short ascent.*

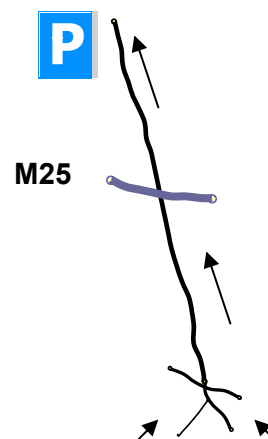
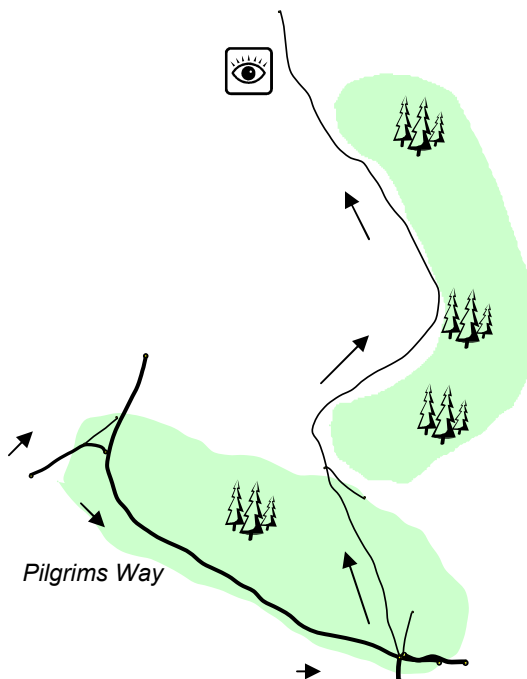
Keep straight on after the barrier, ignoring the wide track right. You join a wide path coming from the right (the Pilgrims Way). In 35m, fork **right** on a narrow path. The path goes over a crossing path and up some steps. Go over a stile into the green slope of the meadow. There is a steep path directly ahead. Previous walkers have dug left-right footholds into the chalk. A *favourite dodge is to pause and turn round every few metres and say you have to admire the wonderful view. (Indeed, the view really is a fine one.)* At the top, pause again to take in the view and continue directly over to a fence and a fingerpost.



#### 4-2 Longer and shallower

*This is the orthodox route. The climb is longer but not quite so tough.*

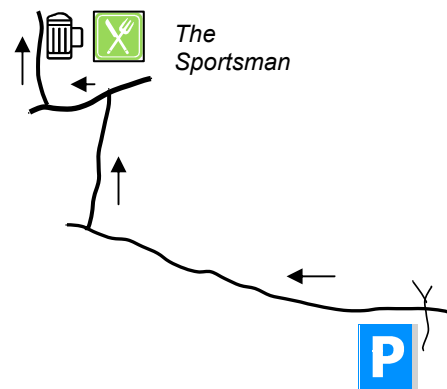
After the barrier, turn **right** and join the Pilgrims Way coming from the left. Just before the track becomes surfaced with a residential road on the right, look for a 3-way fingerpost on the left. (There is in fact a *third way* to the top, even easier than this one: stay on the tarmac road, keep ahead where it curves right and turn sharp **left** between white metal posts. The path leads upwards along a fence and near the top meets the route described here.) Turn **left** at the fingerpost, go up steps and fork **left** on a chalky path. The path winds steeply up the hill with fine views. Near the top, you pass a commemorative pyramid and meet a track coming up from the right (the '*third way*' above). Go through a gate onto the open hillside and ignore steps on the right. The path curves left to the top of the hill towards a fence and a fingerpost on the other side.



5 Continue to the fence and fingerpost. Go through the gate in the fence and follow the drive. The drive crosses the M25 by a bridge and takes you back to the car park.

## Refreshments in Mogador

For a final refreshment stop, if your legs have a little strength remaining, the *Sportsman* at Mogador, one of the great pubs of the region, is easy to reach from the Margery car park (800m or ½ mile). Exit the car park and turn sharp **left** on a bridleway beside a meadow with the car park on your left. Eventually you reach a lane beside *Laurel Cottage*. Turn **right** here. At the end, turn **left** on a road. The *Sportsman* is down a lane, next on the **right**.



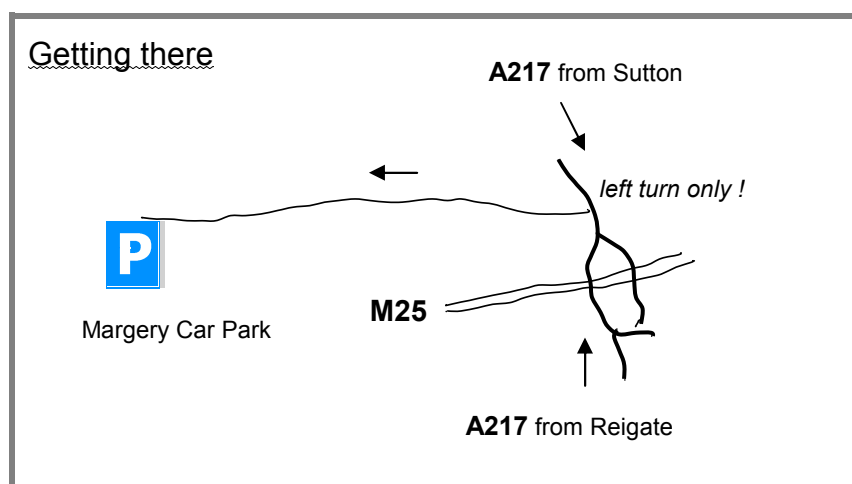
*In a peaceful site just on the edge of Walton Heath, dating from 1532, the Sportsman was once a hunting stop-off for the royal family. It has recently been thoughtfully renovated. It is famous for its out-of-doors atmosphere which is so welcoming for walkers, horse riders, cyclists and families. The beer too is good and includes the delicious Otter brew and Sharp's Doom Bar.*

## Getting there

By car: the **Margery Wood** car park is accessed from the A217 (Reigate-Sutton road). It is the **first** turning left, only about 100m, going **north** from the M25 roundabout. To access it from the M25, turn onto the A217 and take the first small road **left**. If coming from the Sutton direction, you need to go all the way round the roundabout and back on the A217 for 100m. For the car park, go as far as you can (about 1km) until the tarmac finishes.

An alternative car park is the one on Reigate Heath. The walk would miss Margery Wood however.

By train: begin at Reigate or Betchworth station from where the walk is easily accessible.



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