



Pilgrims Way and Mole Villages

Distance: 20 km=12½ miles moderate walking with long easy stretches

Region: Surrey

Date written: 15-may-2010

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Refreshments: Brockham, Skimmington

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

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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.

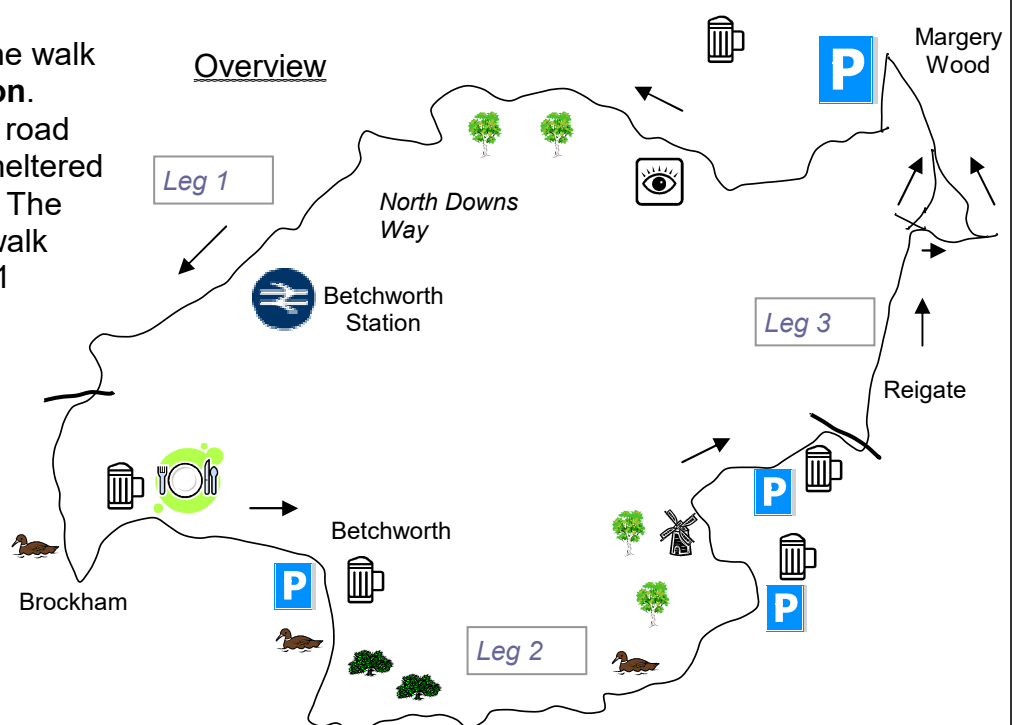


There is a steep section at the very end of this walk. Good walking shoes are adequate in dry conditions. This is a fairly dry walk but when it's wet you may find some mud in patches near the Mole crossings. There are several stretches with nettles, not all easily bypassed. Small-to-medium dogs are welcome.

The walk begins at the National Trust **Margery Wood** car park off the A217 near the M25, nearest **postcode KT20 7BD**, low cost parking by *debit card*. For more details and for alternative transport and starting points see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

You can also begin the walk at **Betchworth Station**.

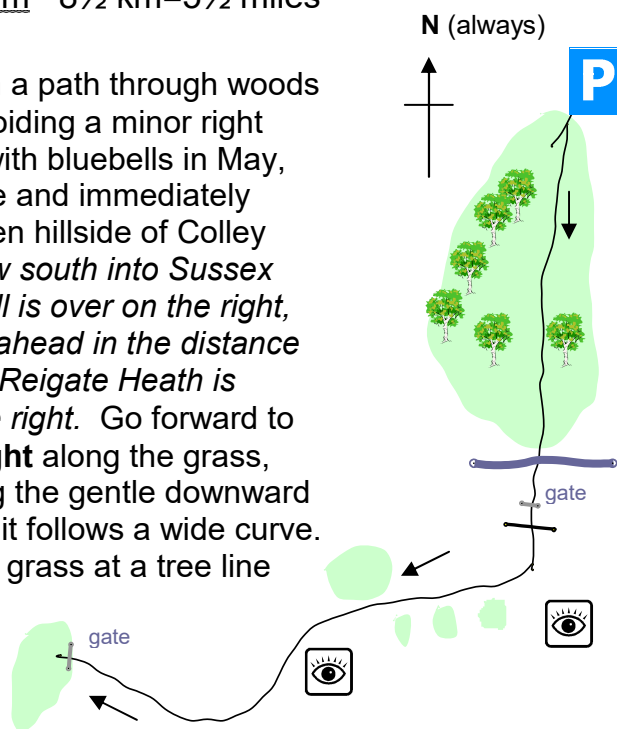
Turn **left** up the main road for 300m using the sheltered footway, turn **left** into The Combe and join the walk near the start of Leg 1 section **4**.



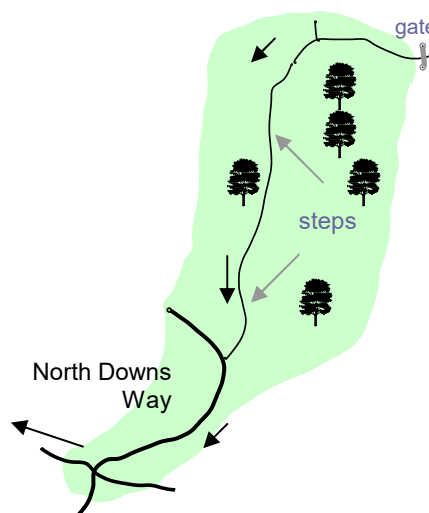
The Walk

Leg 1: Margery Wood to Brockham 8½ km=5½ miles

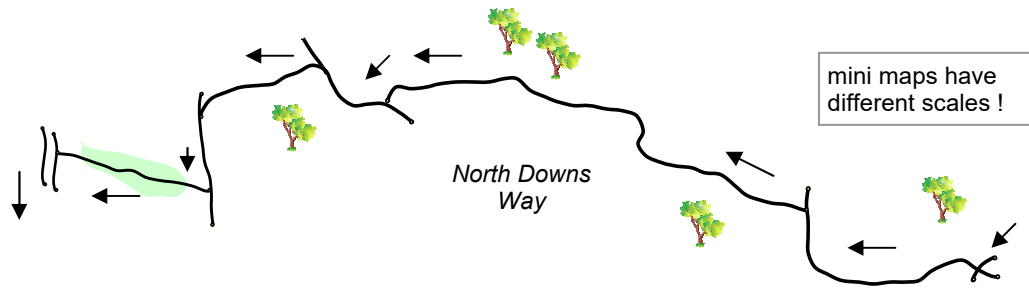
- 1 Begin at the back of the car park on a path through woods by the noticeboard, immediately avoiding a minor right fork. After a woodland walk, thick with bluebells in May, you cross the noisy M25 by a bridge and immediately emerge through a gate onto the open hillside of Colley Hill. *At once you 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 soon 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, fork **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** through a modern kissing-gate. Follow this pleasant woodland path until you reach a road. Turn **left** on the road.

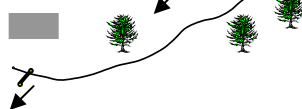


- 4 By the entrance to *The Weald*, an art deco house, cross the road to take a footpath on the other side which runs parallel to the road through woodland. On coming back to the road, continue a little further and, where the road curves left, turn **right** into a semi-tarmac drive called The Combe. Shortly after, take the **left** fork, still on the NDW. Follow the track past houses and then through a swing-gate. *You are now close to the ancient Betchworth Quarry, now partly a nature reserve and a site of industrial history, as you see from the tower chimney on your left. Reigate Windmill is just visible here through a gap in the trees to your left.* Soon after, you come to a 3-way fingerpost. Turn **left** here, steeply downhill, thus **leaving** the NDW. The path immediately bends right where it runs under ancient yew trees. Soon follow the path up a few steps and keep straight ahead at two 4-way fingerposts. *This route is full of botanical interest and it is worth taking time to marvel at the rich flora, including many orchids and uncommon ferns, much of it under the protection of the Surrey Wildlife Trust.* Eventually you reach Brockham Lime Works.

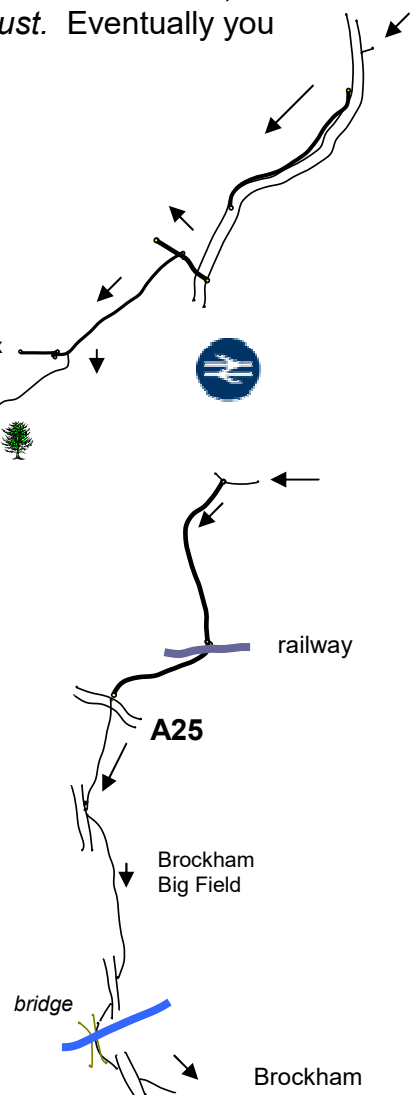
Brockham Lime Works were built around 1889 to a design by Alfred Bishop and were in use until the 1930s. The remains of the lime works show two batteries of eight kilns on one side and two on the other. They are being restored.

Go through a wooden gate directly opposite the Lime Works sign onto a driveway, a permissive footpath.

Brockham
Lime Works



- 5 Follow the drive past a gate and houses and over a level crossing until eventually you reach the main A25 road. Cross the road carefully to a footpath opposite. **This path gets badly blocked by vegetation in summer and you need to take care as there is a hidden ditch beneath your feet. If you are walking bare-legged, you may prefer to avoid nettles by turning right on the road and left at the next junction.** Follow the narrow sometimes **very** overgrown footpath until you join a road into Brockham. Unless you are walking with a dog, side **left** here into Brockham Big Field (NT) and go parallel to the road under the ash trees. Rejoin the road and cross to the other side. Shortly you cross the wide River Mole via a wooden footbridge with an excuse to pause.



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.

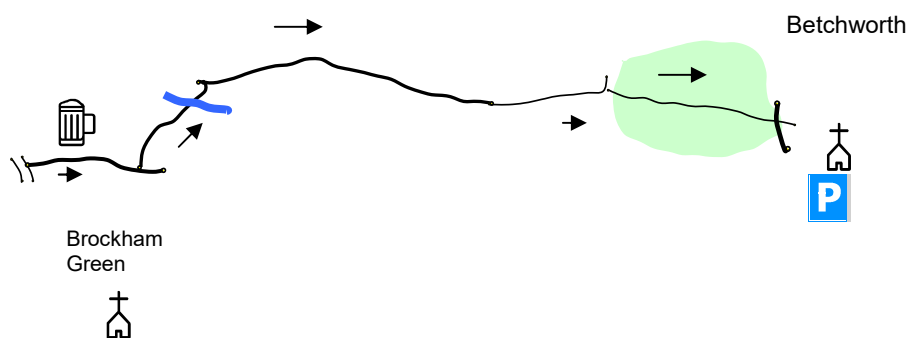
Brockham church is relatively new, the architect being Benjamin Ferris, an associate of Augustus Pugin who designed the Houses of Parliament.

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 the Royal Oak pub, the Inn on the Green restaurant and the local shop (on the right). It is bordered to the north by the River Mole. Brockham is famous throughout the South East for its annual Guy Fawkes Night.



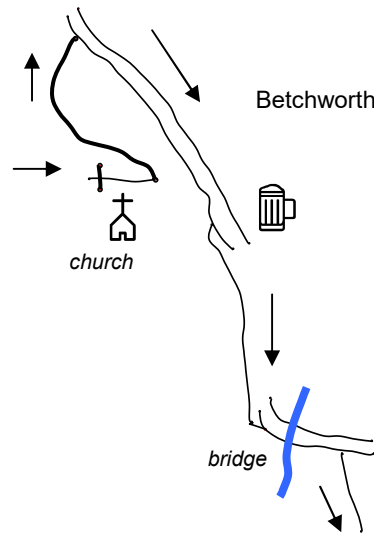
Leg 2: Brockham to Skimmington 7 km=4 miles

- 1 Take the lane past the Royal Oak. On the right soon 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 the top of a slope by 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 over a wooden bridge on an enclosed path and over a drive, arriving at St Michael's Church Betchworth.

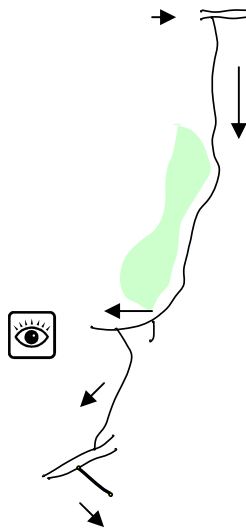


Betchworth church dates back to at least Norman times. Some lancet windows, pillars and arcades are 13th century. It once served Brockham as well as Betchworth, hence its size. Inside are many fascinating and marvellous artefacts. Betchworth itself is an L-shaped cluster of houses, the south part extending 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.

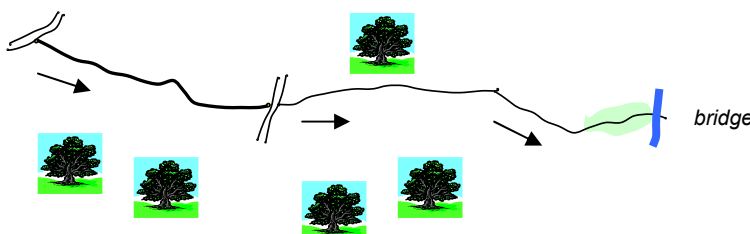
- 2 Take the path through the Lychgate to the **left** of the church. After passing several interesting cottages (which you would have missed without this small diversion), turn **right** at the main road opposite the fine *Old House*, and pass *The Dolphin*, a Youngs pub which welcomes walkers and dogs. Take the footpath running close to the wall on the right – it begins by an 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.



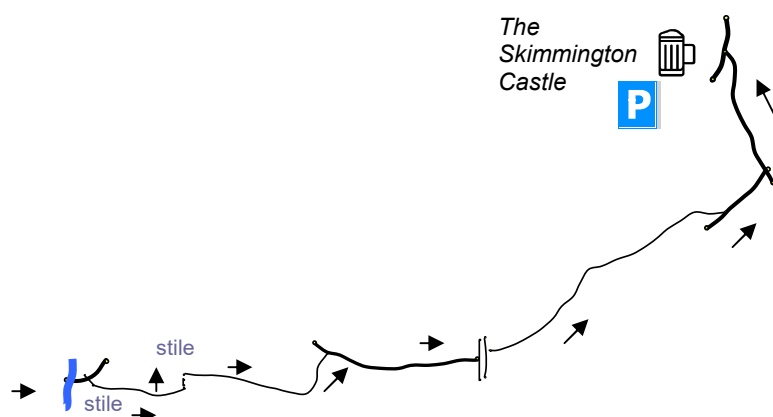
- 3 The path enters woodland, taking you over a bridge, and comes through a kissing-gate to a meadow with fine oak trees. Keep to the right-hand edge, past a redundant stile, and reach a fine viewpoint where you have sight of the River Mole and the North Downs beyond. Here, at a fingerpost, turn sharp **left** to another fingerpost visible in the hedgerow, and turn **right** still in the meadow parallel to a road. (Locals tend to cut this corner, when it's not fenced off.) Just before a clump of trees, exit **left** via a kissing-gate, turn **right** on the road for 30m, then go **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. Your path zigzags right-left and eventually reaches another road. Cross the road and continue on a path the other side across a grassy meadow, veering left to the far corner. 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 [June 2014: propped up against a tree and pointing in the wrong direction, but the path is obvious] indicating that you have to veer **right** diagonally across the centre of the next field. At the far edge of the field, the path veers **left**. In 30m, veer **right** between two oak trees in the hedgerow and turn **left** beside the adjoining field. At a 3-way fingerpost go **left**, steeply down through trees and cross the River Mole via a concrete bridge.



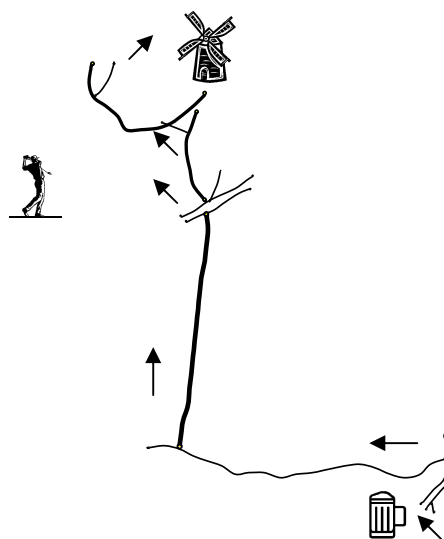
- 5 Soon after, at a junction, go straight ahead up some steps and over a stile into a meadow. [June 2014: the path now crosses a vehicle track after new road building.] The River Mole snakes nearby on the right, but you need to head across this elongated aspen-filled meadow, just to the left of a telegraph pole, for roughly 250m, to a stile in the top left corner. Go **left** over the stile and **right** along the edge of a field. At the field edge, turn **left** and, on reaching a track, turn **right**. The track goes to the left of some houses and zig-zags left-right to reach a road by *Littleton Grange*. Cross the road and join a path on the other side. Your path runs along the left-hand side of a meadow, along a fenced path and over a stile. Follow a diagonal path across a meadow, go over a squeeze-pastable stile by a wooden gate and ahead on a wide fenced track. At a crossing track, continue straight over. You join a concrete track coming from Littleton Manor Farm. At the end, go through a small wooden gate and turn **left** on a sandy track uphill, avoiding a footpath sharp left. The track goes downhill and joins a lane by the *Skimmington Castle* pub with its generous public car park.



A few hours spent at “The Skimmie” is one of the essential experiences of English life. It began as a farm 400 years ago and became a pub in 1825. It is noted for many real ales and Addlestone's Cider and also for great food. This is a cosy pub with loads of atmosphere, enhanced by low ceilings and a real fire.

Leg 3: Skimmington to Margery Wood 5 km=3½ miles

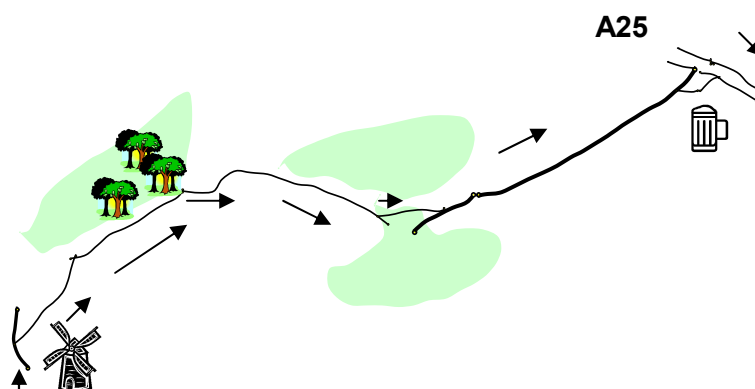
- 1 Turn **left** in front of the pub and take a fenced path in the corner marked as the Greensand Way (GW). At a clearing with a group of houses, veer **right** across the lawn (yes – this is correct!) and turn **right** on a footpath (still the GW). You join a lane running past *The White House* to a T-junction with a road across Reigate Heath. *You could turn right on this road to meet the A25 but the slightly longer next stretch shows you the Windmill and gives you some feeling for the landscape of Reigate Heath.*



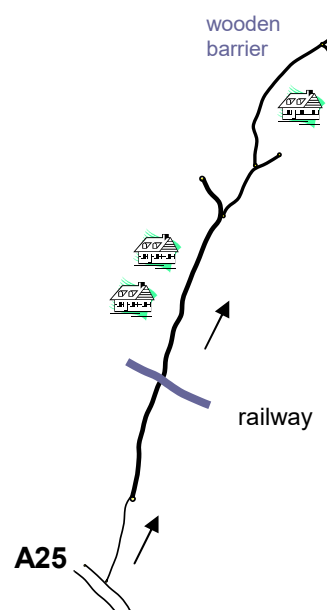
Cross the lane and take a wide sandy track opposite, ignoring the finger-posted path on its right. The track curves right uphill. Near the top, fork **left** on a narrow path towards the red-tiled house. Go round **right** clockwise in front of the clubhouse and, at the corner of the building, keep straight on downhill on a narrow sandy golfer's path which promptly curves right. The windmill is now close by up on your right.

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 At the bottom, near a golf tee, turn very sharp **right** on a narrow ascending path that has an old thick wooden handrail. On meeting a junction of several paths, zigzag left-right to take a path running beside woodland on your left with an open space on your right. When you reach a corner under oak trees where the wide green space curves to the left to distant pines, keep straight ahead, carefully crossing the green space (in case of golf balls) 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. Just before the car park, turn **left** through trees parallel to the road on your right and veer **left** to join a track that runs along the right of the cricket green towards a long 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.*



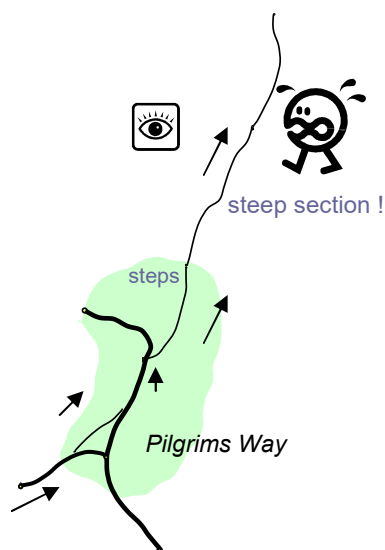
- 3 Cross the busy main A25 road at any opportunity. In nearly 200m, opposite the last of the modern bungalows (no. 71), turn **left** on a narrow signposted footpath. The footpath reaches a residential road (Coppice Lane), which goes over a railway bridge and past properties. Eventually, where the road 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.

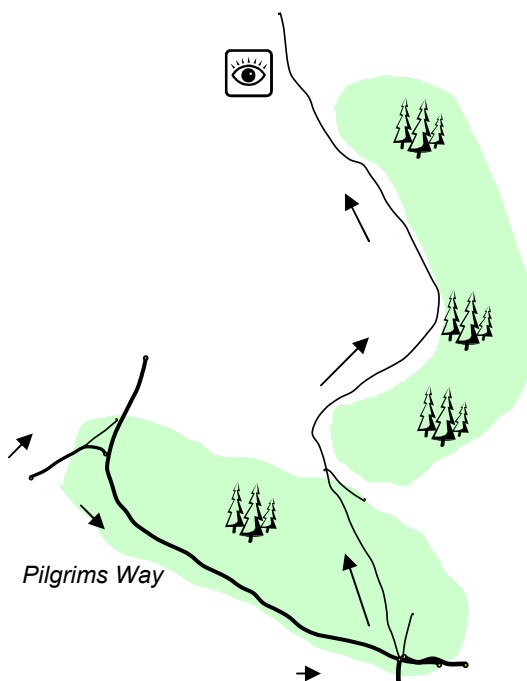
Keep straight on after the barrier, ignoring the wide track right. You join a wide path coming from the right (the Pilgrims Way). In 35m, fork **right** on a narrow path. The path goes over a crossing path and up some steps. Go over a stile into the green slope of the meadow. There is a steep path directly 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.



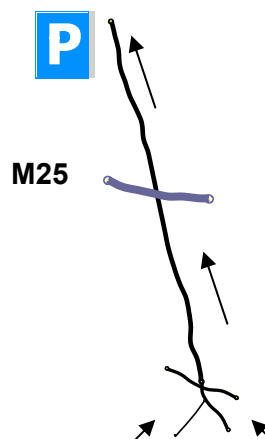
4-2 Longer and shallower

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, ignoring steps on the right. The path curves left to the top of the hill towards a fence and a fingerpost on the other side.

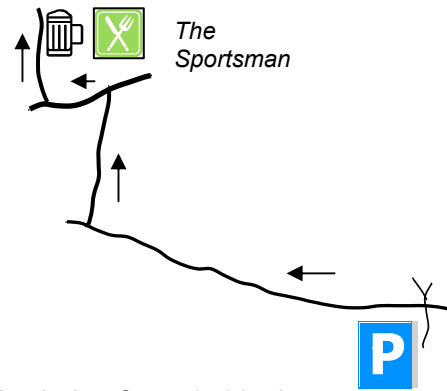


5 Continue to the fence and fingerpost. Go through the gate in the fence and follow the drive. The drive crosses the M25 by a bridge and takes you back to the car park where the walk began.



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**.



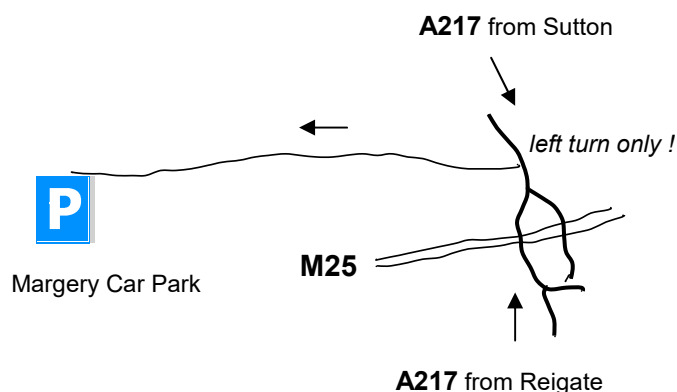
In a peaceful site just on the edge of Walton Heath, dating from 1532, the Sportsman was once a hunting stop-off for the royal family. It has recently been thoughtfully renovated. It is famous for its out-of-doors atmosphere which is so welcoming for walkers, horse riders, cyclists and families. The 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). There is a small charge to non-NT-members but you need to pay by *debit card*, so remember to bring one. The access lane 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.

Alternative car parks are on Reigate Heath, by Betchworth Church and at Skimmington. If you don't park in Margery Wood, do still take the diversion to see it as it is such an attractive locality.

By train: begin at Betchworth or Reigate station from where the walk is easily accessible. Arriva bus 32 runs from Dorking to Brockham.



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