



Darent Valley and North Downs Otford, Shoreham

Distance: 17½ km=11 miles
or 14½ km=9 miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Kent

Date written: 4-jun-2011

Author: Malinovka

Last update: 18-jun-2022

Refreshments: Cotman's Ash, Shoreham, Otford

Map: Explorer 147 (Sevenoaks) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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Hills, views, villages, unique pub, woodland, river, more inns

In Brief

This walk is one great adventure! At the start, you experience some of the most jaw-dropping views from high on the North Downs. You pause for a drink in the garden of what must be the most unusual pub in the Southeast. Note that the *Rising Sun* (see below for opening times) does not serve food, but you can bring your own picnic as well as sampling the inn daughter's icecream. Next, you make your way over wooded valleys to the picturesque village of Shoreham with its many pubs, its medieval church and its dreamy riverside cottages. The return leg re-joins the River Darent, coming back to the starting point in the historic town of Otford.



This walk originally included an extra section to Lullingstone. This has been calved off as a separate walk. But this walk can still be "zipped up" with the Shoreham-Lullingstone walk, giving you a very satisfying 25 km=15½ mile "big zipper" walk. Look for the "zipper" symbols. For those who only want to walk along the Darent Valley to Shoreham and back, without climbing the hills to the east, there is the **Shoreham Pub Walk**, a separate walk in this series.

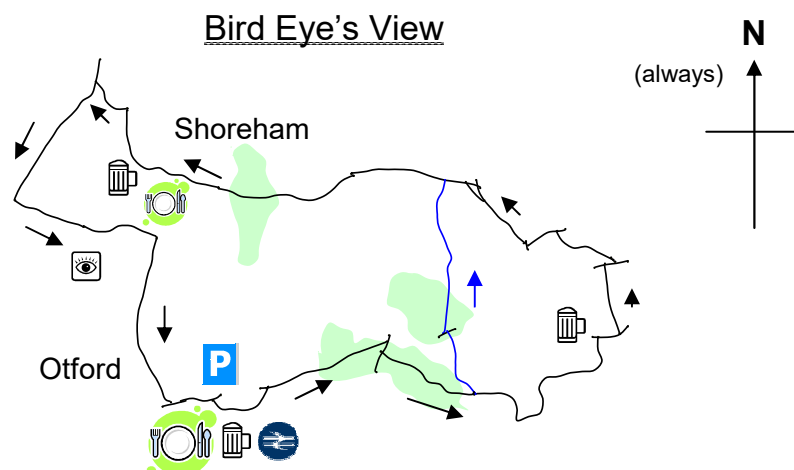


There are a few nettles on the route, easily avoided but they might catch you unawares, so long trousers are recommended. Good strong shoes are advisable, with boots preferable in damp weather. Your dog could come too as all the places en route welcome him. You might bring a trowel to help in the pub garden at Cotman's Ash.



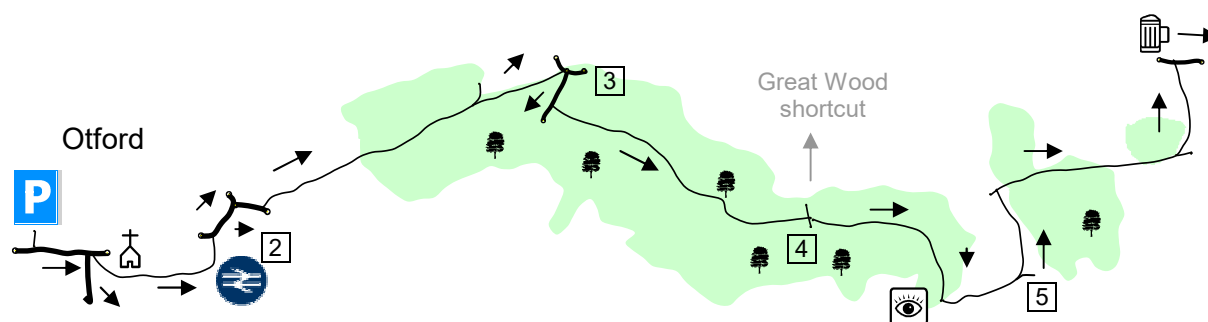
The walk begins in **Otford, Kent**. You can begin from **Otford Station**. Coming by car, park in the main car park (postcode **TN14 5PG** grid ref TQ525595), www.w3w.co/onion.candy.raced, opposite the *Bull* pub. This car park is free on Sundays and Bank Holidays (2015) but pay-and-display other days (£2 all day Sat). There is a free car park in Shoreham (behind the Village School, postcode **TN14 7SN**) and kerbside parking. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



The banks of the Darent (or Darenth) have supported human settlements here for at least 3000 years, leaving evidence such as a Bronze-age urn and a number of Iron-age and Roman artefacts. The name "Otford" can be traced back to the year 800 and may possibly be derived from "Offa's Ford", Offa being the mighty King of Wessex who fought the men of Kent just before that time. The village duck pond which serves as a roundabout is a listed structure. Otford also boasts a scale-model of the solar system.

Leg 1: Otford to Cotman's Ash 5½ km = 3½ miles



If you are beginning the walk in **Otford Station**, go up to the main road and start from section **2**.

- 1** From the car park, turn **left** along the main road, passing a restaurant, a tearoom and several antique shops, and keep **right** at the duck pond roundabout. Cross over the main Sevenoaks road to reach a small double signpost near the church. Your route goes by the church (the **left** fork) but it is interesting first to visit Otford Palace (the **right** fork) from where you can take a short cut to the church. The remains of Otford Palace are at the end of a short path.

There was a palace here at least from the 800s onwards, serving as a residence of the Archbishops of Canterbury. The current Otford Palace was built in the early 1500s by Archbishop Warham, apparently rivalling even Hampton Court in size and splendour. It was passed to Archbishop Cranmer, just in time for Henry VIII to seize it for the Crown. Now just the gate house remains.

By going right round the wall of the gate house, you can read a board with some historical information. Some present-day cottages were built into the cloister. Returning to the church of St Bartholomew, this unusual ancient building is well worth a visit: the automatic doors are on the north side. Now, with the church on your left, follow the path that runs between a wall on your left and the cemetery on your right, zigzagging right-left on a fenced path. The path leads into the station car park. Turn **left** across the car park, passing the station entrance, and go up steps to the main road.



2 Turn **right** over the railway bridge. Follow the tarmac footway which soon runs through trees. *You are on the North Downs Way (NDW), a long-distance footpath running from Farnham to Dover.* On reaching another road, Pilgrims Way East, turn **right** uphill. In 70m, turn **left** carefully across the road at a signpost to a brick-lined driveway opposite. The drive soon narrows to a path and you meet an intermittent series of shallow steps. After a long ascent, you thankfully reach a bench. If you turn around now you have a fine view over Otford and other parts of the North Downs. Continuing on to the right of the bench, you are dismayed to find more steps. However, the path gradually flattens. You now pass through pleasant woodland and go through a swing-gate into a welcome meadow. Keep along the **right**-hand side of the meadow. On the far side, exit through a swing-gate to a junction of tarmac lanes.



3 Turn sharp **right** on a lane downhill. In 80m, turn **left** on a footpath by a metal gate, going up a few steps. You are on a narrow path through dense Rowdown Wood, rising, then levelling out. In 250m, you go over a narrow crossing path. After a further 400m, you come out of the wood. Continue **straight ahead** over a wide crossing path, through barriers on each side, to enter ancient Shorehill Wood, part of Kemsing Down, a nature reserve. Your path goes downhill for a while, curves left and is joined from the right by another path. Stay on the level, avoiding any tracks leading downhill, soon reaching a bench seat with a view. You meet a post at a crossing of paths. The yellow arrows indicate that you are once again on the NDW.

Decision point. If you want to take a short cut from here direct to Romney Street, missing the pub at Cotman's Ash and the best views of this walk, skip to near the end of this text and do the **Great Wood Shortcut**.

4 Turn **right** down steps and through a swing-gate onto Whiteleaf Down where you immediately have a striking view of Kemsing and the hills beyond. Turn immediately **left**, still on the NDW. In the top corner, go through a metal kissing gate, then gently uphill. After a gap in the trees, you come to a clear fork. Take the **right** fork, slightly downhill, passing a notice board on your left, thus temporarily leaving the NDW. The footpath soon goes through trees and through a wooden swing gate, where another path joins from the left. After some more woodland, your path goes through another swing-gate onto the prominent open hillside of Green Hill. Turn **left** steeply uphill to a bench and then keep **left** near the boundary fence. You reach a toposcope (*misspelling our favourite Surrey hill*) with a tall cross in the field behind. Continue to the far corner and turn **left** through a swing-gate uphill on a permissive path. Keep to the **right** at first, then straight across a flowery hillside to a post in the tree-line. Veer **right** at the post, once again on the NDW.



5 The path goes **left** through a metal kissing gate and across a small meadow. *On your left is the walled enclosure of Oak Hall Manor, originally*

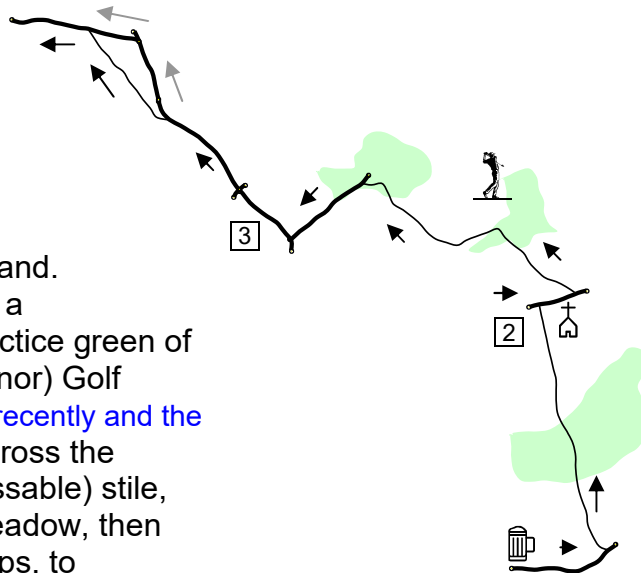
Tudor, now used as a Christian holiday centre. Go through a kissing gate into woods. The path leads, via a small metal gate, to a track. Go over a stile ahead, **right** on a fenced path and over another stile into a horse pasture. Keep to the **right**-hand side of the meadow, going through a small metal gate. On the other side of the meadow, another metal swing-gate leads through woodland with a wire fence on your right, avoiding a footpath right, then into another meadow, with houses ahead of you, via a wooden swing-gate. Turn immediately **left** here along the left-hand side of the meadow, thus leaving the NDW. On the other side, go through a wooden swing-gate, along a hedged path, beside a smoothly mown pasture on your left, over a stile, along a fenced path and out to a lane. Immediately opposite, slightly left, is the *Rising Sun* at Cotman's Ash. (The pub re-opened in 2022 but only on **Thur, Fri, Sat 12.00 to 10pm, Sun 12.00 to 7pm.**)

*The "Rising Sun" is like a time capsule, unchanged from your granddad's day, when many cottages acted as inns for the locals. The landlady is probably sitting outside or pottering in the garden and will pop in to serve you a glass or two. This inn hasn't changed one jot since this walk was first written (except that the parrot is no more). There is an attention-loving cat who has commandeered the serving area. Sometimes you may see pet dogs and several chickens. Plop down on the big sofa in front of the fire in winter or sit in the garden in summer. Pumps dispense rotating craft beers, such as Westerham or Cotleigh. Young Rachel serves delicious home-made icecream. Bring your own picnic to go with the drinks, as there is **no other food**. The *Rising Sun* has live music events some evenings.*



Leg 2: Cotman's Ash to Romney Street 3 km = 2 miles

- 1 Turn **right** on the lane (that is, **left** if you are coming out from the pub). In only 200m, you reach a gate on the right to a house called *Little Cotman's Ash*. Turn **left** here over a hidden stile in the hedge opposite which is very easy to overlook. Go straight across the meadow to an unusual stile leading down into woodland. The narrow winding path emerges on a grass space which *used* to be the practice green of the West Kingsdown (Woodlands Manor) Golf Club. *The club course was abandoned recently and the fairways have become wild meadows.* Cross the "fairway" a fraction right, over a (bypassable) stile, up the right-hand side of a flowery meadow, then down, via an unneeded stile and steps, to Tinkerpot Lane beside the little church of St Mary. *This church was built in 1851 to a design by Thomas Talbot Bury. The adjoining church cottage has a pretty garden and serves teas on Saturdays and has a loo (to the left as you go in) which is hopefully open other days.*
- 2 Turn **right** on the lane and, in just 50m, turn **left** by a metal gate over the remains of a stile. *This is the ex-golf course, fortunately still with (some) yellow-topped marker posts to guide your way but you need to keep a close watch. [2022: there are "developments" going on in the valley: please send more feedback!]* Go steeply uphill on a grassy path where you join a cinder path. Shortly after you pass a blue metal sign, about 20m before the end of the cinder track,

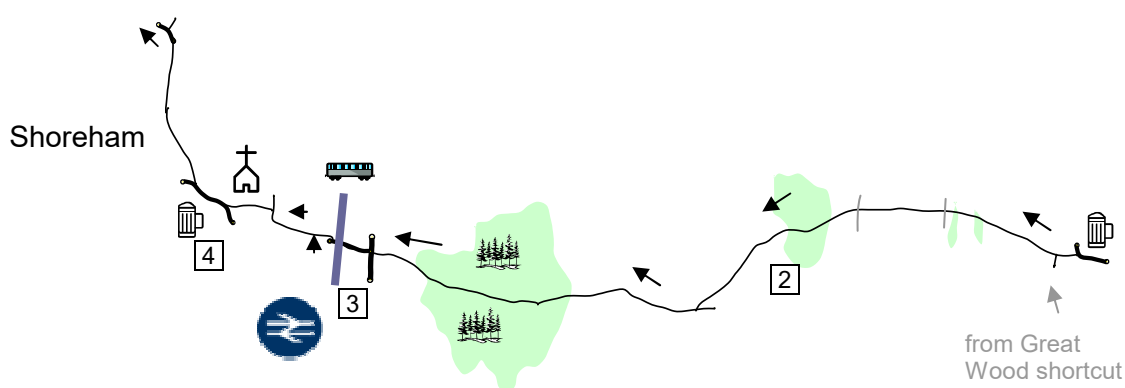


veer **right** uphill to a tall marker post beside a line of trees on the right [2022: now missing]. You pass a post [2022: missing] as you join a stony path coming from the right. You come out onto a large “fairway” and another post. Turn **left** here along the left-hand edge of the “fairway” on an unclear path of high grass, in the shadow of a line of trees on your left. In 100m, just after passing another post, turn diagonally **right**, heading for two conical decorative fir trees on the other side of the “fairway”. Here, the right of a tall metal flagpole, you will find a large well-tended “water hazard”. Pass it on your right as you pass another (rather frayed) post. Keep straight ahead across another “fairway” to a post under trees and continue in the same direction over another “fairway” with trees on your right. Where you meet the corner of thick woodland, keep going **left** around the back of the “fairway” to a final post, this time with a square cross-section. Go down steps to a quiet lane, Hills Lane, and turn **left**.

- 3 In 250m, at a T-junction, turn **right** on Goodbury Road. In 200m, at a crossroads, go straight over on Bower Lane. After 300m, where the lane curves right, leave the lane by going straight ahead over a stile under an oak tree by a short fence into a very ragged field. *This path only cuts a corner and is very poorly marked, so some walkers stay on the quiet lane, forking left at the next junction.* Veer **right** in the field at an angle not far from the right-hand edge, so as to cut the corner of the field. Aim for a gap in the hedge before a large cream-coloured building. Exit the field **right** over a stile and turn **left** on the lane (or, better, stay on the edge for a further 70m where you can go **right** through a kissing gate). Continue on the lane passing new housing. Where the lane bends right, keep straight on along a bridleway through a metal gate. At a post with arrows, keep ahead, following the yellow arrow, avoiding the bridleway left.

Here the **Great Wood Shortcut** re-joins the walk.

Leg 3: Romney Street to Shoreham Hill 4 km = 2½ miles



- 1 Go over a sturdy stile into a field. Here there are great views ahead to London, with the *Gherkin*, the *Shard* and *Canary Wharf* all visible (see *the walk in this series “City Skyscrapers”*). Go steeply down, passing several field boundaries, and up the other side. After a degenerate stile, go over a crossing path onto a grassy hillside with terrific views. Go steeply down the right-hand side of the hillside. At the bottom, the path goes through bushes, past an unneeded stile, over a track and along a path roofed over on both sides by hawthorns. At the end of the path, go over a stile onto the open hillside and continue uphill. At the top, go over a stile into a wood.

2 The path immediately zigzags left-right up through trees. On coming out of the wood, go between posts to cross a wild meadow. The footpath now leads you straight across the centre of a crop field (well marked by a tractor). At a fence, a footpath joins from the left. Keep straight ahead on a farm track, first downhill, then uphill and through the farmyard of Dunstall Farm. The path zigzags right-left around a barn. Stay close to the barn and go straight over the field ahead on a good signed path. *Dunstall Farm is a beef specialist and the "Roundhouse" on your right is a new structure that gives the cattle a stress-free environment.* At the far side of the field, take a narrow path downhill through woods. The path goes over a crossing path and down steps. These first few steps are followed by *many* more as you descend White Hill. In damp conditions, you need to be specially careful as some of the steps are deceptively steep. At the bottom, you are on a beautiful level walk with tall pines, maple, ash, beech and yew trees. Finally, the path joins a path from the left, curves right and leads down to the main A225 road.

3 Cross the main road to a road opposite, signposted *Shoreham Village* near the railway station. Go under the railway arch and, immediately after the arch, turn **right**, slipping past a metal gate, then **left** into a field and continue along the left-hand side. *This is not an official right-of-way and may not be suitable for large groups but it is generally used by local people as a way of avoiding the road traffic.* Ahead on the hill, you can see the *Shoreham Cross*. It was cut in 1921 to commemorate the casualties of the World War I. At the far end, veer **right** along the field edge. In 30m, go **left** through a swing-gate onto the immaculate yew-lined brick path running through the churchyard of Shoreham church which is definitely worth a visit.

The Church of St Peter and St Paul is of Norman origin. You enter the church by the huge 15th-century wooden porch and, on entering, are immediately struck by the width and brightness inside. This is enhanced by the wide arches between the nave and the generous south aisle. Hanging brass chandeliers have real candles which donate their own special light to evening services. Notable features are the pre-Reformation rood screen, the high open wagon roof, the two chapels and the "Tavern Clock". The picture on the west wall is by Charles West Cope RA and depicts the return of V. L. Cameron from his 1872 expedition to find David Livingstone; Cameron crossed tropical Africa from east to west, the first European to do so.

Continue through the archway into the street opposite the *Samual Palmer* (pka the *Olde George*) Inn.

The Samuel Palmer Inn is a true "locals' pub" dedicated to real ales and the traditional atmosphere that goes with its 1500-vintage origins. Its regular beer festival offers 15 different beers, together with live music. The inn is open all day and food is on offer lunchtime and evenings, although the very cheerful landlady has undertaken to serve it out-of-hours to groups using this site!

4 Go straight ahead, with the pub on your left, until the road bends right alongside the Darent by a small cascade and with a house at the corner opposite, optimistically called *Waterfall Cottage*. *Much of this walk follows the Darent Valley Path, a 31-km trail that follows the River Darent from above Sevenoaks to the Thames near Dartford.* Shortly, the road turns left over a bridge. The walk leaves the road here and stays on this side of the Darent. However, across the bridge there is another pub, the *Kings Arms* and more of the village.

The name "Shoreham" means "settlement by a steep slope". It is well known for its Aircraft Museum here in the village and the annual Duck Race on the River

Darent. Shoreham has no less than four pubs. The Kings Arms has a small window showing the "Jolly Ostler" who would have served you in past times. In the High Street there is The Crown. For teas, the "Honey Pot" is at the end of Church Street, just to the right in the High Street.

Keep ahead on a drive beside the river on your left and with Water House on your right, where the painter Samuel Palmer lived from 1828. The wide tarmac drive has a meadowbank on the left and then narrows to a good path, soon passing, on the other side of the Darent, a series of houses with attractive river terraces and gazebos. Turn **left** over the bridge and follow the path beside a fence, coming out to a short tarmac drive by the entrance to *Mill House*. Turn **left** on the drive.



Zip point. For the big zipper to join the Lullingstone walk, turn **right** instead on a footpath and switch to the other guide.

5

Avoiding a footpath on the right, keep straight ahead on a tarmac lane, passing some fine, if rather cornily named, cottages and reaching a major road. On your left here is the *Crown* pub, a good but quiet alternative to the other Shoreham pubs. Cross the road and take a permissive path on the other side, unmarked except for an old wooden sign. This path takes you parallel to the road on your right, through a kissing gate and uphill along the right-hand side of a rather gone-to-seed meadow. At the top, go through a kissing gate beside a large metal gate and turn **left** onto a straight wide footpath by a metal barrier.



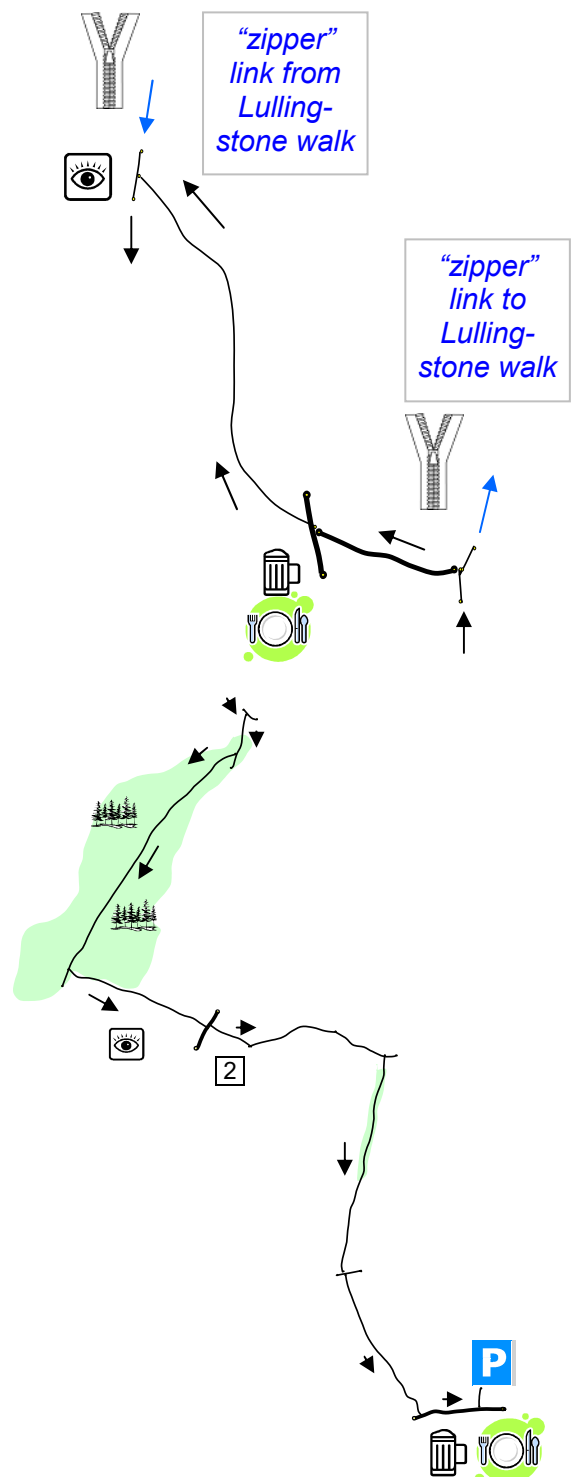
The big zipper from the Lullingstone walk joins here.



Leg 4: Shoreham Hill to Otford 5 km = 3 miles

1

Continue along this wide high path until, in about 200m, you reach another metal barrier. Fork **right** here, on a path with a sign for *Meenfield Wood*. This beautiful wide path runs gently uphill through mixed woodland, with bluebells in late spring, and then levels out. Avoid some footpaths leading off left and right and keep ahead through austere woodland. Where eventually you reach the end of the wood, go **left** through a metal gate (or over a stile) into a meadow with fabulous views towards the Greensand Hills, and with Otford, your destination, visible to the right, with the oasts of Filston Farm nestling in the valley. As you descend, you will find a bench which is an ideal place to rest and enjoy the view. Ignore a gate and path shortly on the left and continue down the hill, passing through a small metal gate and downhill on a rough track. At the bottom, you reach a road. Cross the road to a lane, a fraction to the left.



- 2 Follow the lane gently downhill. After a house, it becomes a track and is soon joined on the right by the River Darent. You cross the Darent at a beauty spot with a bench and a footbridge. Continue on a drive, passing several small houses. Soon on your right is the picturesque *Old Mill House* with its converted oast and small stone weir. After a gentle ascent, you reach a crossing track by a post with yellow arrows. Turn **right** here, if necessary ignoring the arrows, on a narrow enclosed path, immediately passing a stone sign. *You are back on the Darent Valley Path.* You shortly pass a large metal gate with low wooden posts, just before an open golf green. The footpath zigzags and, after 500m, crosses a sandy track. Finally, it takes you through a kissing gate and into an open crop field. Continue along the left-hand edge of the field. In the far corner, cross a track, through a modern kissing gate, over a track, ignoring a footpath on your left, and through another kissing gate. Continue on a path down the right-hand side of a meadow. The oasts in the distance mark your final stop in Otford. Go through another kissing gate and continue along the right-hand side of the next meadow. At the far side, the path goes through a swing-gate onto a narrow path which joins the drive past the *Oast and Mill House*, with the Darent on your right. Finally, you emerge on the main road in Otford. Turn **left** past *The Horns*. Opposite is the medieval timber-framed *Pickmoss* and, shortly after, the *Bull* pub and the car park where the walk began.

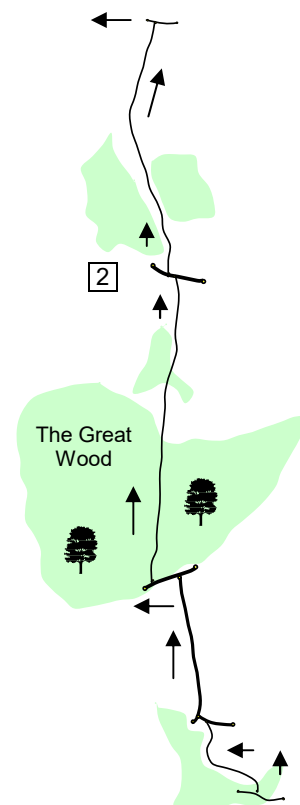


The present-day "Bull" pub was built in 1512 for the principal craftsman of nearby Otford Palace and known as "Mory House". In the dining area are carved Flemish portraits and a tall oak seat known as "Becket's Chair" or the "Wishing Chair". According to tradition, it came originally from Otford Palace and several modern users claim to have had their wish granted. The Bull became an inn in the 1700s and has been the centre of village life until the present day. The Bull has a thin range of ales but does offer an ambitious menu, including "specials", and claims several accolades for food. The "Woodman" pub is further on by the roundabout.

Great Wood Shortcut 2¼ km = 1½ miles

Take this shortcut if you want to omit the section round Cotman's Ash and the *Rising Sun* pub, reducing the length of the walk by 3 km = 2 miles.

- 1 Turn **left** up some steps, on the NDW. The path goes round the side of a pasture on the right and eventually over a stile onto the drive to Oak Hall with the gate posts on the right. Turn **left** on the drive and, at a junction, turn **right** on a lane. In 50m, ignore a fingerpost on the left, thus leaving the NDW, and stay on the lane, going past Shorehill Farm on the right, all the way to a T-junction. Turn **left** on the road. In 60m, turn **right** on a signed footpath. This wide fenced stony path leads through the Great Wood. At the end of the wood, go over a stile into a meadow. Cross the centre of the meadow uphill, go

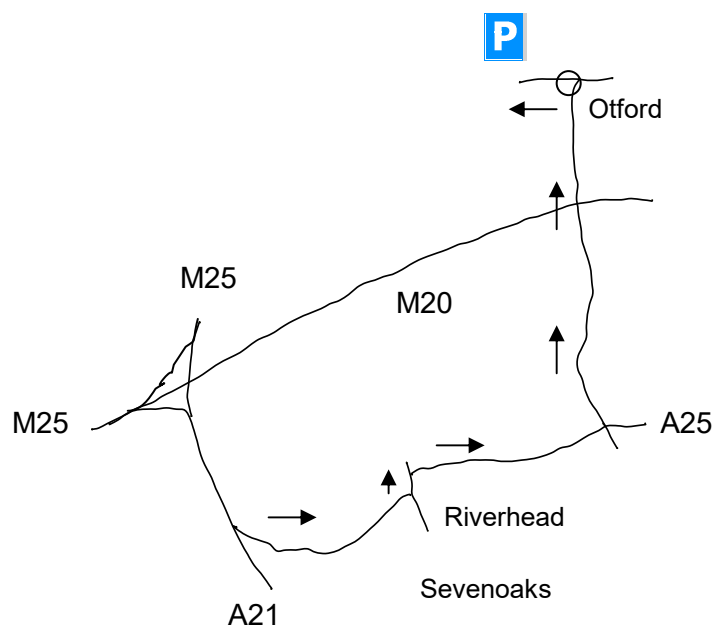


through a gap and along the left-hand side of the next two meadows, with a line of trees separating them. At the far side, go over a stile to a lane. Turn **left** on the lane.

- 2 In just 20m, by *Eastdown*, turn **right** on a footpath marked SR29. The path goes through bushes, over an unusual stile and along the left-hand side of the meadow. Next, go over a stile and along the right-hand side of the next meadow, following a rough track. At the end of meadow, go over a stile by a wooden gate, and then, going slightly right, almost immediately go through a metal gate on the right of a larger one. In a few metres, ignore a yellow arrow on the right and continue ahead soon reaching a T-junction. Turn **left** on a footpath, thus rejoining the main walk at **Leg 3**.

Getting there

By car: if coming from the south or west, the easiest way is via the M25 near Sevenoaks. Take the A21 south and, at the first exit, follow directions to *Riverhead*. At the roundabout with the steeped church ahead, turn **left** and immediately turn **right** onto the A25 (signposted *Maidstone*). At the first traffic lights, filter **left** at a sign for Otford. On reaching the village, turn **left** at the roundabout and in 170m (180 yards) turn **right** into the large car park.



By train: regular **service** to Otford on the line from Victoria Station.

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