



Knole, Ightham and Fairlawne

Distance: 17 km=11 miles or 12 km=8 miles easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Kent

Date written: 2-jun-2010

Author: Malinovka

Date revised: 31-may-2015

Refreshments: Ivy Hatch, Ightham, Godden Green

Last update: 17-sep-2025

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

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

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Woodland, views, parkland, fine houses, bluebells in spring

In Brief

Here is the perfect high circular Kentish stroll through forest with views north and then over Greensand hills with views all round. Blazing the way, as though unexpectedly, are three great houses of immense but very contrasting character.

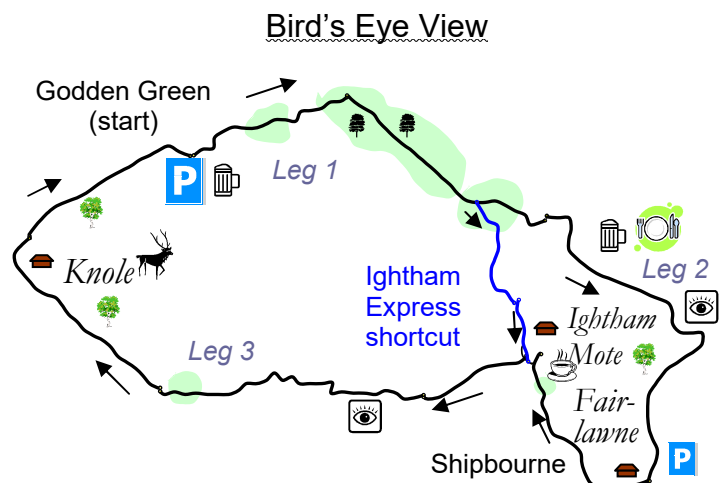
A shorter option omits one of the houses, Fairlawne. (See the *Ightham Express* below.)



This walk is easy in dry conditions with good paths, so good walking shoes are usually adequate. In deep winter, or after rain, boots are necessary and a hiking pole may be useful on the occasional fenced-in paths. There are very few unavoidable nettles on the full walk, just a few on the shortcut. Your dog can be taken provided that he is small or medium sized, because of the half-dozen dog-unfriendly stiles in Fairlawne Park (there is no restriction on the shorter option); and he will need to be on a tight lead in the sheep fields.

The author is indebted to the *Adventurous Walks* books as inspiration for this walk.

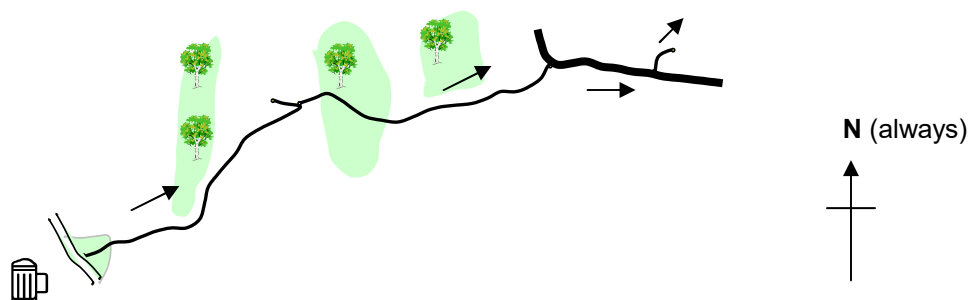
The walk begins at the village green in **Godden Green, Kent, postcode TN15 0JJ**, www.w3w.co/songs.allow.fever. For more details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



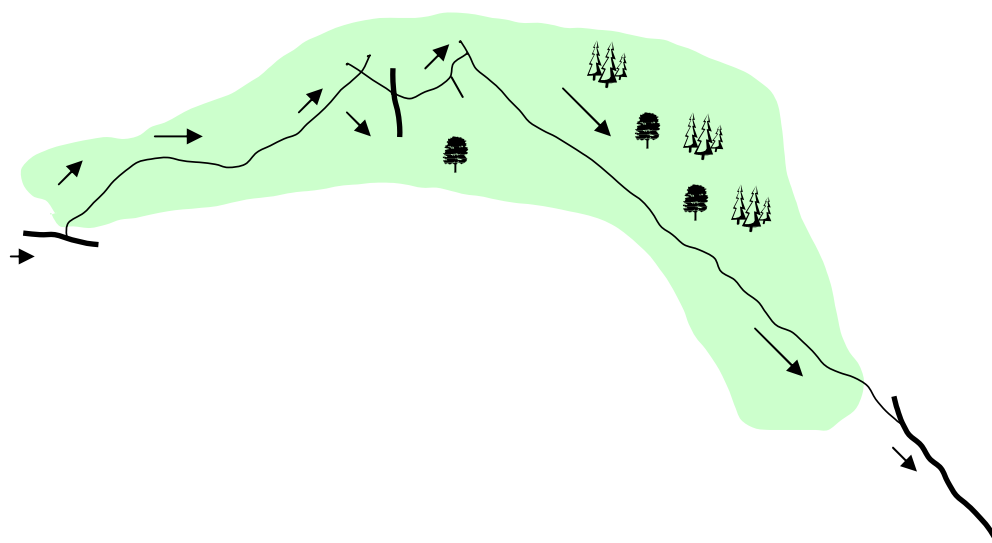
The Walk

Leg 1: Godden Green to Raspit Hill 3 km=2 miles

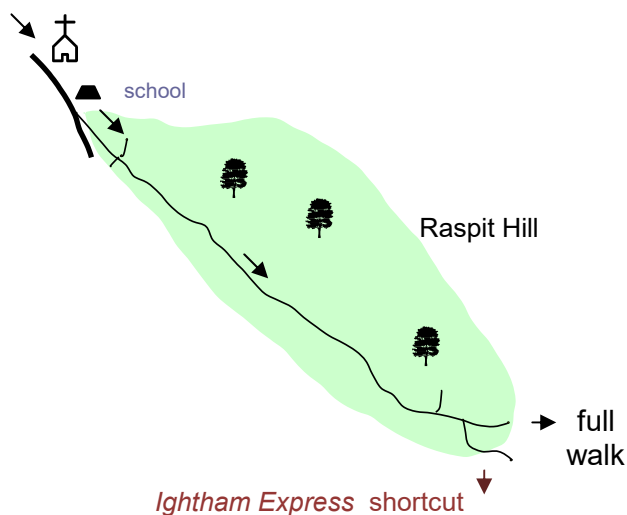
- 1 With your back to the *Buck's Head*, go across the triangular Green and take a track on the other side. The big house up on the right is *Stormont Court*. In 300m, pass Maggoty Ho Farm on your left and follow the track downhill as it curves right. The track emerges from woodland and runs beside a field on the left with the wall of *Hall Place* on the right. Exit the field at the end through a wooden swing gate and turn **right** on the lane, going past the entrance to *Hall Place*. In 120m, turn **left** on a signed wide footpath beside a new metal gate, entering Hanger Wood with its ancient coppice and, in late spring, bluebells.



- 2 In 250m, ignore a minor path on the right and continue up through a coppice. In another 150m, you reach a major 4-way crossing. Turn **right** here. In 50m cross a lane and take a signposted footpath on the other side. The path leads steeply up into Redhill Wood. At the top of a fairly challenging climb, you arrive at a bridleway. Turn **right** on the wide bridleway. At a marker post keep straight on in the direction of the blue arrow, ignoring yellow arrows. *In case of mud, there are a number of small paths running parallel that you can use.* Keep the same direction through Seal Chart Common with steep sloping woodland on your right, avoiding paths that branch off. The occasional blue arrow confirms that you are on the correct track. Eventually you reach a lane. Veer **right** onto the lane.



- 3 You soon pass the church of St Lawrence, Seal and, immediately after, the primary school. Just after the school, leave the lane by forking **left** on a wide track. Shortly after, ignore a signed bridgeway left. Soon this beautiful high path gives you fine views right across the Weald of Kent but later a bank and a quarry obscure your view. Ignore a marked bridgeway which you pass soon on your left, and go another 50m where there is a marked bridgeway on your right.



Decision point. If you want to shorten the walk and go direct to Ightham, take the **Ightham Express** route described at the end of this text and resume at **Leg 3**. Otherwise, continue with the next Leg of this walk.

Leg 2: Raspit Hill via Fairlawne to Ightham 6½ km=4 miles

- 1 Ignore the right turn and continue on the high path which, in 100m or so, becomes sunken and descends, coming out to a road, Pine Tree Lane. Turn **right** on the road. Immediately, at a T-junction, turn **left** on Stone Street Road. In 80m, turn **left** on a signposted path, next to an electric transformer, between paling fences.

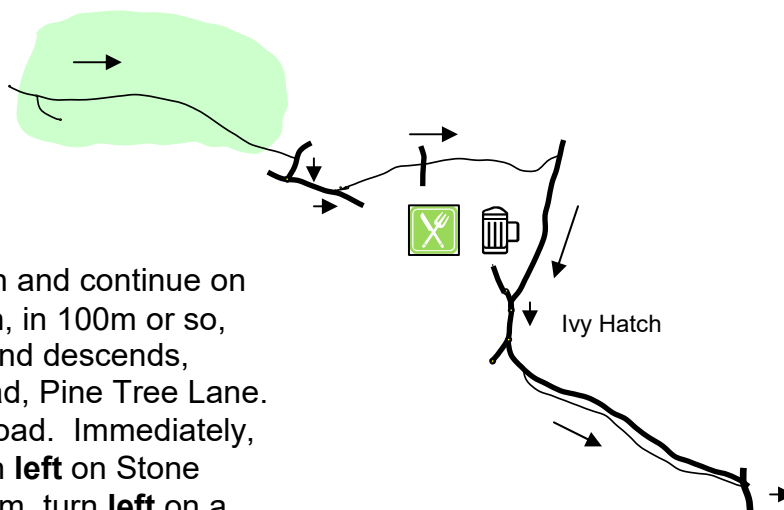


In late spring this path is fringed with a dense mat of bluebells. On reaching a lane, cross over to a path on the other side. Go through a small wooden gate, past allotments, across a track and then continue on a zig-zag course down to a lane. Turn **right** on the lane, going past *High Pines* and the fine garden of *White Cottage Farm*. You come to a T-junction by *The Plough Inn* at Ivy Hatch.

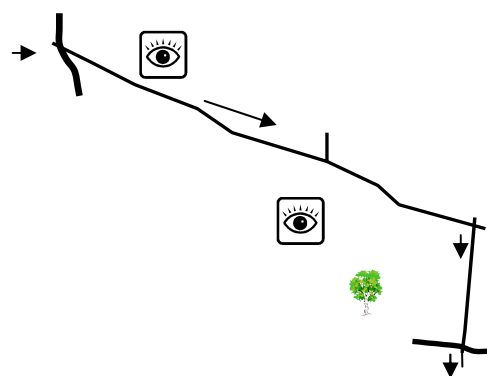


The Plough welcomes walkers and provides an excellent lunch menu that includes braised pigs cheeks, confit duck and venison liver, plus an imaginative collection of craft ales. If you arrive early on a weekday, you can have a "brunch" breakfast from 9 am. Some visitors overstayed lunch and had to take a shortcut to Ightham!

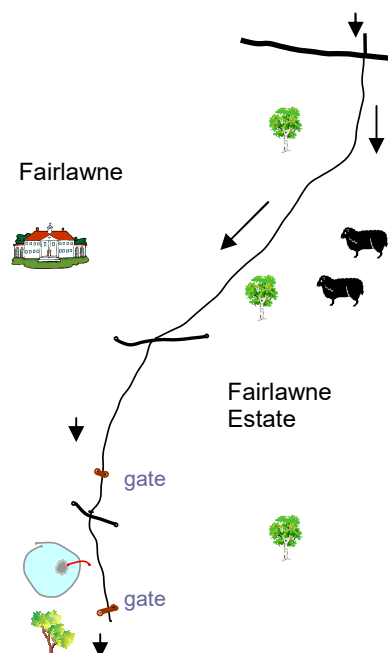
Turn **left** on the road, immediately avoiding a road off to the right, staying on the main High Cross Road. Just 40m from the junction, by an upside-down SLOW in the road, shift **right** into a footpath running parallel with the sometimes busy road. In 300m or so you reach a T-junction with the A227 Tonbridge Road.



- 2 Go straight over the main road and continue on a track opposite. Shortly you go through a gate with a sign informing you that you have reached part of the Fairlawne Estate. Soon there are fine views left to the North Downs. In another 150m the treeline on the right gives way to a fence with great views south. Continue on the main path for another 200m and turn **right** between posts onto a wide stony track which leads down to the road.



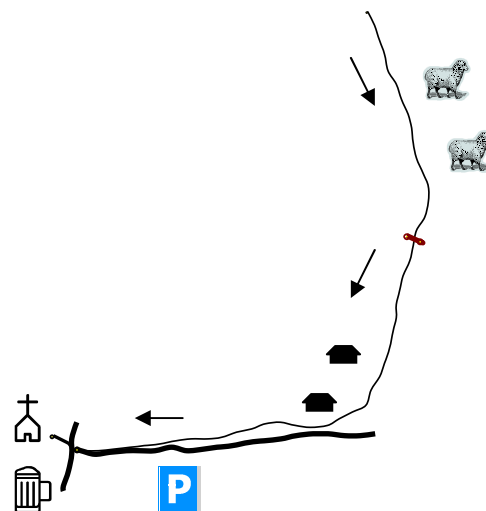
- 3 Cross straight across the road, over a stile into Fairlawne Park. *Unfortunately any dog will need to be carried over all these stiles in the park.* Go straight across the grass passing, on your right, close to a fine wrought-iron gate which leads, via an avenue of limes, to the house. *Sometimes the route is varied by the park management because of the work they do here on soil maintenance.* You will be following yellow-topped stakes marking your direction. Keep the grassy bank on your right to reach the first yellow-topped stake. Go straight on to a second stake which is above a stile in the middle of the separating fence. Go over the stile and proceed to another stake, going straight over a wider crossing path, keeping direction as per the yellow arrow. Fairlawne House with its box hedges, lawns and ornamental shrubs is now in full view.



Fairlawne House, built in the early 1600s, was once owned by Sir Henry Vane (or Fane), Secretary of State to Charles I. His son, also Henry, became Governor of Massachusetts but was later executed as a traitor after becoming disillusioned with royalty and supporting the parliamentary cause during the Civil War. The house was probably the model for Shipley Hall, home of Lord Uffenhams, one of the characters created by P.G. Wodehouse. In fact, his daughter Leonora lived there after 1932 when she married Major Peter Cazalet, trainer of race horses to both the Queen and the Queen Mother.

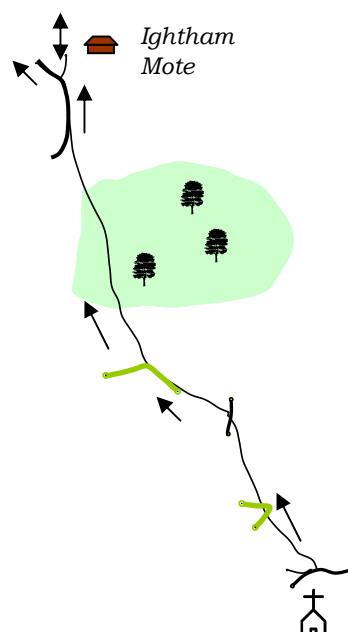
Pass another stake and go down through a small wooden gate beside a larger one. Cross a private drive and go down the drive opposite with a lake on your right. *There is a picturesque red filigreed bridge here leading to a tiny island, although whatever evening trysts took place here would have been in full view.* A little further on, where the drive wheels off right, keep ahead through a wooden gate. *The cottonwood poplars here coat the ground in their unforgettable delicate white wool in early summer.*

- 4 Continue along the left-hand side of the sheep meadow and, where the fence beds left, keep straight ahead along the top of a bank. Go over a stile and a steel bridge, across the centre of a field, straight on at the corner and along a fenced path to a lane at Shipbourne. Keep ahead on the lane, past an oast house, then veer **right** on a path across the grass, not far from cottages and the village hall, to a large wooden village sign. Now turn **right**, still on the grass verge, parallel to the road on your left. Your path goes across a recreation ground and past a car park (alternative start), eventually reaching the T-junction at Shipbourne opposite the church and the *Chaser Inn*.



Shipbourne, pronounced 'shibbun', gets its name from the sheep that always formed a major part of its rural economy and from the nearby Bourne river. The Chaser Inn, refurbished since 2003, is an open-air family-friendly pub that provides several real ales and good food, part of the Whiting and Hammond group. The church of St Giles is 'new' having been built by Edward Cazalet of Fairlawne and opened for worship in 1881. The impressive gargoyled tower contains six bells.

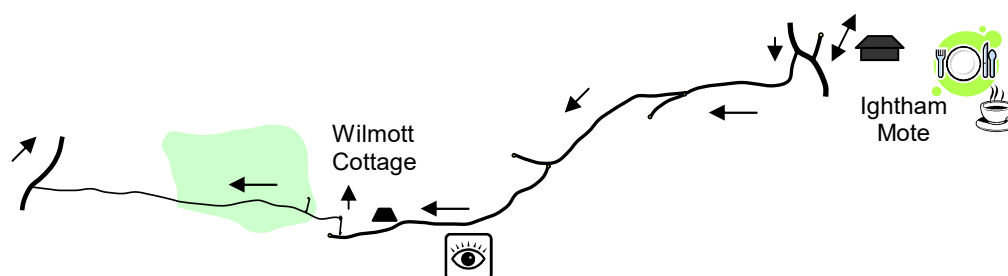
- 5 Enter the churchyard via the gate directly in front of the church, continue past the church (either side) and exit the churchyard on the other side via a swing-gate built into the wall. The waymarkers indicate a choice of three routes. Take the **right**-hand route, part of the Greensand Way (GW), immediately going **right**, through a gap in the hedge, over a stile. Cross a curving drive twice, keeping close to the trees and a hedge on your right. Go over a stile in the far corner of the meadow and, in 10m, go over another stile and out into a meadow where the path runs between wire fences. At the end, continue straight ahead to go over a stile in the far corner. Cross a track and fork **left** to go up the left-hand side of a meadow, avoiding a private path that forks off left. Half way up, veer **right**, staying next to the wire fence on your right. Now go over a stile (with a look back at Shipbourne Church), along a fenced path through woodland. Go over a stile on the other side, along the right-hand side of a meadow and the left-hand side of the next field. Oasts (*hop-drying kilns*) are visible here up to the left and over to the right. Go over a stile and head along the lane. Soon there are brick pillars on the right leading down to an unused entrance gate for a close view of Ightham Mote. *(If you would like to visit, the shortest way to Ightham Mote is **right** on the track, **left** through the staff car park and **left** once you reach the public car park. There is a good restaurant – not requiring an entry fee – plus a snack bar and loo, in the dark wooden building just beside the car park.)*




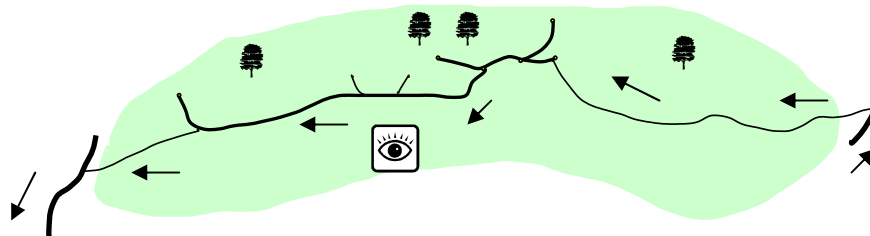
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Leg 3: Ightham to Knole and Godden Green 7½ km=4½ miles

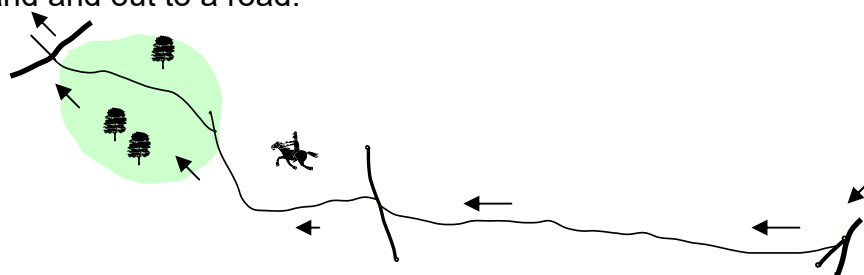
1 Retrace your steps through the brick pillars and continue **right** on the lane. In 20m, turn **left** on a farm drive for Mote Farm which bends right. In about 250m, at a fork, avoid the left fork that only leads into a field. 350m further, ignore a sandy bridleway that forks right. The track becomes tarmac for a small stretch and you have views left back to Shipbourne Church and to Tonbridge in the distance. Ignoring a footpath on the left, you pass *Wilmott Cottage*, once a wayside inn. Keep ahead here on the track, passing a shed on the right that contains a natural spring. The path now turns **right** up steps and wheels left. At a marker post, ignore a footpath that branches sharp right uphill. Your winding woodland path goes past scattered boulders, then uphill through a swing gate by a sign for Ightham Mote. In 300m, you go through a metal kissing gate, arriving at a tarmac drive. Turn **right** uphill.



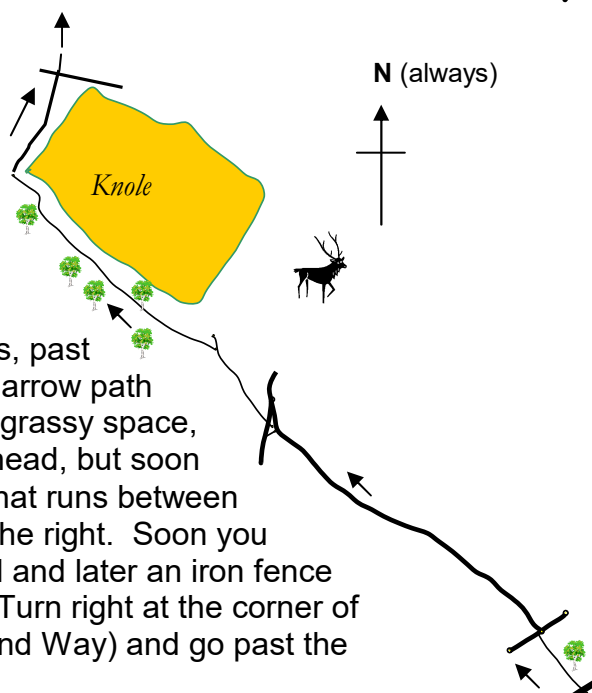
-  **2 See mini-map overleaf.** At the end of the tarmac, go sharp **left** up steps. The path leads uphill into forest which drops away steeply on the left. The path then leads quite steeply uphill in an area thick with bluebells in late spring. Go through a gap in a wooden fence by a National Trust sign for *One Tree Hill* and take a **left** bend by a bench, ignoring a path that leads off right behind the bench. 70m after the bend, take the **left** fork which is unsigned. Ignore a path on the right to go past a stone bench which faces a stunning view and continue straight on along the grass. Where the main path bends right, keep straight ahead on a gravel path. At a fork take the **left** option as directed by a marker-post, still on the GW. In 250m the path comes out to a road. Turn **left** on the road.



- 3 Go downhill for just 50m and fork **right** onto the drive for *Shepherds Mead*. Immediately, just before the white gates, turn **right** on a fenced footpath. At the end, you reach a T-junction with a wide path coming from the left. Turn **right** here and, in 10m, fork **left** and go through a kissing gate next to a large metal gate, into a field used for showjumping practice. Keep straight ahead along the left-hand side of the field and turn **right** at the far corner. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way along the longer side, turn **left** over a stile, through woodland and out to a road.



- 4 Cross the road and go through a metal gate opposite into Knole Park. Keep the same direction to reach the head of a T-junction of lanes and join the lane directly ahead. In 400m you come to a prominent straight crossing track. Go straight ahead across the grass, past a post with yellow arrows, onto a narrow path opposite. Keep ahead across the grassy space, aiming for the corner of the wall ahead, but soon veer **left** on the main sandy path that runs between two lines of trees with the wall on the right. Soon you pass wrought iron gates in the wall and later an iron fence giving you a view of the gardens. Turn right at the corner of the wall (thus leaving the Greensand Way) and go past the entrance to the house.



Knole was built by Thomas Bouchier, Archbishop of Canterbury, between 1456 and 1486, on the site of an earlier house, and passed on his death to the church. In 1538 King Henry VIII persuaded Archbishop Thomas Cranmer to give it to him. It was altered and enlarged up to the early 1600s, but its appearance has hardly changed since then. In 1566 it came into the possession of Queen Elizabeth I's cousin Thomas Sackville and his descendants, the Earls and Dukes of Dorset and Barons Sackville, have lived there since 1603. One of these was Vita Sackville-West whose 'Knole and the Sackvilles (1922)' is a literary classic. Her lover Virginia Woolf wrote the novel 'Orlando' drawing on the history of the house and its inhabitants.

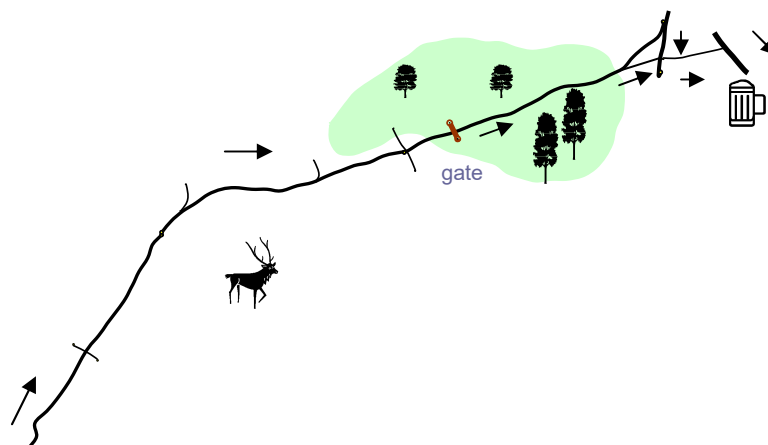
Knole stands in the middle of a 1,000-acre (400 ha) deer park. It is said to have 365 rooms, making it a 'calendar house' (because one could sleep in a different room each day of the year). It also boasts 52 staircases, 14 entrances and 7 courtyards.



Knole is in the care of the National Trust, though ownership is shared with the Sackville-Wests. Its many state rooms contain a superb collection of 17th century royal Stuart furniture, three state beds, rare silver furniture, outstanding tapestries and textiles, together with portraits by Van Dyck, Gainsborough, Sir Peter Lely, Sir Godfrey Kneller and Joshua Reynolds.

A visit to Knole is a life changer. It is open daily in the warmer months except Mon and Tue.

- 5 Just past the main entrance a fence diverts the path left towards the car park. As the track then sweeps right towards the north corner of the house, resume your previous direction down a long avenue of oak trees, passing a small walled enclosure on the right. In 150m, cross a track and, in another 300m, follow the main track as it wheels right, eventually walking across a golf fairway. Stay on the main track uphill, ignoring several lesser paths branching off, finally passing a copse on the left and reaching a large gate. Go through the gate, using a small gate on the side, taking you out of the park and into woodland. Keep to the main track for almost ½ km. 80m before a house visible ahead, look for a footpath sign and fork **right** accordingly. This path goes between fences and comes out to a rough lane by cottages. Go straight over, next to a large metal gate with a sign that reads *Private No Access*. Go through the *Old Stables*, through a one-bar gate which must be kept *tightly closed*, to reach the road at Godden Green. Immediately on your right is the *Bucks Head* where the walk began.

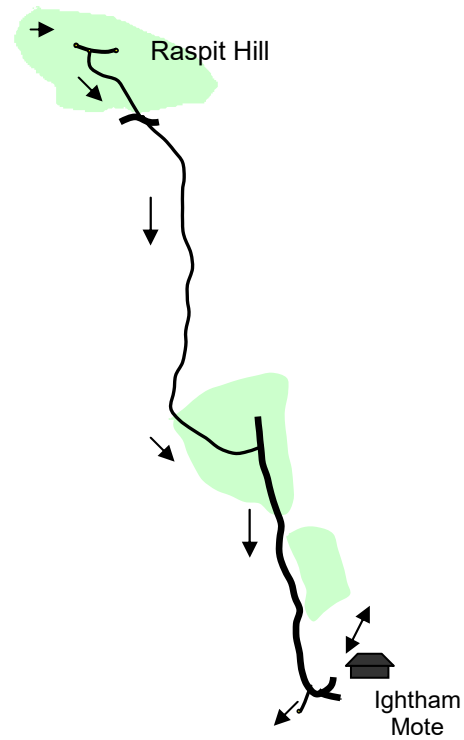


The "Bucks Head" (Shepherd Neame) is a worthy last call with a good classic menu and ales from England's oldest brewer. If your boots are muddy you need to stay on the terrace but here you have a good view of this peaceful quiet village and its little pond.

The Ightham Express 2 km=1 mile

This shortcut reduces the walk by 5 km=3 miles by going direct from Raspit Hill to Ightham Mote, omitting Fairlawne. Continue afterwards from **Leg 3**.

Turn **right** on the bridleway which curves left along the hillside and goes down shallow steps (just think, this is also a horse path!) and reaches a road. Cross the road to a bridleway opposite. The path follows a wall then a fence and orchard on the right and finally descends to a road. Turn **right** on the road. *Opposite the next bridleway, beside a house on the left is a path which takes you to the car park and a quick entrance to Ightham Mote.* Continue along the road, passing the house and gardens on the left and the outhouses. Continue past a brick building of Mote Farm on the right and turn **left** through brick pillars down to Ightham Mote.

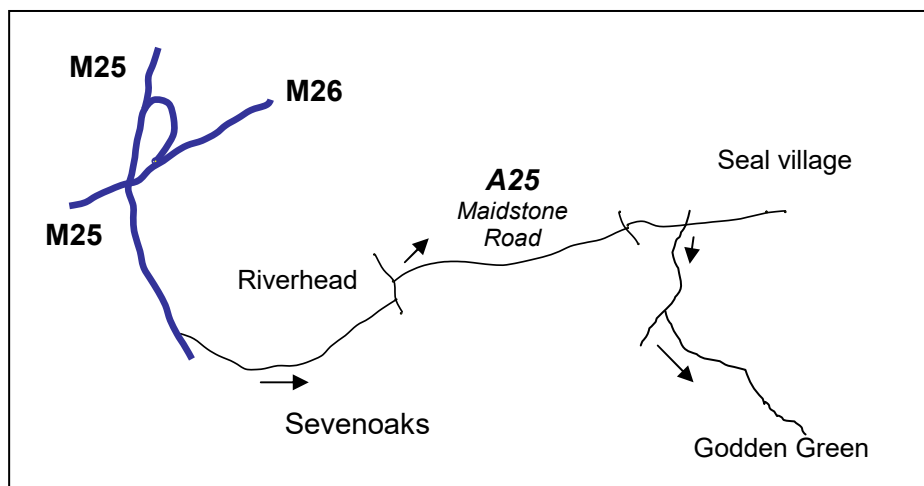


Getting there

By car: if coming from the M25, follow signs to the A21 *Sevenoaks*. After a short distance on the A21, take the first exit signed A25 *Sevenoaks, Riverhead*. Merge into the A25 eastbound and continue to follow signs for the A25, shortly passing through the village of Bessels Green and continue to Riverhead. Here the A25 turns **left** and **right**. Go nearly another 1¾ miles to traffic lights for Seal Hollow Road (B2019), signed right to *Godden Green*. Turn sharp **right** at these traffic lights, continue on Seal Hollow Road for ⅔ mile and turn **left** at the junction with Blackhall Lane signed to *Godden Green*. Park just off the Green.

Another good starting point, recommended by a walker, is the south edge of Knole park on St Julian Road, near the gate used on this walk, grid ref TQ 54919 53156, *approximate* postcode **TN15 0RX**, ideal for a lunch stop at Ivy Hatch.

By rail and bus: the no. 222 from Tonbridge Station goes to Shipbourne and other places on the walk. Check the timetable as it is not frequent. Sevenoaks station is 1½ miles=2½ km from Knole but several buses will take you to the entrance to the Park.



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