Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

Crockham Hill Common
Chartwell Heights, Mariners Hill, Darent Valley

Distance: 6 km=4 miles — easy walking

Region: Kent — Date written: 31-mar-2016

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Refreshments:
Crockham Hill, or picnic, or Westerham after the walk

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

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

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bluebells, woodland, views, nature trails, river valley

In Brief

This crazy little looping walk takes in a variety of landscapes: the piney hillside above Chartwell; carpets of bluebells on Crockham Hill Common; the stark heath by Goodley Stock; the sudden open verdant Darent valley. The area between Goodley Stock Road, Kent Hatch Road and Chartwell is an area of extensive wild forest with many unmapped paths and several surprises. The lack of local car parks means that most walkers usually see only a small section of the commons in passing and always retain a fleeting vivid impression. This walk takes some unexpected turns to find dry paths and the best of the natural scenery.

Since this is all natural woodland, there are no nettles and very little under-growth. Boots were needed when the walk was done in March 2016 because of a few muddy patches, although these were nowhere near deep enough to spoil the walk in any way (and of course it's all dry in 2021). It is a fine walk for your dog too. There is one optional stile.

In 2025, don't start this this walk before 1pm on the following days because the permissive paths on the Squerryes estate are **closed** for **shoot** days between **10am and 2pm**: May 15,16,17, 22, June 4,6,10,11,13,14.

The walk begins in the car park at a bend in the Hosey Common Road, near Westerham, Kent, postcode **TN16 1PR**, w3w:bunk.chat.clots. The car park is well used by families and dog walkers. But note the **potholes** at the entrance: drive slowly, keeping close to one side? On exiting, because of the tight bend in the road, wait till there's no sound of traffic (open the window?) and look through the trees. Because of the bend, some users prefer to use the **alternative starting point** (see end of this text). For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

1 Take the path leading out of the back of the car park by a large wooden gate and follow the path uphill through a birch wood. In 120m, you reach a clear fork in the path. Take the **left** fork. The path follows a course through beech woods, with a drop on your left. In nearly 150m, you pass several side paths, including one on the right with a yellow arrow **(*).** Avoid these branch-offs and keep straight ahead. The path runs for another 200m through the woods. Finally your path makes a definite **right** just before a large fallen tree and in 20m reaches a T-junction with another woodland path. This rather modest muddy path is in fact part of the Greensand Way (GW) long-distance footpath.

2 Turn **left** on the GW. Keep **left**, ignoring a path on the right and some minor paths, and go downhill for another 50m to a marker post, just before a steeper section. You may be aware of the car park of Chartwell down below. Do *not* descend any further but turn sharp **right** on an excellent level path. You are on one of the NT's landscaped walks and no doubt Sir Winston must have known this path well, although visitors to Chartwell are completely unaware of it. You pass two giant redwoods and a bench seat

from where to admire the views to your left down to the house and wide views ahead across the Kentish Weald. *(For more information on Chartwell, see the other walk in this series, "Chart, Churchill and Quebec".)* Soon the Chartwell oasts can been seen. After 400m in total of pleasant walking, your path veers right into woods and begins to descend. The path comes down to a waymarked crosspaths. Ahead is a permissive path belonging to the Squerrys Estate, but this is not on your route.

3 Turn **right** at the crosspaths on a bridleway gently uphill, still on the NT trail, also the *Mariners Hill Loop* and the *Octavia Hill* walk, named in honour of its founder. In late spring, you now have your first spread of bluebells, first on the left, then on the right. After nearly 200m, you meet a crossing path by a marker post. Turn **left** here, still on the NT and *Octavia Hill* walks. This path takes you out of the woods suddenly onto the open part of Mariners Hill with terrific views over the Weald and soon a bench from which to gaze out.

Mariners Hill, owned by the National Trust, was one of three hills overlooking the Weald which Octavia Hill saved from developers (the others being Toys Hill and Ide Hill - see the walk in this series "Greensand Hills in Kent").

4 Follow the path beside a wire fence, still with great views, until you reach a second, rather chunky, seat. Immediately after the seat, your path turns **right** up six steps. (Although the waymarked route is left, right at a crossing path and across a meadow via two stiles; typical of these guides you find an *easier* route.) Turn **right** at the top of the steps and follow a path beside a meadow and a hawthorn hedge. Just before the path enters woodland ahead, with a partly-hidden new-fangled chalet-bungalow on your right, turn **left**, staying by the edge of the meadow. In 150m, just after the far corner, keep straight ahead downhill through a bluebell wood. Go over a crossing path, down stone steps and **right** at the bottom to the Hosey Common Road.

5 Cross the road carefully to a narrow footpath directly opposite. The path leads up into woodland and, in 100m, reaches a junction with a marker post: keep **left** here in the direction of a blue arrow. The path runs between mossy banks, with more bluebells in spring. You pass a line of tall beeches and a railing on your left. Finally, 350m from the last waymarker, you reach a shingle drive coming from a property on your left with an ornamental gate. Keep ahead on the drive, passing more properties, to meet the GW which joins you from the right just before a multiple signpost by a wooden seat.

6 Turn **right** next to the seat on a bridleway which immediately starts to wheel left. Immediately turn **right** again on a straight stony gently uphill path, passing a log barrier, thus leaving the GW. (The GW carries on left and is very muddy: your route will be much drier). In 130m you reach a 5-way junction with a marker post. Turn sharp **left** on another wide path. (Keeping straight on would lead you to *Hunters Lodge* and, bearing right, to the stile just before Crockham Hill House at section 9, but you would miss the best part of this walk.) In 25m, you come to a fork of two wide paths. Take the **right** fork, staying on the main path. Your path winds through an area of birch scrub of Goodley Stock. In 250m or so, your path reaches a cleared area used for forestry and a wide driveway leading to *Hunters Lodge*. Cross straight over the driveway onto a wide unmarked path directly opposite, passing a slanting board which displays info about Crockham Hill Common. Your path now resumes its winding course across the heath of stunted birch and gorse. You may soon hear the

sound of traffic on the Goodley Stock Road, just as a house with red-brown tiles comes into view. Avoiding all turnoffs, aim directly for this house (you can use a narrow path between the trees).

7 Immediately in front of the wall of the house (revealed to be *Kent Hatch Lodge*), turn **right** on a track. It leads to a small metal gate beside a kissing-gate (both unneeded). You immediately come to a fork of two wide forest paths. Take the **right** fork, the straighter, more level permissive path. (The alternative left fork, the official footpath, is a somewhat longer loop around Squerrys Park which few local people take.) This pleasant walk along a wooded valley ends in 600m at a long narrow meadow of grass, part of Squerrys Park. Take a faint path straight ahead down the length of the meadow, not far from the right-hand edge. (The meadow is sometimes ploughed and the path may not be clear. If you prefer, take the rather clumpy and clammy wide path through the fringe of the wood to the right, turning right over a stile at the end.) The meadow path curves right and, in 230m, brings you to a 4-way crossing, just before the junction of two green pastures. In the valley ahead are the ponds of the infant River Darent, much visited by other walks in this series *(see the Otford, Brasted and Westerham walks)*. Beyond the valley is the well-named dome-shaped Tower Wood.

8 Turn sharp **right** at the crossing, over a stile or through a large metal gate, onto a wide footpath which runs close to the woods on your right, with more views to your left of the Darent valley. Ahead, a little to the left, you can see the picturesque *Crockham House*[1] with its grade-II listed oast house. After 350m your path dips and curves left across the valley floor. It ends at a metal kissing-gate near the house. Go through the gate to meet a wide track with a wooden garden fence on your left.

9 (Most walkers would turn left here on the 550m-long wide track running beside the fence, which you could also do, but, to avoid some deep mud and, in spring, to see the best of the bluebells, we will find a much better route …) Zigzag **right-left** onto a steep narrow path ahead uphill. You need to navigate carefully for this short stretch. In 50m your path curves a fraction left and goes through a clump of yew trees. In 70m more, as the gradient gets easier, the path goes under another yew tree, overhanging like an arch. Go another 20m and look left for a fallen silver birch just before a healthy birch. Immediately after these, turn **sharp left** on a narrow, very obscure path *(don't miss!)*. Take this path, curving right on a level course between more yews. You need to watch your feet to stay on this wickedly winding woodland path: remember to stay on the level; you will be walking about 500m before you re-join the main track. This path gets gradually clearer as you go, soon being joined by another path coming down from the right. In late spring this is a little-known secret glade rich in bluebells. The path gradually descends and you can see the main wide track running parallel down on your left, before the path passes a junction on the left [jul 2018-2025: stepping over a fallen tree] and ascends again. In another 250m, your path comes down to merge with the main track. Keep ahead along the track for another 100m. You will now see a wooden fence and a grassy meadow ahead in the distance. Immediately look to your left for a clear but unsigned footpath.

[1] mentioned in a 2016 BBC *Panorama* programme relating to a "hot money" purchase in the 1980s

10 Turn sharp **left** on this mysterious little-known path and follow it along a valley floor which is carpeted with bluebells in season [2018-2026: going round or under several a fallen trees]. In 250m, at a post with a yellow band, keep **right** uphill, quickly reaching a few steps up to the Hosey Common Road. Cross the road carefully to a signposted footpath directly opposite. Keep to the path as it immediately veers **left**. In 100m, you reach a crossing path by a yellow arrow. (If you did not park at the bend in the Hosey Common Road, turn **right** here and in 10m **right** and **left**, resuming at the point marked "(*)" in section 1, otherwise…). Turn **left** here and follow the path, quickly returning to the Hosey Common Road car park where the walk began.

For end-of-walk refreshments, the nearby "Royal Oak" in Crockham Hill village [2021: currently open lunchtime Sat and Sun], serves excellent home-cooked food and ales from Westerham Brewery. The town of Westerham also has a range of pubs and eateries.

Getting there

By car: to easiest approach is through **Crockham Hill**, especially if you are coming from the west side. Come off the M25 at Junction 6, turn **right** onto the A22 and **left** at a roundabout onto the A25 through Oxted and Limpsfield and, after some traffic lights, fork **right** onto the B269 Kent Hatch Road, signposted *Edenbridge*. As you come down into Crockham Hill village, turn **left** on the Hosey Common Road, signposted *Westerham* and *Chartwell*. The car park is in 1 mile=1½ km on a sharp right bend. *Be careful on leaving as the exit is on a tight bend and you need to watch and listen (open the window?) for approaching traffic. (Maybe try that annoying Italian habit of sounding the horn?)*

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If coming from the A25 at **Westerham**, take the turning at the east side of the town, signposted Edenbridge B2026. Follow the road (Hosey Hill or Hosey Common Road), avoiding three junctions on your left, for 1.4 miles=2.2 km. The car park is on a sharp left bend. *See above warning on exiting.*

An **alternative starting point** is in the village of Crockham Hill in the parallel side road, **Smiths Lane**, www.w3w.co/town.cool.buzz, postcode **TN8 6RH**. Park tight at the north end. Walk to join the main road, keep ahead for 150m and, just after a private entrance, fork **right** on a signed footpath uphill. In 300m this path takes you to the junction at point 6 from where your route is straight ahead. Return the same way.

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